Christian Metz and film semiology – dynamics within and on the edges of the 'model' : an introduction

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Figure 1.1: Portrait of Christian Metz (undated)

1.   Christian Metz and Film Semiology

Dynamics within and on the Edges of the 'Model':
An Introduction

Margrit Tröhler

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Keywords: film semiotics/film semiology, psychoanalytic theory of cinema, enunciation theory, methodology, cinematic spectatorship, history of film theory

Amsterdam University Press

> *There are two ways of subverting the legality of knowledge*
> *(inscribed in the institution):*
> *either to disperse it or to give it. Metz chooses to give;*
> *the way in which he treats a problem of language*
> *and/or of cinema is always generous:*
> *not by the invocation of 'human' ideas,*
> *but by his incessant solicitude for the reader,*
> *patiently anticipating his demand for enlightenment,*
> *which Metz knows is always a demand for love.*

> Roland Barthes, 'To learn and to teach', 1975[1]

In his hometown of Béziers in Southern France, Christian Metz (1931-1993) helped to establish two local ciné-clubs after the war; he then moved to Paris in the late 1940s, where he completed the humanities-based programme (*Khâgne*) at the Lycée Henri IV before studying classical philology at the Ecole Normale Supérieure. At each institution, he was again active in the management of the film club. In the early 1950s, he taught at the Institut français in Hamburg and worked as a translator for Northwest German Broadcasting (Nordwestdeutscher Rundfunk). Later, he also translated a book about jazz and articles about linguistic psycho-pedagogy from German and English into French, and – under a pseudonym – published a crime novel in the 1960s. In addition to various other scholarly activities,[2] he went on to teach and research at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE) in Paris, a position procured for him by Roland Barthes, whose 'disciple' and companion he was and whom he held in high esteem intellectually and personally. In 1964, Metz published his first, seminal essay, 'Le cinéma: langue ou langage?' ('The Cinema: Language or Language System?'). In 1970, he launched an informal study group on the topic of 'Cinéma et écriture', and in 1971-72, he taught his first official seminars on film theory, 'La

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1   Roland Barthes, 'To Learn and to Teach', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. by Richard Howard (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989 [1975]), 176-78 (p. 177).
2   In the 1950s, he was temporarily Georges Sadoul's assistant and general secretary of the Laboratoire d'anthropologie sociale under the direction of Claude Lévi-Strauss and A.J. Greimas. Simultaneously, he was also secretary and coordinator during the preparatory phase leading to the founding of the Association internationale de Sémiotique (under the direction of Emile Benveniste and Greimas).

connotation de nouveau' and 'Trucage et cinéma',[3] at the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHESS). From 1975 until his retirement at the end of 1991, he was professor at EHESS in the Department of Language Studies (*Sciences du langage*).[4] Meanwhile, Christian Metz remained a lifelong passionate moviegoer whose heart belonged to classical cinema (the cinema of his initiation into cinephilia) but who also showed great interest in and appreciation for more modern trends, such as Italian Neorealism, contemporary French cinema, and films from around the world.

On the occasion of the twentieth anniversary of Christian Metz's death, I organized a conference together with two postdoctoral researchers, Guido Kirsten and Julia Zutavern, at the University of Zurich's Department of Film Studies from 12 to 14 June 2013. The contributions and discussions from this conference are compiled in the present volume (supplemented by two interviews with Metz from the late 1980s and early 1990s). Like the conference, the volume is first of all intended as a *tribute* to a pioneering scholar, the father of modern film theory, who initiated several generations of scholars (including some of the authors in this volume) not just into the semiology of film but into a more general theoretical and methodological thinking about cinema. Throughout all his creative periods, Metz's works bespeak a standpoint articulated at once resolutely and circumspectly, as well as a consistent method. They are distinguished by an analytical way of thinking that questions its own premises and presents them as transparently as possible. This rigorous scholarly attitude was paired with an intellectual generosity and humanity that characterized his personality

3   Christian Metz, 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?' [1964], in *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. by Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974 [1968]), pp. 31-91. His research for the study group on cinema and writing at EHESS was later incorporated into chapter XI of *Language and Cinema,* trans. by Donna Jean Umiker-Sebeok (The Hague/Paris: Mouton 1974 [1971]), pp. 254-84. The topics of his first seminars led to two corresponding articles in the second volume of the *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972), which has never been translated in its entirety; however, the two articles were published in English as 'Connotation, Reconsidered' [1972], *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, 2 (1980), pp. 18-31, and '*Trucage* and the Film' [1972], trans. by Françoise Meltzer, *Critical Inquiry,* 3/4 (1977), pp. 657-675.

4   For more detailed biographical information see, for instance, *Iris,* 10, (special issue *Christian Metz et la théorie du cinéma / Christian Metz and Film Theory*; ed. by Michel Marie and Marc Vernet, 1990), pp. 317-18, and the German translation of *Le signifiant imaginaire*: Christian Metz, *Der imaginäre Signifikant. Psychoanalyse und Kino*, trans. by Dominique Blüher and others (Münster: Nodus 2000 [1977]), pp. 240-41. For a complete bibliography of Metz's writings, see Ludger Kaczmarek and Hans J. Wulff: http://publikationen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/opus4/frontdoor/index/index/docId/13808 (accessed 7 September 2015). I would like to thank Martin Lefebvre and Roger Odin for supplementary information on Metz's biography.

as a researcher and his commitment as a teacher, as Barthes says in the introductory epigraph.

The volume's second aim is to bring together various views on the genesis and evolution of the semiological approach, to expound on its place in the contemporaneous intellectual context, and to trace its legacy on theoretical debates about film and cinema from the 1960s through the 1990s and up to the present. Accordingly, the volume addresses the historical and theoretical positioning of Metz's works and their spheres of influence over the decades. Our objective is to approach Metz's thinking and the paradigm of film semiology – or the theoretical paradigm as such – at a metatheoretical level. That is to say, our approach is an 'experimental epistemology' that does not seek conclusive interpretations and explanations but that sketches possible relations in order to create an understanding of the emergence, change, and reception of an intellectual edifice and its contingent debates during a certain period.[5] Often this intellectual edifice, which was very influential in the 1960s and 1970s and provoked several controversies, is only perceived retrospectively and rather indirectly today. But now that the partisan mentality of bygone disputes is history, its historicization offers a chance to give new currency to the semiological concepts, and to reexamine Metz's positions – at an epistemological level – in order to reconnect with them in some way. After all, the intellectual edifice built by Metz reflects the evolution of modern film theory, that is, the beginning of systematic theoretical and metatheoretical thinking about film and cinema. Also, Metz's dynamic and multifaceted work throughout its different phases paved the way for many later developments, and it continues to offer links leading in various directions to this day (thus, Michel Marie speaks of three generations with different backgrounds and focuses).[6]

With this metatheoretical perspective and with its broad range of articles, the present volume also aims to facilitate access to a scholarly discussion – which is often perceived as hermetic – for young film and media scholars. In this introduction, I will try to present some of the fundamental theorems of the paradigm and the development of Metz's film semiology, with reference to the articles in the volume. However, it seems just as important to me to outline Metz's general scholarly attitude, which can be seen in his continuous methodological examination of his

5   François Dosse, *Empire of Meaning: The Humanization of the Social Sciences*, trans. by Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999 [1995]), Chapter 34, pp. 352-57.
6   See Michel Marie [in this volume].

own approach and of the concepts of other scholars. This is not only the distinguishing feature of Metzian semiology, it also allows us to understand its innovative potential.

In a first step, this text thus aims to provide an entry point into Metz's writings. In a second step, I will approach his thought – the dynamics within and on the edges of his 'model' – from various perspectives, in order to open up and look beyond this 'model' in various directions, for Metz considered structuralism a productive conflictual space that needed to be reoriented again and again with a view to the 'cinematic institution'.

The Awakening of Modern Film Theory

With his works, Christian Metz initiated a paradigm shift in the mid-1960s. This shift was indebted to the then-current structuralist approach, and it was meant to lead the discourse on film and cinema from 'a state of innocence' (*déniaisement*) – as Metz himself later put it self-reflexively – to a thorough theoretical and methodical grasp of the symbolic institution of cinema (*la machine cinéma*). The aim was to constitute 'film'/'cinema' as a scholarly object of study.[7] To him, this meant first to search for and establish a place for the theoretical thinking about this object of study. His writings not only influenced the theory and analysis of the audiovisual within and outside of France, they also made a substantial contribution to the acceptance of film studies as an academic discipline and thus to its (albeit late) institutionalization.[8]

When Raymond Bellour calls Metz a 'founder of a discursive practice' (following Michel Foucault's text 'What Is an Author?' from 1969), it is mainly because Metz's works opened up a limitless field of possibilities, which provided diverse links to and starting points for other kinds of research: a

7   In his interview with Marc Vernet and Daniel Percheron, Metz uses the French term 'scientifique', which I understand to mean 'theoretical' (developing a systematic approach to the filmic object). For academic-political reasons, Metz was very sceptical of the academic establishment as such (and also towards such authoritative academic role designations as 'directeur de thèse' or 'disciple', etc.). Christian Metz, 'Sur mon travail (Entretien avec Marc Vernet et Daniel Percheron)' [1975], in *Essais sémiotiques* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977), 163-205 (pp. 192-201). See also the comments by Raymond Bellour, 'A Bit of History', in *The Analysis of Film*, ed. and trans. by Constance Penley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001 [1979]), 1-20 (pp. 11-12), or D.N. Rodowick, 'A Care for the Claims of Theory', in *Elegy for Theory* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 2014), 168-200 (pp. 198-200). See also Odin's essay in this volume.
8   Michel Marie, 'Avant-propos', *Iris*, 10, 7-11 (p. 7); see also Marie's essay in this volume.

wide field that not only permits differences but inspires their articulation, provokes them, and which we can always return to.[9]

Over the years, Metz developed his film semiology, based on a 'phenomenological (post-)structuralism',[10] into a multifaceted edifice of theoretical ideas that systematically approached *film* (as an open, dynamic production of meaning, as discourse, and as artistic expression) and *cinema* (as cultural institution and psychic apparatus or *dispositif*). Apart from repeated polemics against the linguistics-inspired terminology and the (often misunderstood) concepts of semiology and semiotics,[11] this theoretical paradigm is now rarely resorted to explicitly. But in the course of researching the cinematic signifier, Metz proposed many theorems to describe the functioning of film and cinema, theorems that have become so essential that contemporary film studies is almost unthinkable without them. Indeed, over time, many of the terms introduced by him became detached from their original discussions so that their provenance is no longer – or only partially – known. From his works of the 1960s comes the cinema's 'matter of expression' (consisting of five tracks: moving photographic image, dialogue, noise, music, and written materials) or the 'autonomous segments' of his 'Grand Syntagmatique of narrative cinema' (especially the distinction between 'alternating' and 'parallel' montage).[12] From his 1971 *Language and Cinema*, the distinction between 'filmic' and

9   Raymond Bellour, 'Le cinéma et …', *Iris*,10, 15-36 (pp. 16-17). See also Bellour's essay in this volume.

10   I borrow this phrase from Elmar Holenstein, who describes Roman Jakobson's approach as 'phenomenological structuralism' (I will return to this at the end of my paper). See Elmar Holenstein, *Roman Jakobsons phänomenologischer Strukturalismus* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1975). A French version of this book appeared under the title *Jakobson ou le structuralisme phénoménologique* (Paris: Seghers, 1975).

11   In this text, I use the term 'semiology', which goes back to the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and which characterizes the structuralist approaches of Barthes or Metz in France, while Greimas used the term 'semiotics', beginning with his works on structural semantics. In the English-speaking world, 'semiotics' is the more common term, but historically, it initially referred to the philosophical-logical tradition of Charles Sanders Peirce, which found its way into film studies through the work of Peter Wollen, among others. At the first congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies in 1969, 'semiotics' was declared the general term; nevertheless, it is customary to identify the Metzian approach as 'semiological', especially in France. Both terms appear in the contributions to this volume. However, unless otherwise noted, the authors refer to the Saussurean tradition of Metz.

12   Christian Metz, 'Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film' [1966-67], in *Film Language*, 108-46 (p. 119 and especially 125-27). In *Film Language*, the concept of the *grande syntagmatique du film narratif* was translated as 'The Large Syntagmatic Category of the Image Track' (p. 119); I prefer the translation by Robert Stam, Robert Burgoyne, and Sandy Flitterman-Lewis in *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics. Stucturalism: Post-Structuralism and Beyond* (London/New York:

'cinematic' established itself. And Metz's discussion of the 'non-specific' and 'specific' characteristics of cinema as a complex ensemble of codes that are activated and combined anew in the 'textual system' of each film is still at times echoed in contemporary works, especially in metatheoretical debates on the semiological paradigm.[13] From his semio-psychoanalytic phase of the late 1970s, the concept of the 'imaginary signifier' and the distinction between 'primary' and 'secondary identification' in cinema have remained in the vocabulary of film and media studies.[14] And in the (postmodern) debate about cinematic self-reflexivity and narrativity, Metz's strictly text-pragmatic intervention in the late 1980s contributed the notion of 'filmic enunciation' – as an anthropoid, non-human, meta-discursive dynamic of *the film* addressing its spectators.[15] This concept still serves as a theoretically logical antithesis to all *personified* concepts such as the implied author, the enunciator, or the narrator (as the enunciator's narratological equivalent).

As a 'founder of a discursive practice', Metz also laid the groundwork for further theoretical developments in the (wide) field of film and cinema – for some of these, semiology provided a foundation; to others, it offered a contrasting foil, a background against which differences and new directions could be outlined. To mention just a few areas, film semiology triggered the development of the narratology of film in France, of semio-pragmatics and, subsequently, historical pragmatics, and (in the realm of applied analysis) of media pedagogy.[16] Together with the works on the cinematic apparatus

Routledge 1992), see, for instance, pp. 38-49. On the conceptual pair of 'parallel' vs. 'alternating' montage, see the essay by André Gaudreault and Philippe Gauthier in this volume.

13   Metz, *Language and Cinema*, pp. 22-39. I will return to all the concepts mentioned here.

14   Christian Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier' [1975], trans. by Ben Brewster, in *The Imaginary Signifier. Psychoanalysis and Cinema*, trans. by Celia Britton and others (Basingstoke/London: Macmillan, 1982 [1977]), pp. 3-87.

15   Christian Metz, *L'énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1991).

16   To mention just a few representative works of the very first generation in these areas: in the field of narratology, Francis Vanoye, *Récit écrit, récit filmique* (Paris: Nathan, 1989 [1979]) and André Gardies, *Approches du récit filmique* (Paris: Albatros 1980); in the field of semio-pragmatics, the essays of Roger Odin in *Iris*, the first of which has been translated into English as 'For a Semio-pragmatics of Film' [1983], trans. by Claudine Tourniaire, in *The Film Spectator: from Sign to Mind*, ed. by Warren Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 1995), pp. 213-26; in the field of media pedagogy, Geneviève Jacquinot, *Image et pédagogie. Analyse sémiologique du film à intention didactique* (Paris: PUF, 1977; revised edition 2012); and specifically on educational television, Rosemarie Meyer, *Télévision et éducation. D'un apprenant modèle aux spectateurs reels* (Paris: Arguments, 1993) and Bernard Leconte, *Entre les lignes. Ecrits sur la télévision: usages et usagers* (Lille: CIRCAV-GERICO, 1993).

and with Louis Althusser's ideological critique of the 'institution of cinema', film semiology was also a critical reference point for feminist film theory as it developed in the English-speaking world in parallel to Metz's psycho-analytical works.[17] His approach was followed by further works about the unconscious processes of subject formation by the apparatus, works that emphasize the historical and social dimension (of film *and* of the subject).[18] And many later film-aesthetical and philosophical approaches would have been unthinkable without his writings, even if they decidedly dissociated themselves from Metz.[19]

Beginning with his 1964 foundational essay 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?', Metz also recognized the necessity of dealing with the history of film theory – as a tradition and as a break with tradition, or innovation. By discussing the writings of the past decades (from the 1920s in France, Germany, and Russia to André Bazin; from the filmologists of the 1940s and 1950s to Jean Mitry in the early 1960s), he laid the foundation for a metatheoretical reflection on film and cinema.[20] In striving to establish a systematic, coherent, and genuinely filmic theory, whose innovative potential could only be realized through confrontation with and appreciation of previous approaches, he also originated the historiography of film theory.

Three Creative Periods

Metz's theoretical works can be divided into three creative periods, with each adding a new conceptual aspect to his film semiology. Various periodizations of his work have already been proposed: in their interview, Michel Marie and Marc Vernet focus on scholarly writing (*écriture*, here taken to mean the manner or style of academic writing). The first period, which Marie and Vernet do not describe any further, includes the essays from 1964

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17   See, for instance, Janet Bergstrom, 'American Feminism and French Film Theory', *Iris*, 10 (1990), pp. 183-98. See also Mary Ann Doane's essay in this volume.

18   See, for instance, Stephen Heath's book, which collected several essays from the 1970s: *Questions of Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981). See also the two *Screen Readers* on the topics of 'Cinema/Ideology/Politics' (1977) and 'Cinema & Semiotics' (1981).

19   Today, this widespread effect makes it possible to read 'Metz with Deleuze' (in a reverse sense, so to speak), as Nico Baumbach does in his essay in this volume.

20   Metz: 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?', pp. 31-61 and 90-91. See J. Dudley Andrew, *The Major Film Theories* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. 212-41; Francesco Casetti, *Theories of Cinema, 1945-1995*, trans. by Francesca Chiostri and others (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999 [1993]), Chapter 6; Rodowick, 'A Care for the Claims of Theory', pp. 168-200. See also Frank Kessler and Guido Kirsten's essays in this volume.

onwards, compiled in the two volumes of *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* (1968 and 1972);[21] the second consists of his opus *Language and Cinema* (1971), which they regard as exhibiting a very rigorous, 'technical' writing style; the third phase encompasses the psychoanalytical works, compiled in *The Imaginary Signifier* in 1977 (as well as the essay 'Photography and Fetish', 1985), which are written in a more fluent, almost literary style.[22] Referring to this periodization, Philip Rosen adds that the three phases each explore different conceptual and epistemological spheres. D.N. Rodowick, for his part, considers these phases as 'points of passage or transition' in the growth of a per se *theoretical* conception in Metz's work.[23] Martin Lefebvre and Dominique Chateau propose a similar periodization, but they take Metz's attitude toward phenomenology and aesthetics as their barometer: the three chronological phases they identify from their perspective are 'Metz's early "filmolinguistic" period (1964-1967), his middle or *pan-semiological* period (1967-1975), and his late psychoanalytic period (1975-1985). In all three of these periods phenomenology plays an important and sometimes pivotal role.'[24] Other structuring options, which focused on the developments and boundaries within the semiological movement from a contemporaneous perspective, were proposed by Dudley Andrew and Raymond Bellour as early as the 1970s.[25]

It is striking that even in later attempts at a periodization, Metz's final preoccupation with the concept of enunciation is barely or simply not present. In order to give an overview of the entire 30 years of his work and to distinguish his creative periods according to their intrinsic focus, I thus resort to Robert Riesinger's afterword to the German translation of *The Imaginary Signifier* and to Elena Dagrada and Guglielmo Pescatore's interview with Metz.[26] In Riesinger's view, the first 'filmo-linguistic' or 'filmo-semiological' and the second 'psychoanalytic' phases are followed by

21   Only the first volume of the *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* (1968) has been translated into English as *Film Language*. For the second volume, see: *Essais sur la signification du cinéma,* 2 vols. (Paris: Klincksieck, 1972), II.

22   Michel Marie and Marc Vernet, 'Entretien avec Christian Metz', *Iris*, 10 (1990), 271-97 (p. 276). The essay 'Photography and Fetish' was originally published in English (translated by Metz himself): Christian Metz, 'Photography and Fetish', *October,* 34 (Fall 1985), pp. 81-90; see D.N. Rodowick's essay in this volume.

23   See Philip Rosen's essay in this volume; Rodowick, 'A Care for the Claims of Theory', p. 198.

24   Martin Lefebvre and Dominique Chateau, 'Dance and Fetish. Phenomenology and Metz's Epistemological Shift' [2013], *October,* 148 (2014), 103-32 (p. 105).

25   Andrew, *The Major Film Theories,* pp. 216-17; Bellour, 'A Bit of History', pp. 10-11.

26   Robert Riesinger, 'Nachwort', in Metz, *Der imaginäre Signifikant*, pp. 230-239; Elena Dagrada and Guglielmo Pescatore, 'The Semiology of Cinema? It Is Necessary to Continue! A Conversation

a 'third semiology', which performs a text-pragmatic turn with its studies on filmic enunciation under the banner of a return to linguistics. These three stages each reveal a shift in and extension of the perspective of Metz's 'film-semiological adventure' (Barthes), whereas some of the basic premises and methodological reflections – to which I will return below – run through all three of these epistemological spheres.

The Systematic Description of the Filmic Construction of Meaning

Metz's first essay 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?', published in the journal *Communications* (no. 4, 1964, special issue devoted to 'Semiological Research'), was followed by other texts attempting to systematically grasp film as a meaningful process, in the vein of the structuralist discourse that had come to pervade the humanities in general.[27] Metz's contributions to the semiology of film from this early period drew on a phenomenological-aesthetical discussion, but they show a shifting interest towards the filmic construction of meaning: they explored a field that was not only new but also open, where the author dealt rather unconventionally with Saussure's structuralist concepts, or, as Rodowick puts it:

> Where one would think that Metz's ambit is to present the value of structural linguistics for the study of film, one finds instead a heartfelt plea to soften the structuralist activity by bringing it into contact with modern film – that is, with art.[28]

As Chateau and Lefebvre also point out, it is in this field of conflicting ideas that Metz searched for a theory – and for a theoretical site – specific to film/cinema, *guided* by the structuralist paradigm of the linguistic turn.[29] Two parallel conceptual and methodological moves dominate here. First, the 'negative definitions', which Metz uses to delineate what film and film

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with Christian Metz' [1989], trans. by Barringer Fifield [in this volume]. The questions of the two interviewers guide Metz on a comprehensive tour through his work.

27   See Guy Gauthier, 'La flambée structuraliste' and 'Christian Metz à la trace', *CinémAction*, 60 (1991), pp. 94-107 and 146-53 respectively. A comprehensive history of structuralism can be found in François Dosse, *History of Structuralism*, trans. by Deborah Glassman, 2 vols. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998 [1991-1992]).

28   Rodowick, 'A Care for the Claims of Theory', p. 182.

29   See Chateau and Lefebvre, 'Dance and Fetish', pp. 105-6; see also Martin Lefebvre's essay in this volume.

semiology is *not*. Based on concepts and methods of linguistics that he confronts critically, he repeatedly returns to his 1964 dictum that film is a language without a language system (*langage* without *langue*). Thus, the intent of semiology is not to establish a grammar of film – that is, a fixed, closed system of rules – but rather to describe film as an open, relational, and dynamic system, a network of codes or a set of conventions that result from practice and remain subject to constant change.[30] This objective not only attests to the beginnings of a poststructuralist attitude, it also leads to the second methodological move in Metz's thinking: the 'positive description' of how film works in its processes of constructing meaning.[31] This method proceeds through numerous ramifications, temporarily culminating in the 'Grand Syntagmatique', which differentiates the organizing principles of (classical) cinema at a structural and denotative level. Here, Metz resorts to linguistic concepts as methodical tools, but – as Riesinger points out – the analogy between film and language (*langue*) only concerns 'their shared syntagmatic nature'.[32] Metz's focus here is the 'codedness' of the filmic discourse, or of the cinematic signifier, which he analyzes in terms of its forms of expression: he distinguishes (eight) types of autonomous segments according to their specific formal organization – segments that also correspond to semantic-narrative units – and describes their internal dynamics. But even if we can agree with Frank Kessler that the Grand Syntagmatique is one of the few well-elaborated 'models' of film semiology, it lays no claim to determining one or *the* general filmic code: 'at best, it can claim some validity for classical fiction film'.[33] The Grand Syntagmatique has provoked some conceptual and methical criticism, from Karl-Dietmar Möller-Nass, Michel Colin, and Emilio Garroni, among

30   Metz, 'Problems of Denotation', pp. 117-119, and Metz, 'The Modern Cinema and Narrativity' [1966], in *Film Language*, 185-227 (pp. 209-10); Metz, *Langage and Cinema,* p. 103; Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, p. 29.

31   Metz comments on this 'negative' and 'positive' impulse in the interview with Bellour: Raymond Bellour and Christian Metz, 'Entretien sur la sémiologie du cinéma' [1971], in *Essais*, II, 195-219 (pp. 197-98).

32   Riesinger, 'Nachwort', p. 223.

33   Nevertheless, following Kessler, the Grand Syntagmatique is an attempt to 'make visible a specifically filmic level of organization, which lies above the diversity of individual processes (that are hard to formalize), and simultaneously below the level of narrative articulations, which are not a specifically cinematic code'; Frank Kessler, 'Filmsemiotik', in *Moderne Film Theorie*, ed. by Jürgen Felix (Mainz: Bender, 2002), 104-25 (pp. 114-15); see also Kessler, 'La grande syntagmatique re-située', *Les cahiers du CIRCAV,* 6-7 (special issue: 'La lyre et l'aulos. Hommage à Christian Metz', ed. by Bernard Leconte, 1994), pp. 184-94. See also the comment by Metz himself more than 20 years later in Dagrada and Pescatore, 'A Conversation with Christian Metz' [in this volume].

others.[34] However, Metz himself qualified it soon afterwards, together with Michèle Lacoste. By critically testing the segment types and their possible arrangements and combinations in the analysis of a specific 'modern' film, Jacques Rozier's *Adieu Philippine* (F/I 1962), they transform and adapt them to the new (modern) object of study.[35] This shows a typical tendency of Metz's work: he is interested on the one hand in the 'structure', the system, the code, and on the other hand in historical practice as an 'experience' in its structural and individual variations, which thus also serves as a corrective to the structure.[36] For around the time of working on the Grand Syntagmatique (of classical cinema), he also wrote his far-reaching essay 'The Modern Cinema and Narrativity', which deals with the aesthetical and narratological innovations of contemporary French cinema. As Francesco Casetti writes:

> Metz highlights two aspects of this novelty. On the one hand, he inquires into the presence of new linguistic procedures, and especially of a new kind of syntagma, which he calls *potential sequence*; on the other hand, he focuses on the extension of the possibilities of 'saying' something – the extension of the 'sayable' or of the 'representable'. Modern cinema is typified by a capacity to go beyond the usual narrative conventions and beyond the usual representational boundaries – without denying the presence of rules to be followed.[37]

Thus, *Language and Cinema* (1971) – together with the texts from the same period collected in *Essais sémiotiques* (1977) – can be considered the apex of the theoretical concern of this first semiology: it showcases the structuralist verve of taxonomy, of segmentation and hierarchization, in its purest form.[38] According to Metz himself, it was necessary to construct this book 'like a complete machine' and to think this machine through 'coherently', as he

34   See Kessler, 'Filmsemiotik', pp. 114-15; further critical positions are mentioned by Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics*, pp. 47-48. See also Guido Kirsten, 'Filmsemiotik' in *Handbuch Filmwissenschaft*, ed. by Britta Hartmann and others (Stuttgart: Metzler) [forthcoming].

35   Christian Metz (together with Michèle Lacoste), 'Outline of the Autonomous Segments in Jacques Rozier's film *Adieu Philippine*' [1967], and 'Syntagmatic Study of Jacques Rozier's Film *Adieu Philippine*' [1967], in *Film Language*, pp. 149-176 and 177-182 respectively.

36   I borrow the conceptual pair of 'structure' vs. 'experience' (as a renewal of and corrective to the structure) from the structuralist anthropologist Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History* (London/New York: University of Chicago Press, 1985), pp. vii-xvii and 136-56.

37   See Francesco Casetti's essay in this volume.

38   See Roger Odin, 'Metz et la linguistique', *Iris*, 10 (1990), p. 90.

later said in an interview.[39] The book's clear aim was 'to found a theory' in the sense mentioned above: that is, a 'positive description' through the focused choice of a 'principle of relevance' (*principe de pertinence*), which also means consistency, transparency, completeness.[40] He thus sees this study as a consequence of his previous work: it examines the fact of the 'codedness' of film,[41] the status of *codes* and their *systems* of correspondences and deviations as a coherently organized set of rules. This also leads him to take up information theory as a side project, as Selim Krichane and Philip Rosen show in their contributions to this volume.[42]

Metz's methodology is based on an analytical approach to his 'cinematic object'; the 'code' and the 'system' are not material entities but logical ones created by the 'analyst'.[43] At the same time, he confronts the abstract dynamics of the codes with the more concrete – but still logically substantiated – '*textual* system'. This system shows the variations of the codes as they are 'actualized' within a complex ensemble of several films (*texts*), or in one specific *text*, where they account for a film's originality. Thus, while Metz proceeds inductively, 'if the Grand Syntagmatique is seen as a general model for the textual actualization of the logic of narrative progression, it does provide a system which can account for the material unfolding of films'.[44]

By thus formalizing the mechanics of the filmic construction of meaning, Metz intended to provoke an 'incisive effect'. The result of this act was a 'severe, quite sombre book (it is intended to be, that's its aspect of a private joke)' that many took as a '"terrorizing or discouraging" book'. But, as Metz explains, one writes a book in order to think an idea through to the end; a book is a 'complete object of desire that exhausts something'.[45]

Language and Cinema is based on Metz's *Thèse d'Etat* (postdoctoral thesis), and it appeared around the same time as Jacques Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1967), Julia Kristeva's *Semiotike* (1969), Roland Barthes'

39   For this and the following quote, see the interview with Vernet and Percheron, Metz, 'Sur mon travail', p. 194.

40   Metz, *Language and Cinema*, pp. 9-15 and 20.

41   Metz, 'Sur mon travail', p. 193.

42   Furthermore, in the Soviet orientation of semiotics, the approach was profoundly linked to cybernetics, for instance in the early work of Jurij Lotman up to his *Semiotics of Cinema*, trans. and ed. by Mark E. Suino (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1976 [1973]), and in his last book, Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. by Ann Shukman (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990). See also Peter Wuss, *Kunstwert des Films und Massencharakter des Mediums* (Berlin: Henschel, 1990), especially pp. 478-83.

43   Metz, *Language and Cinema*, pp. 75-76.

44   Stam, Burgoyne, and Flitterman-Lewis, *New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics,* p. 48.

45   For all these quotes, see Metz, 'Sur mon travail', pp. 190-94.

S/Z (1970), and Michel Foucault's *The Archeology of Knowledge* (1969) and *The Discourse on Language* (1971). From an epistemological perspective, Metz's book can thus be seen as a *professed* entry into what is considered the poststructuralist era (outside of France). Despite consistently remaining within a formalizing, immanent way of thinking, the book shows an awareness of the inadequacy of a purely textual definition.[46] Time and again, Metz's work allows for openings towards the artistic practice of films, their historical context of production (or their film-historical paradigms), and their collective and individual reception (I will return to this at the end of my essay). Film is not only a production of meaning but also an individual artistic expression, inscribing itself into an evolution that is determined by artistic practice. Or, in the words of Jacques Aumont and Michel Marie: 'Each code constructed in the analysis of a given film thus encounters the history of forms and of representations; the code is the process through which the signifying configurations pre-existing a given text or film inscribe themselves into it.'[47]

The textual system of each film, which actualizes the possibilities of organizing the filmic discourse through the experience of the structure, is seen as a process by Metz, a process that destabilizes, deforms, and constantly renews the existing codes in their concrete and historical shapes.[48]

The Imaginary as an Opening in the Cinematic and Theoretical Discourse

Language and Cinema also prepares the ground for the transition to psychoanalysis and enunciation, as Metz realizes the necessity of introducing a subject as part of the cinematographic institution. This leads him to a semiologically oriented psychoanalysis of the cinematic apparatus (*dispositif*) and of the 'code of the spectator'.[49] This phase contains his most personal essays; as Alain Boillat foregrounds in his contribution, they displace the

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46   See Riesinger, 'Nachwort', pp. 232-34; Rosen also sees this book as 'a bridge or hinge in Metz's work', which uncovers 'the necessary inadequacies of signification and representation, elaborating with great complexity and force on the theoretical, philosophical, and analytic implications of this premise'; see Rosen's essay in this volume.

47   Jacques Aumont and Michel Marie, *Dictionnaire théorique et critique du cinéma* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2001; 2d ed. 2008), p. 51, see also 240-41. See also Odin, 'Christian Metz et la linguistique', pp. 82-84.

48   On this point, see also Rosen and Odin's essays in this volume.

49   Dagrada and Pescatore, 'Conversation with Christian Metz' [in this volume]. See also Riesinger, 'Nachwort', p. 235 and Rosen's essay in this volume.

authorial subject to the intellectual, theoretical field, involving it in the preoccupation with the unconscious processes of film perception. Metz achieves this by 'working through' the writings of Sigmund Freud, Melanie Klein, and Jacques Lacan. The two texts 'The Imaginary Signifier' and 'The Fiction Film and its Spectator: A Metapsychological Study' that appeared in 1975 in the journal *Communications* 23 were groundbreaking contributions to film studies, which generally turned to psychoanalytical approaches at the time. (Laura Mulvey's 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' also appeared in 1975, laying the foundation for feminist theory's perspective on classical cinema.)[50] As Mary Ann Doane writes:

> Metz's intuition that the cinema was on the side of the imaginary gener-
> ated an enormously productive amount of thinking about the position
> of the spectator as an aspect of the apparatus. And I would say that one
> of his major contributions, along with others – Jean-Louis Baudry and
> Jean-Pierre Oudart, for instance – was to displace psychoanalysis in
> film criticism from the psychoanalysis of characters (or the *auteur*) to a
> consideration of the spectator's engagement with film.[51]

With this transition, Metz leaves behind the immanent perspective of traditional semiology, as he himself emphasizes. On the one hand, he turns to the relation between the spectator and the screen/film, examining the spectator as a 'psychic apparatus', which is required by the institution during a film screening in order for this institution to function. On the other hand, these studies consider the 'cinema-signifier' as a 'specific mixture of the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary' by analyzing the 'condition of the code's possibility' through the imaginary character of the medium (meaning the perceptual conditions in cinema, the oscillation between presence and absence – 'real presence of photography, real absence of the photographed object' – the interplay between identification and projection). But then this also means a 'socio-historic mechanics without which cinema could not exist'.[52] Or, as Metz wrote some years later, commenting on these two first essays: the cinematic institution is technologically and economically

50   Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen,* 16/3 (1975), pp. 6-18.

51   Doane [in this volume]. Metz comments on the two branches of psychoanalysis in cinema, and on the feminist approach which combines them, in an interview by Dominique Blüher and Margrit Tröhler, Christian Metz, '"I Never Expected Semiology to Thrill the Masses": Interview with Christian Metz' [1990], [in this volume].

52   Metz, 'Sur mon travail', pp. 189-90, and Metz, 'Réponses à *Hors cadre* sur *Le signifiant imaginaire', Hors cadre,* 4 (1986), 61-74 (p. 65 and 73).

connected to modern culture and society; the fact that cinema is an industry influences the films in every detail, including their formal characteristics, and this also has ideological consequences. To 'think cinema within history' means to explore the 'comprehensive and partly unconscious apparatus' – which 'to a degree is the same for all films' – and to conceive of cinema 'as a social entity'.[53]

Two years later, Metz published his monograph *The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema*, which included slightly modified versions of the two essays as well as two others.[54] There is, first, the essay 'Story/Discourse (A Note on Two Kinds of Voyeurism)', which examines enunciation in classical cinema, thus prefiguring the third phase of Metzian semiology.[55] Second, the volume contains the comprehensive, dense, and synthesizing essay 'Metaphor/Metonymy, or the Imaginary Referent'.[56] Here Metz combines three perspectives by trying to answer the question of which theoretical standpoint allows for a coherent discourse about the primary process in the filmic texture. For this purpose, Metz confronts tropes of classical rhetoric (metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche) and their structuralist-linguistic extension by Roman Jakobson, first with the semiological-poststructuralist discussion on the syntagmatic and paradigmatic organization of the film discourse (that he himself had introduced in the 1960s), and second with the fundamental psychoanalytical terms of 'condensation' and 'displacement' in the sense of Freud and, later, Lacan. In short, he is concerned with analyzing 'representability' (in Freud's sense, *figurabilité* in French) and its devices, as they become active in the filmic text itself.[57] The fusion of these three perspectives leads Metz to locate the psychoanalytic constitution of the cinematic signifier between the primary and secondary process. For Metz, there is an 'interstice' (*écart*) – not a 'barrier' (*barrière*) – between the two processes, which is displaced

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53 Christian Metz, '1977-1984', preface to the second edition of *Le signifiant imaginaire. Psychanalyse et cinéma* (Paris: Christian Bourgois, 1984), I-V (p. III); this preface has not been translated in the English versions of the book.

54 Christian Metz, *Le signifiant imaginaire. Psychanalyse et cinéma* (Paris: UGE, 1977); English version from 1982: Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*.

55 Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, pp. 89-98 (essay written as an homage to Emile Benveniste). This essay can also be related to Metz's '*Trucage* and the Film' (first published in 1972), which already announces the psychoanalytical positioning of the spectator in the perceptual regime of classical cinema, see especially pp. 665-68. See also Frank Kessler, 'Méliès/Metz: Zur Theorie des Filmtricks', *Montage AV*, 24/1 (2015), pp. 145-157.

56 Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, pp. 149-297.

57 See Metz, 'Sur mon travail', p. 190; see also Riesinger, 'Nachwort', pp. 236-37.

again and again and thus keeps redefining the conception of 'censorship'.[58] This interstice creates a 'surplus' (Barthes) of the imaginary in the figural operations: a surplus of metonymy, of the syntagmatic, and of displacement (processes that are by no means homologous with each other). This surplus of the film's movement and of the movement of the unconscious in the spectator's psychic apparatus, however, is contained by the 'corroborated' codes or stabilized figures, which function as processes of secondarization (of semanticizing, symbolizing, and ultimately of meaning).[59] In justifying this hypothesis, which Metz pursues in his characteristically systematic and consistent way, the eponymous *referent* somehow fades from the spotlight – on the one hand as a phenomenological aspect of the analogy of the image, on the other hand as a symbolic urge, whether in the sense of the visual aspect of objects or as social and cultural practice, as Doane and Vernet observe from two different angles in their respective critical contributions.[60]

As Metz himself explains in retrospect (1986), in an interview with Michèle Lagny, Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, and Pierre Sorlin (editors of the journal *Hors cadre*), the *imaginary signifier* concerns the imaginary character of the signifier as carrier of the photographic representation, as the 'inevitably unreal correlate of any referent'. At the same time, it involves the fetishistic regime of spectatorial perception (with its specific mix of belief and disbelief, and thus disavowal) that the (fictional) film preferably triggers. Metz thus conceives of the *imaginary referent* as a 'piece of (imaginary) reality, from which the spectator assumes the story to *have been extracted*'. And he continues: '"assumes" is not the right word, it is more of a feeling, vague but strong, which presents itself as something obvious. Literary theory would call it a referential illusion.' However minimal the film's invitation to the spectator to construct a diegesis, there is a socially and culturally strong desire to imagine a world similar to our everyday world but belonging to the order of dreams (or daydreams) or memories. Nevertheless, radically experimental films demonstrate that 'the imaginary signifier is capable of almost entirely disposing of the imaginary referent'.[61]

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58   Metz, 'Réponse à *Hors cadre*', p. 63; see also Metz's preface ('1977-1984') to the second edition of *Le signifiant imaginaire,* p. IV, and Metz, 'Metaphor/Metonomy', in *The Imaginary Signifier*, Chapter 21, pp. 253-65.

59   Metz, 'Sur mon travail', p. 190. And yet, as Guy Gauthier puts it: 'The signifier is as if affected by extra-semantic pressures, to a large part escaping the coherent system reconstructed [...] by the structural analysis.' Gauthier, 'Christian Metz à la trace', p. 150.

60   See Marc Vernet, 'Le figural et le figuratif, ou le référent symbolique', *Iris*, 10, pp. 223-34, and Doane's essay in this volume.

61   Metz, 'Réponses à *Hors cadre*', all previous quotes from pp. 65-69 (emphasis in original).

Cinema itself then becomes the referent, with all of cinema's possibilities, which the film comments on through the enunciative act.

The Text-Pragmatic Turn – Another Way of Approaching the Spectator

Thus, we arrive at the third semiology. (The above-mentioned interview in *Hors cadre* and the retrospective discussion of the imaginary signifier, or referent*,* are already part of this phase; at the same time, however, Metz's essay 'Photography and Fetish' still deals intensely with the psychoanalytic concepts of structures of belief, which are activated differently by the photographic image and the cinematic image, respectively). From the mid-1980s on, Metz again turned to a concept borrowed from linguistics, more precisely from pragmatic text linguistics: the concept of enunciation.[62] To create a rationale for his genuinely filmic notion of enunciation, he once more started out with a 'negative description' (how is film different from verbal language?). His main points of reference, which he critically honoured, are the works of the semiological linguists Emile Benveniste and Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni, and of the literary critic and philosopher Käte Hamburger.[63] With his nuanced contribution, Metz injected himself into the French debate on enunciation, which was already in full swing at this point. In linguistics, which had generally turned to (textual) pragmatics, it was headed by Oswald Ducrot's theory of argumentation in language (which is itself based on John R. Searle's speech act theory); in the field of literary theory, it was connected to Gérard Genette's work; and in the field of cinema, it was also associated with the interests of narratology, as, for instance, articulated in Jean-Paul Simon's *Le filmique et le comique* and in the essays in *Communications* 38 edited by Jean-Paul Simon and Marc Vernet.[64]

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62   In the meantime, Metz was working on a study about the joke in Freud's work as well as on a study of Rudolf Arnheim. Neither of these studies was ever published (on Arnheim, see Kessler's essay in this volume).

63   Emile Benveniste, 'Subjectivity in Language' [1958], in *Problems in General Linguistics,* trans. by Mary Elizabeth Meek, 2 vols. (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1971 [1966]), I, pp. 223-30; Catherine Kerbrat-Orecchioni, *L'énonciation. De la subjectivité dans le langage* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1980); Käte Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature*, trans. by Marilynn J. Rose (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993 [1957]).

64   See, for instance, Oswald Ducrot, *Le dire et le dit* (Paris: Minuit, 1980); Gérard Genette, *Narrative Discourse. An Essay in Method*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983) and *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, trans. by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Jean-Paul Simon, *Le filmique et le comique. Essais sur le film comique* (Paris: Albatros, 1979); *Communications*, 38 (issue: 'Enonciation et cinéma', ed. by Jean-Paul Simon and Marc Vernet, 1983).

Contemporaneous theoretical discussions abroad also served as reference works, including Gianfranco Bettetini's semiotic communication theory in Italy,[65] cognitivist narratology (David Bordwell, Edward Branigan), and the more narrowly semiological works of Francis Vanoye, André Gardies, François Jost, André Gaudreault, Francesco Casetti, and others.[66]

However, Metz's interest in the discursive positions of enunciation is already prefigured in the much-debated essay 'Story/Discourse', which he had published in *The Imaginary Signifier* and, before that, in articles such as 'Notes Toward a Phenomenology of Narrative' (1966), 'Modern Cinema and Narrativity' (1966), 'Mirror Construction in Fellini's *8½*', and in '*Trucage* and the Film'.[67] Francesco Casetti, Anne Goliot-Lété, and Martin Lefebvre point this out in their contributions to this volume. In these earlier texts, Metz already talks of the diegetization of enunciative marks in classical cinema – whether with regard to the aesthetical-technical aspects of 'special effects' or to the film-historical regime – whereas modern cinema exposes these same marks. From Metz's semio-psychoanalytical perspective, which he adopts in 'Story/Discourse', the former equals a disavowal encouraging fetishism, whereas the latter foregrounds the enunciative 'machine' of cinema. From this proposition, Metz develops two forms of cinematic pleasure: the pleasure of immersion in the diegesis and the pleasure of observing the visible work of the cinematic signifier.[68] He then interrelates these two forms with two types of voyeurism. With reference to Benveniste, he claims that classical cinema erases the traces of enunciation to the point of a complete transparency of the referential (voyeuristic) illusion of an idealist realism, which characterizes this mode. While this claim has earned him some adamant criticism,[69] he self-critically returns to it in his last work,

65   Gianfranco Bettetini, *La conversazione audiovisiva. Problemi dell'enunciazione filmica e televisiva* (Milano: Bompiani, 1984).

66   Vanoye, *Récit écrit, récit filmique*; Gardies, *Approches du récit filmique*; François Jost, *L'œil-caméra. Entre film et roman* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 1989 [1987]); André Gaudreault, *From Plato to Lumière: Narration and Monstration in Literature and Cinema,* trans. by Timothy Barnard (Toronto/Buffalo/London: University of Toronto Press, 2009 [1988; 1999]); Francesco Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998 [1986]). For a comprehensive account of Metz's references, see his bibliography in *L'énonciation impersonnelle*.

67   Christian Metz, 'Notes Toward a Phenomenology of Narrative' [1966], in *Film Language*, pp. 16-28; Metz, 'The Modern Cinema and Narrativity'; Christian Metz, 'Mirror Construction in Fellini's *8 1/2*' [1966], in *Film Language,* pp. 228-34; Metz, '*Trucage* and the Film'.

68   As he himself said later, his heart clearly belonged to the former (at least at that time); see Lefebvre's essay in this volume.

69   Especially the claim that classical cinema is 'story without discourse' as a 'good object' has brought on harsh criticism; see, for instance, Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, 'A Note on Story/Discourse',

L'énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film. Here, he describes enunciation as an act and process of discursive activity that is always present as a non-anthropomorphic force in the expression of images and sounds combined into meaningful arrangements. Thus, the 'neutral image' doesn't exist (anymore), it is a 'logical fiction' or a myth of theory.[70] As the marks of enunciation vary through history – at the textual and perceptive levels – they become more or less noticeable, more or less overtly displayed; but every image bespeaks a 'point of view' (also in the figurative sense), 'meta-filmically', self-reflexively calling attention to its discursive constructedness.

Due to the conceptual rejection of deixis in the *filmic* discourse, the text-pragmatic perspective of this last study about enunciation is dominated by an aesthetical-narratological tendency, which once more gives expression to Metz's cinephilia, as Dana Polan and Martin Lefebvre point out in their contributions to this volume. The 'impersonal enunciation' is also a logical, theoretical concept, one that is necessary to explain how films narrate through their aesthetic form and audiovisual flow. Enunciation and narration, for Metz, coincide in the (classical) fiction film, because all enunciative marks are put at the service of the culturally dominant mode of narration as a discursive activity.[71] Similarly, filmic enunciation in documentary – with its often hybrid mode combining narration, description, argumentation[72] – cannot be conceptually equated with verbal communication, for film has no personalized enunciative positions such as 'I' and 'you' (or other deictic indicators such as 'here' and 'now'), which are exchangeable in a conversation.[73] Admittedly, film does contain traces of subjectivization and the stylistic marks of an author (possibly also of a film-historical trend), which point to a 'signature' and which temporarily stand out against the historically ingrained enunciative marks (the code).[74]

in *Movies and Methods,* ed. by Bill Nichols, 2 vols. (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1985), II, pp. 549-57.

70   Metz, *L'énonciation,* see the chapter 'Images et sons "neutres"?', 167-72 (p. 170) and before p. 156. See also the interview by Dagrada and Pescatore, 'Conversation with Christian Metz' [in this volume].

71   Various pleas for a conceptual distinction between 'enunciation' and 'narration' – for instance by Jean-Paul Simon, Dominique Chateau, and François Jost – can be found in *Communications* 38.

72   I take the three 'text-types' from Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms*: *The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1990), Chapters I-IV (pp. 1-73). Metz also refers to Chatman elsewhere.

73   See, for instance, Metz, *L'énonciation*, pp. 186-89, 13-22, and 202.

74   See Metz, *L'énonciation*, pp. 155-59; see Casetti's essay in this volume. On the subjectivity of the 'author' in cinematic enunciation, or in the enunciation of theory, see the essays by Dominique Bluher or Alain Boillat in this volume.

Film also contains the addressing of its potential spectators, targeting them (as discursive, theoretical positions) in a mediated way, in order to self-reflexively comment on its own textual production. For Metz, all of these marks are traces of enunciation, which proceeds as an abstract, impersonal dynamic of discourse between the logical positions of an 'origin' and a 'destination'.[75] Through countless enunciative configurations (as moments of *énonciation énoncée*), enunciation refers to itself, because the ultimate 'I' – here taken as the real author and the real spectator – always remains outside the text: it belongs to 'another world' (another logical site).[76] As a prefabricated, 'canned' product, film is a 'monodirectional' discourse, a term Metz takes from Gianfranco Bettetini.[77] Its enunciation, which doesn't reveal itself deictically, is therefore not reversible, that is, not locatable outside the text, neither temporally nor spatially. With this conceptual set of tools, Metz thus distances himself from most previous propositions on filmic enunciation, above all from Casetti's approach in *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*, with which Metz's book deals in detail.[78] Granted, Casetti uses the personal pronouns metaphorically, so to speak, when he claims that the film (as 'I') addresses the spectator (as 'you') through means such as a close-up or a character's look into the camera. Nevertheless, Metz vehemently opposes a personalization of discursive positions and – through his characteristically consistent reasoning – demonstrates that the transfer of the linguistic concept of deixis to film cannot work.

As part and parcel of this consistent, logical approach, Metz ultimately returns to a text-immanent model here: this had already earned him some criticism with regard to his filmolinguistic phase, for instance from Robert Stam, whose cultural criticism attempted to close the theoretical-methodical gap between textual and historical enunciation based on Mikhail Bakhtin's 'social semiotic':

> While Metz, somewhat 'blocked' by the Saussurean langue/parole schema, tends to bracket questions of history and ideology, Bakhtin locates both history and ideology at the pulsating heart of all discourse. [...] Speech is

75   Metz, *L'énonciation*, especially Chapter I (pp. 9-36).

76   Ibid., p. 189 on the author, p. 202 on the spectator, and pp. 199-205 on spectator and author, (especially on the logical site of the other world, p. 203).

77   Ibid., p. 17; see also Dagrada and Pescatore, 'Conversation with Christian Metz' [in this volume].

78   Casetti, *Inside the Gaze.*

always cast in the form of an utterance belonging to a particular speaking subject, and outside this form it cannot exist.[79]

On a different conceptual level, Roger Odin also dissociates himself from Metz's purely textual – or rather, text-pragmatic – conception of enunciation. Building on Metz's earlier works, Odin outlines his own 'semio-pragmatic' notion of enunciation. He performs a reversal of the theoretical viewpoint, so to speak, in order to think of the film's enunciation from the spectator's perspective, when trying to understand – following Metz's dictum – 'that films are understood'.[80] Although this 'spectator' remains an abstract, generalized concept in Odin's view, too – spectators are not persons but 'actants' – he nevertheless takes a step towards 'pragmatics'. Starting at the end of the 1970s with documentaries, and specifically home movies, Odin develops his heuristic model, which centres on the 'reading' of a film: while stylistic devices instruct spectators to read a film one way or another, the spectators always have the option to refuse such a reading. However, the institutional conditions of reception and their constraints are far more important to Odin when it comes to understanding which contexts activate which 'modes of producing sense and affect'.[81] Frank Kessler, in turn, historicizes Odin's approach in his *historical pragmatics* in order to bridge the gap between the filmic text and its specific context (especially with regard to early cinema).[82]

79   Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures: Bakhtin, Cultural Critcism, and Film* (Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), p. 40. Regarding the pluralization of subjectivity at a less ideological level but rather based on a critical history of theory, see Karl Sierek, 'Beyond Subjectivity: Bakhtin's Dialogism and the Moving Image', in *Subjectivity: Filmic Representation and the Spectator's Experience*, ed. by Dominique Chateau (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), pp. 135-46.

80   Metz, 'Problems of Denotation', p. 145: 'The *fact that must be understood is that films are understood.*' (emphasis in original); Odin, 'For a Semio-pragmatics of Film', p. 213. In his review of *L'énonciation impersonnelle*, Odin critically examines Metz's conception of enunciation: 'L'énonciation contre la pragmatique?', *Iris*, 16 (1993), pp. 165-76.

81   Roger Odin, *Les espaces de communication. Introduction à la sémio-pragmatique* (Grenoble: Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 2011), p. 23. Beginning with the essays 'Rhétorique du film de famille', *Revue d'esthétique*, 1-2 (1979), pp. 340-72, and 'A Semio-pragmatic Approach to the Documentary Film' [1984], in *The Film Spectator: from Sign to Mind*, ed. by Warren Buckland (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1995), pp. 227-35, Odin has been enlarging upon his semio-pragmatic 'model'. In a similar vein, Hans J. Wulff in Germany has developed his own semio-pragmatic 'communication-model' based on Metz's semiology: Hans J. Wulff, *Darstellen und Mitteilen. Elemente einer Pragmasemiotik des Films* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr, 1999).

82   Frank Kessler, 'Historische Pragmatik', *Montage AV*, 11/2 (2002), pp. 104-12, and Frank Kessler, 'Viewing Pleasures, Pleasuring Views: Forms of Spectatorship in Early Cinema', in *Film – Kino – Zuschauer: Filmrezeption / Film – Cinema – Spectator: Film Reception*, ed. by Irmbert Schenk, Margrit Tröhler, and Yvonne Zimmermann (Marburg: Schüren, 2010), pp. 61-73.

The Initial Meta-Theoretical Gesture

As should become apparent from this outline of Metz's works, his film semiology cannot be reduced to *one* theory – even if some of its premises are maintained and corroborated throughout. Just the fact that his works have been and still are an inspiration for countless other works and fields of research warrants his status as a 'founder of a discursive practice'. Bellour elaborates further on what made Metz's position so innovative in the historical context of the 1960s, allowing it to become such a creative force: on the one hand, it is the 'outside' perspective, which Bellour designates with the formula 'le cinéma *et…*' ['the cinema *and…*']; on the other hand, it is Metz's scholarly stance, which finds expression as style, as 'writing' (*écriture* in the sense of Barthes) in his texts and oral contributions.[83]

The two aspects are interlocked, especially at the level of the *methodological* reflection that pervades Metz's works. I will thus discuss the two aspects together, with shifting emphases, and return to some of the points addressed earlier.

The perspective of 'le cinéma et…' manifests itself in how film/cinema as an object of study is approached from the outside, through a theoretical and systematic confrontation of cinema with concepts coming from other theoretical fields or concerning other artistic 'languages'. Metz already articulates this conscious and explicitly methodological stance in his first essay 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?', thus distancing his position from film criticism and film history as *interior* perspectives. In this way, he can draw on the interdisciplinary approaches of the French filmologists (especially Gilbert Cohen-Séat, Edgar Morin, Albert Michotte, or Etienne Souriau) – as Guido Kirsten points out in his essay in this volume – while also radicalizing their works through his systematic method and reframing them with regard to cinema. He also extensively addresses the works of Jean Mitry, Albert Laffay, Marcel Martin, and many others who, as predecessors of modern film theory, attempted to conceive of film as a 'language' from a phenomenological point of view. Their *theoretical* concern, however, was focused on individual aspects of cinema (and often combined with a perspective from the inside, as described above).[84] By

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83   Bellour, 'Le cinéma et …', pp. 17-24; it is particularly the first point that Bellour returns to in his essay in this volume.

84   See Metz, 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?', pp. 42-43, 90-91; and 'Propositions méthodologiques pour l'analyse du film' [1967], in *Essais*, II, 97-110 (p. 100). See also Metz, *Language and Cinema*, pp. 9-15. On how Metz deals with his predecessors, see also Andrew, *The Major Film Theories*, pp. 212-16.

contrast, what Metz envisions is to penetrate all areas of cinema with a newly created, consistent theory; Andrew speaks of his 'early optimism' in this respect.[85] What connects Metz with the filmologists – who also cultivated an experimental (empirical) approach – is an epistemological quest to induce an encounter of cinema with the human and social sciences.[86] Metz wants to get to the bottom of the frequently used metaphor of 'film as language',[87] and he is indebted to the 'linguistic turn' due to his biography and his intellectual environment. Thus, his perspective – unlike that of the filmologists – is not rooted in philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, sociology, or biology but in semiology as shaped by Saussure and Barthes.[88] With the aim of grasping the audiovisual construction of meaning by the signifier, he approached cinema through structural linguistics and later through psychonanalysis. In other words: he used the two disciplines 'interested in meaning as such', that is, the only ones dealing with the 'meaning of meaning', as he said in an interview in 1990.[89] However, in the aesthetic field, the propagated approach *from the outside* also implies a confrontation of cinema – not just with the older arts of painting, theatre, and literature but also, especially in *Language and Cinema*, with television and video: as 'languages', as *dispositifs*, as institutions.[90] This comparative view of his object of study is another aspect, among others, linking Metz to the filmologists (I will return to this).[91]

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85   Dudley Andrew, *Concepts in Film Theory* (Oxford/London/New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 17 and 57. However, as Metz later points out again and again: 'Semiology, the way I understand it, is a "modest" discipline, which doesn't cover all areas: the history of film, for instance, should be approached with historical methods.' Blüher and Tröhler, 'Interview with Christian Metz' [in this volume].

86   Martin Lefebvre, 'L'aventure filmologique: documents et jalons d'une histoire institutionelle', *Cinémas*, 19/2-3 (2009), 59-100 (p. 61); the journal's double issue is entirely dedicated to the ambitious project of filmology, which began after World War II and officially lasted from 1950 to 1962 as the *Institut de filmologie*.

87   Bellour and Metz, 'Entretien', p. 195. On the metaphor of the 'cinematic language' as a 'methodological abstraction', see also 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?', p. 61, footnote * (these footnotes are commentaries added by Metz himself at the time of compiling the essays for the first volume of *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* in 1968).

88   See François Albera and Martin Lefebvre, 'Présentation. Filmologie, le retour?', *Cinémas*, 19/2-3 (2009), pp. 13-56.

89   Blüher and Tröhler, 'Interview with Christian Metz' [in this volume].

90   Metz, *Language and Cinema*, pp. 235-40.

91   See Albera and Lefebvre, 'Présentation', p. 21-22; see also Anne Souriau, 'Filmologie', in *Etienne Souriau. Vocabulaire d'esthétique*, ed. by Anne Souriau (Paris: PUF, 1990), pp. 745-46. She insists on the fact that Souriau considers the semiological approach part of the aesthetic branch of filmology from the outset.

From this standpoint, Metz privileges – logically and methodologically a priori – the relationship or the interrelating (*mise en rapport*) – the 'and' in the phrase 'le cinéma *et…*', as Bellour points out.[92] This reveals Metz's fundamental aim of grasping his object of study theoretically: it is the foundational gesture trying to shape a place for film theory, to give it a *raison d'être*, and to sketch an outline, a kind of programme, for the theoretical activity. This foundational gesture, which motivates 'theory' as a dynamic field of relational possibilities in order to 'construct' the 'cinema' as object, testifies to Metz's driving force, 'his implicit desire to establish the parameters of theory as a discursive genre', as Rodowick puts it.[93] The gesture is a turning point, a break in the thinking and writing about cinema and film, but it also situates itself within a tradition and meta-theoretically reveals itself as a historical gesture: in order to establish a new film theory through semiology, it is necessary for Metz – much like for Jakobson – to address the *history* of theory.[94] That means dealing critically with preceding positions in order to understand them but also to re-orient them with a view to the new approach and thus to root oneself within a non-teleological genealogy of theoretical reflection.[95] This epistemological activity as a necessary step in the theoretical renewal of scholarship is certainly not a solitary act in the context of the late 1960s and early 1970s (especially with regard to structuralism). We find it not just in the works of Jakobson but also those of Barthes, Foucault, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Michel de Certeau, and Pierre Bourdieu, to name but a few.[96] But in Metz's work, the purpose

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92   Bellour, 'Le cinéma et …', p. 17 (emphasis in original).

93   Rodowick, 'A Care for the Claims of Theory', p. 172.

94   Roman Jakobson, 'A Glance at the Development of Semiotics' [1975], trans. by Patricia Baudoin, in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Stephen Rudy, 9 vols. (Berlin/New York/Amsterdam: Mouton 1962-2014), VII (1985), pp. 199-219; see Holenstein, *Roman Jakobsons phänomenologischer Strukturalismus*, p. 28. As Rodowick points out, this meta-theoretical, historicizing gesture is valid for Metz beginning with his first essay in 1964 and it continues through the two texts about Jean Mitry's *Esthétique et pyschologie* (2 vols., 1963 and 1965): Christian Metz: 'Une étape dans la réflexion sur le cinéma' [1964] and 'Problèmes actuels de théorie du cinéma' [1967], in *Essais, II*, pp. 13-34 and 35-86, and 'On the Impression of Reality' [1965], in *Film Language*, pp. 3-15. See Rodowick, 'A Care for the Claims of Theory', p. 174.

95   See Rodowick, 'A Care for the Claims of Theory', p. 176.

96   Some exemplary works are: Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics in Relation to Other Sciences' [1967], in *Selected Writings*, II (1971), pp. 655-96; Barthes, *S/Z*; Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. by Monique Layton, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976 [1973]), II; Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972 [1969]); Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, trans. by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992 [1975]); Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. by Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977 [1972]).

of this reform is to establish the theory and the discipline of cinema in the first place.

Thus, choosing the act of interrelating as the basic methodological and epistemological gesture means more than just viewing the object of study from a distance or even constructing it from a radical position of exteriority. Rather, this attitude demands that Metz develops a coherent and nuanced 'model', 'a complete machine, with all its cogs, even the tiniest ones';[97] in other words: 'every filmic study must clearly and consciously select its principle of relevance'.[98] It is important, however, that the conceptual and methodical rigour Metz demands of himself does not lead to a view of theory as a hieratic or self-sufficient, permanently arrested construction. Andrew speaks of Metz's notion of theory as a constant 'work in progress' and of a semiology that 'begins by examining its own raw material before tackling the raw material of cinema'.[99] Or, as Odin writes: 'The conception that Christian Metz has of theories is basically instrumental. To him, the theoretical models are but working hypotheses, more or less apt tools for resolving this or that problem.'[100] Thus, a theoretical perspective should and must be adapted to the issue in question. This approach permits twisting the object over and over to examine it from various directions by means of new theoretical tools. It also makes it possible to exchange the object of study and thus to verify the theory and question its limitations, that is, to falsify it (this is part of its principle of relevance). In other words, theory is seen as a process, a practice, a 'discursive genre', and in this modern sense, we can also grant it 'scientificity'.[101]

What this position implies from the beginning is a self-reflective distance from the chosen concepts and from one's own approach. It is an approach immersing itself deeply in the issue at hand, exploring the chosen perspective – in Metz's case the semiological perspective, which develops from a semio-linguistic into a semio-psychoanalytical, and eventually a semio-(text-)pragmatical one – as completely, consistently, and systematically as possible. Simultaneously, this approach keeps a distance from its own intellectual edifice and from the theoretical issues Metz confronts it with.

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97   Metz in the interview with Vernet and Percheron, 'Sur mon travail', p. 194.

98   Metz, *Language and Cinema*, p. 20 (translation modified).

99   Andrew, *Major Film Theories*, p. 216 and 215.

100 Odin, 'Christian Metz et la linguistique', p. 93, and Odin [in this volume]. See Metz himself in the interview with Bellour: 'Entretien', pp. 197-99 and 219, and in the interview with Vernet and Percheron, 'Sur mon travail', p. 184.

101 See Odin, 'Christian Metz et la linguistique', p. 93; see also Gauthier, 'Christian Metz à la trace', p. 148.

Structuralism as a Conflictual Space

It is only in the way outlined above that we can understand Metz's use of concepts from linguistics and of Saussure's structuralism, and how he benefited from this approach within the context of the era's scholarly debates. What Odin calls the 'méthode metzienne' encompasses not only Metz's borrowings from neighbouring disciplines in order to create his theory of cinema but also the fact that he chooses them for their 'resilience', testing their suitability for investigating the cinematic language. He starts from a sort of *negative motivation*, which seeks intellectual, theoretical conflict and supports the exteriority of his approach. Thus, with his initial *descriptive* gesture,[102] Metz the semiologist meta-theoretically confronts (verbal) language in Saussure's sense as a system of rules (*langue*) with film as a *langage*, that is, a 'system' of possibilities with the capacity for expression and communication. The concept of language (*langue*) serves as a '*métalangage*' or '*métacode*' in relation to all other semiotic systems or 'languages' (*langages*). The reason for this is that language (*langue*) is a '*universal commentator*'; it is indispensable for everyday communication as well as for scholarly discourse – including the discourse about 'object-languages' (*langages-objets*) such as cinema – as he explicitly states.[103]

In this conceptual confrontation (which, from today's perspective, sometimes appears as a provocation), Metz is more interested in the 'disjunctures' than in the 'conjunctures', as Rosen also points out: 'By determining where cinema resists application of major Saussurian linguistic concepts, Metz marked and defined a need to develop concepts and methods beyond structural linguistics to account for signification in film.'[104] In his first text, 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?', Metz already makes it clear that film has no double articulation comparable to verbal language (as stated by André Martinet):[105] 'Not only does this limit the arbitrariness of the cinematic sign, but it constricts any film

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102 On 'description', see Metz, *Language and Cinema*, pp. 11-12.

103 Christian Metz, 'The Perceived and the Named' [1975], trans. by Steven Feld and Shari Robertson, *Studies in Visual Communication*, 6/3 (1980), 56-68 (pp. 62-63, emphasis in original). On the '*langages-objets*', see also Christian Metz, 'Au-delà de l'analogie, l'image' [1970], *Essais*, II, 151-62, (p. 161).

104 Rosen [in this volume].

105 André Martinet, *Elements of General Linguistics*, trans. by Elisabeth Palmer (London: Faber, 1964 [1960]). This does not mean that cinematic language has no structuring levels or units: Metz distinguishes five levels (and addresses the propositions of Umberto Eco, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Pier Paolo Pasolini); Metz, 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?', pp. 61-63 (see also the long footnote *).

semiotics based on Saussurian principles.'[106] This leads Metz to describe the 'cinematic language' with the well-known phrase '*langage sans langue*'. Extending and countering Saussure's approach, he states that cinema is *parole* from the outset, or even more, *discours*. It is not a system of rules but always already realized or actualized – in the pragmatic sense of speech acts and in the formalist sense of renewal and displacement.[107] The notion of a cinematic language is thus to be understood in the 'figurative sense', as a language of art – though at least in *Language and Cinema*, Metz is more interested in the language and the construction of meaning than in the aesthetic approach: 'if the cinema is an art it is equally a discourse'. Thus, Lefebvre speaks of Metz's notion of a 'logomorphic art'.[108] In other words, at the level of the film – of each individual film – one can detect a system of combinations of codes, specifically cinematic as well as non-specific codes. Yet these are not the product of a finite rule-system but rather the expression of variable, evolving conventions. As Metz explains: 'The proper task of the filmic system is to modify the codes that it integrates.'[109] This shift implies a questioning and extension of the linguistic premises. In doing this from the beginning, Metz discards not only the Saussurian concept of language (*langue*) for the study of cinema but also notions such as the 'sign', replacing these linguistic terms with semiological ones such as 'code', 'message', 'text', 'system', 'discourse' – terms that are valid in all signifying systems.[110] These signifying systems he treats as complex semiological forms of organization, which must be constituted as theoretical objects through media-specific characteristics or codes. All these shifts and dynamizations push the boundaries of the rigid 'structuralist theoretical stance', as Casetti points out.[111]

106 Rosen [in this volume]. On the cinematic sign as 'non-arbitrary' (in contrast to verbal language) but 'motivated', see Metz, 'The Cinema: Language or Language System', p. 59 and 61-67; Metz, 'Problems of Denotation', pp. 108-10; and Metz, 'The Perceived and the Named', p. 59. In *Language and Cinema*, Metz returns to a discussion of the 'sign' and eventually dismisses the *term* entirely for his approach: pp. 193-94, 204-7, 286-88. See also Kirsten [in this volume].
107 Christian Metz, 'Montage et discours dans le film' [1967], in *Essais*, II, 89-96 (p. 93). On actualization and partial renewal, see Metz, 'Propositions méthodologiques', p. 106. On the level of the signifiers and their 'recurring arrangements', see Bellour and Metz, 'Entretien', p. 196.
108 Lefebvre [in this volume], with reference to the quotations above, Metz, *Language and Cinema*, p. 11 and 38.
109 Metz, *Language and Cinema,* p. 106.
110 See Rosen [in this volume]; see, for instance, Metz, 'Problèmes actuels de théorie du cinéma', p. 83; Christian Metz, 'Les sémiotiques. A propos des travaux de Louis Hjelmslev et d'André Martinet' [1965]; including 'Postface 1977', in *Essais sémiotiques*, 9-24 and 25-30 (p. 29).
111 Casetti, *Theories of Cinema*, p. 144.

Thus, transferring the meta-language of theory from linguistics to cinema also requires a new terminology. For Metz, however, this vocabulary doesn't need to be invented; rather he works through the existing concepts and terms of linguistics – and later of psychoanalysis – with great care and precision in order to adapt them to the new 'object' of cinema and to integrate them into a comprehensive semiological conception.[112] But even the most comprehensive ('optimistic') structuralist project of the time, which finds its clearest and strictest expression in *Language and Cinema* and which aims at a 'general semiology', can only be attained through such assimilations, distinctions, and adaptations of the tools with regard to the objects of study and their material of expression (including their phenomenological character). Although a 'semiological interference' between language and media can be observed, and there are various ways of transferring codes between media-specific materials of expression (to which the codes adapt and thus change), it is illusory for Metz to establish a common terminology for all semiological research.[113] It cannot be a matter of claiming the transferability of codes *à l'identique*, because the relations between forms and materials from one signifying system to another or from one medium to another are subject to manifold technical-sensory variations.[114] Thus, we can only agree with Rosen when he writes: 'Consequently, it appears that for the early Metz, even a general semiotic theory must pass through specificities.' Metz qualifies this position later in *Language and Cinema*, regarding specificity 'as a practice of signification more aligned with one medium than another but not necessarily exclusive to it', stating that 'mixtures and hybridities of media and aesthetic forms are constitutive of film history' as well as of cinematic language from a synchronic perspective.[115] From this viewpoint, it seems logical that the technological aspect of film as a medium – and thus also the analogy of the cinematic image – fades from the spotlight, and that the analogy itself is described as coded.[116] The ontological question is

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112   See, for instance, Metz, 'Les sémiotiques', pp. 21-24.

113   On the dynamics of 'semiological interferences' and the forms of 'transposition', see *Language and Cinema*, pp. 214-16; on the translatability between perception and (verbal) language, see 'The Perceived and the Named', pp. 61-64, especially 62. See also Chateau and Lefebvre, 'Dance and the Fetish', p. 113, and Rosen's essay in this volume.

114   See Metz, 'Les sémiotiques', p. 28, or Metz, *Language and Cinema*, p. 223.

115   Rosen [in this volume]. However, as early as 1967, Metz writes that there are only varying 'degrees of specificity': Metz, 'Propositions méthodologiques', p. 105 and footnote **.

116   Thus a development can be traced by looking at the concept of analogy as it changes from the early text 'On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema' [1965], pp. 3-15 to 'Au-delà de l'analogie, l'image' [1970], pp. 151-62, or *Language and Cinéma* [1971], p. 228. However, there are different

pushed aside (though never completely obliterated) by the methodological and epistemological one.[117]

And yet the project of a general semiology as a long-term goal never leads to a conceptual machine of equalization. Each language (*langage*) must be characterized through a plurality of specific and non-specific codes so that each form of expression or each medium contains an 'overlapping of specificities', and the complex combination of codes in the 'textual system' of each film is unique.[118] Because Metz approaches film – as well as other dynamics of meaning-making – by way of the signifier, the intelligible codes remain tied to the distinctive features of the audiovisual form of expression and thus linked to the 'physical realization of the signifier', the 'work of the form in the material'.[119] This, in turn, means that the theorist Metz never loses touch with the perceptible surface of the film image, which – due to the absence of an actual physical substance at the level of the films – develops the imaginary qualities of an immaterial 'body'.[120]

While Metz dedicates himself to the relationship between *cinema and verbal language* (*langue/langage*) in the first semio-linguistic phase of his works, there is always this 'remainder' of the everyday film experience. The phenomenological aspects of the cinematic signifier (such as the analogy of the cinematic image and the image's impression of reality, which escape structural linguistic analysis in his early writings) are gradually subjected to the scholarly examination of textual and cultural codification. Yet Metz never dismisses the reality of the films, their production and reception, their aesthetics or history. They reach him as an individual passionate moviegoer, as a cinephile, but also as a scholar who leaves his subjective traces in the enunciation of his writing (*écriture*), as Dana Polan, Alain Boillat, and Dominique Bluher show in this volume. Films as social practice and historical development and cinema as an anthropological institution also find their way into his thinking, either on the edges or as a basic frame

levels of analogy; see Jacques Aumont, *The Image*, trans. by Claire Pajackowska (London: BFI, 1997 [1990]), pp. 154-55; see also Vernet and Rosen [both in this volume].

117 See Casetti, *Theories of Cinema*, p. 14, 91. Several authors in the present volume also explicitly address this conceptual shift in Metz's works (which was and remains a conflict); see the essays by Doane, Lefebvre, Rodowick, Rosen, and Vernet.

118 Metz, *Langage and cinema*, p. 234 (translation modified); see Metz, 'Problèmes méthodologiques', p. 106.

119 Metz, *Language and Cinema*, p. 234; here, he addresses specificity 'as a notion which is *at the same time material and systematic*' (emphasis in original; translation modified), and p. 253 (translation modified).

120 In Blüher and Tröhler, 'Interview with Christian Metz' [in this volume]; on cinema as fetish, see also his interview with Vernet and Percheron, 'Sur mon travail', pp. 176-77.

of reference.[121] Or, as Odin puts it: 'Metz never separates theory from life', not even in the most consistently structuralist phase of *Language and Cinema* (1971).[122] Even in the theoretical and analytical description of the cinematic image – 'as composed of "purely relational unities"', Metz continues to reflect on the conditions of the possibility of perception.[123] Thus, Vernet claims that, for Metz, 'semiotics must treat both what comes before analogy (what constitutes it or what it is founded upon) and beyond analogy (what supplements it; it is clear that here he reinitiates reflection around denotation and connotation), with respect to all of the diverse systems that come to inform the image'.[124] In 'The Imaginary Signifier' (1975) and 'The Imaginary Referent' (1977), this 'remainder' increasingly resurfaces – as revealed by the essay titles – in the spectator's imaginary relationship to the screen. In his meta-psychological studies, Metz grounds this imaginary relationship in the 'absent' materiality of the cinematic signifier (consisting of light and shadow), which nevertheless causes 'the spectator's strong sensation of reality'.[125] As Metz himself writes: 'the quasi-real that the film presents is always considered as imaginary by the spectator'.[126]

But not only is it impossible to 'separate theory from life', the reverse is also true for the study of cinema because 'without the [theoretical] machine, we are certain to see nothing' – at least nothing new and nothing that would allow us to see the object of study from varying, ever-new perspectives.[127] Thus, Metz also says of research that it is 'a work that makes you schizophrenic, that needs to be maintained *against* everyday life'.[128] Nevertheless – or precisely because of this: 'Le cinéma *et…*' is the engine of the theoretical machine, which Metz is so enthusiastic about, also as a dynamic of thought.[129]

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121 See, for instance, the first pages of *Language and Cinema*.

122 Odin, 'Christian Metz et la linguistique', p. 98.

123 Vernet [in this volume]. Here, the author refers to Metz, 'Au-delà de l'analogie', p. 156. On the conditions of possibility of perception, see also Christian Metz, 'Le perçu et le nommé' [1975], in *Essais sémiotiques*, pp. 159-60; unfortunately, the final section entitled 'Sémiologie et phénoménologie' has been omitted in the English translation of 'The Perceived and the Named', between p. 66 and 67.

124 Here, Vernet [in this volume] refers to Christian Metz, 'La connotation, de nouveau' [1971], in *Essais*, II, pp. 161-72 (p. 163).

125 Vernet [in this volume].

126 Metz, 'Problèmes actuels de la théorie du cinéma', p. 43, note 22; see also his interview, 'Réponses à *Hors cadre*', pp. 66-69.

127 Metz in his interview with Vernet and Percheron, 'Sur mon travail', p. 185; see also the comment by Odin, 'Christian Metz et la linguistique', p. 99.

128 Metz, 'Sur mon travail', p. 179 (emphasis in original).

129 Metz, 'Sur mon travail', p. 177; see also Blüher and Tröhler, 'Interview with Christian Metz' [in this volume].

Method – Methodology

I would now like to switch perspectives once more. By explicitly addressing Metz's method and methodology, I will approach theory as practice, as a reflection of the working and thinking process, and link this with Metz's scholarly attitude.

When Metz chooses his theoretical methods for approaching cinema based on the theories' 'resilience' (according to Odin), this choice cannot be reduced to a polemical 'Le cinéma contre…'. The method of interrelating requires that an approach, once chosen, be thought through completely, that the theorist immerse himself deeply in this process of 'relationship building'. Thus, the fundamental exteriority becomes an interiority in a second phase, although the reflection at the meta-level is never abandoned.[130] When the goal is to coherently and consistently pursue a position – chosen for a limited time and for a specific task – as a principle of theoretical and analytical distinctiveness, then the object of study must be distinguished from the method, as Metz points out: the 'cinematic phenomenon' is vast and diverse, and a variety of perspectives and disciplines can yield valuable knowledge about this object of study. Thus, the semiology of film can draw on psychology, sociology, aesthetics, or history. But regarding the methods, Metz speaks of 'the sole division of labor within the study of film' in *Language and Cinema*, because 'methods are things which cannot be interchanged (and which cannot be "combined" without great danger of giving rise to monstrosities)'. This view is in line with the 'rigour' mentioned earlier and with the chosen method's 'principle of relevance' regarding the object of study. In a later phase, these methods could be joined in 'a true, not syncretic synthesis' (in the spirit of the period, which envisioned a general semiology). In this synthesis, different approaches would illuminate different aspects of the cinematic object – aspects that are related but that nevertheless must recognize their own limits. However, for the time being, a 'necessary methodological pluralism' is in order, as Metz explains in the first, methodological chapter of *Language and Cinema*.[131]

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130   See also Andrew, *Major Film Theories*, p. 215: according to Andrew, earlier theorists 'saw their writing as the fluid development of a total view of the art. […] Metz, however, has reversed the order of labor, beginning with particular problems and searching only later for the potentially unifying relations between the problems'.

131   All quotes in this paragraph are taken from Metz, *Language and Cinema*, pp. 17-21. Later, Metz commented rather sceptically on the interdisciplinary exchange at which this methodological pluralism aimed, because it would only be possible among *specialists* from various disciplines who reflect their epistemological and methodological premises; see the three interviews Metz,

Thus, semiology – even as a general semiology – is by no means all-encompassing. But it should aim to grasp film as 'a *total* signifying-object' and as 'a general study of cultural configurations and logic'.[132] It deals with the *form* of films as 'textual systems' (the *form of expression* and the *form of content*, in Hjelmslev's terms).[133] When Metz chooses linguistics to approach his object of study in this first phase, this is also a matter of dealing with linguistics as a method. Although, like Saussure, he sees linguistics only as a subdiscipline of a general semiology, the young discipline of semiology must take linguistics as its starting point because linguistic research has dealt with language (*langage*) more deeply than any other discipline. Linguistics provides concepts that film semiology – or 'the "filmolinguistic" venture', as Metz initially also calls his approach – can work with.[134] The first process of a 'negative definition', where Metz confronts the *notions* of linguistics by aiming to describe cinematic language and emphasizing the differences from verbal language as disjunctures, can be combined with a second, 'positive' process, which draws on the *methods* of linguistics.[135] These methods are then questioned with regard to their suitability and usefulness and tested for their 'resilience' (Odin). Or, as Metz himself often emphasizes, for instance in the interview with the trio Lagny, Ropars, and Sorlin from *Hors cadre*: 'I haven't applied anything, I've just presented cinema in the light of more comprehensive notions [...].'[136]

Such a stance requires constant self-reflection of one's own activity.[137] And it requires a thorough examination of the current international state of research in linguistics – not just structural linguistics (Saussure, Martinet, Hjelmslev, Jakobson) but also generative linguistics (Noam Chomsky, Nicolas Ruwet) and pragmatics (Charles W. Morris) – as well as in anthropology

'Réponses à *Hors cadre*', p. 62; and Marie and Vernet, 'Entretien', pp. 277-78, and Blüher and Tröhler, 'Interview with Christian Metz' [in this volume].

132 Metz, *Language and Cinema*, p. 19 (emphasis in original).

133 See Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, trans. by Francis J. Whitfield (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1953; rev. Engl. ed. 1961 [1943]), especially Chapter 22.

134 See, for instance, Bellour and Metz, 'Entretien', pp. 195-200. In turn, linguistics can also profit from semiology on its way to a general semiology (p. 197).

135 See Metz, 'Some Points in the Semiotics of Cinema' [1966], in *Film Language*, p. 107; and Bellour and Metz, 'Entretien', pp. 197-98.

136 Metz, 'Réponses à *Hors cadre*', p. 62.

137 This is not only evident from the explicit passages in all his texts but also from the many interviews he gave in the course of his life, which belong to his works as paratexts, as well as from the many forewords and afterwords in revised editions of his books, or the self-critical footnotes he added to reprints of his essays. See *Conversations with Christian Metz: Selected Interviews on Film Theory (1970-1991)*, ed. by Warren Buckland and Daniel Fairfax (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

(Lévi-Strauss) and, of course, in the emerging field of cultural and literary semiology (Barthes), graphic semiology (Jacques Bertin), etc.[138] Later, in the fields of psychoanalysis and enunciation, Metz adds an equally meticulous examination of concepts from Freud, Lacan, and Klein, and from Benveniste, Hamburger, and Bettetini. This contrastive approach to film/cinema is even more evident in Metz's (meta-)theoretical perspective. In addition to the classical film theorists and filmologists mentioned before, he also examines the first parallel attempts at film semiology (Umberto Eco, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Emilio Garroni) or the diverse perspectives on the theory and analysis of film (Bellour).[139] Thus, methodological reflection is a fundamental principle of Metz's work, which aims 'to look at the semiological endeavour as an open research, permitting the study of new forms'.[140]

In this first semio-linguistic phase, Metz's focus shifts from the individual cinematic image (which cannot be equated with the 'sign', nor does it contain any signs) to the syntagmatic ordering of images, to 'transphrastic' units, and the plurality of codes. In a next step, the idea of a structure is replaced by that of a dynamic textual system and of 'writing' (*écriture*).[141] The two methodological steps of positive and negative description run parallel (that is, in the sense of a 'shifting dominant' in Jakobson's terms).[142]

Commutation – Comparative Method – Systematics of Analogical Thinking

An important method that Metz borrows from linguistics is *commutation*. It pervades all of his works as a movement of thought (sometimes in modified form) and shapes his scholarly attitude. This method, which is more than just a tool, is exemplary of the two fundamental positions that supplement each other throughout Metz's work, allowing him to approach the cinematic

138 This list of names is not meant to be exhaustive. See also Odin, 'Christian Metz et la linguistique', pp. 90-91.
139 E.g. Metz, *Language and Cinema*, pp. 70-90 and 91-120. See also Bellour and Metz, 'Entretien', pp. 209-10, 215-18; and Bellour's essay with the self-explanatory title 'Two Ways of Thinking' in this volume.
140 Metz, 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?', p. 89; and Bellour and Metz, 'Entretien', pp. 196-97. See also Rodowick, 'A Care for the Claims of Theory', pp. 199-200; and Rosen [in this volume].
141 Metz, *Language and Cinema*, especially pp. 254-84, as well as the Conclusion, pp. 285-88. See also Casetti, *Theories of Cinema*, p. 144. I will return to this concept below.
142 Roman Jakobson, 'The Dominant' [1935/1971], trans. by Herbert Eagle, in *Selected Writings*, III (1981), pp. 751-56.

object in a complementary way. As a method of structural linguistics, commutation shapes his early works on the construction of meaning in film. In the modified – but no less systematic – form of a comparative method, it pervades his examination of cinema in comparison with the other arts and his view of the history of theory. If the first method seems to confirm a strictly structuralist approach, the second definitely goes beyond the structuralist framework.

Commutation as an operational, heuristic method of structural linguistics is characterized by omission and addition, exchange, and replacement of linguistic units within a defined corpus (it also serves as an elementary method for describing transformative processes in generative linguistics, especially in glossematics). Intuitively recognized regularities at the level of expression thus become objectifiable, allowing for an examination of the changes at the level of content. Through this linking of form and content, the relevant characteristics are determined as invariants, which indicate shifts in meaning.[143] In Metz's works, this commutative method guides, for instance, the systematic examination of codes in the Grand Syntagmatique by means of segmentation and classification. The method serves to identify the 'distinctive units' and 'autonomous segments' and to distinguish the alternatives in their combination within a sequence of images. With this process, Metz is not so much interested in the semantic level, in the result, but more in the *construction* of meaning, the filmic-enunciative process of textual meaning-making.[144] Thus, 'the filmic orderings that are codified and significant [...] organize not only filmic connotation, but also and *primarily*, denotation'. They also allow us to understand how films, on the basis of the photographic image, 'transform the world into discourse'.[145]

On several occasions, Metz accurately and critically deals with determining and naming the units that guide the activities of commutation (segmentation and substitution) while also addressing the taxonomy and the adaptation of these methods to film.[146] He even exhibits a kind of obsession when it comes to hierarchically organizing the units obtained through *découpage* (e.g. the segments of the Grand Syntagmatique) or the

143 See especially Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena*, Chapter 14.
144 Metz, 'Problems of Denotation', pp. 119-24, and *Language and Cinema*, pp. 170-73.
145 Metz, 'Problems of Denotation', p. 117 (emphasis in original) and 115.
146 See, for instance, Metz, 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?', pp. 69-70; Christian Metz, 'La connotation, de nouveau', p. 171; Metz, 'The Perceived and the Named', pp. 56-57; or *Language and Cinema*, pp. 28-29 and 165-66. Metz critically deals with the taxonomy of generative linguistics in his essay 'Sémiologie audio-visuelle et linguistique générative' (in *Essais sémiotiques*, pp. 110-28; incl. Postface 1977).

constructed systematic entities (e.g. the codes), all of which he attempts to assign to different levels and processes.[147] However, he further notes the inevitable circularity of paradigmatics and syntagmatics, which results whenever the focus on categories and structures is relinquished in favour of the functioning of these processes in the textual system.[148] For Metz's 'taxonomic rage' is not limited to typologizing and classifying.[149] Ultimately, his aim is not just to describe the individual elements and characteristics of the cinematic signifier but to determine their performative function in the dynamic audiovisual processes of meaning, a function that is always polysemous and multifarious. His main interest is the theoretical-logical description of the filmic system, of the 'architecture justifying the film's existence', as Casetti writes (Metz distinguishes this *description* from the *analysis* of a specific film's codes in action).[150] In the course of this, perspectives and levels keep changing constantly. Thus, even in *Language and Cinema*, Metz guides his readers from strict commutation to a dynamic organization of the individual elements by way of ever-changing perspectives and an increasing complexity of his method. When Vernet and Percheron compare this work to a 'machine à la Tinguely', this could mean that the 'model' fabricated by Metz is completely self-referential and self-sufficient. But it could also mean that it already goes beyond the structuralist machine because the components identified at the structural level are never arrested in their complex interaction, distribution, and combination within the textual system.[151] Film is not grammar, film is art – this insight underlies Metz's conception of his theoretical object, far beyond this book.

Thus, the method of commutation is not limited to the issues inspired by linguistics. As an extended method of *differentiation*, it also characterizes Metz's methodology when it comes to discussing terminology. Remember, for instance, the distinction between signifier and signified, which

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147 In the sense of a Hjelmslevian 'hiérarchie des sections' of a language, with the sections in turn belonging to interrelated categories, see Metz, 'Les sémiotiques', p. 20.

148 Metz, *Language and Cinema*, pp. 127-30, especially 128; see also Casetti, *Theories of Cinema*, pp. 142-49, and Casetti [in this volume].

149 The term 'taxonomic rage' comes from Odin, 'Christian Metz et la linguistique', p. 90. See also Gauthier, who writes with respect to the structuralist approach in general: 'this period in love with growth – which was believed to be unlimited – convinced that a new civilization based on the American model would flourish, was remarkably consistent in privileging a *fanatical scientificity*, a mastery through numbers, a faith in abstraction, all of which reflected the only order that could be set against the disorder of the world – that of the spirit.' Gauthier, 'La flambée structuraliste', p. 106 (my emphasis).

150 Casetti, *Theories of Cinema*, p. 144.

151 Metz, 'Sur mon travail', p. 190.

he confronts with Hjelmslev's conceptual pairs of 'form'/'material' and 'expression'/'content'. Here, both signifier and signified are assigned a level of form and of material, of expression *and* of content. This is a debate he often returns to, especially in his semio-linguistic or filmo-semiological phase.[152] Or think of the semio-psychoanalytical reflection about the rhetorical figures of metaphor and metonymy: Metz unfolds these across the syntagmatic and paradigmatic textual dimensions, associating them with the mental processes of condensation and displacement (but without equating them).[153] This differentiating approach never lapses into the simple binarism that is inherent to the strict structuralist activity and which Metz was sometimes accused of. Instead, his aim is a descriptive, flexible, never-ending differentiation in the sense of correlating, of surveying parallels and fundamental differences – not a strict definition, which ties down a concept or a relationship between concepts.

This is also true of Metz's second, complementary focus in his endeavours to grasp his object as completely as possible from within and without. This focus concerns the artistic forms of expression or 'languages' (*langages*), which – in a comparative method – appear as 'a complex blend articulated through resemblances and differences'.[154] Apart from the comparison between verbal language and cinema, this also means the interrelating of cinema's traits and of its manners of functioning with other languages (as the comprehensive filmological project had already envisioned). Once again, we note Metz's concern with advancing the formalization of his approach to the object as far as possible; a concern that is nevertheless faced with a more open conception from the beginning:

> The task would consist in establishing the *distinctive traits of the signifier's material* through the commutation of languages (*langages*) among each other. This would mean playing Hjelmslev off against himself (since

152 See, for instance, Metz, 'Propositions méthodologiques', pp. 97-110 (essay from 1967); Christian Metz, 'The Saying and the Said' [1968], in *Film Language*, 235-52 (pp. 242-44); in the course of his discussion of Hjelmslev's concepts, Metz reduces the three notions of material, substance, and form to two – subsuming substance under material – and relates them to the level of expression (signifier) and the level of content (signified) of film; Metz, *Language and Cinema,* especially pp. 208-11 and 251-53. On Metz's discussion of Hjelmslev's concepts, see also Margrit Tröhler, *Offene Welten ohne Helden: Plurale Figurenkonstellationen im Film* (Marburg: Schüren, 2007), pp. 169-76.

153 As mentioned above, for this connection between rhetoric, linguistic semiotics, and psychoanalysis, Metz notably refers to the respective works of Jakobson, Freud, and Lacan; Metz, 'The Imaginary Referent', especially pp. 197-206, 235-44, 266-92.

154 Metz, in the 'Postface 1977' to the essay 'Les sémiotiques', pp. 26-27 (emphasis in original).

to him, a material trait cannot be distinctive, nor vice versa). It would also mean to let each language reappear at the end, that is, each entity that normally passes for a *language* in the sense of a socially confirmed starting point. Language would thus be taken as the *ultimate* combination (= the endpoint) of a certain number of specific traits of socialized sensory perception.[155]

Thus, like the semiological interferences between languages and media (in which Metz is more interested in *Language and Cinema*), the specific traits of a 'language' are coupled with their respective expressive materials. These traits influence the forms of expression and content that a language can develop in the course of constructing meaning. But in order to compare the use of these forms and to distinguish the languages from each other, the semiologist must be guided by social and sensory perception and experience, which form the starting point and endpoint of his examination.[156]

This comparative method, which is related to the structuralist method of commutation, does not result in a taxonomy, neither with regard to languages nor regarding the confrontation between the arts. Beginning with 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?' (1964), and especially with 'On the Impression of Reality in the Cinema' (1965), Metz takes up the traditional comparative approach, which has characterized film-theoretical reflection from the beginning (as a continuation of debates in art theory). However, he is not interested in continuing the 'paragon discourse', the 'competition of the arts' from art theory; nor does he want to pursue the debate on cinema as a legitimate art as it was discussed in classical film theory up to Bazin, Laffay, and even Mitry.[157] In the classical 'ontological theories', this was a normative debate, which aimed at determining the essence of film (that which constitutes cinema as such). In the paradigm of 'methodological theories' (which begins after World War II but, according to Casetti, only becomes established as a 'break' through Metz), what counts are the viewpoint and the method with which research confronts its object: 'As a result, it underscores what is *pertinent* rather than what is

155 Metz uses the conditional here because this work had not been done up to that point; Metz, 'Sémiologie audio-visuelle', p. 115 (emphasis in original). With his notion of 'distinctive traits' (*traits pertinents*), Metz refers to the functionalist linguist André Martinet; see also *Language and Cinema*, p. 24. About Metz's somewhat paradoxical reference to both Hjelmslev and Martinet, see Odin, 'Christian Metz et la linguistique', p. 93.
156 Metz, 'Sémiologie audio-visuelle', pp. 115-17.
157 See, for instance, the discussion of various positions regarding the comparison between film/cinema and theatre in Metz, 'Problèmes actuels de théorie du cinéma', pp. 66-70.

essential."[158] The aim is to describe the set of possibilities in cinema from a certain viewpoint, one that also consciously reflects its own boundaries. The cinematic specificities are distinctive traits that can be described by means of commutation, as Rosen also argues.[159] Nevertheless, through these traits, the processes of meaning remain tied to the phenomenal surface, to the material and artistic expression. To emphasize this once again: although Metz's chosen perspective is characterized by linguistic methods, he also – or even predominantly – sees cinema as a 'language of art'.

Thus, the analogical method of comparison and correlation between the specificities of various arts and media – between film, photography, painting, literature, music, radio play, television, video, etc. – appears as a complement to commutation, its 'softer' counterpart. In fact, this method has its own systematics, but it ultimately follows similar thought patterns. Once again, Metz proceeds from a nuanced negative description – film does *not* function like verbal language, it is *different* from literature, theatre, painting, or photography – to arrive at a positive description. He includes a discussion of the 'tools' in this comparative process when reflecting on his own viewpoint at the synchronous level. Similarly, the comparative approach also enters into his historical-epistemological discussion of classical film theory. He doesn't simply subsume the earlier approaches under a general paradigm. Instead, he considers their insights and diverse perspectives in terms of their premises and juxtaposes them pointedly with regard to specific cinematic configurations.

As mentioned before, this interest in the history of film theory pervades all phases of Metz's work. It begins with his examination of the language-metaphor – especially Eisenstein's 'ciné-langue' – in 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?'.[160] Another early example is the study on 'punctuation and demarcation in the fiction film' (1972) about the transitions between sequences. Through a detailed analysis of the aesthetic positions of Béla Balázs, Rudolf Arnheim, Marcel Martin, and Jean Mitry, Metz concludes that transitional moments in the narrative filmic discourse always simultaneously mark connection and separation (though with varying emphasis), thus giving the film its rhythm.[161] Another example

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158 Casetti, *Theories of Cinema*, p. 15; see also 89-91.

159 See Rosen's essay in this volume.

160 Metz, 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?', pp. 56-59; see also his 'Montage et discours', pp. 91-94. On the language-metaphor as a trigger for the history of theory, see Bellour and Metz, 'Entretien', pp. 195-96 and Rodowick, 'A Care for the Claims of Theory', pp. 189-98.

161 Christian Metz, 'Ponctuations et démarcations dans le film de diégèse' [1971], in *Essais*, II, pp. 111-37.

(from his final work, *L'énonciation impersonelle ou le site du film*) is the comparison between various objects of study and theoretical approaches, especially with respect to literature and literary theory (but also film theory), when it comes to establishing the impersonal source of the enunciative process. Here, he distances himself from Genette's position, who fundamentally argues against the existence of an enunciative process in the medium of film. Instead, Metz draws on Cohen-Séat's 'logomorphism' of the cinema-machine and on Laffay's 'structure without images' of 'the great image-maker' (*le grand imagier*).[162] Although the enunciative process in literature is equally abstract and non-anthropomorphic for Metz, its material of expression is nevertheless tied to language, which is a means of expression connected to the notion of what is human. By contrast, Metz argues, the cinema-machine generates a non-linguistic, audiovisual enunciation and narration.[163]

The comparative approach – whether employed as commutative method or as analogical systematics – encompasses all levels of analysis: Metz is interested in the various 'languages' *and* arts, in structures and codes, in textual processes, in the forms and materials of expression with their dynamics and their various media *dispositifs*. Film and cinema are the centre of attention, and, even at the scholarly level, Metz never loses 'contact' with them. Based on the 'theoretical possibilities in the sense of logical considerations', he approaches film as a 'corpus' but also as a 'body' that he loves.[164] On the one hand, he examines those potentials of the 'cinematic language' that can claim transhistorical validity. On the other hand, he looks at the possible deployment of this language in the 'textual system' of specific films or ensembles of films – with regard to a historical context or a (classical vs. modern) paradigm of film history.[165] Again and again, Metz also deals with the relationship between convention and style (in the sense of a specific, individual expression, a deviation from the norm).[166] Although his primary interest in all these questions finds expression at a

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162 Metz, *L'énonciation*, p. 12, 182-83, and 193-94. Gilbert Cohen-Séat, *Essai sur les principes d'une philosophie du cinéma I: Introduction générale* (Paris: PUF 1946), pp. 120-28; Albert Laffay, *Logique du cinema. Création et spectacle* (Paris: Masson), p. 71, 80-83. On Laffay's concept of the 'great image-maker' and Metz's reading of it, see François Jost, 'La sémiologie du cinema et ses modèles', *Iris*, 10 (1990), pp. 133-41.

163 Metz, *L'énonciation*, p. 195, 208.

164 Blüher and Tröhler, 'Interview with Christian Metz' [in this volume].

165 About these two poles of Metz's theoretical thinking, see especially the final section of Casetti's essay in this volume.

166 See, for instance, Metz, *Language and Cinema,* pp. 267-68, or *L'énonciation,* pp. 154-59. See also Lefebvre [in this volume].

theoretical-logical level ('I'm an abstract person, I think in concepts'), he always explicitly announces a change in perspective, comparing approaches and marking transitions to a specific and unique level. Metz seldom dedicated himself to the analysis of a single film ('If I start with a specific film, I'm paralyzed.').[167] But in addition to the possibilities of the codes, even in *Language and Cinema*, his attention always also belongs to the aesthetic 'figures' and 'enunciative configurations', which mobilize all 'five matters of cinematic expression'.[168] And when he examines the interaction of meaning-making and narration, he never forgets that cinematic images have an expressive and enunciative presence, and that they can only narrate by means of the film's performance, the *dynamics of images and sounds*.[169] As Anne Goliot-Lété emphasizes in her contribution to this volume, even filmic narrativity 'causes a sensation' for Metz. Thus, he also includes the 'orientation' of images and sounds, that is, the film's address of its potential spectators – as targets of filmic enunciation or as imaginary correspondents, as psychic apparatus, as metapsychological field of study.[170] Heuristically, for Metz, the spectator is not 'the person going to the cinema in their concrete totality, but only the part of them that goes to the cinema'.[171] Yet on the edges of Metz's 'model', the spectators are always kept in mind as social subjects, as historical audience, as sensually receptive bodies (I will return to this shortly).

A last step in the analogical move that pervades Metz's view of theory as practice concerns his notion of writing (*écriture*) at various levels. Take, for instance, the following statement about filmic writing, from the conclusion of *Language and Cinema*: 'Writing is neither a code nor a set of codes, but a working of these codes, by means of them and against them, a work whose temporarily "arrested" result is the text, i.e. the film.' This statement concerning the levels and processes of the object of study also applies to his own work, that is, his construction of the object, his reflection on this construction, and the relationship between his complementary theoretical perspectives. While he focuses on analyzing the codes, his 'model' of the cinematic language ('the *set of codes and subcodes*') is repeatedly adjusted

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167 In Blüher and Tröhler, 'Interview with Christian Metz' [in this volume].

168 See the connection of enunciative configurations with numerous film examples in *L'énonciation*, and Dana Polan's essay in this volume.

169 Metz, 'On the Impression of Reality', pp. 4-12; 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?', pp. 67-69 and 75-84, or *L'énonciation*, p. 22.

170 Metz, *L'énonciation*, especially Chapters I and III; and *The Imaginary Signifier*, especially Parts I and III.

171 Metz in the interview with Vernet and Percheron, 'Sur mon travail', p. 189.

through his view of performative filmic writing ('the *set of textual systems*').[172] What's more, this understanding of writing also characterizes his scholarly stance towards his own theoretical edifice and his own activity, that is, the writing of his texts, both of which he considers as only temporarily 'arrested'.

In his address to his readers, the writing corresponds to the 'code of communication and of knowledge, within which Metz situates his work'. But what characterizes Metz as a 'founder of a discursive practice' is the *style*, as Bellour writes (here, Bellour comments on Barthes' text about Metz; see also the quote at the beginning of this essay). What finds expression in the style is not just the radical insistence on clarity and precision, which Metz demands of himself, but also 'the subject's very voice' (Barthes): 'It is the style taking possession of writing', as Bellour states. Metz's complete dedication to his task – with regard to the issues of theory and cinema – also testifies to his communicativeness, generosity, and openness, which are characteristic of the way he addresses his listeners and readers.[173]

As mentioned, this openness is also of a conceptual kind. It manifests itself in Metz's writing with respect to the historical position of the writer, the theorist, and the cinephile. It also shapes his perspective on cinema as a cultural phenomenon, as anthropological entity, and as a realm of experience.

On the Edges of the 'Model'

Many of the authors in this volume have (here and elsewhere) pointed out Metz's conceptual openness and his momentary but repeated transgression of the structuralist framework. This is part of what makes Metz's work so colourful and, despite all his rigour, so communicative and human. It is also what makes the aspect of style so pervasive in its relationship to writing, as a *politics and ethics of form* (in the sense of Barthes in *Writing Degree Zero*).[174]

To conclude this introduction and to once again venture a change of perspective, I would now like to address the subtitle of the present

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172 Metz, *Language and Cinema*, pp. 285-86. See also Metz, 'Sur mon travail', p. 190.

173 Bellour, 'Le cinéma et ...', p. 20; Barthes, 'To Learn and to Teach', p. 176.

174 Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero*, trans. by Annette Lavers and others (New York: Hill and Wang, 1968 [1953]). Except for the already quoted passages on the relationship between writing and the codes, this attitude is especially explicit in Metz, 'The Saying and the Said', as well as in the only recently published manuscript: Christian Metz, 'Existe-t-il une approche sémiologique de l'esthétique?', *1895. Revue d'Histoire du cinema*, 70 (2013), pp. 154-67 (published and presented by Martin Lefebvre).

volume, *Film Semiology and Beyond*. The phrase alludes to all the ways in which the semiological concepts have been extended and transcended, both by Metz himself – who transgressed his 'model' in order to address the conscious perception of film and cinema – and by others. I'm going to outline these transgressions from three angles: *phenomenology and aesthetics*, *diachrony and historicity*, and Metz's conception of the *subject and spectator*.

As the model's 'exterior', the components of art, culture, and the imaginary always resonate on the edges of Metz's intellectual edifice. They precede theory, not as side issues but as a basic condition or foundation of the 'cinematic institution' that Metz is interested in.

Once again, the essays in this volume provide the reference points for the following remarks. Several authors have meticulously explored some of the three above-mentioned aspects with respect to certain periods or issues. I'm not going to summarize the results of their analyses here (see the abstracts preceding the essays). Instead, I will conclude this introduction by approaching the three aspects from a more general point of view. Elmar Holenstein's reflections on Jakobson's 'phenomenological structuralism' will serve as my point of departure. This is not the place to go into great detail about the intellectual kinship (or the differences) between the two semioticians, who were an entire generation apart. Nor do I want to demonstrate a direct influence of Jakobson on Metz (although Metz frequently refers to the Russian semiotician, who was a co-founder of the Prague Linguistic Circle in 1926). Rather, I suggest that there is a kinship in the two scholars' thinking. This kinship allows us to see Metz's work from yet another point of view.[175] There are, for instance, similarities in how the two deal with the structuralist premises and with Saussure's legacy, which are not completed doctrines for them. As Holenstein observes with respect to Jakobson, structuralism and Saussure are taken as a promising start, as an introduction to a generous search for insight into the organization and functioning of language(s) (*langage(s)*).[176] For Metz, like for Jakobson, structuralist semiology is a timely tool for summarizing the diverse manifestations of a group of phenomena and for treating them 'as a structural whole':

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175 This might seem surprising given that Jakobson is known for his 'binary analyses' (remember 'Les chats', together with Lévi-Strauss), and is certainly more interested in cybernetics and information theory than Metz (see 'The Cinema: Language or Language System? ', pp. 34-36). But Metz also characterizes the relationship between linguistics and poetry with recourse to Jakobson (pp. 85-86). See Roman Jakobson, 'Linguistics and Poetics' [1960], in *Selected Writings*, III (1981), pp. 18-51.

176 Holenstein, *Roman Jakobsons phänomenologischer Strukturalismus*, pp. 29-30.

[T]he basic task is to reveal the inner, whether static or developmental, laws of this system. What appears to be the focus of scientific preoccupation is no longer the outer stimulus, but the inner premises of the development; now the mechanical conception of processes yields to the question of their functions.[177]

According to Holenstein, the cornerstones of Jakobson's semiotics include the assumption that the world and all phenomena are structured; the examination of the relationship between the whole and its parts, of the relational characteristics of all elements; and the inquiry into the function of structures and processes, that is, their meaning as construction and their meaning for a subject. Thus, Holenstein argues, Jakobson brings together Saussurian structuralism with Edmund Husserl's phenomenology, a phenomenology that forms 'structuralism's historic and factual condition of possibility'.[178]

Although phenomenology does not have equal weight throughout, neither for Jakobson nor for Metz, and although the two semioticians do not lean on the same reference works continuously, a similar thing can be claimed for Metz.[179] Among other things, this applies to his works on the effect of presence and on the expressivity of the analogue film image, where he often makes recourse to the phenomenological aesthetics of philosopher Mikel Dufrenne (who is not averse to semiology himself).[180] The recurring

177 The quote is from an article that Jakobson published in the Czech weekly *ČIN* in 1929 and which was included in Roman Jakobson, 'Retrospect' [ca. 1969], trans. by [unknown], in *Selected Writings,* II (1971), pp. 711-22; quoted in German in Holenstein, *Roman Jakobsons phänomenologischer Strukturalismus*, p. 11.

178 Holenstein, *Roman Jakobsons phänomenologischer Strukturalismus*, pp. 13-14, 31, and 57. Jakobson also repeatedly refers to Holenstein when arguing that phenomenology is an important foundation of structuralism; see, for instance, Jakobson's theoretical-historical, epistemological study 'A Glance at the Development of Semiotics', p. 204.

179 Even after expressing reservations about phenomenology, Metz writes on the relation between semiology and phenomenology: 'We are all phenomenologists sometimes' – the 'cogito perceptif' cannot be denied. See the end of his essay (written as an homage to Mikel Dufrenne) 'Le perçu et le nommé', *Essais sémiotiques* (Paris: Klinksieck 1988), pp. 159-60; this section has not been translated into English but we can also refer to the conclusion of *The Perceived and the Named*, p. 67 for Metz's relation to phenomenology in general and especially with respect to the point mentioned here, see Chateau and Lefebvre, 'Dance and Fetish', p. 121 and 130.

180 See, for instance, Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, trans. by Edward S. Casey (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973 [1953]) and his essay 'L'art est-il langage ?' [1966] in Section II entitled 'Art et sémiologie', in *Esthétique et philosophie*, 3 vols. (Paris: Klincksieck 1967-1981; repr. 1988), I, pp. 73-112. There are numerous references to Dufrenne's writings especially in Metz's early works; see 'The Cinema: Language or Language

relationship between the *comprehensive* and the *comprised* (*englobant* and *englobé*), for instance, which ties him to the filmologists, testifies to the phenomenological basis of Metz's work. With reference to and in opposition to Cohen-Séat, Metz distinguishes between the 'cinematic fact' and the 'filmic fact', which are in a doubly (if not more) tense relationship. On the one hand, the 'cinematic fact' includes everything that surrounds the films: their context of production, their reception, and also their perceptive, psychic, and symbolic context, in short, the 'cinematic institution'. This he distinguishes from the 'filmic fact', that is, from the films as 'texts', as '*concrete units of discourse*', whereas 'cinema' can also mean all films as an 'ideal set', as 'the virtual sum of all films'. On the other hand, at the more refined level of semiological analysis, the *filmic* also stands for everything that can appear in a film or in some films. It is opposed to the *specific characteristics of cinematic language*, which organizes the 'different structures of signification [...] potentially common to all films'. Thus, it becomes clear that Metz's interest in the abstract whole always includes an awareness of its phenomenological parts: 'The film is an object in the real world, the cinema is not.' However, 'the *notions* of film and cinema are distinct, but not the *study* of the film and the *study* of the cinema; the study of the film is a part of the study of the cinema'.[181] Thus, what is at stake is also the relationship between code and function, a relationship that is able to grasp the change of forms, the variants in their relation to the invariants, and the interior regularities of change within the whole.

Further, for Metz, like for Jakobson, the reference to art is an important source of inspiration.[182] Film is a form of expression in which *language* and *art* are linked inseparably, which is why semiological and aesthetic analysis are tightly interlocked, too.[183] Art serves Metz as a background against which he can confront his theoretical parameters with cinematic practice – *structure* with *experience*, in Marshall Sahlins's terms. This allows him to qualify or adjust his theory again and again, whether with regard to specific films or to historical ensembles, which he conceives as narrative *modes* or perceptive *patterns* (*régimes*). Classical cinema serves

System?', pp. 75-84; 'Some Points in the Semiotics', p. 98; or 'Problèmes actuels de la théorie du cinéma', pp. 52, 59, 63, 69, 83-84.

181   All quotes from Metz, *Language and Cinema*, pp. 22-24 and 156 (emphases in original), see also pp. 12-14. Metz returns to this from a psychoanalytic perspective in 'The Fiction Film and its Spectator', Chapter 10, pp. 138-42.

182   Holenstein, *Roman Jakobsons phänomenologischer Strukturalismus*, p. 32.

183   This was already shown above; see, for example, Metz, *Language and Cinema*, pp. 15-17 and 38. See also Metz, 'Existe-t-il une approche sémiologique de l'esthétique?', pp. 154-67.

as the primary reference point for him, as his theoretical 'vanishing point', so to speak, as the 'socially dominant reading pattern'.[184] But he is always also interested in transformations, in breaks with convention, in historical change – for instance when dealing with montage in the films of Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin, or with modern cinema, which he considers a progressive, avant-garde movement, even though it still adheres to narrativity.[185] In his search for more or less transhistorical invariants and their relation to the many variants and actualizations, Metz overcomes the dichotomy of stasis and dynamics. What's more, he also loosens the rigid relation between synchrony and diachrony, which are strictly separate for Saussure in terms of their perspective.[186] Thus, for Metz too, every period, every synchronic, historical situation contains 'virulent modernisms, which attempt to take hold as future forms of expression and which determine the value of established forms', as Holenstein writes about Jakobson.[187] Even in *Language and Cinema* and in his Grand Syntagmatique, which can both be considered strictly systematic texts, Metz does not exclude the historical dimension. An awareness of the cinematic signifier's changing forms and functions – changes stemming from artistic practice and confirmed by film history – frames his theoretical reflections.[188] In '*Trucage* and the Film', for example, there is an element of ideological critique with regard to classical film, to technology in its relation to economics, and to the cinematic institution, all of which are historicized by Metz. Similarly, in 'The Saying and the Said', Metz grapples with what was *sayable*, *representable*, and *thinkable* at a certain time under certain conditions in film, in the cinematic institution, in society, and in scholarship: 'The plausible [...] is *cultural* and *arbitrary*.'[189]

All these aspects linking the theoretical 'model' with the artistic practice of films, with the historical situation, and with dynamic change in various institutional contexts enter the theoretical model from the edges – or they appear in it like 'inlays' – yet they remain rather general and abstract for the most part. They rarely refer to a specific historical context, and when they

184 Metz, 'Réponses à *Hors cadre*', p. 69.
185 See Metz 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?'; 'Montage et discours'; and 'The Modern Cinema and Narrativity'.
186 On synchrony and diachrony, see Metz, 'Some Points in the Semiotics', pp. 101-2; and 'Problems of Denotation', pp. 117-18.
187 Holenstein, *Roman Jakobsons phänomenologischer Strukturalismus,* p. 39 ('value' in the sense of Saussure); see also p. 48; on the dynamic relationship between synchrony and diachrony in Jakobson, see pp. 23 and 45-46.
188 See, for instance, Metz, 'Problems of Denotation', p. 135.
189 Metz, '*Trucage* and the Film', pp. 657-58, 674-75; and also Metz, 'The Fiction Film and its Spectator', pp. 140-42; Metz, 'The Saying and the Said', p. 244 (emphasis in original).

do, then mostly through anecdotal – though clever – examples. Nevertheless, through these 'outposts', Metz constantly resituates the evolution of his film theory and the historical position of his writing about cinema – most decidedly in *The Imaginary Signifier.*

The anthropological and (implicitly) pragmatic dimension of the cultural phenomenon of cinema also appears in Metz's intersubjective conception of the spectator throughout his works. Thus, narrativity and fictionality combine in the fiction film as components of cinema's socially dominant mode, responding to the spectator's 'desire for narrative and need for understanding'.[190] Much like Bazin (though at a different level), Metz argues that the spectator's attitude between belief and disbelief is 'on the one hand, shaped by the entire Western tradition [...] of art as imitation, imitation of daily life or of some fabulous universe'. One the other hand, he claims, the characteristics of the imaginary signifier affect the spectators as an audience that has completely 'internalized' these characteristics: 'The Signifier is social and historical', it is an 'institution'.[191] In his psychoanalytical works, Metz is concerned with the metapsychology of the spectator as code, that is, the spectator's relationship to the screen and to the film, the psychic apparatus as part of this institution, 'the specifically cinematic *scopic regime*'.[192] This is '*one* ethnography of the filmic state, among others remaining to be done'. It is a filmic state required of the spectator in order for the cinema-machine and the cinematic fiction to function.[193] What is at issue here is not the individual spectator with their psychology and biography but the spectatorial subject, conceived intersubjectively in a certain culture and period, as a 'relation of forces' outlining a 'social-psychic space' and thus enabling individual variations.[194] Thus, the *imaginary signifier* and the *imaginary referent* (in the sense of the referential illusion) are effects produced by the film. They correspond to the functional principles of the filmic text with its specific traits, an invitation to the spectators which they can accept or decline, and which they complete. Similarly, the concept of enunciation refers to a performative activity, the filmic discourse directed from a 'source' to a 'target', addressing the spectator. But even if the spectator is more than a 'blank space in the text' (as is often claimed of the text-immanent approach), Metz does not envisage the spectator

190 Metz, 'Réponses à *Hors cadre',* p. 69.
191 Ibid*.,* p. 65; see also Metz, 'Sur mon travail', p. 186.
192 Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', p. 61 (emphasis in original); see also Dagrada and Pescatore, 'Conversation with Christian Metz' [in this volume].
193 Metz, 'The Fiction Film and its Spectator', p. 138 (emphasis in original).
194 Metz, 'Sur mon travail', p. 188.

inside his 'model'. It is a potential spectator, constructed by the film, a theoretical-abstract subject, in other words, a 'generic' figure of the theorist.[195] Nevertheless, for Metz, on the edge of this text-immanent conception, there is an awareness of a real counterpart *outside* the film and the model, a flesh-and-blood spectator. Without this spectator, there would be no film, because nobody would know of the film; yet the spectators can do anything they want and understand the film any way they like, without changing the film. In addition, with reference to Genette, Metz introduces the 'image' that the filmmaker has of their audience or of an individual spectator as an anthropological, imaginary entity – just like the spectator creates their own image of the author. Not everything situated outside the film is real; 'there is an extra-textual imaginary'.[196]

And when it is understood as real, the conception of the spectator once again changes colour like a chameleon as Metz introduces yet another aspect: the spectators or audience as a social group, 'a group of participants in a culture, today we would say "users"'.[197] These are sometimes invoked very concretely in order to exemplify a theoretical problem. Regarding the intelligibility of filmic language, Metz writes:

> The audience of local shopkeepers who booed Antonioni's *L'avventura*
> [I/F 1960] at the Cannes Film Festival had understood the film, but either
> they had not grasped, or were indifferent to, its message. Filmic intel-
> lection has nothing to do with their attitude; what bothered them was
> simply 'life' itself. It is normal that the problems of the couple as stated
> by Antonioni should leave a large section of the audience indifferent,
> puzzled, or derisive.

In the footnote added later about the 'local shopkeepers', he explains: 'They are given free tickets by the municipality of Cannes and constitute what one refers to as the Festival audience.'[198]

The example's (sociological) concreteness is baffling in such a highly theoretical text. Such everyday examples appear like inlays, bringing theory into everyday life – and vice versa – through an unexpected change of the

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195 Metz, *L'énonciation*, p. 35.
196 Ibid., pp. 199-205 (here p. 205).
197 Metz, 'Some Points in the Semiotics', p. 101; Metz even speaks of a 'group of users' (*groupe d'usagers*), though, of course, he doesn't mean the users of today's media culture.
198 Metz, 'The Cinema: Language or Language System?', p. 74. The last sentence is again followed by a long footnote (added later in 1968) about the 'saying' and the 'said' with regard to this historical case.

perspective and the point of reference.[199] Because cinema is above all a cultural technology and the spectators a social group of users, 'the semiotics of the cinema must frequently consider things from the point of view of the spectator rather than of the filmmaker'.[200]

Thus, although the spectators are only implicit in this model, they are a real social entity. And the theorist includes himself in this: he loves going to the movies, declares himself a 'cinema native', and intersubjectively shares the everyday experience of moviegoing and of the films (as well as of social life) with other participants of the culture.[201] At the same time, as a semiological analyst and theorist, he situates himself outside.[202] His reading of films is a 'meta-reading', which is distinct from 'the "naïve" reading (in fact, the *cultural* reading) of the spectator'.[203] As Metz explains: 'The idea of a film semiology came to me by bringing these two sources into contact.'[204]

As we have seen, this simultaneously exterior *and* interior view of the writer is reflected at the methodological level, culminating in the subjective enunciation described in *The Imaginary Signifier*. This is certainly his most personal work, in which he reveals himself as an individual – a writing and theorizing individual. The notion of writing, which is based on the semiologist's 'meta-language', is ultimately a pragmatic concept. As Metz writes with reference to Jean Louis Schefer, 'the image only exists in terms of what one reads'. This 'one' is situated both on the side of production and the side of reception, in writing as well as in film perception.[205]

I have dwelt at length on the various aspects of the spectator in Metz's works because the notion of the subject thus inscribed in his texts once again comes close to what Holenstein says of Jakobson: 'In the structuralism of Jakobsonian provenance, the subject appears in threefold shape: 1. as observer who is part of their own observation, 2. as intersubjective, and

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199 Another example out of many is the one used to explain the non-specific filmic codes of characters' clothing at the level of the 'form of content'. Here, Metz gives a flowery description of the 'Dandy of the VXI arrondissment' in an unnamed film from 1967, contrasting the character's clothing with that of a blue-collar worker (Metz, 'Propositions méthodologiques', p. 101). On the relationship between theory and everyday life, see also Bellour, 'Le cinéma et …', p. 23; or Odin, 'Christian Metz et la linguistique', p. 94.

200 Metz, 'Some Points in the Semiotics', p. 101.

201 Metz, 'Sur mon travail' p. 173, and Metz, 'The Perceived and the Named', p. 67.

202 Metz, 'Sémiologie audio-visuelle', p. 115; Metz, 'The Fiction Film and its Spectator', p. 138; and the interview with Vernet and Percheron, Metz, 'Sur mon travail', p. 177.

203 Metz, *Language and Cinema*, p. 74 (emphasis taken from the French original).

204 Metz, 'Sur mon travail', p. 173.

205 Metz, 'Au-delà de l'analogie', p. 161.

3. as unconscious producer and recipient of the linguistic message.'[206] Of course, with regard to Metz, 'linguistic' must be supplemented by 'filmic', that is, by a plurality of materials or channels of expression, including the linguistic. These enrich the perception of film, they allow for its offer of significations, and they enable the spectator to create sensual and semantic sense in a mixture of conscious and unconscious processes.[207] The theorist is exposed to these same processes.

On the basis of phenomenology (that of Husserl in the case of Jakobson), the Kantian subject 'is expanded by the dimensions of intersubjectivity and of the unconscious', according to Holenstein. And he goes on to note that Foucault's 'death of the subject' is not a Jakobsonian motto. Lacan's 'decentring of the I' comes closer to Jakobson.[208] We can discern a similar position in Metz's work:

> The image of the I [...] is the only analogous entity we have to *follow* the activities of the characters on screen. From what other source could we infer, for instance, any knowledge about what *crying* means to a character? How to understand acts of evil, except by mobilizing whatever real or virtual evil is inside of us? This recourse is most often unconscious, we include it in our very notion of *understanding*. It is a recourse – we need to emphasize this – to an image of the I rather than the I (we don't know ourselves), unless we define the I, in the sense of Lacan, as the *slipping away of images*.[209]

Thus, Metz counters or qualifies the egocentricity of phenomenology ('the *lure of the ego*' as '*blind spot*') by way of psychoanalysis and the semiology of the signifier, which decentre the subject, each in their own way.[210] For Metz, the spectator's psychic processes set to work in front of the screen are part of the institution, part of the cinema-machine. Neither the film nor

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206 Holenstein, *Roman Jakobsons phänomenologischer Strukturalismus*, p. 56; see also Chapter 2.2 on the relationship between 'object and subject', pp. 55-76.

207 Metz, 'Au-delà de l'analogie', p. 161; Metz, ' Le perçu et le nommé', pp. 159-60 (in the section not translated at the end of 'The Perveived and the Named'); Metz, 'Metaphor/Metonomy', pp. 285-86.

208 Holenstein, *Roman Jakobsons phänomenologischer Strukturalismus*, p. 56.

209 Metz, 'Réponses à *Hors cadre*', p. 74 (emphasis in original). For the allusion to Jacques Lacan, see *Ecrits. The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. by Bruce Fink (New York/London: W.W. Norton and Company, 2002). Lacan's 'fuite du sujet' was translated to English as 'the slipping away of the subject' (e.g. p. 166); as translator Bruce Fink notes, '*Fuite* (slipping away) also means flight, leaking away, or fading' (p. 783).

210 See Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', pp. 52-53 (emphasis in original): '[L]ight must be cast by the real conditions of society and man' (p. 53).

the spectator are *interpreted* hermeneutically or in individual-psychological terms. What are at issue are always the materials and forms of expression, the imaginary signifier, and the cinematic apparatus.

The anti-humanism that has often been attributed to structuralism (Althusser, Derrida, Foucault, Lévi-Strauss, and at times Barthes – at least until *S/Z*) does not find its most radical expression in Metz. Granted, in his systematic intellectual edifice, this anti-humanism appears consistent or even 'logical'; the constructed 'model-like object' must be self-contained. However, this is not meant in an immovable and historically absolute way: 'the large syntagmatic category of the narrative film *can change*, but no single person can make it change over night'.[211] And during a seminar on his last big topic, enunciation, Metz answered a question about the historical change of enunciative configurations as follows (I quote from memory): 'It is language that does that.' What he said around the same time in an interview sounds like a comment on this: 'I'm a materialist.'[212]

And yet, on the edges of the 'model' – as theory's other side, so to speak – cinema is a lived practice, and films are a phenomenal manifestation, culturally and historically. From the viewpoint of production, films are (individual) realizations of enunciative figures. In this discursive sense, they are a '*creation*' because each film has to 'invent the cinematographic language […] to a certain extent' – an act that is sometimes recognizable as personal style.[213] From the viewpoint of reception, films are aesthetic experiences that each spectator can participate in – socially, intersubjectively, and individually, as conscious and unconscious producer and perceiver.

The scholar Metz has a clear and rigorous focus (he is a child of his time), but as a native of a (film) culture, he oscillates between direct everyday experience and scholarly observation: 'Interwoven into every analytical undertaking is the thread of a self-analysis.'[214]

Finally, the oft-quoted statement on the 'pleasure in the toy' reads like an echo of Barthes' 'third degree'. The toy, which must be broken – sometimes with great effort – if we want to see and understand how it works, can be turned both ways.[215] Cinema and the specific films are as much a toy as are

211 Metz, 'Some Points in the Semiotics', p. 102; also Metz, 'Sur mon travail', p. 169.

212 In Blüher and Tröhler, 'Interview with Christian Metz' [in this volume].

213 Metz, 'Some Points in the Semiotics', p. 101 (emphasis in original); on the relationship between enunciation and style, see Metz, *L'énonciation*, pp. 155-59.

214 Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', p. 79.

215 Metz in the interview with Vernet and Percheron, 'Sur mon travail', pp. 170-72; Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', p. 80. On the 'third degree', see, for instance, Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text*, trans. by Richard Miller (New York: Hill and Wang, 1975 [1973]), pp. 11-14; or Roland

theory, the 'model-object', or cinematic language. To break one in order to 'burst' it or open it towards the other means to turn the other into one's pleasure. And thus, I cannot help but invoke once again the oft-quoted words from the conclusion of *The Imaginary Signifier:* 'This is the theoretical break, and like all breaks it is also a link: that of theory with its object.' And 'I have loved cinema. I no longer love it. I still love it.'[216]

Translated from German by Susie Trenka[217]

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Barthes, *Camera Lucida. Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981 [1980]), pp. 6-7, 48, 117-19, and the final chapter.
216 Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', p. 79.
217 I would like to thank Lorenz Vollenweider and Adrian Seward for their assistance as well as Susie Trenka for the English translation.