vocation of the cinema" as a kind of "writing machine." Through exemplary readings of films like *M* and *India Song*, Ropars explodes and disperses filmic signification rather than "taming" it. For Ropars, film texts potentially put into play active, unsynthesizable "structural conflicts." The disjunctive capacity of montage, especially, can dismantle the sign by playing on the "differences" between material signifiers. Films are fissured by two forces, écriture and counter-écriture, one tending toward a disseminating scriptural energy, and the other toward sense and representation. (Bakhtin would have said between "centrifugal" and "centripetal" forces.)

Brunette and Wills (1989) deploy Derridean categories in order to interrogate various totalizing notions which they see as surreptitiously informing film theory and analysis: the notions of narrative film; Hollywood as a self-identical coherent system; the primacy of the visual, seen as analogous to the primacy of speech over writing in the logocentric tradition. (Many of these notions had already been questioned without recourse to Derrida, of course.) Calling for a move beyond totalizations, the authors invoke the possibilities of an "anagrammatical" reading practice that sees cinema as writing, text, "an interplay of presence and absence, of the seen and not seen, in relations not reducible either to totalization or transcendence" (ibid., p. 58).

Deconstruction has also influenced film theory and analysis indirectly, through certain writers themselves influenced by deconstruction, who rarely write about film but who are frequently cited by film theorists. Thus Judith Butler's work on gender becomes a key reference for queer film theory, while Gayatri Spivak's work on the subaltern subject and Homi Bhabha's work on "hybridity" and "nation and narration" become frequent (although often ornamental) references in film-theoretical writing. In political terms deconstruction has been seen as progressive, in that it systematically undermines certain binary hierarchies – male/female, West/East, black/white – that have historically buttressed oppression. Derrida has aligned himself with the feminist critique of Lacanian phallocentrism, for example. On the other hand, critics of deconstruction have complained that it is easily co-optable by academic

elitists (as, for example, in the Yale School of literary deconstruction) and that its grand claims of "subversion" tend to be merely rhetorical. At times, in hyper-deconstructionist discourse, essentialism becomes the equivalent of original sin, resulting in a less-essentialist-than-thou sweepstake. Deconstruction also shifts political valence depending on who or what is the object of its critique. Progressive when it interrogates historically rooted social hierarchies (Man over Woman, West over East), deconstruction becomes regressive when it runs after the chimera of a completely de-essentialized thinking, handing over to language and discourse the collective agency rightfully belonging to human subjects.

Textual Analysis

The question of the text was at the very heart of Derrida's work, and Derrida himself performed textual analyses (of Rousseau, Saussure and others). Deconstruction was on one level a form of textual exegesis, an "unpacking" of texts, a way of interrogating their unspoken premises while being alert to their discursive heterogeneity. And although textual analysis traces its long-term antecedents to biblical exegesis, nineteenth-century hermeneutics and philology, the French pedagogical method of close reading (*explication de texte*), and American New Criticism's "immanent" analysis, its more immediate antecedents include Lévi-Strauss's work on myth, Umberto Eco's study of the "open work," Roland Barthes's distinction between "work" and "text," Althusser's and Macharey's (Freudian) notion of "symptomatic reading" and "structuring absences," and Derrida's work on *différance* and dissemination.

The emergence of the "film text" was thus rooted in multiple problematics and intertexts. The term transferred from literature to film the respect traditionally accorded the sacred word (first religious and then literary) and thus served to garner prestige for a maligned medium. In religious terms, film, too, has its quantum of "revelation." When films are texts rather than movies they become

worthy of the same serious attention normally given to literature. Textual analysis is also a logical corollary to auteurism: What would "authors" write, after all, if not texts? At the same time, the film text is a function of semiology's focus on film as the site of systematically organized discourse rather than as a random "slice of life." The presumption of textual analysis that film as a medium deserves serious study distinguishes it not only from literary elitist writing but also from a journalistic criticism which sees film as mere entertainment. If Pauline Kael's boast that she would never see a film more than once before writing about it had been made by a literary critic with regard to *Hamlet* or *Ulysses* it would have been taken as a sign of laziness or incompetence. Literary criticism, as Barthes pointed out, was always a matter of "rereading."

The concept of "text" – etymologically "tissue" or "weave" – conceptualizes film not as an imitation of reality but rather as an artifact, a construct. In "From Work to Text" Barthes made two distinctions. "Work" was defined as the phenomenal surface of the object, for example the book one holds in one's hand, i.e. a completed product conveying an intended and pre-existent meaning. "Text" was defined as a methodological field of energy, a production absorbing writer and reader together. "We now know," Barthes wrote, "that the text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of an Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (Barthes, 1977, p. 146). In *S/Z* Barthes further distinguished between the "readerly" and the "writerly" text or, better, between readerly and writerly *approaches* to texts. The readerly approach privileges those values sought and assumed in the classic text – organic unity, linear sequence, stylistic transparency, conventional realism. It posits authorial mastery and readerly passivity, turning the author into a god and the critic into "the priest whose task is to decipher the writing of the god" (Barthes, 1974, p. 174). The writerly approach, in contrast, fashions an active reader, sensitive to contradiction and heterogeneity, aware of the work of the text. It turns its consumer into a producer, foregrounding the process of its own construction and promoting the infinite play of signification.

Building on his own background in literary theory, Raymond Bellour addressed some of the difficulties in extending literary models to film in his essay "The Unattainable Text." Whereas literary criticism emerges from centuries of reflexion, film analysis is of recent date. More important, the film text, unlike the literary text, is not "quotable" (Bellour was writing prior to the existence of Cine-Scans, VCRs, laser-disks, and cable television, a time when the very scarcity contributed to the mystique of film analysis). Whereas literature and literary criticism share the same medium of words, film and film analysis do not. While the film medium deploys Metz's five tracks (image, dialogue, noise, music, written materials), the analysis of film consists of 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 "quotability." The painterly 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 uneven susceptibility of the five tracks of cinematic expression to verbal rendering. Dialogue can be quoted, 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 or she is attempting to understand.

Metz distinguished between two complementary tasks, a kind of shot–reverse shot dialogue, as it were, between (1) film theory (the study of film language *per se*) and (2) film analysis. While cinematic language is the object of cine-semiological *theory*, the text is the object of filmolinguistic *analysis* (in practice, as we shall see, the distinction is not always so clear). In *Language and Cinema* Metz developed the notion of the textual system, i.e. the undergirding structure or network of meaning around which the text coheres, even in cases, such as *Un Chien Andalou*, where the structure is one

of willed incoherence. The structure is a configuration arising from the choices made from the diverse codes available to the filmmaker. The textual system does not inhere in the text; it is constructed by the analyst. In *Language and Cinema* Metz was not concerned with providing a "how-to" book for textual analysis, but rather with determining its theoretical "place." Textual analysis, for Metz, explores the mesh of cinematic codes (camera movement, off-screen sound) and extra-cinematic codes (ideological binarisms of nature–culture, male–female), either across a number of texts or within a single text. All films, for Metz, are mixed sites; they all deploy cinematic and non-cinematic codes. No film is constructed uniquely out of cinematic codes; films always speak of something, even if, as in the case of many avant-garde films, they speak only about the apparatus itself, or about the film experience, or about our conventional expectations concerning that experience.

Metz's formulations had the advantage of socializing, as it were, the artistic process of creation. By foregrounding *écriture* as the re-elaboration of codes, Metz envisions film as a signifying practice not dependent on obscure romantic forces like inspiration and genius but rather as a reworking of socially available discourses. However, in some respects Metz's socialization did not go far enough. In this sense, the Bakhtin–Medvedev critique of the Formalists in *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* can be extrapolated so as to apply to the Metzian view of textual systems. The Formalists described textual contradiction in terms redolent of social struggle, in metaphors evoking combat, struggle, and conflict. Shklovsky, for example, compared the advent of a new school of literature to a revolution, "something like the emergence of a new class."[1] However, even the Formalists retreated from the implications of their own metaphor – it was "only an analogy" – and literary contradiction remained in a hermetically sealed world of pure textuality. Bakhtin and Medvedev, in contrast, took the Formalist metaphors seriously, especially those terms evocative of class struggle and insurrection: revolt, conflict, struggle, destruction, and even "the dominant" – but made them apply equally to the text and to the social itself (Pechey, 1986).

The Metzian and the Formalist views of the text might be usefully complemented, then, by the Bakhtinian concept of heteroglossia, i.e. a notion of competing languages and discourses as they operate within both "text" and "context." The role of the artistic text, within a Bakhtinian perspective, is not to represent real-life "existents" but rather to stage the conflicts inherent in heteroglossia, the coincidences and competitions of languages and discourses. A social semiotic of the cinema would retain the Formalist and the Metzian notion of *textual contradiction*, but rethink it through heteroglossia. The languages of heteroglossia, Bakhtin argues (in words that echo Metz's affirmations about mutually displacing filmic codes), may be "juxtaposed to one another, mutually supplement one another, contradict one another and be interrelated dialogically."[2] James Naremore's essay on *Cabin in the Sky*, for example, takes this "discursive" approach, seeing the film as relaying distinct discourses (rural–folklorist, Afro-urban–modernist, etc.).

The publication of Metz's *Language and Cinema* was followed by an international deluge of textual analyses of films in journals such as *Screen* and *Framework* in Britain, *Iris*, *Vertigo*, and *Ca* in France, *Camera Obscura*, *Wide Angle*, and *Cinema Journal* in the United States, *Contracampo* in Spain, and *Cadernos de Critica* in Brazil. (Roger Odin focused on essays in French and found 50 analyses of this type by 1977.) Such analyses investigated the formal configurations of textual systems, isolating a small number of codes and then tracing their interweavings across a film. Among the more ambitious textual analyses were Kari Hanet's analysis of *Shock Corridor*, Stephen Heath's analysis of *Touch of Evil*, Pierre Baudry's analysis of *Intolerance*, Thierry Kuntzel's analysis of *The Most Dangerous Game*, and *Cahiers'* analysis of *Young Mr Lincoln*.

What, then, was *new* in the semiotic approach to textual analysis? First, the new method demonstrated a heightened sensitivity to the filmic signifier and to specifically cinematic formal elements, as opposed to the traditional emphasis on character and plot. Second, analyses tended to be methodologically self-aware; they were at once about their subject – the film in question – and about their own methodology. Each analysis became an exemplum of a possible approach. In contrast to journalistic criticism, the analysts cited their

Textual Analysis

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own theoretical presuppositions and critical intertext (many analyses began with quasi-ritual invocations of the names of Metz, Barthes, Kristeva, or Heath). Third, these analyses also presupposed a radically different emotional stance toward films, one characterized by a kind of Brechtian distantiation, an oscillation between passionate love and critical distance. The analyst was supposed to adopt a schizophrenic attitude, both loving and not loving the film. Rather than a single screening, the analyst scrutinized the film shot-by-shot (the development of VCRs has since that time democratized the practice of close analysis). Analysts such as Marie-Claire Ropars and Michel Marie developed elaborate schemata for notation, registering such codes as angle, camera movement, movement in the shot, off-screen sound, and so forth.

Given the closeness of attention of such analyses it became impossible to try to say everything about a film. As a result, many analyses focused on synecdochic fragments of films. Thus Marie-Claire Ropars devoted 40 pages to the initial shots of Eisenstein's *October* and Rocha's *Antonio das Mortes*, while Thierry Kuntzel dedicated long analyses to the *ouverture* sequences of films such as *M*, *King Kong*, and *The Most Dangerous Game*, seen as condensed matrices of meaning. The dedication of many pages of critical writing to a brief segment also indirectly demonstrated to high-art elitists that the same medium despised by others was actually the scene of veritable cornucopias of meaning. The analyses also varied widely in scale. The limits of the text might be defined by a single image (for example, Ronald Levaco's and Fred Glass's analysis of the MGM logo), by a single segment (Bellour on *The Birds*), by an entire film (Heath on *Touch of Evil*), by the entire oeuvre of a filmmaker as examples of a "plurifilmic textual system" (René Gardies on Glauber Rocha), or even by a vast corpus of films (Michele Lagny, Marie-Claire Ropars, and Pierre Sorlin on the French cinema of the 1930s, and Bordwell, Staiger, and Thompson, from a largely non-semiotic perspective, on classical Hollywood cinema).

Textual analyses rejected the traditional evaluative terms of film criticism in favor of a new vocabulary drawn from structural linguistics, narratology, psychoanalysis, Prague School aesthetics, and literary deconstruction. In what was perhaps an over-reaction against traditional film criticism, textual analysts often completely ignored issues traditionally central to film analysis: elements like character, acting, performance. Although most of the analyses generated by this wave belonged, broadly speaking, to the general semiotic current, not all of them were rigorously based on Metzian categories. Marie-Claire Ropars Wuilleumier's extremely intricate analyses of such films as *India Song* and *October* synthesized semiotic insights with a more personal project inspired by Derridean grammatology. Many textual analyses were influenced by literary textual analyses, for example Julia Lesage's extrapolation of Barthes's "five codes" to Renoir's *Rules of the Game* (in Nichols, 1985). Some textual analyses were inspired by Proppian narratological methods (e.g. Peter Wollen on *North by Northwest*), by Lacan's "return to Freud (e.g. Bellour on *North by Northwest*), or by other theoretical currents.

While some textual 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 interrogation of broader narrative codes shared by a larger body of films; to wit, the constitution of the couple as the *telos* of Hollywood narrative. In two books, Kristin Thompson (1981; 1988) offered a programmatic alternative neo-Formalist method of textual analysis, performed both with and against the grain of semiotics. Alfred Guzzetti (1981), meanwhile, offers a blow-by-blow account of the Godard film in terms of sound, image, and intertextual reference.

The theoretical discourse concerning the cinema that developed in France in the 1960s was taken up in the 1970s by the British journal *Screen* and subsequently migrated to the United States and to many other countries with the growth of cinema studies programs, many of them with a strong Parisian link. (The Centre Americain d'Études Cinématographiques, which sent American students to Paris to study with leading French semioticians, was crucial in this regard.) Left-leaning versions of semiotics favored a

subversive work of denaturalization by scrutinizing social and artistic productions in order to discern the cultural and ideological codes operative in them. Film theory generally, in fact, developed a discourse to the left of many other more traditional disciplines, not only because of a strong "French connection" – the French subsequently moved dramatically rightward – but also because of its simultaneous emergence alongside such counter-cultural disciplines as women's studies, ethnic studies, and popular culture studies. As a result, film studies was never plagued in the same way by the "mouldy figs," entrenched conservatives who dominated more traditional fields like literature and history.

The emergence of film theory as a growth industry also had institutional causes: the inauguration of cinema studies as a discipline in major universities in France, Britain, the USA, Australia, Italy, Brazil, and elsewhere. Sophisticated versions of theory testified to the intellectual seriousness of film study, and thus indirectly provided a rationale for the creation of cinema studies departments. Just as film had to legitimate itself as an art, so film studies had to legitimate itself as a discipline. With its institutional home base in the academy and the publishing industry, film theory acquired considerable prestige and dissemination. The snobbism of traditional literary academics, with their scorn for popular culture and for film as a medium supposedly inferior to consecrated arts like literature, painting, and music, inadvertently prodded film studies to demonstrate its own seriousness, and at times to over-compensate by virtuoso displays of theoretical prowess.[3]

Interpretation and its Discontents

In the 1980s textual analysis as conceived by film semiotics came under attack from a number of directions. On the one hand, poststructuralist currents both inspired and destabilized textual analysis, shaking early semiology's scientistic faith that analysis might definitively capture a film's meaning by exhaustively delineating all its

codes. On the other hand, the emerging field of cultural studies was not terribly invested in textual analysis. Its attitude was summed up later in the words of Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, and Lawrence Grossberg in their introduction to *Cultural Studies* (1992), where they state that "although there is no prohibition against close textual readings in cultural studies, they are also not required, [since] textual analysis in literary studies carries a history of convictions that texts are properly understood as wholly self-determined and independent objects."

Jacques Aumont and Michel Marie (1989) outline four possible critiques of textual analysis:

1 Its relevance is limited to narrative cinema.
2 It "murders to dissect," ignoring the organic unity of the text.
3 It reductively "mummifies" film by reducing it to its systemic skeleton.
4 It elides film's context, its conditions for production and reception.

The first of these critiques misfires (since textual analysis is applicable to any object), while the second seems rooted in hostility to analysis *per se*, especially when performed in relation to an "unworthy" medium. But the last two have some force, and are in fact interrelated. When textual analyses are reductive, it is precisely because they *are* ahistorical and therefore fail to take production and reception into account. And the charge of ahistoricism is not answered satisfactorily by Aumont and Marie's suggestion that analysts "also" do history. The roots of the "decontextualization" of some textual analysis lie in the ahistoricism of two of the source movements of semiotics: Saussurean linguistics – particularly its tendency to cut off language from history – and Russian Formalism, with its preference for a purely intrinsic analysis. When analysts within the filmolinguistic tradition recommend that film scholars should *also* study – within a kind of amicable division of labor – history, economics, sociology, and so forth, they recapitulate the approach taken by the Formalists themselves, who also recommended *first* the immanent study of the