

appropriate? What was the relation between production methods and aesthetics? Should Third World cinema emulate the Hollywood continuity codes and production values to which Third World audiences had become accustomed? Or should it make a radical break with Hollywood aesthetics in favor of a radically discontinuous and anti-populist aesthetic such as the "aesthetic of hunger" or the "aesthetic of garbage?" To what extent should cinema incorporate indigenous popular cultural forms? To what extent should films be anti-illusionistic, anti-narrative, anti-spectacular, and avant-garde? (This last question was also being asked by the First World avant-garde.) What was the relation between Third World filmmakers (largely middle-class intellectuals) and the "people" whom they purported to represent? Should they be a cultural vanguard speaking for the people by proxy? Should they be the celebratory mouthpieces of popular culture, or the unrelenting critics of its alienations?

Unfortunately, perhaps because of an assumption that Third World intellectuals could only express "local" concerns, or because their essays were so overtly political and programmatic, this body of work was rarely seen as forming part of the history of "universal" – read Eurocentric – film theory.

The Advent of Structuralism

The intellectual movement called structuralism was not without relation to these Third World stirrings. Both structuralism and third worldism had their long-term historical origins in a series of events that undermined the confidence of European modernity: the Holocaust (and in France the Vichy collaboration with the Nazis), and the postwar disintegration of the last European empires. Although the exalted term "theory" was rarely linked to Third World Cinema theorizing, third worldist thinking had an undeniable impact on First World theory. The structuralists codified, on some levels, what anti-colonial thinkers had been saying for some time. The subversive work of "denaturalization" performed by what one might call the left wing

of semiotics – for example, Roland Barthes's famous analysis of the colonialist implications of the *Paris Match* cover showing a black soldier saluting the French flag – had everything to do with the external critique of European master-narratives performed by Third World Francophone decolonizers like Aimé Césaire (*Discourse on Colonialism*, 1955) and Frantz Fanon (*The Wretched of the Earth*, 1961). In the wake of the Holocaust, decolonization, and Third World revolution, Europe started to lose its privileged position as model for the world. Lévi-Strauss's crucial turn from biological to linguistic models, for a new anthropology, for example, was motivated by his visceral aversion to a biological anthropology deeply tainted by anti-semitic and colonialist racism. Indeed, it was in the context of decolonization that UNESCO asked Lévi-Strauss to undertake the research which culminated in his "Race and History" (1952), where the French anthropologist rejected any essentialist hierarchy of civilizations.

Both the structuralist and the poststructuralist movements, in this sense, coincide with the moment of self-criticism, a veritable legitimation crisis, within Europe itself. Derrida's decentering of Europe as "normative culture of reference," for example, was clearly indebted to Fanon's earlier decentering of Europe in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Many of the source thinkers of structuralism and poststructuralism, furthermore, were biographically linked to what came to be called the Third World: Lévi-Strauss did anthropology in Brazil; Foucault taught in Tunisia; Althusser, Cixous, and Derrida were all born in Algeria, where Bourdieu also did his anthropological field work.

In terms of film, the adoption of the methods of the human sciences constituted a challenge to what were seen as the impressionistic, subjective methods of earlier schools of film criticism. In this period film semiotics and its prolongations, later called "screen theory" or simply "film theory," came to the center of the analytic enterprise. In a first stage, Saussurean structural linguistics provided the dominant theoretical model. Understanding the causes of this paradigmatic shift requires a brief detour into the origins of the structuralist movement. Although language had been an object of philosophical reflexion for millennia, it was only in the twentieth century

that it came to constitute a fundamental paradigm, a virtual "key" to the mind, to artistic and social praxis, and indeed to human existence generally. Central to the project of a wide spectrum of twentieth-century thinkers – Peirce, Wittgenstein, Sapir, Whorf, Cassirer, Heidegger, Bakhtin, Merleau-Ponty, and Derrida – is a concern with the crucial importance of language in shaping human life and thought. As the methodological success story of the twentieth century, structural linguistics generated a rich proliferation of structuralisms premised on the principles of Saussurean linguistics. The overarching meta-discipline of semiotics, in this sense, can be seen as a local manifestation of a more widespread "linguistic turn," an attempt, in Fredric Jameson's words, to "rethink everything through again in terms of linguistics."¹

Film semiotics must be seen as symptomatic not only of the general language-consciousness of contemporary thought but also of its penchant for methodological self-consciousness, its "metalinguistic" tendency to demand critical scrutiny of its own terms and procedures. The two source thinkers of contemporary semiotics were the American pragmatic philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) and the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913). Roughly simultaneously, but without each other's knowledge, Saussure founded the science of "semiology" and Peirce the science of "semiotics." In *A Course in General Linguistics* (1916) Saussure called for a "science that studies the life of signs," a science that "would show what constitutes signs, what laws govern them." Peirce's philosophical investigations, meanwhile, led him in the direction of what he called "semiotics," specifically through a concern with symbols, which he regarded as the "woof and warp" of all thought and scientific research. (That there are two words for the semiotic enterprise, "semiotics" and "semiology," largely has to do with its dual origins in these two intellectual traditions).

It is Saussure, however, who constitutes the founding figure for European structuralism, and thus for much of film semiotics. Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* ushered in a kind of "Copernican Revolution" in linguistic thought by seeing language not as a mere adjunct to our grasp of reality but rather as formative of it.

Saussurean linguistics forms part of a general shift away from the nineteenth-century preoccupation with the temporal and the historical – as evidenced by Hegel's *historical dialectic*, Marx's *dialectical materialism*, and Darwin's "*evolution of the species*" – to the contemporary concern with the spatial, the systematic, and the structural. Saussure argued that linguistics must move away from the historical (diachronic) orientation of traditional linguistics toward a synchronic approach which studies language as a functional totality at a given point in time. In fact, however, it is virtually impossible to separate out the synchronic from the diachronic. Indeed, many of the aporias of structuralism derive from its failure to recognize that history and language are mutually imbricated. For the structuralists themselves, however, the qualifiers "synchronic" and "diachronic," then, were seen as applying less to the phenomena themselves, therefore, than to the perspective adopted by the linguist. What matters is the shift in emphasis from a historical approach preoccupied with the origins and evolution of language, to a structural emphasis on language as a functional system.

More a method than a doctrine, structuralism was concerned with the immanent relations constituting language and all discursive systems. Common to most varieties of structuralism and semiotics was an emphasis on the underlying rules and conventions of language rather than on the surface configurations of speech exchange. In language, Saussure famously argued, "there are only differences." Rather than a static inventory of names designating things, persons, and events already given to human understanding, Saussure argued, language is nothing more than a series of phonetic differences matched with a series of conceptual differences. Concepts, therefore, are purely differential, defined not by their positive content, but rather by their diacritical relation with other terms of the system: "Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not." Within structuralism as a theoretical grid, then, behavior, institutions, and texts are seen as analyzable in terms of an underlying network of relationships; the elements which constitute the network gain their meaning from the relations that hold between the elements.

Although structuralism developed out of Saussure's groundbreaking work on language, it was not until the 1960s that it became widely disseminated. The process by which structuralism came to form a dominant paradigm is retrospectively clear. The scientific advance represented by Saussure's *Course* was transferred to literary study initially by the Russian Formalists and later by the Prague Linguistic Circle, which formally instituted the movement in the "Theses" presented in Prague in 1929. The Prague School phonologists, notably Troubetzkoy and Jakobson, demonstrated the concrete fruitfulness of looking at language from a Saussurean perspective and thus provided the paradigm for the rise of structuralism in the social sciences and the humanities. Lévi-Strauss then used the Saussurean method with great intellectual audacity in anthropology and thereby founded structuralism as a movement. By seeing kinship relations as a "language" susceptible to the kinds of analysis formerly applied to questions of phonology, Lévi-Strauss made it possible to extend the same structural-linguistic logic to all social, mental, and artistic phenomena and structures. Lévi-Strauss extended the idea of binarism as the organizing principle of phonemic systems to human culture in general. The constituent elements of myth, like those of language, only acquire meaning in relation to other elements such as myths, social practices, and cultural codes, comprehensible only on the basis of structuring oppositions. When Lévi-Strauss delivered his inaugural lecture in 1961 at the Collège de France, he situated his structural anthropology within the broad field of semiology. By searching for constants within a multitude of variations, and by banishing all resort to a conscious speaking subject, Lévi-Strauss laid the bases for structuralism.

In terms of film, the structural approach implied a move away from any evaluative criticism preoccupied with exalting the artistic status of the medium or of particular filmmakers or films. Auteur-structuralism in the late 1960s built on Lévi-Strauss's concept of myth to speak of genre and authorship. In terms of directors, semiology was less interested in the aesthetic ranking of directors than in how films in general are understood. Just as Lévi-Strauss was uninterested in the "authors" of Amazonian myths, so structuralism was

not particularly interested in the artsmanship of individual auteurs. While auteurism valorized specific directors as artists, for semiology all filmmakers are artists and all films are art, simply because film's socially constructed status is that of art.

The Question of Film Language

The shift from the classical film theory of Kracauer and Bazin to film semiology mirrored larger changes in the history of thought in general. Film semiology also reflects changes in French cultural institutions: the expansion of higher education and the opening up of new departments and new forms of research; new publishing venues willing to publish trans-disciplinary books like Barthes's *Mythologies*; new institutions such as the École Pratique des Hautes Études (where Barthes, Metz, Genette, and Greimas all taught); and new journals such as *Communications*. Indeed, issue 4 of *Communications* in 1964 presented the structural linguistic model as the program of the future, with Barthes's essay "Elements of Semiology" providing a blueprint for a broad research project. Issue 8, two years later, on "structural analysis of the *recit*" (story), framed a narratological project that would be carried out over decades.

In the wake of the work of Lévi-Strauss a wide range of apparently non-linguistic domains came under the jurisdiction of structural linguistics. Indeed, the 1960s and 1970s might be seen as the height of semiotic "imperialism," when the discipline annexed vast territories of cultural phenomena for exploration. Since the object of semiotic research could be anything that could be construed as a system of signs organized according to cultural codes or signifying processes, semiotic analysis could easily be applied to areas previously considered either obviously non-linguistic – fashion and cuisine, for example – or traditionally deemed beneath the dignity of literary or cultural studies, such as comic strips, photo-romans, James Bond novels, and the commercial entertainment film.

The core of the filmolinguistic project was to define the status of

lang. system :
langue
a film language
langage

film as a language. Filmolinguistics, whose origins Metz attributed to the convergence of linguistics and cinéphilia, explored such questions as: Is cinema a language system (*langue*) or merely an artistic language (*langage*)? (Metz's 1964 article "Cinéma: ^{present} *langue* or *langage*?" was the founding essay within this current of inquiry.) Is it legitimate to use linguistics to study an "iconic" medium like film? If it is, is there any equivalent in the cinema to the linguistic sign? If there is a cinematic sign, is the relation between signifier and signified "motivated" or "arbitrary," like the linguistic sign? (For Saussure the relation between signifier and signified is "arbitrary," not only in the sense that individual signs exhibit no intrinsic link between signifier and signified, but also in the sense that each language, in order to make meaning, "arbitrarily" divides the continuum of both sound and sense.) What is the cinema's "matter of expression?" Is the cinematic sign, to use Peircian terminology, iconic, symbolic, or indexical, or some combination of the three? Does the cinema offer any equivalent to *langue's* "double articulation" (i.e. that between phonemes as the minimal units of sound and morphemes as the minimal units of sense)? What are the analogies to Saussurean oppositions such as paradigm and syntagm? Is there a normative grammar for the cinema? What are the equivalents of "shifters" and other marks of enunciation? What is the equivalent of punctuation in the cinema? How do films produce meaning? How are films understood? In the background lurked a methodological issue. Rather than an essentialist, ontological approach - what is the cinema? - attention shifted to questions of discipline and method. Quite apart from the question of whether film was a language (or like a language), there was the much broader question of whether filmic systems could be illuminated through the methods of structural linguistics, or any other linguistics for that matter.

Metz exemplified a new kind of film theorist, one who came to the field already "armed" with the analytic instruments of a specific discipline, who was unapologetically academic and unconnected to the world of film criticism. Eschewing the traditional evaluative language of film criticism, Metz favored a technical vocabulary drawn from linguistics and narratology (diegesis, paradigm, syntagma).

With Metz we move from what Casseri (1999) calls the "ontological paradigm" à la Bazin to the "methodological paradigm." Although Metz clearly built on the antecedent work of the Russian Formalists, along with that of Marcel Martin (1955) and François Chevassu (1963) and especially Jean Mitry (1963, 1965), he brought a new degree of disciplinary rigor to the field.

Within a few years a number of important studies were published on the language of film, notably Metz's *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* (1968; translated as *Film Language* in 1974); Metz's *Langage et cinéma* (1971; translated as *Language and Cinema* in 1974); Pasolini's *Empirismo Eretico* (translated into French as *L'Experience heretique: langue et cinéma* in 1971 and into English as *Heretical Empiricism* in 1988); Eco's *La Struttura Assente* (The Absent Structure); Emilio Garroni's *Semiotica ed Estetica* (Semiotics and Aesthetics, 1968); Gianfranco Bettetini's *Cinema: Lingua e Scrittura* (The Language and Technique of Film, 1968); and Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969), all of which addressed on some level the issues raised by Metz. (The Italian work, as Giuliana Muscio and Roberto Zemignan point out, has generally been filtered through French channels.)¹

Of these, Metz's *Film Language* was the most influential. Metz's chief 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. In the background of Metz's 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 *langue* in the Saussurean schema. And much as Saussure concluded that the purpose of linguistic investigation was to disengage from the chaotic plurality of *parole* (speech) the abstract signifying system of a language, i.e. its key units and their rules of combination at a given point in time, so Metz concluded that the object of ciné-semiology was to disengage from the heterogeneity of meanings of the cinema its basic signifying procedures, its combinatory rules, in order to see to what extent these rules resembled the doubly articulated diacritical systems of "natural languages."

For Metz, the cinema is the cinematic institution taken in its broadest sense as a multidimensional socio-cultural fact 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 decor of the theater, the social ritual of moviegoing). ("Film," meanwhile, refers to a localizable discourse, a text; not the physical object contained in a can, but rather the signifying text. At the same time, Metz points out, the cinematic institution also enters into the multidimensionality of films themselves as bounded discourses concentrating an intense charge of social, cultural, and psychological meaning. Metz thus reintroduces the distinction between film and cinema *within* the category "film," now isolated as the specific and proper "object" of film semiology. In this sense, "the cinematic" represents not the industry but rather the totality of films. As a novel is to literature, or as a statue is to sculpture, Metz argues, 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.

Thus Metz closes in on the object of semiotics: the study of discourses, of texts, rather than of the cinema in the broad institutional sense, an entity much too multifaceted to constitute the proper object of filmolinguistic science, just as *parole* was for Saussure an object too multiform to form the proper object of linguistic science. The question which oriented Metz's early work was whether the cinema was *langue* (language system) or *langage* (language). Metz begins by discarding the imprecise notion of "film language" that had predominated up to that time. It is in this context that Metz explores the comparison, familiar from the earliest days of film theory, between shot and word, and sequence and 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 filmmaker, unlike words (which

preexist in lexicons) but again like statements.

- 3 The shot provides an inordinate amount of information and semiotic wealth.
- 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 designate any type of dog, and can be pronounced with any accent or intonation, whereas a filmic shot of a dog tells us, at the very minimum, that we are seeing 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 filmmakers might "virtualize" the image of a dog through backlighting, soft-focus, or decontextualization, Metz's more general point is that the cinematic shot more closely resembles an utterance or a statement ("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. In the cinema, shots form part of a paradigm so open as to be meaningless. (Signs, within the Saussurean schema, enter into two kinds of relationship: paradigmatic, having to do with choices from a virtual, "vertical" set of "comparable possibilities" – e.g. a set of pronouns in a sentence – and syntagmatic, having to do with horizontal, sequential arrangement into a signifying whole. Paradigmatic operations have to do with selecting, while syntagmatic operations have to do with combining in sequence.)

To these disanalogies between shots and words, Metz adds a further disanalogy concerning the medium in general: the cinema 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 historically determined; one can

hypothesize a future society where all citizens will have access to the code of filmmaking. But in society as we know it, Metz's 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. Natural language, however, shows a more powerful inertia and is less open to individual initiative and creativity. The analogy is less between cinema and natural language than between cinema and other arts like painting or literature, which can also be suddenly inflected by the revolutionary aesthetic procedures of a Picasso or a Joyce.

Metz concluded that the cinema was not a language system but that it was a language. Although film texts cannot be conceived as 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 systematicity. Although film language has no *a priori* lexicon or syntax, it is nevertheless a language. One might call “language,” Metz argues, any unity defined in terms of its “matter of expression” – a Hjelmslevian term that designates the material in which signification manifests itself – or in terms of what Barthes in *Elements of Semiology* calls its “typical sign.” Literary language, for example, 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). 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.

Much of the early debate centered around the question of minimal units and their articulation in the sense of André Martinet's notion of the “double articulation” of minimal units of sound (pho-

nemes) and minimal units of sense (morphemes). In response to Metz's argument that film lacked double articulation, Pier Paolo Pasolini argued that cinema did form a “language of reality” with its own double articulation of “cinemes” (by analogy to phonemes) and “im-signs” (by analogy to morphemes). The minimal unit of cinematic language, for Pasolini, is formed by the diverse real-world signifying objects in the shot. The language of im-signs, for Pasolini, was extremely subjective and extremely objective at the same time. He postulated minimal units of film, i.e. cinemes, the objects depicted in a filmic shot, but which unlike phonemes were infinite in number. The cinema explores and reappropriates the signs of reality. Eco argued that objects cannot be elements of a second articulation since they already constitute meaningful elements.

Both Eco and Emilio Garroni criticized Pasolini's “semiotic naiveté” for confusing cultural artifact with natural reality. But a number of recent analysts have argued that Pasolini was far from naive; in fact he was actually in advance of his contemporaries. For Teresa de Lauretis Pasolini was not naive but rather prophetic, anticipating the role of cinema in “the production of social reality” (ibid., pp. 48–9). As Patrick Rumble and Bart Testa point out, Pasolini saw structuralism as only one interlocutor, along with Bakhtin, Medvedev, and others. For Giuliana Bruno, Pasolini is not the naive reflectionist portrayed by Eco; rather, he sees both reality and its filmic representation as discursive, contradictory. The relation between film and the world is one of translation. Reality is a “discourse of things” which film translates into a discourse of images, what Pasolini called “the written language of reality.” Like Bakhtin and Voloshinov, Pasolini was more interested in *parole* than in *langue* (see Bruno, in Rumble and Testa, 1994).

Pasolini was also interested in the issue of the analogies and disanalogies between cinema and literature. Just as written reworked oral discourse, the cinema reworked the common patrimony of human gestures and actions. Pasolini favored a “cinema of poetry” over a “cinema of prose.” The former evoked an imaginative, oneiric, subjective cinema of experimental form where author and character blend, while the latter evoked a cinema founded on classical con-

ventions of spatiotemporal continuity. In *Empirismo Eretico* Pasolini also discussed his notions of "free, indirect discourse" in the cinema. In literature "le style indirect libre" referred to the managing of subjectivity in a writer like Flaubert, whereby mediated representation conveyed through pronouns like "Emma thought" modulated into a direct presentation "How wonderful to be in Spain!" In the cinema it referred to the stylistic contagion whereby authorial personality would blend ambiguously with that of the character, where a character's subjectivity would become the trampoline for stylistic virtuosity and experiment.

Umberto Eco, whose work on the cinema was part of his work on languaged articulations in general, rejected a double articulation for the cinema in favor of a triple articulation: first, iconic figures; second, iconic figures combined into semes; and third, semes combined in "kinemorphes." Garroni, meanwhile, argued that Metz had asked the wrong question; the right question concerned the constitutive heterogeneity of the filmic/artistic message. Bettetini preferred a double articulation based on the cinematic "sentence" on the one hand, and technical units (the frame, the shot) on the other. He spoke of the "iconeme" as the privileged unit of film language. In *L'Indice del Realismo* (The Index of Realism) he applied Peirce's trichotomy to the cinema as deploying all three dimensions of the sign: the indexical, the iconic, and the symbolic. Bettetini argued that the minimal signifying unit of film, the "cineme" or "iconeme," is the filmic image and this corresponds not to the word but to the sentence. Peter Wollen too, in *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969) found Saussurean notions of the sign overly rigid for a medium whose "aesthetic niches" derived from a computer and unstable deployment of all these type of signs.

Film became a discourse, Metz argued, by organizing itself as narrative and thus producing a body of signifying procedures. As Warren Buckland points out, it is as if the "arbitrary" relation of Saussure's signifier/signified was transferred to another register, i.e. not the arbitrariness of the single image but rather the arbitrariness of a plot, the sequential pattern imposed on raw events. Here we find an echo of the Sartrean idea that life does not tell stories. The

true analogy between film and language, for Metz, consisted 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. While no image entirely resembles another image, most narrative films resemble one another in their principal syntagmatic figures, their orderings of spatial and temporal relations.

The Grand Syntagmatique was Metz's attempt to isolate the principal syntagmatic figures or the spatiotemporal orderings of narrative cinema. It was proposed as a response to the question "How does film constitute itself as narrative discourse?" against the backdrop of the notorious imprecision of film terminology, much of which had been based on theater rather than on the specifically cinematic signifiers of image and sound, shots and montage. Terms like "scene" and "sequence" had been used more-or-less interchangeably, and were based on the most heterogenous criteria. The classification was at times based on a posited unity of depicted action ("the farewell scene") or of place ("the courtroom sequence") with little attention to the precise articulations of the filmic discourse, and ignoring the fact that the same action (e.g. a wedding scene) might be rendered by a diversity of syntagmatic approaches.

Metz used the paradigm/syntagma distinction, along with the larger binary either/or method - "a shot is continuous or it is not" - to construct his Grande Syntagmatique. The Grande Syntagmatique constitutes a typology of the diverse ways that time and space can be ordered through editing within the segments of a narrative film. Using a binary method of commutation (commutation tests have to do with discovering whether a change on the level of the signifier entails a change on the level of the signified), Metz generated a total of six types of syntagma (in the version published in *Communications* in 1966), subsequently increased to eight (in the version included in *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* in 1968 and also in *Film Language*). The eight syntagmas are as follows:

F+7 → ✓
0-2 → ✓

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: the 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: spatiotemporal continuity perceived 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.

This is not the place to inventory the innumerable theoretical problems with the Grande Syntagmatique (for a sustained critique see Stam et al., 1992). Suffice it to say that while some of Metz's syntagmas are conventional and well established - the alternating syntagma, for example, refers to what was traditionally called narrative cross-cutting - others are more innovative. The bracket syntagma,

for example, provides typical samples of a given order of reality without linking them chronologically. 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. Similarly, the fragmented shots of two lovers in bed that open Godard's A Married Woman provide a typical sample of "contemporary adultery;" 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." Godard's Brechtian fable about war, Les Carabiniers, mobilizes bracket syntagmas as part of the film's systematic deconstruction from within of the dominant cinema's traditional approach to dramatic conflict. The bracket syntagma's emphasis on the typical - here the behavioral typicalities of war - is eminently suited to the social and generalizing intentions of politicized directors.

As a kind of illustration of his method Metz performed a syntagmatic breakdown of the film Adieu Phillipine into 83 autonomous segments. But given Metz's methodological restrictions, his syntagmatic analysis did not address many of the most interesting features of the film: its portrayal of the TV milieu; the chronotopic implications of the frequent TV monitors in the shot; the working-class attitudes and accents of the characters; the war in Algeria (in which the protagonist enlists); gender roles and flirtation in 1960s France. Once the linguistic analysis is finished, almost everything else remains to be said, whence the need for a Bakhtinian translinguistic analysis of the film as historically situated utterance. But Metz offered the Grande Syntagmatique in a more modest spirit than was often granted by his detractors, as a first step toward establishing the main types of image orderings. To the objection that "everything remains to be said" it might first be answered that 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 significance of experiencing the Grand Canyon or reading *Hamlet*, yet that does not mean that geology and linguistics are useless. Second, the work of addressing all levels of signification in a film is the task of textual analysis, not film theory.

In *Language and Cinema* Metz redefined the Grande Syntagmatique as merely a subcode of editing within a historically delimited body of films, i.e. the mainstream narrative tradition from the consolidation of the sound film in the 1930s through the crisis of the studio aesthetic and the emergence of the diverse New Waves in the 1960s. Metz's schema, clearly the most sophisticated developed up to that point, was subsequently applied (in myriad textual analyses) and was later reconfigured by Michel Colin from the Chomskian perspective of transformational grammar (see Colin, in Buckland, 1995). Film theory could still use a more sophisticated approach to the questions raised by the Grande Syntagmatique, one that would synthesize Metz's work with other currents: Bakhtin's suggestive notion of the chronotope as "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" in artistic texts; Noël Burch's work on spatial and temporal articulations between shots; Bordwell's work on classical cinema; and Genette's narratology insofar as it is transposable to film.

Metz was subsequently criticized for surreptitiously privileging the mainstream narrative film and marginalizing such forms as documentary and the avant-garde. A Bakhtinian translinguistic formulation might have saved ciné-semiologists in the Saussurean tradition a good deal of trouble by rejecting from the outset the very notion of a unitary (cinematic) language. Anticipating contemporary sociolinguistics Bakhtin argued that all languages are characterized by the dialectical interplay between centripetal pressures toward normativization (monoglossia) and centrifugal energies favoring dialectal diversification (heteroglossia). This approach provides a valuable framework for seeing the classical dominant cinema as a kind of standard language backed and "underwritten" by institutional power, and thus exercising hegemony over a number of divergent "dialects" such as the documentary, the militant film, and the avant-garde cinema. A

translinguistic approach would be more relativistic and pluralistic about these diverse filmic languages, privileging the peripheral and the marginal as opposed to the central and the dominant.

Cinematic Specificity Revisited

In their attempts to legitimate film as art, as we have seen, theorists made conflicting claims about the "essence" of film. The 1920s Impressionists like Epstein and Delluc had earlier embarked on a quasi-mystical search for the photogenic quintessence of film. For theorists such as Arnheim, meanwhile, the artistic essence of cinema was linked to its strictly visual nature, and thus to its "lacks" (the limiting frame, the lack of a third dimension, etc.) that marked it as art. Others, such as Kracauer and Bazin, rooted film's "vocation for realism" in its origins in photography. Film semiology, too, was concerned with this perennial issue. For Metz, the question "Is film a language?" was inseparable from the question "What is specific to the cinema?" The pertinent sensorial traits of film language help us distinguish the cinema from other artistic languages; in changing one of the traits, one changes the language. For example, film has a higher coefficient of iconicity than does a natural language like French or English (although one could argue that ideographic or hieroglyphic languages are highly iconic). Films are composed of multiple images, unlike photography and painting which (usually) produce single images. Films are kinetic, unlike newspaper cartoons which are static. Metz's approach, then, involved teasing out the specific signifying procedures of film language. Some of the specific materials of expression of the cinema are shared with other arts (but always in new configurations) and some are unique to itself. The cinema has its own material means of cinematic expression (camera, film, lights, tracks, sound studios), its own audiovisual procedures. This question of "materials of expression" also brings up the issue of evolving technologies. Is an IMAX spectacle, or a CD-ROM narrative, or video art still a film?

Metz's most thoroughgoing exercise in filmolinguistics was *Langage et cinéma*, first published in French in 1971 and translated (disastrously) into English in 1974.¹ Here Metz substituted the broad concept of "code," a concept thankfully free of specifically linguistic baggage, for both *langue* and *langage*. For Metz, the cinema is necessarily a "pluri-codic" medium, one which interweaves (1) "specifically cinematic codes," i.e. codes that appear only in the cinema, and (2) "non-specific codes," i.e. codes that are shared with languages other than the cinema. Cinematic language is the totality of cinematic codes and subcodes insofar as the differences separating these various codes are provisionally set aside in order to treat the whole as a unitary system.

Metz describes the configuration of specific and non-specific codes as a set of concentric circles, with a differential approach to cinematic specificity. The codes range from the very specific (the inner circle; for example, those linked to film's definition as deploying moving, multiple images – codes of camera movement, continuity editing, etc.), through codes which are shared with other arts (e.g. generally shared narrative codes), to codes which are widely disseminated in the culture and in no way dependent on the specific modalities of the medium or even on the arts in general (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 specifically cinematic codes are camera movement (or lack of it), lighting, and montage; they are attributes of all films in the sense that all films involve cameras, all films must be lit, and all films must be edited, even if the editing is minimal. The distinction between specifically cinematic and non-cinematic codes, obviously, is often a tenuous and shifting one. While the phenomenon of color belongs to all the arts, the particularities of 1950s technicolor belong specifically to film. Even non-specific elements, moreover, can be "cinematized" via filmic simultaneity, by their neighboring and coexisting with the other elements featured on other "tracks" at the same moment in the filmic-discursive chain.

Within each particular cinematic code, cinematic subcodes repre-

sent specific usages of the general code. Expressionist lighting, for example, is a subcode of lighting, as is naturalistic lighting. Eisensteinian montage is a subcode of editing, which can be contrasted in its typical usage with a Bazinian *mise-en-scène* 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 to deploy Eisensteinian montage. Metz notes, however, that certain filmmakers such as Glauber Rocha at times mingle contradictory subcodes in a "feverish anthological procedure" by which Eisensteinian montage, Bazinian *mise-en-scène*, and cinema vérité coexist in tension within the same sequence. The diverse subcodes can also be made to play against one another, for example by using Expressionist lighting in a musical, or a jazz score in a western. For Metz, the code 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. There is a tension in *Language and Cinema* between an additive, taxonomic approach to codes, developed in the first half of the book, and a more activist "writerly" deployment of the codes, developed at the end of the book.

A history of the cinema, for Metz, would trace the play of competition, incorporations, and exclusions of the various subcodes. In his essay "Textual Analysis etc.," David Bordwell points out some of the problems with Metz's analysis, arguing that Metz's characterization of subcodes 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 subcodes. Bordwell therefore calls for the historicization of the study of cinematic subcodes.² The invaluable historicization suggested by Bordwell is limited to the institutional and the art-historical; it does not include what Bakhtin would call the "deep-generating series" of both life and art, i.e. history in a larger sense as it impacts on film.

Metz inherited the question of *langue/langage* from Saussure and the question of cinematic specificity from the Russian Formalists, with their emphasis on literary specificity or *literaturnost*. Metz, in this sense, inherits the combined blindspots of Saussurean lin-

guistics (which "brackets the referent" and thus severs text from history) and of aesthetic formalism (which sees only the autotelic, autonomous object of art). If Metz, like the Formalists, could be said to have brought great "sharpness and principle to the problem of specification," he was somewhat less adept, given these inherited blindspots, at linking the specific and the non-specific, the social and the cinematic, the textual and the contextual. In this sense the Bakhtin School critique of Formalism is pertinent to Metz's notions of the "specifically cinematic," and, as I suggest later (p. 188), to the "neo-Formalism" of Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell.

What is perhaps more promising in Metz's work is his attempt to distinguish film from other media in terms of its means of expression. Metz distinguishes between film and theater, for example, by the physical presence of the actor in the theater versus the deferred absence of the performer in the cinema, a "missed rendezvous" that paradoxically makes film spectators *more* likely to "believe" in the image. In subsequent work Metz stressed that it is precisely the "imaginary" nature of the filmic signifier that makes it so powerful a catalyst of projections and emotions (Marshall McLuhan implied something similar in his contrast between "hot" and "cool" media). Metz also compares film to television, concluding that despite technological differences (photographic versus electronic), differences in social status (cinema by now a consecrated medium, television still deplored as a wasteland), differences in reception (domestic small screen versus theatrical large screen, distracted versus concentrated attention), the two media constitute virtually the same language. They share important linguistic procedures (scale, sound off and on, credits, sound effects, camera movement, etc.). Thus they are two closely neighboring systems; the specific codes which also belong to the other are much more numerous and important than those which do not belong to it; and, inversely, those which separate them are much less numerous and important than those which separate them, in common, from other languages (Metz, 1974). Although one might argue with Metz's conclusions here (for example, one might say that technologies and reception conditions have evolved since the 1970s), what is important is the differential, diacritical method: con-

structing or discerning film's specificity by exploring the analogies and disanalogies between it and other media.

Interrogating Authorship and Genre

Linguistically oriented semiotics had the effect of displacing auteurism, since filmolinguistics had little interest in film as the expression of the creative will of individual auteurs. At the same time, auteurism had introduced a kind of system – one based on the constructing of an authorial personality out of surface clues and symptoms – which made it reconcilable with a certain kind of structuralism, resulting in a marriage of convenience called auteur-structuralism. Undermining the cult of personality endemic to both the *Cahiers* and the Sarris models, auteur-structuralism saw the individual author as the orchestrator of trans-individual codes (myth, iconography, locales). As Stephen Crofts points out, auteur-structuralism emerged out of a precise cultural formation in the late 1960s, that of the structuralist-influenced left in London, and specifically of the film-cultural work of the British Film Institute's Education Department. Auteur-structuralism was exemplified by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith's study *Visconti* (1967), Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (1969), and Jim Kitses' *Horizons West* (1969). The auteur-structuralists highlighted the idea of an auteur as a critical construct rather than a flesh-and-blood person. They looked for hidden structuring oppositions which subtended the thematic leitmotifs and recurrent stylistic figures typical of certain directors as the key to their deeper meaning. For Peter Wollen, the apparent diversity of John Ford's oeuvre, for example, hid fundamental structural patterns and contrasts based on culture/nature binaries: garden/wilderness; settler/nomad; civilized/savage; married/single. Auteur-structuralism had little to say on the issue of cinematic specificity, since many of these motifs and binary structures were not specific to the cinema but were, rather, broadly disseminated in culture and the arts.