

10. Interview with Christian Metz

Michel Marie and Marc Vernet

[The interview took place after the conference ‘Christian Metz and Film Theory’, held at the Cerisy Cultural Centre in 1989.]

Buckland, Warren and Daniel Fairfax (eds), *Conversations with Christian Metz: Selected Interviews on Film Theory (1970–1991)*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017.

DOI: 10.5117/9789089648259/CH10

Abstract

In this wide-ranging interview published in 1990, Christian Metz speaks about his early work on film semiology and discusses his more recent work on impersonal filmic enunciation, and a future project, a study of jokes. He also makes a series of positive remarks on Gilles Deleuze’s two books on film (*The Movement Image* and *The Time Image*), books usually regarded to be at odds with Metz’s semiological and psychoanalytic approaches to film.

Keywords: Christian Metz, film theory, enunciation, Gilles Deleuze

‘Entretien avec Christian Metz’, Michel Marie and Marc Vernet. *Iris*, 10 (1990), pp. 271–296. Translated by Daniel Fairfax.

I. Semiology and Film Theory

1. On the Conference

Michel Marie: The conference ‘Christian Metz and Film Theory’ has finished. I would like to know what impression you have had of it.

Christian Metz: I really liked the atmosphere of this gathering, and I consider you to be largely responsible for it: the organizer of a conference, who has

worked on it for a whole year before proceedings even begun, has a major influence on the style of the discussions, even if this is only due to the tone he adopts when talking about the simplest matters, like when the meal breaks are. In this case, you had a tone that was both serious and ‘cool’, not without humor, an imperturbable and amusing tranquility, in short, a good mix. And then there were the relatively short sessions, allowing plenty of time for conversations, and downtime. All this resulted in a certain spontaneity in the interventions and discussions during the sessions, and the absence of this stodgy and verbose theater that permanently threatens meetings, even interesting ones.

I am also persuaded that the opening address by Raymond Bellour, due to his intellectual generosity, his agility and his refusal of hackneyed clichés, also greatly helped to get the conference off to a good start.

Marie: It is also due to the place, and the format. The participants were present for several days in a row and were far from Paris. So we had the good fortune to be shunned by the professional conference-goers, who make remarks just for the sake of it.

Metz: In fact, I noticed that all of the ‘speakers’ talked about what they were actually doing, what was in their hearts, and also that they had all worked on their ‘papers’ – either well beforehand or (for those who kindly replaced absentees at the last minute), right here, in the château, and losing sleep in order to do so. In short, we escaped from those talks where the speaker is simply showing off. What is more, the level of discussion was very high, and remained high from start to finish: this should be noted, because, in general, having a large number of talks gives rise, through sheer probability, to uneven talks that are facilitated by being drowned out by the others. I will also take advantage of this interview to thank all the participants for having consistently maintained this high quality. The organizers (once again) have notably played a part here: by dedicating an entire session to each paper (or at the very least half a session), you allowed them to be genuinely listened to, something I observed with pleasure and surprise, and which ‘obliged’ everyone to give their most.

In a sense, of course, I could not avoid being satisfied with this conference, because it focused on my own work. But this personal, narcissistic aspect had a potential counter-effect: it made me more sensitive, because I was directly concerned; it made me desire a ‘perfect’ encounter, of a sort that I could just as well have been very disappointed with it.

Marie: Do you think that there were real debates, exchanges between researchers coming from different horizons?

Metz: Completely different? No, because the topic and even the title of the conference already indicated a specific orientation, and not a 360-degree general survey. Of course, empiricism and positivism, for example, were not represented, neither was 'salon' criticism, etc. But there were diverse points of view, and sometimes they were reasonably distant from my own point of view, despite indisputable common areas. I am thinking, for example, of what was said by Marie-Claire Ropars, Asanuma Keiji and others.

Marie: Do you think that the contract presented by the title, the confrontation between your works and film theory, was respected in this diversity?

Metz: I wouldn't say *all* of film theory, because today it is a very large machine, but a notable part of it was, yes. Unfortunately, as with every international gathering we should also make note of the researchers we were counting on who were prevented from coming for practical reasons: Mary Ann Doane, Kaja Silverman, Edward Branigan, Stephen Heath, Yuri Tsivian, Gábor Szilágyi, Dana Polan, Eliseo Veron.

2. Semiology and Other Disciplines

Marie: In the last twenty years, film theory has seen a rather remarkable expansion, albeit very uneven in certain domains. Semiology, semio-pragmatics and narratology have been significantly developed, but this is much less the case for historical and sociological approaches, what I would generally call the human sciences – the non-literary, non-linguistic disciplines, of a somewhat 'harder' type, or a little less soft, than the habitual discourse on literature. These approaches do not seem to have adopted the cinema as an object of study, to have really taken stock of it, in particular on the institutional level. How do you explain this uneven development? This is also a question that, roughly speaking, poses the problem of the relationship between semiology, theories of cinema and their interdisciplinarity.

Metz: Firstly, on the fact itself, I would be less absolute than you. In the domain of history, there is the work of Ferro, Sorlin, Janet Staiger, Douglas Gomery, etc.

As for the causes, I do not have an explanation. Nobody does. Everything that is presented here or there as a cause is, in reality, a *circumstance*, which sheds light on the issue but does not explain it.

To start off, this question should be asked of historians and sociologists. I would simply say, limiting myself to what I know, that, in France, toward 1963, there were circumstances favoring semiology, which had no equivalent for the other approaches: namely, the presence around Barthes (and Greimas, in a different way) of several young researchers, in a landscape that also contained Lévi-Strauss and Benveniste.

In any case, in order for a genuine history of the cinema to be created, somebody has to start. That is how it worked for semiology, and that is how it works for everything. It is possibly only the immediate cause, as it would be necessary to understand why this somebody began something at a certain time. But it does not prevent this from being the efficient cause.

Marie: Yes, but, at the same time, there is the formidable expansion of the 'new history' movement. And yet, this produced practically nothing on the cinema...

Metz: What about Marc Ferro? Is his work not a typical product of the new historians? He was the secretary of *Revue des Annales* for a long time...

Marie: Yes, but his work on the cinema remained very peripheral, while his books on more strictly historical subjects, such as his recent work on Philippe Pétain, are of an entirely different scope.

Metz: I would not say 'peripheral', but, this aside, I have observed something that confirms your remarks: namely, that, for us at the École des Hautes Études, among the so-called *Annales* historians, there are fewer specialists on the twentieth century than there are for earlier historical periods.

Marie: How has it come about that literature departments, in the very general sense of the term, have been more open to teaching film, and not history departments? I can suggest an initial answer: I believe that 'modern literature' represents a discipline with vague contours and an unrestricted methodology. It is a disciplinary field that differs greatly between the different campuses, above all if we compare it to linguistics or history. And so, there was a certain permeability and openness.

Metz: As far as the institutions are concerned, you are right. It is true that there are advantages to the amorphous nature and elastic consistency of 'modern literature' – a little bit like French classes in high school, or

English departments in the United States, or ‘comparative literature’ pretty much everywhere – and that it permits innovations to overcome traditional resistances, which presuppose a hard, even dumb kernel. But this does not explain the uneven development of *research*, to the (manifestly provisional) advantage of the galaxy of semiology, psychoanalysis, etc., at least for the last 25 years or so – which is a long time as far as a dominant idea is concerned, but very short in terms of the history of the world...

Marie: I have a complementary element to propose: I believe that, for the disciplinary institution of history – its professors and research teams – the cinema is a futile, frivolous object; it comes within the domain of fiction and does not represent very serious material. This sentiment remains strong: historians study garbage bins, refuse, because they can learn a lot about consumption and living standards, but the cinema, even less noble than refuse, does not seem to teach them anything about society, or at least a lot less. Historians seem to judge that its mediatic importance and the set of discourses to which it gives rise are disproportionate to its real place in the economic circuit, in the evolution of contemporary societies. For them, it is merely a vast simulacrum to be demystified.

Another aspect, which, alas, plays a decisive role in France, is the inaccessibility of the archives (in terms of both films and written documents). Students who have supervisors that point them toward the archives often find a closed door, even when it comes to written sources. In the United States, most of the major production companies have deposited their archives in university departments. This attitude is inconceivable in France, because the production companies are still dominated by a secretive mindset, protecting their sources, or even destroying large swathes of the traces of their past. This is the case with Pathé, for example: it is very difficult to study the first twenty years of its existence, when the company had a dominant position in the global film economy.

Metz: This is unfortunately true. But the closely-guarded archives also could have deterred our pals in modern literature...

Marie: Not entirely, since academics in literature can work at length on a single film, whereas the historian needs whole series.

Marc Vernet: It is true that, in relation to other countries (the US, the UK, Belgium), scholarship in France is distinguished by the inaccessibility of the archives. That said, there are some encouraging signs, like the openness

offered at the Arsenal by Emmanuelle Toulet, or at the Archives du Film by Frantz Schmitt (who has unfortunately just been dismissed from his post), or at the Centre National du Cinéma by the Councillor of State, Théry, who has opened the dossiers of the Commission de Contrôle for the first time. But all this does not amount to a general policy. They are individual initiatives, and when the individual moves on, you have to start from scratch.

Marie: The paradox is that it is academics like you, me and Marc – that is, scholars with more of a background in literature – who encourage and set up teams of historical research, while very few professional historians have done so before us, with a few rare exceptions (including Marc Ferro and our friends from the Association Française de Recherche en Histoire du Cinéma, where the non-academic researchers are by far the most numerous). In France today, there is still a genuine ostracism of film studies among historians of the contemporary era, which explains the role played, in spite of themselves, by literature academics in embarking on historical research on the cinema.

Metz: I would add one remark, somewhat oblique with respect to your comments.

The pre-eminence of the sciences almost makes us believe that the ideal preparation for a film scholar lies in the École Centrale, or a firm grasp of mathematics. We willingly forget that there is something common, beyond the mere word itself, between the humanities and the human sciences: how can we fail to see that the grammar of foreign languages – rhetoric laden with examples, reading comprehension as a sensitivity to the signifier and the acts of construction, narratology frequently practiced in the study of novels, art history and the commentary of great paintings – that all this, and plenty else, directly prefigures the various kinds of modern ‘scientific’ analyses, which include the semiological enterprise? This last wants more solid and, above all, more explicit theoretical bases, but *it speaks about the same things*.

Of course, all research, as Jacques Aumont reminded us at Cerisy, when responding to me, deserves the name ‘scientific’, to the extent that it is neither a novel, nor a poem, etc.: if you use the term in this sense, there is nothing to discuss. But I prefer to speak of ‘research’ without an adjective, since this mirage of science, in our field, is the source of too many illusions for certain people, and of too many impostures among other people.

3. Writing – The ‘Crisis of Theory’

Vernet: It is often said that theory, especially in Europe, has run out of steam, and that the major bodies of theoretical work have disappeared into obsolescence. For my part, I think that this is wrong. Simply put, theory is being developed along new axes, and possibly, above all, in new forms, new ways of writing. You yourself have known at least three different writing regimes: that of the *Essais*, that of *Language and Cinema* (which you specifically sought to be consolidated into a technique, from A to Z), and finally that of *The Imaginary Signifier*, with a much more literary, fluid, sometimes almost transparent style. What is your position today on this matter?

Metz: I agree about my three ‘ways of writing’. As far as theory running out of steam is concerned, I do not believe this any more than you do. We are often fooled by the spectacular side of things (all the more so when, in this case, it is infinitely sad): the disappearance, one after the other, of several major figures: Barthes, Lacan, Foucault, the Althusser tragedy. Of course, this results in a huge void. But if you direct your gaze elsewhere, you will notice, for example in our domain, that there has never been such a large amount of interesting and solid work being done as there is today. When we speak of ‘theory’, we have in mind, as the expression indicates, a corpus, a set of research areas, and not only one or two giants (this is why my response would be totally different if you asked me about the major personal *œuvres*).

Another element has changed: theory, today, is no longer in fashion. But this tells us more about fashion than it does about theory.

Marie: What is in fashion now is the theme of the crisis of theory... (*laughter*).

Metz: As far as new ways of writing are concerned, they seem to trace a rather clear evolution over the last thirty years or so. The idea of the human sciences may well stretch back to the nineteenth century, but their actual, socially visible development dates primarily from the Libération. In the end, this is quite recent. At the beginning, it was implicitly admitted that, since a text was scientific, it could accommodate a rather rough or relaxed writing process, or even give a technical sense to every word used, so that this was all that was needed to express oneself. People took themselves for chemists, they sketched out formulae. (I note, however, that the ‘greats’, as if by chance, wrote beautifully: especially Foucault, Lévi-Strauss, Lacan, and Barthes, but this was not a concern shared by everyone.) And then, as the social sciences gradually established themselves, they were also subject to

a common process. Researchers once again became sensitive to the basic, prejudicial demands of intellectual exchange: texts that were too poorly written, devoid of the minimum amount of skill and style, began to bore us, to leave us with a feeling of carelessness or shoddiness. A striking corollary is that authors, on the whole, write better than they used to. Either they have evolved without being aware of it, or they have a conscious will to respond to expectations. Of course, it is not that writers have become better, but that they have a greater respect for the reader.

Vernet: In the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a unity at the *École des Hautes Études* that included Barthes, Genette, Bremond, and yourself. Today, this unity is no more, and yet there still seems to be repercussions of this past history. I wanted to know what your feelings about this are.

Metz: To the names you have just cited, we should add, for that point in time, the names of Ducrot, of Todorov, and of Kristeva (outside the *École* but not outside of our group), and of Julien Greimas, who, back then, seemed to us to duplicate or refract, in somewhat enigmatic fashion, the figure of Barthes. You are right to speak of a quite strong unity: this is what happens in situations that bring together a mentor with young researchers, who are yet to have real autonomy. Subsequently, in classic fashion, there was a diaspora – everyone chose their own path. Some of us really did part ways, such as Ducrot and Kristeva, or, later, Bremond and Todorov. Greimas and Barthes distanced themselves from each other. Then Barthes died. But it seems to me that of this geography dating from 1963, which lasted a further four or five years, there remains a partial affinity between Genette's work and my own, for example surrounding the notion of diegesis or narratological problems. By the way, Genette's approach, like my own, has something obsessive about it: in book after book, he calmly charts the terrain of poetics. I am, like him, not very permeable to those absurd 'important' or urgent matters (formerly 'ideological', now 'epistemological'), which we are incessantly deafened by, and which change every morning.

Vernet: In her intervention at Cerisy, Marie-Claire Ropars' interrogated you on the relationship between semiology and its 'outside'. Can we imagine semiology establishing relations with other disciplines and movements?

Metz: I have yet to study Marie-Claire Ropars' intervention in its written form. At Cerisy, I was struck by several points in which I was in agreement with her. In any case, I will give you my answer. Firstly, semiology, which

is itself 'interdisciplinary' without shouting this out from the rooftops, has already established relations with other fields: ideological critique, psychoanalysis, feminism, textual analysis, structural history (see Jens Toft²), education sciences, etc.

As for more profound relations, like the notorious 'articulations' that people comically insist on researching, I do not believe in them. It is normal for semiologists to do semiology, for critics to do criticism, etc. If they manage to do their own work *well*, this is already a lot, and it does not happen that frequently.

It is true that the outside of semiology is immense, just as the outside of history or any other field is immense, for the simple reason that these disciplines are numerous, and the 'outside' of each one is constituted by the sum of all the others. Real competence, the formation of the mind, mental know-how can only be acquired within a disciplinary framework, because, as their name indicates, disciplines correspond to formations and not objects. Interdisciplinary undertakings can be interesting when each person involved sufficiently knows *both disciplines* in question. Otherwise, we bear witness to methodological psychodramas or metaphysical duels, as we all know well: the two approaches intensely stare into the whites of each other's eyes, and question each other on the place from which they are speaking. Interdisciplinarity must be above the respective disciplines, and not below them.

Marie: These last ten years have been characterized, during your relative silence, by the sensational appearance of Gilles Deleuze's two books on the cinema, which are now very much in fashion among certain academics and large numbers of students. Deleuze has often reaffirmed his numerous misgivings about semiological approaches, or those inspired by linguistics, but paradoxically he frequently refers to Peirce. How do you perceive his work? Is a dialogue, or a bridge, between your current project and his approach possible? Deleuze cites a large number of films, and reiterates the major classifications dedicated to the history of the cinema, which you rarely do. What do you think of him?

Metz: Firstly, the reference to Peirce. It is not really a reference, because many of Peirce's concepts are (avowedly) distorted from their original meaning, or even retroactively invented (and noted as such: see the 'rheume' [*reume*] supplanting the 'rHEME' on page 80 of the first volume [*Cinema 1: The Movement Image*, trans. by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (University of Minnesota Press, 1986)]. Deleuze could have written the

same work without invoking Peirce. He had no 'need' of him (it is a different matter for Bergson). But it is common to bring up Peirce when you want to attack Saussure; Peter Wollen already did it in his first book, Bettetini did it, Eliseo Veron is still doing it.

As far as the numerous films and 'schools' that the book comments on are concerned, this is one of the qualities that make it such a rich and interesting work. It is also quite normal, if you think of what Deleuze himself said about his books. Deleuze clearly stated that he wanted to write a 'natural history' of the cinema. His objective immediately led him to films (the great, hallowed films), schools, filmmakers, etc. In a way, it is a vast film society of legitimation, with a dose of talent added: an almost Bazinian return to the cinema as amorous totalization. For my part, I will willingly go along with it.

Moreover, contrary to what I sometimes hear, I in no way think that his book is a war machine [*machine de guerre*] against semiology. Of course, third parties have used it for this purpose, but that is another matter. And of course, Deleuze is opposed to semiology and psychoanalysis – and he says this explicitly. But I fail to see where the war machine is. The work has nothing polemical about it; it is not a 'coup'. On the evidence it is very sincere, it is an endearing book where the author says what he thinks without bothering with other people too much. This is why it was somewhat meteoric.

Marie: And yet he cites a lot of journal articles, and not always the most interesting ones. He also creates a total impasse, not only with respect to semiology, but also to the great film theorists like Arnheim, Balázs, in short all of film theory.

Metz: Of course, but this is clearly a fundamental choice for him, and not a maneuver or a mark of sloppiness. It is easy to discern that he has decided to refer only to texts that speak directly about films. Moreover, he does not force us to make use of them. He does not adopt the posture of a specialist, even though he has seen a lot of films. He does not hide the fact that he has carried out a kind of 'raid' (and a raid of great scope for that matter).

His way of thinking is profoundly foreign to my own (there is no bridge between us), but I found his work to be very beautiful, a work of extreme intelligence. My 'response' is a warm esteem. I have never understood why books should have to 'match', because people in everyday life never match, and they are the ones who write books.

4. The 'Semiological Regime'

Marie: You just spoke of Roland Barthes as a mentor. This is a role that you have always denied or refused for yourself. And yet, if it is true that you enjoy the exterritoriality of the École des Hautes Études, this does not prevent you from lending consistent support to your old students.

Metz: It is the least I can do! I do not see any connection between helping people out and playing the role of mentor. It is a deformation of our profession to see subtle scientific politicking when it is often just everyday acts like helping a friend in need.

Marie: So, I will ask you a somewhat brutal question that other people have also asked, like Guy Hennebelle for example: is there a semiological regime within the university institution?

Metz: Of course, semiology has a certain (modest) influence, as is the case with any movement that has caught on. But it is funny to take umbrage at it, when you think of the massive, overwhelming power, in the same institution, of disciplines like English, History, Physics, etc. The university is a big house, very old and very complex, and becoming familiar with it is difficult. 'Power' does not lie in books doing well, but in the committees, the budgets, the hallways.

To return to the small upsurge of semiology, for the most part it has been beneficial, because it has contributed, along with other factors, to assuring (after many tribulations) the position of an entire generation of scholars, those who are about forty years old today. It has also contributed to film studies being admitted into academia (we had already tried this before, but without success), and not just semiological film theory, such that others have also benefited, which is good for them.

Now, on the crux of the matter: I never wanted to establish a School, or even to personally edit a journal, which would have immediately put me in the position of a boss. I do not wish to deny the reality of my position, the symbolic effect attached to my books, my notoriety abroad, and, above all, perhaps, my seniority (I was the first to take this path, and I am also the oldest member of the group). Of course, I had an intellectual and moral influence – as soon as you start writing, this is the risk, whether little or big. But it does not oblige you to *act* as a mentor, to tyrannize everyone, to condemn the work of others, to be haughty, to drape oneself in a stuffy solemnity.

Marie: Who, then, in your opinion, are the scholars directly extending your work?

Metz: At Cerisy, in my 'speech' on the last day, I proposed a threefold partition, which I have since reconsidered. But I would still adhere to it. There are the scholars outside of semiology (in its many forms), for example Jean-Louis Leutrat and Jacques Aumont, who are of great importance to my pluralist temperament, because they show that my enterprise has in no way *clogged up* the landscape. There are the 'other' semioticians – the non-Metzian semioticians, shall we say – like Marie-Claire Ropars or John M. Carroll in the United States. Finally, there are those who, more or less beginning with my propositions, have opened up new paths. I will not speak of the fourth group, those who are content to recapitulate my ideas while twisting them in all directions (at one point there were a lot of them): they are supposedly my 'disciples', but I recognize myself more in the third group. Moreover, I do not like the notion or the word disciple, which is reductive for the disciple, and burdensome for the 'mentor'.

II. The Unpublished Works

Vernet: While you have not published any books since *The Imaginary Signifier* in 1977, since that time you have worked on two major objects: the first is on the joke [*mot d'esprit*], for a book that remains unpublished because unfinished; the other is on enunciation, for a book which you are in the midst of completing.

Metz: Yes. But first a few clarifications. As far as the joke is concerned, my book is in fact 'finished' but, in its present form, it does not satisfy me. It was refused by two publishers – Seuil and Flammarion – after contradictory discussions between several readers, and, re-reading it, I appropriated this hesitant and finally negative judgment, which relates not to the subject matter but to the structure of the work (= useless digressions, awkward delineation of the chapters, etc.). So I put it to one side, with the idea of resuming it in this perspective, possibly in two years, when I retire.

Now, for my current book, it is true that I have written about two thirds of it, but I have had a lot of projects blocking its path, so I still need a year or eighteen months to complete it.

1. On Jokes

Vernet: What motivated your passage, after *The Imaginary Signifier*, to a purely psychoanalytic work on jokes?

Metz: To tell the truth, it is just as much a linguistic work (and even phonetic, for those quips that play on sounds). It is not a work that relates to the cinema, but only to written or spoken jokes. And also on Freud's famous work on the *Witz*, for which I have a profound admiration, along with various objections.

In spite of appearances, this manuscript is situated as a direct extension of *The Imaginary Signifier*, or at least the second half of that book, the very long text on metaphor and metonymy, where I was already quite distant from the cinema.

Each of the patterns of thinking (what Freud calls 'techniques') that produces a series of quips of the same mechanism, consists of a 'psychic trajectory', a 'symbolic path' that is primary in principal and then made more or less secondary. For example, following Freud, and in partial disagreement with him, I study the technique he calls 'deviation' (*Ablenkung*) – deviation of thought, of course. It gives rise to an immense, very widespread family of jokes and funny stories: a painter introduces himself to a farmer and asks if he can paint his cow. Answer: 'No way! I like her as she is!' At the airport, a woman asks how long the Paris-Bombay flight takes. Consulting his schedule, the desk clerk says, 'Just a minute, madam'. Satisfied, the woman answers: 'One minute? That's great. Thanks a lot!' Two friends are chatting. The first one says: 'Did you know that in New York someone has an accident every ten seconds?' His buddy says: 'Oh, poor guy! What rotten luck!', and so on.

All these quips relate to *slippages*, to displacements in the Freudian sense. These slippages are absurd, preserving something of the primary process (whence our laughter), as well as being made true-to-life, domesticated in order to accede to social exchange and become capable of passing into language. To this end, the invention of a joke allows for a kind of turnaround. For example, the double meaning of 'to paint' [*peindre*]: 'to represent on a canvas' and 'to daub with color' (it is thus necessary to be in accordance with the resources of the language in question, or in other cases with the discourse). Along with the turnaround, the joker needs to 'play' on two very uneven, unbalanced probabilities: in the context, the only acceptable meaning is 'to represent on a canvas', to the extent that the listener does not even think of the other meaning (this is what the joker is counting on). Thirdly,

we must find a phrase that, while remaining simple and plausible, has the effect of resuscitating the meaning that had been implicitly excluded, or merging the two meanings. Thus, these familiar tales, outwardly facile, rest on sustained and precise abstract operations. I have studied about fifty of them, roughly thirty of which had already been discussed by Freud, from a corpus of about a thousand examples. In all instances, they are *itineraries*, typical pathways of thinking between 'plots' put into place by the joke itself. They are often similar to metaphor, metonymy or synecdoche in the broad sense of the terms (as defined by Jakobson and then Lacan). For example, lexical double meanings (*"Tous les sots sont périlleux"*)³ exhibit in a nearly pure state the work of condensation: two different ideas fuse into a single, identical audible syllable.

Vernet: Could you give some indications why you are opposed to certain aspects of Freud's book?

Metz: Yes, two things. In detail, many of the clarifications are marked by numerous contradictions, linguistic errors, approximate definitions, textual slip-ups, etc. (Freud is sometimes very slapdash, very hurried). Additionally, something more central: this very fine book was written in the wake of *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, when Freud was still struck by his major discovery, the unconscious. Hence, he is not always attentive to the discrepancies in the degrees of secundarization (even though the idea, on a basic level, is his), and he exaggerates the proximity of mental thought with the dreamwork. He does not take into account the tremendous constraint exerted on the joker by the waking state, socialization and the 'linguistic state', where one is dependent on a non-psychological machine. It is language, as much as the joker, that creates quips. The unconscious manipulates it, but within certain limits. Without the polysemy of the word '*peindre*' in the French lexicon, there would be no joke about the farmer's cow. The primary process only creates humor if it partly quietens down. Freud does not say the opposite, but he hovers uncertainly over this important point.

Vernet: Do you think that a real enrichment of psychoanalytic reflection through a better knowledge and understanding of linguistic mechanisms is possible?

Metz: No, I do not think so, although it is an obsession for French psychoanalysis. We should make an exception – which is actually pretty

obvious – for the psychoanalytic study of objects that *are* linguistic, like the written or spoken joke, literary works, etc., that is, a certain field of study of applied psychoanalysis. But in psychoanalysis proper (which we always forget about), therapy, the process is more language-based [*langagier*] than linguistic in nature. In order to ‘understand’ the words that the analysand produces, it is clear that a theoretical knowledge of the syntax of the language or its phonological system is not what matters. It is more a matter of sensing, through the process of transference/counter-transference, what is functioning in the Freudian slips, contradictions, stammering, or the overly-assured phrases of the patient. This is still language, but it is not that of the linguist (Benveniste said this emphatically, and very early on). In a word, it is ‘*lalangue*’, in the Lacanian sense, and not language as we commonly understand it. The former digs its twisting tunnels, its warrens, in the density of the latter, but they remain profoundly different, as if they were foreign to each other; their constant proximity does not lead to any resemblance. Moreover, psychoanalysis is intended to heal people – whatever the (Parisian) great minds may say – and, on this terrain, it is subject to the harsh competition of the striking progress made in neuropsychiatric chemistry, which it is absurd to denounce. Rather than be burdened by linguistics, or permanently sacrificing itself to the Desire of Literature, psychoanalysis would do better to reflect on its probability of surviving beyond the year 2000, and on the new role that it can play alongside medication, if it possesses the wisdom to accept this.

Vernet: Does your work on the joke have anything to do with the Lacanian formula according to which the unconscious is structured like a language?

Metz: Yes, plenty. But on the condition of avoiding an excessively frequent misunderstanding of this formula. The ‘language’ it invokes is ‘*lalangue*’, which I just spoke about. Lacan utterly refuses any, let us say, iconic, figurative conception of the unconscious. The unconscious, in his view, is relational, ideographic, its space is like that of the rebus or the grapheme, not that of the photograph or the image, whence the reference to a ‘language’. All the same, it does not resemble a language-system [*langue*], with a clear exposition and diurnal logic. Lacan is thinking of the depths of the machine, where poetry, Freudian slips and the abracadabra of dreams reside. Conversely, those who considered Lacan’s formula as outrageous and provocative have unwittingly shown that they had turned language (in the eyes of linguists, and everybody else) into a particularly threadbare conception, entirely reduced to the secondary

process, because they judged that the unconscious differed from it in such a radical and self-evident fashion. However, the study of metaphor and metonymy, in my work on the 'imaginary referent', has permitted me to measure the importance of the *primary part* that remains active in the most common figures, and in the very constitution of the basic lexicon, reputed to be non-figurative but whose terms often owe their meaning (their specific meaning) to an old figure that was then 'used up', as traditional linguists are fond of saying: this 'using up' strongly resembles the progressive secundarization of what was initially a rather disruptive outpouring.

Hence, to reply to your question, jokes all result from a twisting of *lalangue* on and with *language* [*la langue*], and it is the various possible imprints of this minor convulsion, this 'smiling scar', that I have tried to study, after, with and sometimes against Freud. Lacan's formula can serve as an extension of this work, even if, in the joke, the unconscious motion only acts, for the most part, in its preconscious state. Since Lacan, certain psychoanalysts willingly present puns as pure products of the unconscious to the fourth degree, targeting depth and manifestly crafted with great lashes of culture and labor. But this difference concerns the psychic 'milieu', more or less close to the primordial haze, and not the specific design of typical trajectories, like for example the 'turnaround' I just mentioned. As a characteristic itinerary, each one of them can be realized to various levels of secundariness; this is why, as we can see, jokes are not all absurd to the same degree, although they necessarily must have an ounce of absurdity in them.

2. Filmic Enunciation

Vernet: As for your current work on filmic enunciation, I would also like to ask you what motivated this transition to this object, which is in the framework of what we today call narratology, and which has precisely been developed while you were working on the joke. Genette has already indicated the manner in which narratology was the extension of semiology, but what interests me today is to better understand how this term can designate reflective thinking on relations between pairs of concepts, concepts that we sometimes consider as finalized (often when we take them in isolation), but which, for the most part, are really difficult, because matters are still not resolved. The first pair is 'history/discourse', the second 'enunciation/narration', the third 'conversation/projection', and the last is 'deixis/configuration'.

a. *History/Discourse*

Vernet: In his *Nouveau discours du récit*,⁴ Genette said that he would have done better to sprain his wrist the day that he had hastily interpreted Benveniste's formula, which claimed that 'history seems to tell itself', by misjudging the importance of the world 'seems'. Are you carrying out a similar revision today? Do you think that Benveniste's formula has been applied too brutally? And if this is the case, does it not also imply that we again reflect on the position of the spectator, which would look both at history and discourse, and would thus show itself to be less affixed to the imaginary, and more devoted to the "belief in the spectacle," to adopt the expression you use in an interview with the journal *Hors-Cadre*? [see Chapter 9].

Continuing in this relationship with the double-barreled term 'history/discourse', I am struck by the fact that narratology has not worked on the position of the actor, despite the fact that we see actors throughout the entire film.

Metz: There are multiple aspects to your question. Firstly, narratology. My study of enunciation significantly overlaps with this enterprise, but departs from it at other times, because I am also concerned with non-narrative films, experimental films, television news, or historical programs, etc. I will return to this point later.

Secondly, my motivation. Without realizing it, you have answered your own question: while I was elsewhere, immersed in Freud, many interesting and solid works were published on narration and enunciation. Jean-Paul Simon began work on this matter very early, as the title of his book on the comic film does *not* indicate.⁵ There was issue number 38 of *Communications*, in 1983, which you are well placed to know, and many other studies. After having surfaced and familiarized myself with this research, I set myself the task of systematically studying how far behind I was, what I had read too quickly, a bit like someone who goes through the newspapers upon returning from a distant country. I spent an entire year familiarizing myself with these analyses, and I found them interesting, I wanted to enter into the debate. Therefore, it is not the logic of my earlier work that led me to this new study, it was the work of others.

Now, 'history/discourse'. There is, first of all, the position of Benveniste himself. I am persuaded that he truly thought that history *did* tell itself (phenomenally, of course, not really). It was through simple prudence, to avoid lazy misunderstandings, that he added the verb 'seem'. It does not, however, settle the question, for we are not forced to think like Benveniste. As for

me, in a text entitled 'Story/Discourse (A Note on Two Types of Voyeurism)' and published in a collective work dedicated to Benveniste [republished in *The Imaginary Signifier*, pp. 89–98], I go in the same direction: "it is the 'story' which exhibits itself, the story which reigns supreme" [p. 97] (= the final words of my article). The context indicates that we must take the idea in a psychoanalytic direction; just before that, I had described film as "the seeing of an outlaw, of an *Id* unrelated to any *Ego*" [p. 97]. The entire text, incidentally, has a lyrical and strongly 'personal' character, it is a form of prosopopoeia (at least that was the intention) of cinematic transparency, of the classical American cinema that I loved so much, that I exalted in, whose character I magnified without going into details. Nonetheless, I recognize that this article, if readers do not contribute a dose of finesse and sensitivity, or if they dispense with comparing it to my other writings, can indeed lead to confusion, because it does not clearly abstain from being a scientific text. As for what I have said elsewhere, it is that, very regularly, history is also a discourse, or that it has a discourse 'behind' it, etc.

Marie: So you no longer believe in transparency at all?

Metz: Yes, I do believe in it, but as being itself a type of enunciation, in which the signifier actively works at effacing its own traces (in this spirit, I have dedicated an entire passage of *The Imaginary Signifier* to it). In the same sense, my article on special effects, which dates from much earlier, recognized two different forms of pleasure (here, I am in entirely in agreement with what Marc [Vernet] has just said): the pleasure of immersing oneself in the diegesis, and the pleasure of admiring a nice toy, to rhapsodize before the cinema-machine. Whence those self-contradictory but very common reactions, like for example this strange phrase: 'What a great effect, you can hardly see it'. Whence also my idea of a 'belief in the spectacle', which Marc has just recalled.

Today, I think that enunciation is an instance with which we must *always* reckon, but that sometimes it is only 'presupposed' (= implied by the existence of the utterance), while it is itself 'enunciated' (= inscribed in the text). I have borrowed this distinction from Francesco Casetti without changing a thing, I think it is excellent.

However, the term 'marker' [*marque*] suggests a localized sign, which would for example be in the top-left corner of the screen, whereas what 'marks' the enunciation is most often the construction of the combination of image and sound. This is why I have spoken about 'configurations' (apart from motivated exceptions) rather than markers.

By way of example, here are some of the enunciative configurations that I have distinguished: the on-screen voice talking to the camera, the look-at-the-camera (the two often go together, as Casetti and yourself, Marc, have observed and commented), the written address (through a title-card), secondary screens (doors, windows), mirrors, the film in the film, the laying bare of the device, the numerous forms of subjective images and sounds (the semi-subjective image, perspectival sound, the notion of the 'underneath' that you defined...), the character's I-voice [*voix-je*], the oriented objective image (an equivalent to the 'intrusions of the author' in literature), etc., etc., without forgetting the neutral image, which, by the way, does not exist, but which, like the number zero in arithmetic, is indispensable for placing other enunciative regimes in perspective. In fact, we have not asked often enough that they should all be defined in a negative manner, like deviations from a point of reference that would be, precisely, neutrality: to consider off-screen sound as notable (which everybody does do) equates to implying that on-screen sound is in some way more normal; to isolate the look-at-the-camera as a particular figure is to consider that it is less striking for the character to look in a different direction.

In sum, enunciation is everywhere. Simply put – and this is where we come back to 'transparency', which it is absurd to deny as a *spectatorial impression* – it happens that this instance is done very discreetly, it asymptotically tends toward 'neutral' images and sounds, or at least neutral for a given period and genre.

Marie: So you are in radical disagreement with Bordwell, when he says that in classical films, there is no enunciation?

Metz: He says that for all films, not only classical films.

No, I am not in disagreement with him. He rejects the concept of enunciation for the mortal sin of linguisticity, but he adopts the concept of narration which, when the film is narrative, designates exactly the same thing (we will return to this matter). Whence my resolute assent to many of Bordwell's propositions and analyses. The 'disagreements' of this kind are chimeras that are deliberately exaggerated in order to occupy positions. I have never liked these labeling games, which only serve to mask real convergences and differences.

Vernet: So it would be a disagreement about the terms used? What strikes me when listening to you is that enunciation tends to be a much vaster territory than what was initially attributed to it. And that, in fact, in the

past, the semiological and narratological work on enunciation owed much to a sort of nostalgia for the notion of the author. Through the work of the structuralists, we told ourselves that there remained a personal point of origin, and we in fact attempted, by studying enunciation, to recover something from this point, whereas your current position transforms it into a much more diffuse instance, which must be understood on two levels at least: what Paul Verstraten would call diegetized enunciation and, in contrast, the origin of the film-utterance [*énoncé-film*].

Metz: Yes, except that the former is merely one of the manifestations, or one of the avatars, of the latter: the origin of the utterance is diegetized by the fiction (in both senses of the word).

It is true that, for me, enunciation has little to do with the author, or even with any kind of 'subjective' authority, regardless of whether it is a real or imaginary person, a character, etc. Enunciation, as the suffix indicates, is an activity, a process, a *doing*. I have never understood why narratologists, after having banished the author with unnecessary violence (when it was necessary to keep the author as a concept, because it is the source of style), conceive of their so-called textual authorities in a perfectly anthropomorphic model: implied author, narrator, enunciator, etc. One could say that the author, ejected through the door, has come back in through the window. Now, it is either one or the other: in terms of Reality, it is the author and the author alone (the true, empirical author) who has created the work. And within the work, that is, in terms of the Symbolic, you only find enunciation. If the work depicts the film's director, as in *Intervista* [1987] by Fellini, it is once again this doing that does it. Enunciation is at work in each segment of the film. It is simply the *angle* from which the utterance is enunciated, the profile it presents us with, the orientation of the text, its geography – or rather its topography. The film can be presented – and always by means of fiction, even in documentaries – as being told by one of its characters, as being told by an unnamed voice, as gazing upon its diegesis from below, as itself being gazed upon by someone else, as containing another film, as 'really' addressed to the public by means of a title-card in the second person, etc. Enunciation is a landscape of creases and hemlines across which the film tells us that it is a film. It says only this, but it has a thousand ways of saying it.

Vernet: Has narratology not forgotten an element of the cinematic institution: a narrative film is not only made to produce a story, but also to produce an 'author', an image of the author as a figure of the artist in whom we trust. Every director of fiction films seeks to assure both the progression

of the story and the progression of his career, by assuring that he can make another film.

Metz: I am skeptical, as I have just explained, about crypto-authorial authorities (whether enunciative or not), and even more skeptical when they are multiplied. There is nothing between the author and the act of enunciation. But there is something *alongside* them, an extra-textual authority that is not, however, 'real' (narratology sometimes confuses the two things), an imaginary author, or more exactly an image of the author that the spectator creates on the basis of certain qualities in the text refracted by their phantasms, their external knowledge about the filmmaker, etc. Edward Branigan is right to allude to this, and also to note that a text, strictly speaking, gives *no* indications about the author: it is situated in another world, in another 'frame', and if it contains (for example) fervent confessions in the first-person, only a knowledge about what is external to the text [*le hors-texte*] allows us to decide the strategy or spirit of sincerity in which these confessions are made.

By the same token, filmmakers can only make their films by fashioning an equally arbitrary image of the spectator 'for' whom they are working.

As for the filmmakers targeted by your question, they are guided by a concern for combining textual indices that they sow here and there with the character of the spectator that they have dreamed up, in the hope that the former will lead the latter toward the imaginary author that they wish to embody... And it is true that this case is very frequent.

Vernet: Before moving on to other matters, there was one final point in my question, concerning the position of the actor.

Metz: I must say, first of all, that nobody, to my knowledge, has spoken of the actor from the perspective of enunciation, except for yourself in the last part of your article in *Iris* no. 7 on the film character.⁶ Theorists, because they are theorists, are used to seeking more or less subjacent structures. If they do not adequately perceive the actor, this is because the actor is too visible. He is dissimulated to them by an authority that has the advantage of being invisible, the character, who both conceals and is 'represented' by the actor.

As far as enunciation is concerned, it seems to me that there are two major types of actors, with, of course, intermediate or mixed cases. If the actor is unknown, he will necessarily function to the benefit of the character, because the spectator cannot detach him from the character in order to associate him with other characters, or a private life talked about by the

gossip magazines – in short, he is not associated with anything else. So he ‘sticks’ to the present character, he has no other reality.

Marie: There are very fine things said on this issue in the article by Jean-Louis Comolli on *La Marseillaise* [Renoir, 1938],⁷ counter-posing Pierre Renoir, who plays Louis XVI, to the almost unknown actor (Edmond Ardisson) who plays the young Marseillais Jean-Joseph Bomier.

Metz: When the actor is well-known (with the star being the limit-case), he imposes on the spectator the need to interrogate the reasons for his choice, reasons which are sometimes obvious and sometimes enigmatic. A film with Danielle Darrieux immediately orients us in two directions: it is going to take place in ‘society’ and it is going to be ‘French’. And then, another result of enunciation, which Marc has spoken about in his article, is the fact that the well-known actor – that is, and I will come back to this, *well-known elsewhere* – will import into the film the echo of other films he has played in, he will instill his character with a multiple, virtual, fluctuating quality, he will make it vacillate, sometimes to the point where his identity is questioned. In *Les Bas-fonds* [Renoir, 1936], for example, who is Louis Jouvet? Can we really believe he is a Russian baron bankrupted by a passion for gambling? Is it not obvious that we are in the presence of genial, superlatively French thespian called Jouvet, who is neither a Baron nor bankrupt?

Vernet: This is what Michel has also shown for *Le Mépris* [Godard, 1963]. The actor, like the auteur, must have an imaginary status for the spectator.

b. Enunciation/Narration

Vernet: To turn to the pair ‘Enunciation/Narration’, Genette, if I recall correctly, sees a sort of equilibrium between the two. Narration relates to the mode, enunciation to the voice. In my work, I follow this division somewhat, with narration on the side of the nature of the story (the regulation of the delivery of information about the diegesis), and enunciation referring more to an extradiegetic authority, to the status of the text itself more than the diegesis. In your work, it seems the enunciation ends up single-handedly invading the entire terrain, dividing itself between a diegetized enunciation and an enunciation *tout court*.

Metz: No, I do not think it is like that. For Genette, the voice and the mode both relate to narration, whereas enunciation only concerns the idiom that

is the 'basis' of the novel. For me, there is no such thing as enunciation *tout court*, or else it is permanently '*tout court*'. But it is true that it is expressed through figures that can be diegetic, extra-diegetic, juxta-diegetic (like the I-voice), etc. (this list is not final).

Jacques Aumont has clearly formulated one of the great 'challenges' of narratology: to study the explicitly narrative construction of the text. But in a narrative film, *everything* becomes narrative, even the grain of the filmstock and the timbre of the voices. This is why it seems to me that, in stories, enunciation becomes narration, provisionally abolishing a more general duality. Actually, I would define enunciation as a discursive activity (this is the literal meaning of the word: *act of enunciating*). Consequently, in a scientific documentary, scientific enunciation is at work, in an activist film militant enunciation is at work, in educational television didactic enunciation is at work, and so on. But, for narrative enunciation, whose anthropological importance is exceptional and whose social diffusion is vast, there is a special word whose homologue is absent everywhere else, the word 'narration'. We thus dispose of two nouns, and we have a tendency to look for two things, forgetting that for all non-narrative discourses, we do not even pose the same question. Before a geographical documentary, we do not attempt to distinguish the enunciation of some kind of 'geographization'. This is because this latter, in fact, does not have any social existence. So we say (very reasonably) that enunciation is geographical.

We also forget something, which is that the terminology was principally established in reference to *linguistic* narration, in particular, novels. There, the narrative codings are superposed onto a primary layer of strong rules, those of language; it is for them that we speak of enunciation, because the term is a linguistic one. Conversely, as an effect of this we can, if necessary, reserve 'narration' for the higher level. But the narrative film *does not rest on anything*, it does not pile up on some equivalent to language; it *is* itself, or rather it manufactures everything that, in it, would come within the term 'language'. Just as enunciation becomes narrative, narration takes responsibility for all enunciation.

To sum up, I think that enunciation is distinguished from narration in two, and only two, cases: in non-narrative discourse, which is nevertheless an enunciating instance; and in written or spoken narrations, where it is permissible to consider as 'enunciative' those narrative mechanisms that relate more to the idiom in which they are conveyed. (But the problem reappears: their *usage* inevitably conflates enunciation and narration, as we see with the deictics of novels.)

Marie: I think back to what Marc said earlier, that the spectator took pleasure in the tale related and in the narration as a narrating instance. For me, 'enunciation' designates the general *dispositif*, valid in any production of messages, and 'narration' designates the specific part of this *dispositif* concerning narrative messages.

Metz: Yes, except that narration, when there is one, mobilizes the entire *dispositif*. We should, in any case, be precise: 'inasmuch as there is a narration', because there are partially narrative films, partial to varying degrees. But this changes nothing in our debate: in a means of expression that does not involve language, narration, on the patch of terrain that it occupies, assures the totality of discursive regulations. Moreover, when we think of the figures that everybody considers as enunciative, we notice that frequently they are also inseparably narrative: the diegetic narrator, the non-diegetic narrator, the character's look to the camera, the off-screen voice, etc.

But it is still true that 'enunciation' is more general, because the term (and the notion) are also suited to multiple non-narrative registers, and consequently to the *dispositif* itself, before being specified.

Marie: What also deceives us, and what we tend to forget, is that for literary narratology there is a homogeneity in the material of expression, of such a kind that the character who narrates speaks with the same words as the book. For there to be such a reduplication in the cinema, the character would have to be filming the scene. If he speaks or writes, the textual functioning is no longer the same.

c. *Conversation/Projection*

Vernet: The other narratological pairing is 'Conversation/Projection'. Perhaps, it is true, one cannot measure the gap between the conversation situation described by Benveniste, which is the basis for his theory of enunciation, and that of the spectator faced with a film to which he cannot respond, and which is not supported by anybody. Conversely, however, is the manner in which Benveniste represented the conversation correct, and as simple as he says it is? It was critiqued in two of the talks at the conference, by Marie-Claire Ropars and Roger Odin.⁸ The latter argued that, in conversation, we do nothing but hold discourses, which never have an enunciative source. Marie-Claire Ropars, meanwhile, asked if, by denouncing the mirage of the enunciation in cinema (= the quest for an author-character), you are not taking it outside of the film. What is your position, today, with respect to what could be an imperfect link between the conversational situation and the situation of a film screening?

Metz: As far as conversation is concerned, what I believe above all is that we have not sufficiently been aware of the specific and 'exceptional' character of this situation. Specific by its nature, by its status, and not, of course, by its frequency (it is precisely the latter that obscures the former). With Benveniste and Jakobson, the theory of enunciation is narrowly constructed, it is a configuration that is not generalizable. A great number of pragmatic situations are 'monodirectional' in Bettetini's sense of the term: reading a book, listening to the radio, a lecture, a seminar, watching a play or, better still, a film or television program, etc. In all these cases, the discourse is more or less prefabricated (sometimes integrally), more or less immutable (sometimes entirely), and the reactions of the addressee cannot 'feedback' on the machinations of the 'addresser': in sum, it is the exact opposite of a conversation.

Now, you say, could the conversation reveal itself to be more complicated than in Benveniste's descriptions (already not all that simple)? Yes, certainly. Do we not exchange discourses? That too, certainly; I said something along these lines in issue no. 1 of *Vertigo*.⁹ But as complicated as we may suppose it to be (and psychoanalysis would rightly make it complicated), it does not modify the quality that radically opposes it to monovalent discourses, and it does not suppress the alternation between the *I* and the *you*. It also does not prevent the verbal tenses from being evaluated on the basis of the speech act. If my interlocutor declares 'I was ill', it is because this illness, in his view, is prior to the phrase uttered; by the same token, 'I will come back soon' informs us of a return that will come after the information act. On the contrary, the first effect of film – solely due to the fact that nobody can respond to it, and that it can be projected at times and places that are infinitely variable – is to 'unhook' all these terms from their strong meaning, and to limit their action to a fictional, de-situated space-time. The deictics, for example, in spoken words or on-screen texts, become 'weakened symbols', to use Käte Hamburger's terms. Hence, enunciation, for me, has nothing to do with the *I*, and the spectator has nothing to do with the *you*.

The first studies of enunciation, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, carried out research on the role of deictics. This is also what linguistics was doing, before pragmatics revealed the omnipresence of enunciation, which goes far beyond grammatical *persons* (enunciators and enunciatees). It was normal and necessary to initially explore this path; you cannot skip the stages.

In any case, as far as 'primary' research is concerned, I think that we must recall that enunciation has given rise to two kinds of explorations, which are, at the end of the day, quite separate: enunciation in the 'technical' (or pragmatic) sense, which was the great subject of the 1980s, and

enunciation in the psychoanalytic sense (= identification, scopic regimes, divisions in belief, the male gaze and the image-woman, etc.), which was foremost in France during the 1970s and which is now only being studied by Anglo-Saxon feminists, who have carried out very important work in this field.

Vernet: You have just cited Käte Hamburger. What is your relationship to her thinking, and to her book?¹⁰

Metz: It is a dual relationship. On the one hand, I have difficulty in tolerating the brutal and arbitrary aspect of her work. For example, her affirmation that the cinema is part of literature, under the sole pretext that it is fictional, and without even thinking that it is not always fictional. Or her claim that her whole book is based on linguistic notions, when there is not even a shadow of linguistics in any of it. Thus, her definition of the utterance as the act of a subject saying something about an object is extremely vague, and even comes close to being trivial, as her study of lyricism shows clearly, where we see an 'object' that is both present and absent. She also has the gall to affirm – in 1957 and once again in the 1968 edition – that linguists have shown little interest in enunciation, whereas Benveniste's classic articles (which she did not know about) appeared between 1946 and 1959.

But what intelligence this wild woman had! What strength there is in her thought, notably in the definition of epic fiction! And then, to return to our domain, I essentially find her manner of situating the cinema (narrative film) between the theater and the novel perfectly just. Film is described as a mixture: characters accede to fictional existence through their own words, as in the theatre; but they are images, thereby escaping the all-too-real limitations of the stage, and are capable of showing everything that the novel can describe, of being able to do without characters and speech for long passages, such that the fiction is also materialized outside of the protagonists, through an exterior intervention. I had sketched out somewhat similar ideas in a Spanish article, then at some lectures in Australia, and I will now re-open the question, this time with the 'help' of Käte Hamburger (and several others), in the context of an upcoming seminar where the enunciative regimes of the novel, the theater and the poem will be contrasted with each other, considered from the point of view of the cinema, and, so to speak, 'from' the place of the cinema. In sum, it will be a comparative study.

Vernet: Do you agree with this idea of a false enunciation, and of deictics deflected from their primary usage in narrative, or, more precisely, in fiction?

Metz: Yes, what Käte Hamburger says about these matters is enlightening. She shows that the preterite does not express the past, but the present of fiction: 'He was sad' signifies that, *at this moment in the story*, he *is* sad. So this 'past' is accompanied by an adverb in the present tense: 'This evening, he was sad'. I think this is very strong.

d. Deixis/Configuration

Vernet: The last pair in narratology, or in my primitive typology of narratology, is 'Deixis/Configuration'. Whereas deictics had occupied a decent share of the work done on narratology or 'enunciatology' (?), I note that you now speak of 'weakened deictics', and also of 'enunciative configuration', as if we have passed from a study of taxemes to a study of expositions, of more diffuse networks and heterogeneous constructions rather than units fixed in a kind of lexicon.

In this perspective, has the work of Edward Branigan been of any importance for you, and has the passage of deictics to configurations led to revising notions of the text and the impression of reality, insofar as the spectator who feels this impression operates on an enunciative material that is more complex and labile than the view, the image, or the visual field would be?

Metz: What makes the deictic conception of enunciation difficult is, to begin with, a fact that has often been noted but whose importance has not been adequately taken stock of. At the stage of transmission there is nobody, there is no person, there is only a text; the enunciator does not exist, it is a figure that is constructed on the basis of the text. At the stage of reception, on the contrary, there must be a person, a virtual spectator (much as Genette rightly talks about the virtual reader), a spectator who will become real through (at least) one other person, the analyst, or in any case, someone who has seen the film, because without him the very instance of reception disappears.

If someone at the pole of reception is necessary, this is because there is no text there, and if the pole of transmission can do without a symmetrical human presence, this is because the text compensates for it. We do not go to see the filmmaker, we go to see the film; but this *we* who goes to see it is not another film, it has to be somebody. The pairs of symmetrical terms, like 'narrator/narratee' and all the others, refer in reality to the conversation (again!), and they are more deceptive for the film or for the book, because they mask this basic, inaugural dissymmetry: the artist transmits his work to its place, while the spectator, who has nothing to

emit, is himself displaced. *There is no exchange*. On the one hand, there is an object that removes the person; on the other hand, there is a person, present, deprived of an object.

I will add one thing. In my opinion, we should not cede to a permanently threatening latent confusion between textual pragmatics and experimental (psycho-sociological) pragmatics. The former furnishes no indication of the various empirical audiences. If we want to know them, we must go to see them, and thus leave the text (we must also leave semiology, which cannot do everything by itself). It is dangerous, even if it is partly a matter of words (see Francesco Casetti), to speak of the enunciative instance as an 'interface' between film and the world. Textual analyses will tell us, for example, that in sequence seventeen, the film 'positions' its spectator in such and such a location. This is true in the symbolic order (= of the film). But the spectator in the movie theater can position himself wherever he likes, he is the one who decides, and the film ignores this choice entirely.

In a soliloquy, the enunciation, dissociated from interaction, can only mark itself out by a *metadiscursive* path, that is, by unfolding the utterance in order to say that it is a discourse. It seems to me that the metadiscursive register contains two major variants, reflection and commentary. Reflection: the film mimes itself (screens within the screen, films within the film, showing the device, etc.). Commentary: the film speaks about itself, as is the case with certain 'pedagogical' voiceovers about the image, to use Marc's expression, or in non-dialogue intertitles, explicatory camera movements, etc. You are right to note that the notion of the text is displaced, or reworked, at least in relation to what it was in *Language and Cinema*, where I still presented the text as a rather smooth surface, even if I admitted that analysis could striate it along several axes. But at present it is the text itself that appears to me to be permanently stirred, crumpled up and torn into two by its own production.

It is indeed true – I will come back to your question, which has spread out even more – that enunciation, for me, ceases to be 'affixed' to privileged and relatively narrow textual zones (whence my hesitation about the term 'marker'), in order to be diffused over the entire discursive network. Deep down, *enunciation is the text*, but the text considered as production, not as a product. Alternatively, it is the text considered in everything that, within it, tells us that it is a text. This idea appears in the work of Marie-Claire Ropars, Pierre Sorlin, François Jost, and maybe some other people who I have momentarily forgotten. In my work, it has become the backbone for all of my reflections on the matter.

Now, for your question on Branigan. Yes, I am interested in his work, and our 'theses' overlap on several points, notably the idea of narration as an activity without an actor, or as having a status as metalanguage with respect to the narrated object. It is not by chance that I referred to his work not too long ago.

On the impression of reality, finally, I cannot give you an answer because, although it is one of my favorite topics, I still do not know if it is affected by my new ideas on enunciation.

For Roland Barthes

Metz: Out of friendship, and fidelity to myself, I would like to finish up, as we did at Cerisy, with some thoughts on Roland Barthes, who was my only true mentor. This declaration will perhaps be surprising, for (alas) my work is not very similar to his. Linguists, film theorists, and even (later) Freud, have more visibly influenced me. But to have had a mentor is something else, it assumes a proximity in the daily exercise of the craft, an almost physical contagion, lasting many years, of a certain number of practical attitudes, ways of acting, and this is something that no book can do.

Roger Odin, in his contribution, remarked with much finesse that, although very concerned with theory, I was not that attached to theories, that I changed them according to my needs, without even pausing to think that they could be competitors. This is one of the traits that I share with Roland Barthes, with its effect on one's conduct, one's way of 'handling', we might say, the works of others.

This practical philosophy, which he transmitted to me more than taught me, is a kind of ethics; it is the will to set up, in the midst of carrying out research, an amicable, tolerant space. This is rather rare, for intellectuals are no more intelligent than other people, and they are often tense with each other. With Roland Barthes, his tolerant, unaffected manner was due to the quite unique combination of kindness (which everybody noticed in him), an attentiveness to other people, and a total freedom of mind with respect to established ideas, often borrowed from the physical sciences, that guide our field, such as Methodology, Result or Research Coordination. In this regard he was incredibly tranquil; he knew that there were misunderstandings, distortions and bluffing in the expeditious commodity of the great disciplinary divisions – 'post-modernity', 'structuralism' and their ilk – or even in the guerrilla war of projects that aim to oust each other when, so often, they are not responding to the same question and are

in reality unrelated to each other. He saw different languages there, more or less apt in each case to *speaking* about such and such an object. There was nothing discouraging about his skepticism, rather, he expressed a calm and confident belief that we could work differently.

I owe to him this level-headed conception of our profession, as he was an example of it before my eyes. I have constantly taken inspiration from it, or at least, I have constantly tried to. I am not the head of a school or the 'Pope of the audiovisual' (!), as the stupid stereotypes, without having read me and without knowing my work, sometimes have it. On the contrary, I am very wary of the imperialist forms of semiology, of those formalizations that are more complex than the object that they are 'explaining'. Semiology, for me, must remain one approach among others, well-adapted to certain tasks, but not all of them. Moreover, a concern for people, helping them out in the profession (there are minor distresses, and sometimes major ones), a meticulous respect for the expression of their thinking when citing them – in a word, amiability – founded on a constructive agnosticism and real (that is, modest) advances, all this seems to me to be more beneficial to research than any epistemological or proselytizing rigidity, even in the case of semiology. This is what Roland Barthes 'taught' me, without ever saying as much. And today, to pay back the favor, I cherish being able to say this to other people, to all those who would like (to re-use a turn of phrase that he liked) to understand me beyond my words.

Conversation recorded on September 23, 1989.

Notes

1. [Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, 'Christian Metz et le mirage de l'énonciation', *Iris* 10 (1989), pp. 105–118.]
2. [Jens Toft, 'Pour une théorie sémiotique de l'histoire du cinéma', *Iris* 10 (1989), pp. 177–181.]
3. [An untranslatable pun: '*tous les sots sont périlleux*' literally means 'all fools are dangerous', but the joke plays on the homophony with '*saut périlleux*' (somersault). Trans.]
4. [Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse Revisited*, translated by Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988).]
5. [Jean Paul Simon, *Le filmique et le comique: Essai sur le film comique* (Paris: Éditions Albatros, 1979).]
6. [Marc Vernet, 'Le personnage de film', *Iris* 7 (1986), pp. 81–110.]

7. [Jean-Louis Comolli, 'Un corps en trop', *Cahiers du cinéma* 278 (1977), pp. 5–16; translated as 'Historical Fiction: A Body Too Much' in *Screen* 19, 2 (1978), pp. 41–53.]
8. [Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier, 'Christian Metz and le mirage de l'énonciation', *Iris* 10 (1990), pp. 105–118; Roger Odin, 'Christian Metz et la linguistique', *Iris* 10 (1990), pp. 81–103.]
9. [Christian Metz, 'L'énonciation personnelle ou le site du film', *Vertigo* 1 (1988), pp. 13–34.]
10. [Käte Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973).]

