

Figuration

FIGURES AS EVENTS OF DESTRUCTURATION

In pointing toward a hermeneutics of film, psychoanalysis seconds the project already indicated at the end of our discussion of semiotics.¹ There we discovered connotation to be the congenital condition, if not of language in general, at least of artistic language and assuredly of imagistic discourse like the cinema. Psychoanalysis makes the primacy of interpretation over structural analysis even more obvious, because its notion of the sign is truly radical. Although connotation seriously complicates the originally pristine Saussurian description of the sign as an invariable relation of a signifier to its signified, Roland Barthes and other critics nevertheless were optimistic in their belief that, if cleverly employed, the circuitous techniques of etymology, rhetorical analysis, and so on could ultimately restore to intelligence the thrust of every sign, no matter how involuted. Psychoanalysis dashes this hope by severing forever the relation of signifier and signified. Certainly signs do indeed involve unconscious signifieds, but this involvement proceeds by a logic unavailable to standard analysis. It takes precisely a "psychoanalysis" to tease out, if not the meaning, at least the force of any charged discourse like that of art.

Unfortunately psychoanalysts differ profoundly in their conception of this relation. Jacques Lacan, undoubtedly the most influential source of such ideas, posits that the unconscious is structured like a language

and that an intensive analysis can account for the eruption of the primary processes in the secondary flow of discourse.² His most persistent critic, Jean-François Lyotard, is less sanguine.³ For him, all conscious acts of signification have as their first object the suppression of unconscious desires. There is no easy access to the primary flow of images and dreams.

Both approaches, however, insist on the indicative nature of "figures," those twists and complications in discourse that mark out a difficulty in the path of meaning. As its name implies, a figure is a direct representation of meaning, nearly a visual representation, as opposed to the sequential logic of grammatical language. Figures (metaphors, parallelisms, disjunctions, and so forth) transgress or manipulate grammar and, by doing so, insist on the importance of their peculiar mode of presentation. Figures, thus, have a special tie to fantasies and are, for the psychoanalyst, the focus of any investigation that hopes to get at the force (that is, the deep significance) of discourse.

From every perspective, figuration assumes the first rank in an overall theory of film. From the point of view of signification, it takes over where semiotics was forced to leave off. From the psychoanalytic standpoint figures mark the terrain of analysis. From the position of genre and of the history of the cinema, figures make up on the one hand the only true dictionary we have (dissolves figure a change in time or location, black hats signify that their wearers are evil, at least in Westerns up to 1950, and so forth), while on the other hand they provide the energy that alters the system. In all these cases, the term "figure" implies either a conscious or unconscious work against the ordinary language of filmic discourse in the service of something that presses to be expressed. It is, in short, an indication of the presence of narration, of a narrator employing film in addressing spectators.

The category of figural discourse marks a return to certain earlier assumptions in film theory. It implies a hierarchy of texts based on the density of their signification, for instance. Studies of cinematic figures have generally been conducted on the works of filmmakers like Buñuel where narration clearly sets itself in opposition to standard narrative grammar and where the primary processes seem hardly suppressed at all.⁴ In the era of Lévi-Straussian structuralism, all texts were treated as equal versions of a central myth whose importance lay in its structure. But figures are exactly those textual elements that complicate and derail structure. For the same reason, where Lévi-Strauss and his fol-

lowers disregarded narration and the event of creation, discussion of figures wants to flow back to the moment in which a particular meaning was shaped. It flows back to the act of narration or to that of reception and is, consequently, bound to historical and psychological contexts. In sum, the category of figuration is paramount because it involves structure and process simultaneously, and because by its very nature it insists on the primacy of interpretation. In this it helps right the topsy-turvy world of film studies by restoring to the texts themselves an integrity worthy of discussion, and by fostering an interplay of theory and interpretation rather than a dominance of the former.

The opposition I have implied between the study of structure and the interpretation of figures or texts is historical, not logical. Christian Metz is a perfect example of a scholar whose original focus on structure (the laws of film syntax, most obviously) has shifted to that of cinematic figures. The parallax this shift produces is designed to account for the effect on the viewer, something his early semiotics neglected and his later psychoanalysis took up.

Metz sees no discontinuity in these changing projects of film study because, for him, a single model of the mind rules every phase of the work. In brief, Metz is committed to Jakobson's position that the mind (and all its processes) works by selection and ordering.⁵

In linguistics and semiotics this is easy to see. The dictionary (the paradigmatic law) contains our possibilities of selection whereas the grammar book (the syntagmatic law) governs the ordering of whatever is selected. Lacanian psychoanalysis (followed by Metz and most film theorists) explicitly echoes this same model. The unconscious is structured like a language because it too operates via principles of selection and ordering, only this time the results are difficult to catalogue in dictionaries and grammars. But our terms for the major work of the psyche match the model very well, "condensation" operating by means of a radical selection and "displacement" by means of circuitous ordering. Freud's third concept for the dream work, "secondary revision," is actually only a coefficient regulating the degree of condensation or displacement functioning in a dream, a work of art, a habit, and so on. Metz has made great use of this, labeling as "highly secondarized" common conventions (like a slow motion run of two lovers, cut as a parallel syntagma).⁶ Shockingly new cinematic effects (the freeze frame conclusion of *The 400 Blows*) are barely subject to revision. These would seem to have arisen as nearly direct expressions of

the psyche instead of being carefully selected from the already established codes of cinema.

Bringing the psychoanalytic concept of secondary revision into the realm of codes makes these same principles of selection and ordering available to rhetoric also. This is hardly surprising since psychoanalysis from the first adopted a rhetorical vocabulary (terms like antithesis, negation, and metalepsis are common to both fields). In the 1950's we find the psychoanalyst Lacan seconding the linguist Jakobson in attaching metaphor to the pole of selection, and metonymy which operates by means of contiguity to the pole of ordering.

Altogether, the master concepts of selection and ordering (similarity and sequence) permit the structuralist scholar to move from semiotics to rhetorical analyses and even to psychoanalysis. This holds true when the subject is a single film like *Young Mr. Lincoln* or a general problem in the cinema. Metz, as usual interested in general problems, takes great pains to discriminate among the related but not fully synonymous vocabularies of semiotics, rhetoric, and psychoanalysis. Yet his discriminations serve not to promote some new approach to the cinema but to refine its structural description. The obtuse presence of figures in cinematic discourse forced such a refinement in structuralism. In my estimation they force much more than this, as the remainder of this chapter hopes to demonstrate.

BETWEEN THE PSYCHE AND THE SYSTEM

Structuralism and semiotics of film have been enormously attractive enterprises because they promise to supply procedures capable of dealing systematically with a phenomenon that staunchly resisted systematizing for its first seventy years. The smooth visual surface of the movies could rebuff the advances of all but "global" scholars ready to fawn over or rebuke their charms. Until the mid-1960's, scholars of the art were scarcely distinguishable from popular reviewers. Many performed both functions.

Cinema was adored or feared but in all cases it was deemed inaccessible to scientific or even scientific labor, this despite such pretentious organizations as the "Institut de filmologie" in Paris and America's poor copy of it, "The Society of Cinematologists."⁷ Such groups floundered about in phenomenology, behavioral study, and psycho-

sociology searching for keys to enter the inner workings of the mystic screen. Structuralism and semiotics at last opened the door.

The greatest immediate breakthrough in these infant disciplines came in relation to genre films, especially those of the so-called classic American period (1935-55). Here the rewards seemed highest. If ever a cinema consistently guised itself as reality, it was in this era. If ever cinema brooked no challengers, it was then. The goal of structuralism and semiotics, therefore, was to "crack" this hermetic system, expose its workings, and provide social critics with the evidence they needed to perform a symptomatic reading of American culture through a study of the elements and rules structuring its movie reality.

At the same time, the hopes for success in this enterprise could hardly be higher, for the classic American genre film displayed a consistency that could be only the result of regularization achieved by some hidden application of rules. The sheer accumulation of 450 films a year for twenty years all coming from Hollywood under essentially a single production system foretold an aesthetic system mediating the production situation and the final product. Semiotics promised to track down the units of representation in that aesthetic system; structuralism promised to account for the specific narrative shape of the values represented. Both derived from structural linguistics, a master discipline which, in 1960, seemed on its way to the complete delineation of the communicative powers of language from its smallest elements to their ordered and "meaningful" combinations.

If structuralism has run up against resistance in the past few years, it is in part because cultural studies have felt the need to pass from the logical clarity of linguistics to the murkier discipline of rhetoric. Henceforth the study of *figures*, not codes, must be paramount in an examination of cultural artifacts. This is an especially appropriate attitude to adopt in relation to film which even in the case of the classic American genres has always seemed more a collection of strategies than a well-ordered system. Recent interest in the study of Third World films, art films, experimental pieces, and documentaries has confirmed this priority.

In practice this shift to rhetoric has meant supplementing categories of semiotics (codes) and of discourse theory (syntagms, paradigms, aspects of narration) by introducing the terminology of rhetoric (tropes of metaphor, metonymy, irony, and so forth) and of psychoanalysis (condensation, displacement, representability, secondary elaboration,

and so forth). As we have noted, all these disciplines share a method of organizing a text according to the selection and placement of elements. It was this vision of the structure of cinema which at first provided such impetus to treat it as a legitimately linguistic system since selection and ordering make up the very processes of language (dictionary and grammar).

And it is only an enlarged concern for selection and ordering that has forced a semiotician like Christian Metz to shift his categories from those of discourse theory to those of rhetorical and especially psychoanalytic theory. The cynic may find this shift perfectly congruent with the changing intellectual fads in France. The more serious student will see in this shift the recognition by film scholars themselves that film is ordered not as a natural language but at best as a set of practices and strategies that are in some way "ready-to-hand" but hardly form a system in any strong sense of the term.⁸ This aspect of *bricolage* at the heart of the medium suggests that meaning in film comes largely by way of conventions which began as figures. A dissolve denotes the passage of time today only because for years it figured that passage palpably through the physical intertwining of adjacent but distinct scenes.

While we may be accustomed to thinking of figures as abnormal, disordering embellishments in well-ordered rational discourse, Metz suggests that they are, especially in cinema, the normal marks of an irrational discourse which becomes progressively ordered. He sees film operating at three levels: semiotically (through grammar and syntax and an invariant relation of signifier to signified), rhetorically (where figures extend or replace the domain of the signified thus developing an unstable relation between it and its signifier), and psychoanalytically (where a free play of signifiers responds to dynamic instinctual forces and organizes itself through the processes associated with the dream work).

In his most recent writings, Metz has reversed our conventional order in handling cinematic meaning. Instead of proceeding from the ordered discourse back through figures of discourse to the psychic wellsprings of discourse, Metz has suggested that the true source and referent of all discourse is the "indestructible" (the drives and processes of the unconscious). The progressive displacement of meaning operating in relation to a censoring process turns a desire into a pattern of flight and detour that surfaces as a discursive form. This form is composed of the figurative movements of the medium which are ulti-

mately constrained into a semiotic matrix that can be rationally exchanged in a communicative act.

Film has freed us, Metz feels, from dealing with figures as instances of disordered speech, classifiable by logic or philology. From Aristotle to our own day, figures have been treated as obscure units replacing conventional units. Taxonomies have enumerated them.⁹ But the movement of meaning in film suggests that grammar, order, and semiotic consistency are a last order consideration and that discourse proceeds by way of figures and, through figures, by way of the unconscious. Thus he finds it more appropriate to speak of "figuration" rather than "figure," of great processes in which signifiers seek for, attain, extend, and often lose their signifieds.

For Metz, metonymy is the key and most usual figure, the figure of association by which we pass from one aspect or image to a related one in search of a satisfying final picture. When this process becomes fully "secondarized," that is, elaborated in logical (namely, semiotic) patterns, we have before us a filmed narrative. Only the close inspection of the remaining figures that protrude from the otherwise clean path of narrative provides an inkling of the complex detours which were taken in the production of an acceptable story. Thus metonymy does double duty, marking the displacement of psychic energy in its shifting trajectory refracted through censorship, and entering into the sheer contiguity of narrative successivity in which everything is, "in the end," well placed. Metonymies are midpoints between force and signification.

Metz's dynamic conception of textuality as a flow, a filtering, and successive detours observable in the struggle between volatile figures and a ruled narrative does not, however, free him from a limited structural stance in the analysis of texts. He calls for the classification of figures in film along four separate axes: degree of secondarization, dominance of metonymy or metaphor, suggestion of condensation or displacement, and the type of incorporation in the text (syntagmatic or paradigmatic).¹⁰ Here once again a closed structuralism dominates its object of research, even though that object is avowedly free and open. In genre study, to return to our clearest instance, the analyst may classify the figurative markers in the texts as they respond over the years to a timeless unconscious source (Lévi-Strauss's "inherent contradiction") in varying historical contexts.

If our interest is not to interpret what lies beyond the text but rather

to classify methods of textual disfiguration, then Metz may help us construct a history of rhetorical strategies. The tropology of classical rhetorical theory has its counterpart in Metz's four-axis classification method. The result of both schemas (despite their opposing theories of texts) is a list of genres, practices, and specific tropes by which art carries in its own (artistic) way the force of unconscious drives or the direction toward reasonable signification.

Let us take as an example the horror film. From their beginnings to our own day such films have fulfilled a set of constant functions. They have even told a limited number of tales. To chronicle the horror film is to examine the changing styles by which the unspeakable is represented. Hollywood in the classical era of the 1930's and 1940's relied primarily on makeup and model work to depict monsters incarnating whatever horror the film could express. But the European cinema of the 1920's often employed other elements, figuring horror through convoluted and irrational set designs (*Caligari*), through rhythms and mise-en-scène (Nosferatu's implacable trip to Bremen and to the bedroom of Mina), or through camera movement and optical effects (Dreyer's *Vampyr*). In the modern era, special effects have developed to such an extent that the audience is challenged to "figure" out the magic employed. *Poltergeist*, for example, carefully arranges its key scenes to occur in broad daylight, instead of the never-ending night of classical films.

Naturally this sort of inquiry could continue across hundreds of films and hundreds of pages. An astute and fastidious structural critic could, presumably, calculate a shifting dictionary of figures of horror, treating their interrelationships in a single film and across films as part of a history of representation.

Whereas this is most assuredly a necessary and valuable enterprise, it is nevertheless insufficient as a final research strategy. For all Metz makes of the unconscious origins of textuality, his is essentially a theory of narration wherein filtering and detour (selection and association) operate to shape a logical and closed story. Classical rhetorical theories of texts comprise the inverse of Metz's psychoanalytic view. The text for these stands in relation to a direct prose sense whereas for Metz it stands in relation to an unconscious non-sense. To take our example again from a horror film, *Vampyr*, classical rhetoric might begin by explaining that a figure like the superimposition of David Gray's ghost over his body substitutes for more prosaic ways of signifying his men-

tal life (using an intertitle, or a close-up of his eyes closing in thought). The trope of the superimposition is thus straightened out, permitting us to understand the direct sense of the film and to appreciate the ingenuity of Carl Dreyer in presenting that sense to us in such a striking way.

Now Metz's interest in aspects of the horror film would be quite different. The particular manner by which supernatural or horrific elements are represented becomes the basis for an inquiry into the deep forces responsible for our interest in the tale at all. The visual splitting of David Gray, via superimposition, links up with other moments of splitting scattered throughout *Vampyr*. Indeed the entire film is fractured so deeply that it is useless if not impossible to try to reconstruct some linear sense. It is a schizophrenic tale, rising up out of the unconscious. The figure of the doubled hero is from this point of view not a finishing rhetorical touch added to the story to give it weight; it is first and foremost the palpable expression of schizophrenia, outside all narrative context and before it is integrated into the logic of the rest of the film.

Despite their quite different levels of interest, classical rhetorical analysis and the contemporary sort descending from psychoanalysis hold in common a transitive conception of figures. In both cases figures operate as detours from, and substitutions for, a more direct formulation that the author cannot or will not provide. Thus in both cases the figural nature of a text is a transitional stage through which, as critics, we may try to pass on our way to the recovery of total sense (meaning) or total energy (the drives).

From neither point of view (rationalist or psychoanalytic) is the specific figural movement of a given text worth pursuing in and for itself. Structural analysis studies artistic speech without listening to it. It either translates such speech into the "real" discourse (of the unconscious or of reason) or it treats such speech as a cultural object, a datum for classification.

THE CENTRALITY OF INTERPRETATION IN FILM THEORY

If figural discourse has anything to say to us by means of its unique form only a hermeneutic, not a structural, orientation will prepare us to deal with it. It is hardly coincidental that the leading authority on

hermeneutics, Paul Ricoeur, has recently published a lengthy treatise on metaphor.¹¹

Ever the arbiter, Ricoeur threads his way between a theory of figural substitution for proper meaning coming from Aristotle (conscious, grammatical, ordered, and secondary) and a theory of sheer figural process coming from Freud (unconscious, disordered, disordering, and primary). Retaining both substitution and process, Ricoeur emphasizes the *event* of discourse rather than its structure. From this perspective a figure is reducible neither to its proper sense nor to some timeless process it exemplifies, for it has the ability to change the rules of the discursive game in which it participates. Its meaning is not purely substitutionary, nor is it irrecoverable in the indestructible unconscious, for while it depends on rules, sense, and grammar, and while it undoubtedly rests on psychological preconditions, a figural event in discourse expands the space of meaning and invites us to fill in that space through interpretation. Figures alter, but do not dispense with, the dictionary.

Now film historians and genre theorists may very well be content to trace the development of film art in terms of the figural markers that serve each generation. To return a final time to the horror film, in 1920 a superimposition was the appropriate marker to denote the presence of spirits (*Phantom Chariot*) and to connote "art." In 1961 the same denotation was carried by an electronic sound accompanying an overexposed long shot of a man (*The Innocents*). The history of the cinema and of any of its genres is not so much a compilation of the tales it has told as a development in the figures it employs to denote such tales and to signal to its audience that this tale is presented "artistically."

Without denying the utility of this sort of scholarship, Ricoeur implies that it is unable to attend to the specific world of meaning opened up in a genre film by means of figural operations. More important, neither can it accurately account for the general *process* by which films make artistic meaning. Metz's four categories of figure analysis, for instance, do not provide a dynamic model of the work of figures even though he asserts that figures are dynamic. His is an analysis of the various levels at which a figure may be thought of as working, levels which Metz is at pains to keep separate (the unconscious, the rhetorical, the grammatical, and the diachronic, corresponding to his examination of displacement, metonymy, syntagmatics, and degree of secundarization).

Ricoeur opposes this method of "analysis through separation" by

treating the figural process dialectically. It is not a matter, he claims, of a metaphor being drawn from the lexicon and responding to a certain psychic pressure; the metaphor is an event within which the psyche and the linguistic system adjust to one another. No analysis of this event can afford to neglect this interaction. Perhaps we can see now why Ricoeur privileges metaphor above all figures whereas Metz demotes it to an occasional and special form of association seldom if ever appearing in pure state. Every metaphor, Ricoeur claims, alters the discourse (artwork) while changing our sense of (name for) the referent.

Metz's view is an essentially narrative one in which a progressive filtering directs the successive signifying elements, ruling out unrelated connotations from the objects and events we recognize in the images. Metonymy has always been the privileged figure of narrative. Ricoeur, for his part, is eager to lift poetry, and its prime figure, metaphor, to the summit of artistic activity and by doing so to give metaphor a special function in the life of language.¹²

If metonymy proceeds by redirecting and filtering meanings, we may say that metaphor completely reorients meaning with respect to the situation in which it is used. It is the redescription of a semantic field (let us say, for example, the field of musical sounds) via a statement employing a term transferred from a foreign signifying domain (labels used to cover colors). We not only can speak in a given instance of a "bright or saturated tone" but the entire system of musical distinctions suddenly becomes vulnerable to a "chromatic" redescription. This is much more than the redirection of meaning. It is indeed the very birth of meaning as both language and its object are altered in adjusting to one another. It is not a special manner of traversing a semantic field but a way of permanently restructuring it through an "impertinent attribution" which demands interpretation in order to restore pertinence at some higher point.

Once metaphor is conceived of not as a verbal substitution but as a process resulting in the redescription of a semantic field, it becomes useful to film theory. For we may say that metaphor can occur as the calculated introduction of dissonance into any stage of the film process. That process we have broken into perception, representation, signification, structure, adaptation, and genre. When operating smoothly, as in a conventional educational film, we should expect the images to be clear, to mark out (represent) a recognizable field of interest, to

transmit a stream of unambiguous messages through standard relations of images and sounds, and to organize those images and sounds into a progressive outline or argument.

There is very little need to discuss such a zero degree film. But curiously, very few films seem unworthy of discussion. Most films, particularly most fictional ones, disrupt the smooth flow toward intelligibility and encourage, if not demand, our active interpretation. Such disruptions can block our trajectory through the film momentarily or vigorously and they may do so at any stage of this progressive process. We might liken these stages to successive thresholds across which we pass: from recognizing light and shadows as objects and actions, to understanding their signification, to seeing the overall pattern they develop, and to understanding this pattern in relation to the filmic system (genre) and filmic discourse (narration).

Cinematic representation (the image itself) is normally an unquestioned mapping of the visible field. Despite its limitations and because of its photochemical origins, we accept the image as a threshold to the properly narrative and rhetorical levels of discourse. Our sense of the perceptual field can, however, be questioned by a work on the elements of the sign (grain, focus, color, depth, camera stability, and so forth). Patterns and games played with these elements, once brought to a level of pertinence for the spectator, might then form a model adequate in itself and suggestive of new relations in the field, relations formerly unmapped and therefore insignificant or nonsignifying. Avant-garde cinema has proven this.

A figure functions only when it is observed to function, only when it stands in the way of an automatic movement across signs. If, as is usual, nothing halts us at the level of perception, the next potential figural work occurs at the level of narrative. Here, more than at the first level, we recognize the norm as a residue of figural strategies coming down to us through the years as a trial-and-error process in the attempt adequately to map the field of interlacing actions. But here, more easily than at the first level, we can see at work the concept of the model, the heuristic fiction, which, built in such a way that it is consistent to itself, may give us the terms to redescribe our life-world of objects, actions, and their interrelations.

The conventions of genre and the rules of verisimilitude make up the norms of narrative. The construction of an inconsistent world or one whose maniacal logic does not fit our experience (as in the *nouveau*

roman) forces us to imagine the world by wrestling with this problem which poses as a model of the world. Similarly the introduction of elements totally foreign to a genre breaks the code of likeness, thereby figuring a new relation of artwork to life.

Figuration can even occur globally at the level of adaptation. Jean-Marie Straub has made an entire reputation by representing classic texts from what can only be called a figural perspective. His *Othon*, for example, features Corneille dialogue spoken by actors all of whom carry heavy foreign accents. And this is only the most obvious way he has shaped the play. The camera moves in and out of the action with insistence but without relation to the dramatic flow of the original. Finally, the set is a "stage" in ancient Rome behind which one catches glimpses of modern traffic patterns. The Corneille play comes to us, to be sure, but it does so figuratively.

Finally, the narrational stage involves the codes of discourse and of personal style by which a text foregrounds certain of its aspects. In a film like Robert Bresson's *Pickpocket* we have no trouble construing either the images or the story set before us; but Bresson's importation of baroque music and a literary voice-over, not to mention his formal camera movement and obsessive close-ups, halt our easy access to this film. We find ourselves seeking the appropriate level of discourse, that is, interpreting the film at the level its incongruities and obsessions seem to point to. This jump in levels is precisely a metaphoric one, since no literal reading of these marks of discourse is adequate to the work of the film. The film, then, becomes for us a model of a moral stance applicable to the world at large.

Although in practice these stages in the process of signification in the cinema occur simultaneously, metaphor always localizes itself at a particular stage as it strives to disrupt the system of signification in order to signify something "other." What guides the propriety of a metaphorical shift and what guides our subsequent effort to interpret it? I would have to say here that a metaphor only points to a potentially fruitful rapport with the semantic field, a rapport which it is up to the spectator to work out. The metaphor demands close description since by definition no rule or convention can determine or locate its utility and scope. As it is elaborated in detail it becomes a model for the redescription of reality as such.

Only the manifold of experience can determine the extent of a metaphor's power. Hence the metaphor demands an interrogation between

experience and system, between the field and the map, which is largely self-regulating. The point should be clear. A semiotics of film hoped to specify the meaning of its elements. A rhetoric of film hopes to point to its figural moments and to initiate an interpretative process which may go on for as long as it is fruitful.

It should be evident now why structuralism can only provide a partial explanation for the workings of film and no real comprehension of the achievement of any given film. For structuralism will not recognize the event of cinematic discourse. It will always and only provide a description of the system which is put into use in the event. If, as I claim with Ricoeur, the system is altered by the event, if (to make a stronger claim) the system was born and exists only as a residue of such events of figuration, then we need a broader vision of the creation of meaning in films.

Semiotics and structuralism taught us to study the system through which signs are recognized as images and stories. We need to focus now on those instances when a sign is not assimilated by the narrative and where therefore a misrecognition occurs. For Metz such misrecognition arises from the unconscious and points back to it even while a radical filtering reorients the context as the film moves toward its proper closure. All figuration for him is merely displaced narration.

Ricoeur's view is stronger. For him misrecognition forces us to put into play all the possibilities of the sign and then leap to a new possibility, the one that will change the context itself and make us see it through the "improper and impertinent" sign. This is what produces a seismic shift of the contextual field. In politics we call such condensation "revolution," in psychoanalysis "transference," and in artistic and religious experience "insight." Figures are thus more than shortcuts by way of association and substitution; they have the power to disrupt the relation of context to sign and reorient not only the discursive event but the system itself which will never be the same afterwards.

The institution of film proceeds by a tension between rules and a force of discourse trying to say something. This force overdetermines a sign within a conventional context so that the sign overflows both recognition and narrative placement, disturbing the system through misrecognition until, in the tension, we recognize what was meant. Such misrecognition can occur in the presentation of the elementary cinematic sign, in its placement in a scene, in the scene's placement in the

narrative, and in the film's relation to a cultural context. Though we may be fascinated by the rules of genre, for example, we ought to be still more fascinated by the play of misrecognition which makes a particular genre film interesting to us and which makes it a useful and not merely a redundant way to view culture. The great film puts the genre and the culture into question, permanently altering both by means of its defiance of meaning and its simultaneous search for a true meaning. This can occur only in a process that incorporates structure as one of its constitutive elements, but that could never be exhausted by a study of structure.

- Apparatus," *Film Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Winter 1974-75): 39-47, trans. Alan Williams from *Cinématique*, pp. 7-8.
30. Christian Metz, "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator," in *Imaginary Signifier*, pp. 99-148.
 31. Jean-Louis Baudry, "Le Dispositif," *Communications* 23 (1975): 69, 70. This essay, translated in *Camera Obscura*, no. 1 (Fall 1976), substantially influenced Metz as can be seen in his *Imaginary Signifier*, p. 49.
 32. Christian Metz, "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator," in *Imaginary Signifier*, pp. 99-148.
 33. This term, coming from Bakhtin, has been directed explicitly against Metz's system by Doane, "The Dialogic Text," chs. 1 and 2. I am indebted to Mary Ann Doane for this and many other insights.
 34. Ricoeur discusses the "indestructible" character of the instincts in *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 442. Freud's classic formulation appears in "On Dreams," *Standard Edition*, vol. 5, pp. 553, 577.
 35. Sigmund Freud, "Analysis Terminable and Interminable," *Standard Edition*, vol. 23, pp. 209-54.
 36. Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, pp. 483-93 and 514-23.
 37. Ricoeur, "Psychoanalysis and Art."

CHAPTER 9

1. See Chapter 4, Sect. III, "Critique of Semiotics."
2. Jacques Lacan, "The Agency of the Letter in the Unconscious," *Écrits: A Selection* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), ch. 5. For a thorough discussion of this issue see also *Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis* by Lacan with a commentary by Anthony Wilden (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981).
3. Jean-François Lyotard, *Discours, figure* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1971).
4. Buñuel has been the subject of numerous excellent recent publications: Linda Williams, *Figures of Desire* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Paul Sandro "Assault and Disruption in the Cinema, Four Films by Louis Buñuel" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1974); and Marvin D'Lugo, "Glances of Desire in *Belle du Jour*," *Film Criticism* 2, nos. 2-3 (Winter/Spring 1978): 84-89. Other recent studies of dense filmmakers would include Paisley Livingston, *Ingmar Bergman and the Rituals of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), and Donald P. Costello, *Fellini's Road* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983).
5. Metz, "Metaphor and Metonymy," pp. 174-82. Metz deals with Roman Jakobson's seminal essay "Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of

- Aphasia," in Roman Jakobson and Morris Halle, *Fundamentals of Language* (The Hague: Mouton, 1956).
6. Metz, "Metaphor and Metonymy," opens with a sophisticated analysis of the problem of "secondarization" and it is a topic that persists throughout this important and lengthy essay.
 7. Edward B. Lowry, "Filmology: Establishing a Problematic for Film Study in France 1946-55" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas, 1982). Lowry explicitly links filmology to semiotics through the early essays of Christian Metz.
 8. Metz was clearly already aware of this in his 1964 essay "Cinema: Language or Language System," in *Film Language*, ch. 3. Stephen Heath has commented most fully and subtly on this issue first in his "Cinema/Text/Cinetext," pp. 102-28, and more recently in "Language, Sight, and Sound," in *Questions of Cinema*, ch. 9. This latter essay indicates the complications that the psychoanalytic turn in theory have brought to the issue of "language and cinema."
 9. Metz, "Metaphor and Metonymy," pp. 245-52, reverses the standard direction of thinking about figures. The more standard views are laid out and criticized in Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, studies 1 and 2. Also see Tzvetan Todorov, *Theories of the Symbol* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982).
 10. Metz, "Metaphor and Metonymy," p. 275.
 11. Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*, studies 4-7.
 12. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-33.

CHAPTER 10

1. The history of interpretation theory is the subject of many books. I am most indebted to Gerald L. Bruns, *Inventions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). The first two chapters of this book, "Secrecy and Understanding" and "The Originality of Texts in a Manuscript Culture," force the modern reader to confront the issue of the difference of interpretation in an earlier age.
2. See especially notes 14 and 16 in chapter 2 above.
3. See note 22 in chapter 2 above. Also see Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 184-95.
4. At the University of Kansas Conference on Hermeneutics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (May 1981) Richard Rorty expounded at length on the connection between Continental post-structuralism (Foucault, Deleuze, et al.) and American post-pragmatism (James and Dewey). He has often referred to this connection. See, for example, Richard Rorty, "The Fate of Philosophy," *The New Republic*, October 18, 1982, p. 29.

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