

## 9. Christian Metz, Editing, and Forms of Alternation<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

The goal of this chapter is to understand the role of Christian Metz's work in the history of theories of film editing, and in particular with respect to alternation devices. The authors discuss how Metz's propositions (with the Grand Syntagmatique in particular) cleared up a great deal of ambiguity around definitions of these editing devices. They examine Metz's syntagmatic analysis of the images in the film *Adieu Philippine* (Jacques Rozier, F 1962) in order to identify three problems that the Grand Syntagmatique's 'alternating' techniques posed for him. These three problems represent areas for future research that will have to be pursued if new light is to be cast on the forms in which crosscutting first emerged.

**Keywords:** film semiotics/film semiology, Grand Syntagmatique, editing devices, forms of alternation, parallel editing, crosscutting

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For the Zurich conference on the work of Christian Metz, we believed it germane to seize the opportunity it presented to discuss the advances that the French semiotician made possible with respect to understanding the various ‘mechanisms’ of film editing. More precisely, here we will examine Metz’s ideas on *alternation*. The two authors of the present text have been engaged for many years in far-reaching explorations of the advent of cross-cutting, through two research projects funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada:<sup>2</sup> the first studied the emergence in early cinema of the forms of the discursive practice of *alternation*, founded on the recurrence of the terms of two series; while the second, with broader aims, had as its goal the classification and analysis of the earliest forms of editing in the kine-attractography era.<sup>3</sup>

Because alternation has a leading role in the history of editing,<sup>4</sup> we thought it important to analyze the different forms that this configuration can take before cinema’s institutionalization and to highlight the techniques used before this discursive practice was codified by the institution. We feel it is all the more essential because, in the view of some scholars, alternation made it possible to instill a new mode of expression. Noël Burch, for example, believes that ‘the emergence of the alternating syntagm[a] has to be seen as the foundation-stone of modern syntax’.<sup>5</sup>

It was primarily through his work on the *grande syntagmatique*<sup>6</sup> (hereafter the GS) that Metz, in the late 1960s, set out to untangle the maze of names proposed in numerous ‘editing charts’ produced by film theorists since the late 1910s. One of Metz’s most important feats with his GS chart was his success in clearing up a good deal of the ambiguity around definitions of editing techniques, developing a detailed and precise nomenclature by looking at things from a fresh perspective despite also drawing on tradition, as

2 These two projects were carried out under the leadership of André Gaudreault at the Université de Montréal from 2004 to 2007 for the former and from 2010 to 2013 for the latter.

3 For an understanding of what is meant by the term ‘kine-attractography’, see André Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction: From Kinematography to Cinema*, trans. by Timothy Barnard (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011 [2008]).

4 See in particular Nicolas Dulac and André Gaudreault, ‘Crosscutting in the Face of History: The Case of *Attack on a China Mission*’, trans. by Timothy Barnard, *Early Popular Visual Culture*, 7/1 (2009), pp. 1-18.

5 Noël Burch, *Life to those Shadows*, trans. and ed. by Ben Brewster (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990 [1991]), p. 157.

6 Christian Metz, *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema*, trans. by Michael Taylor (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974 [1968]), in particular the chapter ‘Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film’, pp. 108-46. Note that this translation employs the expression ‘large syntagmatic category’ for Metz’s term *grande syntagmatique*, which we have retained here.

he clearly indicates. Indeed, Metz himself stated that his eight syntagmatic types were based on ‘certain “presemiotic” analyses by critics, historians, and theoreticians of the cinema’ who preceded him:

Among the authors who have devised tables of montage, or classifications of various kinds – or who have studied separately a specific type of montage – I am indebted notably to Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Kuleshov, Timoshenko, Béla Balázs, Rudolf Arnheim, André Bazin, Edgar Morin, Gilbert Cohen-Séat, Jean Mitry, Marcel Martin, Henri Agel, François Chevassu, Anne Souriau and one or two others perhaps whom I have unintentionally overlooked.<sup>7</sup>

One of the achievements of the GS was to distinguish between crosscutting and parallel editing,<sup>8</sup> two of the main forms of alternation. Because Metz’s writings have been so widely read, this distinction has taken hold, to the extent that it is almost universally acknowledged by French-language scholars.

The situation was quite different a scant fifteen years before Metz’s initial writings on the subject, however. This at least is what can be deduced by consulting the writings of Etienne Souriau and his daughter Anne Souriau. The title of an important text published by the former in 1951 in the

7 Metz, ‘Problems of Denotation’, p. 120.

8 One might wonder, incidentally, why authors such as Metz, Agel, Martin, and Mitry grant so much importance to such a little-used technique in classical narrative cinema as ‘parallel editing’ (Metz makes it one of his eight syntagmatic types). In our view, the great use French theorists made of the work of their Russian counterparts plays a part in this. Martin, for example (but also Agel), refers to the ideas of Pudovkin, who distinguishes three techniques we might describe after the fact as parallel editing (the synthesis here is by Martin): ‘Antithesis (an opulent storefront – a beggar), Parallelism (the demonstrators – the ice in *Mother*), [and] Analogy (the metaphor of the slaughterhouse in *Strike* [Sergei M. Eisenstein, SU 1925].’ It would seem that Agel and Martin granted a special role to parallel editing after reading Pudovkin (and the other Soviet film theorists), thereby inaugurating a tradition amongst French-language scholars. The situation was entirely different in English: as we explained in an earlier publication, the distinction between simultaneous events and not-relevant temporal relations (between what French-language scholars call ‘montage alterné’ [crosscutting] on the one hand and ‘montage parallèle’ [parallel editing] on the other) does not exist in the same way in the English-speaking tradition. Indeed, in English the two expressions are completely interchangeable. See Marcel Martin, *Le langage cinématographique* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 1955), p. 140; Henri Agel (in collaboration with Geneviève Agel), *Précis d’initiation au cinéma* (Paris: Editions de l’école, 1957); and André Gaudreault and Philippe Gauthier, ‘Crosscutting, a Programmed Language’, in *The Griffith Project*, ed. by Paolo Cherchi Usai, 12 vols. (London: BFI, 1999–2008), XII (2008), 30–47 (pp. 37–38).

*Revue internationale de filmologie*, 'La structure de l'univers filmique et le vocabulaire de la filmologie', indicates off the bat its author's concern for questions of vocabulary. We cannot help but notice, however, the obvious lack of terms to identify alternation techniques:

I am shown the course of two simultaneous events in *alternating* slices. I see Dolores embroidering in the parlor [...] while stopping at times to look towards the window with expectation. Then I see Ramiro galloping down the road. Then I see Dolores again. I understand perfectly that Ramiro is galloping while Dolores awaits him: the two events are contemporary in the diegetic time; they alternate in filmophanic time. Nothing could be clearer.<sup>9</sup>

There can be little doubt that Souriau's '*alternating* slices' are what film theory would end up identifying as 'crosscutting' ('montage *alterné*'), but Souriau, otherwise so careful in his vocabulary, does not yet go so far as to use a suitable expression (such as 'montage *alterné*' [crosscutting]). Paradoxically, although his entire text is attached to suggesting 'terms in order to [...] avoid having to repeat these explanations each time',<sup>10</sup> this desire concerns not editing devices but rather '*levels of existence of the filmic universe*',<sup>11</sup> leading him to conceive his famous 'filmology vocabulary' (with its concepts afilmic, profilmic, filmographic, filmophanic, screenic, diegetic, etc.).

In the present case, what Souriau suggests is that we distinguish, in the case of a kind of editing that presents 'two simultaneous events unfolding in alternating slices', the *diegetic* level (what is 'depicted by the film'<sup>12</sup>) from the filmophanic level ('the phenomena related to this depiction that is projected for viewers'<sup>13</sup>). In *filmophanic* time, Dolores's adventures (time A, say) and those of Ramiro (time B) are depicted in an alternating and discontinuous manner (A<sup>1</sup>-B<sup>1</sup>-A<sup>2</sup>-B<sup>2</sup>). But in *diegetic* time, each series – taken

9 Etienne Souriau, 'La structure de l'univers filmique et le vocabulaire de la filmologie', *Revue internationale de filmologie*, 7-8 (1951), 231-41 (pp. 233-34) (our emphasis).

10 Souriau, 'La structure', p. 234 (our emphasis). Souriau's complete remark is as follows: 'Nothing could be clearer, but it still needs to be said and to have the terms with which to say it: first in order to avoid having to repeat these explanations each time, or to count on a more or less vague and confusingly suggestive term to fill in for such explanations; and also because these words have a role in a structural whole.'

11 See in particular Souriau, 'La structure', p. 238, where he asks: 'Have we finished our exploration of the filmic universe through its various levels of existence?'

12 Ibid., p. 237.

13 Ibid., p. 236.

as a block – is in continuity (in the diegesis, A<sup>2</sup> follows A<sup>1</sup> and B<sup>2</sup> follows B<sup>1</sup>), and the events in each block are presented as unfolding at the same time as the events in the other block (A<sup>1</sup>A<sup>2</sup> takes place at the same time as B<sup>1</sup>B<sup>2</sup>).

We may thus presume that in the early 1950s, film theory did not yet have a stable vocabulary to describe alternation techniques. This fact is even more bluntly apparent in a volume Souriau edited in 1953, two short years after the publication of his text quoted above. In an article of almost surgical theoretical precision entitled ‘Succession et simultan  t   dans le film’, Anne Souriau explored all the ins and outs of what would later be described as ‘crosscutting’, describing it from top to bottom and from side to side *without ever allowing herself, like her father, to give it a name*:

Most often, however, the two *simultaneous actions* are simply shown to us in *alternating order*. The single succession of shots in a film is made up of *two intertwined successions*.

When the *interlacing* is not tight enough, the viewer can no longer tell whether the scenes being shown took place one after the other or at the same time.

Through spontaneous interpolation, we follow in a continuous manner the *parallel existences* of two stories shown discontinuously.

The *alternation effect* is reinforced when the alternation is prompt.

Moreover, the scenes are not, properly speaking, *parallel*. They are, more precisely, *converging*.

In the face of a well-done chase sequence the audience is stirred, because the encounter of *alternating scenes* is virtually contained in these actions.<sup>14</sup>

Here, as can be seen, circumlocutions abound: simultaneous action, alternating order, interlacing succession, intertwining, the parallel existences of two stories shown discontinuously, alternation effect, parallel scenes, converging scenes, alternating scenes.

This lack of clear and precise terminology is just as obvious in the work of French film theorists and historians of the 1950s and early 1960s (with one exception, that of Marcel Martin writing in 1955, which we will discuss below). Here are examples from three figures of the period, Henri Agel, Andr   Bazin, and Jean Mitry:

<sup>14</sup> Anne Souriau, ‘Succession et simultan  t   dans le film’, in *L’univers filmique*, ed. by Etienne Souriau (Paris: Flammarion, 1953), 59–73 (pp. 67–68; our emphasis).

1. In 1957, inspired by the work of Vsevolod Pudovkin on montage,<sup>15</sup> Henri Agel used the expression ‘montage parallèle’ (‘parallel editing’) to describe a sequence that we today would see instead as an example of crosscutting (‘montage *alterné*’): ‘Parallel editing shows us in alternation two simultaneous actions taking place in different places.’<sup>16</sup> Agel also uses, in a somewhat consistent manner, the expression ‘montage alterné’ (‘crosscutting’) to describe a sequence that we today would see instead as an example of parallel editing:

Griffith’s *Intolerance* ([USA] 1916) remains to this day one of the boldest attempts at crosscutting. The film has four episodes which are initially shown separately and then interlock with each other: the Fall of Babylon, the Passion of Christ, the St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre and the Mother and the Law (the Modern story).<sup>17</sup>

2. In 1958, in the chapter entitled ‘Montage interdit’ in the first volume of *Qu’est-ce que le cinéma?*, André Bazin also uses the expression ‘montage parallèle’ (parallel editing) to describe a sequence that we today would see instead as an example of crosscutting. This sequence alternates between events taking place simultaneously (on the one hand, a young boy bringing a lion cub back to his family’s encampment, and on the other the lioness tracking the boy from a distance: ‘Up to this point everything has been shown in parallel editing and the somewhat naive attempt at suspense has seemed quite conventional.’)<sup>18</sup>

3. Jean Mitry, for his part, in his *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma* (1963 and 1965), makes no distinction between the expressions ‘montage alterné’ (crosscutting) and ‘montage parallèle’ (parallel editing). He uses them indiscriminately (as English speakers still do today with the respective

15 An English reprint of Pudovkin’s book on editing was published in 1954 under the title *Film Technique and Film Acting* (London: Vision), and it is to this edition that Agel refers. The first English editions of *Film Technique* and *Film Acting* were published in 1929 and 1933 respectively.

16 Agel, *Précis d’initiation*, p. 97 (our emphasis).

17 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

18 André Bazin, ‘The Virtues and Limitations of Montage’, in *What is Cinema?*, trans. by Hugh Gray, 2 vols. (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 1967), I [1958], 41–52 (p. 49) (our emphasis). Note that this translation of Bazin employs the expression ‘parallel montage’ rather than ‘parallel editing’ as given above. This chapter is a reworking of two previously published articles in *Cahiers du cinéma*. Note that the section of the text we quote here is not found in either of these two articles but was added for the 1958 version. The sequence analyzed by Bazin is from the film *Where No Vultures Fly* (Harry Watt, UK 1951), about the life of a young family in South Africa during the Second World War.

terms indicated here) to describe a technique that alternates two series of events presented as unfolding simultaneously in the diegetic universe suggested by the film. Writing about *The Birth of a Nation* (D.W. Griffith, USA 1915), Mitry remarks:

In a series of faster and faster crosscuts, we pass from sequences showing the town of Atlanta in flames to scenes of terror in the Cameron farm, returning to the battle scene and scenes of brother killing brother. And so on. In the final sequence, at the end of which the Camerons, holed up in a tiny hut, are saved in the nick of time by the Ku Klux Klan, the parallel editing is made to fit a clever quasi-musical rhythm. [...] For instance, we cut from a wide angle showing the besieged hut to shots becoming ever closer revealing the Camerons preparing for the fight. We see the face of one of them, the actions of another, etc. From the Camerons, we cut to the ride of the Klansmen. [...] A series of closeups and extreme closeups picks up the galloping horses' hooves [...] and once again we see the whole cavalcade crossing the prairie. [...] We return to the hut. [...] Back to the ride. [...] And the alternation is kept up until the final crescendo with which the film is resolved.<sup>19</sup>

We should note that, despite the fact that Mitry uses crosscutting on some occasions and parallel editing on others, the only technique being discussed in this long excerpt is what French-speaking scholars would call 'montage alterné' (strictly speaking: crosscutting, in keeping with the principles of the GS, which have taken hold amongst French-speaking scholars).

One page earlier in the same book, Mitry uses the expression 'contrast editing' to describe a technique that alternated two series of motifs in a kind of parallelism between two situations whose temporal relation to each other is not relevant (this technique thus corresponds instead to a sequence in parallel editing [*montage parallèle*]). Thus Mitry wrote the following about *The Ex-Convict* (Edwin S. Porter, USA 1904):

In *The Ex-Convict*, Porter opted for what we know nowadays as contrast editing. In this drama, which shows the problem of an ex-convict being refused work by a wealthy industrialist, the American director contrasts

19 Jean Mitry, *The Aesthetics and Psychology of the Cinema*, trans. by Christopher King (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997 [1963]), pp. 96-97 (our emphasis). Note that, in the final sentence, this translation of Mitry employs the term 'crosscutting' rather than 'alternation' as given above.

scenes showing, on the one hand, the luxurious interior of a bourgeois home and, on the other, the miserable hovel of the ex-convict. This use of editing in a sequence of comparison where the dramatic development depends on alternating scenes brought the technique one step closer to the art it was to become some years later.<sup>20</sup>

It is clear that in 1963, when the first volume of *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma* was published, vocabulary around these techniques was not yet settled, as is apparent in the fact that Mitry also wrote the following about what we might call the 'macrostructural' editing of *Intolerance*:

Enlarging upon the technique of interwoven editing and parallel action, Griffith, with four separate story lines to maintain, was to jump continually from one to the other and follow, through time and space, the course of four tragedies whose events, related thematically to one another, contributed cumulatively to the overall theme.<sup>21</sup>

20 Mitry, *Aesthetics and Psychology*, p. 95 (our emphasis). Note that Mitry's description of the film is a little 'whimsical'. Whether what he describes is in the film or not, however, Mitry nevertheless defines what, for him, is 'contrast editing'. One might presume that Mitry used this expression under the 'influence' (the word is not strong enough) of Lewis Jacobs, for we can find the entire passage we have just quoted, but *in English*, in a volume published twenty-four years before Mitry's volume in French: 'In *The Ex-Convict*, for instance, a wealthy manufacturer refuses to give an ex-convict work. It was necessary to contrast the two men's life situations in order to emphasize for the audience the drama of their encounter. Porter therefore employed the formal device now known as contrast editing. Scenes of the poverty-stricken home of the ex-convict were opposed to scenes of luxury in the manufacturer's household, and thus by implication and inference the sympathy of the audience was directed. This new application of editing, not straightforward or direct but comparative, pointed to future subtlety in film expression. Not until years later, however, was contrast editing to be properly valued and developed.' Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1969 [1939]), pp. 46-47. We have provided the published English translation of Mitry's text. Because the translator was not aware of the 'influence' of Jacobs on Mitry's remarks, the two texts do not match in English. In order to enable the English reader to appreciate the degree of Jacobs' influence on Mitry, we provide here the French text: 'Dans *The Ex-Convict*, un industriel refuse du travail à un ancien condamné. Pour signifier le drame et surtout pour agir sur l'esprit du spectateur, il était nécessaire d'insister sur la différence de situation des deux hommes. Porter fut donc amené à ce qu'on appelle aujourd'hui le *montage contrasté*. Des scènes de vie dans le misérable intérieur de l'ancien condamné étaient opposées à d'autres scènes de vie luxueuse dans l'intérieur bourgeois. Cette application du montage dans une suite comparative dont la progression reposait sur l'*alternance* des scènes apportait un point de plus à l'actif d'un art qui ne devait généraliser cette formule que beaucoup plus tard.' It is an almost perfect match. Jean Mitry, *Esthétique et psychologie du cinéma*, 2 vols. (Paris: Editions universitaires, 1963-1965), I [1963], p. 275 (our emphasis).

21 Mitry, *Aesthetics and Psychology*, p. 97 (our emphasis).



In one case (*The Ex-Convict*), Mitry uses the expressions ‘contrast cutting’ and ‘alternation’, while in another (*Intolerance*), he chooses to use ‘interwoven editing’ (‘montage entrecroisé’) and ‘parallel action’. True, these two films operate under different paradigms: *The Ex-Convict* is a worthy representative of kine-attractography, while *Intolerance* is a product of institutional cinema.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, Mitry proposes a number of other terms and expressions, which he grafts onto the terminology he already uses, running the risk of adding more confusion to the already prevailing state of confusion.

In 1968, when the definitive version of the GS table appeared in the first volume of Christian Metz’s famous *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*,<sup>23</sup> this vocabulary was still up in the air in French. Metz emphasized that alternate<sup>24</sup> syntagma are ‘well known by the theoreticians of the cinema’ under a variety of names (‘montage alterné’ [crosscutting], ‘montage parallèle’ [parallel editing], ‘synchronisme’, etc.).<sup>25</sup> By contributing to ‘institutionalizing’, at least in the French-speaking world, a clear and well-marked distinction between crosscutting (his term: alternate *syntagma*)

22 For an understanding of what is meant by the term ‘institutional cinema’, see Gaudreault, *Film and Attraction*, passim.

23 This table appears at the end of chapter five, entitled ‘Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film’, of Metz, *Film Language*, p. 146. As noted in the French edition only, the chapter is an ‘(extensively “augmented”) reworking’ (*Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, 2 vols. [Paris: Klincksieck, 1968-1972], I [1968], p. 245) of three previous texts: ‘Problèmes de dénotation dans le film de fiction: contribution à une sémiologie du cinéma’, report at the *International Preparatory Conference on the Problems of Semiotics* (Kazimierz, Poland: 1966), reproduced in *Signe, langage, culture*, ed. by A.J. Greimas and others (The Hague/Paris: Mouton, 1970), pp. 403-13; ‘La grande syntagmatique du film narratif’, *Communications*, 8 (1966), pp. 120-24; and ‘Un problème de sémiologie du cinéma’, *Image et son*, 201 (1967), pp. 68-79. Although Metz’s ideas evolved between 1966 and 1968 and his major syntagmatic types shifted a little, the distinction between crosscutting and parallel editing remained the same for him. This is why we will not examine here the evolution of Metz’s ideas with respect to the GS. For more information on this question, see Alain Boillat, *Cinéma, machine à mondes* (Chêne-Bourg: Georg Editeur, 2014), p. 214.

24 In conformance with the published English-language translation of Metz, the present authors use here the English expression ‘alternate syntagma’ to render Metz’s term ‘syntagme alterné’, which is confusing because the syntagma being described is not ‘alternate’ but rather ‘alternating’. Our ideal translation would thus be ‘alternating syntagma’. Metz’s English translator, however, reserved this latter term to translate the expression ‘syntagme alternant’, which we describe here as a ‘configuration of alternation’. The published English translation has left us with no choice but to follow its lead and to use the expression ‘alternate syntagma’ for ‘syntagme alterné’.

25 Metz, ‘Problems of Denotation’, p. 128. Note that this translation of Metz employs the expressions ‘alternate montage’ rather than ‘crosscutting’, and ‘parallel montage’ rather than ‘parallel editing’ as given above.

and parallel editing (his term: parallel *syntagma*), Metz made proposals that contributed, like no others, to dissipating much of the confusion around alternation techniques in his day. 'Much of the confusion', we maintain, because the syntagmatic analysis that Metz carried out on the image track of the film *Adieu Philippine* (Jacques Rozier, F/I 1962) demonstrates that some confusion still remained (to which we will return below).

Metz's definitions appear at first to be clear, plain, and precise. For him, crosscutting arises from a form of alternation that has a particular relation with narrative temporality. His definition of the 'alternate syntagma' describes the situations in which it becomes possible:

The editing presents alternately two or more series of events in such a way that within each series the temporal relationships are consecutive, but that, between the series taken as wholes, the temporal relationship is one of simultaneity (which can be expressed by the formula 'Alternation of images equals simultaneity of occurrences').<sup>26</sup>

One of the essential criteria for crosscutting is thus that the series of events unfold *simultaneously* in the diegetic universe suggested by the film.

As for parallel editing (parallel syntagma in Metz's vocabulary), this arises from a form of alternation which, on the contrary, has no precise temporal relation:

Editing brings together and interweaves two or more alternating 'motifs', but no precise relationship (whether temporal or spatial) is assigned to them – at least on the level of denotation. This kind of editing has a direct symbolic value (scenes of the life of the rich interwoven with scenes of the life of the poor, images of tranquility alternating with images of disturbance, shots of city and the country, of the sea and of wheat fields, and so on).<sup>27</sup>

In this case, the two series of motifs suggest a kind of symbolic parallel between situations whose temporal relation is not relevant.

26 Metz, 'Problems of Denotation', p. 128. Note that this translation of Metz employs the expressions 'montage' rather than 'editing', and 'alternating of images' rather than 'alternation of images' as given above.

27 Metz, 'Problems of Denotation', p. 125. Note that this translation of Metz employs throughout this quotation the term 'montage' rather than 'editing' as given above.

Although Metz does not come out and say so,<sup>28</sup> we might imagine that he drew on the work of Marcel Martin for the principle by which crosscutting and parallel editing are differentiated according to the criterion of narrative temporality (simultaneous series of events in the former and non-relevant temporal relation in the latter); in Martin's book *Le Langage cinématographique*, published in 1955, we find a clear and precise proposal in this sense.<sup>29</sup> There Martin explains that, for him, crosscutting connects motifs whose temporal relation is one of simultaneity: '*crosscutting* is a form of editing by *parallelism* based on the *strict contemporaneousness* of the two actions it juxtaposes, which moreover most often conclude by meeting at the end of the film'.<sup>30</sup>

In addition, Martin specifies that *parallel editing* connects motifs whose *temporal relation is not relevant*: '*parallel editing*: two (and sometimes several) actions are brought to the forefront by the intercalation of fragments belonging *alternately* to each of them in order to *create meaning from their juxtaposition*. [...] This form of editing is characterized by *its indifference to time*'.<sup>31</sup>

Note that Martin, to define what he understands by *parallel editing*, uses the word 'alternately', just as he uses the word 'parallelism' in his definition of *crosscutting*. In truth, as any dictionary will point out, the semantic fields of the words 'parallel' and 'alternating' overlap enormously: what a *crosscutting* ('montage *alterné*') sequence does is mix together two events taking place, in a sense, *parallel* to one another ('in parallel' in this case indicating that the actions are simultaneous), while what a *parallel editing* sequence does is mix together two series shown to viewers in an *alternating* manner. It is apparent that, if one is not careful, there is enormous potential here for

28 In an unnumbered footnote from which we quoted a part above, Metz states 'Because there is not enough room here[,] I will not (at least in this text) indicate how the various classifications of these authors [to whom he is indebted] are distributed in relation to each specific point of my chart.' Metz, 'Problems of Denotation', p. 121.

29 Marcel Martin, *Langage cinématographique*, pp. 147-50.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 149. In this quotation, the emphasis is in the original, except for the word 'parallelism', which is our emphasis.

31 *Ibid.*, p. 147. In this quotation, the emphasis is in the original, except for the word 'alternately', which is our emphasis. Martin also drew on the work of Pudovkin and Balázs to refine his definition of parallel editing: 'One sees that Pudovkin's montage by antithesis, analogy and leitmotif correspond to what I call parallel editing, which also encompasses the metaphorical, allegorical and poetic forms of montage defined by Balázs, as all these forms of editing consist in bringing together, without any consideration for temporal co-existence (or spatial co-existence either, but space has much less importance, as we shall see), events whose juxtaposition should give rise to a precise and generally symbolic ideological meaning.' (pp. 148-49).

confusion:<sup>32</sup> the overlap between the two lexical fields is considerable, and it is only by decree (and this in a sense is what Metz did, following Martin) that one can impose a clear distinction in the definition and terminology of the two most important forms of alternation. This, moreover, explains the haziness that existed before the 'Metzian decree' and the interchangeability of the two terms even today in English.

That said, the sources of confusion did not all magically disappear with Metz's 'decree'. One only has to look at how Metz himself juggles his own definitions once he passes from the conceptual world of theory<sup>33</sup> to the quite real world of film practice (and its corollary in film studies, film analysis). For Metz had the felicitous idea of trying out his nomenclature (with the collaboration of Michèle Lacoste) on a film, in two articles first published in 1967 in the magazine *Image et son*.<sup>34</sup> Metz and Lacoste propose a *table*

32 This probably explains not only the prevailing confusion around the terms in question but also the lack of consistency in their use and the great instability of their meaning from one author to the next, if not within the work of one and the same author. This is the case with Mitry, for example, who proposes the following to describe certain features of crosscutting: 'Naturally this means of expression in no ways denies the relevance of using shots separately whose meaning and purpose are quite different. Moreover, it must be obvious that the simultaneity of scenes being played out in different locations (otherwise known as *parallel action*), can only be suggested by alternating events with successive fragmentation.' Mitry, *Aesthetics and Psychology*, p. 97 (emphasis in original). The mere fact that the attributive adjective 'parallel' can be used in such a context (even when done so quite adequately, as is the case here) can be a source of confusion, because what Mitry is describing here is well and truly crosscutting (according to the 'Martin/Metz' system of nomenclature, which we adopt).

33 It is true that Metz's ideas are relatively abstract, particularly in the case of the 'parallel syntagma', because as one of the main exegetes of the GS, Michel Colin, explains, 'Note that here Metz does not exemplify with a concrete example, unlike what he would do with the bracket syntagma, for example, but rather with ad hoc examples which have not been manifested or may never be.' Michel Colin, *La Grande Syntagmatique revisitée* (Limoges: Trames and Université de Limoges, 1989), p. 20. The same is true for alternate syntagma, for which Metz does not give concrete examples from films: 'Typical example: shot of the pursuers, followed by a shot of the pursued, and back to a shot of the pursuers.' Metz, 'Problems of Denotation', p. 128.

34 The texts are 'Outline of the Autonomous Segments in Jacques Rozier's film *Adieu Philippine*' and 'Syntagmatic Study of Jacques Rozier's film *Adieu Philippine*', in *Film Language*, pp. 149-76 and 177-82 respectively. These were included in the first volume of *Essais sur la signification au cinéma* in 1968 (translated as *Film Language*, from which we quote here), but were published before under the common title 'Un problème de sémiologie du cinéma' in *Image et son*, 201 (January 1967), pp. 81-98. In *Essais*, and its English translation, the two texts make up a section (section III), about which the author indicates in a note on the title page of the section: 'The following analysis was conducted with the assistance of Michèle Lacoste' (p. 147 of the English edition). In the initial version (the magazine publication), however, the second text is identified as the work of Metz and Lacoste and the first as the work of Lacoste alone. The latter version was in addition extensively revised (we will mention one of the modifications below).

of *autonomous segments* – by way of a fine-grained, segment-by-segment analysis – for the film *Adieu Philippine* and a *syntagmatic study* of the same film. These studies provide us with a series of self-critical comments that are very useful to anyone seeking to understand all the ins and outs of the GS table. In their syntagmatic analysis of *Adieu Philippine*, Metz and Lacoste encountered a series of problems, particularly around alternation techniques. Naturally, part of the difficulty lies in the fact that the syntagmatic organization of Rozier's film resists somewhat Metz's predefined criteria, as might logically have been expected. But the main problem, in our view, lies in the lacunae in the definitions found in the GS itself.<sup>35</sup>

These lacunae are nowhere more tangible and visible than in the syntagmatic types that weave together two (or more) series of events. Metz was quite aware of this and identified three problems that alternation posed for him.<sup>36</sup>

### Problem Number One

Metz admits that, in its final state, the GS does not make it possible to account for every technique that could be classified as what we can identify as the 'configuration of alternation'. It is thus impossible for him to fit certain segments of *Adieu Philippine* into the GS table. This is the case with segment 32, for example, which is described as follows:

Liliane's room. The two girls are confiding in each other. Liliane tells Juliette that she has gone out secretly with Michel. The alternation in this case occurs between two series, each of which has a different diegetic status: one is actual; the other is past and is *told* by one of the characters.<sup>37</sup>

Because there is *alternation*, we should be in the presence here of either an alternate syntagma or of a parallel syntagma. The problem is that the segment does not meet the criteria of either of these categories: segment 32

35 It would be astonishing if this were not the case, for what Metz proposed with his GS table was an immense construction site, something no one before him had dared take on. His goal, he himself stated, was to 'determine the number and the nature of the main syntagmatic *types* used in current films' (Metz, *Film Language*, p. 120), or more precisely to draw up 'a list of all the main types of image-orderings occurring in films' (Metz, 'Problems of Denotation', p. 121). That's quite a programme, one has to admit!

36 Metz, 'Outline of the Autonomous Segments', p. 164.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 163.

cannot be a parallel syntagma because alternation assigns a 'precise [temporal] relationship' to the 'alternating motifs' which, at the same time, have no 'symbolic value'.<sup>38</sup> This is why Metz 'associate[s] it provisionally with the alternate syntagma' but of a 'relatively rare' type which, combining present and past, cannot (cannot yet, say) find a place in the GS table: 'the two series, even when each one is considered as a whole, are not simultaneous; the series "Liliane-Juliette conversation" is subsequent to the series "Liliane-Michel" (alternate flashback).'<sup>39</sup>

Metz could perhaps have gone a step further and created a new category (the *alternate flashback syntagma*, for example), but he held back: 'No doubt, it will be necessary eventually to redefine [this type] as a specific type, whose position in the outline of the syntagmatic categories remains to be determined.'<sup>40</sup> The configuration of alternation can thus give rise to a number of techniques other than *alternate* and *parallel* syntagma alone. Metz himself said, in notes written some time after his book's publication<sup>41</sup> and in which he undertakes a critique of his GS table, that '*at a minimum* what is needed is to subdivide the alternate syntagma into several sub-types'.<sup>42</sup> The vexing question of segment 32 of *Adieu Philippine* would, moreover, come back to haunt him in these same notes:

38 Metz, 'Problems of Denotation', p. 125.

39 Metz, 'Outline of the Autonomous Segments', p. 163.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 163-64.

41 See Christian Metz, 'Topo susceptible de servir de "partie introductive" et/ou conclusive à tout exposé sur ma "grande syntagmatique", pour situer cette dernière à l'usage d'un quelconque public peu sémiologisé (ou même un peu plus sémiologisé)', handwritten note preserved at the Bibliothèque du film (BiFi) in Paris (ms. CM1441). Nine undated sheets of paper. The authors thank Martin Lefebvre for having brought this document to their attention and for making a copy available to them.

42 Metz also suggests, in these same notes, that he would have to rethink his syntagmatic types from zero, using in particular the ideas of Noam Chomsky: 'I started from the principle that the units of these two orders coincided: a non-Chomskian *structuralist hypothesis*. [...] Chomsky would thus be useful for his hypothesis of the *dual structure* (surface/deep), rather than *precise rules for grammatical generation*, which is something different.' To the best of our knowledge, Metz did not go down this path, but Dominique Chateau (1986) and Michel Colin (1989) did, each on his own. Chateau extends Metz's model by setting out the prolegomena of a generative 'modeling' based in particular on the work of Chomsky (see his *Le cinéma comme langage* [Brussels: AISS, 1986]). Colin, for his part, drew on Chomsky's rules for lexical sub-categorization to propose, for example, new classification rules for the syntagma of the GS in order to 'deduce many more types than those shown in the [GS] table' (Colin, *La Grande Syntagmatique revisitée*, p. 76). For a detailed analysis of the work of Chateau and Colin around the *grande syntagmatique*, see Warren Buckland, *The Cognitive Semiotics of Film* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 109-40.

*Criticism of the table*

[...] Even in films whose editing is fairly traditional, some sequences fit nowhere in my table.

For ex., no. 32 of *Adieu Philippine* (p. 163 of my book).<sup>43</sup>

**Problem Number Two**

Metz acknowledges the impossible task he is confronted with, in the absence of a ‘rigorous semiological theory’<sup>44</sup> capable of resolving the problem, of determining whether a sequence intercut with inserts should be seen as an autonomous segment comprising multiple inserts<sup>45</sup> or as belonging to one or the other of the two kinds of alternating syntagma (parallel and alternate). In his analysis of *Adieu Philippine*, Metz encountered a number of examples of *sequences intercut with inserts*,<sup>46</sup> leading him to search for criteria that would enable him to determine the threshold from which semioticians could conclude that alternation is truly present. There are two such criteria.

**The First Criterion**

Of the two criteria, the one which appears more circumscribed (and which is thus more clearly distinguished) involves the treatment given to some inserts by the filmmaker, by having them extend over two (or possibly more) successive shots. When we encounter, in a *sequence intercut with inserts*, an insert made up of more than one shot, the original syntagma into which these inserts are placed loses its ‘status’ as an *autonomous segment*

43 See Note 41.

44 Metz writes: ‘The solution would seem to assume that a rigorous semiological theory be established in order to account for *two facts* that are both very “pronounced” in films though neither of them has yet been satisfactorily explained [...]: (1) [...] the *transformation of the insert* [...] into an *alternate type* [...] (2) the distinction between *true alternation* [...] and *pseudo alternation* [...].’ Metz, ‘Outline of the Autonomous Segments’, p. 164; emphasis in original).

45 To identify what we call here a ‘sequence intercut with inserts,’ Metz constantly employs the expression ‘autonomous *segment* comprising multiple inserts,’ but it seems to us that this formulation is confusing and even a contradiction of terms. For Metz, the first kind of autonomous segment (recall that the seven other kinds are ‘syntagma’) is the ‘autonomous shot.’ Because Metz truly does see inserts as *segments*, it would have been preferable, in our view, for Metz to speak of a ‘*syntagma* comprising multiple inserts’ rather than of an ‘*autonomous segment* comprising multiple inserts.’ This is all the more true in that an ‘autonomous shot’ cannot, by definition, contain inserts, precisely because it is ONE shot.

46 These are ‘segments 12, 20, 22, 24, 30 and 31.’ Metz, ‘Outline of the Autonomous Segments’, p. 164.

*comprising multiple inserts* (to use Metz's expression). This is the case with segment 24, one of whose inserts, showing Michel on the telephone, is a *compound* (or *pluri-punctiliar*<sup>47</sup>) insert: '[...] *two [of the shots showing Michel] are organized sequentially; they function not as inserts but as a series.*'<sup>48</sup>

As a result, Metz sees the segment in question as an *alternate syntagma*.

Metz refers on two other occasions to the criterion of the 'pluri-punctiliar.' The first concerns segment 12 and the second concerns segments 22 and 23. Segment 12 is a *sequence intercut with inserts* but, because one of these is a compound insert, we cannot view the inserts in question as autonomous shots. The mere fact that one of the inserts is pluri-punctiliar seems sufficient for a series of inserts to acquire a 'higher' status which, in the case under study here (as with segment 24), enables the segment to be recognized as an *alternate syntagma*:

Inside the screening room. We see alternately the room itself (with the two girls, Pachala, and the client), and the screen on which the rushes of an unsuccessful commercial are flickering by. Between these rushes, increasingly funny, are interspersed shots of the spectators. [...] at least one of the images of the spectators (in all other respects similar to the others) *comprises two consecutive shots.*<sup>49</sup>

The lack of a pluri-punctiliar quality is, on the contrary, invoked to describe the nature of segments 22 and 23. There we are truly in the presence, Metz writes, of 'a scene with inserts, rather than an alternate syntagma,' one of the reasons being that 'the girls' faces [are] never more than a single shot'.<sup>50</sup> Thus the two segments under discussion remain autonomous from each other.

## The Second Criterion

The second criterion that arises out of Metz's analysis of Rozier's film comprises two complementary aspects, both of which, in a sense, concern the *extent* of the series of inserts: on the one hand, what we could identify as the *number* of inserts, and on the other, their *duration*.

47 For discussion in greater detail of what is meant by the term 'pluri-punctiliar' (as well as the term 'punctiliar'), see André Gaudreault, *From Plato to Lumière. Narration and Monstration in Literature and Cinema*, trans. by Timothy Barnard (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009 [1988]), in particular chapter 1.

48 Metz, 'Outline of the Autonomous Segments', p. 160 (our emphasis).

49 *Ibid.*, p. 156 (our emphasis).

50 *Ibid.*, p. 160.



Let's look first at segment 20, made up of four autonomous shots of Michel inserted in segment 19, as Michel speaks on the telephone with the two girls. Here, Metz concludes, the number of inserts showing Michel (there are four) is not enough to qualify as a 'series.' There are simply not enough of them. In addition, the ensemble they form is not long enough to constitute one of the two parts of an alternate syntagma (Metz deems their development too embryonic).<sup>51</sup> What is at issue in segment 19 is thus not only the frequency or recurrence of the inserts (their number), but also the temporal extent of the ensemble they make up, its temporal significance in a sense (its duration):

The episodes are experienced from the point of view of the girls; the shots of Michel are *not sufficiently elaborated, or frequent enough*, to constitute the second series of an alternate syntagma.<sup>52</sup>

The shots of Michel, Metz writes, are 'spatially discontinuous diegetic inserts', which represent 'four occurrences of theme B', 'four images [seen] as four variations of a single insert'.<sup>53</sup> This *sequence intercut with inserts* (this *segment comprising multiple inserts*, Metz would say) cannot be classified as a type belonging to the configuration of alternation, hence its categorization as an *episodic sequence*.

Metz brings out two other cases involving this second criterion – associated with the question of *number* and *duration* – but in terms that do not always make it possible to distinguish clearly, in his filmic examples, what pertains to the former and what pertains to the latter. Thus segments 22 and 23 (discussed above with respect to the criterion of the pluri-punctiliar), alternate in a way that is only faintly apparent:

The emphasis on the details of the studio atmosphere (shots of the head engineer at the sound monitor) and the *very brief references* to the girls' faces [...] indicate that this is a scene with inserts, rather than an alternate syntagma.<sup>54</sup>

51 How long exactly must a segment be to be considered an alternate syntagma? The text is silent on this question.

52 Metz, 'Outline of the Autonomous Segments', p. 159 (our emphasis).

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid., p. 160 (our emphasis).

The case is clear: mere reference is not enough, in Metz's eyes, to forge links between two series that will be solid enough for us to describe their relation as giving birth to an *alternate syntagma*.

Metz also identifies a case in which alternation is so faintly apparent that it is not even worthwhile to treat the inserts involved as autonomous shots (they thus lose even their quality as inserts). The segment concerned is no. 68:

The sequence ends with alternating shots of Horatio left behind and the others driving off, laughing, but it is an alternation that is *too subtly suggested* to produce a distinct syntagma.<sup>55</sup>

The shots that exude this hint of alternation are so minor, have so little significance, that Metz does not deem them sufficiently developed to constitute a legitimate *alternate syntagma* in the relations they establish with the shots showing the main action.

By way of a comment arising out of his analysis of segment 20, Metz adds an interesting proviso, this time concerning the duration of inserts alone (he speaks of the 'temps d'occupation de l'image' in French, the time the shot occupies the screen). This duration, moreover, is not significant enough for the segment under study to become an *alternate syntagma*:

We find within an autonomous shot A not one insert B but three or four inserts B, all of them repeating the same theme and separated from each other by returns to the original syntagma. When the quantitative difference between the duration of the image in A and the duration of the image in B is too great, it becomes impossible to speak of an 'alternate syntagma'.<sup>56</sup>

In other words, for the original segment of a series of inserts to attain the status of alternation, the inserts must have at least a certain amount of screen time.

Another obvious case of segments to categorize as references, and which Metz considers only according to the question of *duration*, is the telephone conversation between Pachala's wife and Michel (segments 30 and 31). Metz remarks about the first of these two segments:

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 173 (our emphasis).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 159.

Phone conversation, with inserts of one of the speakers. Pachala's wife answers a call from Michel; the latter is seen *only briefly*. On the other hand, Pachala's study, where Pachala is sleeping on a couch, is described at length, the scene continuing after the phone call.<sup>57</sup>

There are also cases where Metz makes reference only to the question of *number* in the second criterion. This is the case with segment 24 (which also, as we have seen, meets the criteria of the pluri-punctiliar), which interlaces shots from two 'themes,' on the basis of a fairly significant recurrence, such that the inserts lose their status as such.<sup>58</sup> Hence the recognition of the segment in question as an *alternate syntagma* (and not as an *autonomous segment comprising multiple inserts*):

[...] there is no strict equality between the two 'themes.' But the shots of Michel are *numerous* [...] they function not as inserts but as a series that alternates with a longer series.<sup>59</sup>

### Problem Number Three

Metz concedes that his GS, to be fully operational, must be able to base itself on the rigorous semiotic theory he advocates, which would enable him to distinguish between 'true alternations' and 'pseudo alternations.' For Metz, true alternations are those that 'establish a narrative doubling in the film'.<sup>60</sup> This is the case in particular when a sequence alternates between series of images from two 'distinct'<sup>61</sup> events. Such a sequence is thus an

57 Ibid., pp. 162-63 (our emphasis).

58 Here is a criterion whose boundaries are somewhat unclear. How many inserts exactly are needed for a *segment comprising multiple inserts* to be seen instead as an alternate syntagma? The text is silent on this question as well.

59 Metz, 'Outline of the Autonomous Segments', p. 160 (our emphasis). In the initial version of the text, written by Michèle Lacoste alone ('Tableau des segments autonomes du film *Adieu Philippe*', p. 87), the passage we have just quoted reads as follows: '[...] the shots of Michel are numerous and, especially, an *absolute criterion*, two of them are grouped in a sequence [...]' (our emphasis). The idea that this is an *absolute criterion* fell out of the formulation. Because we have been obliged, in order not to muddy the waters, to cut the later version of this quotation on two occasions, we believe it would be useful here to provide the reader with the passage in full: '[...] the shots of Michel are *numerous*, and *two of them are organized sequentially*; they function not as inserts but as a series that alternates with a longer series (Metz, 'Outline of the Autonomous Segments', p. 160; our emphasis).

60 Metz, 'Outline of the Autonomous Segments', p. 164.

61 'The story [...] contains a fair number of passages in which that narrative ramifies, and two *distinct* series of "telling little facts" appear alternately. This contrapuntal construction

*alternate syntagma*. As for pseudo alternation, this is ‘reduced to a mere visual alternation within a unitary space or else derives simply from the fact that the *filmed subject* itself assumes a vaguely “alternating” aspect within a certain relationship’.<sup>62</sup> Pseudo alternation is thus characterized by the fact that, despite appearances, the action shown creates one and only one event unit. This is the case, for example, with segment 3, whose shot-reverse shots might at first appear to be examples of alternate syntagma but which Metz classifies instead as another type of syntagma, that of the *scene*:

During the conversation [...] a series of shot-reverse shots shows us alternately each of the speakers as he or she is speaking. The alternation of shots [...] does not impede the action of the scene, which is a conversation in a café. [...] To check that in this case we are dealing with a scene and not with an alternate syntagma, one can try to commute the scene in one’s mind with an autonomous shot. The communication is perfectly possible: A single shot would have allowed one to treat the same subject with no difference other than that of connotation. The alternation, a simple switching back and forth of the camera, has no *distinctive* function in this instance.<sup>63</sup>

Thus one of the criteria for separating the wheat (‘true alternation’) from the chaff (‘pseudo alternation’) could be summed up as follows: if it is possible to film the sequence in a single shot (giving rise to a *sequence shot*, which for Metz is a sub-variety of the *autonomous shot*), then we are in the presence of pseudo alternation.

Nevertheless, we find in the analysis of Rozier’s film two examples that appear to contradict this differentiating criterion: Metz sees segments 12 and 43 as *alternate syntagma* even though these sequences unfold in a single space and, as a result, could have been filmed by a single camera in a single *sequence shot*.<sup>64</sup>

is maintained through the alternate syntagmas.’ Metz, ‘Syntagmatic Study’, p. 180 (our emphasis).

62 Metz, ‘Outline of the Autonomous Segments’, p. 164 (emphasis in original).

63 Ibid., pp. 151-52 (emphasis in original).

64 Segment 12 (viewing the rushes of a commercial in the production studio) could indeed have very easily been done in one shot by a single camera placed behind the viewers and with the screen and the image on it in the background. It is true that what is shown on the screen is taking place in another location. This is probably why Metz decided to classify the sequence as a form of alternate syntagma. Strangely, segment 43 is seen as an alternate syntagma, even though the action is taking place in a single location, as Metz himself describes: ‘*In the same location* (the set in the television studio), three simultaneous diegetic series alternate rapidly

\* \* \*

As can be seen, concern for understanding the diegesis (the signified) takes precedence in the GS over the formal composition when determining whether one is in the presence of an alternate type.<sup>65</sup> Martin Lefebvre is in agreement with us when he writes:

That's what interests Metz in the end: the fiction (meaning the diegetic, the construction of a world through fictional operations and the codified operations of film language). This is the price he is willing to pay to drop certain formal 'details'. What counts most of all is the understanding of the signified (the diegesis).<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, analysis of the world constructed through the operations of film language appears to interest Metz the most in the end, even though his work on the GS, in principle, takes two directions: the 'form' of film language and the 'content' of the film diegesis.

Accordingly, for Metz a full analysis of a film can only be carried out by studying both the diegesis (the filmic universe shown on screen) and editing (the units of time that make up the film). Otherwise, one is left 'examining the signifieds without taking the signifiers into consideration' or the opposite, 'study[ing] the signifiers without the signifieds'.<sup>67</sup>

For us it is more important, in our long-term work mentioned at the outset of this text, to grant a special place to concerns of a strictly *formal* nature (without at the same time overlooking the question of *content*) than it was for Metz in his work on the GS. In fact, as our main goal is to produce a fine-grained genealogical study of alternation<sup>68</sup> and to set out the parameters of

on the screen.' Metz, 'Outline of the Autonomous Segments', p. 166 (our emphasis). It is true that the set is subdivided into three distinct 'sub-locations': 1) 'sound monitor'; 2) the 'set' properly speaking; and 3) 'monitoring screens', which probably explains Metz's choice.

65 In this sense the case of segment 12 is an exception, in that the reasons given by Metz to view it as an *alternate syntagma* appear in this case to privilege the 'form' over the 'content': 'If we were to consider this autonomous segment as a scene [...], we would be able to give just as exact an account of the literalness of the narrated events, but we would not be able to account for the construction that organizes their narration; the alternating effect is clearly deliberate and systematic'. Metz, 'Outline of the Autonomous Segments', p. 156.

66 E-mail correspondence with the two authors dated 11 June 2014.

67 Metz, 'Problems of Denotation', pp. 143-44. Note that this translation of Metz employs the term 'significates' rather than 'signifieds' as given above.

68 This volume, on the emergence of crosscutting, is in the process of being written under contract with Columbia University Press. Its working title is *From Pathé to Griffith: The Emergence*

its establishment in the heart of institutional cinema, we believe that we must first identify the formal techniques that were used before discursive editing practices were 'codified'. This in any event has been the guiding principle behind the systematic study of moving pictures from this period that we have carried out over the past few years. The results have led us to conclude that the editing devices that can be identified during the period when the 'kine-attractography' paradigm reigned did not obey (of course not, we are tempted to say) any established rule and varied in many often quite subtle ways. Because of the absence of any standardization (such absence is an essential condition for a paradigm such as 'kine-attractography'), we believed it crucial to study every arrangement of shots displaying any kind of alternation (of which there were many, moreover, in the early 1900s).

As we continue our research, we will try to overcome the various aporia found in Metz's texts (and which are still seen today, nearly fifty years later, such that film theory and history still have a long road ahead). We will thus have to return to Metz's work in an attempt, in particular, to resolve the question of what role should be occupied in the history of crosscutting by a 'genre' known as the keyhole film, which proliferated between 1900 and 1906 and in which a character (most often a building concierge) indiscreetly bends down to observe a scene through a keyhole. This action was normally depicted by means of editing that *alternated* systematically on screen between the *subject looking* and the *object of its gaze*.<sup>69</sup> Are we, in such a case, in the presence of a patent example of crosscutting?

The same question arises in the cases of other recurring series of pictures, also based on the act of looking, whose underlying 'plot' boils down to showing characters who, through the use of optical instruments such as microscopes, telescopes, and other kinds of magnification lenses, scrutinize the world around them.<sup>70</sup> In a case such as this, there is clearly *systematic alternation* between the *subject looking* and the *object of its gaze*, but does this mean that we are, here too, in the presence of patent examples of crosscutting?

We might also pronounce judgment, in a manner as 'definitive' as possible, on the place in history that should be occupied by the alternation

*of Crosscutting to 1915* [forthcoming 2020].

69 Examples include *Par le trou de la serrure* (*What Happened to the Inquisitive Janitor*, Pathé, F 1901), *Un coup d'oeil par étage* (*Scene on Every Floor*, Pathé, F 1904), and *The Inquisitive Boots* (Hepworth, UK 1905).

70 As in pictures such as *Grandma's Reading Glass* (George A. Smith, UK 1900), *As Seen through a Telescope* (George A. Smith, UK 1900), *Ce que l'on voit de mon sixième* (*Scenes from My Balcony*, Pathé, F 1901), and *Un drame dans les airs* (*A Drama in the Air*, Pathé, F 1904).

configuration of the perennial favorite *Attack on a China Mission* (James Williamson, UK 1900). Often seen as the *earliest* example of crosscutting, we should examine how its 'narrative'<sup>71</sup> structure, despite being based on a form of alternation, does not meet the minimum criteria for crosscutting.

*Translated from French by Timothy Barnard*

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71 The scare quotes are used here to indicate that, despite its evident narrative euphoria, this picture from 1900 is also in keeping, considerably so, with the imperatives of the attraction system. For more information on this topic, see Dulac and Gaudreault, 'Cross-cutting in the Face of History', pp. 1-18.

cinema, animation, television, and comic books has appeared in a number of edited collections and journals such as *Film History*, *Studies in French Cinema*, *International Journal of Comic Art*, *Cinémas*, and *Cinema & Cie*.

### About the translator

**Timothy Barnard** is the translator of volumes on film theory by Jacques Aumont, André Bazin, André Gaudreault, and Jean-Luc Godard in addition to numerous catalogues of modern and contemporary art. He is the proprietor of 'caboose', an independent scholarly publisher of books on film, and the author of *Découpage* (2014), a brief historical and theoretical study of this aesthetic concept in cinema and the only volume on the topic in any language.