In Part I we spoke of the rise of linguistics as a kind of master discipline for the contemporary era. The cinema, for its part, has hardly been immune to the magnetic attraction of the linguistic model. Indeed, the notion of FILM LANGUAGE was already a commonplace in the writings of some of the earliest theorists of the cinema, even those untouched by the theoretical movements and schools of which we have spoken. One finds the metaphor in the 1920s writings of Ricciotto Canudo in Italy and Louis Delluc in France, both of whom saw the language-like character of the cinema as linked, paradoxically, to its non-verbal nature, its status as a “visual esperanto” transcending the barriers of national language. One finds the metaphor in the writings of poet-critic Vachel Lindsay, who spoke of film as “hieroglyphic language,” as well as in the work of Hungarian film theorist Bela Balazs, who repeatedly stressed the language-like nature of film in his work from the 1920s through to the late 1940s.

It was the Russian Formalists, however, who developed the analogy between language and film in a somewhat more systematic way. In Poetics of the Cinema the Formalists downplayed the mimetic dimension of film in favor of its “poetic” and “linguistic” qualities. Tytianov spoke of the cinema as offering the visible world in the form of semantic signs engendered by cinematic procedures such as lighting and montage, while Eikhenbaum saw film in relation to “inner speech” and “image translations” of linguistic tropes. The cinema, for Eikhenbaum, is a “particular system of figurative language,” the stylistics of which would treat filmic “syntax,” the linkage of shots into “phrases” and “sentences.” Close shot-by-shot analysis would allow analysts to identify a typology of such phrases—a project taken up some four decades later by Christian Metz in his Grand Syntagmatique of narrative cinema. While Eikhenbaum did not develop a full-blown typology, he did mention certain principles of syntagmatic construction—such as contrast, comparison and coincidence—which resemble in embryo the concepts later developed by Metz.

Subsequent to the work of the Russian Formalists, the notion of film language came to form the implicit topos grounding the many normative

THE CINEMATIC SIGN

“Grammars” of cinema—for example, Raymond Spottiswoode’s Grammar of Film (1933) and Robert Bataille’s Grammaire Cinématographique (1947). In other pre-semiotic discussions, the film-language metaphor became intimately linked to the cognate tropes of the “camera pen” (Astruc) and “film writing.” In post-war France, especially, this “graphological” figure, as we shall see in some detail in Part V, became a key structuring concept subtending film theory and criticism.

THE CINEMATIC SIGN

It was only with the advent of structuralism and semiotics in the 1960s, however, that the film-language concept was explored in depth by theorists like Umberto Eco, Pier Paolo Pasolini and Christian Metz. Much of the early discussion had to do with the nature of the filmic analogon. The initial tendency was to contrast the arbitrary signs of natural language with the motivated, iconic signs of the cinema. In his earliest work, Metz emphasized both the analogical nature of the filmic image as well as the causal photo-chemical connection between representation and prototype. But in a 1970 article, “Beyond Analogy, the Image;” Metz nuanced his argument, pointing out that to see an image as simply analogical is to forget that it can be analogical and motivated in some respects and yet be arbitrary in other respects. Representational images, in sum, can themselves be coded (Metz 1972).

Another important figure in the theorization of the image was Roland Barthes. For Barthes, the image is characterized by POLYSEMY (literally, many “semes” or meanings), i.e., it shares with other signs, including linguistic signs, the property of being open to multiple significations. The accompanying captions of photographs, or written materials in a film, Barthes suggested in “Rhetoric of the Image,” often function as ANCHORAGE, i.e., as a verbal device which “disciplines” polysemy by coaxing the observer’s perception into a preferred “reading” of the image. The anchoring words “fix the floating chain of significeds”; they guide the viewer among the different possible significations of a visual representation. Barthes gives the example of an advertisement showing fruits scattered around a ladder, an image that might connote “paucity of harvest,” “damage due to high winds,” or “freshness”; the caption “as if from your own garden” anchors the meaning of “freshness” (Barthes 1977). In Camera Lucida (1980) Barthes theorizes the specific pleasures provoked by the “force of silence and immobility” typical of still photography. He speaks of two ways of apprehending the same photograph: the STUDIUM deploys objective signs and coded information, while the PUNCTUM triggers the play of chance and subjective association, investing the photo with personal desire.

Other analysts also took up the Peircian trichotomy. Peter Wollen
argued in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969) that cinema deploys all three categories of sign: icon (through resembling images and sounds); index (through the photo-chemical registering of the “real”); and symbol (in the deployment of speech and writing). In their essay “Quis Ego Nominor Leo,” Ronald Levaco and Fred Glass perform an exemplary Peircean analysis of the logos of diverse Hollywood studios (Levaco/Glass in Bellour 1980). The classical MGM studio logo features the celebrated MGM lion circled by a film strip on which is written “Ars Gratia Artis,” under which we see a garlanded mask, placed, in turn, above the words “Metro Goldwyn Mayer.” The diverse planar surfaces of the logo play in play iconic and symbolic elements, thus foiling nature – the lion – and culture – language. But the symbolic is thoroughly intermeshed with the iconic. The word “Metro,” for example, is inscribed in Roman characters, while “Mayer” is inscribed in neo-Gothic. The polysemy of the mask, meanwhile, plays a mediating role, evoking the classical masks of both tragedy and comedy (and thus the lofty dignity of classical art) and the racist portraiture of safari films (evoked by the mask’s stereotypically African traits and thick lips). The mask’s hybrid construction thus points on one side to the classy artiness claimed by the “Ars Gratia Artis” and on the other to the primitive power of the lion. Taken together, the iconic and symbolic signs designate the broad orientations of MGM productions – primitive adventure, sentimental tragi-comedy and spectacular epics.

Many semiotics, in their analysis of pictorial representations, draw on the notion of codes. Originating in information theory, a code is defined as a system of differences and correspondences which remain constant across a series of messages. Exported into linguistics, the concept came to be synonymous with langue or “language system.” Code usually refers, however, to any systematized set of conventions, any set of prescriptions for the selection and combination of units. The message refers to the meaningful sequences generated by the coded processes of communicative utterances. The term code has extensive applications in sociology, as Meta points out, it refers to transpersonal codes of behavior or collective representations; in administrative language, the term crops up in such phrases as the “highway code,” the “zip code” and the “telephone code,” all instances which conform to the original definition as examples of conventionalized systems which remain constant across numerous and various particular messages. (Within textual analysis, a code is always a construction of the analyst, and not something inherent in the text or found in nature.) Within film analysis, the notion of code postulated the existence within a film of relatively autonomous levels of signification organized as part of an overall system.

Umberto Eco drew on Peirce, and on the notion of “codes,” in his analysis of the filmic analogon. In his essay “Semiology of Visual Messages” (Communications 15), Eco inventories the following codes operative within the iconic sign; (1) Perceptive Codes (the domain of the psychology of perception); (2) Codes of Recognition (culturally disseminated taxonomies); (3) Codes of Transmission (the dots of a news photo, the scan lines of a televisual image); (4) Tonal Codes (intoned elements having to do with stylistic-convention); (5) Iconic Codes proper, subdividable into (a) figures, (b) signs, and (c) sensus; (6) Iconographic Codes; (7) Codes of Taste and Sensibility; (8) Rhetorical Codes, subdividable into (a) figures, (b) visual premises, and (c) visual arguments; (9) Stylistic Codes; and (10) Codes of the Unconscious. (The inventory, while in some ways suggestive, is at times redundant. The distinction between (a) tonal codes, as larger units of stylistic convention, (b) codes of taste and sensibility, and (c) stylistic codes, for example, is far from crystalline.)

In *A Theory of Semiotics*, Eco returns to the question of the nature of the iconic sign. He criticizes the naive notions that the iconic sign “has the same properties” as its referent. A portrait of the Queen of England, Eco points out, is not composed of skin and bones. The stimuli clearly differ, but they share a perceptual structure, a system of relations between parts, so that the queen herself and the portrait provoke similar perceptual responses. Eco also criticizes the notion that the iconic image is in fact similar. This similarity is highly coded; one recognizes an object and its representation as similar because our cultural training teaches us to select pertinent features. (The documentary film-maker Robert Flaherty claimed that the Eskimo Nanook had to learn to recognize himself in a photographic portrait.) The impression of similarity, then, is historically informed and culturally coded. Eco cites thirteenth-century painters who depicted lions according to the heraldic conventions of their time rather than in accord with their actual appearance. Artistic representation, in this sense, responds to other representations rather than to “real-life” referents. Eco also speaks of pseudo-iconic phenomena, citing the example of a child who straddles a broom pretending it is a horse. The analogy in such a case is not iconic; the broom does not resemble a horse; the two entities share only the functional capacity of being straddled.

**MINIMAL UNITS AND THEIR CINEMATIC ARTICULATION**

The cine-semioticians of the 1960s were working within the Saussurean tradition at a more advanced stage of development, a tradition which now included the work of Saussure’s heirs such as the Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev and the French linguisti André Martinet and Emile Benveniste. The pioneer film semioticians of the 1960s spent much of their energies looking for quite literal equivalences between linguistic and filmic units. Much of the discussion revolved around the related issues of double articu-
lication and minimal units. A semiotic or LINGUISTIC UNIT is a class of entities constructed by the linguist as part of a descriptive metalanguage in order to reduce the confusing heterogeneity of language to a manageable matrix of generating principles. Linguists thus tried to establish MINIMAL UNITS on the basis of which language as a whole was constructed. In semiotics, ARTICULATION refers to any form of semiotic organization which engenders distinct combinable units. The notion of DOUBLE ARTICULATION develops, and gives precision to, Saussure’s view of the linguistic system as a kind of “matching” of phonetic differences with conceptual differences. Especially developed by the French linguist André Martinet, the concept of double articulation refers to the two structural levels on which natural languages are organized. Speech can be analyzed into MORPHMES, i.e. “significant units,” or units of sense (or to use Martinet’s preferred term MONEMES) which constitute the FIRST ARTICULATION. (The temptation to equate phoneme with “word” was resisted because single words can include a number of morphemes – “anti-dis-establish-mentarian-ism” being an obvious example.) These units are further analyzable into the “meaningless,” that is the purely distinctive units of sound or PHONEMES which constitute the SECOND ARTICULATION. (The temptation to equate phoneme with “letter” was avoided because the actual sounds used to create differential contrasts in meaning are not always exactly congruent with letters, especially in languages such as English which are rich in phonetic inconsistencies and alternative spellings for identical phonemes.) These minimal units can then combine to form part of larger units; the phoneme can become part of a syllable, for example, and a morpheme can become part of a sentence, or a novel. It is the differential interplay of these two articulations that explains the remarkable economy with which language, on the basis of a score or more of phonemic units, generates its infinite semantic wealth.

Although the concept of articulation is frequently used in cine-semiotics – for example in analyses of the articulation of single “codes” such as color or lighting – Metz points out that the cinema as such has no equivalent of the double articulation of natural language. (Metz specifies the cinema “as such” because the cinema can include natural language in the form of dialogue or written materials.) Although Metz later came to argue that the individual codes forming part of cinema as a pluri-codic medium can be seen as having minimal units, the cinema per se has no minimal units which operate differentially to produce it as a language-system. Nothing in film is purely distinctive in the same sense as the phoneme, which depends entirely on combination to produce significant units. Cinematic shots and even individual frames already signify separately without depending on combination.

In “The Cinema of Poetry,” Italian film-maker and theorist Pier Paolo Pasolini suggested that the cinema is a system of signs whose semiology corresponds to a possible semiology of the system of signs of reality itself. Unlike literature, Pasolini argued, film entails no symbolic or conventional filter between the film-maker and “reality.” The smallest units in the cinema, the equivalent of phonemes, are unaltered by being reproduced on film. Nevertheless, the language of the cinema has its own version of double articulation. The MINIMAL UNITS of cinematic language, he argues, are the various real objects that occupy the frame. He designates these minimal units CINEMES by analogy with phonemes. The cinemes are then joined into a larger unit, the frame, which corresponds to the morpheme of natural language (Pasolini, in Nichols 1985, vol. 1: 542–6).

Umberto Eco, in “Articulations of the Cinematic Code,” criticizes Pasolini’s argument for failing to acknowledge the culturally coded, ideological and systematic nature not only of film but also of human behavior and communication generally. The real objects whose image occupies the frame, he points out, are merely effects of a conventionalization by which an iconically codified signifier triggers our attribution of a signed. In any case, Eco argues, these minimal units are not equivalent to linguistic phonemes. Pasolini’s “cinemes” retain their own unit meaning; they do not depend on the second articulation of the frame to differentially produce meaning. Eco, for his part, suggests a cinematic code of TRIPLE ARTICULATIONS of the image, consisting of a first articulation, called SEMES, i.e. initially recognizable meaningful units – for example “gangster wearing trench coat” – which can in turn be broken down into a second articulation of smaller iconic signs such as “cigarette dangling from lip,” all finally analyzable into a third articulation having to do with conditions of perception (Eco, in Nichols 1985, vol. 1: 590–607).

CINEMA: LANGUE OR LANGAGE?

The key figure among the filmo-poetic pioneers was Christian Metz, whose purpose, as he himself defined it, was to “get to the bottom of the linguistic metaphor” by testing it against the most advanced concepts of contemporary linguistics. Metz took the linguistic metaphor seriously, but also skeptically, in order to discern its quantum of truthfulness. In the background of Metz’ discussion was Saussure’s founding methodological question regarding the “object” of linguistic study. Thus Metz looked for the counterpart, in film theory, to the conceptual role played by langage in the Saussurean schema. And much as Saussure concluded that the rightful purpose of linguistic investigation was to disengage the abstract signifying system of a language, Metz concluded that the object of cine-semiology was to disengage the cinema’s signifying procedures, its combinatory rules, in order to see to what extent these rules resembled the doubly articulated diacritical systems of “natural languages.”

Metz makes the distinction, borrowed from Gilbert Cohen-Seat’s contrast
of "cinema" and "film," between the "cinematic fact" and the "filmic fact." The **CINEMATIC FACT**, for Metz, refers to the cinematic institution taken in its broadest sense as a multi-dimensional sociocultural complex which includes pre-filmic events (the economic infrastructure, the studio system, technology), post-filmic events (distribution, exhibition, and the social or political impact of film) and a-filmic events (the décor of the theatre, the social ritual of movie-going). The **FILMIC FACT** is that of localizable discourse, a text; not to the physical film-object contained in a can but rather to the signifying text. Thus Metz closes in on the goal of semiotics: the study of discourses, of texts, rather than of the cinema as an institution, an entity much too multi-faceted to constitute the proper object of the film-linguistic science, much as parole was for Saussure too multiform to form the proper object of the linguistic science. (Metz never argued that the institutional context of the cinema should not be studied, only that such study does not form part of cine-semiotics.) At the same time, Metz points out, the cinematic institution also enters into the multi-dimensionality of films themselves as bounded discourses concentrating an intense charge of social, cultural and psychological meanings. (Metz developed this imbrication of film with the cinematic institution further in his *The Imaginary Signifier* (Metz 1982).) Metz thus reintroduces the distinction film/cinema within the category "film," now identifying cinematic specificity as the specific and proper object of the semiotic study of film. In this sense, "the cinematic" represents not the industry but rather the totality of films. As a "novel" is to "literature," or a statue to "sculpture," so is "film" to "cinema," the former refers to the individual film text, while the latter refers to an ideal ensemble, the totality of films and their traits. Within the filmic, then, one encounters the cinematic.

The question which oriented Metz' early work was whether the cinema was LANGUE (language system) or LANGAGE (language) and his well-known conclusion to his own question was that the cinema was not a language system but that it was a language. Metz offers a number of reasons why film does not constitute a language system. First, he argues, langue is a system of signs intended for two-way communication, while the cinema allows only for deferred communication. Cinematic communication is doubly deferred, first through the lapse of time between a film's production and its reception, and second, through the lapse of time between its reception and the filmic response ensuant to that reception. This initial argument, however, is open to a number of objections. First, nothing precludes, in principle, the possibility of a future interactive cinema that would allow for instant two-way communication. Second, Metz' emphasis on two-way communication as norm seems to assume spoken speech as a model in a way that leaves him open to the same charges that Derrida levelled against Saussurean phonocentrism, i.e. that such a view privileges speech over writing, seen as the mere transcription or supplement of spoken speech. (In *Language and Cinema* Metz transcends this phonocentrism by highlighting cinema as a form of textual écriture.) The real analogy, in this sense, is between cinema and literary writing, which also allows only for deferred communication in the form of a dialogically "answering" poem, novel, or act of literary criticism. It could also be argued that spectators do "respond" to films, in the form of inner-speech reactions, or of verbal commentaries during or after the film. (The utterance, to be communicative, Bakhtin points out, does not require an immediate response.)

Metz' other reasons for rejecting cinema as langue are more substantial. Cinema is not a language-system, Metz argues, because it lacks the equivalent of the arbitrary linguistic sign. Produced through a process of mechanical reproduction, film installs a different relationship between signer and signified. The perceptual similarity between the filmic image of a dog and the actual pro-filmic dog, or between the recorded sound of a dog's barking and the actual bark, suggests that the relation between signer and signified is not arbitrary but motivated. (One encounters a slippage, in early Metz, from the broad notion of "motivation" to the much more restricted category of "analogy." ) Under the pressure of criticism by Eco and others, Metz later shed the implicit Bazinianism of these positions by acknowledging that the filmic analogon is indeed coded. The analogy, Metz suggests in *Language and Cinema*, is less between filmic signer and signified than in the parallel perceptual situation common to everyday experience and the cinematic experience.

In suggesting that cinema lacks the arbitrary sign of linguistics, Metz was not suggesting that the concept of sign, or of the signer/signified as composing the sign, is irrelevant to the cinema; it is only the relation between signer and signified that differs, being arbitrary in one case and motivated in the other. In his later psychoanalytically-inflected work in the 1970s, as we shall see in Part IV, Metz came to insist on the doubly imaginary nature of the cinematic signer, imaginary in what it happens to represent and imaginary in its very constitution as presence-absence. It is in this same context that Metz explores the notion, familiar from the earliest days of reflection concerning film, that the shot is like the word while the sequence is like the sentence. For Metz, important differences render such an analogy problematic: (1) shots are infinite in number, unlike words (since the lexicon is in principle finite) but like statements, an infinity of which can be constructed on the basis of a limited number of words. (2) Shots are the creations of the film-maker, unlike words (which pre-exist in lexicons) but again like statements. (3) The shot provides an inordinate amount of information – a fact which becomes obvious in any attempt, as in shot-by-shot analysis, to register in words the semantic wealth of even a single, relatively straightforward cinematic image. (4) The shot is an actualized unit, unlike the word which is a purely virtual lexical unit to be used as the speaker wishes. The word "dog" can be
associated with any type of dog, and can be said with any pronunciation or intonation available to English-speakers. A filmic shot of a dog, in contrast, has already undergone any number of determinations and mediations. It tells us, at the very minimum, that here is a certain kind of dog of a certain size and appearance, shot from a specific angle with a specific kind of lens. While it is true that film-makers might “virtualize” the image of a dog through backlighting, soft-focus or decontextualization, Metz’ more general point is that the cinematic shot more closely resembles an utterance or an assertion – “here is the backlit silhouetted image of what appears to be a large dog” – than a word. (5) Shots, unlike words, do not gain meaning by paradigmatic contrast with other shots that might have occurred in the same place on the syntagmatic chain. (Certain avant-garde films can, however, mimic the paradigmatic nature of language by drawing analogies between linguistic and cinematic paradigms; Frampton’s Zorn’s Lemma sets up a structural system by which images are made to substitute for letters of the alphabet.) In the cinema, shots form part of a paradigm so open as to be meaningless. In a typical sentence, one imagines a limited number of substitutions at each point on the syntagmatic chain, whereas images in film are opposed to a completely open list of possible alternatives. (Michael Snow’s Wavelength demonstrates this openness, with its vast number of distinct shots strung along the trajectory of a 45-minute simulated zoom shot produced within the confines of a single Manhattan loft.)

To these disanalogies between shots and words, Metz adds a further disanalogy concerning the cinema in general, i.e. that it does not constitute a language widely available as a code. All speakers of English of a certain age have mastered the code of English – they are able to produce sentences – but the ability to produce filmic utterances depends on talent, training and access. To speak a language, in other words, is simply to use it, while to “speak” cinematic language is always to a certain extent to invent it. One might argue, of course, that this asymmetry is itself culturally and socially determined; one can hypothesize a society in which all citizens would master the code of film-making. But in society as we know it, Metz’ point must stand. There is, furthermore, a fundamental difference in the diachrony of natural as opposed to cinematic language. Cinematic language can be suddenly prodded in a new direction by innovatory aesthetic procedures – those introduced by a film such as Citizen Kane, for example, or those made possible by a new technology such as the zoom or the steadicam – while natural language shows a more powerful inertia and is less open to individual initiative and creativity. The analogy, here again, is less between cinema and natural language than between cinema and literature, which can be suddenly inflected by the revolutionary aesthetic procedures of, for example, a James Joyce or a Virginia Woolf.

Although film texts do not constitute a langue generated by an underlying language system – since the cinema lacks the arbitrary sign, minimal units and double articulation – they do nevertheless manifest a language-like systematality. Metz posits three metaphorical tendencies or extrapolations within the word “language.” First, systems are called languages if their formal structure resembles that of natural languages, as in the expression “the language of chess.” Second, everything that signifies to human beings even without a formal system can be seen as reminiscent of language (here Metz comes close to the Peircian definition of a sign as “something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity”). Thus semioticians study the language of fashion or cuisine. Third, Metz places the notion of language in a more specifically Hjelmlevian context. One might call “language,” Metz argues, any unity defined in terms of its MATTER OF EXPRESSION – a Hjelmlevian term designed to designate the material in which signification manifests itself – or in terms of what Barthes in Elements of Semiology calls its “typical sign.” Literary language, in this sense, is the set of messages whose matter of expression is writing; cinematic language is the set of messages whose matter of expression consists of FIVE TRACKS or channels: moving photographic image, recorded phonetic sound, recorded noises, recorded musical sound, and writing (credits, intertitles, written materials in the shot). Thus cinema is a language in the sense that it is a “technico-sensorial unity” graspable in perceptual experience. Cinema is a language, in sum, not only in a broadly metaphorical sense but also as a set of messages grounded in a given matter of expression, and as an artistic language, a discourse or signifying practice characterized by specific codifications and ordering procedures.

THE GRAND SYNTAGMATIQUE

Film became a discourse, Metz argued, by organizing itself as narrative and thus producing a body of signifying procedures: “It was precisely to the extent that the cinema confronted the problems of narration that . . . it came to produce a body of specific signifying procedures.” While no image entirely resembles another image, most narrative films resemble one another in their principal syntagmatic figures, those units which organize spatial and temporal relations in various combinations. The true analogy between film and language, then, operates not at the level of basic units, but rather in their common syntagmatic nature. By moving from one image to two, film becomes language. Both language and film produce discourse through paradigmatic and syntagmatic operations. Language selects and combines phonemes and morphemes to form sentences; film selects and combines images and sounds to form syntagmas, i.e. units of narrative autonomy in which elements interact semantically.

The GRAND SYNTAGMATIQUE, Metz’ attempt to isolate the principal syntagmatic figures of the narrative cinema, comes in response to the
question: “How does film constitute itself as narrative discourse?” The Grand Syntagmatique was proposed against the backdrop of the notorious impression of film terminology concerning the sequential arrangements of fiction films. Much of the terminology was based on theatre rather than on the specifically cinematic signifiers of image and sound, shots and montage. Terms like “scene” and “sequence” were used more or less interchangeably, and classifications were based on the most heterogeneous criteria — a posited unity of depicted action (“the farewell scene”) or of place (“the courtroom sequence”) — with little attention to the exact temporal and spatial articulation of the filmic discourse.

Two concepts, one theoretical and the other methodological, undergird Metz’ work in the Grand Syntagmatique. First, Metz draws on the notion, borrowed from the classical Greek tradition of literary commentary, of the “diegesis.” In the Poetics, Aristotle uses DIEGESIS to refer to a mode of representation that involves “telling” rather than “showing.” In 1953, Etienne Souriau revived the term to designate the “recounted story” of a film, after which it was elaborated by Gerard Genette in literary analysis, before Metz imported it into film theory. DIEGESIS (more or less synonymous with Genette’s “story” (histoire)) refers to the posited events and characters of a narrative, i.e. the signified of narrative content, the characters and actions taken as it were “in themselves” without reference to their discursive mediation. The diegesis of the Nabokov novel Lolita and its filmic adaptation by Stanley Kubrick, for example, might be identical in many respects, yet the artistic and generic mediation in film and novel might be vastly different. The same “diegesis” can be “carried” by a wide variety of material signifiers or narrative media.

In the cinema, the word diegesis refers to the film’s represented instance, the sum of the film’s DENOTATION, i.e. the narration itself, plus the fictional space and time dimensions implied in and by the narrative (characters, landscapes, events, etc.), and even the story as it is received and felt by the spectator. The diegesis is thus an imaginary construction, the fictive space and time in which the film operates, the assumed universe in which the narrative takes place. The notion of diegesis, Metz insists, is only appropriate to a designation of a complete universe whose elements exist on the same level of reality (photographic reality in the case of the cinema, verbal in the case of the novel). In this sense, there can be no diegesis in the theatre, for fundamental to the notion of diegesis is the creation of a “homogeneous pseudo-world.” Gerard Genette appeals to the notion of the diegetic in his analysis of levels of narration in literature, distinguishing between three levels: the DIEGETIC (arising from the primary narration), the EXTRADIEGETIC (narrative intrusion upon the diegesis) and the METADIEGETIC (pertaining to narration by a secondary narrator). Dominique Château in “Diegèse et Enunciation” (Communications 38) distinguishes between the diegesis as mental referent, and as a “world-producing activity.” An element can be diegetic, she points out, without being iconic — for example, in the evoked off-screen presence of a monster in the direction of whom a frightened character looks but which we nevertheless do not see ourselves. Once familiar with a character, we represent that character to ourselves mentally, even when the character is no longer present on the screen. Thus the diegesis forms an implicit system, often becoming more implicit as the story progresses.

Daniel Percheron clarifies the notion of diegesis by placing it in differential opposition with certain related terms. Diegesis/Film: the time of the diegesis is not identical to the time of the film. Apart from rare exceptions such as Hitchcock’s Rope, Varda’s Cloe from 5 to 7 and Louis Malles’ My Dinner with André — and even they display momentary lapses — most films do not attempt to equate diegetic time with the time of the filmic discourse. At times the disparity is quite dramatic. The diegesis of Kubrick’s 2001: A Space Odyssey’s spans millennia, but its discourse is limited to a few hours. Diegesis/Production: in the classical fiction film, there is a frequent discordance between the posited world of the diegesis and the actual world of film production. Godard’s Made in USA is diegetically set in the United States (Atlantic City) yet the images themselves (deliberately) make it transparent that the film was actually shot in France. Michael Curtiz’ Casablanca is diegetically set in Morocco, but was actually made in a Hollywood studio. A close scrutiny of many period reconstruction films often reveals flaws in the diegetic representation — the television antenna on a picturesque “Victorian” rooftop, the automobile winding down a distant road in the far background of a Renaissance costume drama. The advantage of referring to a film’s “diegesis” rather than simply to its “story” or its “plot” is that first, it helps focus attention on the constructed nature of the story, and second, it helps us separate the notion of story from its more dramatic and romanesque connotations of “exciting events.” By shifting emphasis away from the events of the story, the term diegesis allows for a film in which little “happens,” for example in certain avant-garde-inflected films (e.g. Jeanne Dielman) more or less lacking in dramatic incident in the conventional sense, but which retain a diegesis in the sense of a “posited world.”

Metz’ project also draws on the notion of BINARY OPPositions developed by phonologists such as Jakobson and Trubetzkoy. Just as the phonologist extracts from the heterogeneous acoustic phenomena associated with language-use the key elements that play a role in communication, which serve in one way or another to transmit information, so Metz, in defining the syntagmas, works through a series of successive binary dichotomies: a syntagma consists of one shot or more than one shot; it is chronological or achronological; if it is chronological, it can be either consecutive or simultaneous, linear or non-linear, continuous or discontinuous. The diverse kinds of syntagmas are susceptible to COMMUTATION.
THE EIGHT SYNTAGMATIC TYPES

The Grand Syntagmatique constitutes a typology of the diverse ways that time and space can be ordered through editing within the segments of the narrative film. For Metz, three criteria serve to identify, delimit and define autonomous segments: unity of action (diegetic continuity), the type of demarcation (i.e. the visible or invisible punctuating devices used to separate and articulate the major segments), and syntagmatic structure (the principles of pertinence which identify the syntagmatic type). The syntagmatic units combine with other codic systems to make up the internal unfolding of events represented in the filmic chain. Metz uses the word SYNTAGMA as the general term to designate the units of narrative autonomy, the pattern according to which individual shots can be grouped, reserving both “sequence” and “scene” to designate specific types of syntagmas. Syntagmatic analysis enables the analyst to determine how images come together in a pattern which forms the overall narrative armature of the film-text. Once the syntagmatic arrangement has been discerned, the analyst is better equipped to generalize about the frequency, distribution or preponderance of certain syntagmatic types.

The eight syntagmas, then, are:

1. the AUTONOMOUS SHOT — a syntagma consisting of one shot, in turn subdivided into (a) the SINGLE-SHOT SEQUENCE, and (b) four kinds of INSERTS: NON-DIEGETIC INSERT (a single shot which presents objects exterior to the fictional world of the action); the DISPLACED DIEGETIC INSERT (“real” diegetic images but temporally or spatially out of context); the SUBJECTIVE INSERT (memories, fears) and the EXPLANATORY INSERT (single shots which clarify events for the spectator);
2. the PARALLEL SYNTAGMA — two alternating motifs without clear spatial or temporal relationship, such as rich and poor, town and country;
3. the BRACKET SYNTAGMA — brief scenes given as typical examples of a certain order of reality but without temporal sequence, often organized around a “concept”;
4. the DESCRIPTIVE SYNTAGMA — objects shown successively suggesting spatial coexistence, used, for example, to situate the action;
5. the ALTERNATING SYNTAGMA — narrative cross-cutting implying temporal simultaneity such as a chase alternating pursuer and pursued;
6. the SCENE — spatio-temporal continuity felt as being without flaws or breaks, in which the signified (the implied diegesis) is continuous, as in the theatrical scene, but where the signifier is fragmented into diverse shots;
7. the EPISODIC SEQUENCE — a symbolic summary of stages in an implied chronological development, usually entailing a compression of time;
8. the ORDINARY SEQUENCE — action treated elliptically so as to eliminate “unimportant” detail, with jumps in time and space masked by continuity editing.

Before proceeding to an overall evaluation, we might discuss the specific utility of the eight types of syntagmas. The first syntagma, the AUTONOMOUS SHOT, consists of a single shot clearly separated and without close connection to neighboring shots. The only syntagma defined in terms of its signifier (i.e. that it consists of a single shot), it is by definition not a syntagm, but it is a syntagmatic type in that it is one of the types that occur within the global syntagmatic structure of narrative films. Metz subdivides the autonomous shot into two subtypes, the single-shot sequence and inserts, themselves divided into four subtypes — non-diegetic, subjective, displaced diegetic, and explanatory.

Examples of the SINGLE-SHOT SEQUENCE would include many of the first Lumière shorts such as The Waterer Watered in which complete episodes are handled in a single shot. The French New Wave, encouraged both by André Bazin’s admiration for the spatial and temporal integrity he discerned in the work of such directors as Flaherty, Welles and Wyler, and by direct cinema’s penchant for long takes, made the one-shot sequence an integral part of its aesthetic. That the prolonged one-shot sequences of Hitchcock’s Rope would also qualify as autonomous shots points to a potential problem in applicability. Does the term cease to be useful when so much can “happen” within a single shot, when the equivalent of shot changes, usually performed through editing, can be simulated through camera movement, the disposition of actors within the frame, and interventions on the soundtrack? Any film, such as Fellini’s 8½, which develops complex single-shot sequences whose meaning unfolds slowly over time, will also fit only awkwardly into this category.

The four subtypes of INSERT — single shots which stand out from their context in particularly striking ways — are no less problematic. These inserts include: (1) the NON-DIEGETIC INSERT, for example, a single interpolated metaphoric shot such as the image associating Kerensky with a peacock in Eisenstein’s October; (2) the SUBJECTIVE INSERT, an interpolated shot representing, within the diegesis, an image representing a memory, a dream, or hallucination clearly marked as subjective; (3) the DISPLACED DIEGETIC INSERT, i.e. a shot which is temporally or spatially displaced relative to the series of shots in which it is inserted, such as the shot of a loafing Michel in Adieu Philippine, offered by the film-maker to contradict that character’s grandiose claims of importance; and (4) the EXPLANATORY...
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INSERT, in which material is abstracted from the fictional space and enlarged for didactic or explanatory purpose, for example closer shots of letters, newspaper headlines, maps and so forth.

While these subdivisions of the autonomous shot are useful, and while they do clarify certain procedures of filmic narration, they are problematic in so far as they are somewhat arbitrarily identified with the single shot. There is no reason, for example, why the subjectivity of a memory or fear must be represented or evoked within the confines of a single shot. A film like Last Year at Marienbad might be regarded as itself a lengthy subjective "insert" composed of hundreds of shots. The same objection holds true for the other subtypes. In Singin' in the Rain, certain early shots serve to contrast the squallid truth about matinee idol Don Lockwood's (Gene Kelly) past with his mendacious tale of his glorious rise to stardom, and are thus reminiscent of Metz' "displaced diegetic inserts," yet the ironic undercutting does not take the form of single shots. Explanatory material, similarly, often extends beyond a single-shot format, as in the police investigation sequences of Fritz Lang's M. In sum, all of these "inserts" might just as easily operate over much larger syntagmatic units such as the segment, the sequence or even an entire film.

The notion of the subjective shot, furthermore, has meaning only in relation to the signified of the diegesis; it cannot be so clearly separated from its narrative context. Subjectivization, in film, is in no way restricted to single-shot situations. Hitchcock's Marnie, for example, evokes the subjectivity of its female protagonist through a number of devices in a variety of registers: by Hitchcock's classical point-of-view editing structures, by interpolated redfiltered shots, by a mise-en-scène evoking the spatiality of dream, by subjective sound, and by selective focus. Only rarely does this subjectivization take place within the confines of the autonomous shot. By "ghettoizing" the subjective shot, furthermore, Metz elides the thorny problem of point-of-view, i.e. that subjectivity and point-of-view articulate films in their entirety. The subjective insert category, then, creates an awkward "bulge" in the system for all subjectivity in film cannot be neatly assigned to a subset of the autonomous shot. Metz' approach seems to assume a conventional kind of realism -- occasionally interrupted by interpolated subjective shots -- which does not allow for the possibility of extended subjective realism (for example, Red Desert) and even less for a thoroughgoing reflexivity. For all these reasons, the autonomous shot category, while pointing to useful distinctions, is the weakest and most unwieldy feature of the Grand Syntagmatique.

The PARALLEL SYNTAGMA displays none of these problems. The parallel syntagma consists of more than one shot, isachronological and is based on alternation. It characteristically interweaves two motifs without positing any clear spatial or temporal relationship between them. Thus a series of two or more images are intercut to denote a symbolic or thematic parallel or contrast rather than to communicate a narrative development. D. W. Griffith was especially fond of the parallel syntagma, a trait correlatable, perhaps, with the dualistic, often Manichean thinking which typifies his work. Corner in Wheat develops a thematic counterpart between images of wealth (rich men's banquets) and poverty (poor people's breadlines). The Birth of a Nation contrasts images of war and peace, without suggesting any clear sequential, spatial or temporal relation between the two sets of images. Many militant leftist films, such as Hour of the Furnaces, similarly exploit parallel syntagmas in order to highlight class differences or oppression, juxtaposing images of upper-class leisure (the bourgeoisie at the horse races) with images of lower-class squalor (the lumpenproletariat scavenging in garbage dumps).

The BRACKET SYNTAGMA consists of more than one shot, isachronological and, unlike the parallel syntagma, is not based on alternation. The bracket syntagma provides typical samples of a given order of reality without linking them chronologically. As in the parallel syntagma, the shots are related to each other thematically, with no spatial or temporal continuity, but this time there is no alternation between motifs. The audiovisual logos which open television sitcoms -- for example the initial montage-segment showing the typical activities of a day in the life of Mary Richards on the Mary Tyler Moore Show -- might be seen as bracket syntagmas. The fragmented shots of two lovers in bed that open Godard's A Married Woman, similarly, provide a typical sample of an order of reality known as "contemporary lovemaking"; indeed, the sequence's lack of teleology and climax form part of a Brechtian strategy of de-eroticization, a "bracketing" of eroticism. (Many of the films featuring significant numbers of bracket syntagmas can be characterized, not coincidentally, as "Brechtian," precisely because the bracket syntagma is especially well equipped for representing the socially "typical.")

Metz calls the opening segment of Adieu Philippine -- a series of shots showing the film's protagonist working in a television studio -- a bracket syntagma, a problematic classification in that it is contradicted by the music of the segment, which is diegetic, synchronous and uninterrupted. The temporality of the music, with its unfolding temporal continuity correlated with the visual continuity of the images of the performing musicians, differs from and contradicts the supposed atemporality of the image track. (In his later Language and Cinema, Metz opens up a theoretical space for a film text characterized by multiple temporalities.) But despite this misapplication in the case of Adieu Philippine, the category of the bracket syntagma remains broadly useful in characterizing the function of certain sequences in films. The bracket syntagma which comprises the opening of Resnais' Muriel sets the tone of unnameable mystery which lingers around that film. Godard's Les Carabiniers features a preponderance of bracket syntagmas which are none the less organized into the larger narrative structure of a
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Brechtian fable about war. Here the bracket syntagma is mobilized as part of the film’s deconstructive procedures – the systematic destruction from within of the dominant cinema’s traditional narrative approach to dramatic conflict. The bracket syntagma’s emphasis on the typical – here the behavioral typicalities of contemporary war – is eminently suited to the social and generalizing intentions of politicized directors.

The DESCRIPTIVE SYNTAGMA is chronological and consists of more than one shot. It involves the successive display of objects so as to suggest spatial coexistence. Metz cites the sequenced presentation of shots of a flock of sheep, of particular sheep, of shepherd and sheepdog. The descriptive syntagma, in Metz’ view, is not necessarily restricted to inanimate or non-human objects or motionless human figures; human beings in the shot can be performing actions as long as the film does not emphasize the purposeful narrative development of these actions. But the distinction between the bracket syntagma and the ordinary sequence is sometimes hard to draw. In theory, spatial coexistence is absolutely necessary to the descriptive syntagma, while the bracket syntagma allows for a looser, more discontinuous form of organization. But in practice the two are often difficult to distinguish; it is at this point that more specific signifying criteria come into play. Is an opening segment of “establishing” shots of city landmarks to be seen as a “typical sample of a certain order of reality,” and therefore as a bracket syntagma, or as a descriptive syntagma? What about cases such as the opening of Hitchcock’s Psycho, with its precise marking of time and place – “Phoenix, Arizona, Friday, December the Eleventh, 2.43 p.m.” – where the superimposed titles almost instantly mark the initial moment of the diégésis (a lunchtime tryst) – and where the airborne crane shots are marked by an overriding sense of teleology, prefusing the film’s obsession with avian imagery by literaling the notion of a “bird’s-eye-view” of a city named after a mythical bird. Such complex interweavings point up the difficulty in assigning a single syntagmatic category to such a segment.

The ALTERNATING SYNTAGMA, the least controversial of Metz’ categories, refers to what was traditionally called narrative cross-cutting. It consists of more than one shot, and is chronological, consecutive and non-linear. Its quality of consecutiveness makes it a narrative syntagma; unlike the parallel syntagma, it is chronological rather than archi-chronological. It involves spatial separation – for example, between pursuers and pursued, cops and robbers – but temporal simultaneity or quasi-simultaneity. The SCENE consists of more than one shot and is chronological, consecutive and linear. The signifier is fragmented (into diverse shots) but the signified (the implied diegetic event) is continuous. The scene offers a spatio-temporal continuity experienced as if without flaws or breaks. Any sequence of continuous conversation in a classical Hollywood film would qualify as a scene in the Metzian sense that such sequences imply a complete coincidence of screen time and diegetic time. The signifier is fragmented – by a series of shot/counter-structures for example – but the signified – the conversation – is felt to be continuous, whole and uninterup- ted. The scene is the only syntagmatic type, if one excludes the one-shot sequence, that resembles the theatrical scene. Films which attempt to maintain a strict spatio-temporal continuity throughout, such as Agnes Varda’s Cleo from 5 to 7 or Louis Malles’ My Dinner with Andre, might be regarded as virtuoso exercises in the extended scene. The signifier is fragmented – both films consist of hundreds of shots – but their signified is, generally speaking, continuous. The scene can be contrasted with syntagmas such as the episodic sequence or ordinary sequence where not only the signifier but also the signified is discontinuous.

The EPISODIC SEQUENCE is chronological, consecutive and linear, but not continuous and usually consists of more than one shot. The episodic sequence brings together a series of brief episodes – often separated by optical devices such as dissolves and sometimes unified by musical accompaniment – which succeed each other chronologically within the diegesis. The meaning of this succession of “scenelets” lies in the totality, that is in the overall progression and development, rather than in the scenelets themselves. Each scenelet constitutes a symbolic summary of a stage in a part of a larger development. In Adieu Philippine, for example, one episodic sequence showing three successive rendezvous between Michel, Liliane and Juliette is organized by the teleology of the threesome’s growing friendliness. The celebrated “breakfast sequence” in Citizen Kane (part of Leland’s flashback account of Kane’s first marriage), meanwhile, demonstrates a kind of reverse teleology. The individual scenelets in themselves are of less consequence than the developing sense of estrangement as the couple passes from newly-wed passion to bored hostility. In the episodic sequence the signifier is discontinuous – since the sequence deploys itself over a number of shots – as is the signified – since there are implied temporal ellipses between the scenelets. (Although Metz does not himself do so, one might posit as a subcategory of the episodic sequence the “montage sequences” (named Vorkapich after their creator) of Hollywood films which summarize, for example, the meteoric rise to fame of a character in a musical or the precipitous fall of a politician through a highly condensed series of images of newspaper headlines, radio announcements, or movie marquees.)

The final syntagma, the ORDINARY SEQUENCE, is, like the episodic sequence, chronological, consecutive, linear and discontinuous. But whereas the episodic sequence involves a series of clearly separated scene-lets linked by an overall trajectory of development, the ordinary sequence develops a more or less continuous action, but with temporal ellipses whereby “unimportant details” and “dead time” are excised so as not to bore the spectator. Almost any cinematic dinner in the classical fiction
film – for example, the filmic reduction of a meal to a few characteristic gestures and a short exchange of dialogue – would qualify as "ordinary sequence." (The innovation of My Dinner with Andre was to expand one of those dinners into a feature-length "scene.") While the signifier in the ordinary sequence is discontinuous, the signified of the diegesis is often implied to be continuous. The spectator, that is, is not intended to be made conscious of the temporal fissures of the narrative. The ordinary sequence is frequent not only in the classical fiction film but also in many documentaries and even in filmed television news segments.

The Grand Syntagmatique, while fairly widely disseminated and while engendering a diverse progeny of syntagmatic analyses, also encountered considerable criticism, and Metz himself came to express reservations about it and ultimately redefined its status. Some critiques focused on the general thrust of Metz' project as unduly privileging the mainstream narrative film. The definition of cinematic language as "first of all the literalness of a plot" apparently excluded both documentaries and avant-garde film. Metz granted the point subsequently in Language and Cinema by redefining the Grand Syntagmatique as merely one of many cinematic codes, and more specifically as a subcode of editing within a historically delimited body of films: the mainstream narrative tradition from the early 1930s (the consolidation of the sound film) through to the late 1950s, with the demise of the studio aesthetic and the challenge of the diverse "new waves."

Since the Grand Syntagmatique deals with the spatial and temporal articulation of the diegesis, it is most effective with those films which presuppose a narrative substratum, a pre-existing story or anecdotal nucleus from which the "high points" have been extracted. Problems with the model arise when it is applied to avant-garde films such as Nostalgia and Wavelength or even Le Gai Savoir. The Grand Syntagmatique can be useful even when it turns out to be inapplicable, in the sense that it reveals the degree to which a given film departs from classical narrative procedures. Apart from its privileging of narrative denotation, the Grand Syntagmatique was also faulted for the vestigial phenomenology of its theoretical underpinnings. This critique argued that Metz implicitly appeals to "common observation" and "general experience" as if these were unproblematic notions. Metz proceeds inductively as if he were searching for syntagmatic types in the films themselves rather than constructing a theoretical model which would both generate and account for the entire range of possible types. However, if the Grand Syntagmatique is seen as a general model for the textual actualization of the logic of narrative progression, it does provide a system which can account for the material unfolding of films. In this light, one might imagine a more inclusive model applicable not only to classical narrative films but also to documentaries and to "advanced" films such as Numero Deux and ultimately to all possible time-space relations in the films of both the past and the future.

Some of the "bugs" in Metz' schema emerge in the syntagmatic analysis of Adieu Philippine. Apart from perceptual inaccuracies – a jump-cut edited series of twelve lateral tracking shots is treated as a single shot – there are other problems. The Grand Syntagmatique pretends to limit its attention to the image track, yet it has frequent recourse to information drawn from the soundtrack. The characterization of a shot of Michel loafing at the TV studio (contradicting his exaggerated claims of importance) as a "displaced diegetic insert" depends on our knowledge of Michel's boasting, knowledge provided by the dialogue rather than the image track. A less monolithic schema would allow for the possibility of multiple syntagmatic attributions depending on which track or which dimension of the sequence is being discussed. Thus one might speak of a certain film segment having both bracketing and descriptive "functions" or of having a diversity of syntagmatic "operations." (Such a move would parallel Eco's progression from speaking of "signs" to speaking of "sign functions," or Metz' own shift of interest, in "Metaphor/Metonymy" (in Metz 1981), from defining a given textual instance as essentially either metaphor or metonymy to speaking of simultaneous metaphorical and metonymic "operations" within the same instance.)

The Grand Syntagmatique also assumes that films develop a single temporality, when in fact even some Hollywood films develop multiple temporalities. An altered schema would allow for the possibility of distinct and even contradictory temporalities at the same textual point within the same film, depending on whether one is analyzing the image track, the dialogue track, the music track or even the written materials track. The permutations of these coordinates, systematically explored in a film like Numero Deux, are anticipated in Adieu Philippine. The "episodic sequence" in which Michel accompanies Liliane and Juliette to three distinct locales (a train station, a country road, an airfield) combines flawless continuity on the dialogue track with clear spatial and temporal discontinuity on the image track.

Much of the hostility initially provoked by the Grand Syntagmatique was based on the misperception that it was intended to be definitive and exhaustive, as the master code of the cinema. After such an analysis is finished, critics pointed out, virtually everything important remains to be said. But Metz offered the Grand Syntagmatique in a more modest spirit than was often granted by his detractors, as a first step toward establishing the main types of image ordering. To the objection that "everything remains to be said" Metz would presumably answer that, first, it is in the nature of science to choose a principle of pertinence. To speak of the Grand Canyon in terms of geological strata, or of Hamlet in terms of syntactic functions, hardly exhausts the interest or signification of experi-
encerning the Grand Canyon or reading Hamlet, yet that does not mean that
gology and linguistics have nothing to offer. Secondly, the work of address-
ing all levels of signification in a film is the task of textual analysis, not
of film theory or of the Grand Syntagmatique. The Grand Syntagmatique
is merely one of the subcodes, functioning as an armature or support for
the work of the codes comprising the film's textual system.

Although the Grand Syntagmatique belonged to a euphorically scientistic
phase of the semiotic project, a phase subsequently both complemented by
and relativized by psychoanalytic methods before being aggressively
questioned by the proponents of deconstruction, it would be wrong to
underestimate its importance or Metz' achievement. In contrast to the
impression of previous models, Metz introduced a relative rigor by shifting
attention away from the narrative signified onto the cinematic signifier.
Metz' schema, if not infallible, at least addressed an important question:
what are the diverse possibilities of temporal and spatial articulation within
the fiction film? In practical terms, the Grand Syntagmatique can serve
as an attention-focusing device, of interest even when only partially appli-
cable. The syntagmatic types are also broadly useful in defining the spatio-
temporal coordinates of specific genres, or the stylistic options of given
directors, genres or films. John Ellis, in his analysis of Ealing Studios
(Screen, Spring 1975), shows that two-thirds of Passport to Pimlico consists
of syntagmas favoring spatio-temporal integrity (scenes, ordinary sequences
and autonomous shots), a feature reflective of the illusionistic
thrust of the film. In "The Real Soap Operas," Sandy Fetterman-
Lewis delineates the syntagmatic patterns typical of television commercials
(in Kaplan 1983). It is easier, finally, to point out flaws in a model than
to construct one. The Grand Syntagmatique, whatever its flaws, still offers
the most precise model to date for dealing with the specific image-ordering
procedures of the narrative film.

CODES AND SUBCODES

Although lacking a grammar or phonemic system, Metz argues in Language
and Cinema (published in French in 1971 and translated into English in
1974), film still constitutes a quasi-linguistic practice as a PLURICODE
MEDIUM. Like any artistic language, the cinema manifests a plurality of
codes. In cinema, numerous codes remain constant across all or most films;
unlike language, however, film has no "master code" shared by all films.

Filmic texts, for Metz, form a structured network produced by the inter-
weaving of SPECIFIC CINEMATIC CODES, i.e. codes that appear only in
the cinema, and NON-SPECIFIC CODES, i.e. codes shared with languages other
than the cinema. Metz describes the configuration of specific and non-
specific codes as a set of concentric circles ranging on a spectrum from
the very specific – the inner circle – for example, those codes linked to
film's definition as deploying moving, multiple images (e.g. codes of camera
movement and continuity editing), through codes shared with other arts
(e.g. narrative codes, shared with the novel and the comic strip, or codes
of visual analogy, shared with painting) to demonstrably non-specific codes
which are widely disseminated in the culture (for example, the codes of
gender roles). Rather than an absolute specificity or non-specificity, then,
it is more accurate to speak of "degrees" of specificity. Examples of specifi-
cally cinematic codes would be camera movement (or lack of it), lighting,
and montage; they are attributes of all films in that all films involve cameras, all films must be lit, and all films must be edited, even if the
editing is minimal. (Avant-garde attempts to do away with even these
basic traits, as in flicker films, reveal the covert dependency of Metz' model
on classical cinema.) The distinction between specifically cinematic and
non-cinematic codes is obviously often a tenuous and shifting one. While
the phenomenon of color belongs to the arts generally, the particularities
of 1950s technicolor belong specifically to film. While a recorded voice
seems non-specific, a voice recorded in Dolby sound for a "concert film"
approaches the specific. While gestures and mimicry are common to film,
theatre, and everyday life, there also exist specifically cinematic forms of
acting. Even non-specific elements, moreover, can be "cinematized"
through their simultaneous coexistence with the other elements featured
on other "tracks" at the same moment in the filmic-discursive chain.

Within each particular cinematic code, cinematic SUBCODES represent
specific usages of the general code. Expressionist lighting forms a subcode
of lighting, just as Eisensteinian montage forms a subcode of editing,
contrastable in its typical usage with a Bazinian mise-en-scene that would
minimize spatial and temporal fragmentation. According to Metz, codes
do not compete, but subcodes do. While all films must be lit and edited,
not all films need deploy Eisensteinian montage. Metz notes, however, that
certain film-makers (such as Glauber Rocha) at times mingle contradictory
subcodes in a "feverish anthological procedure" by which Eisensteinian
montage, Bazinian mise-en-scene and cinema verité coexist in tension within
the same sequence. The diverse codes can also be made to play against
another one, for example, by using expressionist lighting in a musical, or
a jazz score in a Western. The code, for Metz, is a logical calculus of
possible permutations; the subcode is a specific and concrete use of these
possibilities, which yet remains within a conventionalized system. CINE-
MATIC LANGUAGE, for Metz, is the totality of cinematic codes and sub-
codes in so far as the differences separating these various codes are pro-
visionally set aside in order to treat the whole as a unitary system, thus
allowing us to formulate general propositions. Cinematic language, Metz
acknowledges, has neither the same cohesion nor the same precision as a
language; it is not pre-given, furthermore, but rather a system to be forged
by the analyst.
A history of the cinema, for Metz, would trace the play of competition, incorporations and exclusions of the subcodes. A number of analysts have complained about the circularity of definition and argument in Metz’ early work, and the lack of clear criteria, with regard to both code and subcode. In his essay “Textual Analysis etc.,” (Emulit) David Bordwell points out some of the problems. While Metz insists that codes are potentially “common to all films,” Bordwell argues that no code is actually present in all films, while all codes are potentially present in all films, since anything could have been put in a film. Metz’ characterization of the subcodes, Bordwell argues further, shows covert dependency on received ideas about film history and the “evolution of film language,” ideas which provide the unstated grounding for the recognition of the subcodes. Bordwell therefore calls for the historicization of the study of cinematic subcodes. He appeals to Jan Mukarovsky’s concept of AESTHETIC NORMS, i.e. the historically evolving sets of alternatives available to the film-maker, the set of more or less probable substitutions within a functional context. Thus a given mode of film practice at any historical moment ranks certain paradigmatic alternatives as more or less likely. The wipe, for example, is an unlikely alternative in a 1920s film but a highly likely one in the mid-1930s. These norms should be studied, furthermore, in terms of their relation to the forces and relations of film production. (Such is the project of Bordwell/Thompson/Steiger’s The Classical Hollywood Cinema.) Hollywood film-makers clung to certain schemata, Bordwell argues, because of already fixed patterns of capitalist film production. A style based on extensive cutting, for example, allowed the studios to plan scripts as ensembles of shots which could be routinely dispatched during the shooting.

TEXTUAL SYSTEM

It is also in Language and Cinema that Metz develops the notion of TEXTUAL SYSTEM — the undergirding organization of a film-text considered as a singular totality. Every film has a particular structure, a network of meaning around which it coheres — even if the system chosen is one of deliberate incoherence — a configuration arising from the diverse choices made among the diverse codes available to the film-maker. The textual system does not inhere in the text; it is constructed by the analyst. The concept of the textual system as a structured network of codes helps Metz define the task of the film analyst as opposed to that of the theorist, though the distinction is often far from clear. Just as cinematic language is the object of cine-semiological theory, so the text is the object of filmo-linguistic analysis. What the cine-semiologist studies is not the film-making milieu, or the lives of the stars, or the technological supports of the cinema, or their reception, but the text as a signifying system. (This New-Critical-style “ghettoizing” of the text was questioned subsequently, even by Metz himself.) Metz is not concerned, in Language and Cinema, with providing a “how to” book for textual analysis, but rather with determining its theoretical status, its “place.” Metz repeatedly emphasizes the notion of constructing codes, or better, of doing textual analysis so as to expose codes not previously recognized as codes. Second, Metz suggests that no film is constructed uniquely out of cinematic codes; films always speak of something, even if they speak about nothing more than the apparatus itself, the film experience itself, or our conventional expectations concerning that experience.

At certain points in Language and Cinema, Metz’ theorizations are infected by post-structuralist literary currents, and particularly by the theoretical interventions of Barthes, Kristeva, and more generally, by the writers associated with the French journal Tel Quel, a group which had as its goal the promotion of a new kind of literary-textual practice. Kristeva saw in the avant-garde writings of Lautréamont, Mallarmé and Artaud the paradigm of a revolutionary écriture. These literary currents were absorbed to a certain extent by the film-theoretical milieu, especially in such film journals as Cahiers du Cinéma and especially Cinétique. Within film studies, Tel Quelism urged a radical rejection of all conventional mainstream films, and even of aesthetically conventional left militant films, in favor of films like Jean Daniel Pollet’s Mediterranés and the experimental films of the Dziga Vertov group (Jean-Luc Godard and Jean-Pierre Gorin) which provoked a dramatic rupture with conventional practices.

In Language and Cinema Metz tended to oscillate between a more neutral notion of TEXT as any finite, organized discourse intended to realize communication, and a more programmatic avant-garde deconstructionist sense of text. But unlike the Tel Quelists, Metz does not generally use the word “text” to separate out radical avant-garde films; for him, all films are texts and have textual systems. There exists a clear tension in Language and Cinema, consequently, between a static, taxonomic, structuralist-Formalist view of textual systems, and a more dynamic post-structuralist Barthesian-Kristean view of text as productivity, “displacement,” and “écriture.” Influenced by the Kristevan critique of the Saussurean paradigm (a critique indebted not only to the Derridean critique of the sign but also to Bakhtin’s translinguistic critique of Saussure), Metz describes the moment of filmic parole as the dissolution of the very systematicity he has elsewhere emphasized.

The system of the text is the process which displaces codes, deforming each of them by the presence of the others, contaminating some by means of others, meanwhile replacing one by another, and finally — as a temporarily “arrested” result of this general displacement — placing each code in a particular position in regard to the overall
structure, a displacement which thus finishes by a positioning which is itself destined to be displaced by another text. (Metz 1974: 103)

It is this latter, more dynamic view of the text as a "non-finalized" perpetual DISPLACEMENT that constitutes the more dynamic pole in Language and Cinema. A film's text, within this more dynamic conception, is not the "list" of its operative codes, but rather the labor of constant restructuration and displacement by which the film "writes" its text, modifies and combines its codes, playing some codes off against others, and thus constitutes its system. The textual system, then, is the instance which displaces the codes so that they come to inflect and substitute one another. What matters is the passage from code to code, the way in which signification is relayed from lighting, for example, to camera movement, from dialogue to music, or the way that music plays against dialogue, or lighting against music, or music against camera movement. Cinematic ECRITURE refers to the process by which the film works with and against the various codes in order to constitute itself as text. While film language can be seen as an ensemble of codes, écriture is an operation, the process which displaces the codes. This formulation has the corollary advantage of "socializing" the process of artistic creation. By foregrounding écriture as the re-elaboration of codes, Metz envisions film as a signifying practice not dependent on romantically connoted entities such as "inspiration" and "genius" but rather as a reworking of socially available discourses.

One film theorist who took very seriously the post-structuralist critique of first-phase semiology was Stephen Heath. Besides presenting Metz' work for an Anglo-American audience, Heath also criticized certain aspects of that work from a Lacanian–Kristevan perspective. Heath called for a shift in attention away from the text as an interweaving of codes toward a view of the text as "process" and "operation." Both Stephen Heath and Ben Brewster found Metz' notion of codes somewhat too restricting, and out of keeping with the idea of the cinema as a langage without langue. Heath therefore redefined codes, in a somewhat looser way, as "systems of constraints" or "systems of possibilities" bearing on both paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations. Heath's redefinition was obviously influenced by S/Z, Barthes' prolonged analysis of the Balzac novel Sarrasine, where Barthes suggests that signifiers partially "escape" their codes during their passage through the text. (We will discuss S/Z in detail in Part V.) But Heath also builds on other aspects of Metz' writing which he finds congenial, notably the notion of filmic écriture as "displacement." Building on the Derridean–Kristevan critique of the sign, Heath suggests that the systems constructed by the analyst will always be inadequate, always leaving gaps, losses, producing "waste," or in Lacanian terms, EXCESS. Heath used the term excess to refer to manifestations of the imaginary within the symbolic which betray or point to the menacing plurality of the subject and more broadly to all aspects of the text not contained by its unifying forces. He also distinguishes between HOMOGENEITY, i.e. the unifying forces in the text – what Bakhtin would call the CENTRIPETAL forces – and HETEROGENEITY, i.e. the forces which disrupt and fragment unity (Bakhtin's "CENTRIFUGAL forces"). Mainstream cinema, for Heath, proliferates in examples of "excess": play with the frame line designating an off-screen space which escapes the perspectival organization of the frame, improbable virtuoso camera set-ups, unmotivated camera movements. (We will return to Heath's work in Parts IV and V.)

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The publication of Language and Cinema was followed by an international deluge of textual analyses of films. These analyses investigated the formal configurations making up textual systems, usually isolating a small number of codes and then tracing their interweavings across the film. Among the more ambitious semiotic textual analyses are Stephen Heath's of Touch of Evil (in Heath 1981), Pierre Baudry's of Intolerance, Thierry Kuntzel's of M (in Communications 19, 1972) Cahier's of Young Mr Lincoln (in Nichols 1983), and the collective analyses of Muriel (see Baille et al. 1974) and October (see Lagny et al. 1976). Although most of the analyses generated by this wave belonged, broadly speaking, to the general semiotic current, not all of them were based on Metzian categories or assumptions. Historian Pierre Sorlin's textual analyses formed part of a sociological project largely inspired by the work of Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron. Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuillemin's extremely intricate analyses of such films as India Song and October synthesized semiotic insights with a more personal project, partially inspired by Derridean grammatology, concerning filmic "writing." Many textual analyses betrayed the influence of literary critical models, such as Barthes' S/Z, while Kristin Thompson's book-length study of Joan the Terrible demonstrates the possibilities of "neo-formalist analysis." Some textual analyses were inspired by Propppian narratological methods – Peter Wollen on North by Northwest – or by other theoretical currents. While some analyses sought to construct the system of a single text, others studied specific films as instances of a general code informing cinematic practice. Here, too, the distinction is not always clear, however; Raymond Bellour's analysis of The Birds offers both a microcosmic textual analysis of the Bodega Bay sequence of the Hitchcock film and an extrapolation to broader narrative codes shared by a larger body of films – to wit the constitution of the couple as the telos of Hollywood narrative.

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS finds its historical antecedents in biblical exegesis, in hermeneutics and philology, in the French pedagogical method of close reading (explication de texte) and in New-Critical "immanent" analysis. What
was new, then, in the semiotic approach to textual analysis? First, the semiotic method demonstrated, in comparison with antecedent film criticism, a heightened sensitivity to specifically cinematic formal elements as opposed to elements of character and plot. Second, the analyses were methodologically self-aware; they were at once about their subject—the film in question—and about their own methodology. Each analysis thus became a demonstration model of a possible approach to be extrapolated for other films. Unlike journalistic critics, these analyses saw it as their obligation to cite their own critical and theoretical presuppositions and intertext. (Many analyses began with quasi-ritual invocations of the names of Metz, Barthes, Kristeva or Heath.) Third, these analyses presupposed a radically different approach to studying a film. The analyst had to abstract him/herself from the “regressive” conditions imposed by conventional movie-going. Rather than a single screening, the analyst was expected to analyze the film shot by shot, preferably on a flatbed editing table. (The existence of VCRs has to some extent democratized the practice of close analysis.) Analysts such as Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier and Michel Marie developed elaborate schemas for notation, registering such codes as angle, camera movement, movement in the shot, off-screen sound and so forth. Finally, these analyses rejected the traditional evaluative terms of film criticism in favor of a new vocabulary drawn from structural linguistics, narratology, psychoanalysis and literary semiotics.

Given the closeness of attention seen as de rigueur in such analyses, it became impossible to say everything about a film. As a result, many analyses focused on isolated segments or fragments of films. Thus Thierry Kuntzel focussed long analyses on especially dense beginnings of films, for example, the opening shots of Fritz Lang’s M or King Kong. Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier devotes forty pages to the first two minutes of October; Thierry Kuntzel devotes fifty-two pages to the first sixty-two shots of The Most Dangerous Game. These analyses are also characterized by a sense of relativism. In an intuition of the post-structuralist refusal of mastery, criticism begins to be written in the conditional “might have” mode. The analyst demonstrates awareness that the analysis “might have” been based on other theoretical references, “might have” dealt with a different corpus, “might have” discerned or constructed other “textual systems.” The limits of the text, meanwhile, might be defined by the segment (Bellour on The Birds, Kuntzel on King Kong), by an entire film (Heath on Touch of Evil, Bellour on North by Northwest), or even by the entire oeuvre of a film-maker (René Gardies on Glauber Rocha).

Raymond Bellour combined many of these currents in an ongoing reflexion both on films themselves and on the methodology of their analysis, performing painstaking analyses of a number of Hollywood films. His analysis of The Birds explores the textual logic of what Bellour calls an “undetermined fragment” (i.e. one established by the analyst rather than

based on a pre-existing code such as the Grand Syntagmatique), in terms of three pertinent codes—the absence or presence of camera movement, framing and point-of-view—in order to reveal the “desire of the film” and the fundamental mechanisms of repetition and variation characteristic of Hitchcockian cinema. Bellour’s second analysis, of Howard Hawks’ The Big Sleep, treats the textual logic of a determined fragment—i.e. one which the film itself isolates as a segment—which despite its apparent banality still serves to advance the text and the constitution of the couple. Bellour’s third analysis, of Hitchcock’s North by Northwest, relates smaller segments such as the “crop dusting sequence” to the scenario as a whole, all in terms of the Oedipal trajectory of the film’s male protagonist. Bellour’s analysis of Gigi, meanwhile, explores the textural logic of the film as a whole, foregrounding the elaborate mirror effects and symmetries operative in the film. The large narrative units, Bellour demonstrates, entwine between themselves highly organized relations of displacement, condensation, resolution, acting on a larger scale the way shots do within a segment. Bellour’s analysis of Marnie concentrates on the first forty-four shots of that film in order to disengage (1) the “work of the film” in its opening segment, and (2) the inscription of the look in terms of identification in so far as it bears on sexual difference, constituting the woman as an object of the gaze while positing both Hitchcock the enunciator and the spectator as those who look.

Building on aspects of the work of Barthes and Metz, Bellour discerned in the classical film a complex system of repetitions and regulated differences. In “Segmenting/Analyzing,” he calls attention to the rhyming effects frequent in American classical cinema, i.e. the devices that “carry” narrative difference through an ordered network of resemblances, contrasts and unfolding symmetries and asymmetries. Bellour called attention to the importance of repetition in creating what he called textual volume, the process of repetition and variation whereby the filmic discourse advances thanks to differential increments which repeat codical elements so as to generate both continuity (and thus comprehension) and discontinuity (and thus interest). Repetition, for Bellour, “saturates” narrative space, and operates at both micro and macro levels. Through systems of alternation (e.g. between shots, between syntagmatic units, mise-en-abyme constructions), smaller units become mobilized as part of the larger unit of the narrative achieving its resolution. Within the segment, the transition from shot to shot is governed by a process of alternation whereby each match results from the mutual interplay of cinematic codes such as point-of-view and camera angle (the specific subject of Bellour’s analysis of The Birds). On a macro level, we find a similar play of difference and identity in terms of the interplay of entire segments (the focus of Bellour’s analysis of Gigi).

Bellour further distinguishes between external repetition (1), i.e.
those repetitions inherent in the production process, for example the
rehearsal of actors or the multiple takes involved in getting a shot, and
EXTERNAL REPETITION (2), i.e. the repeatbility or “obstinate textual
identity” of the film/text itself, which is, ideally at least, repeated
unchanged, but which in fact rarely occurs, due to the variability of
screening conditions, or change of medium (films shown on television, for
example). INTERNAL REPETITION (1) refers to the elementary repetition of
the frame itself, usually masked by the projection, but which only becomes
visible on an editing table or in certain avant-garde films which privilege
the frame. INTERNAL REPETITION (2) refers to the alternation or structural
opposition of two terms, which develops through the return of either one
or both terms according to a process of more or less limited expansion:
\[a/b/a\]. \[a/b/a/b\] and so on. This principle of alternation can then be
subdivided according to specific codifications such as point-of-view, fram-
ing, and opposition of stasis and movement. This principle, for Bellour,
founds the narrative on an ordered return of its elements. INTERNAL
REPETITION (3) refers to an all-encompassing textual repetition charac-
terized by the fact that its level constantly changes, displaces itself, and is
fed by elements drawn from all levels: a gesture, a sound, a frame, a color,
a décor, an action, a camera movement, or any of these together. Bellour
points to three determinants, the conjunction of which outlines a type of
global apparatus by which the classical American cinema reveals itself as
a scenography of repetition: micro-repetitions which structure the minor
units, the macro-repetiton which makes the film both progressive and
regular, and positive and negative resolutions which advance or retard the
narrative.

Bellour’s work on filmic repetition and “rhymes” was obviously inflected
by his background in close literary study. In “The UNATTAINABLE TEXT,”
Bellour addresses some of the difficulties in extending literary models to
film. Whereas literary criticism emerges from millennia of reflexion, film
commentary is of recent date. More important, the film-text, unlike the
literary text, is not “quotable.” Whereas literature and literary criticism
share the same medium — words — film and film analysis do not. While
the film medium entails five tracks — image, dialogue, noise, music, written
materials — the analysis of the film consists of a single track — words.
Critical language is therefore inadequate to its object; the film always
escapes the language that attempts to constitute it. Bellour then compares
film to other artistic texts in terms of their coefficient of “quotatability.”
The pictorial text is quotable, and can be taken in at a glance. The
theatrical text can be rendered as written text, but with a loss of “accent.”
Bellour then analyzes the relative susceptibility of the five matters of
cinematic expression to verbal rendering. Dialogue can be quoted, for
example, but with a loss in tone, intensity, timbre, and the simultaneity
of bodily and facial expression. In the case of noise, a verbal account is
always a translation, a distortion. The image, finally, cannot possibly be
rendered in words. Individual frames can be reproduced and quoted, but
in stopping the film one loses what is specific to it — movement itself. The
text escapes at the very moment one tries to “seize” it. Given this obstacle,
the analyst can only try, in “principled despair,” to compete with the
object he/she is attempting to understand.

FILMIC PUNCTUATION

Apart from grand theorizations, cine-semiology has also devoted itself to
more “local” questions having to do with specific codes. In “Punctuation
and Demarcation in the Diegetic Film,” (in Metz 1971). Metz attempted
to clear up some of the confusion concerning the nature of filmic PUNCTU-
ATION, i.e. those demarcating effects — dissolves, fade-ins and fade-outs,
direct cuts — used simultaneously to separate and connect filmic segments.
Metz rejects the view that these devices are analogous to punctuation in
written language. Since film is not a language-system, their structure is
radically different from that of natural languages and therefore involves
units of different nature, size and boundaries. The typographical model,
which the notion of filmic “punctuation” is based, is indirectly linked
to the structure of natural languages, and as a result there is no equivalent
to typographical punctuation in film. What is called punctuation in the
diegetic film is in fact a kind of MACRO-PUNCTUATION, which intervenes
not between shots — which might be seen as the minimal units of the
syntagmatic chain of the editing code — but rather between whole syntag-
mas. These demarcating devices articulate the large segments which form
the diegesis of the narrative film. Their special status derives from the fact
that they are not analogous signs and therefore do not directly represent
any object or set of objects. Yet the spectator accepts them “as if” they
formed part of the diegetic “universe” and thus are indirectly linked to
analogue representation. Devices such as the lap-dissolve foreground the
essential unreality of filmic representation, since they represent nothing yet
are transformed by the desiring spectator into the “imaginary” of the
diegesis.

Since the cinema does have devices which function as macro-
punctuation, the problem arises of differentiating between the diverse types
between those, for example, which connect two individual shots and those
which articulate entire segments. Markedly visible punctuation effects, for
Metz, are optional, since the film-maker can also choose the “straight cut”
or “zero-degree” of enunciation. In Rosemary’s Baby, the passage from one
segment to another is frequently marked only by a shot dramatically closer
in scale, one which provokes questions in the spectator’s mind — What
object is this? Where is it? Why is it being foregrounded here? In short,
it is only the overall diegetic coherence that retroactively allows us to

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recognize the sudden close-up as a variation on a punctuating effect. The straight cut, meanwhile, avoids all markers of transition from segment to segment. It stands in paradigmatic relation to the other visible optical effects, but is evidenced, paradoxically, only by the refusal of marks of punctuation.

Some optical effects, furthermore, do not function as macro-punctuation. Certain lap-dissolves function as the filmic equivalents of Genette’s iterative – i.e., they denote duration of repeated actions, as in the cinematic evocation of a woman’s fruitless search for employment in Marcel Hanoun’s Une Simple Histoire, in which successive lap-dissolves suggest the frustration of repetition. In Hitchcock’s Vertigo, repeated lap-dissolves denote a semi-serial state, and in Chris Marker’s La Jetée, the lap-dissolves generate ersatz movement in a film consisting almost entirely of still photographs. In all these cases, the lap-dissolves do not demarcate distinct segments of the diegesis but operate strictly within one of them. Other “unorthodox” uses of optical devices would include the “jump-cut” lap-dissolves within Antoine’s interview with the psychologist in Truffaut’s 400 Blows, or the fade-ins and fade-outs which intervene between the individual shots that compose the initial lovemaking sequence in Godard’s A Married Woman. In such cases the optical devices mark a mini-autonomy within a larger segment while simultaneously rendering it more formally coherent and homogeneous.

Metz speaks of the punctuating “functions” of certain cinematic signifiers which themselves have no intrinsic significeds apart from that given them by a specific text. When a lap-dissolve separates two segments, it functions as a punctuating device; when it smooths over distinct moments within a larger segment evoking duration, it functions differently. In the classical fiction film, the lap-dissolve generally marks a temporal ellipsis, but it can also vary in function, since its function is also determined by the structure of the filmic chain as well as by other diegetic factors. Although punctuating devices “carry” no intrinsic signified, then, we can speak of certain connotative tendencies in their signification. The dissolve tends to emphasize transition, while the fade-out emphasizes separation; the former carries us from one place and time to another, while the latter provides time for contemplation.

In the classical film, especially those of the silent period, iris-ins and iris-outs were used either to isolate a specific portion of the frame or as equivalents to fade-ins or fade-outs. With the advent of the French New Wave, iris-ins and iris-outs became a virtuoso stylistic effect connoting “archaic film style,” as in Godard’s Breathless and in Truffaut’s Two Englishwomen. Iris-ins and iris-outs, along with wipes, also form part of Tony Richardson’s adaptation of Fielding’s Tom Jones; here too they connote the archaic, as well as being a reflexive attempt to analogize the aesthetic procedures of the eighteenth-century “self-conscious” novel.

THE SEMIOTICS OF FILMIC SOUND

Metz returns to the subject of punctuation in his article “Metaphor/Metonymy” (Metz 1981). Whereas Jakobson sees montage as metonymic and dissolves as metaphor, Metz finds it more precise to see both as syntagmatic. Both lap-dissolves and superimpositions are syntagmatic, but with superimposition the syntagmatic is simultaneous while with lap-dissolve it is consecutive but with a moment of simultaneity. In a later passage, Metz returns to the question of the lap-dissolve, this time in the contexts of condensation/displacement and primary/secondary process. In the lap-dissolve, Metz suggests, the film exhibits, almost in a pure state, the process of its own textual advancement. The lap-dissolve foregrounds the passage from one image to another in such a way as to suggest a quasi-metalinguistic commentary on the very fact of this displacement. By hesitating on the threshold of a textual bifurcation – the passage from shot to shot – the lap-dissolve can be seen as offering an emblem of film’s constant process of contiguous weaving of shots. Condensation, meanwhile, is present in the ephemeral co-presence of two images on the screen, in the brief moment in which they are mutually indiscernible. A lap-dissolve is not a “nascent figure” but a “dying figure,” in which two images “run toward” each other and then “turn their back” to each other; condensation is begun, but through a process of progressive “extinction.” (Metz’ evocations of these operations are themselves highly metaphorical.)
and copy involve mechanical radiant energy transmitted by pressure waves in the air; thus we perceive sound as three-dimensional. For Mary Ann Doane, the cinematic situation deploys three auditory spaces: the space of the diegesis, the space of the screen, and the acoustical space of the theatre or auditorium. At the same time, these theorists point out, it is a mistake to see acoustic sound as unmediated, uncoded, non-conventional.

Feminist currents have also influenced the theorization of the sound. Many feminist analyses, such as Joan Copjec and Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, have focused on the films of Marguerite Duras as a filmmaker who constantly foregrounds the voice. Feminist discourse often contrasts the voice as fluid and continuous expression with the rigidity and discontinuity of writing. The voice, in this sense, is seen as a free space to be reconquered. Kristeva especially speaks of a pre-language vocal freedom, close to the marvelous original language of the mother, a language which would be incarnated purely in the form of voice. Luce Irigaray claims that patriarchal culture has a heavier investment in seeing than in hearing. Mary Ann Doane, for her part, points out that the use of the voice in the cinema appeals to what Lacan calls the Invocatory Drive (la pulsion innocatrice), that is, the desire to hear. At the same time she warns against any feminist idealization of the voice, since the voice, in psychoanalysis, is also the instrument of interdiction, of the patriarchal order; the voice, therefore, can provide "no isolated haven within patriarchy."

The notion of the "diegesis" as the posited world of the film's fiction also facilitated a more sophisticated analysis of the diverse possible relationships between the soundtrack and the diegesis. In the case of formal dialogue within film, for example, Metz distinguished between full diegetic speech (that spoken by characters as voices in the fiction), non-diegetic speech (commentary "off" by an anonymous speaker), and semi-diegetic speech (voice-over commentary by one of the characters of the action). Daniel Percheron distinguished between films with an unmarked diegesis, i.e. films which resemble the narrative activity, and those, such as Jules and Jim, with a marked diegesis, i.e. films which foreground the act of narration. David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson distinguish between simple diegetic sound, i.e. sound represented as emerging from a source within the story, and temporarily simultaneous with the image it accompanies, external diegetic sound, i.e. sound represented as coming from a physical source within the story space and which we assume the characters to be aware of, internal diegetic sound, i.e. sound represented as emerging from the mind of a character within the story space of which we as spectators are aware but of which the other characters are presumably not aware, displaced diegetic sound, i.e. sound which originates in the represented space of the story but which evokes a time anterior or posterior to that of the images with which it is juxtaposed, and

non-diegetic sound, for example, mood music or the voice of a narrator represented as being outside the space of the narrative. The tripartite division of the soundtrack into phonetic sound (dialogue), music, and noise, drawn from the vocabulary of film-making practice, is hardly adequate to the analysis of the audio-visual logic of the represented world of the film. Music, for example, is open to any number of possible permutations, deployed along a wide spectrum from total diegetization to dediegetization. Totally diegetic music would involve instances where the music is diegetic, on-screen and sung in sync; for example Ronée Blakley, recorded direct, singing "Daddy" in Nashville. At the other end of the spectrum, music can be non-diegetic, i.e. purely commenorative, as in the case of the orchestral music of "Try a Little Tenderness" superimposed on shots of B-52s in flight in Stanley Kubrick's Doctor Strangelove. At times a director can play with audience expectations, as when the diegetic status of a given piece of music is temporarily obscured for comic or reflexive effect. Thus Woody Allen, in Bananas, undermines his protagonist's happiness at receiving a presidential invitation by providing harp music, which we assume to be commenorative until he opens the door of a closet and uncovers a harpist at work. Progressive diegetization refers to the process by which music first presented as non-diegetic comes, by the end of the film, to function diegetically. The theme music from Grieg in Fritz Lang's M, for example, begins as non-diegetic - as accompaniment to the credits - but is diegetized when it is whistled in conjunction with the killer (Peter Lorre), then whistled again by the blind man who identifies the murderer.

Among the most acute analysts of filmic sound is Michel Chion, who has explored the subject in three volumes: La Voix au Cinema, Le Son au Cinema, and La Toile Trouée. Filmic sound, for Chion, is multi-track, and has diverse origins. The synchronous voice in the cinema, for Chion, can be traced back to the theater; film music derives from opera; and voice-over commentary goes back to commented-on projections such as magic lantern shows. For Chion, both film practice and film theory/criticism are characterized by vococentrism, i.e. the tendency on the part of both film-makers and critics to privilege the voice vis-à-vis the other soundtracks (music and noise). The film-makers' practice of aiming the camera toward speaking personages is "echoed," as it were, by a parallel privileging of spoken dialogue on the part of film analysts. In the classical cinema, especially, all the phases of the sound production process are subordinated to the goal of showcasing the human voice and making it audible and comprehensible; other sounds (music, noise) are subordinated both to the dialogue and to the image.

Chion borrows from Pierre Schaeffer (1966) the word acousmatique to refer to those sounds which one hears without seeing their source, a situation Schaeffer sees as typical of a media-saturated environment where we constantly hear the sounds of radio, telephone, records, without seeing
LANGUAGE IN THE CINEMA

The question of the relations between film and language was seen in a very partial and limited manner by the pioneer film semioticians. The view has, however, been criticized by some, who have argued that a full understanding of film requires an appreciation of both verbal and non-verbal elements. The role of language in film is complex, as it not only provides the narrative structure but also contributes to the visual and aural elements of the film.

Language in Film

Film language involves both verbal and non-verbal elements. Verbal elements include the dialogue, narration, and subtitles, while non-verbal elements include sound, music, lighting, and camera movement. These elements work together to create a cohesive and engaging narrative.

Verbal Elements

Dialogue

Dialogue in film can range from realistic conversations to more stylized or poetic expressions. It is used to advance the plot, develop character, and provide insight into the intentions of the characters.

Narration

Narration in film can take various forms, such as voice-over or off-screen commentary. It can provide additional information that is not visible on screen or help to contextualize the narrative.

Subtitles

Subtitles are used in films to provide translations of dialogue for non-native speakers. They can also be used to convey additional information, such as the names of characters or descriptions of actions.

Non-Verbal Elements

Sound

Sound in film includes dialogue, music, and ambient sounds. It can be used to create tension, establish atmosphere, or enhance the emotional impact of a scene.

Music

Music in film can be used to establish mood, underscore action, or create a sense of nostalgia. It is often carefully selected to complement the visual elements of the film.

Lighting

Lighting in film can be used to create mood, highlight important elements of the scene, or create a sense of depth.

Camera Movement

Camera movement can be used to guide the viewer's attention, create a sense of movement, or convey the psychology of a character.

The role of language in film is complex and multifaceted. It requires an appreciation of both verbal and non-verbal elements to fully understand the narrative and the intended impact of the film.
CINE-SEMIOLOGY

Metz points to the linguistic presence even in the image track. The codes of ICONIC RECOGNITION - the codes by which we recognize objects - and of ICONIC DESIGNATION - the codes by which we name them - structure and inform spectatorial vision, thus bringing language, as it were, "to" the image. This infiltration of the iconic by the symbolic, to use Peircean terminology, takes many forms. Verbal discourse structures the very formation of images. Boris Eikhenbaum, as we have seen, viewed film metaphors as parasitic on verbal metaphor, speaking of "image translations of linguistic tropes," while Paul Willemen, elaborating on Eikhenbaum, speaks of LITERALISMS, i.e. filmic instances in which the visual impact of a shot derives from strict fidelity to a linguistic metaphor, for example, the way a camera angle might literarize specific locations such as "look up to" or "oversee" or "look down on" (Screen 15, Winter 1974-5). Hitchcock's films constantly highlight the interface of word and image, at times structuring sequences and even entire films "through" linguistic formulations. The Wrong Man (1957) is informed in its entirety by the quibbling sentence: "Manny plays the bass." He plays the bass, quite literally, in the Stork Club, but he also plays the role of the base when he is falsely accused and forced to mimic the actions of the real thief. The overt sequence of Strangers on a Train (1951), as a number of commentators have pointed out, orchestrates an elaborate verbal and visual play on the expressions "criss-cross" and "double-cross" (crossed railroad tracks, crossed legs, crossed tennis racquets, tennis doubles, double scotch, alternating montage as double, lap-dissolve as a criss-cross of images and so forth). Hitchcock's cameo appearance, significantly, shows him carrying a double bass, in a film featuring two doppelgänger characters each, in his way, "base."

Language, at least potentially, exerts pressure on all the filmic tracks. The music and noise tracks, for example, can embrace linguistic elements. Recorded music is often accompanied by lyrics, and even when not so accompanied, can evoke lyrics. The purely instrumental version of "Melancholy Baby" in Lang's Scarlet Street (1945) elicits in the spectator the mental presence of the words of that song. Even apart from lyrics, the allegedly abstract art of music is permeated with semantic values. Musicologist J. J. Nattiez (1975), for example, sees music as embedded in social discourses, including verbal discourses. Nor are recorded noises necessarily "innocent" of language. Setting aside the question of the cultural relativity of the boundaries separating noise from music from language - one culture's "noise" may be another culture's "language," as in the case of African talking drums - we discover the frequent imbrication of noise and language in countless films. The stylized murmur of conversing voices in classical Hollywood restaurant sequences renders human speech as background noise, while Jacques Tati films give voice to an international esperanto of aural effects - vacuum cleaners that wheeze and vinyl seats that go "poof!" - characteristic of the postmodernist environment.  

BEYOND SAUSSURE

Even when verbal language is absent from both film and movie theatre, semantic processes take place in the mind of the spectator through what the Russian Formalists called "INNER SPEECH," the pulse of thought implicated in language. Film viewing, according to Boris Eikhenbaum, is accompanied by a constant process of internal speech, whereby images and sounds are projected onto a kind of verbal screen which functions as a constant ground for meaning, and the "glue" between shots and sequences. In the 1970s and 1980s, the journal Screen published a series of essays both by and about Eikhenbaum's theories of inner speech. Paul Willemen (Screen 15, Winter 1974-5) saw the notion of inner speech as potentially filling a gap in Metz' theories by demonstrating the linguistic nature of meaning and consciousness, as well as the link to psychoanalysis, since the condensations and distortions of inner speech were closely akin to the mechanisms explored by psychoanalysis. Willemen went on to evoke the possibility of a specifically cinematic kind of inner speech essential to the construction and understanding of films. Since this inner speech is language-specific, the filmic images are often grounded in the tropes of specific languages. Much of the discussion in the 1970s centered on the meaning of inner speech for the filmic work and theory of Eisenstein. David Bordwell (Screen 15, Winter 1974-5 and Screen 16, Spring 1975) argued that Eisenstein's work in the mid-1930s was partially designed to engender a spectatorial inner speech conceived as sensuous and pre-logical and, ultimately, private. Eisenstein's view of inner speech, for Bordwell, involves a "non-verbal psychic associationism underlying all behavior, including language." Ben Brewster (Screen 15, Winter 1974-5), in response, argued that Eisenstein's vision of inner speech is neither private nor constitutively pre-verbal but rather involves a psychic process rooted in everyday social language.

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Our discussion so far has privileged certain currents within the broader movement of semiotics - Russian Formalism, the Bakhtin Circle, Prague structuralism, Saussurean semiology and its prolongations and, to a lesser extent, the American Peircean semiotic tradition. We have neglected, for reasons of space, a number of other important traditions. First, the application of Peircean "pragmatist" semiotics to the cinema has not been limited to the explication and extrapolation of Peirce's trichotomy of icon, index and symbol. Peirce's ideas have been taken up with interest by Kaja Silverman, Teresa de Lauretis, Gilles Deleuze and Julia Kristeva. Gilles Deleuze in Image/Movement, especially, deploys Peirce, in conjunction with Bergson, in a defiantly non-linguistic manner, reproaching Metzian semiotics for displacing interest from the visual and auditory material to signs and syntagmas. Deleuze proposes instead to study the plenitude of a non-
signifying image and all the dispersed and moving figures of which the cinema is capable. Second, a strong semiotic movement has operated in the Soviet Union, one drawing strength from Russian Formalism, the Bakhtin School, and from Prague structuralism—a movement centered especially in Moscow and Tartu (Estonia). Soviet scholars, some direct heirs of the Formalist movement, have made strong contributions in the area of what they call "secondary modelling systems." In this perspective, natural language is a PRIMARY MODELLING SYSTEM, i.e. a grid which shapes our apprehension of the world, while artistic languages constitute SECONDARY MODELLING SYSTEMS, i.e. apparatuses, existing at a higher level of abstraction, through which the artist perceives the world and which model the world for the artist. The Tartu group treats language, myth and other cultural phenomena as closely interrelated models of meaning, and tries to draw up cultural typologies on the basis of norms, rules and typical signs. In Semiotics of Cinema, Jurij Lotman, the most active and representative of this school, discusses cinema both as language and as secondary modeling system, while trying to integrate the analysis of cinema into a broader cultural theory.

There have also been attempts to apply Noam Chomsky's transformational-linguistic models to the cinema. Chomsky's GENERATIVE GRAMMAR is concerned with the speaker's capacity both to generate and to understand "new" sentences. Rather than restrict itself to SURFACE STRUCTURES, i.e. the syntactic organization of the sentence as it occurs in speech, it seeks the DEEP STRUCTURES, i.e. the fundamental mechanisms of language, the grammar or underlying logic, which make possible the engendering of an infinity of grammatical sentences. This grammar has a SYNTACTIC DIMENSION—the system of rules determining which sentences are allowable in a language, a SEMANTIC dimension, the rules defining the interpretation of the sentences generated, and a PHONOLOGICAL/PHONETIC dimension, a system of rules organizing the sequence of sounds used to generate sentences. Extended to the study of the film-text, generative semiology studies the rules which guarantee the coherence and the progression of a film. It asks such questions as: What are the operative rules which render a series of shots "readable"? Is it possible to compare these rules to those of natural language? The major American proponent of a transformationalist approach to the cinema has been John M. Carroll. In "A Program for Film Theory" (1977) Carroll argues that cinema does indeed have a grammar, that its "deep structure" consists of events while its "surface structure" consists of actualized film sequences, felt by ordinary viewers to be "grammatical" or "ungrammatical." Carroll's reliance on Chomsky's early work, especially Syntactic Structures (1957), leads him to privilege, the syntactic over the semantic, an option which makes it difficult to account for the enormous differences of signification of syntactically similar sequences. Carroll's normative view has the effect, moreover, of naturalizing and universalizing one historically bound set of film practices—those of dominant cinema.

Michel Colin's Langue, Film, Discours: Problèmes à une Sémiologie Générale du Film (1985) constitutes a much more subtle and ambitious attempt to think through the possibilities of transformationalist models for the cinema. Unlike Carroll, Colin builds on Chomsky's later work in order to compare its productivity to that of non-transformationalist approaches. Rather than look for exact equivalents between film and natural language, or for merely metaphorical analogies between film and transformational grammar, Colin emphasizes the concrete processes of transformation (for example addition, effacement) and the structures common to the filmic and the verbal utterance. He seeks, therefore, the deep structures underlying both filmic and linguistic utterances. Colin's object, then, is less film itself than grammar, the set of rules which make possible both the production and the comprehension of filmic statements. Colin suggests that all statements, whether linguistic or filmic, entail both given knowledge and new knowledge. Colin distinguishes between THEME, as the nominal syntagma at the head of an utterance, and RHÈME, the element at the tail of an utterance. The question of knowledge leads Colin to move from the level of individual utterance to the level of discursive context. Utterances form part of discourse as a succession of utterances generated and received by a sociocultural community accustomed to seeing films, i.e. equipped with cinematic COMPETENCE, the capacity to generate or understand linguistic/filmic utterances. Filmic and linguistic competence, for Colin, are homological, in that the spectator, to understand filmic configurations, deploys the mechanisms already internalized in relation to language. In an intricate argument impossible to summarize here, Colin uses theme/rheme distinctions in an attempt to demonstrate the superiority of a generative model for dealing with specific filmic figures such as the single-shot sequence and shot/reverse shot. He also attempts to synthesize transformational theory with Marxist-inflected theories (especially those of Michel Pêcheux) of the social production of meaning. Ultimately, Colin is less interested in developing a semiotics of the cinema than in imagining how the analysis of film might contribute to a general transformationalist theory of discourse.

NOTES


2 See, for example, Bela Balazs, Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art (New York: Arno Press, 1972).

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inept translation turned Metz’ already difficult text into an unreadable monstrosity. Two of Metz’ key terms – langue and langage – were more or less systematically mistranslated into their opposites, thus transforming much of the book into nonsense.