

Roger Odin

Spaces of Communication. Elements of Semio-Pragmatics

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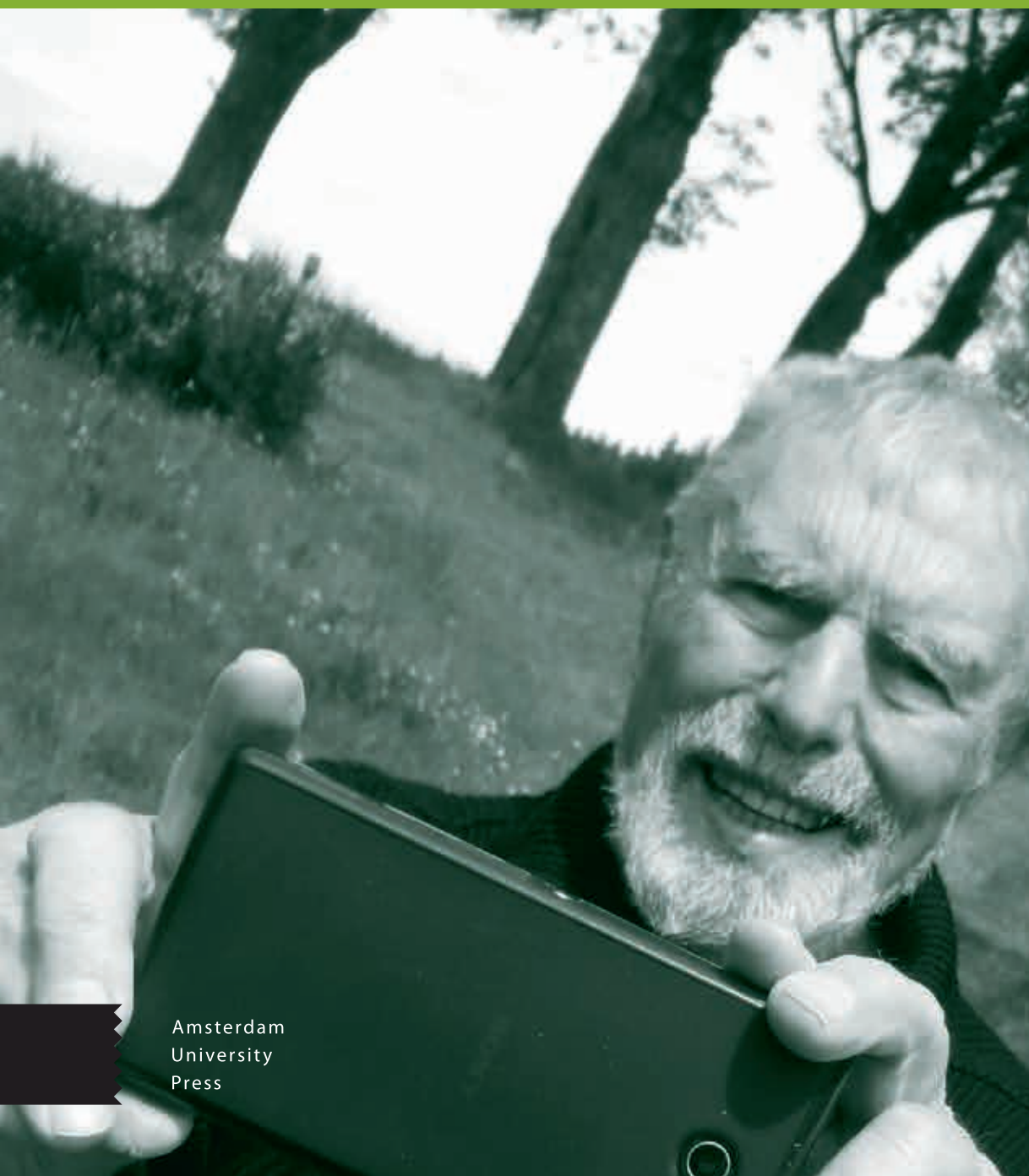
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SPACES OF COMMUNICATION

ELEMENTS OF SEMIO-PRAGMATICS

ROGER ODIN



Amsterdam
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Press

Spaces of Communication

Film Theory in Media History

Film Theory in Media History explores the epistemological and theoretical foundations of the study of film through texts by classical authors as well as anthologies and monographs on key issues and developments in film theory. Adopting a historical perspective, but with a firm eye to the further development of the field, the series provides a platform for ground-breaking new research into film theory and media history and features high-profile editorial projects that offer resources for teaching and scholarship. Combining the book form with open access online publishing the series reaches the broadest possible audience of scholars, students, and other readers with a passion for film and theory.

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Spaces of Communication

Elements of Semio-Pragmatics

Roger Odin

*With an Introduction by
Vinzenz Hediger*

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A Democracy of Readings and Objects: Roger Odin's Contribution to the Theory of Film

Vinzenz Hediger

Abstract

Semio-Pragmatics, an approach to the study of film and audiovisual media first proposed by Roger Odin in the early 1980s, shifted the focus from textual analysis to the interaction of text and context and to institutional modes of framing and reading which shape the viewer's engagement with the film. A response to an impasse in post-1968 film semiotics and semio-psychoanalytical approaches to film spectatorship, semio-pragmatics contributed significantly to the further development of film studies alongside such approaches as Cultural Studies, neo-formalism, historical reception studies and the phenomenology of film. At the same time, by expanding the scope of inquiry beyond the dispositive of cinema from the outset to include home movies or mobile phone films, semio-pragmatics defined film studies as a field rather than a discipline exclusively focused on the cinephile canon, thus anticipating the current shape of that field by more than two decades.

Keywords: Film theory, film semiotics, non-theatrical film, media theory, communication theory

The last thing a new discipline acquires, Alfred North Whitehead once wrote, are its foundations. The purpose of this book series, which makes key texts from the history of film theory available to a broad academic and non-academic audience, is to offer some contributions towards that goal for the still fairly young discipline of film studies. The inclusion of Roger Odin's *Spaces of Communication*, which first appeared in French in 2011 and was translated into German in 2019, fulfils the series' purpose in exemplary fashion.¹ *Spaces of Communication* is a book that condenses the intellectual trajectory of one of the foundational figures of film studies into a relatively short and accessible volume. It is a book that testifies to the author's deep and rich intellectual engagement with a vast array of objects ranging from the classics of the cinephile canon to television news programmes, home movies and mobile phone films. But it is also text which has the potential to contribute towards the growth of film and media studies for years to come.

In this Introduction I want to offer a brief discussion of the position of the book in relation to Odin's intellectual trajectory. I will then situate Odin's work with a view to both the institutional history of film studies and the

1 Roger Odin, *Kommunikationsräume. Einführung in die Semiopragmatik*. Trans. by Guido Kirsten, Magali Trautman, Philipp Blum, Laura Katharina Mücke, (Berlin: oa books, 2019).

history of film theory since the 1960s, with a particular view to the concept of communication. Finally, I want to discuss how Odin's work intersects and communicates with some of the most important current developments in the field of film and media studies.

What We Make of Images and Sounds: Semio-Pragmatics as Approach and Method

One way of accessing *Spaces of Communication* is to follow the instructions of the subtitle and read the book as a concise introduction to semio-pragmatics, the theoretical approach to film and media which, for all practical purposes, bears Odin's name. Film semiotics focused primarily on semantics and syntactics, i.e., the meaning-making properties of image and sound and their articulation in narrative and other temporal sequences. The semantics of the Western, to cite Rick Altman's classic semiotic analysis of the genre, concern themselves with the iconographic lexicon of cowboys in rugged landscapes, horses, cattle, guns, coffee and beans; the syntactics focus on recurring plot structures.² As the name indicates, semio-pragmatics shifts the focus from semantics and syntactics to what in linguistics is the third leg of the field, pragmatics or the usage of signs. Or, to stay with the example of the Western: pragmatics concerns what we make of all those plots, hats, horses, guns, coffee cups and beans.

Odin inaugurated semio-pragmatics as a theoretical approach in his "thèse d'état," which he completed in 1982.³ He further developed his approach in various essays and his subsequent books, *Cinéma et production de sens* (1990), an introduction to the semiotics of film from a semio-pragmatic point of view, and *De la fiction* (2000), which, as the title says, takes the problem of fiction and non-fiction as its focus.⁴

2 Rick Altman, "A Semantic/Syntactic Approach to Genre," *Cinema Journal*, 23/3 (Spring 1984), pp. 6–18.

3 The "thèse d'état" is a substantial written work which comes after the dissertation proper and used to be the formal requirement for the qualification for thesis supervision. In 1984, it was replaced with the "habilitation à diriger des recherches," analogous to the German "Habilitation," which qualifies the holder for full professorship positions.

4 Roger Odin, *Cinéma et production de sens* (Paris: Amand Colin, 1990); Roger Odin, *De la fiction* (Bruxelles: De Boeck Université, 2000). For a survey of Odin's trajectory see the Introduction by Frank Kessler and Guido Kirsten to the German translation of *Spaces of Communication* and the comprehensive bibliography and filmography compiled by Hans-Jürgen Wulff and Ludger Kaczmarek in the Appendix to this volume.

To simplify, semio-pragmatics argues that meaning is not just a matter of text, but of context. What a film means depends not only on what it says and how it says it, but also on where and when it says it and to whom. Far from opening another French theory door to the twin evils of subjectivism and relativism which critics of post-structuralism so heartily decry, the “where,” “when” and “whom” of semio-pragmatics are not indeterminate variables. Rather, they consist in highly specific institutional framings and settings. These determine to a significant extent how viewers will approach a film or set of moving images, and how they will read them. Accounting for these specific variations, Odin spells out his theory of the production meaning first in a typology of “modes de lecture,” of modes of reading and the viewer’s engagement with the world of the film.

A mode of reading can be more accurately described as a mode of producing meaning and affect. It consists of a set of specific, repeatable cognitive and affective operations, which are applicable to different types and bodies of work. These operations constitute a body of (largely) implicit knowledge which the viewer activates when dealing with a film or program, a communicative competence which can be culturally and situationally specific but remains relatively stable over time.

Apart from the problem of text and context, an important impulse for Odin to develop his approach came from his thinking about documentary. When documentary theorists in the 1980s and 1990s argued that the line separating documentary from fiction had become blurry,⁵ they responded to new types of documentary, but also to an underlying conflict within film theory. Bill Nichols had developed an influential typology of modes of documentary practice in the mid-1970s, which he has since further developed to accommodate new trends.⁶ But in film theory, and particularly in France, the line separating documentary from fiction had never been clearly set. Instead, two equally totalizing and seemingly mutually exclusive claims competed with each other, one which associated cinema with reality, the other which associated it with the imaginary. These claims reflect, in a way, the grand struggle between Lumière and Méliès in French film history: Lumière, the inventor of documentary, vs. Méliès, the inventor of the fiction film – or the other way around, as Jean-Pierre Léaud famously argues in Godard’s *La Chinoise* from 1968, in which he references Henri Langlois to

5 See for instance Michael Renov, *The Subject of Documentary* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

6 Bill Nichols, *Introduction to Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), pp. 99–138.

suggest that Lumière was a painter of sorts and the last great impressionist and Méliès a purveyor of current news.

Bazinian ontologies – sometimes implicitly, often explicitly – awarded a privileged connection to reality to all filmic representations as they defined the photographic image as trace, index or “natural image,” i.e., a sign which participates in the being of the object and re-presents reality in an emphatic way.⁷ Different from Bazinian reality, the Lacanian real was not present in the image. It was defined precisely as that which could not be represented. Accordingly, Lacanian accounts stressed the lack of reality in the cinematic signifier and the viewer’s relation to the screen, which was merely a replay of the child’s discovery of the mirror, i.e., the imaginary relationship of the self to its own image. Christian Metz summarized this position most forcefully, when he declared in *The Imaginary Signifier* that “every film is a fiction film.”

A young psychologist from Belgium, Jean-Pierre Meunier had tried to solve the problem in 1969 by offering a typology of film experiences which associated the three stages of Sartre’s phenomenological conception of the imaginary with the home movie, the documentary and the fiction film respectively. But his book went largely unnoticed at the time and resurfaced only in the context of home movie research in the 1990s and again in more recent debates about the phenomenology of film.⁸

To answer the question of how we understand a documentary film, Odin made a more radical move. He applied Ockham’s razor to the underlying assumptions of the debate so far and cut both the concepts of reality and the imaginary out of the equation. Neither did he rely primarily on classifications of textual properties of the kind offered by Bill Nichols. Instead, Odin argued that whether a film was a documentary was a matter of labelling and processing or framing and reading. He proposed the concept of a “documentarizing reading” and further suggested that certain films lent themselves to such readings, or rather advertised themselves to invite such readings.⁹ In a carefully worded retort to Metz’s claim that every film was a fiction film – a retort which can be read as a condensed summary of the systematic difference between Metzian semiotics and

7 Vinzenz Hediger, “Das Wunder des Realismus. Transsubstantiation als medientheoretische Kategorie bei André Bazin,” in: *Montage AV* 18/1 (2009), pp. 75–107.

8 Cf. Daniel Fairfax, Julian Hanich (eds.) *The Structures of Film Experience by Jean-Pierre Meunier: Historical Assessments and Phenomenological Expansions* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).

9 See also Frank Kessler, “Fakt oder Fiktion? Zum pragmatischen Status dokumentarischer Bilder,” in *Montage AV* 7/2 (1998), pp. 63–78.

semio-pragmatics –, Odin even claimed in a 1984 essay that every film *could be read* as a documentary film.¹⁰ What made a documentary, then, was the meeting of a certain mode of reading with a suitable text – which is not a tautology, but a precise instruction for textual analysis and the modelling of the viewer's activity from a pragmatic point of view.

The third important impulse for the development of semio-pragmatics, apart from the problems of text and context and documentary and fiction, came from Odin's interest in home movies.¹¹ Jean-Pierre Meunier can claim to have published the first work of film theory in which home movies figure prominently. But the “film-souvenir,” the memory film, as Meunier called it, served mostly as a steppingstone to a theory of the fiction film, which was the real focus of his interest.¹² For Odin, on the other hand, home movies were a genuine “theoretical object” in the sense of Hubert Damisch, an object which “oblige one to do theory.”¹³ Home movies are a ground zero of semio-pragmatics because in dealing with them, no other approach to textual or semiotic analysis makes much sense. Devoid of the formal and textual properties which provide the basis for auteurist and other work-centred approaches to analysis and interpretation, the meaning of home movies lies almost exclusively in the uses their makers make of them.

From the comparison between fiction, documentary and home movie readings, Odin developed a typology of eight distinct modes of reading, a list which slightly varied over time: the spectacular, the fictionalizing, the energetic, the private, the argumentative/persuasive (which in *Spaces of Communication* has been replaced by the discursive mode), the artistic and the esthetic modes. While Odin's typology remains open to the inclusion of additional modes – more recently, his thinking has included a “making of”-mode –, the modes of reading are in themselves fairly consistent and quite distinct from each other. To borrow an analogy from sociology, they have roughly the consistency of Weberian ideal types. They owe their relative stability to an important extent to that of their corresponding institutional frameworks – e.g., the cinema, the art world, the school, the family.

10 Roger Odin, “Film documentaire, lecture documentarisante,” in: Roger Odin, Jean-Charles Lyant (eds.) *Cinéma et réalités* (Saint-Étienne: CIEREC, 1984), pp. 263–277.

11 Roger Odin (ed.) *Le film de famille: Usage privé, usage public* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1995).

12 See the interview with Meunier in Fairfax, Hanich, *Meunier*.

13 Yve-Alain Bois, Denis Hollier, Rosalind Krauss and Hubert Damisch, “A Conversation with Hubert Damisch,” in: *October* 85 (Summer 1998), p. 8. See also Alexandra Schneider, “Theorie des Amateur- und Gebrauchsfilms,” in: Bernhard Groß, Thomas Morsch (eds.) *Handbuch Filmtheorie* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2021), pp. 225–242.

As Odin further developed the question of the relationship of text and context, he came up with a concept which ties together the various ensembles or assemblages of frameworks, settings, and modes of reading. He moved to embed the modes of reading in what he proposes to call “spaces of communication,” which constitutes the key conceptual innovation of the book which we are presenting here, and which provides its title.¹⁴

Significantly, as readers of this book will discover, the list of modes of readings and of spaces of communications includes academic readings of film and the space of the university. By placing the work of professional interpreters of film on equal footing with, for instance, home movie screenings, Odin subtly undercuts claims to hermeneutic privilege and authority even as it validates academic readings on their own terms. Semio-pragmatics proposes what we might call a democracy of meaning making, built on the idea of the equality and diversity of a wide array of possible modes of reading. But this democracy of meaning making is also one of objects. If semio-pragmatics awards no special privilege to academic readings, neither does it award one to theatrical fiction films.

Odin is of course not oblivious to the persistence of social hierarchies and power differentials. Of the major French film theorists, he is the one who is closest in spirit to Bourdieu, as his discussion of the coercive aspects of the institution of the nuclear family or the legacies of French colonialism in this book shows. Odin’s democracy of objects and readings has political thrust but deploys it at the level of methodology. Like the *epoché* in phenomenology it serves to bracket certain aspects of reality. By suspending established stratifications and distinctions, it manages not to replicate them in research designs and theoretical frameworks, squarely putting them in the focus of analysis instead. Through the democracy of readings and objects, in other words, semio-pragmatics turns the stratified field of culture into a level field of inquiry.

To understand the point of the concept of “spaces of communication” and of semio-pragmatics’ continuing and potentially growing relevance to contemporary film and media studies, it is useful to take a short look back and place Odin’s contribution in the larger context of semiotics and film theory. Specifically, semio-pragmatics can be understood as the solution to one of the key problems of the semiotics of film as it first emerged in the 1960s and 1970s, even as it addresses some of the shortcomings of the

14 Odin had first used the term “fictional space of communication” at the end of the 1980s, but only returned to the concept of “spaces of communication” for the publication of this book.

approaches which emerged in cinema studies in response and as alternatives to the semiotics of film in the 1980s and 1990s.

Establishing a Discipline, Cultivating a Field: Roger Odin and Film Studies in France

Born in 1939, Roger Odin belongs to the generation of film scholars who grew up in and were formed by the culture and atmosphere of post-war cinephilia.¹⁵ A linguist by training, a film club activist and a consummate amateur filmmaker, Odin became the first film scholar to ascend to a full professorship in cinema studies in a French university when he moved to Paris 3-Sorbonne Nouvelle from Saint-Étienne in 1983.

Film scholars had, of course, worked in French research institutions before. Christian Metz held a position in the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, a research institution in Paris which includes disciplines ranging from history to anthropology and economics, and which has also been the home of scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Pierre Nora, Jacques Derrida or, more recently, Thomas Piketty. Raymond Bellour had joined the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, another non-university “grand établissement,” at the invitation of Edgar Morin in 1964. Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier created a department of cinema from within French literature at the experimental university of Paris-Vincennes in the early 1970s, an important step towards film studies as a discipline. In *Spaces of Communication*, Roger Odin pays tribute to her work with a subchapter dedicated to a re-reading of Ropars-Wuilleumier’s pioneering publications of that time. Furthermore, historians like Pierre Sorlin, Michèle Lagny or Marc Ferro focused their research on cinema from their respective positions in sociology and history departments.

But the department of cinema and audiovisual media at Paris-3 was to become the first proper film studies department in a French university. Odin moved quickly to expand the department with chairs in film aesthetics for former *Cahiers* critic Jacques Aumont and in film history for Michel Marie, who had written his dissertation under Ropars-Wuilleumier’s and Metz’s supervision and joined Paris-3 as a maître de conference (assistant professor) for cinema in 1974. Together with Aumont and Marie, Odin continued to expand the scope and size of the department during his twenty-year

15 Antoine de Baecque, *La cinéphilie. Invention d'un regard, histoire d'une culture, 1944-1968* (Paris: Pluriel, 2013).

tenure as its director, to the point where the department is now the largest of its kind in the world in terms of full professor positions, including one exclusively dedicated to the study of the economics of cinema currently held by Laurent Creton.

Odin was also instrumental in the creation of a doctorate in film studies at the national level. Decisions concerning the shape and structure of academic disciplines in France are in the hands of the national ministry of tertiary education and research rather than in the hands of individual universities. The doctorate as granted by the ministry is the birth certificate of a discipline. Roger Odin led a committee which developed a curriculum in cinema studies comprised of optional courses in secondary education, as well as undergraduate, graduate and doctoral degrees at the tertiary level. Following the committee's recommendation, the ministry created film studies doctorate in the early 1990s.¹⁶ This emancipated cinema studies from the neighbouring disciplines of literature, art history and history and secured its place among established subjects for tertiary education and research. It granted a license to universities across France to institute doctoral programs and departments in cinema studies. In quick succession, with Lyon-2, Rennes, Bordeaux and Montpellier among others emerging as new centers of film studies from the 1990s onwards.

Throughout his tenure at Paris-3 and beyond, Roger Odin has always insisted that he considered cinema studies to be a field rather than a discipline. This is an important distinction both in the light of the history of cinema studies in France and with a view to its development in a broader perspective. It is also a distinction which helps us understand how Odin's work as a theorist intersects with his work as an institution builder.

One of the countries that lay claim to the invention of cinema, France has always had a uniquely vibrant film culture. It was built and fostered by institutions such as the ciné-club movement, which started in the 1920s and in which Roger Odin actively participated as a programmer and presenter during his years in Saint-Étienne. It was also built around institutions like the Cinémathèque française, which Henri Langlois established in the early 1930s just as film archives sprung up around the world as salvage institutions for film history in the wake of the introduction of sound. French film culture was further sustained by a film criticism striving to elevate film to equality with the other arts, an effort best exemplified by the work of André Bazin

16 Roger Odin, "Zur Etablierung der Filmbildung in Frankreich – Ein Erfahrungsbericht," in: Malte Hagener, Vinzenz Hediger (eds.) *Medienkultur und Bildung. Ästhetische Erziehung im Zeitalter digitaler Netzwerke* (Frankfurt: Campus 2015), pp. 295–312.

and the *Cahiers du cinéma* in the 1950s. Since the 1920s, the operative concept which brought all facets of French cinema culture together had been the notion of the director as *auteur*. First introduced to distinguish French films from the American competition in the 1920s, it became a selection criterion that served to distinguish art from mere merchandise and build canons of significant works in a global perspective from the 1930s onwards.

However, the first attempt to establish film studies in France had little to do with cinephilia or auteurism. The Filmology movement of the 1940s and 1950s was organized by producer/philosopher Gilbert Cohen-Séat at the Sorbonne, with help from Étienne Souriau, an eminent philosopher and France's foremost aesthetic theorist at the time, and Henri Wallon, a leading developmental psychologist who first described the mirror stage, which later made the fame of Jacques Lacan.¹⁷ As a top-down effort to study and control the social effects of cinema in the wake of the Second World War, Filmology initially met with scorn from cinephiles. A young Jean-Luc Godard signed up to quell the concerns of his Swiss bourgeois parents about his lack of interest in academic study, but he appears to never have attended classes. In 1951, André Bazin published a fierce polemic against the "filmologues" and their ignorance of cinema in the *Cahiers* under the pseudonym of Florent Kirsch (combining the first name of his son and the maiden name of his wife).¹⁸ The controversy petered out towards the end of the 1950s, when Filmology shifted its focus to television and eventually morphed into mass communication effects research in France and Italy.

When film studies finally found its place in the French university system in the 1980s the cinephile canon constituted the core of the curriculum. Universities are conservative institutions. Once a plausible claim could be made that cinema had produced a body of work equivalent to that of national literatures – a claim which the *Cahiers* critics had established and which Stanley Cavell strategically repeated in 1971, when he wrote in the Introduction to *The World Viewed* that classical Hollywood cinema had brought forth more masterpieces than the Elizabethan period in literature¹⁹ – chances improved for cinema studies' acceptance as a discipline. Absent

17 Edmund Lowry, *The Filmology Movement and Film Studies in France* (Ann Arbor: UMI Press 1985); François Albéra, Martin Lefebvre (eds.) *La filmologie, de nouveau*, double issue of *CINÉMAS: Revue d'études cinématographiques/Journal of Film Studies*, 19/2-3 (spring 2009); Vinzenz Hediger, Guido Kirsten (eds.) *Filmologie* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, forthcoming).

18 Florent Kirsch [André Bazin], "Introduction à une filmologie de la filmologie," in: *Cahiers du cinéma*, 5 (1951), pp. 33–38.

19 Stanley Cavell, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).

mandarin champions of the stature of Souriau and Wallon, it was ultimately the combination of a solid grounding in the academic rigor of structuralist linguistics and semiotics and cinephile culture which created the conditions of acceptance for film studies as an academic subject. Incidentally, this applies to both France and the United States, and in both cases the path to success led through Paris. Through his seminars at the EHESS, Christian Metz had taught the first generation of university professors “what research was,” as Jacques Aumont once put it.²⁰ Metz’s students also included numerous young American scholars, who would become the first and second generation of film professors in the United States. In the US, film studies emerged from literature departments, with the department of romance studies at Iowa with Dudley Andrew, a biographer of André Bazin and specialist in French cinema, playing a particularly important role in training the first generation of cinema studies PhDs.²¹

Roger Odin is part of that group – a student of Christian Metz’s who is nothing if not firm in his command of the cinephile canon. Yet even as he emerged as a pivotal figure in the consolidation of cinema studies as a discipline focused primarily on the history and aesthetics of fictional theatrical films as art, he continued to insist that film studies is a field rather than a discipline. Film Studies’ cinephile pedigree had distinct advantages, of course. It connected the new academic discipline to a dynamic set of cultural practices, including highly sophisticated forms of film criticism as art criticism, which kept cinema studies from prematurely veering off into scientist pretensions even as it demonstrated the standards of rigor required of an accredited member of academia. But Odin managed to translate this energy into a broader set of potentials. Explicitly referencing filmology as a model and strategically naming the new department “Cinéma et audiovisuel,” Odin kept the door open for the inclusion of new methodologies and objects of inquiry beyond cinema, and he contributed to this opening through his own work. One of Odin’s most widely quoted and translated essays, which he co-wrote with Francesco Casetti, is “De la paléo à la néo-télévision” from 1990, a text which analyses a major shift in television aesthetics and mode of address from the 1960s to the 1970s and continues to be a key reference

20 Personal communication with Jacques Aumont.

21 For a survey of Metz’s role in the formation of academic film theory and his intellectual legacy cf. Dominique Chateau, Martin Lefebvre, “Dance and Fetish: Phenomenology and Metz’s Epistemological Shift,” in *October* 148 (Spring 2014), pp. 103–132; Margrit Tröhler, Guido Kirsten (eds.) *Christian Metz and the Codes of Cinema: Film Semiology and Beyond* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2018).

in television studies.²² And as the department in Paris-3 grew, additions include permanent positions for television studies.

But insisting on a definition of film studies as a field rather than a discipline also creates a problem. Scientific disciplines emerge and coalesce around well-defined objects. Biology as a discipline only comes into existence with the theory of evolution, which defines life as a continuous historical process, a definition further corroborated by the description of the cell as the smallest unit and building block of life as a self-organizing process. The cinephile canon is cinema studies' theory of evolution: a simple, neat definition which separates its object from that of other, neighboring disciplines. Stressing the field character of film studies means to abandon the safety afforded by that definition. One other way of understanding semio-pragmatics is as a solution to this epistemological conundrum: the concepts of modes of reading and of spaces of communication provide an epistemological bracket, a principle of unity, for the diversity of readings and objects to which semio-pragmatics ascribes equal value. Or, to put it differently: these concepts broaden the scope of inquiry beyond a singular object and its corresponding discipline, while at the same time securing the coherence of the field.

In that sense, there is in Roger Odin's work as a theorist and an institution builder a remarkable and, for an academic, rather unique convergence of thought and action, of theory and practice. But to fully appreciate the contribution of semio-pragmatics to the field of film studies it is important to also situate Odin's approach more specifically within the history of film theory.

Moving Semiotics Forward: Semio-Pragmatics and Film Theory since the 1960s

In retrospect, the original promise of semiotics can probably best be described as that of a *prima philosophia* for media culture and, in fact, for culture understood as a set of practices of meaning making more generally. In the able hands of authors like Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco or Yuri Lotman, Ferdinand de Saussure's concept of the sign worked like a Swiss Army knife of cultural analysis: easy to handle and variable in use, it cut across everything, from comics to novels, movies and magazine covers to car designs and spaghetti packaging, so long as the object in question could be described

22 Francesco Casetti, Roger Odin, "De la paléo- à la néo-télévision," in *Communications* 51 (1990), pp. 9–6.

as a text and broken down into relationships of signifier to signified. And even though the connection of signifier to signified remained arbitrary (at least in the case of non-indexical signs) and many of the meanings created through that connection turned out to be deeply troubling, the concept of the sign provided a philosophically soothing sense of unity not just of an object of study upon which one could build a discipline, but unity in the face of the increasingly bewildering diversity of contemporary culture and society and its signifying practices.

Following close on the heels of Barthes and others – but also borrowing some of his key concepts and insights from Étienne Souriau and Filmology –, Roger Odin's teacher and mentor Christian Metz inaugurated the semiotics of film in a double move: he narrowed the focus of analysis to the dominant mode of narrative cinema and its technological infrastructure and social frameworks, and he stressed the linguistic origins of semiotics. "La grand syntagmatique du cinema" was an attempt to spell out in rigorous scientific terms the implications of André Bazin's famous throw-away line at the end of his essay on the ontology of the photographic image: "On the other hand, cinema is also a language."²³ As it turned out, the language of cinema did not quite have the structural consistency of a natural language. But semiotics still prevailed.

Spreading from France to other parts of Europe, the anglophone world and the Global South (and with significant additional lines emerging from Eastern Europe and the Tartu school) semiotics became the dominant paradigm in film theory in the 1960s and 1970s. Metz, Baudry, Bellour and Kuntzel in France and Laura Mulvey, Stephen Heath and others in Great Britain and the US combined it with Lacanian psychoanalysis and, in some strains, with Althusser's neo-Marxist analysis of the ideological effects of the state apparatus to build a critical analytics of film spectatorship which resonated strongly with the political outlook of post-68 cinema culture.²⁴ In the hands of Mulvey the combination proved to be particularly potent. Mulvey provided an account of the regressive politics of gender in classical Hollywood cinema which continues to reverberate in debates about intersectional feminism and queer theories of spectatorship to this day.²⁵

23 André Bazin, "Ontology of the Photographic Image," transl. Hugh Gray, in: *Film Quarterly*, 13/4 (Summer 1960), pp. 4–9.

24 For a comprehensive history of post-68 French film culture and film theory see Daniel Fairfax, *The Red Years of Cahiers du Cinéma (1968-1973): Volume I. Ideology and Politics* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021); *Volume II. Aesthetics and Ontology* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2021).

25 Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in: *Screen*, 16/3 (1975), pp. 6–18.

However, the very feature that made the combination of semiotics and psychoanalysis so compelling as an elegy of the failed revolution of 68 turned out to be a liability in the long run. The emphasis on the ideological determinism of the “apparatus” restricted the spectator’s subjectivity to a mere afterthought of a pernicious interplay of technology and text. To many scholars coming up in the 1970s and 1980s particularly in anglophone film studies, this no longer seemed to be a useful account of spectatorship. In succession, Cultural Studies, a combination of neo-formalism and cognitive science, historical reception studies, the phenomenology of film experience and Deleuzian approaches to the philosophy of film emerged as compelling alternatives.

Cultural Studies is a multi-faceted field which covers some of the same territory as semiotics and emerges at the same time, to the extent that it could be seen as its British counterpart: what the Citroen DS is to Barthes, dime novels and television are to Raymond Williams. At its intersection with media studies Cultural Studies offered an alternative to the linear models of communication and media effects in communication research. Stressing the activity and agency of the viewer, Stuart Hall highlighted the possibility of oppositional readings of (mass) media texts and the ability of the viewer to engage with normative representations of ethnicity and gender even as they maintained their sense of identity and difference.²⁶ This approach became highly influential in anglophone television studies of the 1980s and 1990s, as well as in studies of film stars and popular cinema.

The combination of neo-formalist film analysis and cognitive psychology, which took shape in the United States and Germany in the 1980s through the work of authors like David Bordwell, Peter Wuss and Hans-Jürgen Wulff, offered another account of the active spectator, albeit one that was willingly oblivious to questions of context, identity and difference. Particularly in Bordwell’s formulation it proposed a model of spectatorship as a largely disembodied mode of information processing. Bordwell even claimed at one point that it was perfectly possible to build a model of how audiences understand a film without accounting for the role of affect and emotion – a point that was disproven not least by a subsequent generation of cognitivist scholars like Murray Smith and Ed Tan in their work on spectatorship and emotion.²⁷

26 Stuart Hall, “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse,” in: Meenakshi Gigi Durham, Douglas M. Kellner (eds.) *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2009), pp. 163–174; Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Cinematic Representation,” in: *Framework* 36 (1989), pp. 68–81.

27 David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (London, New York: Routledge, 1985); Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion, and the Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

Another response to the disembodied and decontextualized concept of spectatorship proposed by early cognitivist theories consisted in historical reception studies, an approach pioneered by authors such as Janet Staiger, a co-author with Bordwell and Kristin Thompson on the groundbreaking 1985 book *The Classical Hollywood Cinema*, or Annette Kuhn.²⁸ Historical reception studies reconstruct the viewer's experience from reviews, scrapbooks, diaries and other historical sources.

In a more theoretical vein, the phenomenology of film experience, which Vivian Sobchack pioneered in opposition to the then dominant semio-psychoanalytic paradigm, stresses the corporeal and tactile dimensions of spectatorship, substituting for the transcendentalist notion of the gaze, which had been a cornerstone to Lacanian notions of spectatorship, the viewer's engagement with the body of the film.²⁹

And finally, Gilles Deleuze offered a critique of both the semiotic concept of the sign and the psychoanalytic concept of the gaze in his two books on cinema.³⁰ Both sign and gaze, Deleuze argued, stood for absences and implied a lack – of the object depicted, and of the object desire by the subject of the gaze. They were transcendentalist notions which offered an abstract, impoverished account of cinema, which a philosophy of film should replace with an account of the image in its immanence.³¹ Following through on his critique Deleuze did away entirely with the concept of the spectator and replaced it with a typology of images inspired by pragmatist philosopher and semiotician Charles Sanders Pierce (even though some of his readers argued that his notion of the fold could be read as a theory of spectatorship, of the folding of the viewer into and out of the image³²).

One way of describing the place of semio-pragmatics in the history of film theory is to say that Roger Odin set out to solve the same problem

1995); Ed S. Tan, *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine* (London, New York: Routledge, 1996).

28 Janet Staiger, *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Annette Kuhn, *An Everyday Magic: Cinema and Cultural Memory* (London: J.B. Tauris, 2000); Daniel Biltereyst, Richard Maltby and Philippe Meers (eds.) *The Routledge Companion to New Cinema History* (London, New York: Routledge, 2019).

29 Vivian Sobchack, *The Address of the Eye: A Phenomenology of Film Experience* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

30 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement Image* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013).

31 Gilles Deleuze, *Deux régimes de fous. Textes et entretiens* (Paris: éditions de minuit, 2003), pp. 263ff.

32 Raymond Bellour, "Le dépli des émotions," in *Trafic* 43 (2002), pp. 93–128.

to which this succession of models and approaches responded, but from within semiotics. How can we escape the narrow focus and determinism of a semio-psychoanalytic model of spectatorship in the classical dispositive of cinema? Metz himself had opened a pathway in his influential essay "The Fiction Film and its Spectator." Quite against the grain of some of his more determinist readers, he described his theory of spectatorship as site-specific and situated. It applied mostly, Metz wrote, to the cinephile culture of Paris, but it may not apply in the same way to other settings. "We have only attempted *one* ethnography of the spectator, among others remaining to be done," Metz wrote. As a note of caution, he added that going forward Freudian notions would "be perhaps less helpful and certainly less directly useful, since they were established, despite their pretensions, in an observational field with cultural limits."³³ Semio-pragmatics can be understood as a systematic exploration of the field of inquiry which that admission opened up. Maintaining the original framework and rigor of Metzian film semiotics but shifting the focus to pragmatics, Odin developed the concept of modes of reading as an account of spectatorship which is highly differentiated, but also clearly delineated, i.e., attuned to specific constellations of sound and image in varying institutional and pragmatic settings – constellations which include, but are far from limited to the dispositive of the cinema and the practices of cinephilia. Furthermore, semio-pragmatics is concerned with specific films, and with the surface of films rather than with depth. In a discussion of the difference between Bellour's concept of "blocage symbolique" and his own notion of the "mise-en-phase," the viewer's phasing in with the formal operations of the film, Odin argues that Bellour stresses the importance of deep-seated cultural meanings and scenarios, such as the patterns of sexual desire in modern societies of the nineteenth and twentieth century, whereas semio-pragmatics proposes to have the closest possible look at how such orders manifest themselves on the surface of a given film, i.e., in the relations inside the diegesis and the relation between a viewer and film.³⁴ *Surfaces, singularities, site specificities*: if the problem of semiotics is indeed the transcendentalism of the concepts of sign and gaze, what we may describe as the three "s" of semio-pragmatics provide the contours of an immanentist approach to film from within pragmatics itself.

33 Christian Metz, "The Fiction Film and Its Spectator: A Metapsychological Study," trans. Alfred Guzzetti, in *New Literary History*, 8/1 (1976), pp. 75–105, here p. 100.

34 Roger Odin, "Mise en phase, déphasage, performativité," in *Communications* 38 (1983), pp. 213–238.

Film theory is not a horse race, and while paradigm skirmishes broke out among the various approaches which I just sketched out in the 1980s and 1990s,³⁵ contemporary film studies is a surprisingly harmonious field, at least by the standards of larger and more consolidated disciplines like literature, philosophy or sociology, where paradigm wars structure much of the disciplinary debates. But since our aim here is to understand the place of semio-pragmatics in the broader field of film theory, it can still be useful to engage in a brief exercise of compare and contrast.

Cultural Studies maintained a focus on mass media and popular culture and proved to be particularly productive in the analysis of television and later fan cultures and fandom; semio-pragmatics' scope of inquiry encompasses practices ranging from cinephile and the art world to marginal media practices like home movies or educational films. Cognitivist approaches focus on a binary relationship of film and viewer; semio-pragmatics develops a ternary model: each mode of reading and space of communication includes text, context and viewer, which means that spectatorship is necessarily situated. Historical reception studies focus on historical practice; semio-pragmatics maintains a strong focus on theory and with it the ability to respond and adapt to emergent new media practices and modes of spectatorship. Phenomenological and Deleuzian approaches stress the embodied and immanent nature of spectatorship and the engagement with the image; semio-pragmatics offers an account of spectatorship as embodied and situated by spelling out for each space of communication the specific constituents of its ternary model.

Another axis along which these approaches can be compared concerns the degree of freedom and spontaneity they assign to the viewer. At one end of this spectrum we find the ideological determinism of post-68 semio-psychoanalysis, which largely shares with Adorno the assessment that mainstream cinema is an assembly line for commodified subjectivities. At the other end we find Cultural Studies, and more specifically fan studies. *Textual Poachers*, the title of Henry Jenkins's 1992 book,³⁶ which was based on his dissertation under the supervision of one of the pioneers of Cultural Studies, John Fiske, makes this point: if cinephilia is a form of reverence

35 David Bordwell and his school were particularly vocal in their criticism of what they perceived to be the then-dominant paradigm of psychoanalytic film theory and hermeneutic approaches to film. Cf. David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); David Bordwell, Noel Carroll (eds.) *Post-Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996).

36 Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (London, New York: Routledge, 1992).

for the text, fans approach popular texts with a mixture of dedication and irreverence. Their fidelity is to their own emotional response to the text rather than to the text itself, which they treat as a resource for their own artefacts and inscriptions. Fandom is a transgressive form of meaning making, an extractive rather than a pious form of devotion – hence “textual poaching.” Semio-pragmatics occupies a middle ground between these two poles. It is heedful of the strictures which text and context, or cinematic form and institutional framing, impose on a given mode of reading or space of communication. But it also allows for, and helps us understand, re-framings and reappropriations in a highly specific way.

An example may serve to illustrate this balance.

Almost twenty years ago, I curated a program of movie trailers for a video art festival in Basel, Switzerland. The pièce de résistance of the program was a ten-minute trailer for Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* from 1956. Produced as a multi-purpose short film which could be screened as a trailer in theatres and as an educational short in 16mm prints in schools, this trailer features Cecil B. DeMille in a wood-panelled office delivering a lecture on the historical sources of his film. DeMille addresses his audience with paternalistic aplomb: this is America's filmmaking history teacher speaking. One by one, he produces for the camera objects ranging from papyrus scrolls to a scale model of Michelangelo's sculpture of Moses and a replica of the marble plates on which the Ten Commandments were supposedly incised. The short film ends with a selection of scenes from the film, over which DeMille voices a series of questions, following a standard template of trailers from the 1950s. Having appeared on camera in similar fashion in his trailers since the 1920s, DeMille in his wood-panelled office cuts a familiar figure for contemporary American audiences – so familiar, in fact, that Alfred Hitchcock chose to advertise *The Birds* with a parody of DeMille's *The Ten Commandments* trailer, in which he can be seen delivering a lecture about “our feathered friends.” In my trailer program, the Hitchcock trailer followed immediately after the *Ten Commandments* short. But the audience did not need to be educated about possible divergent readings of DeMille's trailer. It chose to develop one itself, spontaneously. To every new object the audience responded with roaring laughter, for the full ten minutes of the film's run time.

In her work on genre theory and reception history, Janet Staiger has shown how films can change their genre over time – or rather how they can be gradually re-classified and re-labelled.³⁷ But there is nothing gradual about

37 Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pp. 61ff.

the re-classification the Basel audience operated on the DeMille short film. Theirs is also not a camp reading. Theorists like Benjamin Buchloe think that camp is a form of mockery of the ruling order. But there is “no position of superiority in camp,” as Juliane Rebentisch argues: “The camp relation to its objects of choice is, to the contrary, one of siding with failure and decay.”³⁸ The Basel audience was not laughing with or in support of DeMille, but at him, and however old and decaying he may have been in 1956, he was clearly sitting at the top of a social hierarchy which had lost little of its purchase on people's lives since then. So mockery of the ruling order yes, camp reading no. What it was is an audience of festival goers watching a program in an evening sidebar, ready for entertainment after a hard day's work of engaging with serious video art and experimental films. What they collectively chose to do is pick up on a structural feature of the film, the regular intervals at which DeMille produced his historical artefacts. They chose to respond to the educational short much as they would to a sitcom episode, in which gags are spaced out at similar intervals.

This experience demonstrates an insight from one of Odin's earlier texts, which is key to the entire project of semio-pragmatics: namely that the “traitement filmique,” the cinematic form, functions in a certain way, but has no determined function (“Tout en ayant un fonctionnement spécifique, le niveau du traitement filmique n'a pas de fonction spécifique”³⁹). Far from prescribing their position in any definitive way, it engages the viewer's affects and moves her along in the process of constructing the world of the film. But the element of indeterminacy remains. The fact that the cinematic form functions in a certain way, but is not fully determined in its function, allows the viewer to phase out, for instance to be bored and lose interest, or to phase in with a different set of affects. The options, however, remain limited and prescribed by the way the film functions.

This exactly describes the actions of the Basel audience. Rather than be educated, they chose to be entertained – they were, after all, sitting in a cinema, in the evening, after a full day of work. They chose to relabel the text and approach it in accordance with the label they chose. But in their contrarian preference for entertainment, they remained faithful to the text, or at least to what it ineluctably prescribed – not, admittedly, to its tone, but to its structure. Neither cinephiles nor fans, not engaged in pious or extractive devotion, they behaved rather like a group of scrupulous

38 Juliane Rebentisch, “Camp Materialism,” pp. 242–243.

39 Roger Odin, “Mise-en-phase, déphasage, performativité,” in: *Communications* 38 (1983) p. 214.

semioticians having a ball. As radical as their reframing and repurposing of the DeMille short may seem, it is well within the boundaries defined by the text and the context, and well within the boundaries of the space of communication of the festival.

A key criterion for the validity of a theory is elegance, and semio-pragmatics certainly offers the most elegant explanation of what a festival audience did with, or rather to, a DeMille film on that night in Basel twenty years ago.

Beware of the Crypt: Semio-Pragmatics and the Question of Communication

We have noted the alignment of thought and action in Odin's work as a theorist and an institution builder. We have also noted his pioneering work on home movies, amateur films and, most recently, mobile phone films.⁴⁰ This is another area of convergence of theory and practice in Odin's work. Odin was always a filmmaker as well as a theorist. His body of work includes more than fifteen short films, mostly documentaries. On 6 December 2020, Odin uploaded a twenty-minute video film shot with a mobile phone to YouTube entitled *Méfiez vous de la crypte!*⁴¹ The film consists of observations in the style of diary entries, commented by Odin himself in voice-over. It covers the period from March to November 2020, i.e., the first eight months of the COVID-19 lockdown, which Odin and his wife Andrée spent in their country home, a modest restored farmhouse in a rural section of the Haute-Loire. The video chronicles Odin's work in and around the house, his viewing of television news, his readings (of Francis Ponge, among others), etc. It is both a diary film and the work of a theorist in action, a work of reflection on the lockdown and its mediated condition through the format of the video/mobile phone film. Odin, we are given to understand at the outset, films almost like he breathes. If the writer's motto is to never spend a day without writing – “nulla dies sine linea” –, the film theorist/filmmaker Odin's motto is to never spend a day without filming.

The film's climax consists in a montage of shots of an empty white bathtub which has been repurposed as a drinking trough for cows and graces a green

40 Roger Odin, “Spectator, Film and the Mobile Phone,” in: Ian Christie (ed.) *Audiences* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012), pp. 155–169; Laurence Allard, Laurent Creton, Roger Odin (eds.) *Téléphonie mobile et création* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014).

41 <https://youtu.be/ZpsUJoeAnrs>

pasture near Odin's house. Odin records that he returns to the bathtub and films it every day, and sometimes even at night. "The videos testify to a transfer upon that object, to a proper fixation," Odin comments. "There is a coherence to this choice of object, and my way of filming it." The images make him understand that the space of confinement of the lockdown defines his way of filming. And he recognizes what draws him to the tub and what he sees in it: himself. Unable to focus on writing during the lockdown, his head had been empty ("J'avais la tête vide"). Instead, he was drawn to the bathtub and started to film it obsessively. Citing psychoanalysts Nicholas Abraham and Maria Török, Odin describes the bathtub as a repository of experiences which cannot be represented and assimilated into conscious memory: a crypt.

Recently, John Mowitt has also used Abraham's and Török's concept of the crypt to raise the question of communication and film in a discussion of David Bowie's last video work, "Lazarus."⁴² Film scholars have tended to avoid the concept of communication, not least to distinguish themselves and their object from the field of mass media and communication studies. As Christian Metz put it, cinema "goes beyond communication strictly speaking" since "it does not authorize the immediate play of bilateral exchange." But then, Metz continues, "it is not the only semiotic system to behave in this way; nothing directly responds to a myth, to a folk tale, to a ritual, to a culinary or a clothing system, to a piece of music."⁴³ The reversal of terms in Metz's observation is striking: what moves cinema beyond communication is not the lack of response from its semiotic system; it's the lack of direct response from the viewer.⁴⁴

That we must nonetheless speak of communication is one of the underlying assumptions of Odin's work, one which he makes explicit with the concept of "spaces of communication." In Metz's seminar, Odin had found an ally in Francesco Casetti, who broadened the scope of film semiotics in his 1984 book *Dentro lo sguardo* (translated into English as *Inside the Gaze* in 1999)⁴⁵ to study the ways in which films directly address spectators and take their engagement

42 John Mowitt, *Tracks from the Crypt* (Lüneburg: meson press, 2019). <https://meson.press/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/978-3-95796-003-0-Mowitt.pdf>

43 Christian Metz, *Language and Cinema*. Translated by Donna Jean Umiker-Sebeok (The Hague and Paris: Mouton & Co., 1974), p. 288.

44 Having first stated his stance on cinema and communication in the late 1960s, Metz continued to elaborate his take through the 1980s. Cf. Christian Metz, "Théories de la communication vs. Structuralisme. Sur la notion de communication," in: *Mise au Point* 8 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.4000/map.2121>.

45 Francesco Casetti, *Inside the Gaze: The Fiction Film and Its Spectator*. Translated by Nell Andrew, with an Introduction by Christian Metz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999).

into account. Metz, in turn, responded to both Casetti and Odin in his last book, *Impersonal Enunciation, or The Place of the Film* (originally published in 1993 and translated in 2016),⁴⁶ in which he insisted that a thorough analysis of the film's enunciatory patterns was sufficient to understand how films are understood, and no account of the viewer's engagement was required. Against Metz, and moving beyond Casetti's focus on the fiction film, Odin's semio-pragmatics consistently focused on how the viewer does respond, if indirectly, to the semiotic system of the film. The concept of "spaces of communication" further embeds the semiotic system of the film in specific settings and framings. German sociologist Niklas Luhmann has emphasized what he called the "improbability of communication." As Daniel Lee writes, "regardless of how much people believe they have in common [...] it is not due to their regional, national or cultural backgrounds" that they manage to successfully communicate and build a society. Rather, it is "by employing established systems of communication, building new understanding upon what was successfully communicated in the past."⁴⁷ Semio-pragmatics offers a fine-grained analysis of such established systems of communication, and the Basel experience illustrates, among other things, how little shared background matters for a group of people to successfully communicate with each other over and through a film. But the DeMille example exemplifies not just the improbability of communication and how it is overcome. It also points towards an element of indeterminacy, which implies a possible failure to communicate. That is, in a way, also the message of the empty bathtub. It marks an internal boundary in the space of communication. "Méfiez vous de la crypte!" means that we must not just be able to account for the improbable event of communication. We must also account, in the spaces of communication, for that which goes beyond communication, the possibility that communication is, strictly speaking, not possible.

After the Elegy of Cinema: Semio-Pragmatics and the State of Film Studies

As it emerged from cinephilia and established itself as an academic discipline, film studies rephrased Bazin's argument about the ontology of the

46 Christian Metz, *Impersonal Enunciation, or The Place of Film*. Translated with an Introduction by Cormac Deane, afterword by Dana Polan (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

47 Daniel Lee, "The Society of Society.: The Grand Finale of Niklas Luhmann," in: *Sociological Theory*, 18/2 (2000), p. 323.

photographic image in the language of semiotics and defined cinema as a photochemical image technology with a privileged bond to reality (and index), a site of public projection, which also happens to encapsulate a model of the modern public sphere as an open, accessible, but ultimately homogeneous space (the dispositive),⁴⁸ and a limited body of works from directors from a limited number of countries (the canon).

Cinema is currently undergoing a transformation that can be described as a triple crisis of the index, the dispositive and the canon.⁴⁹ Digitization has turned the photographic image from an index into a graph. The moving image has always also been an image in movement, but it has become more so in the age of digital devices, platforms and streaming.⁵⁰ Whereas the cinema used to be a model for the modern public sphere, moving image culture now consists of a multitude of publics in different, interconnected but distinct spaces,⁵¹ which – illustrating Sarah Sharma’s point that while publics used to be “almost solely understood as spatial constructs, they are also temporal”⁵² – also means different temporalities. As a consequence, we can also no longer deny that the history of film has long included much of which even the most knowledgeable gatekeepers of Western film culture have been unaware.

We now live, so the diagnosis goes, in an age of post-cinema – a formula which appears to capture one of the key aspects of the transformation, but also conveys a melancholy attachment to cinema’s classical dispositive.⁵³

To the triple crisis of index, canon and dispositive many film theorists of Odin’s generation have responded with books and essays which either diagnose an “explosion” of cinema⁵⁴ and a “cinema éclaté”⁵⁵ or offer elegies

48 Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Specatorship and American Silent Film* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994). See also the discussion of cinema and public sphere in Heide Schlüppmann, *Raum geben – der Film dem Kino* (Berlin: Vorwerk 8, 2020).

49 Vinzenz Hediger, “Illusion und Indexikalität,” in *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie* 54 (2006), pp. 1–10.

50 Frank Kessler, “The Multiple Dispositifs of Early Cinema,” in: *Cinémas* 29/1 (Fall 2018), pp. 51–66.

51 Among the first to diagnose and account for this transformation apart from Roger Odin – and from within a Habermasian rather than a semio-pragmatic framework – was Miriam Hansen. Cf. Miriam Hansen, “Early Cinema, Late Cinema: Permutations of the Public Sphere,” in: *Screen* 34/3 (Autumn 1993), 197–210.

52 Sarah Sharma, *In the Meantime: Temporality and Cultural Politics* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2014), 146.

53 See for instance José Moure and Dominique Château (eds.) *Post-cinema: Cinema in the Post-art Era* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020).

54 Francesco Casetti, *The Lumière Galaxy: Seven Key Words for the Cinema to Come* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

55 Guillaume Soulez (ed.) *Le Cinéma éclaté. Formes et theories* (= *Cinémas* 29/1, Fall 2019).

for cinema in its former shape and form.⁵⁶ Roger Odin has written no such book. Instead, he has published books on mobile phone films, and he has written *Spaces of Communication*. It is a book which offers an approach to all kinds of objects which would not traditionally have been identified as “cinema.” It is also a book which accounts for a wide variety of spatial arrangements of moving images beyond the cinema dispositif, without imposing a hierarchy. It is a book which endorses a democracy of spaces of communication and helps us account for their different, interconnected, but distinct temporalities.

Among many younger film scholars, the response to the transformation of cinema has been to similarly broaden the scope and redefine the objects of film studies to include non-theatrical films, “useful cinema” and other configurations of film beyond the dispositif of cinema.⁵⁷

But Roger Odin has been at this for a long time.

When Odin insisted that film studies is a field rather than a discipline, and when he first developed semio-pragmatics as an approach to identify and analyse a broad variety of modalities of the moving image including, but not limited to, the cinema, he marked out what may at the time have seemed like a marginal position. But he was anticipating the shape of cinema studies to come. If semio-pragmatics can be read as a response to a key

56 For instance, Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is! Bazin's Quest and Its Charge* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005); Raymond Bellour, *La querelle des dispositifs. Cinéma – installations, expositions* (Paris: P.O.L., 2012); Jacques Aumont, *Que reste-t-il du cinéma?* (Paris: Vrin, 2013); Schlüppmann (2020).

57 See for instance Vinzenz Hediger (ed.) “Gebrauchsfilm 1”; “Gebrauchsfilm 2” (= special issues of *Montage AV*, 14/2 (2005), 15/1 (2006); Valérie Vignaux, *Jean Benoit-Lévy ou le corps comme utopie. Une histoire du cinéma éducateur entre les deux guerres* (Paris: AFRHC, 2007); Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau (eds.) *Films That Work: Industrial Cinema and the Productivity of Media* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009); Charles Acland and Haidee Wasson (eds.) *Useful Cinema* (Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2011); Dan Streible, Devin Orgeron and Marsha Gordon (eds.) *Learning with the Lights Off: Educational Film in the United States* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Yvonne Zimmermann and Pierre Emmanuel Jacques (eds.) *Schaufenster Schweiz. Dokumentarische Gebrauchsfilme 1896-1964* (Zürich: Limmat, 2011); Eef Masson, *Watch and Learn: Rhetorical Devices in Classroom Films after 1940* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012); Pascal Laborderie, *Le cinéma éducateur laïque* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2015); Oliver Gaycken, *Devices of Curiosity: Early Cinema and Popular Science* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Scott Curtis, *The Shape of Spectatorship: Art, Science, and Early Cinema in Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015); Marsha Gordon and Allyson Nadia Field (eds.) *Screening Race in American Non-Theatrical Film* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019); Florian Hoof, *Angels of Efficiency: A Media History of Management Consulting* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2019).

problem of film theory and the semiotics of film in the period after 1968, the solution Roger Odin proposed has been such that film studies is now, in a way, finally catching up with him.

This is why the English translation *Spaces of Communication* could not come at a more auspicious and appropriate time.

A complete bibliography and filmography of Roger Odin's works compiled by Ludger Kaczmarek and Hans-Jürgen Wulff with a presentation by Guido Kirsten can be found here: <https://mediarep.org/handle/doc/13732>

Spaces of Communication: Elements of Semio-Pragmatics

Roger Odin

Foreword and Acknowledgements

My reflections on semio-pragmatics began in the 1980s and have continued up to this day without interruption, thus giving rise to quite a number of publications (see the bibliography for some of these). However, what I have to say in this book is fundamentally new. Even though the themes here are similar to those I have explored in previous publications, the way I approach them, but also the argument itself are, as a general matter, different. This is not only because I happened to change my mind on one or another point, and not only because since publishing previous books I have continued to work and thus to clarify certain points, but because the axis of reflection that runs all the way through this work requires that issues be addressed in a different light: this is the first time I have tried to theorize the notion of a *space of communication* and to show how it can be used in analyses.

I have long resisted the idea of writing a book on semio-pragmatics. Articles are more flexible – better suited to a process of reflection that is still in the making. A book makes the presentation of content more rigid and more conclusory – to say nothing of the risk of presumptuousness when one ventures to present one's approach. However, there comes a time where it seems necessary to try to make at least one provisional point, if only to take stock more precisely of where I am in the process of reflection. (Articles – and this is where their flexibility pays off – allow a certain vagueness when it comes to overall consistency, whereas a book does not). And still I had to make the decision to throw myself into the project.

This book would not exist without a kind request from Bernard Miège.

The proposal to publish it as part of a series on communication certainly helped things along: I initially conceived of semio-pragmatics as an approach that could work for all types of production, but up to then I had stuck almost exclusively to cinema and broadcasting. Publishing in this series has prompted me to work on more-varied output. Although there are still plenty of references to my own professional domain, I have also tackled other areas. I have greatly enjoyed writing this book, and I hope the general aim of the “model” I have set out will be clear.

I cannot give enough thanks to those students and colleagues who had to put up with my various attempts at theorizing in various seminars, whether at the University of Paris III – Sorbonne Nouvelle, elsewhere in France, or abroad, and who, with their questions and their comments, and sometimes just by listening, allowed me to look back at my work and move forward with my research.

I would like to thank Isabelle Pailliar, Bernard Miège and Pierre Moëglin for reading the book with such a critical eye. I have taken full account of their comments, and even where I have not followed their suggestions, I have always benefitted from them one way or the other. It is rare in this day and age to find a book series that affords its authors critical readings of such high quality.

“Without a machine, one is sure, from the start, to see nothing.”

– Christian Metz

Introduction: The Semio-Pragmatic Model

There is a rather surprising observation to be made right at the starting point of semio-pragmatics: a great many theorists seem to have enormous difficulties deciding where they stand with regard to these two major paradigms: the immanentist and the pragmatic.

A look back at a couple of definitions:

The *immanentist approach* posits the text or language [*langage*] as an entity endowed with permanent structural characteristics (a system in which each term has meaning only in relation to the system), an entity that it describes without reference to what lies outside it. As Ferdinand de Saussure put it: “Language [*la langue*] is a system that knows only its own order.”¹ Classical semiology was built on these foundations.

Conversely, *pragmatic approaches* hold that a sign, a word, a statement and a text make sense only in relation to the context in which they are sent and received. Theorists have different conceptions of what we are to understand by “relationship with the context.” I regard *pragmatics* as comprising those approaches that put the *context* at the *starting point* of the production of meaning – that posit the context as *regulating* this production.

On the Difficulty of Getting Away from Immanence

A number of attempts by theorists to move away from the immanentist paradigm and enter the pragmatic have ended up running aground in a return to the immanentist.

1 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Cours de Linguistique Générale* (Paris: Payot, 1986), p. 43.

This is true, for instance, of the theory of enunciation that was initially constructed as the analysis of the relationship between enunciation and the set of parameters in the communication setting (the sender, the receiver and the context, and the spatio-temporal circumstances, as well as the conditions of the production and reception of messages) – that is, as a pragmatic approach. This theory quickly gets to the point where it is boiled down to an analysis of “the imprint of the process of enunciation on the utterance.”² This return to immanentism is often made in the awareness that one is missing something: Catherine Kerbat-Orrechioni³ thus observes: “We are methodologically *bound* to the problematic of traces” [my emphasis].

The same goes for the pragmatics of speech acts (Austin, Searle), which are limited to studying how a text affects the reader. Thus the text still comes first. In the field of film studies, this movement is evident in the book *Western Graffiti* (1983) by Daniel Dayan, who, even as he shows his willingness to “move from one type of analysis oriented towards the text of a film to another oriented towards the viewer”⁴ (a statement that seems to fall within the pragmatic paradigm), is devoted in fact “to the study of the effects of the *utterances*” on the viewer.⁵ Moreover, the subtitle of the book is “Image Games and the Programming of the Viewer in John Ford’s *Stagecoach*.” We do not get away from the immanentist paradigm.

Here is one last example: the case of Umberto Eco, a theorist who, in 1962 [1989], wrote a book, *The Open Work*, which begins with this statement: “It is a fact that production and consumption may be at the origin of two objects that *are strangers to one another*.”⁶ It thus announces itself as a precursor to the pragmatic approach to texts. And there he is again in 1990, in *The Limits of Interpretation*, dedicating one of his first chapters to “an apology of the literal sense”⁷ and setting himself the goal of “knowing what *one has to protect* in order to open it” [my emphasis].⁸

2 Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov, *Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage* (Paris: Seuil, 1972) p. 405.

3 Catherine Kerbat-Orrechioni, *L'énonciation. De la subjectivité dans le langage* (Paris: A. Colin, 1980), p. 32.

4 Daniel Dayan, *Western graffiti. Jeux d'images et programmation du spectateur dans La chevauchée fantastique de John Ford* (Paris: Clancier-Guenaud, 1983), p. 269.

5 Ibid.

6 Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, Trans. by Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, (1989) [1962]), p. 11 [my emphasis].

7 Umberto Eco, *The Limits of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 53.

8 Ibid., p. 55 [my emphasis].

On the Difficulty of Staying Within Immanence

One might think that, if it is hard to get away from immanence and turn to pragmatics, staying within immanence poses no problem – but that is just not so. Theorists who say they are adherents of immanence still find just as many difficulties staying within the immanentist paradigm as the theorists who seek a pragmatic approach in trying to escape the immanentist one. The world of theorists is really quite complicated....

The work of the semiologist Christian Metz is a remarkable illustration of this second movement. Few theorists, indeed, have claimed so vigorously that they belong to the immanentist paradigm. He has claimed that he has prioritized the study of systems, used a method based on the study of internal differences (distributional or componential analysis), and established typologies and taxonomies: a taxonomy of sequential constructs likely to appear in films (the famous *grand syntagmatic* [1968]), a taxonomy of languages [*langages*], a taxonomy of various types of “system,” a taxonomy of the “codes” of cinematic language.... And the list could go on. His last book, *Impersonal Enunciation, or the Place of Film* (2016 [1991]), is an immanentist manifesto if ever there was one. Metz states not only that the enunciator and the addressee are “parts of text”⁹ but that, “in principle the reader only decodes what the writer produces, yet their respective activities move in opposite directions.”¹⁰

The paradox is that the first gesture Metz made in founding the semiology of cinema was to construct cinematographic language as a “language without a language system” [*un langage sans langue*] (1968) and thus to place this approach from the get-go alongside the models of performance and pragmatics: “one finds oneself thrown back from the outset onto judgements that correspond to instances of acceptability (performance models) that come into play in the reception of the socio-cultural classes of users and the broadcast of film genres.”¹¹ In Metz’s first articles (1968), references to the work the viewer does to produce meaning figure prominently (*cf.*, for example, the notion of “induction current,” which suggests that the viewer projects a narrative relationship between two shots). Even the *grand syntagmatique*, which is always cited as a model of the immanentist structural approach, was conceived to work for a class of films (fiction films) that is delimited

9 Christian Metz, *Impersonal Enunciation, or the Place of Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, (2016) [1991]), p. 20.

10 Ibid.

11 Christian Metz, *Essais sémiotiques* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977a), p. 118.

historically (classic fiction films produced from 1930 to 1955 or thereabouts). External (that is, not immanent) considerations thus determine the construction of the model. At first glance, *Langage et Cinéma* (1971) would seem to be farther from these pragmatic concerns. In it, Metz insists, however, that even if cinematographic language can be described as a combinatory of codes, only the notion of the subcode can explain how it works at any given point in its history. If the codes are the locus of the problems that every director has to resolve (how to frame? how to organize a sequence of images? how to link up moving images?), there are indeed many ways to answer these questions. The subcodes are specifying “the same coding problem.”¹² For example, the issue of montage leads to different answers depending on the period, the author, aesthetic currents, and genres: montage of attractions (Eisenstein), invisible montage, montage-collage, “forbidden” montage (Bazin), and so on. The notion of the subcode is without doubt pragmatic.

More generally, for Metz, “linguistic-analytical capture” is “from the start a socio-historical project.”¹³ In *The Perceived and the Named*,¹⁴ he shows that “the perceptual object” is a “socially constructed” entity. The transition to the psychoanalytic approach (1975) becomes part of the same movement by integrating the unconscious determinations into the process of reading movies and into the construction of the cinematic signifier itself. Metz points out in closing that the way he has described how the cinematographic signifier works “concerns...only certain geographical forms of the institution itself – those used in Western countries.” And he adds: “The entire film as a social fact, and thus also the psychological state of the ordinary viewer, may entail aspects that are very different to those we are used to. Only one ethnography of the filmic state has been attempted, among others that have yet to be tried.”¹⁵ The contextual, pragmatic approach is not even absent from *Impersonal Enunciation, or the Place of Film* (2016 [1991]). Metz points out several changes in the way the configurations he studies work, depending on the communicative contexts they are operating in. He observes, for instance, that the gaze of the camera “was capable of taking forms one would not think of.” The viewer of primitive cinema would see it as something normal, because at that time “it is a set-up [*dispositif*] that differs profoundly from what prevails today.”¹⁶

12 Christian Metz, *Language and Cinema* (The Hauge, Paris: Mouton & Co., 1971b), p. 193.

13 Metz, *Essais sémiotiques*, p. 186.

14 Ibid., pp. 127–161.

15 Ibid., pp. 132–133.

16 Christian Metz, *L'énonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1991), p. 41.

In short, the analyses Metz offers are based on the conviction that external constraints determine the cinema's *conditions of possibility*. Beyond its immanentist proclamations, we can say that the entire work of Metz reflects concerns from pragmatics.

Vacillation

Some works vacillate between the two paradigms. I will give just one example. Gianfranco Bettetini's 1984 book *La conversazione audiovisiva* invites us to look at conversational analysis, one of the major trends in linguistic pragmatics. Yet, from the beginning, Bettetini explains that the notion of conversation cannot have the same meaning in film as in linguistics: not only is film a mono-directional medium that does not allow an authentic exchange, but the film text itself cannot be modified during the conversation. There is thus no real interactivity. On the other hand, the audiovisual conversation in question takes place between two entities, both of which are identifiable through a set of marks inscribed in the text itself: the enunciator and the addressee. It is, in a word, a *conversazione testuale* (this is the title of Chapter 4).¹⁷ At the same time, Bettetini recognizes that it is essential to step back from the text and to extend his investigations to concrete situations in which communication takes place. In this way, he begins a typology of the various constitutive instances of the empirical enunciating subject (*il soggetto empirico*) – instances that may speak in the communicative field: the editorial, the author, the major genres¹⁸ and an analysis of the extratextual enunciative marks (paratexts, a TV schedule, indications about genre, and so on).¹⁹ Two conceptions of enunciation are thus posited – one, textual (enunciation in the classic sense of the term, which falls under the category of immanence); the other, whose status is pragmatic, external.

At other times, Bettetini shows that the empirical viewer can be registered in the textual conversation only by putting themselves in the shoes of the subject of the enunciation that the text offers them, a symbolic subject who works as a “prosthesis”²⁰ on which the viewer must rely in order for

17 Gianfranco Bettetini, *La conversazione audiovisiva. Problemi dell'enunciazione filmica e televisiva* (Milan: Bompiani, 1984), pp. 95–133.

18 Ibid., p. 29.

19 Ibid., p. 36.

20 Ibid., p. 28.

the communication to work. Now, because the filmic text has a fixed and immutable structure that includes in its semiotic articulation “the representation of its standards of use and of the mode of access to its meaning,”²¹ it is ultimately this text which, *through* the enunciative prosthesis, programmes the empirical viewer. Once again, the movement therefore goes from text to viewer. There is a return to immanence. But Bettetini also recognizes that the empirical spectator cannot content themselves with putting themselves in the shoes of the viewer produced by the text – that they are stuck between two projects: the project of the text and their own project, or at least the project that they define under the constraint of the external determinations that weigh on them. It may happen, then, that external, contextual determinations outweigh the textual determinations.

There is thus a constant back and forth going on in the book between the immanentist and the pragmatic paradigms. No one is more aware of these switches than Bettetini, who, in his presentation, talks about the “dialectical tension”²² that is at the heart of his thinking. It is obvious that he wants to renounce neither the immanence that reassures him theoretically (it is immanence that, in his view, establishes semiotic relevance), nor the consideration of the pragmatic dimension that he strongly senses cannot be expunged without being cut off from the actual workings of communication.

For an Articulation between the Two Paradigms: Semio-Pragmatics

My view is that the difficulty theorists have in escaping immanence, such as Metz’s position in extolling immanence while developing a pragmatic approach, or Bettetini’s vacillation, should neither be condemned as inconsistent nor dismissed as signs of theoretical weakness, but, on the contrary, should be taken quite seriously as the mark of a very real phenomenon: what if neither paradigm could be escaped?

Everything happens as though both paradigms were still there, at the same time, present in theorists’, but also in everyone’s, minds: at the same time, there is the belief in the text and its independent existence, and the recognition that the meaning of a text changes with the context.

In *L’implicite* (1986), Catherine Kerbrat-Orrecchioni describes the existence of this dual belief with a bit of humour. She begins by quoting Bob Wilson,

²¹ Ibid., p. 101.

²² Ibid., p. 8.

who was interviewed about *Einstein on the Beach*: “I handle images as a composer would. You are free to interpret them as you like.” But a little later on, in response to the question, “What does this building represent? Is it a school?”, he protests, outraged. “What? No! Not at all!” And Catherine Kerbrat-Orrecchioni remarks: “Every one of us can give in to it one day. As semioticians, we are ready to allow the right, and even to claim it, to more than one reading of the same text; to repeat endlessly (because this truth is still a long way from being recognized by most people in the world of criticism, or among those who teach literature) that we must recognize the existence, at the heart of interpretive activity, of a principle of both uncertainty and diversity. But as soon as we take off our semiotician's hats and become ordinary consumers of literary or other texts, we fall right into the interpretive dogmatism we were excoriating a few moments earlier, stubbornly extolling the virtues of common sense and setting off on a crusade against misinterpretation: “I know very well, but all the same....”²³

In *Le film sous influence, un procédé d'analyse*, Jean-Daniel Lafond reasons rigorously in the opposite direction, but ends up arriving at the same conclusion: he attributes to the viewer the idea of the individual reading – the idea that there are as many films as there are viewers – and to the semiologist the role of the one who restores the immanent truth of the text: “the analyst is going to...focus their work on reviewing the stimulus – in this case, on the film as an organised information system. The study of this structure is precisely what is involved in analysing a film. This approach therefore turns its back on the sense of ‘the unique’ that the viewer usually has of how they perceive the film, and that justifies the prejudice that says there are as many films as viewers.”²⁴

Whether it is the ordinary reader or the theorist who does or does not believe in the variability of the text, one thing is certain: the double movement is within us. On the one hand, it is impossible for us not to presuppose the existence of the text, namely immanence: without this belief, social life would be really very difficult. On the other hand, it is equally impossible for us not to recognize that, depending on the context in which it is carried out, the construction of the text may be different (the pragmatic approach).

It seems to me that the logical conclusion to draw from this finding is that these two paradigms must intervene in the analysis of communication and therefore in the theoretical framework that aims to take account of it. Nor can we fail to recognize that the text varies in accordance with the

23 Catherine Kerbrat-Orrechioni, *L'implicite* (Paris: A. Colin, 1986), p. 310.

24 Jean-Daniel Lafond, *Le film sous influence, un procédé d'analyse* (Paris: Édilige, 1982) p. 70.

context, or overlook the fact that the receiver believes in the existence of a text that has been sent to them with a meaning that has been set in stone, and that they would simply have to decode. Whether it is or is not an illusion does not alter the fact that it is this text that, ultimately, *is* the result of the communication process. What is needed, then, is a theory capable of articulating these two contradictory movements at the heart of the communication process – a theory that connects the two paradigms.

Even its name tells us that the semio-pragmatic approach aims to articulate these two paradigms. This approach does not make obsolete the immanentist approach of classic semiology, whose key contributions it recognizes: the attention paid to the text, the production of analytical tools (the typology of signs, certain conceptual pairings – denotation vs connotation, paradigmatic vs syntagmatic relations, and so forth), the structural analysis of the narrative and of the description, procedures for analysing the enunciative structure, acts of language, etc. – and even salutary warnings against the deviations that an uncontrolled pragmatic approach can lead to. Its goal is to put this immanentist approach *into a contextualized pragmatic perspective*. Once the contextual constraints governing the construction of the text have been recognized, the immanentist analysis can be put into action.

The Semio-Pragmatic Model

It now makes sense to create and construct a model of communication that will be adapted.

One caveat, however, about this term “model” is in order: I use it for convenience, and my constructions do not have the logical rigour that this notion normally implies. The quotes are there to indicate this reserve. Since putting them around every occurrence of the term would weigh the text down too much, I will ask the reader to include them in their mind every time they see the term. What I call a model is only a *working tool* that mediates between theory and observation – a theoretical device, a “machine,”²⁵ a kind of optical instrument, a telescope, or rather a microscope, that aims to *help the reader to see better and ask themselves questions*.

I am looking for a model that can account for the two contradictory movements that have been highlighted: on the one hand, there is the fact that we believe we are looking at a text that someone wanted to communicate to us and that we believe we can understand. On the other, there is the fact

25 Metz, *Essais sémiotiques*, p. 185.

that different texts are produced depending on the reading context we are in. These two movements do not have the same relationship to the pragmatic paradigm: whereas the second is recorded directly, the first derives from the immanentist illusion – though it must be possible to explain this illusion starting from the pragmatic position.

It is clear that patterns of transmission of the encoding-decoding type (Shannon and Weaver, Jakobson) or so-called models in “Y” that are content to add a pragmatic component to the codic components (for example, the deictic component in Benveniste) would not suit this approach. Interactive models developed by Bateson, Goffman, Watzlawick and others are closer to what I am after. For these models, the “context,” sometimes referred to as the “framework,” or the “culture,” is the determinant, an “element” in the sense in which we speak of air and water as elements, an enveloping element in which the actors of communication are bathed. The metaphor that has been developed is that of the “orchestra”: “the members of a culture participate in communication just as musicians participate in an orchestra. But the communication orchestra has no boss, and the musicians are not playing from the same score. They come to more or less harmonious agreements because they will guide each other as they play.”²⁶ Thus “each individual participates in communication rather than being its origin or its outcome.”²⁷ However, the concept of communication has a specific meaning here. These models are, in fact, made for social communication: what happens *for the individual and between individuals* in the *hic et nunc*, with a focus that is often (though not always) therapeutic. In their current form, these models seem to me barely serviceable if one wishes, as I do, to study both mediated and deferred communication, bringing into play a film, a television show, a book, a journal article, and so on, as well as viewers or readers.

The model I suggest building posits a radical separation between the space of the sender (S) and that of the receiver (R): when, in the space of the sender (S), the sender gives birth to a text (T) in the space of reception, this text is reduced to a set of visual and/or sound *vibrations* (V) from which the receiver (R) will produce a text (T') that cannot, *a priori*, be identical to (T). We thus have a model of non-communication.

Note: This position does not contradict the statement by Paul Watzlawick (1972) that “one cannot not communicate.” What the theorist from the

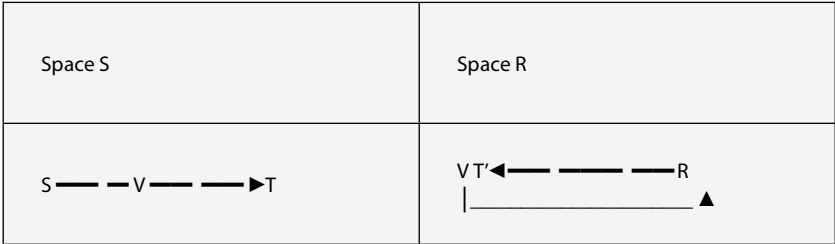
26 Yves Winkin, *Anthropologie de la communication. De la théorie au terrain* (Bruxelles: De Boeck/ Paris: Seuil, 2001).

27 Yves Winkin, *La nouvelle communication* (Paris: Seuil, 1981), p. 25.

Palo Alto school means is that we cannot not produce signals. This does not mean at all that these signals are interpreted correctly by those who perceive them.

Here is a first snippet of how the model is built:

Schema 1: Two spaces



In the space of the sender (S), (V) is located between (S) and (T): the work S does actually involves giving shape to vibrations in order to produce a text. When we enter the space of the receiver (R), this text is again reduced to vibrations (V), and it is these vibrations that (R) will in turn transform into text (T').

The status that I am assigning to this model is worth noting. The key point is that it in no way claims to *describe* how communication works: rather, it aims to make it possible to ask about how communication processes do or do not work. The semio-pragmatic model is *heuristic*: one does not try to determine whether a heuristic hypothesis is true or false. Rather, one adopts it only provisionally as a guiding idea as one looks for the facts. That is the status that is given to the hypotheses which (in)form semio-pragmatics.

The value of putting a *model of non-communication* at the starting point of our reflections is clear: because of its radical character, this model forces me to consider communication as a *problem* and not as something that exists. More precisely, the value of such a model is that it forces me to try to explain what can lead (S) and (R) to “communicate,” i.e., to ask how the processes by which meaning is produced in both spaces can get so close to each other that (R) has the impression that (T) was *transported* from one space to the other. This constitutes an immanentist position: (R) “thinks” they have in front of them a text that (S) has communicated to them: first movement.

The model also allows us to ask about the second movement, namely the fact that different texts (T') can be built from the same (V). Indeed, if (R) is responsible for the construction of the text (T') in the space of reading, we can imagine that a receiver (R2) will lead to the construction of a text (T''),

that (R₃) will lead to (T'''), and so on, and that there are as many texts that have been constructed as there are receivers.

But what is meant by receivers and, more generally, what is the status of the actors in communication?

I will consider (S) and (R) not as individuals, but as *actants*. Accepting the risks that come with abstraction and a deterministic vision – a purely theoretical determinism – I will define (S) and (R) *as the intersection of a set of constraints that passes through and constructs them*.

The same person can thus appear in the form of different (R_s) – (R₁), (R₂)...(R_n) – following the sets that cross them and produce different texts from the same (V): (T₁), (T₂)...(T_n).

Conversely, different people will be able to appear in the form of one and the same (R) and therefore produce the same (T) if they are traversed by the same set of constraints.

Finally, if we ask ourselves about the way in which the constraints are involved in each of the two spaces, we can then compare how (S) and (R) produce meaning based on the set of constraints that constitutes them. The more similar the set of constraints that weigh on (S) and (R), the more (S) and (R) will be constructed in a similar way, and the greater the chances that they will produce meaning in the same way and that what they produce will be similar to one another: (T') becomes more like (T). In the end, communication can take place because the actants who are producers of meaning, (S) and (R), are not free. Specifically, it is these constraints, and they alone, that allow us to get the impression that the process of communication works.

Here we find the question of the "context," seen not as what the referential process refers to (as, for example, in Jakobson's model), *but as all of the constraints that govern the production of meaning* (cf. Schema 2 at the end of the Introduction).

In the same way that some theorists have proposed classifying narrative models into models of the finished story (Greimas) and models that follow the movement of the construction of the narrative by the reader (Bremond, Eco), communication patterns can be classified into:

- models that analyse communication that has finished, or models oriented around *results*, such as Jakobson's model, which is focused on the message (these models derive from the immanentist paradigm)
- models that analyse communication as it unfolds, or models oriented around *progressions*²⁸

28 Cf. Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson, *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* (Oxford: Blackwell Publisher, 1995).

The semio-pragmatic model falls under neither of these categories. It is concerned with the constraints that govern how the actants in communication are constructed, and with the way in which they are led to produce meaning: I propose to talk about a *production model*.

A production model describes the context as a construction that precedes communication, in order to set the terms on which it takes place: for instance, if I were to take the set of all theatres, I could construct the context as a space in which the actant (R) is positioned as a “viewer,” as opposed to the academic context, where (R) is positioned as a “learner,” or to the family context, in which they are positioned as a “member of the family.” In progression models, by contrast, the context is constructed in the course of communication and works as a “variable”: “A central problem for pragmatic theory is to describe how, for any given utterance, the hearer finds a context which enables him to understand it adequately.”²⁹

Here we are, then, facing two different conceptions of the notion of context – or, more exactly, two different notions of context. Sperber and Wilson offer a robust critique of the models that regard the context as a prior condition, but if we look carefully at their criticisms, we notice that what they see as falling under the notion of prior context has nothing to do with the conception of the context as it is found in semio-pragmatics: the prior context as they envisage it consists essentially of encyclopaedic content and of information stored in memory (they also speak of “common knowledge”); for the semio-pragmatic model, the context is constituted by the constraints. I think these two models complement one another: the production model sets the overall *framework* within which the progression model will operate.

Moreover, Sperber and Wilson acknowledge the existence of this framework, but only for very special cases such as the institution of the law, where “there really is a serious attempt to establish mutual knowledge among all the parties concerned: all laws and precedents are made public, all legitimate evidence is recorded, and only legitimate evidence can be considered, so that there is indeed a restricted domain of mutual knowledge on which all parties may call, and within which they must remain.” But they go on: “There is no evidence of any such concern in normal conversation, however serious or formal it is.”³⁰ We can see that Sperber and Wilson are right, of course, if we regard the prior context as content. But it is quite a different matter if we look at the constraints that govern the production of meaning.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 16.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

Communication takes place most frequently within institutional frameworks that are obviously just so many systems of constraints (family, school, university, the factory, and so on). Going to the theatre and the cinema, watching TV, going to a football or rugby game in a stadium, going into a supermarket, opening a newspaper, also involve entering into a system of constraints. Even spontaneous dialogues come into such frameworks, as has been shown by specialists in verbal interactions and conversational analysis. In addition, systems of constraints can readily be transported and internalized: when I ask my friend Pierre, whom I have just bumped into on a street corner, for news of his family, I am caught up in the constraints both of the family as an institution and of politeness. And as for romantic relationships....

In the semio-pragmatic model, analysis starts decidedly from the context – that is, from constraints. These constraints lead the actant (R) to produce *hypotheses of reading* that they will test out on (V): for example, if I am in a context that invites me to resort to fictionalization, I will try to construct the space as a “world,” but it may be that the system of vibrations to which I apply this process does not allow this.

Chapter 1 examines the status of natural, narrative language and other constraints, and suggests constructing the notion of a *space of communication* to escape the aporias in the notion of *context*. Chapter 2 postulates that, inside a *discursive space* (in this case, “Western” space), the actors put a shared *communicative competence* into action. This skill is designed as a reservoir of *modes of production of meanings and affects*, which can themselves be analysed as a combination of processes. By way of example, several modes are constructed. Chapter 3 offers a detailed analysis of two modes, the artistic and the aesthetic, and inquires into the relationship between modes and spaces of communication. Starting from the example of the communication of memory within the family as an institution, Chapter 4 shows how the notion of a space of communication can allow contextual analysis. Chapter 5 mobilizes the notion of a space of communication to allow an understanding of what a production becomes when it moves outside its original space. Finally, Chapter 6 examines the difference between traditional (immanentist) textual analysis and textual analysis within the semio-pragmatic perspective.

Schema 2: Context as a Set of Constraints

Space S	Space R
$S \text{ --- } V \text{ --- } \blacktriangleright T$	$V T' \text{ --- } \text{---} R$ $ \text{ --- } \blacktriangle$
Context S Constraints a, b, c,...n	Context R Constraints b, c, d, g,... n

1. Context, Constraints and the Space of Communication

Abstract

Chapter 1 examines the status of universally shared constraints, narrative constraints and the language as a set of constraints.

Keywords: universal constraints, narrative, language

If the context is defined as a *set of constraints*, and if the total weight of the operation (or non-operation) of communication rests on these, it is essential that we give ourselves the means to analyse them. And this is where the trouble begins, because there are countless constraints. A number of theorists have emphasized, moreover, that this was where pragmatics ran aground. François Latraverse sees a “problem that is both theoretically and philosophically interesting, even if also something of a cause for despair.”¹

At the end of this chapter, I will go out on a limb by suggesting a tool for tackling this problem, but before I do that, I will look at two questions that have given rise to countless debates, and that it seems essential to ask, even if I cannot really answer them. The first can be formulated as follows: are there any constraints that are shared universally – that is, that would weigh on (S) and (R) regardless of the communication context in which these actants are located? The second concerns the role of language in the system of constraints.

Universally Shared Constraints

It has essentially been cognitivists who have highlighted these constraints. They insist on everything that makes a person a person – on the fact that

¹ François Latraverse, *La pragmatique: Histoire et critique* (Bruxelles: Mardaga, 1987), p. 18.

our perceptual and neural apparatus has remained largely unchanged for thousands of years, and that it is this same apparatus that is shared today by every human being. We will thus speak of natural constraints.

Natural Constraints²

Here is an example to get us pondering. We know the thesis that Umberto Eco has set out in various articles and in Chapter II of his book, *The Absent Structure*: “Iconic signs are conventional. That is, they do not have the property of the thing represented, but they transcribe certain conditions of experience, according to a *code*.”³ Faced with this position, which is characteristic of the age of semiology, the cognitivists try to persuade us that the recognition of objects in images takes place through processes that are largely the same as those we use in the world.

There are, first of all, pure and simple phenomena of identity: a triangle that has been drawn is a triangle. Similarly, some facial features are directly present in an image: the more-or-less round or oval shape of the face, the geometric configuration of the eyes and the mouth, as well as their relative positions. On the other hand, Torben Grodal⁴ tells us that Eco is wrong when he holds that what distinguishes a drawing of a horse clearly from the view of a horse in reality, is the lines in the drawing. Since the work of David Marr, we know, in fact, that seeing an object entails producing lines that delimit “virtual borders,” that is, drawing the apparent outline of the objects (*cf.* the concepts of “zero crossing” and “primal sketch”). There is no need to master a code in order to recognize a horse in a drawing: it is enough to know what a horse is. Laurent Jullier has come up with a rule for this: if an object that is known to a given extent by someone is recognized in a given image, “it will be universally recognised by anyone who knows that object to the same extent.”⁵

A number of processes come from automatic cognitive functions that in their workings not only have no relation to culture but do not even arise from a process of inference: “Who has ever had the impression of seeing a

2 The following section owes much to Laurent Jullier, *Cinéma et cognition* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2002).

3 Umberto Eco, *La structure absente. Introduction à la recherche sémiotique* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1972), p. 191.

4 Torben Kragh Grodal, *Moving Pictures: A New Theory of Film Genres, Feelings, and Cognition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), pp. 75–77.

5 Jullier, *Cinéma et cognition*, p. 100.

flat movie? And who can even manage to do so by some effort of the will?”⁶ Experiments show that the same goes for spotting apparent movement, for determining relative sizes, and for sensing three-dimensional relief. This type of process even concerns effects that have nothing to do with the production of meaning, such as the effects of dizziness, or of a change in pressure and speed that one can experience in some simulators or in an IMAX theatre: a sense that is impossible to escape. To characterize these phenomena, the cognitivists talk about short circuits, “pre-wiring” (meaning neuronal connections that are there from birth, and even before that), a “sub-symbolic connectionist” level, and encapsulated modules: modules not consciously controlled by the subject and that thus cannot be disconnected.

We must insist on one point: that, in order to be valid, such an approach must deploy a highly controlled experimental process. Now, very often, those who work on communication in that respect do it second hand: they do not experiment themselves, and thus rely on experiments carried out by researchers from other disciplines, which are highly technical and advanced (neuro-anatomy, neurophysiology, neurobiology, artificial intelligence, cognitive psychology, and so on). Since these specialists do not agree among themselves, and since there are various currents (such as computationism, as opposed to connectionism) and thus propositions that often contradict each other, it is difficult for those doing research in communication to get their bearings and particularly to choose among these propositions, because they do not have the professional competence to evaluate them.

Conversely, scientists who do experiments are often too trusting when it comes to the traps that the field of communication sets for them. The most serious risk, from this standpoint, is that, because of how they conduct their experiments, these researchers allow themselves to be trapped by their own way of communicating and of understanding the world (this is what is known as the *naturalist illusion*). Thus, some theorists felt able to say that tonal music was based on the natural principles of human cognition and that they could deduce from this the existence of a natural and implicit grammar of hearing that would explain, for instance, the difficulties that serial music faced in its reception by the public: the idea was that we are simply not programmed to hear series in the first place. The compositional grammar that composers of this type of music use would thus, on this view, come into conflict with the natural grammar of reception.⁷ However,

6 Ibid., p. 98.

7 Fred Lerdahl and Ray S. Jackendoff, *A Generative: Theory of Tonal Music* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983).

we have as many difficulties identifying the play between *subject and countersubject* in Bach's fugues as there are series in serial music. Also, how can we explain, if we accept this theory, that Pygmy polyphonies work with no problem for the Pygmies themselves, while we are unable to correctly identify their rhythms?⁸ Does this not also show the existence of musical grammars (of production and listening) *different from* our own, and does it not amount to a rejection of the idea that tonal grammar is the result of natural constraints? These observations do not mean that there are no musical universals: the very fact of *music* (as opposed to words or noise) appears to be a universal phenomenon, as do certain principles of construction (tension vs release; repetition vs non-repetition), but we must be rather careful in identifying them.

We must add, following Jullier, that the farther we move from the level of automatic constraints and towards processes of a symbolic kind, the farther we move from processes that may lead to indisputable experiments and the more hypothetical the models become. If those doing research on memory still base themselves on more-or-less verifiable models, the validity of everything to do with the modelling of the human mind (sometimes referred to as the theory of mind) as a systematic way, inspired by the computer, of treating information (which is itself also an information-processing system) depends on the answer to the question: are the two systems of the same nature? This debate is wide open. The problem is even more acute when it comes to the evolutionary approach. How do I prove that, if I manage to convey to my girlfriend my enthusiasm for this landscape, this is because it would have been appreciated by our ancestors in the Pleistocene era?⁹

The Narrative Constraint

There is, however, a universal constraint that seems all but indisputable: the narrative constraint. Theorists hailing from a range of disciplines agree: it is as if an inner force were driving us towards narrative structures. Ethnologists recognize it: the recourse to stories can be found in all societies. Psychoanalysts talk about "a desire inherent in the structuring of the psyche,"¹⁰

8 Michel Gribenski, "Musique et sciences cognitives," *Labyrinthe*, vol. 20 (2005), pp. 99–116.

9 Cf. the Savanna hypothesis, Gordon H. Orians and Judith H. Heerwagen, "Evolved Responses to Landscapes," in Jerome H. Barkow, Leda Cosmides and John Tooby (ed.), *The Adapted Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 555–579.

10 Jean-Louis Baudry, "Le dispositif," *Communications*, vol. 23 (1975), pp. 56–72.

a desire that flows directly from the Oedipal constraint: “isn’t storytelling always a search for origins, an account of one’s entanglements with the Law, an entry into the dialectic of tenderness and hate?”¹¹ Psychologists, for their part, have shown that “plot development” structures our experience of early childhood. The use of the term, coined by Ricoeur, is no accident: what is at stake here is the issue of “narrative identity.” The child psychiatrist Daniel Stern (1995) thus describes what he calls the *temporary feeling shape* in babies as a combination of affects structured in time in tension-crisis-resolution mode, which produces the line of basic narrative tension: it is this shape that binds the schema of affect to the narrative schema. As the clinical psychologist Denis Mellier puts it: “Stern promotes narrativity as a true experience of precocious, infra-verbal symbolization.”¹² Mellier also points out that this idea already underlay Freud’s description of the *fort-da* game. In more-recent texts, Stern talks about “affective narration” and even about a “narrative model,” a construction that would play the role, as the toddler approached its third birthday, of an “operating model that one recounts to oneself or to another.”¹³ The neurobiologist Antonio Damasio goes even farther: he talks about the “narrative function of the brain”: “Storytelling, in the sense of recording what happens in the form of brain maps, is probably an obsession of the brain that probably begins early, in terms both of development and of the complexity of neuronal structures that are needed to create stories. Storytelling precedes language, since it is, in fact, a precondition for language....”¹⁴

The consequences of this internalization of narrative constraint for communication are extremely important. No branch of communication escapes narration. Narration runs through literature, comics, theatre, ballet, press articles, recipes, songs, weather forecasts, the news (radio and television), and just about all TV shows (even reality TV is scripted). In cinema, non-narrative films are extremely rare, even in experimental cinema. As for documentaries, they most often have a narrative form. The development of “storytelling” in the press, and in business and political communications,

11 Barthes, cited by Raymond Bellour, *The Analysis of Film* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 77.

12 Dennis Mellier, “L’intégration psyché-soma et le temps de l’intrigue, ce que nous apprennent les bébés,” *Cairn*, vol. 30 (2003), p. 2.

13 Daniel N. Stern, “Engagements subjectifs: le point de vue de l’enfant,” in André Carel, Jacques Hochmann and Henri Vermorel (eds.), *Le Nourisson et sa famille* (Lyon: Cesura Lyon Éditions, 1990), pp. 30–45, here, pp. 30–35.

14 Damasio quoted by Raymond Bellour, *Le corps au cinéma. Hypnoses, émotions, animalités* (Paris: P.O.L., 2009), pp. 182–183.

is without doubt the most obvious recent manifestation of the appeal of the narrative model. Narratives also turn up in daily life: the conversations that we have are most often merely a succession of mini-tales: the games that children make up, but also those that grab and hold their attention on gaming devices, are obviously narrational. In fact, it is through narrative structures that we perceive the world and organize what we do. It is these structures that a grammar of narrative such as Claude Bremond's (1973) aims to construct. It describes the narrative as interrelations of roles during the course of the action, and its ultimate goal is to establish a universal theory of human action.

The flip side of the coin is that forms other than narrative seem not to work so well. The *discursive* form exists autonomously, but everyone knows that a discourse works better when it gets the story going, either by increasing the number of mini-narratives inside the discourse itself, or by turning itself purely and simply into a narrative. That gives rise to fable, parable, narrative propaganda, the moralistic novel, the educational novel, and a great number of films (especially fictional American ones). On French television, Alain Decaux brought history to life for the public with his talents as a storyteller. The *poetic* form reaches only a very limited number of readers. As for *description*, it is decidedly the least favourite among readers: who can honestly say they have never skipped descriptions?

Just the one structure does a little better out of the game: the list. Lists with scientific aims, lists for practical purposes (inventories of all kinds, lists of committees, or of things to do, and so on), and "poetic" lists. In *The Infinity of Lists* (2009), Eco shows that there are writers who are in love with lists: Homer, Rabelais, Cervantes, Calvino, Prévert, Borges, Perec, among others, including Eco himself. However, anthropologist Jack Goody notes two important limitations: even if there is a particular pleasure to be had from reciting lists (from playing on the sounds, from the rhythm, a more-or-less obsessive pleasure from the act of enumerating items), still, apart from the listing of ancestors' names, the recitation of genealogical lineages, lists of saints, religious litanies and some situations in games, "the occasions that would give rise to verbal lists are few and far between."¹⁵ On the other hand, the list is a structure that works better in writing than orally. More fundamentally, the list does not have the same structuring power as narration: as a structure, it opens onto the infinite (one can always add an item), whereas all narrative is, by contrast, built starting from the ending.

15 Jack Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 108.

Besides, even if the list gives off a certain appearance of coherence, it is only because the items on it are next to one other, while narrative works based on a causal chain. Mnemonics specialists also recommend turning lists into stories to memorize them more easily (according to some anthropological cognitivists, the human memory is better at storing bits of information that are connected by causal sequences). The list is far from having the significant status that the narrative form has.

The pressure of the narrative form is so strong that non-narrative structures can be read in a narrative fashion. In a series of experiments in cinema, Paul S. Cowen was surprised to discover this: "It seemed reasonable to expect films with a non-narrative structure, and especially those whose structure is decidedly dynarrative, to free the viewer from the ideological prison in which narrative films insidiously help lock them...." But he was soon disillusioned: "viewers did not show any wish to abandon their narrative schema, despite the inconsistency of certain scenes or of the whole movie." "I wasn't expecting," he admits, "that the tendency to use a narrative structure to make a series of visual experiences coherent would be so strong."¹⁶

I can now conclude on this point. If one accepts the existence of universal constraints (and it seems rather difficult not to), one must recognize that, *at a certain level*, the production of meaning and affects is *always* carried out in the same way in the spaces of the sender and of the receiver, and that this weakens the separation between those two spaces without, however, making it disappear: there are a lot of levels that are not affected by these mandatory processes. From a theoretical standpoint, the value of separating the model into two spaces is precisely that it forces the theorist to provide evidence of the existence of these shared constraints: that way, they avoid presupposing the universality of this or that procedure simply because it is the one they are themselves used to using.

We could also suppose that the existence of such processes calls into question one of the starting points of the semio-pragmatics model, namely that what is transmitted to us are simple vibrations (V). And it is true that, because of the mandatory processes, we do not generally have the sense that we are perceiving vibrations: "Even with the idiocy of television, the visual system does not learn that the screen is a pane with points of light."¹⁷ But, then again, the fact of putting this transmission of vibrations into the model serves as an invitation to explain at what level, and how, the

16 Paul S. Cowen, "L'importance des processus cognitifs et de la recherche empirique en études cinématographiques," *CiNéMAS*, vol. 12, no. 2 (2002), pp. 39–60, here pp. 46–48.

17 Pinker, cited by Jullier, *Cinéma et cognition*, p. 103.

mandatory processes that transform vibrations into meaning or affects come into play.

Finally, highlighting universal constraints presents at least the value of “putting limits on discourses from other fields”: there is no point in getting tired looking for constraints elsewhere (in culture, society, and so on), if we are facing constraints that have been programmed to work universally. There is no point in wondering about choices if there is no choice.¹⁸

The Case of Languages

There would seem to be nothing universal about the use of languages. Quite the contrary: one cannot fail to notice their plurality. However, there are theorists – and not unimportant ones, either – who support the existence of a universal grammar or at least the existence of linguistic universals beyond the diversity of languages. We know that this was the position of the Port-Royal Grammar (Arnauld and Lancelot 1660). More recently, Noam Chomsky (1957 and 1966) hypothesized the existence of structures common to all languages and inherent in the human mind. For him, only the existence of a universal syntax within us could explain the speed of language learning by a child, a speed that precludes the hypothesis of learning by trial and error. It seems that we are predisposed to learn grammar, as if this knowledge was already part and parcel of the structure of our language faculty. Universal grammar would therefore be a positive constraint (Chomsky described his universal grammar as an “unconscious constraint”). This hypothesis is, however, disputed today by some cognitivists.¹⁹

We can also consider language itself as a constraint, or a set of constraints. We do not choose our native language: it is because we are born into a community that we find ourselves having a native language attributed to us (“[language] exists only by virtue of a sort of contract signed by the members of a community”²⁰). Languages are even a prior constraint on all

18 Jullier, *Cinéma et cognition*, p. 198.

19 Cf., for instance, Luc Steeles, *Synthesising the Origins of Language and Meaning Using Co-Evolution, Self-Organization and Level Formation* (Brussels: AI Lab, Vrije Universiteit, 1996); Terrence W. Deacon, *The Symbolic Species* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997); Philip Lieberman, *Eve Spoke: Human Language and Human Evolution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998).

20 Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: The Philosophical Society, 1959), p. 14.

the constraints linked to the body: we are born into a language that was here before us and that our body becomes an integral part of.

The fact that linguistic communication is constrained by our relationship to a language is an obvious fact that we experience whenever we are talking to someone who has a different native language. What is more interesting to look at is the role that a language may or may not play outside the space of linguistic communication.

Language and Perception

The famous “Sapir-Whorf” hypothesis, as it is known,²¹ posits that language governs the most fundamental categories of our thought, as well as the way we divide the world up into objects. For instance, the categories time, space, subject, and object would not be the same in English, for example, as in the language of the Hopi. The example that is always cited is that of the Eskimos and the snow. The fact that their language includes ten words to describe snow is said to lead them to consider that there are ten different objects, whereas a French person sees only a single object, snow, to which they might tack on adjectives: crystallized, melting, frozen, powdered, and so on.²² Another example comes from research on the performance of arithmetic operations in various languages in the Amazon region: it seems clear that there is a link between lexical richness around numbers in a language and the ability of enunciators of that language to perform certain arithmetic operations. On that view, then, one’s language would thus have an effect on one’s cognitive capacities.²³

The fact remains, though, that the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis has been strongly criticized by many ethnologists, who have faulted the experimental conditions, and especially by cognitivists, who hold that we represent the world to ourselves through an internal universal language, the language of thought, which Jerry Fodor (1975) dubbed “mentalese,” and that the way one or another language divides up the world is only a surface effect that does not affect our perception of it.

21 Benjamin Lee Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1956).

22 Adam Schaff, “Language and Reality,” *Diogenes*, vol. 13, no. 51 (1965), pp. 147–167.

23 Pierre Pica, Cathy Lemer, Véronique Izard and Stanislas Dehaene, “Exact and Approximate Arithmetic in an Amazonian Indigene Group,” *Science*, vol. 306, no. 5695, (2004) pp. 499–503; Peter Gordon, “Numerical Cognition Without Words: Evidence from Amazonia,” *Science*, vol. 306, no. 5695 (2004), pp. 496–499.

The only thing we can say in response to these discussions is that the jury is still out.

The Influence of a Language on How We Read Images

At one level, the question of the influence of a language on how we read images is related to the foregoing problem: if we divide up objects in the world as one or another language seems to dictate, the same constraint will apply to how we divide up objects in an image.

But we should also recall Michel Colin's hypothesis, which aims to show the existence of a constraint, no longer at the semantic level but at the level of the vectorization of a language. In *Langue, film, discours* (1985), Colin suggests that, in Western civilization, we vectorize our reading of images (and therefore also their production) in accordance with the vectorization of written speech – that is, from left to right. The work of certain anthropologists seems to support this hypothesis. In *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Jack Goody (1977) shows how tables and lists are instrumental in the construction of some forms of thought, and holds, more broadly, that we think the same way when there is a written language. Goody incidentally evokes the question of the linearity of the written text and its orientation (horizontal, or up and down), pointing out that “the consequences are radical, on the nature of output but more particularly on the nature of the input, as well as on the receiver himself.”²⁴ For Goody, the key point is that, with writing, you can escape the constraints of temporal succession: it allows you to go back, to jump from one passage to another, and so on, but he says nothing about the vectorization that Colin talks about (that of the signifier), because he is talking about the opposition between the written and the oral, and not about the structuring of one or another language. That said, if some graphical figures are capable, as Goody has it, of occasioning changes “the psyche in here,”²⁵ why would the vectorization of the linguistic signifier not influence the reading and production of images?

If we start to look at them in this light, we find that a number of still or moving images seem in fact to have been constructed as though one had taken this vectorization into account, whether deliberately or not (because that can happen within an implicit grammar).

24 Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, p. 124.

25 Ibid., p. 108.

As far as audiovisual language is concerned, Colin refers in particular to the direction in which panning is done: for a viewer in whose native language the vectorization is from left to right, panning from left to right is unmarked, whereas panning from right to left is marked and has a striking effect. There is an effect at the level of presentation: "And here come those we were expecting," says the left-to-right panning that opens *Une Partie de campagne* (Jean Renoir 1936–1946) and that shows us the family Dufour arriving at the edge of the river in a carriage.²⁶ And there is a destabilizing effect: at the beginning of *State of Siege* (1973), Costa Gavras uses numerous right-to-left pans on the long lines of cars caused by the police checkpoints that have been set up to search for terrorists. (This is a first-rate foreshadowing of what is to follow in the film.)

Colin also notes the predilection in cinema for introducing new elements to the sequence shot through panning or the use of left-to-right travelling shots. Jullier criticizes this analysis,²⁷ pointing out that the famous uninterrupted long tracking shot that opens Orson Welles's 1958 *Touch of Evil* is characterized by its right-to-left movement; a bit of bad luck, then, that this tracking shot can be read as an excellent counter-example to support left-to-right vectorization: it uses a right-to-left camera movement to destabilize the viewer and prepare them emotionally for the car-bomb explosion at the end of the sequence. It is not enough to note that there are a lot of long right-to-left tracking shots in classic narrative cinema. That proves nothing, because it is possible that these shots are done right to left in order to produce a particular effect on viewers. We thus have to carry out analyses, and I must say that those I have done tend to support Colin's hypothesis.

Colin has done a good job of explaining the upshot of his hypothesis for communication. "If the assumption about the direction in which we read images in film, and figurative images more generally, were confirmed, it would follow that figuration processes, and more particularly the production of speech in film, could not be regarded as escaping a given linguistic tradition – the Western tradition." And he adds: "It is...not impossible that this orientation from left right can be found in cinemas whose linguistic tradition does not have this orientation in writing (in Arab cinema, for example). This would thus tend to support the idea that Western cinema, to the extent that it is dominant, imposes not only its semantic models but its syntactic structures."²⁸ In countries whose languages are not based on

26 I analyse this film in detail in Roger Odin, *De la fiction* (Brussels: De Boeck, 2000b).

27 Jullier, *Cinéma et cognition*, p. 80.

28 Michel Colin, *Langue, film, discours. Prolégomènes à une sémiologie générative du film* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1985), p. 104.

a left-to-right vectorization, one could thus say that directors and viewers alike “talk” cinema as a second language. Moreover, directors in these countries have often learned cinema in the West or from Western teachers. And as for viewers, if they want to understand movies, they are forced to learn the vectorization that governs the filmic language of the movie they are watching – and this happens implicitly. If one were to go along with this last remark of Colin’s, one would say that there is a form of cultural colonialism within the language of film itself.

“Non-Natural” Constraints and the Notion of the “Space of Communication”

I don’t know whether Colin’s hypothesis is on the mark, but one thing is certain: it invites us to foresee the constraints related to the language in the model, if only so that we do not forget to ask ourselves the question (in my view, the cognitivists underestimate the influence of languages). This is a question that also requires us to take into account another set of constraints, of an economic and political nature, because if Western cinematic language can be said to be dominant, that is because the West has had the power to impose *its* cinematographic language on other parts of the world.

It was those working in the field of cultural studies who have been especially interested in *non-natural* constraints on communication. Their approach is diametrically opposed to that of the cognitivists. Instead of turning towards what is universal in humankind, researchers in this field stress differences, otherness, idiosyncrasies, the diversity of communities, and the pluralization of identities. The relationship between the two camps is rocky, but I do not see why cultural studies and, more broadly, taking other cultures and social customs into account, should put a damper on the cognitivist approach, or vice versa. A few cognitivists who are more open than others, such as Jullier, share this point of view.

The problem with this type of approach is that when you start to list the contextual constraints that are likely to govern communication, there is no reason not to keep going. Wanting to show that the filmic text could not resist the power of the viewers, who are themselves determined by the context in which they evolve (“Free readers do not exist”²⁹), Janet Staiger

29 Janet Staiger, *Perverse Spectators: The Practices of Film Reception*, (New York: New York University Press, 2000), p. 162.

(2000) explains, by setting out an entire list of constraints – age, “race,” “ethnic” group, sex, sexual preference, national identity, and profession – how to respond to a movie. She observes, about the film *Ferris Bueller’s Day Off* (John Hughes 1986), that the reactions to the film differ according to whether the viewer is an “Anglo, middle-/upper-class” heterosexual male, a lesbian teenager, a male homosexual, someone of Hispanic origin, a working-class youth, or someone who accepts or rejects the capitalist ideology of consumption and male domination. Other constraints appear in the course of the book:

- constraints related to education (the respectful silence in cinemas is related to the development of the bourgeois public sphere)³⁰
- constraints related to professional *habitus*: academic analysts valorize the cognitive over the emotional, and above all presuppose a cooperative, coherent viewer who is eager to understand the purpose of the film and is not out simply to be entertained³¹
- intertextual constraints: reflecting on the reasons that may have brought her to laughter when she saw *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (Marcus Nispel 2003), Staiger says she believes they may have been related to her juxtaposing the film to *Psycho* (1960) and Hitchcock’s “morbid sense of humour”³²
- psychoanalytic constraints: Staiger says these constraints also played a part in her reaction to *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*: “As Freud notes about jokes, the economies of expenditure of energy are related to inhibition”³³

It would not be hard to add other constraints to Staiger’s list.

Faced with this proliferation of constraints, we can easily lose hope. Staiger, moreover, is quite aware of this problem: “Studying the responses of empirical subjects is a very complex process, full of historiographical and theoretical problems.” And she specifies that it is “a difficult task” to determine “what identities in the interaction with a specific text are at stake for the individual.”³⁴ To put it in my own words, it is difficult to define how the actants in communication are constructed by contextual constraints.

30 Ibid., pp. 44–51.

31 Ibid., pp. 38–39.

32 Ibid., p. 185.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., pp. 115–124.

To avoid these aporias, I suggest moving away from the notion of “context” to that of *space of communication*. The latter is an attempt to “model” the context.

Here is a definition: a space of communication is a space within which the set of constraints pushes the actants (S) and (R) to produce meaning on the *same* axis of relevance.

This idea is not new: communications professionals (communicators) understood that if they wanted to have any chance of being heard, they had to narrow the difference between the space of production and the space of reception by building up these spaces for those they were trying to reach: the modelling serves, here, to *model* the context. I will mention two main ways to do this, though there are no doubt others.

The first is to build a system of external constraints so that the addressees communicate as intended. When it comes to mass communication, this is the role played by *genres* that are used to regulate these addressees’ expectations by setting the axis of relevance that will be used during playback. Raphaëlle Moine talks about “generic rails.”³⁵ This is also the role that television listings play. Most large institutions (schools, the Church, and so on) also make use of these kinds of construction.

The second part places constraints within the message itself, in the hope that receivers identify the axis of relevance that the sender wants to see adopted: this is the method of the segmented audience, which consists in targeting a specific audience (French teenagers, the “50-year-old housewife,” young gay couples, and so on).

In the semio-pragmatic perspective, the notion of the space of communication differs from that of “context” in much the same way as *langue* differs from *langage* in Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory. Confronted with “context,” a vague notion that covers a heterogeneous, or even heteroclitic, set of constraints that cannot be tamed by analytic discourse, a space of communication is a *construction* that theorists have come up with. Thus, whatever the word “space” might mean, there is nothing concrete about a space of communication. It is already less far from the notion of “mental space” that Gilles Fauconnier³⁶ constructed, but aside from the fact that its workings cover units much broader than sentences, it does not have the cognitive status that this author ascribes to it. Here, it is the theorist who chooses the axis of relevance that in turn ensures the consistency of the

35 Raphaëlle Moine, *Cinema Genres* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008), p. 89.

36 Gilles Fauconnier, *Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction in Natural Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

space of communication on which they will work or that they will use as a tool of analysis.

Those who know my previous work will have noticed that I am using here the concept of a space of communication and no longer that of an *institution*: in fact, I realized that the notion of an institution ran too great a risk of creating the idea that it is a structure existing in the real world. In addition, a space of communication can be anything other than an institution in the common understanding of the term. The fact remains, however, that the definitions of the institution I gave at that time focused on a point that still seems to me just as essential, namely the notion of a *sanction*. I quoted Cornelius Castoriadis, for instance: "The institution is a socially sanctioned, symbolic network."³⁷ I also cited Alain Berrendonner, who wrote that the institution is "a normative power that subjects individuals to certain practices under penalty of sanction."³⁸ For the actants in communication, not respecting the constraints imposed within a space of communication in which they find themselves means they will pay the price one way or another. It is therefore worth asking about the type of sanctions involved in any particular area of communication: for television, it could be the boredom I feel when some soppy film comes on, when I was expecting a thriller; at school, a bad grade given by the teacher in the mark book; in interpersonal communication, a conflict among the members of a family, and so on.

The construction of a space of communication is governed by the following principles:

- (a) The theorist has the right to attribute to the space of communication they want to work on the degree (and precise kind) of generality or particularity (scope) they want in terms of object, space and time. For example, they may decide to work on the space of pedagogical communication (the object) in general (not taking into account the parameters of time and space), or on the space of pedagogical communication in education in the Third Republic (time) in France (space), or then again on the space of pedagogical communication in history classes (object) today (time) in France (space), and so on.
- (b) The theorist has the right (even the obligation) to reduce this space to a limited number of manageable parameters. This is the principle of *relevance*: the space of communication is the result of the selection of the

37 Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Trans. by Kathleen Blamey, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), p. 132.

38 Alain Berrendonner, *Éléments de pragmatique linguistique* (Paris: éd. de Minuit, 1981), p. 95.

- constraints that govern the production of meaning, depending on what axis of relevance the theorist chooses for their analysis. For example, if I decide to work on the space of pedagogical communication in general, I will single out only the constraints that set it apart from the space of everyday interpersonal communication, or of playful communication, informative communication, and so on. I will not focus on the historical, cultural, or ideological differences among the different approaches to pedagogy.
- (c) The key thing is to show these limitations. This is one of the lessons I have learned from Christian Metz: “It is enough to say it” was one of his favourite pieces of advice.³⁹

Schema 3: Levels of constraints

Space S	Space R
$S \text{ --- } V \text{ --- } T$	$V T' \text{ --- } R$ ▲
Universal constraints	
Constraints related to a language	
Constraints related to a “space of communication”	

39 Christian Metz, *Langage et cinéma* (Paris: Larousse, 1971), p. 49.

2. The Discursive Space: Communicative Competence and Modes of Production of Meaning

Abstract

Chapter 2 postulates that, inside a *discursive space* (in this case, “Western” space), the actors put a shared *communicative competence* into action. This skill is designed as a reservoir of *modes of production of meanings and affects*, which can themselves be analysed as a combination of processes. By way of example, several modes are constructed.

Keywords: modes, processes, operations, fiction, spectacle, documentary, energy

I assume that at some point in history it will be possible to construct a very broad communication space within which actors will deploy *homologous processes by which meaning is produced*.

I refer to all of these processes taken together as *discursive-communicative competence*. This competence is a reservoir that the communicating actors (sender and receiver) draw on so that, by deploying one or another process, they can produce meaning.

The notion of competences I use here should not be confused with the notion of competence that Noam Chomsky¹ developed in linguistics: Chomsky argued that language ability is innate – hard-wired into our genetic make-up – and thus independent of any contextually given influence. He also argued that it is limited to syntax – that is, to the ability to generate sentences. The competence I have in mind here is something different: it is

¹ Noam Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957); Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1965); Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics* (New York: Harper & Row; 1966).

related to a space of communication and has a much broader aim than just the production of sentences: it is a *discursive-communicative* competence. In using this concept, I am working more in the tradition of Dell Hymes² and many researchers, such as Sophie Moiran and Patrick Charaudeau, who have carried on his thought in their own way, than in that of Habermas.

Discursive-communicative competence is just one of the components of *communicative competence*. The number and status of the components of communicative competence vary by researcher, but aside from the fact that everyone (taking into account terminological differences) agrees on the existence of a discursive component, it seems to me that if we come up with certain groupings, we can capture three other competences: semio-linguistic, sociocultural and referential.

Semio-linguistic competence has to do with the mastery of languages: natural languages (written and oral), sign language, the language of images, the language of cinematography, and so on. In the semio-pragmatic model, it is on this semio-linguistic competence that the implementation of processes is based, according to the language used.

Socio-cultural competence has to do with the interactive and social dimensions of communication. In the semio-pragmatic model, this competence intervenes in the relationship between the space of communication and the actors in this space, as well as in the relationships among those actors.

As for *referential competence*, which regulates the relationship to areas of experience and to objects in the world, and thus directly to the *meaning that is produced*, the semio-pragmatic model must assign it a place, but it cannot say anything about it, because the meaning that is produced is *always socio-historical*, and it is only *empirical* analyses in spaces of communication that are precisely situated – whether in historical, geographical, or sociological terms – that make it possible to grasp it. The semio-pragmatic model itself has to do with process, not content. Content is reintegrated during *case studies*.

A note on terminology: because of its specificity, and especially in view of the broader terrain it covers, from here on in I will use the term *discursive space* to designate that space that regulates *discursive-communicative competence*. I will limit the use of *space of communication* to spaces constructed at a lower level (spaces of pedagogical, scientific, artistic, and family communication, and so on) – that is, to spaces that have been constructed within the discursive space: these spaces select the processes

2 Dell Hymes, *Foundations in Sociolinguistics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974).

of discursive-communicative competence that will be deployed by the actants in a given communication.

The question of the field of reference covered by this *discursive space* cannot *not* be asked. Despite the vague, elusive, or even equivocal character of the term “Western” – it conveys, as Claude Prudhomme puts it so nicely in his article “Occident” in the *Dictionnaire des concepts nomades en sciences humaines*, “a cumbersome ideology for the present age”³ – I will take the view that the discursive space in this book emerges from within *Western* space. The use I make here of the adjective “Western” is contrary to its ideological, and even more so to its polemical, use. As I see it, talking about a Western space shows, first, a recognition of the need for prudence, and indicates that, if they work, the processes that are described do so within a limited space. Specifically, the adjective “Western” tries to take into account that these processes are built from my own experience as an actor in communication, and that I believe this experience is shared by a wide range of actors. In fact, I use the term “Western” for lack of a better alternative – Prudhomme notes there is no “alternative”⁴ – because it is the term that comes to mind immediately when I wonder about this set of actors that I have a sense of belonging to, but he does not prejudge in any way the geographical or historical situatedness of these actors. It is likely that at least some of these processes work in actors who are not “from the West” within the meaning often given to this term (Europe, North America). I do not think, either, that an extended definition of this space is possible. I share the view held by Alexandre Zinoviev – who, to avoid the misunderstandings created by the word “West,” coined the term *Occidentalism* (1995)⁵ – that it is necessary to pass to a higher level of abstraction: the “Western” space I mean here is simply a *theoretical fiction*. Moreover, we must also insist that this construction has to do neither with values (the West is often defined in terms of values: freedom, Christianity, humanism, scientific thought, and so on), nor with content (geographical, historical, cultural, civilizational, and so on), but with processes and, more generally, with phenomena that come from within social anthropology (or socio-anthropology).

This chapter and the next will look primarily at these combinatories of processes that I call *modes*.

3 Claude Prudhomme, “Occident,” in Olivier Christin (ed.), *Dictionnaire des concepts nomades en sciences humaines* (Paris: Métailié, 2010), pp. 343–362, here p. 356.

4 Ibid., p. 343

5 Alexandre Zinoviev, *L'Occidentisme, essai sur le triomphe d'une idéologie* (Paris: Plon, 1995).

Modes are *theoretical constructs* that aim to structure the processes of the production of meaning into functional sets. The construction of these modes answers three major questions:

1. What discursive form or forms does this mode implement: narration, description, “discourse” (in the narrow sense of an argumentative construction), poetic structure, and so on?
2. What affective relationships does it produce?
3. What enunciative relationship, and what enunciator(s), does it invite us to construct?

It may be useful at time to introduce a subquestion to question 1:

- 1a. What type of space does this mode construct: a world, a set of signs, a symbolic or “discursive” space, an abstract space, a plastic space, and so on?

All of these questions point to a further question that summarizes them all:

- What type of *communication experience* does this mode lead to?

The major importance of this series of questions lies in its analytical value: by making it work systematically (but not necessarily in the order indicated: depending on the modes, it can be more effective to start with this or that question) and by playing on systems of opposition, we get to the construction of a series of modes. My goal here is not to offer a list of these modes, but to show, based on a few examples, the problems that constructing them poses for the theorist.

In order to make the construction of modes more meaningful, I will discuss it on the basis of productions that exemplify the operation of any particular mode (productions that are made to be read in this mode), but let there be no mistake: these productions are exemplary only because I assume that both actants in a communication process agree to play the space-of-communication game for which they were designed. These productions could be read in an utterly different way in another space of communication. Conversely, any mode can be deployed outside its own space of communication. I will offer a few examples below.

Fictionalizing Mode (First Approach)

If there is one experience that is commonly shared, it is indeed that of fiction. As a consequence, it does not seem absurd to start constructing modes in an attempt to construct one that can give an account of this experience: the fictionalizing mode. One might think that the extremely strong presence of this mode would make it easier to construct, and that it would thus be easily identifiable, but that is not the case.

The first difficulty the theorist encounters in this operation is the word “fiction” itself. There has been a tendency to use this word to refer to anything and everything. Even theorists feel this temptation. Thus Metz asserts that “all film is fiction”⁶ while Eric Clemens has it that “All literature...is ...fictional, even realist literature, and even memoirs and autobiography.”⁷ Of course, this position may have its relevance within the theoretical frameworks these authors use, but for an analysis of communication (especially one centred on various communicative experiences), it can only be counterproductive. If everything is fiction.... Assimilating fiction and narrative, as other theorists do, is just as problematic: believing, as does Laurent Gervereau,⁸ that “a report that is filmed is still fiction” because “it involves the creation of a narrative by one or more particular characters” does not allow us to account for the difference in the communication experience between seeing or reading a piece of reporting and seeing or reading a piece of fiction. In addition, if deploying a narrative construction thus means creating fiction, then here again, everything or almost everything becomes fiction: as we have seen, we use narration in almost all communication situations. It is crucial that we be more restrictive in how we characterize this mode.⁹

I will characterize fictionalizing mode through the following series of processes:

- (a) at the level of the space: constructing a *world* – that is, a space that is at least potentially *habitable*, even if only by the receiver (diegetization)

I am reading *Le ventre de Paris* (*The Belly of Paris*) by Émile Zola (1873): “In the midst of this great silence, in the deserted space of the avenue, the

6 Christian Metz, “Le film de fiction et son spectateur,” *Communications*, vol. 23 (1975b), pp. 108–135.

7 Éric Clemens, *La fiction et l'apparaître* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1993), p. 276, note 20.

8 Laurent Gervereau, *Les images mentent. Histoire du visuel au XX^e siècle* (Paris: Seuil, 2000), p. 399.

9 Roger Odin, *De la fiction* (Brussels: De Boeck, 2000b).

carts of the market gardeners were heading to Paris, their wheels bumping along in rhythm, the clatter echoing off the façades of the houses that slumbered along both sides of the avenue, behind the disorderly rows of elm trees.” From the first lines, having forgotten these black spots on the page, these words, as well as the syntax of the sentence (that is the advantage of arbitrary constructions: as soon as we know the rules, we have access to the meaning), I myself am on the avenue amongst the carts and the market gardeners. Fictionalizing involves, first and foremost, entering into a world.

(b) at the discursive level: the construction of a *narrative* (*storytelling*).

“Florent, taking in the immense glow that Paris was giving off, thought of this story he was hiding. Having escaped from Cayenne....” Just a few words are enough to get my imagination as a reader going, to get me wondering about Florent as a character, and about his history – in a word, to draw me into a narrative construction: I am just dying to see what is going to happen next....

(c) at the level of the affective relationship: the construction of the text such that the events narrated resonate fully with me. This is the process of *mise en phase*.

Here is an example: Zola interrupts Mademoiselle Saget’s revelations about Florent (“He’s coming from the jailhouse....”) with four pages filled with descriptions of cheeses, thus raising both our own expectations and those of the women who are waiting for the story that the gossip is taking mischievous pleasure in dragging out. The process of *mise en phase* aligns the affective positioning of the receiver (in this case, the reader) regarding the relationships that appear in the diegesis.

(d) at the enunciative level: the construction of an enunciator I am forbidden to ask questions of, in terms of identity, ways of acting, and truth: this is what I call the process of the *fictivization* of enunciation.

As soon as I start to ask about the identity of the enunciator (who wrote this text? who was Zola?), about how the text was constructed (for instance, if I start admiring Zola’s powers of description, or his way of playing with metaphors, such as that of the sea, which is spun throughout this passage, or about the truth of what is stated (does the rue Pont-Neuf actually stretch from the Seine to the rue Montmartre and rue Montorgueil?) – as soon as

I start doing that, I stop engaging in fictionalizing reading. Fictionalizing means being willing to “believe” in the existence of a world without asking how it came to be. On the other hand, questions are possible at the level of the events taking place in this world: Why was Florent sent to prison? How did he escape? What did he come to Paris for?

I will talk about a *real enunciator* when an enunciator is constructed who can be questioned in terms of identity, ways of acting, values and truth, and of a *fictitious enunciator* when the enunciator is constructed such that they cannot be questioned, as is the case with the fictionalizing mode.

This way of constructing the enunciator radically distinguishes fictionalization from the lie, the hypothesis or the error, which assume, rather, a real enunciator who is questioned in terms of truth.

Finally – and this is doubtless the most important phenomenon from the point of view of communication – the fictivization of the enunciator leads to the *fictivization of the receiver*: by agreeing not to ask questions about the enunciator, I somehow place myself outside the real world.

Definition of the fictionalizing mode (preliminary approach)

- At the level of the space: construction of a world (a diegesis)
- At the discursive level: the construction of a narrative
- At the affective level: relationship between *mise en phase* and narrated events
- At the enunciative level: construction of a fictitious enunciator.

Spectacularizing and Energetic Modes

Compared to the normal usual use of the notion of fiction, the way I have constructed the fictionalizing mode is highly reductive, with the result that a number of productions that have generally been designated as “fictions” are excluded from the realm of fictionalization: they do not produce the experience of fiction that I have just described. Explaining the communicative functioning of these productions involves the assumption that one is going to construct other modes.

In writing on cinema, musicals are categorized as fictional films. However, the experience of the musical works only partially in fictionalizing mode. When dances or songs are being performed, two changes take place for the viewer with regard to fictionalization: the transformation of the “world” into a “spectacular space,” and the shift from a fictitious to a real enunciator.

I am watching *Singing in the Rain* (Gene Kelly and Stanley Donner 1952). Don Lockwood and his friend Cosmo Brown are walking along, chatting away, in the bustling *Monumental Pictures* studio. Don Lockwood is sad, because he is still thinking about the girl he loves. As they come up to a piano, Cosmo Brown launches into a stunning number that combines song, dance and acrobatics, to give his friend back some *joie de vivre*. Initially, we see his wisecracks through the eyes of Don Lockwood, to whom they are addressed in the diegesis and who has ensconced himself in an armchair in the foreground to look at his friend. Then, as the sequence continues, Cosmo Brown's song gradually becomes more autonomous. The sound, which up to this point has been diegetic (Cosmo Brown has been playing the piano), is replaced by a soundtrack that Cosmo Brown begins to dance to. Soon, Don Lockwood disappears entirely from the scene. We do not even see him at the end of the sequence, as we might have expected to: the sequence ends with a fade that segues directly from the show Cosmo Brown has put on to the next scene. We thus end up completely forgetting that Don Lockwood was even there, and getting absorbed in Cosmo Brown's showstopper performance: he rolls on the floor, climbs the walls, moves through a set while singing and dancing to the rhythm of the music, and so on. Even if on the face of it the space has not changed (we are still in the studios, and stagehands keep coming onto the set, even prompting the odd gag with Cosmo Brown), my relationship to what is being shown is undergoing a profound change: whereas at the beginning of the sequence I was invited to enter the world of the story being told, and to take a look around the studio along with two friends, I am now being sent back to my position as "viewer": between the space where Cosmo Brown performs his song and the space I am in, an invisible barrier of sorts is established. The world of the story gives way to a *spectacular* space. At the same time, I can only admire the performance put in by the actor who plays Cosmo Brown, as pianist, singer, dancer and acrobat. That is to say that I am no longer constructing a fictitious enunciator – the character fades into the background – but, on the contrary, a real enunciator: Donald O'Connor – that is, an enunciator I can question in terms of identity and ways of acting – all questions that are forbidden by the enunciative construction of fictionalizing reading.

At moments such as these, I switch from fictionalization to the spectacularizing mode.

Definition of the spectacularizing mode

- At the level of the space: the creation of a spectacular space – that is, a space separated from the viewer by a barrier that is either visible

(the orchestra pit, the stage curtain, or the cinema screen) or invisible (the barrier is in our heads)

- At the discursive level: even it has a fairly clear penchant for storytelling, spectacularizing mode can deploy any discursive process
- At the affective level: the affective relationship takes place not with the characters as it does with fictionalization, but with these real people: the singers, dancers, actors, and so on
- At the enunciative level: the construction of a real enunciator who can be asked questions in terms of identity and ways of acting

This mode is the one that I turn to in dealing with any performance that is broadcast live, or recorded and shown later, on television: a piece of theatre, a concert, a ballet, a variety show, a circus show, a boxing match, a soccer or rugby match, and so on. Wildlife films and films about nature very often work in this mode (we hear, moreover, of “spectacles of the world”). But sometimes I also use this mode in daily life – for instance, when I look at holidaymakers on a beach or attend a speech by a politician at a meeting, and so on.

Another set of productions generally regarded as falling within fiction, but that still stand in the way of fictionalization: those that function in the *energetic* mode.

The first break with fictionalization takes place at the discursive level: at certain moments in *Natural Born Killers* (Oliver Stone, 1994), really fast-paced editing completely unstructures the narrative. In the case of James Cameron (*Terminator*, 1984; *Aliens*, 1986), this effect is produced by dazzling flashes and strobos. In these sequences, the story becomes less important than the work the rhythm does. Even in films that are undeniably narrational, it can happen that the viewer is taken along in a visual and sound stream that allows them to take off and rise above the narrative (for example, in some parts of Lucas’s *Star Wars*, [1977 to ...]).

The second break – which is linked, moreover, to the first – has to do with the affective relationship. At moments such as these, it is not so much a matter anymore of allowing myself to move to the rhythm of the events being narrated (*mise en phase*) as it is of allowing myself to vibrate *to the rhythm of the images and sounds*. Affects make way for *effects*. To characterize these productions, Richard Corliss created the category of *Dyna-Movies*¹⁰ – films that are more dynamic than they are dramatic. For his part, Laurent Jullier

10 *Time*, 2 July 1990, p. 46.

(1997) speaks of a “film orchestra” and of a cinema of “fireworks,” the idea here being that these films instantly short-circuit the viewer’s intellect and strike their sensory system directly.

This is, indeed, one of the unique characteristics of this mode. Meaning is still produced, of course – though it fades into the background somehow: what is important plays out in the relationship to the body. It is less about sharing ideas with me or telling me a story than about getting me to feel certain effects physically. “My films,” wrote George Lucas, “are closer to an amusement park ride than to a play or novel.”¹¹ The “natural constraints” whose place in the semio-pragmatic model was mentioned in the previous chapter play an essential role here.

Definition of the energetic mode

- At the level of space: construction of an image-sound space (as opposed to a world or a spectacular space)
- At the discursive level: a (partial) blocking of discursive production in favour of a construction based on rhythmic variations and variations in intensity
- At the affective level: relationships based more on *effects* than on *affects*
- At the enunciative level: the construction of a fictitious enunciator

It is certainly in the music video that this mode is expressed most purely: some clips do not tell a story, but lead me – in a complex sequence of images that deploy all the resources of film language, all the special effects – to stick as closely as possible to the pace and atmosphere of the song and/or the music. On the radio, it often happens that music is received in this mode by listeners with no training in listening to music (a kind of listening that requires that acute attention be paid to the work done on the sounds). Similarly, it is this mode that is imposed on me when, tired of an evening, I look with a superficial eye at the television, without paying attention to what is being said or to how the story being told is unfolding, allowing myself to be lulled by the torrent of sounds and images the TV floods me with (speaking of “media flux,” then, is actually getting at something). Finally, it can happen that I watch the world in this mode (the passing of clouds, water flowing in stream, a fire in a fireplace, an unending procession of cars on the motorway).

11 *Time* 15 June 1981, quoted by Laurent Jullier, *L'écran post-moderne. Un cinéma de l'allusion et du feu d'artifice* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), p. 37.

Documentarizing Mode, Moralizing Mode

As opposed to the mode of experiencing fiction, everything encourages the theorist to build another grand mode: that of the experience of the real. In previous publications, I proposed to refer to such a mode as the *documentarizing mode*. Today, to account for this experience of the real, it seems to me that we need to construct not one but two modes. I will continue to use *documentarizing mode* for that mode that is aimed at communicating information on the real (if only by showing it), and I will talk about a *moralizing mode* for the mode for transmitting and discussing *values* (which are also elements of the real). Even though in the process of communication these two modes are often linked, in fact two types of experience are concerned here: knowing the world, and wondering about values. These two modes have been institutionalized in a different way in the world: on the one hand, there is science; on the other, philosophy and morality. It would seem to be a good idea, then, to separate these two modes.

I open up the 13 August 2009 edition of *Le Monde*. With the exception of a small section devoted to games (crosswords and Sudoku), which calls for the deployment of the *ludic* mode (a mode that should be analysed in and of itself), it is clear that the primary space of communication established by this newspaper demands recourse to the *documentarizing* mode. The majority of the articles have a “discursive” structure more or less mixed with narrative elements or mini-stories. Some articles fall squarely within the category of the narrative, including biographies, obituaries (Thierry Jonquet, Francisque Collomb, François Luchaire) or otherwise: four-time Olympic champion Greg Louganis. On the last page, I can even read a travelogue, whose title is an explicit reference to Jules Verne – “Around the world in 80 days on a bike” – and which deploys three of the four processes of fictionalization: diegesis, narration, and *mise en phase*. The only difference from fictionalization is that I am asked to construct a real enunciator, Guillaume Prébois, the cyclist and the author of the article. It is this enunciative construction which puts me into the *documentarizing* rather than *fictionalizing* mode. Several articles belong to one and another series. One case in point is the article on Greg Louganis (part of the “Summer Portraits” series); another is an article on “Clarksdale and the Curse of Cotton” (part of the series “On Route 61”). But there are also maps (for example, to locate Clarksdale on Route 61 or to check the weather), schedules (radio and television programmes airing that day, and more weather), a

copy of the first page of the 4 May 1989 edition of *Le Monde*, informative photos and a page put together in list mode (“Notebook”: births, deaths, and so on). But *Le Monde* also invites me to use the *moralizing* mode. For instance, the editorial is in the form of an argument that tries to show that the values of peace can prevail in today’s Middle East. Plantu’s cartoon, on the bottom right of the front page, also calls for such a reading: it shows a space littered with graves and corpses. It is clear we are seeing individuals who have recently been murdered: they are still bleeding. A banner across the top reads: “Human-Rights Cemetery in Russia.” In the foreground, a well-dressed man wearing Western attire and holding a suitcase in the colours of the European Union flag (a yellow circle of stars against a blue background) is looking inside a huge pipe that wends its way towards us from the horizon and that a sign identifies as a Russian pipeline. We read in a thought bubble what the well-dressed European thinks: “I’d come out against it, but I can see the light at the end of the tunnel.” It is a moral “discourse” by means of a picture.

If we compare this to fictionalization, we cannot fail to be struck by the variety of structures and forms that are accepted by the documentarizing and moralizing modes. The originality of these modes derives, in fact, from their imposing just a few constraints:

- at the discursive level, all discursive forms are accepted: the most common are the narrative and the “discourse”
- at the level of the construction of space, only the construction of a plastic (abstract) space is forbidden, because it blocks the discursive process; otherwise, we have a choice between different modalities of constructing a “discursive” area (a chart, a series of symbols, diagrams, and humorous cartoons) or the construction of a world
- at the level of affective relationships: we also see both the deployment of the narrative arrangement of material and an utter lack of concern at this level, at the risk of boring the receiver (as happens in the case of certain education films)

In addition to the production of information or values, the only real constraint on these two modes is at the enunciative level:

- construction of a *real enunciator who can be asked questions* in terms of *identity, ways of acting, and truth* for the *documentarizing* mode
- the construction of a *real enunciator who can be asked questions* in terms of *identity, ways of acting, and values* for the *moralizing* mode

Example for the documentarizing mode: who are you to be telling me about this or that topic? What competence do you possess in this area, and how did you manage to get this information? Is your story true? Are you sure you're not trying to hide something from me?

Example for the moralizing mode: Do you have the authority to say what you're claiming? Who are you to be giving me lessons, or urging me to embrace this or that value?

The fact that the enunciator can be asked questions does not mean that they will be asked any. It is common for a real enunciator to be constructed without there being a felt need to go farther and engage in a process of questioning – but the key point is that this is possible. At any time, these questions can crop up and put the enunciator in a spot of bother. It is this possibility that establishes the real enunciator.

This enunciative constraint itself opens up several possibilities: indeed, several real enunciators can be constructed for a single production. As I watch Howard Hawks's *The Big Sky* (1952), I can construct Hawks himself (what does the film tell me about Hawks as a person?), the era in which the film was shot (historian Marc Ferro has done much to promote this type of reading of fiction films), the language of film, cinema in the 1950s, and so on, as actual documentarizing enunciators, and Hawks again, the production house, Hollywood, American society and his values, and so forth, as real moralizing enunciators.

This considerable freedom to engage in construction may explain the difficulty that productions involving these modes have in being well received in the social space: as a reader of fiction, I know very precisely what cognitive and affective work I am going to have to do. But this is not the case with these productions. These two modes do not create a strong *system of anticipation*, and that is not very comfortable for the receiver.

Proof *a contrario*: documentarizing and moralizing productions that are most fully accepted by the public are those whose form is closest to that of fiction, or those that compensate for the weakness of the set of expectations by creating a strong contextualization that calls up one or both of these modes. This is what happens when I buy a newspaper such as *Le Monde*. It is the role played by the TV schedule. As for documentaries, they work so much better when they are seen in a dedicated space such as at festivals, as part of regular broadcasts, or in the context of sessions that have been announced in spaces that are themselves involved in documentarizing and moralizing (for example, schools). In general, we see that these productions are received all the better by the public if they are part of debates that are in tune with the times – that is, in existing spaces of communication in social

space, as spaces involved in documentarizing and moralizing: debates on sexuality, ecology, globalization, and so on.

Finally, the consequence of the construction of a real enunciator is that I am myself involved in communication as an actual person. This implies a positive result: that I can make clear my disagreement with the enunciator, challenge the information they have, and reject their values – all of which is much more difficult to do in the case of fiction. But there is a catch: I myself can be directly implicated, and summoned to explain or justify myself. If in general this does not pose too many problems in the space of scientific or moral communication, where one has to do with actors (scholars and philosophers) who have accepted this risk by entering into in this space, we can see in this enunciative construction one of the reasons why documentarizing and moralistic productions are less popular with the public than fictionalizing ones. While fiction reassures me (as an actual person, I am not being targeted), these productions speak to me personally.

Definition of the documentarizing mode

- At the level of discourse: the production of information (with no constraint on the form)
- At the affective level: undetermined
- At the enunciative level: the construction of a real enunciator who can be asked questions in terms of identity, ways of acting, and truth

Definition of the moralizing mode

- At the level of discourse: the production of values (with no constraint on the form)
- At the affective level: undetermined
- At the enunciative level: the construction of a real enunciator who can be asked questions in terms of identity, ways of acting, and values

Fictionalizing Mode (Second Approach); Fabulating Mode

The way in which I have presented modes up to this point suggests that there is a system of oppositions of the type:

documentarizing mode and mode moralizing = relationship to reality

vs.

fictionalizing mode = no relationship to reality

Now, although this system of oppositions is quite frequently attested to in analyses devoted to fiction or documentaries, it is not at all in keeping with the experience of fiction. Because the experience of fiction is also an *experience of the real*, on the one hand as *knowledge of the world* (how many African children have discovered snow or, in an earlier period, supermarkets, through fictional films?), and on the other hand as a site where values are made manifest. If we take the analysis of the fictionalizing mode to its logical conclusion, we find that it always results in the construction of a “discourse” and a morality that it aims to communicate to us. That is because of the very nature of narrative, which conveys values with which fiction, thanks to the *mise en phase*, links us up and invites us to identify.

The question that then arises is this: if it is true that all fiction is both documentarizing and moralizing, what is the point of keeping fictionalization as a separate mode? Should we not, rather, regard it as a set of processes that can be deployed by the documentarizing or the moralizing mode – that is, as a modality of these modes?

This way of thinking could be quite useful. If we consider that fiction blends in with documentarizing and moralizing modes, this shows indeed that fiction is not some innocent game: on the one hand, it informs (so it can be used educationally, for teaching); on the other hand, it also conveys values, and here we should be vigilant. The weakness of this analysis is that that is not how fiction is experienced: that experience is neither that of the documentarizing nor that of the moral “discourse.”

Second proposal: establish an obligatory relationship between the fictionalizing mode on the one hand, and documentarizing and moralizing modes on the other – and bear in mind that any use of the fictionalizing mode leads to these two modes. Again, this way of presenting things is not satisfactory, because if fiction conveys information and values, it does not do this by using the same processes as are used by the documentarizing or moralizing modes. In the case of fiction, the relationship with reality is made under cover of the construction of the fictitious enunciator in the narrative. As a result, the real enunciator of information and values is masked here – hidden – to the point where the addressee of the fiction may believe that they do not exist. This is the specificity and also the strength of fiction: this information and these values are transmitted implicitly, as it were: the receiver includes them unintentionally and without even knowing it, simply by taking an interest in the story. This has prompted Louis Marin to say, “the narrative is a trap.”¹²

12 Louis Marin, *Le récit est un piège* (Paris: ed. de Minuit, 1978).

Third proposal: take another look at how I have constructed the fictionalizing mode, and integrate processes regarding the relationship to reality into its construction. It is the only solution that, for me, seems pertinent. It is the basis for this new characterization of the fictionalizing mode.

Definition of the fictionalizing mode (new proposition):

- At the level of space: construction of a world (diegetization)
- At discursive level 1: the construction of a narrative (storytelling)
- At discursive level 2: the construction, from the narrative, of a “discourse” that conveys information and values
- At the affective level: *mise en phase* with the story and thus with the values it conveys
- At enunciative level 1: construction of a fictitious enunciator of the story and of characters (what I have been calling *fictivizing*)
- At enunciative level 2: construction of a real enunciator of information and values, who is hidden – masked beneath the fictivization contract

The splitting of the discursive and the enunciative levels is what allows us to understand how fiction intervenes in the real world.

But things are just a bit more complicated than that again. There are, in fact, texts that explicitly proclaim the fiction they offer as an illustration of a moral “discourse.” In such a structure, at the logical level, it is the “discourse” and the values that it conveys that come first: even if the moral of the tale is given at the end, everyone understands that the point of the story they have just been told is to exemplify it. However, the fiction does not lose its power: it pulls the reader in, and makes them want to read to the end. We are thus faced with a balance between fiction and a “discourse” that is both particular and somewhat precarious. When moral “speech” asserts itself too strongly, communication heads straight into moralizing mode. When the world and the story do so, we head straight into fictionalizing mode. When the balance is respected, experience is confused neither with fiction (the world that is constructed is less dense and less present to us), nor with the moralizing mode: the moral is deduced from the story we have just been told, and it is this story that the addressee was interested in in the first place.

We could regard such productions as a subcategorization of the moralizing mode (where fictionalization is used as a “discursive” process for moralizing) or of the fictionalizing mode, which, as we saw above, still results in an implicit morality, which is explained here. Both of these ways of proceeding, however, suffer a disadvantage: they do not take account of the fact that this configuration gives rise to a specific experience. But the key fact, which is

also a bit surprising, is that this construction – based as it is on a structure that is, however, and as we have just seen, fairly unstable – has become institutionalized over the course of history to the point where it has been given a name: “fable” or “parable.” What we have here, then, is an experience that has a long tradition, in both oral and written literature, but also in the theatre, in painting and even in sculpture (the cornices on Romanesque churches often operate in this mode). Some films also work based on this model: *Neighbours* (Norman McLaren, 1952), *The Boy with Green Hair* (Joseph Losey, 1948), and so on. In these circumstances, my theoretical choice is to construct a specific mode: the *fabulating mode*.

Definition of the fabulating mode

- At discursive level 1: construction of a “discourse” that posits a system of values (those that the story will convey)
- At enunciative level 1: the construction of a real enunciator of the “discourse”
- At the level of the space: the construction of a world (but of a density that is often lower than in fiction)
- At discursive level 2: the construction of a narrative
- At the affective level: the process, through the narrative, of *mise en phase*
- At enunciative level 2: the construction of a fictional enunciator of the tale

Described in this way, that fabulating mode appears to be made up of the same processes as the fictionalizing mode. However, the hierarchization of processes is not the same in each case. Whereas with the fictionalizing mode it is the construction of a narrative by a fictitious enunciator that governs everything, here it is the construction of a “discourse” delivered by a real enunciator.

The methodological consequence of this is that the modes differ from each other in virtue not only of their *processes*, but also of their *structure*.

It would certainly have been possible to go farther with the specification of certain descriptions (the next chapter contains a more detailed characterization of two modes: the artistic and the aesthetic) – but it was important to first explain how to construct the modes. For each mode, a systematic description has been given in the form of a structure of processes. While one may disagree with my definitions, at least everyone can respond with all the givens at their disposal. Another advantage of these systematic descriptions is that they make it possible to make comparisons among the

modes and thus to point up more effectively, through mutual differentiation, what type of communicative experience each one refers to. I hope in the end that I have been able to show that the work of constructing the modes is interesting in itself, in view of the theoretical questions that it prompts us to ask.

Schema 4: The Levels of Semio-Pragmatic Analysis

Space S	Space R
$S \text{ --- } V \text{ --- } T$	$V T' \text{ --- } R$ $\text{---} \blacktriangle$
Universal constraints	
Constraints related to a language	
The discursive space Communicative competence as a repository or processes The modes	
Spaces of communication Selection of processes, and of one or more modes to use	

3. Aesthetic Mode, Artistic Mode: Relationship between Modes and Spaces

Abstract

Chapter 3 offers a detailed analysis of two modes, the artistic and the aesthetic, and inquires into the relationship between modes and spaces of communication. Starting from the example of the communication of memory within the family as an institution.

Keywords: aesthetic, artistic

The modes constructed in the preceding chapter are characterized by what might be called their *vertical structure*: they are made up of a series of processes that take place at the same time – thus, of a block. Even though these processes can be hierarchized, and individually deployed over the long term, the system they comprise is not staggered: they are all mobilized together, as an indissoluble whole. By contrast, the artistic and aesthetic modes demand to be built in accordance with a *horizontal structure*: their processes are staggered – in succession. Even though I cannot engage partially in fictionalizing or documentarizing (I fictionalize, I document, or I deploy another mode), I can embark on aesthetic or artistic modes without being able to finish them.

While a number of theorists recognize the autonomy of the aesthetic mode (you can look at a natural object in the aesthetic, but not the artistic, mode), the aesthetic mode is most often related to the artistic, and to such an extent that it defines it. “If aesthetic experience constitutes an intrinsic end and value, then there may be good reasons to define art in its terms....”¹

¹ Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), p. 47.

Similarly, in *The Aesthetic Experience* (1986), anthropologist Jacques Maquet notes that, since the Renaissance, in Europe, an object whose function is merely to create aesthetic delight is regarded as emanating from art. (He opposes this delight to the aestheticizing of the functional.) For his part, Rainer Rochlitz has it that “any work [of art] is at first only a claim to aesthetic recognition”² and seeks to determine the “aesthetic criteria” for the artistic (Chapter VI). Gérard Genette, for his part, defines all artistic production as “an artifact (or human product) with an aesthetic function,” even though he thinks it is impossible to determine these criteria³ and has it that the existence of an aesthetic intent (and even of an “epsilon of aesthetic intent”) is enough to make any object into a work of art.⁴

In the face of these positions, it seems to me necessary, rather, to construct the two modes as utterly independent. Unlike Jean-Marie Schaeffer⁵ this position is not, for me, a philosophical option. It seems to me, simply, that by positing this independence one is better equipped to take account of the experience of artistic and/or aesthetic communication.

From the Aesthetic Mode to Aesthetic Spaces

Contrary to what I have written earlier, I no longer believe that the aesthetic mode is characterized by the fact that it does not involve the construction of an enunciator.⁶ What had led me to this unfortunate idea is that I could not find which one could be the enunciator of natural objects when these are read in the aesthetic mode (for instance, stones, such as in the beautiful book that Roger Cailliois dedicated to them: *The Writing of Stones*, 1985); however, not only could there be no text without an enunciator, but I became aware that I am the one who operates as an enunciator when I look at the stones or at any natural object in the aesthetic mode. What had misled me at the time was what Gérard Genette refers to as the “objectification of the

2 Rainer Rochlitz, *Subversion et subvention. Art contemporain et argumentation esthétique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), p. 36.

3 Gérard Genette, *The Work of Art*, Trans. by G.M. Goshgarian, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 4.

4 Gérard Genette, *La relation esthétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1997), p. 271.

5 Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *L'art de l'âge moderne. L'esthétique et la philosophie de l'art du XVIII^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Gallimard, 1992), pp. 28–31.

6 Roger Odin, “Art et esthétique dans le champ du cinéma et de la télévision,” in Dominique Groux and Henri Holec (eds.), *Une identité plurielle. Mélanges offerts à Louis Porcher* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003a), pp. 219–232.

subjective":⁷ the object of aesthetic reading is seen as if it itself has aesthetic values, while in reality I am the one who attributed them to it while I was looking at it. The illusion that there is no enunciator came about because I was not aware of this attribution. I am thus indeed the one who constructs the aesthetic text: it is a matter of constructing a real enunciator who can be asked questions in term of identity – and it is indeed this enunciative structure that constitutes one of the major characteristics of the aesthetic mode.

I use the term *aesthetic mode* for the process by which a subject takes part in this adventure that is a *quest for aesthetic values*.

To account for this quest, I hypothesize that, as a subject of the aesthetic mode, I act as the subject of a *narrative journey* whose goal is to investigate aesthetic values. Yet we must indeed clarify the status of this narrative journey: above all, we must not conflate it with the narrative constructions that can be found at the discursive level of the aesthetic mode itself. It is, rather, a matter of my using the narrative model as a *meta-level* tool to describe the *dynamics* of the mode itself.

The first phase is the moment of my encounter with the object, what we can call (using the terminology of Greimas's narrative semiotics⁸ – terminology that I will use throughout this analysis) the moment of the *contract*, which commits me to the aesthetic mode. This contract can take various forms: sometimes, it is the object that directly arouses my desire to set off in search of values: "Oh that's beautiful!" (it is love at first sight). Sometimes it is someone else who draws my attention to the object ("Look how beautiful it is!"), or a critical text, or a reading. Sometimes it is a complex process that can be described only on a case-by-case basis. One thing is certain: without *affective relationships* with the object, there is no chance of my committing to the aesthetic mode. Affective relationships are indeed the addresser (*destinateur*) of the aesthetic mode, and it is this that launches the quest and gives rise to my desire to go farther in the study of values.

The second phase – the "*qualifying sequence*" – corresponds to the allocation of resources (*adjuvants*) that will allow me to carry out this study. Indeed, the aesthetic mode works only under certain conditions (being able to disconnect from the stress of daily life, being free to look around, and so on), and requires, on the part of the subject, certain qualities, even if nobody really agrees on what these are (sensitivity, the ability to think in

7 Genette, *La relation esthétique*, p. 117.

8 Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1984).

symbolic terms, to imagine, and so on). What is going on here is the entire question of aesthetic education, which is very different from that of artistic education, with which it is so often confused.

The final phase ("*the main sequence*") is the production (or not) of aesthetic values, it being understood that this production is supposed to have conquered various opponents: anything that can distract me from my aesthetic quest. I can also be my own opponent and take an interest in plenty of other things than the study of the object's aesthetic values, such as the information conveyed, the story being told, and the author.

Aesthetic values should not be confused with the message of the work (these are not the values conveyed by the story being told, or by the "speech" being engaged in). Aesthetic values are constructed in *my* encounter with the object, an encounter that takes place in a double movement from the feelings that are experienced to the cognitive work they prompt, and/or from the cognitive work done to the emotions it gives rise to. While I agree, in the case of the first movement, with Nelson Goodman, who holds that "in aesthetic experience, the emotions function cognitively,"⁹ the second movement flips his formulation around and states that, in aesthetic experience, cognitive outputs operate at the level of emotions. The two movements seem to me inseparable, even if the one can take precedence over the other under certain conditions.

In any case, it is at the affective and enunciative level that most of the work of the aesthetic mode takes place. Production at the discursive level often remains internal to the subject, and shows up only in the form of an "interior speech." When it is expressed and gives rise to the production of statements, it can take various forms. Thus, in an amateur travel film, we see a woman in the middle of a beautiful landscape. She is on her own (as is often the case, it is the husband who is filming) and she is making big gestures with both arms, both to tell her husband what to shoot (the waterfalls around her) and to say to whoever watches the film later: "Look how beautiful it is!" Not a word is spoken (the film is silent), but the gestures amount to discourse.¹⁰ Discursive production can range from a simple exclamation of admiration ("Oh!") all the way to an aesthetic treatise spanning several volumes, via a poem celebrating the object of my aesthetic experience, or a story of my encounter with the object, or the production of drawings, paintings, photographs, films and even music (*Pictures at an Exhibition* by Mussorgsky is intended to convey the artist's aesthetic experience as he

9 Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), p. 248.

10 Karl Siereck, "C'est beau, ici. Se regarder voir dans le film de famille," in Roger Odin (ed.), *Le film de famille. Usage privé, usage public* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck 1995), pp. 63–78.

looks at Victor Hartmann's paintings). The only thing that matters is that the discursive structure has to do with the communication of aesthetic values.

We must be careful not to take this term as having exclusively "discursive value." The values do indeed always have "discursive" content, but the bulk of that is often elsewhere, in sensitive relationships through which values are communicated. With the aesthetic mode, it is a matter not just of constructing a text, but, to use a formulation of Jacques Rancière's, of "distribution of the sensible."¹¹ While I have indicated in the foregoing analysis what place I believe the emotional level occupies, still, we must go farther: the aesthetic mode invites us to admit that a certain domination by, or even a certain autonomy of, the sensitive in relation to textual construction is possible. Herman Parret speaks of an *aestheticization of pragmatics*.¹²

In any event, values are put at the centre of the aesthetic mode, and provide it with its ultimate justification. These values fall under the collective; they are imposed on the individual. The *space of aesthetic communication* regulates the aesthetic relationship of its members to works and to the world. The content of aesthetic values (which, as the axis of relevance, imparts consistency to every space of aesthetic communication) varies from one space to the next: beauty, ugliness, the sublime, well done, new, authenticity, "power of resistance," the ability to change people's lives, the development of sensitivity, the enrichment of the self and of society, and so on. Not only do these values change in the course of history (there is a history of aesthetic spaces), but at some point in history there are several aesthetic spaces. In *Distinction* (1984), Pierre Bourdieu differentiates among these spaces in taking as a criterion the dispositions that consumers owe to their relative position in the economic field. There is thus a diachrony and a synchrony of spaces when it comes to aesthetic communication, but at this level, semio-pragmatics does not have much to say. While it provides the framework for analysis, as soon as we move to content, it is up to the historian and the sociologist to do the work: to study the semantic investment of the values that define these spaces.

Definition of the aesthetic mode

Phase 1: contract

- At the emotional level: linking up of the subject with an object

¹¹ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible* (London: Continuum, 2006).

¹² Herman Parret, *The Aesthetics of Communication: Pragmatics and Beyond* (Berlin: Springer Science+ Business Media Dordrecht, 1993).

- At the enunciative level: I construct myself as a subject heading off in search of the aesthetic values of the object

Phase 2: qualifying sequence

- At the emotional level: the emotional experience of the object
- At the enunciative level: the quest for adjuvants that can help me eliminate opponents

Phase 3: final sequence

- At the emotional level: indeterminate form, and the production of aesthetic values
- At the discursive level: indeterminate form, and the production of aesthetic values

From the Artistic Mode (in Reduced Form) to Inscription in the Space of Art

In the course of the year 1908 (not long before the appearance of Ricciotto Canudo's famous piece on the seventh art, "Trionfo del Cinematografo," which appeared on 25 November 1908 in *Nuovo Giornale* in Florence), a lawyer, Émile Maugras (who was also the Omnia Pathé's Managing Director and Chairman of the Board of Pathé Cinema) and Maurice Guégan, a doctor of law (and also a Managing Director of Pathé National Cinema), undertook to have cinema enter into the space of art to promote the productions of the firm they were working for – that is, to meet the economic objectives that are part and parcel of industrial competitiveness. They set out their thesis in *The Cinematograph before the Law* [*Le Cinématographe devant le droit*] (1908).¹³ The entire position that both authors took was based on a single line of argument, which aimed to show that film falls under the Act of 1793 on Artistic Property, according to which "The authors of writings of every kind, music composers, painters and designers who create paintings or drawings, will, as long as they live, have the exclusive right to sell their work, and to have it sold and to distribute it."¹⁴

13 The passage that follows is based on a study conducted in collaboration with André Gaudreault. It was Gaudreault, moreover, who introduced me to the text by Maugras and Guégan (André Gaudreault and Roger Odin, "Le Cinématographe, un "enfant prodige," ou l'enfance de l'art cinématographique," in Leonardo Quaresima and Laura Vichi (eds.), *La decima musa. Il cinema e le altre parti* (Udine/Gemona del Friuli: Forum, 2001), pp. 67–81).

14 Émile Maugras and Maurice Guégan, *Le Cinématographe devant le droit* (Paris: V. Giard & E. Brière éditeurs, 1908), pp. 2–3.

The argument is, first of all, that cinema is nothing other than drawing: "Drawing, according to one generally accepted definition, is the representation of one or more figures in a landscape, of some object, drawn in pencil or pen, painted with a brush, or *created in any other way* (Trousset). Cinematography is nothing other than the representation of landscapes or characters by a mechanical and chemical process."¹⁵ Although there is an entire tradition that locates drawing within the "mechanical arts," and although the use of some processes such as grids, optical tools, the application of the rules of perspective and of geometric rules, and so on has sometimes limited human involvement, the definition proposed overlooks what is generally seen as the major feature of drawing, its "character of gestuality": the fact that it is produced by "instruments that have historically been the natural extension of the human hand" (Larousse). Maugras and Guégan seem to be aware of the problem, because they take the precaution of anchoring their definition in what I will call a double enunciative delegation: on the one hand, they present the definition as "generally accepted" – that is, as having been accepted by anyone and everyone (the *doxa* is appointed as an enunciator); on the other, they ascribe it to an authority, Jules Trousset, who in 1877 published the *Nouveau Dictionnaire Encyclopédique* (five volumes, La Librairie Illustrée, Paris). In reality, the conflation of cinema with drawing is for all intents and purposes based on the last element in the definition: representation "*by any means*" (emphasis given in the book itself).

The second part of the argument conflates cinema with engraving: "engraving is the art of producing figures on a flat surface, either with incisions, usually shallow, or with mordants – in the end, through the processes of chiselling and sculpture. Cinematography also reproduces images on a flat surface (film) with mordants in developing baths. For let there be no mistake, film that has been exposed to light contains the image in the making; the developing bath simply contains the corrosive chemicals that, by destroying certain salts, reveal the drawing. Cinematography is thus engraving...."¹⁶ Here, the reasoning is particularly modern: it is in keeping with the definition of photography as an *index*, which we find in Peirce and, more recently, in Jean-Marie Schaeffer, who speaks of a "luminous footprint."¹⁷ However, the definition of photography as an index, far from being what establishes it as art, is, on the contrary, what makes it an imprint

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 3.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁷ Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *L'image précaire* (Paris: Seuil, 1987), p. 59.

of the real. It is precisely because of this indexical status that Jean-Marie Schaeffer sees photography as a “precarious art”: “How can we distinguish between what counts as the image in its own right and what counts as the real, when we are looking at an image that is not an image as such in its specificity except when it is understood as recording the real?”¹⁸ The assimilation of cinema with engraving is thus a paradoxical argument, to say the least, for integrating cinema into the space of art. The argument is, then, not without its weaknesses. But what matters for our two authors is to show that, *because* cinema is of a part with drawing and engraving, it falls *de facto* under the 1793 Act, and it must thus be recognized as belonging to the space of art: “cinematography is a drawing or an engraving, and it is certain, *regardless of the value of the work in question*, that we must see it as belonging to the fine arts.”¹⁹ This declaration calls for two remarks. The first is that cinematography’s entry into the space of art is taking place at a price – its negation as a specific medium: “cinematography is a drawing or an engraving.” The second concerns the passage I have given my emphasis; it says, in the clearest way, that the process of inscribing an object in the space of art (in this case, cinema) has nothing to do with the aesthetic value of the object: “*regardless of the value of the work in question.*” On the other hand, Canudo closely linked the entry of cinema into the space of art to an aesthetic production.

In *The Cinematograph before the Law* [*Le Cinématographe devant le droit*], what allows the registration of cinema in the space of art is nothing more than the status of the enunciator (we are in the paradigm of the “institutional” definition of art²⁰). All film thus falls within the space of art, because the enunciator that produces it, cinema, belongs to this space. Any object can thus be regarded as belonging to the space of art if it is recognized that the enunciator belongs to the space of art: it is the *logic of the ready-made*. This logic works whether the enunciator is an individual (Duchamp or Mozart, for instance), an institution (The Pompidou Centre), a group (the Impressionists), a form (literature), and even, as we have just seen, a means of expression (drawing, engraving) or a medium (cinema). At this level, implementing the artistic mode means constructing a real enunciator belonging to the space of art.

18 Ibid., p. 158.

19 Maugras and Guégan, *Le Cinématographe devant le droit*, p. 5 [my emphasis].

20 Morris Weitz, “Le rôle de la théorie en esthétique” in Danielle Lories (éd.), *Philosophie analytique et esthétique* (Paris: Klincksieck 1988), pp. 27–40; George Dickie, *Evaluating Art* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988).

It can happen that the artistic mode is limited to this process. Insofar as this process remains outside the object itself (which it is happy enough just to label), I will talk about *artistic labelling*.

Definition of the artistic mode (in reduced form)

- At the enunciative level: the construction of an enunciator belonging to the space of art (artistic labelling).

Even if we take the view that the artistic mode as I have just described it is not sustainable, we would be wrong to underestimate its importance. On the one hand, this approach is far from being exceptional: it happens really often that I find myself having to recognize the artistic status of an object (“This is art”) without pursuing any further the quest for values, in analysing or contemplating this object, either because this object does not affect me (while I know that Poussin is a recognized artist, his paintings do not speak to me at all) – or, to put it more simply, because I do not even ask myself: it is art, I know, but I just leave it at that. On the other hand, because, for a production, being labelled as belonging to the space of art has major consequences: it gains “distinctiveness,” “auratic value,” it will certainly sell better, and can give rights to its author. It can even happen that this labelling makes us want to approach it more carefully, and finally that it leads to the artistic mode in its full-fledged form, or even to the aesthetic mode.

From the Artistic Mode (Full-Fledged Form) to the Spaces of Art

The objective of the artistic mode in its full-fledged form is to establish a relationship, which is required, between the characteristics of the object and an enunciator with a proper name: it’s a Renoir; this is by Mozart; that’s a Le Corbusier building.

From the outset, there is a twofold difference from the preceding process: on the one hand, there is a requirement that the enunciator be individualized. For example, I cannot just say that the enunciator is cinema. Rather, the enunciators will be of the type: Abel Gance, Jean Renoir or Alain Resnais. On the other hand, we are interested in the object and its characteristics.

The movement that connects an object and a proper name can go in both directions: from proper name to object, or the other way round. In both cases, it is the proper name that is at the heart of the relationship to the

space of art. Ben, a painter from Nice well known for his black-and-white paintings written in the form of aphorisms, says that “art is a matter of the proper name.”

Seen in this way, the work of the artistic mode consists entirely in filling in the proper name. In itself, the proper name is empty. Searle describes it as a nail on which we hang descriptions.²¹ The processes of the artistic mode are designed to endow the proper name with content, whether this is done before or after the enunciation of the proper name:

- biographical studies
- studies on the context in which the work was produced (historical studies)
- thematic and stylistic analyses whose aim is to make what links productions by the same author (productions done under the same name).

Finally, the artistic mode can develop further through the construction of series and through comparisons with the productions by other proper names, either synchronically or diachronically (the history of art is a history of proper names).

The artistic mode thus appears to be based on an enunciative process (labelling or the enunciation of a proper name) and on discursive processes. If the aesthetic mode is a *quest*, the artistic mode, in its full version, is a *search*. It seems that no affective production is required, even if there is nothing to stop it. I can analyse a work very precisely, and dissect its structure systematically, without being in the least bit moved or touched, and without heading off in search of aesthetic values. Pierre Sorlin thus distinguishes “stylistic” and “systemic” analysis from the aesthetic approach.²² Several works in the field of art history, numerous university productions, high-quality texts that are very well documented and that even pay close attentive to textual work, show no signs of any search for aesthetic values. Besides, that is not what the institution is asking for....

Thus, even when the mode in its full-fledged form is involved, the artistic mode often remains separated from the aesthetic mode.

As we conclude this analysis, one thing seems certain: in our cultural space, only the enunciation of the proper name guarantees full-fledged membership in the space of art.

21 John R. Searle, *Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

22 Pierre Sorlin, *Esthétique de l'audiovisuel* (Paris: Nathan, 1992), p. 210–212.

Work being done to remove African productions – and the same goes for Oceanian and Inuit productions, for instance – from the ethnographic space and locate them within the space of art demonstrate this clearly. It all starts with the analysis of objects to establish identifiable sets based on relevant features spotted through categorical differentiation (masks, sculptures, seats, and so on), differentiation based on the materials used (wood, stone, metal, and so forth) and stylistic features. These sets lead to the construction of a series of collective enunciators generally related to the places of origin of these objects (thus people speak of Dogon masks, Nigerian masks, Ivorian masks, and so on) and to a certain point in time (determining a given period). These sets are in turn divided into subsets by “tribe.” But the big moment, one that all art historians are waiting for, is the identification of the individual creator who can be recognized by their “personal vision”²³ and accorded a proper name. “For quite some time,” note Martine Degli and Marie Mauzé, “we have specifically not referred to creators from non-Western societies as artists, whether they are sculptors, poets or musicians. That is because artistic expression is considered as a kind of specific offshoot of a society’s creative capacity.... It was only starting in the 1960s that a number of studies started drawing attention to the individual dimension of creation, beyond the respect for stylistic or more broadly cultural constraints: a number of home-grown artists emerged from anonymity in this way.”²⁴ Similarly, Frank Willett, after having noted that a stylistic designation “is nevertheless a significant turning point in the history of African art,” feels he must add: “even the sculptor’s name was not recorded.” And we feel relieved to be able to specify that “at the moment, hundreds of names of artists are mentioned in various publications” and to be able to give a few examples of works that have been written about sculptors who have been named: those by Fischer on Tame, Si, Tompieme et Son, from Northeast Liberia, those by Father Kevin Carroll on the sculptor Yoroubas Arowogun and his son Bandle, and so on.²⁵ If we cannot say the proper name, there is still something missing. That explains the jubilation one can feel in the text of the presentation by Philippe Dagen for the exhibition entitled *Abomey* at the Musée du quai Branly: “Finally, African artists are no longer anonymous. *Abomey*, an exhibition at the Musée du quai Branly, affixes names to the works.” Finally, “with African sculptures

23 Frank Willett, *African Art: An Introduction* (New York: Praeger, 1971), p. 153.

24 Degli, Martine and Marie Mauzé, *Arts premiers. Le temps de la reconnaissance* (Paris: Découvertes Gallimard 2000), p. 112.

25 Willett, *African Art: An Introduction*, pp. 226–237.

we can do what we do with European art: make stylistic comparisons, study an individual's details, a signature look."²⁶

A *contrario* proof of the importance of the proper name in *our* space of art: the process, popular among collectors of primitive art, of "distinguishing" a work of art by promoting the absence of a proper name associated with it. Sally Price tells us that, for these collectors, "the anonymity of the creator adds even more value to a work of art...." She quoted a Parisian collector: "I'm utterly enchanted by the artist's anonymity. Not knowing who the artist is gives me enormous pleasure! "Once we know who created an object, it's not primitive art any more."²⁷

We might think that, if it is so hard to find artist's proper names in Africa, that is because in Africa there is another conception of art as we know it, or even that the notion of art does not exist there. Goody reports that, when the discussion was about "African art," "Meyer Fortes, an anthropologist, said that the Tallensi of Northern Ghana did not have any," but he adds: "one may question the use" that Fortes "makes of the word 'art.'" Goody notes that for Fortes, art is limited to representational forms – sculpture, theatre, myth – but that the Tallensi know music and the verbal arts, and produce objects of an artistic character.²⁸ It seems to me that there is no reason to think that Africa does not have any art. And there is no reason to see Africa as a seamless whole. This means that if one wanted to account for the functioning of African productions from the African point of view, not only would one have to construct the artistic mode otherwise than I have done – one would have to construct several artistic modes and thus several spaces of art depending on the region, the "ethnicity" and the "tribe" being considered.

I think that only African researchers could come up with these constructions. Perhaps, after all, these researchers will show that there are no real differences with our space of art – for example, that the conception of art in Africa also calls for the use of the proper name (why would African societies be societies without authors?) and that it is only because there is a lack of information that there is this feeling of anonymity or because, in oral civilizations, there is a tendency, related to the nature of oral communication, towards the gradual erasure of the individual signature (as Goody suggests in *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*²⁹). However, we cannot assume that *a priori*.

26 *Le Monde*, Sunday/Monday, 29/30 November 2009.

27 Sally Price, *Espaces de l'art. Arts primitifs; regards civilisés*, (Paris: énsb-a, 1995), p. 155.

28 Jack Goody, *La peur des représentations. L'ambivalence à l'égard des images, du théâtre, de la fiction, des reliques et de la sexualité* (Paris: éd. La Découverte, 2003), pp. 14–37.

29 Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*.

Definition of the artistic mode (in its full-fledged form)

- From the proper name to the object:
 - At the enunciative level: attribution of a proper name
 - At the discursive level: filling in the proper name (biographical studies, thematic and stylistic analyses, comparison with other artists, the history of art)
 - At the affective level: undetermined
- From the object to the proper name:
 - At the discursive level: thematic and stylistic studies, comparisons with other productions, the construction of sets and subsets, biographical studies
 - At the enunciative level: research into and the allocation of a proper noun
 - At the affective level: undetermined

Relationship among Modes and among Spaces

As we have just seen, separating the artistic mode from the aesthetic mode makes it possible to account for a number of behaviours that would otherwise remain unexplained. Another advantage of this separation is that we can ask about the relationship between these two modes as well as about the relationship to the spaces they belong to. There are four questions we can ask here.

Can belonging to the space of art and having recourse to the artistic mode lead to the aesthetic mode?

The mere fact of putting a question mark over this relationship shows the break that has been created in relation to the *doxa* that holds that “aesthetic experience is both an intrinsic end to art and a sufficient justification,” following Richard Shusterman’s formulation, which we cited above. However, just because the relationship is not required, that does not mean that it cannot come into being. This is what happened to me in the case of Stéphane Mallarmé, who has always bored me, even though I know perfectly well that Mallarmé is a great poet who belongs without question to the space of art (artistic labelling). Now, it happened that Mallarmé was included in the programme at CAPES³⁰ and that I had to study his work in detail to

30 Certificat d’aptitude au professorat de l’enseignement du second degré (secondary-education teaching certification).

present to my students. From reading and rereading his writings, and by dint of carrying out stylistic analyses of his poems (= the deployment of the full-fledged artistic mode), I have come to discover in them a hitherto unsuspected wealth, and have gone in search of values and shifted to reading in the aesthetic mode, a process that is itself determined by my belonging to a certain aesthetic space (which corresponds to my place in the social structure).

Can the aesthetic mode lead to the artistic mode and the space of art?

Even if any entry into the space of art does not originate in an aesthetic approach – economic interests are often a more powerful driver, as we have seen in the case of the cinema – it is still a possibility: because this piece had an effect on me, and because it drew me into a rewarding aesthetic experience, I want to bring it into the space of art to give it some social and institutional recognition that it would not otherwise get. My job, then, is to find institutional support, critics, dealers, museum officials, and art historians who, by deploying the artistic mode, will legitimize the entry of this production into the space of art.

Jean Dubuffet's initiative promoting productions by insane and marginalized people is an example of this approach. Dubuffet is interested in "works done by people unscathed by artistic culture, in which mimicry, unlike what is happening among intellectuals, plays little or no part, so that these authors are drawing everything – in terms of subject, choice of materials, means of transposition, rhythms, ways of writing, and so on – from their own creative capital, and not the clichés of classical art or the art that is in fashion."³¹ Even though he uses the term "art" in his writings, what captivates Jean Dubuffet are the values at stake in these productions (we are indeed in the aesthetic mode): "We are witnessing the workings of art – utterly pure, raw, reinvented in all its phases by its author, based only on their own impulses – thus of art in which only the workings of invention appear, and not the workings of the chameleon and the monkey, which are constants in cultured art."³² To defend these values, Dubuffet set about legitimizing these productions through recourse to the artistic mode – that is, by doing everything to bring out the proper names of their authors: seeing to the promotion of artists (Wolff, Aloïse, Müller, et al.), the creation of notes on their work and of their biographies, analyses of their works, the creation of a specialized journal (*L'Art brut*, the first issue of which came out in 1964)

31 Michel Thévoz, *L'art brut*, (Geneva: Skira, 1995), p. 11.

32 Quoted by *ibid.*

and even the setting up of a museum (unable have it set up in France, in 1976 Dubuffet eventually established it in Lausanne).³³ The end result was nothing less than the production of a new artistic space: *l'art brut*. And one could also regard Dubuffet as the “inventor of *l'art brut*” Dubuffet³⁴ – an artistic space different from the space “of the cultural arts.”

This analysis confirms the hypothesis I advanced earlier, about the situation of art in Africa, namely that there can exist at a given moment in history (in synchrony), and in the same cultural space, several spaces of art. Interestingly, the processes of the artistic mode that we find in the two spaces of art that have been spotted (the space of art cultural vs the space of *l'art brut*) are the same. What changes when we go from the space of cultural art to the space of *l'art brut* is nothing more or less than the values conveyed by the aesthetic mode, which has led to the mobilization of the artistic mode.

Can belonging to the space of art block the deployment of the aesthetic mode?

It can happen that a recognition of belonging to the space of art blocks the aesthetic mode. It has thus been possible to see the declaration that theatre is Art (with a capital A) as constituting a block to the ability of the working class to make an aesthetic approach to theatre, as opposed to film. There is a similar problem with the space of the Museum as this high place of Art. What is at issue here is that what we might call the “arrogance of Art”³⁵ gets in the ways of the deployment of the aesthetic mode: I am crushed by the weight of the label, a label that, what is more, can be read as a marker of class position (Bourdieu). The result is that I have no wish to go farther, and that I confine myself by acknowledging the label.

Can the aesthetic mode block entry into the space of art?

The aesthetic mode, for its part, can block entry into the space of art: there are many poets, painters and filmmakers who have found themselves, for a time at least, denied access to the space of art because the values that were the object of their aesthetic quests were not recognized by their time or their country, and therefore by the space of art that was dominant at that moment in history. From the Impressionists (“That’s not painting!”) to *musique*

33 Lucienne Peiry, *Art Brut: The Origins of Outsider Art*, (New York: Random House Incorporated, 2001).

34 Thévoz, *L'art brut*, p. 11.

35 Masahiro Hamashita, “La quête de la beauté contre l’arrogance de l’art,” *Museum International*, vol. 61, no. 4 (2009), pp. 9–15.

concrète ("That's not music – it's just a load of noise!") via experimental film ("This is not cinema!"), there are countless examples of productions that people have tried to kick out of the space of art, refusing to recognize their authors (to take into account their proper names). This was also the case for productions of *l'art brut* before Dubuffet's initiative.

The choice to separate the two modes turns out to be productive – but then again it is the questions that the analysis brings up that are the most interesting: the question of the relationship between textual production and sensitive relationships, of the relationship of the modes among themselves, and of the relationship between modes and communication spaces.

A priori, the implementation of modes in a given space of communication is really flexible: pretty much any mode can occur in any space. However, in practice, if the actant who is the receiver wants the communication to work (which is not a requirement), they will make the effort to inscribe within the space of communication that the sender has set aside for them (they still must be able to access this information), and will give priority to the mode(s) of production of meaning that this space calls for. This does not, however, block the use of other methods – although these will take place in second position, often in an *ad hoc* and unpredictable way (the analyst generally does not have the means to take them into account). Things get complicated when a production migrates into a space of communication that does not belong to it, because this space is going to try imposing its own way; in this case, it will be a good idea to wonder about the relationship between the mode of origin and the mode called for by the new space of communication. I will revisit these questions in the following chapters.

4. Contextual Analysis and the Space of Communication: The Space of Communication of Family Memory

Abstract

Chapter 4 shows how the notion of a space of communication can allow contextual analysis.

Keywords: home movie, memory, family

In this chapter, I will show how the notion of a *space of communication* can be used to understand what is happening, from a communication point of view, in a given contextual framework.

I will take as an example communication within the family institution, as it exists in western space. But studying the family from a communication point of view can mean many things. The first decision I have to make involves choosing the *axis of relevance* that I will hold onto in order to build the communication space I will work on. I am spoiled for choice: interpersonal relationships? relationships as a couple? parent-child communication? the relationship to the media? the influence of the spatial arrangement of the house or apartment on family communication? and so on. I decided to analyse the *space of communication of family memories*, an important axis: by creating links between the present and the past, memory is what ensures the internal permanence of the family. Even if everything that does not relate to this axis is not studied, that does not mean that everything that does concern it *will* be studied (important issues on this axis that will not be addressed include genealogical research, which fascinates many families): here again, the goal is more to show a method than to analyse in detail any particular space of communication.

The Space of Communication for Memory in the “Traditional” Family

When I say “traditional” family, I mean the bourgeois patriarchal family that predominated from 1945 to 1975, the great period of *familialism*. This structure can be described as a set of constraints governing the construction of the actants in this space.

The Constraints and the Construction of the Actants

“Every group assigns spaces.” In his thoughts on Maurice Halbwachs, Paul Ricœur¹ remarks that “these are retained or formed in memory.” According to Halbwachs,² this system of places is particularly strong and stable within the framework of the family: “Men may change their occupations or nationality, they may rise or fall on the ladder of social positions: subjects may become masters, and masters may become subjects – a layman may become a priest, and a priest can return to the laity. But a son does not become a father unless he builds another family; and even then he will always remain the son of his father. There is in this case an irreversible relationship there. In a similar manner, brother cannot stop being brothers, for this is a kind of indissoluble union. Nowhere else does the place of the individual seem more predetermined, without taking into account what the individual desires or indeed is.”³ We have also known, since Freud, that these determinations have to do not only with biological relations, but with the symbolic places that manifest themselves in the Oedipal relationship.

In this structure, the father has a special status. Not surprisingly, then, it is he who pioneers the construction of family memories (he is the one who has the tomb built, who orders the portrait paintings, who takes the photos, who does the filming, and so on.), but he does involve the entire family in all of this. Concerned about generational continuity, he organizes grand rituals of remembrance: when there is a birth in the family, rites of passage (first communion, wedding, retirement), physiological changes (the first tooth, the first words, the first steps), material changes (a new house, a new car), he arranges for visits to the cemetery, sends out invitations to big meals, shows home movies of the family, and so on. He is the one who

1 Paul Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), p.121.

2 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago, London: Chicago University Press, 1992).

3 Ibid., pp. 69–70.

oversees the construction, or reconstruction by the members of the family of the family history – a more or less mythical story that serves, for outsiders, as the official history, and for family members, as a consensus builder, or at least as a generator of an apparent consensus. At this level, it is the Family (the family as a structure) that is the real enunciator of the work of memory: concerned about its preservation, the institution ensures that nothing can disturb its harmony. Paternal censorship is coupled with self-censorship: there are certain things we simply do not talk about.

But the family is not only a structure. It is also a group of individuals, and we cannot conceive of the relationship to family memory without taking account of this dual status. Even Halbwachs, who, as we know, defends the thesis that individual memories are always based on social and thus collective relationships – makes this distinction: “In short, any event or figure remembered by the family partakes of these two characteristics: on the one hand it recreates a singularly rich picture, which is deeply penetrating since it allows us to retrieve realities we have come to know personally through intimate experience; on the other hand it obliges us to view the person from the experience of our group, that is, to recall the kinship relationship that explain why this person is important for all of us.”⁴ There is thus another family memory, deeply personal, and more secret, too. This memory is no freer than the last one, but the constraints that govern it concern, not the group, but the individual themselves. This hidden memory that works in everyone’s inner self gives rise to a textual production very different from the preceding one – a production with an often-dysphoric tone: that is where the old resentments show up, the old conflicts between members of the family – all the unspoken things that make up its shadowy side.

Which Mode(s) to Construct? Private Mode, Intimate Mode

The existence of these two memories means that I cannot stick to the construction of a single mode, as visual anthropologist Richard Chalfen does with what he calls the Home Mode (1987). Two modes must be constructed, corresponding to the two types of memory that have been identified: the *private* and the *intimate modes*.

By *private mode*, I mean that by which a group (here, the family) makes a return to its past. With the private mode, we are in what Edward S. Casey

4 Ibid., p. 71.

called *Reminiscing*:⁵ reliving the past, evoking it as a group, for example by talking about it, but also, perhaps, by sharing photos or videos. Here, communication is *exteriorized* (whether by speech, sound, or image) and is therefore directly subject to the constraints (censorship) of the family structure. As a result, productions made in this mode are highly standardized (there is nothing that looks so much like a home movie as another home movie) and they most often have a euphoric tone to them. Another consequence is that what is being said (the textual production) is in this case often less important than the fact that it is said in the first place: the key is in the exchange between the actants who are taking part in the communication.

By *intimate mode*, I mean the mode by which I go back over my life and the family's past. The intimate mode takes the form of *inner speech*: communication is not externalized. There is no point in dwelling on the strength of the emotions that animate this internal production and on its role in building the identity of the individual – a construction done by opposing the Self to the Other.

Like the aesthetic and artistic modes, the intimate and private modes operate *horizontally* and can be described with a *narrative* structure. This structure can give rise to various scenarios, depending on the answer to the questions: what prompts the movement of remembrance? What kind of movement is involved? Who are the opponents? Here are a few examples.

Stories of sudden emergence: I encounter an object and it triggers a memory. Ricœur tells us that memory “arises in the manner of an affection.”⁶ This is the famous madeleine scene from Proust. Here we are in intimate mode. There is no intention at work in this sudden emergence of the memory, neither on my part or on the part of the object, which certainly was not made to put the memory in motion. Here, the object is not so much a *vehicle* for memory as it is a *stimulator* of it.

Stories of quests: These occur at two levels. At the personal level, the scenario is the other way around from the one we have seen: I set off in search of family memories. This is the strategy of the *reminder* that Ricœur defines as “an active search.”⁷ Here, the intention is mine (I am the subject who goes on a quest) and the memory is the Object of my quest. It may happen that this quest comes up against that opponent, oblivion. I will then have

5 Edward S. Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

6 Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, p. 17.

7 Ibid.

to resort to adjuvants to reach my goals: question other members of the family, consult the archives, look at photographs, reread letters, and so on. In private, the quest takes on a collective dimension: the re-united family goes in search of memories (family meals, meeting around the family grave, the screening of family movies, and so on).

Stories of transformation: X intentionally gives an object the status of curator of family memories that, in the future, it reminds him of the moment he is living (*intimate mode*). In *La Photo sur la cheminée* (1993), Bertrand Mary describes how newlyweds decided to lovingly keep, under a glass globe, a large silver coin that had been blessed by the priest along with the rings, the garland of orange blossom the bride was carrying, and the white ribbon she was wearing in her hair (*private mode*). We have to do here with the logic of the “talisman,” or what Krzysztof Pomian (1990) calls the domain of semiophores (how objects are accepted into museums): it is a matter here of accepting the object into my personal museum.

Stories of donation: It is no longer I, but someone who intentionally gives me an object on which they confer the status of curator of memory (*private mode*): the bride who snips off a lock of her hair to give it to her fiancé, the father who gives his son a watch so that he’ll remember him. Here again, memorial labelling is aimed at the future.

Stories of transmission: my father tells me what his life was like when he was a child, or I get a letter in which my daughter tells me all about her holiday by the sea. The account he gives and the letter she sends (but it could also be a series of photos, audio recordings, videos, and so on) are *vehicles* for remembrance: they transmit the *content* of memories in the battle against forgetting. The two modes, intimate and private, can then take hold.

The use of one mode does not mean the other cannot be used at the same time: one can participate in collective memory research (*private mode*), while individually going back to one’s past (*intimate mode*) and vice versa. Three major types of relationship can then be established between the two modes.

The construction of parallel stories: while we are watching a home movie that recounts the last trip to Greece, and while the re-united family evokes memories (a collective construction: *private mode*), I start thinking about my grandpa who died a year ago and whom I miss (*intimate mode*). The private and intimate modes work separately here.

The construction of a single story through the articulation of the two modes: the private and the intimate modes reinforce one another; I go in greater depth into what is said collectively without, however, wanting to give utterance to these thoughts. The intimate mode enriches the relationship of remembrance.

The construction of divergent stories: the constraints on the space of communication for family memory imply that what is enunciated by the private mode contributes to family cohesion, or at least does not jeopardize it. In these circumstances, it is common that my inner speech (*intimate mode*) is not in agreement with what I say in my oral communication with other members of the family (*private mode*). In the end, both modes involve the construction of a *real* enunciator who can be asked questions in terms of identity:

- the enunciator “I” for the intimate mode: individual memory is a stakeholder in the construction of my personal identity;
- the enunciator “The Group” for the private mode (here, the Family): the collective approach helps construct and assert the identity of the Family as a *collectivity* with regard to its members, to other families, and to other community groups with which members of the family may be involved (at work, school, the sports club, and so on). Of course, the collective approach is also involved in the construction of my personal identity.

Definition of the intimate mode

- At the discursive level: inner speech
- At the emotional level: extremely powerful
- At the enunciative level: the construction of a real enunciator: *I*
- At the relational level: the construction of identity

Description of the private mode

- At the discursive level: indeterminate in form, but highly standardized in a given context
- At the emotional level: feelings of euphoria, and a sense of community belonging
- At the enunciative level: the construction of an actual collective enunciator
- At the relational level: interactions within a group

It should be noted that, in order to describe these two modes, I had to add a level to the ones I had used previously for the other modes: the *relational level*.

Communication Operators

A *communication operator* is anything that, in a given space, on the axis of relevance that is selected, is used by the actants to enable communication.

In this case, the communication operators are *operators of memory*. At the level of *textual production*, they work as *vehicles for*, and *stimulators of*, memory. On the one hand, they give me information that feeds my memory directly: I did not remember that my aunt was so beautiful – but this portrait reminds me. On the other hand, they lead, through a chain reaction, to a textual production, which can sometimes move away completely from the text produced by the operator: seeing a picture of my grandparents, I start thinking about Pierre, one of my childhood friends whom I have not seen for more than twenty years, and then about all the anxieties I felt when I was coming back from my first day of classes in primary school... the mystery of associations.... At the *relational* level, they are involved in the relations among the members of the family, in the relationship the family has to other groups and the relationships all the members of the group have individually to themselves (all three cases have to do with the construction of identity).

A brief typology allows us to distinguish between unintentional operators (Proust's madeleine), operators that are born of the intention of the receiver (I decide to go and see once again the village where my grandparents lived, Châtel-de-Neuvre, thus setting it up as a memory operator) and operators conceived as such when they were being produced: the tomb (around which the family gathers every year for All Saints' Day), the oral histories that my grandfather would tell me of his adventures during the First World War, the portrait paintings, postcards, photographs, films, and so on.

But we cannot simply identify and classify operators; we must still wonder about their nature. It is then that we find out that an operator is not necessarily what we tend to imagine it to be.

When it comes to the communication of family memories, portraits are not really interpreted as paintings. Even though the artistic mode can show up as an element of evaluation ("It's a Paulin!" said Mrs. X with some pride as she showed her portrait to her guests – Paulin being an obscure painter from the Lyon region), the relationship to the person painted (the indexical relationship) is what prevails: "It's the spitting image of her!" In fact, these portraits are seen as photographs, and even before photography exists: they ask for a reading, and also, in the space of the sender, for a production in the mode of the *imprint* (with the particularity that the print is performed here by human hands, mediated by the look and the work of the painter). I will refer to this memory operator as *photographic painting*.

We could then be tempted by an approach in terms of *remediation* – "Every new medium is justified because it fills a void or fixes a fault made by its

predecessors”⁸ – and we may imagine that photography will substitute, as an operator, for the painted portrait, because it works directly on the indexical mode. (“The production of a print is a stand-alone process that is not necessarily mediated by a human gaze.”⁹) Yet things are not actually that simple, because the photograph often appears to be too exact, too precise and, if truth be told, too true. It can be, then, that the model does not feel sufficiently valued. Painting is thus making a comeback with the touch-up job: reduce the size of a nose that is a bit on the big side, add a missing tooth, redraw an ear that is sticking out, and so on. We can then talk about the *painted photograph* as an operator.

What is suitable as an operator for the space of communication of family memory is thus a new medium that is neither painting nor photography, but a mixture of both: this is not convergence,¹⁰ but hybridization.

The same phenomenon of hybridization takes place in the case of the home movie. Contrary to what its designation seems to assume, the home movie is not, or more precisely *should not be*, a “movie,” at least not if what we call a “movie” is a production that is *structured* for communication purposes, with a beginning and an end. When the home movie is constructed as a “movie,” it shows the family history from the point of view of the one who made the movie (generally, the father), a point of view that may not be accepted by the other members of the family, who will have trouble finding their own experiences in it. For a home movie to work well, it must be composed as a series of unordered shots that show only snippets of the lives of the family in such a way so that each member can reconstruct their family history: in a word, it must be less of a *vehicle for* and more of a *stimulator of* memory. To put it another way: the home movie works well when it is “badly done.”¹¹ It would thus be a mistake to imagine that amateur makers of home movies are bad at what they do: they are simply respecting the constraints of the space of communication in which they are operating. This constraint can be formulated as follows: when you make a home movie, do not act like a filmmaker.

The *a contrario* proof is that, if one makes home movies as a “filmmaker,” this becomes a source of conflict with the members of the family (conflict is the *sanction* that flags the fact that the constraints on the space of

8 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT, 1999).

9 Schaeffer, *L'image précaire*, p. 22.

10 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

11 Roger Odin (ed.), *Le film de famille. Usage privé, usage public* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck, 1995), Roger Odin (ed.), “Le cinéma en amateur,” *Communications*, vol. 68 (1999).

communication have been transgressed). The film *The Amateur*, by Krystof Kieslowki (1979), thus tells the story of a maker of home movies, Filip Mosz, who, little by little, is seized by the desire (the demon) “to make films” (he puts his family in front of the camera) and who, because of this role change, loses his wife and his child. Although his story is far less dramatic, Steven Spielberg shows, for his part, the conflicts generated by his position as a filmmaker when he films his family: “What my father was filming was awfully boring. A lot of baloney. So I decided to take matters in hand. I got out of the car to run ahead and add some interest to our arrival. Like in a gangster movie. Over time I began to serve as director on our vacations. *My sisters were irritated because they had to unpack the luggage several times in a row.... They are very tough. They know exactly what I've cut out. And they want me to reinsert it. But I'm the one who has artistic control. And I'm not going to give in.*”¹²

And here is another exhibit, this time in terms of reception: if we regard a home movie as a “film,” we will get bored in a hurry. Unlike films made for the cinema, the home movie is made, not to tell a story to an audience, but only to get family memory going.

But if making a home movie is not filmmaking, what *is* it? The answer seems to be this: the home movie is an *animated photo album*. Here are three arguments that can support this answer. Arguments at the aesthetic level and at the level of content: the home movie shows the same family events and uses the same stylistic figures as are used in family photography (pauses, frontality, looking directly at the camera, the group photo, and so on), but animated. Ethno-methodological: the person making the home movie regards themselves, not as a “filmmaker,” but rather as a photographer. Hervé Guibert quotes a remark his father made after a screening of home movies: “‘You’ll be disappointed,’ he said, ‘they’re only home movies.’”¹³ With the home movie, we have to do with the photographic *strip* and not the film *strip* (*strip*: “an ongoing activity...as seen from the perspective of those subjectively involved in sustaining an interest in them”¹⁴). Here there is a structural argument: the home movie shows a sequence of snippets from life, separated by holes in time of various sizes (from a few minutes to several days, or even several months). There is often no link between these moments other than that they all belong to the family history. Here we are talking about chronological order, not narration. This is precisely the structure of the family photo album.

12 “Interview with S. Spielberg,” *Die Zeit*, 26 August 2004, no. 36.

13 Hervé Guibert, *Ghost Image* (Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1998), p. 49.

14 Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), p. 10.

What these two examples – the portrait and the home movie – show is that, in order to analyse the operators involved in a space of communication, it is not enough to stick to the mediums as they are. What is needed is to analyse how each space of communication *constructs* its operators. This construction is intended to adapt the operator to its function in the space of communication in question. For instance, the value of structuring the home movie as an “album of family photos” (that is, as a construction with “holes” in it) is two-fold: not only does this construction allow each member of the family to have a one-to-one relationship with the family history (everyone can find their experiences in it, since there is no story being imposed on them), but it encourages the collective reconstruction of this history by all of the members of the family, because the holes have to be filled in; and it is true that there is a lot of chatter while a home movie is being shown, even to the point that people stop watching it. The home movie (like the photo album) thus functions more as a relational than as a textual operator.

To summarize, then: the constraints that are at work in the family govern the construction of the operators, the actants and the modes in such a way that the communication of memory between members of the family takes place “in the best way” and is carried out for the benefit of the family as an institution. In particular, the system of censorship or self-censorship involved in communication between family members and the separation between two modes of speech – one of them external, standardized and euphoric (*private mode*), the other internal (*intimate mode*), which returns the expression of problems to the realm of the unspoken while allowing them to be formulated by the individual – these are two major factors of this proper functioning. If intimate speech comes to be externalized, if censorship is not respected, and if operators are not constructed as they “should” be, these transgressions will be punished, and that will create conflicts within the family. Analysed in this way, the communication of memory in the family seems to have a primarily *ideological* function: to strengthen family cohesion in order in turn to promote familialism and perpetuate the family as an institution in its traditional form.

The Space of Communication for Memory in the New Family Structure

Halbwachs notes that some families, “more sensitive to present conditions than to the prestige of the past,” “have organised their lives on a new basis....

Such families indicate the traits of a society in which the barriers erected by particular traditions between domestic groups have been lowered, familial life no longer completely absorbs the individual, and where the family circle is enlarged and is partly merged through other forms of association. Their ideas and beliefs represent the budding traditions of these more extended groups, into which the old families will be absorbed.”¹⁵ This description by Halbwachs takes pretty good account of how the actants are constructed in the new family structure: as hierarchical constraints diminish, individuals take precedence over the institution, and personal relationships outweigh kinship (in what is sometimes called “*the family of choice*”).

On the other hand, and in parallel with the evolution of the family, an unprecedented technological evolution has directly affected memory operators in the family space, both at the level of production and at that of dissemination: the development of TV, which has turned out to be a very good teacher of audiovisual language – everyone now “knows” how to film and even how to edit: codes have been integrated. Then there are the shift from film strip to video and then to digital, the ability to record sound directly, the appearance of miniature audiovisual recording equipment, the spread of the mobile phone and the computer, and the rise of the Internet. Even as we make sure not to succumb to technological determinism, it is certain that these developments change the constraints. And as we shall also see, they provide tools that are adapted to the new family structure.

This change in the institutional and technological context implies a change in the characterization of the space of communication of family memory as we have just presented it. The first idea that comes to mind is to take account of this development as a *transformation* of the preceding space. However, it is not this solution that I will latch onto: it seems to me more useful from a descriptive standpoint to build a *new* space of communication, a space different from the preceding one at the level both of operators and of modes of the production of meaning and textual production. On the one hand, this is because with regard to the experience in this new space, things are changing quite dramatically; on the other hand, because this new space does not make the one that preceded it disappear. To varying degrees, these days, the family is a mixed structure, hovering between the two spaces: there is thus an *intersection* between the two spaces. In the analyses that follow, I will try primarily to characterize the new space, but also point up a few characteristics that attest to the persistence of the preceding space.

¹⁵ Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 185.

“Freed-Up” Communication

The loosening of the institutional constraints at the heart of the family has meant that the new productions of memories immediately bring up aspects of family life that until that point had remained unspoken.

Breaking with the euphoric view of family pictures, we see family “as is,” with its happy moments, to be sure, but also with all its minor instances of pettiness and all the moments of rivalry and conflict that always arise within any group. The introduction of direct sound encourages this movement: because sound is harder to control than images, particularly everything that is said off-camera, things are said in new productions that would previously have been unthinkable: words that we would prefer to forget, unpleasant remarks, denials that cause more hurt than any assertion could, poisonous innuendos, and so on.

But it is especially the relationship to intimacy that has changed. The change in institutional constraints, along with technological evolution, means that nothing is missed when the camera is rolling. In *Family Viewing* (Atom Egoyan, 1987), a son discovers that his father is erasing home movies so that he can film himself having sex with his new girlfriend. The selfie film is on the rise. In an advertisement for a camcorder, a woman lying on her back holds her camera at arm’s length and films herself as the slogan tells us: “My film – my life.” As far as I know, no advertisement for an amateur film camera offers the possibility of the selfie film as a selling point. With small cameras, and especially with mobile phones, one more milestone has been passed. These devices establish a relationship of intimacy with their owner (we always have them in our pockets or in the palm of our hand). The selfie film is getting banal: we tell our mobile phones the secrets we used to tell our favourite teddy bear.

Testimony Mode: Another Mode of Production of Meaning

Today, it is no longer only the father, but all members of family, who take family photos and make home movies. This is made possible by making easy-to-use equipment available to everyone. We then see a proliferation of productions made from *different points of view*: that of the father, of the wife, but also of the children, who have their own devices (often mobile phones). An individual enunciative structure replaces the enunciative collective structure (the Family). In the new family structure, the photo album and the home movie (in both of which the Family is the enunciator) make way for a plethora of photos and movies *about* the family.

A new mode of production of meaning takes place – a mode that complements, and does not substitute for, the private and the intimate modes: that of *testimony*.

By *testimony* mode, I mean a subject, an *I* who, through the production of a text (written, oral, image and/or sound) offers their views on what they see or have seen – in this case, family life.

This construction of an enunciator, *I*, differs from that which takes place in intimate mode, in that the enunciator no longer expresses themselves through inner speech, but through explicit utterances addressed to the other family members. This mode has both a personal and a collective dimension. Another point of difference with the intimate mode is that, while we can reprise for this mode what Kate Hamburger said of the *lyric I* – in intimate mode, “we no longer can, no longer may, ascertain whether the statement’s content is true or false, objectively real or unreal – we are dealing only with subjective truth and reality, with the experience-field of the stating I itself.”¹⁶ Testimony mode calls, on the contrary, for an assessment in terms of identity (who are you to be giving an account of this event?), of ways of acting (where were you when it happened?) and of the *truth*, for which the one giving the testimony is held responsible. We are a long way off from arriving at the consensus we saw in the preceding family structure. The role of constraints has been overturned, and the “normal” status of family communication has changed: newly produced memories beget debate, discussion, and even conflict between members of the family and the enunciative subject. The family is now an area of tensions that are manifested explicitly. However, it is not certain that this leads to a dissolution of the family space. What can be seen here, rather, is a process of clarification in relations and a change in the structure of the institution.

Definition of the mode of the first-hand account

- At the discursive level: the predominance of narrative structures
- At the emotional level: an extremely strong personal investment
- At the enunciative level: the construction of an I-enunciator who can be asked questions in terms of identity, ways of acting, and truth

Other Memory Operators

Whereas in the preceding space it was the constraints within the family structure that governed the status of the operators, it is now language

16 Käte Hamburger, *The Logic of Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. 277.

constraints from television that are imposed. Films are now made in accordance with the conventions used by television programmes: interviews with family members, zoom shots pointing up this or that detail (the “zoom” is a strong enunciation mark), interruptions straight from the camera operator, who comments on this or that situation, and so on. These films are often edited: they play with transitions that the software offers as possibilities: of creating overlays, mixing films and still photos, and so on. The home movie turns into a journalistic *report* on the family: a production performed by a subject.¹⁷

Moreover, this subject is no longer aimed only at family audiences, but also at boyfriends and girlfriends, buddies, relatives, and even all of those friends one does not know on sites such as Facebook. Some of these videos have in fact been uploaded to the Internet, to a personal blog or some sharing platform, and in this way they contribute to the confused relationship between public and private spaces characteristic of society today. Patrice Flichy, using a notion proposed by the psychologist Serge Tisseron, speaks in this context of an “extimate space.”¹⁸ Tisseron refers to a “desire for extimacy” as “the force that is driving everyone to put part of their life out there.”¹⁹ These videos, indeed, count as self-expression at least as much as home movies do. However, if in some ways they escape family constraints, they still fall under the yoke of other ones: editorial and economic models that govern these shared platforms – constraints that the makers of these videos are not always aware of.

Changes also take place at the level of reception operators. These days, home movies and photos are watched on a TV, a computer, or a mobile. In general, the switch to small screens is seen as promoting reading in isolation – but this is only partly true. Not only are films and photos watched on small screens with other family members immediately after being recorded or snapped, but the camera or the mobile phone is passed from hand to hand (“pass me the film” thus means “pass me the mobile”²⁰). Unlike the traditional photo album, the mobile phone can even expand the family

17 James M. Moran, *There's No Place Like Home Video* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002).

18 Serge Tisseron, *L'intimité surexposée* (Paris: Hachette, 2001), p. 45.

19 Ibid., p. 52.

20 In an interview for the Pocket Films Festival (July 2006), “Videos taken with phones as shifters,” Jean-Louis Boissier says: “Because we did not have the equipment to screen these films on the big screen, I told the audience, ‘I’ll pass you the film.’ No sooner were these words out of my mouth than I thought: ‘pass a film’ – that could be it. The phone is handed by one audience member to another.”

circle to include, with a simple click, those who are absent. More than the individualization of reading, the essential change lies, I think, in the fact that on these screens I can watch a lot of things other than just home movies: football, the news, variety shows, video games, my e-mails, my bank account and even my tax forms. As a result, not only do these operators lose their “sacred” dimension – they also become trivial. And the more of them there are, the more banal this process becomes. Previously, we had to do to with images in relatively small numbers that became real “*loci* of memory.” Nowadays, there are so many of them that they have to be archived, and that in turn begets an obsession to classify, organize, and prioritize them with the help of one and another app. It is a radical change in logic: we are in the functional logic of databases.

This deficit of the sacred is sometimes difficult to live through – and that is a sign that the traditional family structure has not lost all of its influence. This is clear from the revival that one of the oldest memory operators is enjoying these days: portrait paintings done in oil. We upload a photograph to a website and get a painted portrait of it. We can interpret these productions as a return to *photographic painting*, but with the difference that the focus is now on the fact that it is a *painting*. Advertisements that promote this on the Internet emphasize that the portrait is produced “by human hand” (if not by an artist) and signed (a marker of subjectivization). The other argument is that the painted portrait “resists time and light without a problem” and that “its colours will still be just as vivid in fifty years,” whereas there is nothing more perishable than digital photographic productions.

This uncertainty about the durability of the new memory operators seems to be one of the major reasons for the proliferation of “family websites,” which constitute a resurgence of sorts, in the Internet space, of the “home movie” under the previous structure. By contrast with *Home Videos*, family sites have the Family as an enunciator. They lie at the intersection of the editorial constraints on the home page and of those on the family structure. The posting of family images serves here as a *guarantee* that family memories will be preserved. On the one hand, this is because we believe that a website is more reliable as a storage space than individual solutions – a belief that is, for the most part, unfounded. On the other – and this is the key point – it is because there is the more or less unconscious notion that, if these images are seen by others (and on the Internet that can mean thousands of others), they will be around for all eternity. In this case, we cannot speak of blurring the boundary between public and private spaces: we are still in private space, but the public space becomes the ultimate operator for family memories.

A few general remarks in conclusion. As the reader will have observed, during this effort to characterize the space of family memories, both in its traditional and current versions, communication has taken on a new dimension: the production of *relationships* (the creation of a family history is used to achieve consensus, the work of memory contributes to collective and/or individual identity, the new modalities according to which memories are produced may generate conflicts, and so on) has been added to the production of meanings and emotions. It is not surprising that this dimension appears at the moment when I start using the notion of a space of communication, which is, at bottom, a space of relations. This relational dimension may even be more important than that of textual production. In addition, the communication process appears to be oriented towards the production of different *effects*. Here, it produces identitarian and ideological effects, for instance. The analysis in terms of the space of communication enriches the semio-pragmatic model that has been proposed so far: communicating means producing meaning, emotions, relationships and effects in the larger sense of the word (*cf.* Schema 5 at the end of the chapter). The model is constructed in a back and forth between theory and analysis.

On the other hand, we can now list what questions to ask as we contemplate analysing the context in terms of a space of communication:

- Which communication space should be constructed? What axis of relevance should be chosen to carry out this work?
- What determinations are at work in the space that has thus been built?
- How have the actants involved in this space been constructed? What are the relations among them?
- How have the communication operators been constructed?
- How are meaning, emotions, relationships and effects produced?
- What is the importance of each of these productions?

Finally, this chapter shows the need to consider the *diachronic* evolution of contexts: the change in constraints within the same context (here, the family) can, indeed, make the construction of a new space of communication necessary, even though we have stayed on the same axis of relevance (memory) to carry out the analysis. The communication experience we are taking account of is no longer the same: the actants and the operators are constructed in a different way, meaning is no longer produced in the same mode, text productions have a different status, and relational effects are no longer the same.

Schema 5: Levels of Semio-Pragmatic Analysis: New Version

Space S	Space R
S — — V — — ►T/Rel/Effects	V T'/Rel/Effects ◄ — —► R — — — — — ▲
Universal constraints	
Constraints related to a language	
Discursive space Communicative competence as a reservoir of modes	
<i>Spaces of communication</i> Choice of an axis of relevance Highlighting of constraints Construction of actants and operators Selection of one or more modes to use	

T: textual production
Rel: Relationships

5. The Space of Communication and Migration: The Example of the Home Movie

Abstract

Chapter 5 puts into action the notion of a space of communication to create understanding around what a production becomes when it moves outside its original space.

Keywords: home movie, archives, television, history, art, medical context

In the preceding chapter I showed how analysis in terms of a space of communication made it possible to describe how productions belonging to the same axis of relevance worked in a given context, and how it could take account of the transformation of this context throughout history. The present chapter looks at how this same concept can help explain what becomes of a production when it *migrates outside its original context*. To address this issue (and in keeping with the previous chapter), I will take the example of family audiovisual productions – and more precisely, of the home movie. And indeed, the home movie goes through a remarkable phenomenon of migration through a whole range of diverse contexts. It is a matter here of studying, not these contexts in and of themselves, but only what they do to the home movies that come into their midst. There can be no question, either, of analysing all the contexts into which these productions migrate. I will simply offer a few examples that I have chosen because of the variety they represent and the methodological interest they hold for us.

The Home Movie: From Archives to Loci of Memory

The most notable manifestation of the migration of family audiovisual productions outside their home institution is most certainly the creation,

around the world, of archives that either are specialized in these productions or that at least have a fund specifically dedicated to them: The Cinémathèque of Brittany, the Video Library of the City of Paris, the Library of Saint-Étienne, the Andalusian Cinémathèque, the Cinémathèque Basque, the Museum of Ethnography of Goms (Switzerland), the North West Film Archive (Manchester), the Scottish Film Council (Glasgow), the Small Film Museum (the Netherlands), the New Zealand Film Archive, the Austrian Film Museum (Vienna), the Bophana Audiovisual Resource Center (Cambodia), the National Board of Antiquities for Prints and Photographs (Finland), the Living Picture Archive (Viborg, part of the Museum Salling Complex, Denmark), the Human Studies Film Archives (Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC), and so on.

It is their value as documents that justifies the migration of home movies to these archives. Read in the *documentarizing mode*, they do indeed impart valuable information on whole sectors of society that are not documented by official authorities or in professional reports. In particular, they are second to none when it comes to documenting what happens when nothing happens: “the banal, the everyday, the obvious, the common, the ordinary, the infra-ordinary, the background noise, the usual.” Georges Perec, from whom I have borrowed this listing, notes: “The newspapers talk about everything except the everyday.” And he wonders: “What is really happening – what we live through, the rest, all the rest: where is it?” He then starts musing about an “endotic” (as opposed to an “exotic”) anthropology.¹ Makers of home movies are, in their own way, involuntary endotic anthropologists. Without thinking about making this or that document, they film these moments of life that professionals do not film (because they do not come from the communication space in which they operate).

But we cannot stop there. Most of the institutions that collect these films are *regional* archives or cinémathèques and are thus subject to specific constraints: in particular, they are involved in the identity problems of the region in question. At more or less ritualized screenings, people meet up to share a story and make clear their belonging to the same community. The production of meaning and affects is then related to the memory of the group. We are no longer in documentarizing but in *private mode*. The relational dimension of communication outweighs, then, the production of meaning. The archives are transformed into “*loci* of memory.”² The main

1 Georges Perec, “Approche de quoi,” *Le pourrissement des sociétés*, Paris: 10/18 (1975), pp. 251–255.

2 Pierre Nora, “Entre mémoire et histoire. La problématique des lieux,” *Les lieux de mémoire*, I. *The Republic* (1984), Paris: Gallimard, pp. xvii – xlii.

reason that those who deposit films give for doing so is, moreover, that they want to be part of the region's memory.

The choice between the documentarizing and the private modes depends for the most part on the status of the actant who is interested in these movies. Whereas the inhabitants of a given region enter an archive as members of a community (using the *private mode*), researchers (historians, sociologists, ethnologists, anthropologists, and the merely curious) use documentarizing mode first and foremost: for them it is the truth that is essential. Of course, the same individual may straddle both actantial roles.

Different operators are deployed in accordance with whether the production of meaning is in accordance with one or the other mode. When the private mode predominates, we find the same type of operator as in the family, but at the level of a larger community such as a city or a region: films serve as *stimulators* of memory and relationships. What is important is less what they show or say, and more the work of memory they generate and the link that they create (or reinforce) between or among the receivers. Conversely, when it is the documentarizing mode that predominates, these same films are approached, rather, as *vehicles* of information, and these *operators* have an utterly different status: they are tools that make it possible to reconstruct the past in a (more or less) systematic, reasoned, distanced way (which memory does not do). They are *analyst-operators*.

Here are some examples of analyst-operators.

Surface analysis: here the focus is on things the film shows but that are not the subject of the shots: the landscape, the milieu, shopfronts, signs in shops, cars passing in the street, what the characters are wearing, activities going on in the background (the police officer on traffic duty, the street sweeper, the person hawking the morning paper), and so on.

Serialization: comparing representations of the same theme (the status of women, holidays, marriage) in films from different periods and cultures makes it possible to highlight differences and make interpretation productive.

Enunciative analysis: this has to do with the point of view from which films show the world: how do settlers film Africa and Africans? Is there a male way of filming? Does a Protestant make the same home movies as a Catholic?

Contextualization: what is represented can remain opaque, or at least not deliver all of its meaning, if it is not put into context. You must then request information from the author of the images, and set the film in its historical and social context. In a word, you must leave the film, all the better to come back and understand it more fully.

The change of “framework”:³ a film can become important because the historical framework in which it is interpreted has changed. Thus, André Huet, the founder of the INEDITS European Association (“amateur films/memory of Europe”) which since 1991 has been bringing together all those – archivists, directors, researchers – who are interested in the home movie as a document, tells how travel films that had been shot in Yugoslavia and that he had stored even though he considered them irrelevant, became remarkable documents after the war.

I would add that analyst-operators differ depending on the disciplinary framework within which meaning is produced: historians, sociologists, ethnologists, and anthropologists use difference theoretical and methodological tools.

In a word: in this context, family audiovisual productions are inscribed in two spaces of communication:

- On the one hand, there is the space of communication of the document, where meaning is produced through the documentarizing mode, and the actants in the communication act as “researchers” to make films produce information;
- On the other hand, there is the space of collective memory: the film operator serves as a stimulator (*private mode*) and the actants behave as members of a community.

It can certainly happen that these spaces work on their own, but more often there is some *intersection*: the former miner who comes to the multi-media library at Saint-Étienne for a screening of home movies from the 1950s will no doubt allow himself to be carried away by the dimensions of remembrance and community, but at the same time he will be certain to learn a few things about his city. Similarly, the historian who works on a corpus of home movies to study the life of miners in the Loire Region, will doubtless feel the need – in order to flesh out their analysis – to appeal to their own memory and that of those who have lived that life.

Note: We can ask whether it would not have been more useful to construct just a single space of communication, the space of the archive, and to establish at its core two poles, in accordance as communication tends to move more towards memory or more towards the document. This solution would certainly have the advantage that it would signal the unity of the context of the archive, but it has two drawbacks. On the one hand, it places memories

3 Goffman, *Frame Analysis*.

and documents on the same axis, thus suggesting that these experiences are of the same nature, which is at the very least up for discussion.⁴ On the other hand, by placing these two notions on two poles of the same axis, it links them, thus preventing us from envisaging that one of them can work without any connection to the other (even an oppositional one). While it may be thought that the memory approach is most often combined with a good helping of the documentarizing approach, the latter can also work independently.

The Home Movie on Television

After archives, probably the most significant phenomenon when it comes to the migration of family audiovisual productions outside the family context is their rather persistent presence on television, on the news, in magazines, on talk shows (television can no longer have a writer, a painter, an athlete, a politician or a scientist on as a guest without showing excerpts from their home movies), not to mention the French home-movie show *Vidéo gag*.

If for the moment we exclude *Vidéo gag*, which belongs to another space, this migration can be described as a movement within the space of the document, and thus as an invitation to read these films in *documentarizing mode*. But while it is not incorrect, this way of conceiving things misses the point. Besides the fact that the informational content of the fragments of film that are broadcast is usually extremely low, this migration can be understood only if we relocate it within the perspective of the shift from *paleo-* to *neo-*television – that is, in the context of a change in structure thus in constraints within television itself. In the 1980s, economic and political changes did indeed lead television to favour a certain type of relationship to the viewer: a relationship of proximity replaced the pedagogical (hierarchical) relationship that is characteristic of *paleo-*television.⁵ The use of home movies is a continuation of this movement: they serve as *proximity operators*. For example, by showing me the home movies of the personalities who have been invited, television brings me closer to them, because these films are like those of my family. Meaning is then produced in *intimate mode*: I will

4 Cf. the entire debate between memory and history: Nora, "Entre mémoire et histoire. La problématique des lieux"; Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

5 Francesco Casetti and Roger Odin (1990), "De la paléo- à la néo-télévision," *Communications*, vol. 51 (1990), pp. 9–26.

look, in my own life, for what I share with these guests. A relationship of empathy can then be established.

But even more important than their content is the *origin* of these images. Directors of these programmes also make a point of underscoring this (often with a subtitle, “amateur pictures”), undoubtedly to get themselves off the hook for the poor quality of the images, but especially because mentioning this origin works as an *enunciative operator* that invites me to see these images as shots taken by people “like me,” as opposed to a professional. From now on, these images appeal to me in a different way: they have a specific emotional force, a force that encourages me to accept them as they are without questioning their enunciator in terms of truth (their origin is the guarantee of their innocence). I use the term *authenticity mode* for the mode that, even as it invites me to construct a real enunciator, forbids me from questioning it in terms of the truth.

Definition: authenticity mode

- At the enunciative level: construction of a real enunciator constructed as “like me” at the level of identity
- At the discursive level: all textual productions are possible
- At the emotional level: the fact that this enunciator is “like me” produces an affective relationship that prohibits all questioning in terms of the truth

The authenticity mode is thus opposed to the documentarizing mode.

What is important when it comes to the television programmes I consider here, is to encourage the viewer to use the authenticity mode *within* the space of the document, and thus in competition with the documentarizing mode. The authenticity mode thus undermines the space of the document from within: it has nothing to do with the question of truth. It seems to me that what we have here is one of the major functions of the use of family audiovisual productions on television, but also in many other contexts: the effort to limit the opportunities for a critical mindset to take hold.

One thing that demonstrates the strength of the authenticity mode is advertising, which thinks nothing of creating fake home movies (identifiable by their topic, but also by blurry, shaky, poorly framed images, the noise of the projector, and so on) to deploy it. The idea is to exploit the point of intersection between family space and advertising space: the use of “ready-to-use” family scenes, but refocused around the product to be promoted. This involves the use of the fictional-communication trope: we see a fictional family addressee who comes into contact with the product – this with a view

to targeting the actual addressee, the buyer watching at home. One thus comes to take the point of view of these films as perfectly objective, "since it is ours."⁶ The use of this mode also makes a programme such as *Vidéo gag* something other than a show belonging to *the space of entertainment* – to which, however, it does undoubtedly belong. *Vidéo gag* is probably the most famous show when it comes to the migration of home movies to television: it has enjoyed continuous success since its launch in France in September 1990. It seems that it was the Japanese show *Kato-chan Ken-chan Gokigen TV* that got the idea off the ground in the mid-1980s. And now it, and variants of it, can be found the world over: *America's Funniest Home Videos* (US), *You've Been Framed* (UK), *Drôle de vidéo* (Canada), and so on.

In a way, the title says it all: it is about drastically reducing home movies to gags. The operator is both simple and remarkably effective: fragments of home movies are selected for the gags they show. These gags are then grouped by theme: falls, blows, weddings, pets, children, and so on. Finally, sound effects are added, as is a commentary (often in the form of a dialogue) to enhance the comic dimension of the situations involved. The fragments of home movies thus transformed are intended to be read in the *spectacularizing mode*: on the face of it, they are there only to make us laugh. Yet this is not quite how things work in the space of reception: yes, the spectacularizing mode is used to good effect, and yes, we laugh a lot, but what is happening goes well beyond this laughter. The show I see on the screen has people like me as enunciators (and I am like them): there are those performing in the gags, there is the one responsible for filming, and then there is the one who has decided to send these clips in to the television station. This enunciative relationship contradicts the effect of the distance from the spectacularizing mode, and encourages me to deploy the *authenticity mode* and acknowledge the indisputable truth of the images I am being shown: these series of gags that send me back a picture of myself and others that is ridiculous, grotesque, and frankly lamentable, tell the truth. *Vidéo gag* is not some innocent show: not only does it make me a participant in universal stupidity – it also invites me to accept it without any argument and, what is worse, to take pleasure in a radical exercise of self-contempt.

These analyses all point to the same conclusion: by inciting self-contempt (*Vidéo gag*) and by blocking questions about truth (documentarizing and advertising spaces), the migration of the home movie to television plays an ideological role: to reduce critical consciousness. In doing so, the home

6 Marie-Thérèse Journot and Chantai Duchet, "Du privé au publicitaire," in Roger Odin (ed.), *Le film de famille. Usage privé, usage public* (Paris: Méridiens Klincksieck 1995), pp. 177–190.

movie meets up with one of its primary functions in the space of the family: to prevent problems from being raised, to manufacture consensus, and to keep the institution going. Home movies summon up authenticity mode with such natural ease that we can speak of a *home-movie effect* to refer to this relationship between film and viewer – a relation in which the entire question of the truth is blocked out.

From Home Movie to Micro-Histories

As we saw in the study on archives, the home movie is a really good documentary source. It is hardly surprising, then, that historians or citizens eager to escape their country's official history decide to use it to convey history. But how can we escape the *home-movie effect* when we are using this type of document for the purpose of historical reflection?

The series *Private Hungary* by Peter Forgács seems exemplary in the response it offers to this question. This series is made up of no fewer than a dozen feature films entirely produced by reassembling home movies (we have to do here with the *found-footage* tradition). The context of creation of these films allows us to offer a hypothesis to explain the director's use of this type of treatment: confronted in its history by the question of national existence at the heart of an empire, and subjected to multiple occupations over many years, Hungary has had its memory shattered. If it is true that, as Pierre Nora said, "there are *loci* of memory because there is no longer a community memory,"⁷ we can understand why Forgács, a Hungarian director who wants to investigate the history of his country, would decide to turn to home movies, those wonderful *loci* of memory. In addition, it is not absurd to think that the change of scale will allow things to be seen differently than they are portrayed in the official history. We recognize here the micro-history problematic (Revel, 1996).

The first film in the series, *The Bartos Family* (1988), which I will take here as an example (it sets out the overall principles), explicitly claims its place in this tradition of historical research: The voice-over track tells us, "The saga of the Bartos is a Hungarian family novel, and the reflection of a private story."

Forgács's cinematographic work – the use of subtitles, the decomposition of movements, the use of freeze frame and slow motion, playing with the repetition of sequences, and the use of repetitive music – acts as an

7 Nora, "Entre mémoire et histoire. La problématique des lieux," p. xvii.

enunciative analyst-operator: its role is to explicitly show the director's point of view: "the world as seen by Zoltán Bartos," as the opening sequence of the film says. This programmatic statement is intended to make the *mediation* process the central subject of the film. The usual functioning of the cinematographic reference is modified: instead of reality in the present, we are shown *representations*. It is thus impossible to switch to interpreting in authenticity mode.

On the one hand, I am invited to read in *discursive mode*:

Definition of discursive mode

- At the discursive level: the construction of argumentation
- At the emotional level: emotions are used to convince (we have to do with rhetoric here)
- At the enunciative level: the construction of a real enunciator who can be asked questions about identity, ways of acting, and truth

On the other hand, the discursive mode occurs here at the meta-level: I am prompted to wonder what it is that gives the world seen by Zoltán Bartos its specificity.

The film quickly gives two answers: the world according to Zoltán Bartos consists first and foremost of his family and the family business. The father, "the head of the family," is also the "CEO of the timber business." We follow him as he gives a sort of guided tour of his workshops on the banks of the Danube with his board of directors. It is rare in a home movie to find sequences devoted to work. The fact that Zoltán Bartos has decided to film such a visit is certainly indicative of a bourgeois mindset. But what is most interesting is how we are shown the relationship to the world of work. During the visit, the film takes us into the workshops where workers are busy sawing boards. Whereas up to that point the film had merely let us hear music, it now reintroduces the noise of the workshops, in particular the piercing racket of the saws. A little later, between two shots of Bartos posing in front of his shop, the film will show woodworkers carrying huge boards to put them in a cart, and here again the soundtrack will be the noise of the boards falling into the cart. Because amateur film of the time was silent, the viewer knows that these noises are the result of post-production work and that the only enunciator there can be is thus Forgács. The only thing the viewer can do, then, is look for a deliberate meaning that exceeds their simple diegetic anchoring, and all the more so since the way the editing has been done encourages the construction of an oppositional system: whereas the Bartos family is associated with music, the noise is associated with the

work the workers are doing, as though one were suddenly falling back to reality, to the concrete world (every noise makes us think of its source). Without making it explicit, the film makes the viewer realize that it is the very real work of others that allows the bourgeoisie to “live well” (“he [Bartos] had a factory and a shop that allowed him to live well”).

On the other hand, a few sentences from the voice-over pointing up the historical events of the period, with images showing us members of the bourgeoisie dancing, wining and dining (Hitler’s *Anschluss* of Austria, laws on the Jews, and so on) are enough for Peter Forgács to give us a real sense of the indifference to history that bourgeois society showed. The film makes clear that the bourgeoisie saw nothing coming – neither Nazism nor communism. The conclusion of the film focuses directly on this obliviousness to history: while we attend the communist May Day parade, Peter Forgács adds a song by Kazal: “When did Napoleon win or lose a great battle? In what year was he Emperor? When was he crowned? They can ask me all they like – I can’t answer, because there’s never been a date in history I could recall.”

But there is more: while blocking interpretation in authenticity mode, Peter Forgács has understood how much he could get out of the emotional potential within these images. He uses these fuzzy, whitewashed images of the past to free up their figural dimension, while putting in place a series of processes to force us to take some distance. It is a matter of putting this emotional potential at the service of reflexive thinking. The music by Tibor Szemzo (his favourite composer) acts as a sort of commentary on the images. It is the voice of history, a voice that prompts us to question these images by projecting us into the future (it is in relation to the impending disasters that they produce meaning). The noises, which strike us even in proportion to their rarity, also play on this premonitional mode (the train sequences, which make us think of the trains for the concentration camps) or check off problems in the images – problems that, without the noises, we would not have seen: problems around the relationship of the bourgeoisie to the real, around class relations, and so on. As for the voice-over comments, which are few and far between, and which are offered under the guise of very simple structures (often short noun phrases), they are far from neutral. These short sentences say both too much and not enough, thus prompting us to construct the discourse ourselves. The film presents us with a text perforated with holes, fragmentary, incomplete, and sometimes seemingly disordered, which we need to complete and organize. Thus all the film work Peter Forgács does, he does to make us ask questions about the images it shows us. *The Bartos Family* belongs to the category of *stimulating* films (to borrow a formula used by Alain Resnais about his film *Muriel*). It seeks to

involve us in historical reflection – a reflection that goes far beyond just the Bartos case, because it bears on the position of the bourgeoisie in history.

In *The Bartos Family*, the use of home movies, far from blocking the question of truth, puts it at the very heart of the construction, but it took important cinematographic work to get to that result. This work consists in analysing the home movie as an ideological operator that reveals the behaviour of a social class. The passage to a meta-level space of communication is what makes this analysis possible: the cinematographic work brings about the creation of a “discursive” critical space in relation to that of home movies. Peter Forgács’s film is a kind of semio-historical analysis, on film, of home movies.

The Home Movie in the Space of Art

The film *A Song of Air* by the Australian Merilee Bennett Air (1987) is presented as a letter to her late father. At the beginning of the film, a text, handwritten by Merilee herself, tells us that the images in this film come from the home movies shot by her father, the reverend Arnold Lucas Bennett, who had filmed his family with unflagging regularity from 1956 to 1983. From the images we are shown, it is clear that Merilee’s father was a “good filmmaker”: not only are the images sharp and well framed, but the films are carefully constructed – we could even say: directed: “On holidays, he would gather us together to be in his movie; we staged the departure so he could film the farewell and the car pulling away,” runs the voice-over. The father even created scenarios, all of which had the same theme: a family threatened by outside danger. “We were playing our one life for the sake of his movies. The important thing was to be together, and feel the same way about the world.” Shots taken automatically show us the father surrounded by his wife and children, keeping them under his thumb, embracing them with his long arms, moving them around to arrange a family-style portrait, and asking them again and again to look at the camera. Doing that means looking together in the same direction and thus bearing witness to the family’s unity as a group. Here, form closely follows content. Images are placed in order, regulated, policed, always being controlled: images of the moral and familial order that the father (a dyed-in-the-wool Baptist) imposes uncompromisingly within his family.

The result of this upbringing, in which cinema plays an important role – “almost every Sunday evening, after tea, we would watch movies; we saw ourselves growing up as time went by...” – is presented in the words of the

letter that Merilee reads in a voiceover: it is the story of her revolt against the family order and against films that both reflect and advance it. In the text of this letter, Merilee explains to her father how and why she threw herself into a life exactly that is the opposite of the one he had planned for her, how she became a topless waitress in a brothel, and how she prostituted herself and took drugs.

In the face of a “well-made” home movie that’s “made too well” and that coerces its family viewers, another kind of coercion, in the form of violence, has to result. The violence here is that of art. Not only does Merilee cut and reassemble the images from her father’s films in order to make them fit into what *she* is saying – she also does cinematographic work that plays a game that is the opposite of the work done by her father: she de-structures the images that were made by her father and that are framed too well, that are too sharp and too clean, by reworking them through decomposition and recomposition or by tackling the very substance of the images (by adding graininess). That creates these moments of considerable formal beauty, notably in a sequence in which Merilee is swimming under a waterfall: the shot is paused a number of times in succession, so we see the torrent of water drops through a succession of frozen images showing the young girl’s determination to hold her own against this force that is submerging her.

It is only at the end of this long work – which feels a bit like it is torturing the film, the filmmaker herself, and the father – that Merilee can say to her father, “I love you.”

A Song of Air is a good example of what we can call “films that settle scores through the home movie.” There are plenty of films of this kind from pretty much all over the world, especially final student projects in art schools or universities, for which students reassemble home movies. You could almost say it has become a genre.

The context in which these films appear is almost always the same. After being subjected to an extremely restrictive family order (sociopsychological constraints), the child breaks free, trying to find their way, and embarks on a life that is precisely the opposite of what the family had planned for them: we are in the *space of personal construction* (identity). This move is the *operator* that will allow them to take their distance from the *home-movie effect* (which has often been one of the instruments of an imposed order) and to return to these films in the *intimate mode*, but with a critical point of view. Not only is the euphoria that predominates in home movies denounced as untrue, but home movies appear, on this reading, as formidable operators of oppression: everything that was meant to promote fulfilment and guarantee happiness is seen as destructive.

On the other hand, the search for a life that is the opposite of the one planned by the family leads the girl or the young man to turn to the *space of art*: it is there that the encounter with cinema takes place (for instance, Merilee Bennett studied photography and cinema at Philip Institute of Technology in Melbourne). The space of art is particularly well suited to the psychological problems that these young people have to solve: it is a space in which they will be able to take on the role of *author* and thus of the subject responsible for production – that is, a space in which they will be able to assert their identity. What better way, then, to settle accounts with the past than by taking possession of the films of one's own father and using his home movies for one's own personal creative ends? The *operator* is the work of artistic creation. Significantly, *A Song of Air* begins and ends with images of Merilee at the editing table working on her father's 16-mm films. It is not a matter, however, of switching to a meta-level, as in *The Bartos Family*. The work done on home movies is more radical here: it can be described as involving the *destruction* of the father's home movies, followed by the work of *reappropriation* in order to transform these films into personal work.

Finally, having home movies migrate to the space of art means bringing them into a *public space* (as against the private space of the family), which is not only a strong act of emancipation, but also an obvious demand for recognition: in this space, the films will be read in artistic mode – that is, in relation to their author (*A Song of Air* is a film by Merilee Bennett). The text thus produced has a two-fold status: on the one hand, it is an *œuvre* asking to be seen as belonging to the space of art; on the other, it is a gesture of identity affirmation. We are at the *intersection* between the space of art and that of personal construction.

But there is another way for home movies to migrate into the space of art: from the outset, artists conceive of their home movies as part of this space. Jonas Mekas and Stan Brakhage are undoubtedly among the initiators of this movement, but there are many artists working in this way. The titles clearly show the relationship to the home movie: *Oh My Mother*, *Oh My Father*, *The Sons* (Kohei Ando), *The Family Album* (Alan Berliner), *Der Fater* [sic] (Nol Brinckmann), *Family Portraits* (John Porter), and so on. Sometimes the designation is even simpler and more explicit: *Home Movie* (Vito Acconci, Jane Oxenberg, Lee Ann Brown, Taylor Mead, et al.).

We might ask whether it is legitimate to talk here about migration, in so far as there is no change of context but immediate integration into another: art. It seems to me, however, that we have a case of migration here, because the home movie is a genre assigned to a space of communication: the family. Getting this type of production into the space of art involves

a real shift. Perhaps we could talk about a *mental migration*, because this shift is made first and foremost in the director's mind. The viewer, for their part, is encouraged to make a move in the opposite direction: faced with a production that claims to belong to the space of art, they are forced to recognize that it originated in the family space.

The space of art thus overlaps with that of the family, but this overlap is a merger. It is not a fusion, or a meta-relationship with a critical aim (as in *The Bartos Family*). Nor is it a relationship of destruction and re-appropriation (as in *A Song of Air*). We have to do, rather, with a relationship of *domination*: the space of art is imposed on the family space. Even though they are still home movies, they are made to be interpreted in artistic mode by an audience outside the family: those who direct them claim to be *auteurs* (artists) and demand to be recognized as such.

In these films, as in the home movie, signs showing that they are badly made are everywhere to be found, but – and this is the key distinction – in this case they are there on purpose. In this context, they become part of the *auteur's* brand signature (we can spot one of Mekas's films right away from his way of playing with skipped frames) and they will be read in aesthetic mode (the viewer enjoys the malleable aspect of these images: blurry, overexposed, grainy, with unsteady pans, and so on.). But we must see all the same that, in order to work, these tropes require that viewers agree to read them in this mode. And that assumes in turn that these viewers belong to the same “interpretive community” as the director (Fish, 1980; Allard, 1995) – that is, that they are part of the same aesthetic space of communication.

It is thus on the basis of the *aesthetic space* that this interpretation authorizes the entry of these films into the space of art and interpretation in artistic mode. If these actants are not part of the *same* aesthetic space of communication, they will simply be rejected.

The Home Movie in the Medical Context

I will finish with this quick analysis of the migrations of home movies, evoking a context that is rather different from all those I have mentioned up to now: that of medical research.

The first example is within the framework of research on developmental psychology. Psychologists⁸ call on parents of autistic children to lend them

8 Jean-Louis Adrien and Maria Pilar Gattengo, “Dépistage précoce de l'autisme à l'aide des films familiaux: apport de la recherche et d'une démarche rétrospective dans la démarche de

their home movies so they can try to spot the clues, the warning signs that would make it possible to offer an early diagnosis of autism and thus to treat it more effectively. The review covers babies from birth to eighteen months. The goal is to identify signs of “relational withdrawal”: children with pervasive development disorders have more-significant and longer-lasting scores on relational withdrawal in the first months of their lives than do other babies. It is the axis of relevance that governs the interpretation of these movies in this context. The interpretation is done here by researcher-actants – we are in the *space of scientific research* – that is, of actants who deploy a rather specific *operator*: a package of thorough knowledge without which we would not even know what to look at on the axis of relevance that has been chosen. The mode of production of meaning is the documentarizing mode. The home movie becomes a stand-in experimental laboratory. While it is impossible for researchers to carry out investigations within families themselves in order to study children’s behaviour, the home movie makes such research possible: seeing a home movie is a little like living with this family in the months when the film was shot. In this operation – in contrast to what we saw in *The Bartos Family* – the home movie as a medium is erased: it is regarded as *transparent*, and gives direct access to the signs documenting the issue of autism. The enunciator questioned by the interpretation in documentarizing mode is not the film, but the family itself.

Other practitioners use the home movie to help patients who are suffering from severe memory problems. Here we are in the *space of therapy*. Jean-Claude Leners⁹ tells how, at the Centre gérontologique de Pontalize in Luxembourg, “reminiscing sessions” are arranged for patients suffering from Korsakoff’s syndrome, during which clips of home movies are projected. These clips are not necessarily of the patients’ own home movies: they can be of any family. The sessions take place once a week. The communication operator consists of micro-sequences of one to two minutes, based around key moments in life such as a birth, a marriage, school, work, and local traditions – moments that each patient will be able to recognize. It is here that the use of the home movie is particularly relevant: its heavily stereotyped character is a valuable asset, because the images will be all the more likely to resonate with patients. These sequences are then projected,

soins,” in Alain Haddad, Antoine Guedeney and Tim Greacen (eds.), *Santé mentale du jeune enfant: prévenir et intervenir* (Toulouse: éditions Erès, 2004), pp. 85–93.

9 Jean-Claude Leners, “Reminiscence: A Way to Use Amateur Films in Order to Work with Patients Suffering from Memory Problems” in Sonja Kmec and Viviane Thill (eds.), *Private Eyes and the Public Gaze: The Manipulation and Valorisation of Amateur Images* (Trier: Kliomedia, 2009), pp. 97–99.

either on their own or in series (based around the same theme). For these screenings, the sequences are chosen so as to form a relationship with the outside environment. For example, if a given screening takes place in December, it will focus on activities having to do with Christmas. If it is in July, the emphasis will be on summer-holiday pictures, and so on. The constraints on the context thus reinforce the power of the images shown, or at least resonate with them so as to enhance their galvanizing power. Patients look at these sequences in a group in a hospital room. The idea is to stimulate the *intimate mode* of meaning production by using the *private mode*. After each screening, the sequences are discussed in a group, but patients are asked to call up their most intimate memories. This process of remembrance is helped along by the group discussion and the overall context. The long-term objective is to allow people in the group to get into a more stable living environment. Finally, all sessions are transcribed, so the practitioners can use information from other sessions. The text produced is therefore twofold: on the one hand there are the stories the patients tell; on the other, the transcripts that will in turn serve as operators. But beyond this textual production, the key is in the *act* that is performed both in relation to patients and by them. The role of home movies is explicitly *performative* here: to elicit a response in order then to offer treatment.

These analyses show the great variety of contexts into which a production can migrate, and the complexity of the constructions that are needed in order to take account of one's place in these various contexts. However, it is possible to summarize the approach. (It would be no different if, instead of studying the migration from one type of production, as I did here, I were to study that of a single production such as a film, a photograph, a painting, a text, or a piece of music.)

By contrast with the previous chapter, which held to a single axis of communication that was posited *a priori* at the start of the analysis, analysing the migration of a production into different contexts requires first and foremost that we ask ourselves about the axes and the spaces of communication that we must construct in order to take account of the workings of this production in these contexts. Which communication space or spaces are the more relevant to helping us understand what is happening? How many spaces of communication do we have to construct? We have seen, for instance, that, while for the archives I have constructed two spaces of communication corresponding to the two modes that have been evoked, I have thought it more appropriate, in order to account for the use of home movies as documents on television, to construct only one mode – and this even though, here too, two modes are involved. It is a matter in this case of

strategic decisions that the analyst has a duty to take on what seem most clearly to them to be the most important points of the communication experience being analysed.

Once the space or spaces of communication have been fixed upon, the construction of the actants and the operators of communication proceeds as it did in the previous chapter. The next question, once several spaces of communication have been constructed, has to do with the relationship between and among them: the analyses in this chapter have highlighted intersectional relationships, and those involved in the movement to the meta level, in superposition, and in domination. The next chapter will show that yet other relationships are possible.

We can still ask what is left of the original space in the new context, what the role of this reference to the origin is, and what effects this reference produces. We can then try to characterize what becomes of the productions in the new context. What is their status? When it comes to home movies, that status ranges from the document to their reduction to a series of gags or to the signs of autism (with the erasure of the medium), via their positioning as objects of analysis (*The Bartos Family*), or to their destruction or reconstruction (*A Song of Air*). And what about their role? Here again, analyses show the diversity of responses: a role that is informative, relational, ideological, based around identity, therapeutic, and so on.

Finally, we must question the why of the migrations themselves, for these do not happen for no reason. They are not innocent. Thus the proliferation of family-film migrations today draws on the existence of a vast space of communication that is shot through by strong identitarian and communitarian temptations, but also by a change in the relationships among intimate, private and public. Taken together, these migrations are part, both of the effects produced by the constraints that result from this space, and of its operators: they help, at the level they operate to strengthen and extend it.

6. Textual Analysis and Semio-Pragmatics

Abstract

Chapter 6 examines the difference between traditional (immanentist) textual analysis and textual analysis within the semio-pragmatic perspective.

Keyword: textual analysis

The objective of semio-pragmatics is to put the “immanentist approach *into a contextualized pragmatic perspective*. Once the contextual constraints governing the construction of the text have been recognized, the immanentist analysis can be put into action.” That was, as we may recall, the definition of the semio-pragmatics programme I gave in the Introduction. The wording used could suggest that the pragmatic perspective taken does not change anything about the textual analysis as it was carried out within the immanentist paradigm. However, this is not the case. While it is true that the tools of immanentist analysis are still very useful, we are witnessing a radical transformation of what textual analysis itself is: from now on, as we have already seen from the analyses presented in the two previous chapters, it is no longer a question of analysing an existing text, but of analysing the *experience of textual production in context*.

I would now like to place myself in the conditions that most resemble traditional textual analysis: the analysis of *one* specific production in a *unique* context. I hope that this will highlight the differences even more effectively.

The three productions I will analyse have been chosen for the variety of fields they represent: a television show belonging to this mythical moment in cycling, the Tour de France; the reproduction of a painting in an art-history collection; and joint research work on a film, carried out at a university.

The approach I take is as follows: I begin by describing the context in which the reading takes place. I then use the notion of the space of

communication to try to characterize the communicative workings of this reading, and the experience it gives rise to. In the context in question, the goal is to unfold this reading, to open it up in all its dimensions (or at least in the broadest way possible).

A Stage of the Tour de France on Television

It is really hard to escape the hold exerted by this “total myth” known as the Tour de France¹ everywhere in the press, and on radio and television, it invites us, over a period of three weeks, to “align our lives with that of the Tour.”² Philippe Gaboriau sees it as “a substitute for working-class desire for liberation,”³ but more broadly it is all social classes who are caught up in a massive wave of reconciliation with the world. Even though I am not a big fan of sports broadcasts, I still decided, therefore, to look at the 17th stage, a crucial step because there are several passes to cross: the Marie-Blanque, the Soulor, and especially the legendary Tourmalet. My knowledge of the region from having holidayed there probably contributed to my decision. My expectations were as much those of a tourist as of a sports fan.

The café I sat down in had a bit of a party atmosphere: watching the Tour de France, everyone is friendly and in a good mood. People call out from one table to another, recalling what happened in the last stage. The Tour de France is a TV serial: what I see today is determined by what happened yesterday, the day before yesterday and the days before. Little by little, the entire history of the Tour can be evoked. If there is one show that works based on prior knowledge, this is it. I must confess that I am sorely lacking on this score, but the atmosphere is contagious and I get caught up in it: even though I am quite clueless, I cannot stop myself from getting involved in the conversation. The relational dimension of communication sometimes makes one do funny things when it comes to the production of meaning.... On the other hand, the broadcast of the Tour de France is a debased form of what Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz⁴ described as “ceremonial television”: it

1 Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 118.

2 Alain Arnaud and Michel Chandelier, “La prise en charge du Tour de France par la télévision, dans le contexte de la crise du dopage. 1998–99,” in Pierre Gabaston and Bernard Leconte (eds.), *Sports and Television. Regards croisés* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000), pp. 247–265, here p. 250.

3 Gaboriau, Philippe (1995), *Le Tour de France et le Vélo histoire sociale d'une épopée contemporaine* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1995), p. 16.

4 Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

produces a “specific sociability,” “a need for community,” “the oceanic feeling” of being immersed in the immensity of an audience without borders.⁵ Using a formulation used to describe the fiction effect, we can speak here of a process of “*mise en phase*,” but it is not a matter here of swaying to the rhythm of events as they are recounted (the broadcast has not started). Rather, the café resonates with the millions of spectators who are also about to watch the Tour at the same time. Thus we have to do with a *spectatorial* “*mise en phase*.”

The broadcast is on France 3. The title of the programme, “En direct du tour,” sets the axis of relevance on which I am invited to register, at the intersection of the *sports communication* space and that of *live broadcast communication*: what I see is happening in real time. Far from leading to the erasure of the process of mediation, a live broadcast encourages people to become aware of it: it is France 3 that is showing the Tour. It is the enunciator, a real enunciator that can be asked questions in terms of its identity (what are the differences between France 3’s sports shows and those of the other channels?), in terms of truth (I hope what I am told about the Tour is true; the channel does everything to convince me of this: expert opinions, commentaries by former riders, and so on.) and in terms of ways of acting: who is the communication operator? How does it work?

The communication operator can be described as the technical device for live television broadcasting, and I must say that it sometimes leaves something to be desired: periodically the image freezes, stopping the cyclists dead in their tracks; it can also happen that the picture becomes distorted or even disappears. The irony is that these problems have a positive effect: they serve as a reminder of the liveness effect. Commentators do not seem to mind talking about these “vagaries of broadcasting live.” Very often, indeed, the commentary is on this system of live broadcasting: the role of helicopters, the switch to motorcycle shots, the emphasis placed on the organization that all this requires, and on the complexity of the technology. This *meta* (reflexive) dimension stresses the importance of the technical operator even as it posits an operator capable of assessing his work. This enhances the human dimension of communication.

As a specialist with habits picked up on the job, I cannot help but notice that editing violates quite often what they call, in cinema, “the 180° rule”: the riders cross the TV screen from right to left and then, in the next shot, from left to right. However, there is no sense in which this calls into question my experience of the race: it would not occur to me to think that the

5 Ibid., p. 208.

riders have turned around, because I know (since I come equipped with a cognitive *schema*) that the race is linear: “space corresponds to a vector” and “constraints are of the type ‘to be in front,’ ‘behind,’ ‘close,’ ‘distant.’”⁶ As Colin notes, “the spectator’s knowledge of audio-visual ‘language’ does not appear to be sufficient” to understand “spatial relationships in the context of a cycling race.”⁷ They have to know what a cycling race is in the first place. For a few moments, my positioning was split in two: my experience as a film researcher prompted me to question my experience as a spectator. But it is the spectator in me that won.

From the first shots, France 3 takes me into the world of the Tour (diegetization): after a wide shot of the peloton from the helicopter, there is a shot of the race from the viewpoint of the spectators at the event. Then there is a subjective shot from a motorcycle that just about places me in a spot where one of the riders would be: I am in the race, right in the midst of the peloton. The race itself serves as a grand narrative divided up into a series of mini-stories, each of which has its own issues at stake (especially when the riders tackle the passes). To watch the Tour is to engage in an eminently narrative experience: who will win? The programmes promised to allow me not only to attend the race, but to “live the Tour.” And they were not lying. The “*mise en phase*,” this time a *narrative process*, has taken full hold. Even though I am implementing three processes that are found in fictionalization (entering a world, following a story, vibrating to the rhythm of the events), my reading does not involve fictionalizing: France 3 is constructed as a real enunciator. My reading deploys two modes: *spectacularizing* and *documentarizing*, both of which feature some narration. I am both a *spectator* and a *learner* (someone eager to have the information I need so I can understand the race). At the documentarizing level, the broadcast does not merely inform me on how the race is unfolding – it also gives me a “discourse” on this story: the voice-over commentary names the competitors, explains the strategies of the various teams, provides technical details, and so on. For someone like me who has no idea about any of this, the information is quite invaluable: it allows me to understand what is at stake in the race. As a show, the programme gives me everything I expect: first, there is the first, there is the scenery that the helicopter shots allow me to experience: views of gorgeous mountains made even more vivid by the passage of clouds. But that is not all: this stage of the race is quite eventful: there is the torrential

6 Michel Colin, “Comprendre l’événement sportif à la télévision. L’exemple de la course cycliste,” *Communications*, vol. 51 (1990), pp. 79–110, here p. 95.

7 Ibid., p. 103.

rain that pelted the cyclists, Samuel Sanchez's coming off his bike – will the stunned cyclist get back into the race, the duel between Alberto Contador, Andy Schleck, the nice gesture made by the wearer of the yellow jersey, who let his rival take the victory lap.... All of this leads me to construct what I will call a *sports* text that includes components of both a documentary and a spectacle.

At times, the broadcast of the race cuts to ads, thus switching to the *space of advertising communication*: I leave the live broadcast, while continuing to use the documentarizing mode, but it is the commercials that are the operators. However, the reference to the space of sports is not abandoned, because films often use it to construct their mini-scenarios: two spaces thus intersect. It amuses me quite a bit, and I rather admire the designers who have been so good at getting the most out of the situation (*aesthetic mode*). Still, I am in the construction, not of the sports text any more, but of a series of *advertising texts* whose aim is to get me out of my position of spectator to make a *consumer* out of me and, by leveraging the prestige of the Tour de France and the competitors, to encourage me to make a purchase. I doubt that this will work, but you never know....

The broadcast brings me, finally, into the *space of tourist communication*, which I was waiting for from the start. The tourist part is rather cleverly packaged as belonging to the same space of communication as the race itself (there is a relationship of inclusion: we are still in *the space of sports*): the helicopter shows me the cyclists passing through the village of Oloron, and then flies over the Sainte-Marie cathedral. The next few shots show me the portico of the cathedral in all its detail, and take me into the cathedral itself. These latest images were shot beforehand, but there is still the sense that this is a live broadcast. Here I am, turned into a *tourist*: it is almost as if I was actually visiting Oloron. Sometimes we see a split screen: on the left, there is the tourism documentary, while on the right, the race goes on, thus making clear that these two spaces of communication are both present but that they are also different from each other. The result of all this is the construction of a third text: the *tourist text*.

But my reading does not stop there: while on holiday in the Pyrenees, I went to Oloron. The small town thus becomes a communication operator that takes me into the *space of memory*. I recall: my car had had a problem, and I had been forced to drive around in the town, miffed at having had to fritter away hours of holiday time looking for a repair shop (production of meaning in the intimate mode). I had then gone to see the cathedral. Keen to understand the architectural work (artistic mode), I had carefully read what the *Guide bleu* had to say on it. I remember very well what I felt

as I stood in front of the portico and the cornices; I spent quite some time taking them in (*aesthetic mode*). This forced stop had, in the end, resulted in a very interesting experience: the production of a *personal text* that combined the intimate mode, artistic references, and aesthetic feeling. For a few moments, I had all but forgotten the race: I must now pick up the thread of the sports story.

Interpreting the Reproduction of a Painting

I deliberately gave the previous analysis a personal twist. However, this should not imply that semio-pragmatic textual analysis can only ever describe an individual experience.

For example, I will try to describe the reading determined by the book *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice*,⁸ of the Titian painting *The Vendramin Family Venerating a Relic of the True Cross* (1543–1547).

My view in this regard is that Brown's work serves as the *context* governing the reading of Titian's painting, and what I am trying to describe is the experience of the *reader* of this analysis and no longer just my own personal experience.

The French translation of the book, *La Renaissance à Venise*, is part of the *Tout l'Art* series put out by Flammarion. This simple mention obliges us to broaden the context. Through Brown's analysis, all the determinations of the space of art are conveyed: instructions are given to the reader to focus on the proper name of the author of the painting, and to take an interest in biographical, thematic, stylistic, and historical questions, and so on.

The *Tout l'Art* series includes various subcategories: a *Grammar of Styles*, *History*, *Monographs*, and *Encyclopaedias*. In its French translation, the book belongs to a series, *Context*, in which we also find *La Renaissance à Florence*, *La Renaissance dans les pays du Nord*, *L'Artiste impressionniste*, *Le Corps photographié*, and *Le Monde critique*. A note introducing the series says: "It is the series of initiation and synthesis *par excellence*, focused on *illuminating the historical, economic, political and cultural conditions of artistic creation*." All of this encourages us to take this definition as the *axis of relevance* starting from which the communication space in which the reader is invited to operate is constructed. I will speak here of a "*discursive*" *communication space*, a space that turns the receiver into a reader who is involved in a "discursive" experience.

8 Patricia Fortini Brown, *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice* (London: Pearson, 2005).

The communication operator consists of a mix of text and images (maps, reproductions of paintings, photographs of monuments, buildings, sculptures, Venetian spaces, and so on). In Chapter VI, "Social Identities and Gender Differences" and, more precisely, on page 161 of a section devoted to the "cult of the family," one can read: "The central place of the male lineage for patricians is eloquently expressed in Titian's painting *The Vendramin Family Venerating a Relic of the True Cross*."⁹ The number in parentheses invites the reader to look at the reproduction of this painting, which occupies approximately one-third of the following page. The way in which this reproduction is introduced, reduced in size and inserted into the text itself encourages us to read it as part of the "discourse" on the status of the family in Venice in the 1500s (*documentarizing mode*) and, more precisely, as an illustration of the "discourse" on "the central place of the male lineage." And indeed, even if some are adults and others are children, there are only males in the painting. The scene shows that the men of the Vendramin family have a strong relationship to religion: the characters demonstrate their devotion to a cross on the right side of the painting, on an altar (construction of a documentary text).

The legend and the commentary in the painting, which act as constraints in regulating its reading, give us to understand that it is a portrait of a family group created in the Vendramin family's *space of communication of family memory*. The Titian painting belongs to the lineage of memory operators that we analysed in the preceding chapter. Brown's text includes the elements the reader needs to start entering this space and to imagine how this painting could be read in this frame (*private mode*): the presentation of the characters ("Behind Andrea, among his brothers, is Leonardo, the eldest son..."), an invitation to read the painting as photographic (in the sense I gave this expression in the preceding chapter), information on the position of the characters in the family (Andrea is painted with her seven sons, but not with the seven daughters mentioned in the documents), and the narrative of the story that is at the origin of the scene. Andrea Vendramin had been responsible for the Scuola di San Giovanni Evangelista in 1369, the date on which the brotherhood received the relics of the True Cross... (construction of the Family Text).

The analysis indicates that the Titian painting was established as a memory operator in the Vendramin family because of the painter's fame as an artist (artistic labelling), and this enhances the status of the family that owns one of his works (the space of the family intersects with that of

9 Ibid., p. 116.

art). At the same time, the text encourages the reader to locate themselves in this latter space and to look at the painting in “full artistic mode.” This is the construction of the reader as an art lover. Brown adds that the painting is at the National Gallery in London, the Mecca of the Art World if ever there was one, and that the canvas measures 210 by 300 cm. She offers pointers that guide the artistic interpretation itself: contrary to what one might expect, the composition of the Titian draws our attention away from the True Cross (which is relegated to the upper-right corner of the painting) and towards the members of the family. Brown tells us that the Titian “offers a masterful solution that makes it possible to create a portrait of nine people in the same scene, even as it keeps each one’s individual character”: refusing the traditional formula of the procession, Titian divides the characters into groups within the space of the painting. Brown also offers a series of comments on Titian’s work with colours, which imparts “the sense of a whole” to the pictorial field: the light blue of the sky, the brown of the altar, and the many characters dressed in black (Gabriele and his six younger nephews) make for a contrast with the red outfits the other characters are wearing, which range from dark through bright red to pink satin. Construction of the text: the art of Titian.

The way Brown praises the work of Titian might give us to believe that she would like the reader, too, to admire the painting (the attempt to construct an actant who is an aestheticizing interpreter), but pulling off the move to the aesthetic space is tricky: even though the reproduction is high-quality, it is difficult to make the aesthetic mode work properly on such a small scale (13 x 9 cm). This would probably become possible if the painting were reproduced over a full page, but that would mean it would have to be put in a separate section of the book, and that in turn would change the hierarchy of modes: the aesthetic reading would benefit from this, but it would then take quite some effort to link the table to the “discourse” held by the text and to move on to reading in documenting mode. (Not much is needed to change the hierarchy of spaces and modes of reading.) The work thus chose the solution best suited to its “discursive” aim, even if that meant sacrificing the aesthetic experience.

Collective Academic Research

From 1969 to 1972, three researchers, Claude Bailblé, Michel Marie and Marie-Claire Ropars worked to produce an analysis of Alain Resnais’s film *Muriel* (1963). This work led, in 1974, to the publication of a book, *Muriel*,

histoire d'une recherche.¹⁰ It is the experience of these researchers, which is rare and well worth recalling, that I will now attempt to analyse.

The *context* is that of a university research team, and it is the constraints of this type of structure that regulate the experience lived by its participants as well as their textual production. From the "Foreword," the *axis of pertinence* is posited: "When it was being formed, the group had set itself the goal of systematically analysing a film by identifying the categories that regulate its functioning and meaning."¹¹ We are in the *communication space of analysis*. More precisely, we are at the intersection between the *space of analysis* and the *space of the university*. This relationship to the latter space distinguishes the analysis of *Muriel* from the many critical analyses that have been devoted to this film in specialized magazines: on the one hand, the production of meaning is subject to constraints of method and scientificity that the space of criticism does not require; on the other, whereas the critic is a cog in the space of the cinema (by encouraging audiences to go and see this or that film, the critic keeps the cinema machine running), the academic analyst is outside this space (the stakes are not in the "domain" of cinema).

This specific status of the academic analyst gives them a particular virtue: the strength of externality. Compared to the space in which films are commonly viewed (the screening experience), the way analysis happens in the academic space is indicated first and foremost by a change in temporality: in the case of *Muriel*, the experience of interpretation lasted three years, certainly not on an ongoing basis, but in a relation to time that has nothing to do with the length of an actual screening. The actantial positioning is also no longer the same: researchers are not spectators, but academic analysts. The problem becomes more complicated, however, because, on the other hand, researchers are also spectators (they go to the cinema), and it is certain that they saw *Muriel* as spectators before starting to analyse it. This double actantial role, which produces a superimposition of two spaces of communication, the spectatorial space and the space of academic analysis, is both the necessary condition for analysis and one of the analyst's major problems. (I will come back to this point later on.) In the space of academic analysis, the communication operator is no longer the film, but the set of theoretical and methodological tools used to produce the analysis. Finally, the mode of production of meaning used is no longer the spectacularizing or fictionalizing mode, nor even the artistic or aesthetic mode, but the analytical mode.

10 Claude Bailble, Michel Marie and Marie-Claire Ropars, *Muriel: Histoire d'une recherche* (Paris: Galilee, 1975).

11 Ibid., p. 7.

The analytical mode is a subcategorization of the “discursive” mode (which I described above). Indeed, whereas not every production of “discourse” has analysis as its primary objective (a “discourse” can be produced to convey ideas, to convince, to mobilize...), any analysis involves the production of “discourse.” Like the aesthetic and artistic modes, the analytical mode is a horizontal structure: it assumes different phases and can be interrupted along the way (an analysis may or may not succeed). The phases of the analysis depend a lot on the discipline in which it takes place and on the methodology called for: here, we are in the context of the textual analysis of films.

To give a correct account of the analysis of *Muriel*, I believe it is necessary to treat these phases as distinct spaces of communication: they are certainly subspaces of the space of analysis, but they have their own actors, their own operators and their own aim.

The Space of Description and the Construction of the Object of Analysis

The researchers start by producing a shot-by-shot breakdown of the film, a cut of the film after editing, as it is actually screened. Here, the researcher acts as an *observer*, identifying and categorizing (or categorizing and identifying). The result is the transformation of the film text into a written text that is presented in the form of a table that has no fewer than twelve columns. The entries in these columns are the operators used to produce the breakdown: the number of the shot, its duration, the situation, how the characters move about and which way they look, colour, the scale of view (close-up, medium shot, and so on), angle, camera movement, soundtrack (sounds, music, dialogues, status of the sound source: on/off).

At the same time, 1,300 photograms illustrate this breakdown, shot by shot. As Michel Marie noted, these photograms are “photographic reproductions of the original photograms from the film,”¹² so we cannot say that the series of photograms is a reproduction of *Muriel* (they have nothing to do, for example, with the reproduction of the painting of Titian analysed in the preceding example). One could speak, rather, of a *compression* of the film: *Muriel* in 1,300 photos. Unlike the compression made by the sculptor Armand, this one results from a process of *sampling*: one photogram per shot was kept, except for complex shots, which are represented by several photograms.

12 Ibid., p. 335.

The first function of this combination (the shot breakdown and the photograms) is obviously to allow researchers to remember the film precisely. The memory of a film is, indeed, something particularly labile, and the risk of working on more or less imagined sequences is not negligible. Bellour thus recalls that André Bazin, “who was nevertheless the epitome of intellectual consciousness,” stated that *Le Fleuve* (*The River*) (Renoir, 1950) was made up only of fixed shots, whereas it comprises about twenty camera moves, and that he himself, in analysing *Brigadoon* (Minnelli, 1954), had transformed two fixed shots into an “admirable camera movement” that he had “literally dreamed up.”¹³ Photograms and cutting are there to avoid this type of problem, but their function goes beyond that.

Indeed, it is not easy to watch a film as an analyst. All film teachers know how difficult it is to switch from watching as a spectator to watching as an analyst, especially if one is a cinephile. Digging out photograms from the film and making a shot breakdown (the word itself is violent) entail breaking this object of love that is the film, destroying its hold over us, and creating the distance needed for analysis.¹⁴

On the other hand, with the cutting and the photograms, the temporal structure of the film is converted into a spatial structure (a table, a series of images). The value for the researcher here is that they can choose their interpretive path: they can certainly follow the order of the shots and the temporalization of the film, but they can also stop at a photogram – Bellour sees in the decision about whether or not to stop at a given image a distinctive criterion of the analytical posture¹⁵ – or engage in a non-linear navigation, for instance comparing shot 5 to shots 75 and 122, and coming back from shot 375 to 28. They can also “develop hypotheses on the consolidation of plans into meaningful units,”¹⁶ depending on their scale, the characters who are filmed, or the framework in which the scene is set. (Between pages 144 and 145, the book includes four pages of photograms that are interesting in the sense that they offer an understanding of the terms under which the space has been constructed.)

Finally, the cutting works like a *description* of the film. Most of the parameters used in the shot breakdown generally go unnoticed by spectators,

13 Raymond Bellour, *L'analyse du film* (Paris: Albatros, 1979), p. 13.

14 Christian Metz, “Le signifiant imaginaire,” *Communications*, vol. 23 (1975a), pp. 3–54; Raymond Bellour, “Le blocage symbolique,” *Communications*, vol. 23 (1975), pp. 235–350.

15 Bellour, *L'analyse du film*, p. 10.

16 Bailble, Marie and Ropars, *Muriel: Histoire d'une recherche*, p. 33.

who are not concerned with the number of shots, the framing, the camera movements, and all the rest. They are focussed on the story, by the fictional work, and if these parameters have an effect on them, they are not aware of it. The shot breakdown shows up these parameters explicitly. As for the photograms, whereas they themselves engage not in description but in *monstration* (*showing*), if they are questioned, they provide a considerable amount of information that the breakdown does not give: in this sense, they participate in the description process.

Shot breakdowns and photograms make us see the film in a different way: they constitute a first level of analysis of the film, a first text corresponding to a first reading of *Muriel*. At the same time, they make it possible to continue the analysis by helping the researcher-spectators position themselves as analysts and by setting the film up as the *object of analysis*.

From the Space of Textual Analysis to the Space of Interpretation

The first analyses carried out after the shot breakdown are still very much in the mode of an overview of the elements of the story: places, characters, and events (Chapter I: "Two Stories, No Story: the Narrative Material of the Film") and of sound coding modalities (Chapter III: "A Sound Film, a Musical, a Talkie (Studies of the Subcodes Used in the Soundtrack)") or even a systematic overview of the codes involved in the construction of space (Chapter IV: "Represented Space/Constructed Space"). The difference compared to the shot breakdown is that we are taking stock of figures, processes, and codes, and not isolated settings. The analyst seeks to answer questions of the type: Starting from what point is the story constructed? How is the space built? How does the soundtrack work? The analyst is no longer an observer, but a kind of *mechanic*: they "disassemble" the mechanisms at work in the text. Metz explained well the somewhat "sadistic" pleasure that one could take from this positioning: "There is no sublimation, as Freud himself insisted, without 'defusion of the drives'"

"The cinema is 'persecuted,' but this persistence is also a reparation (the knowing posture is both aggressive and depressive), a reparation of a specific kind...":¹⁷ certainly a very particular experience....

The work of the "textual mechanic" really comes into its own when they produce articulations and make connections in an attempt to understand

17 Christian Metz, "The Imaginary Signifier" *Screen*, Vol. 16, no. 2 (1975c), pp. 14–76, here p. 76.

how meanings and affects are produced. The analysis focuses initially on fragments of film. Chapter V, "Two Short Montages," attempts to account for the unease that seizes the spectator as they look at these two passages and shows that it "comes from the perceptive behaviour"¹⁸ imposed by cinematographic treatment, which "makes reading unstable, the present painful, and vision uncertain" (bad link shots, changes in outfits, choppy links between looks, and abrupt breaks in time). Chapter VI, "Concerning a Sequential Analysis: the Work of Writing," devoted to shots 435 to 471, confirms this analysis, thus demonstrating the production of "an increasingly clandestine subversion of reality, corresponding to the search for an increasingly direct hold on this reality."¹⁹ The cinematographic work of *Muriel* in this sequence is thus characterized as resting on "the diversion of a diegetic system, which, precisely because it is diverted, does not appear to be completely destroyed," and, more generally, as a diversion of classical narrative language that values "difference" and works "at the frontier of meaning...in an ever-renewed debate about meaning and signification."²⁰ At this stage, we are faced with a series of texts that offer limited analyses of those elements to which they are applied (be it a level or a fragment), but also with analyses that constitute tests of sorts or, to be more exact, probes that open onto interpretive hypotheses that can have a bearing on the entire film.

For its part, Chapter VII, "Muriel, or the time of a story," presents a "global" reading²¹ of the film. The analysis of the narrative's temporal system seems, in fact, to be the axis that makes it possible to mobilize the results of the different approaches taken so far in order to capture the film as a narrative whole. This leads Marie-Claire Ropars (who was responsible for this analysis) to make a proposition, no longer just about the modalities of the production of meaning, but about the very meaning of the film: "I would suggest that the film is a story about liquidating the past, which we interpret from the double point of expressed by Alphonse's and Bernard's stories."²² The "I" here is not innocent: as soon as they venture to define the overall meaning of a text, the researcher no longer acts only as a textual "mechanic," but as a *Subject* who produces their text at the risk that is assumed here of leaving the space of analysis to enter *the space of interpretation*.

18 Bailble, Marie and Ropars, *Muriel: Histoire d'une recherche*, p. 193.

19 Ibid., p. 227.

20 Ibid., p. 247.

21 Ibid., p. 267.

22 Ibid., p. 295.

The Space of Ideological Analysis

Up to this point, the analyses carried out have remained internal to the film. The interpretation of *Muriel* goes beyond this approach: "Once deciphered, the meaning still has to be evaluated: it is less its nature than its function that is subject to debate here."²³ The texts proposed in Chapter 8 are part of this movement and are located on an axis of relevance that signals that they belong to the space of ideological analysis (the title of the chapter is "Meaning and Ideology: the Text of *Muriel*"); debate on the ideological function of the cinematographic form of *Muriel*; debate on the way in which the film speaks of the Algerian war; debate on the political role of the film in relation to mainstream and political cinema.

The operator of the analysis here is the (re)construction by researchers of three spaces of communication, all rooted historically (the film came out in 1963). Naturally, the researchers refer, not to "spaces of communication" but to "context," but these spaces are what it is all about:

- an attempt to describe the experience of the spectator in the 1960s during the viewing of *Muriel*, from analysing either the work of the film itself (Ropars: "Text"), or the reactions of the public as these are reported in the press (Marie: "Context"): the construction of the *space of the spectator*
- analysis of "critical reading in 1963" ("Context"²⁴): construction of the *space of critique*
- analysis of all the cinematic practices "of the bourgeois cultural apparatus":²⁵ Bailblé, "*avant-texte*" and "*hors-texte*": construction of the *space of the cinema in the 1960s*.

The analyses reveal differences of opinion on the intervention of *Muriel* into these various spaces. Ropars believes that the film, through its textual work, gives the spectator "access to a productive activity": "the deciphering of an unceasingly *différent* writing makes the signified a question the solution to which is both proposed and concealed, and shifts the spectacle towards the spectator, leaving open the spot where the intervention has taken place."²⁶ Even as he agrees with this analysis (he sees *Muriel* as a Brechtian film),

²³ Ibid., p. 299.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 327.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 299.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 322.

Marie shows that, in reality, this writing was one of the reasons for its public and critical failure. Finally, Bailblé is the most critical: for him, *Muriel* “is a progressive film for progressives,” not a revolutionary film, and he regrets this: “in 1963, Cayrol and Resnais benefited from a balance of forces that allowed them to go farther, to accord a larger place to the people’s positivity, to the ideological transformations that are always emerging, even if they are controlled and dominated.”²⁷ How can one ignore one’s own convictions when engaging in such analyses? The experience of the research work overlaps with the commitment of the researcher within society – their experience as a citizen. Here the analyst is also a *citizen*.

The Space of Epistemological Reflection

Compared to the reading of a film by a spectator, the analyses presented above are at the meta-level: it is a matter of questioning the functioning of the film text and not only of producing it; the analytical text is a text about a text. But the experience of interpreting *Muriel* shows from the beginning it will go farther; it wants to be *reflexive*, “to try out a method.”²⁸ The analytical experience is duplicated and turns back on itself: it is the experience of an experience. We enter the *space of epistemological reflection*, a meta-meta-level space: reflection on the analysis or, rather, on the operator (the method) that produces it: the problem of the relationship between general codes and “film’s own codes” (analyses of general codes “do not lead to the discovery of the specific codes at stake in the movie”;²⁹ reflection on the notion of “text,” on the notion of “filmic writing,”³⁰ reflection on the relations between meaning and signification (“signification emanates from a combinatorial process that decides meaning. None of the materials that come into play in this combinatorial process can be analysed in accordance with a fixed system that would belong to it in its own right”);³¹ recognition of the irreducibility of textual analysis to semiological analysis: “meaning awakens in the suspension of signs.”³² The analysis thus serves as a challenge to the theory of cinema. The analytical text does double duty as a theoretical text. The analyst joins the *theorist*.

27 Ibid., pp. 348–349.

28 Ibid., p. 7.

29 Ibid., p. 289.

30 Ibid., p. 227.

31 Ibid., p. 239.

32 Ibid., p. 241.

The Place of Cinema in the Academic Institutional Space

In fine, the experience of reading *Muriel* is intended to produce *institutional* effects in the university space. For researchers, it is a matter of having cinema be an object of research at the university and, more broadly speaking, an object worthy of study – that is, to have it recognized by other researchers, by other disciplines, and finally by the institution itself, because if cinema already has a presence these days at a certain number of universities, it is quite a ways yet from being regarded as a serious academic subject. The *operator* of this undertaking of recognition here is the book: *Muriel, histoire d'une recherche* [*Muriel: Story of a Research Project*]. It is difficult to gauge its novelty today; but, although at the time (1974) thousands of books were devoted to the analysis of one or another literary work, devoting a 400-page text to a film constituted a minor revolution. It would take another few years for cinema to gain institutional recognition (it would become a recognized academic field only in the 1990s), but we cannot disregard the possibility that the analysis of *Muriel* had some influence on levels of awareness of the cinema among the institutions. The researchers who took part in this analytical experiment thus served as *actors* in the process of the institutional recognition of the cinema.

What I will retain above all from these three analyses is the plurality of the spaces of communication and the receiving actants that were constructed, the plurality of the operators and of the modes of production of meaning that were deployed, the plurality of the relational, “discursive,” ideological, and theoretical effects, institutional and memory effects produced, and the plurality of the texts created during *each* of these readings.

Semio-pragmatic analysis dismantles the immanentist illusion that there is a *single* text and a single reading. Both pluralization and heterogenization are at work, as opposed to what happens with immanentist analysis. Every reading experience is a palimpsest of readings.

Finally, semio-pragmatic analysis shows that, even without the migration of production into different contexts (as was the case in the previous chapter), any reading experience engages the reader in a migratory movement from one space of communication to another, each involving a change in the mode of production of meaning and emotions and, more broadly, a change of their role. Every reading experience is an adventure.

Conclusion

Pragmatics has been the subject of a lot of critiques. In *Impersonal Enunciation*, Metz waxes ironic about those who “...volubly criticize Saussure and ‘structuralism’ for the sins of immanentism and ignorance of the Social but is careful to support its conclusions with purely textual analyses, linguistic intuition, or invented examples that are inserted into contexts that themselves are contrived.”¹ Pierre Sorlin remarks, in a similar vein: “In the absence of a clear definition of the audience, the theory of the film runs the risk of erring on the side of an abstract pragmatism for which the spectator will in fact only be the analyst trying out on themselves and those around them the provocative and blocking effects that are placed throughout the film.”² Here is one last example: for Eliséo Véron, “pragmatics imagines, on the one hand, increasingly complex situations of enunciation (which are not, for all that, any less arbitrary) and introduces, on the other, a set of rules and principles of sociality whose status, origin and cultural validity remain uncertain.”³ More recently, in *La pensée communicationnelle*, Bernard Miège draws up a list of the limits encountered by what he calls the “general theories” of communication, in which he includes, perhaps “most” pragmatic approaches: reductionism, abstraction, the primacy accorded to a single paradigm, the confusion of the instances envisaged, the futurological deviation, and the absence or inadequacy of empirical verification procedures.⁴

I will not seek to respond directly to these criticisms, some of which (such as the futurological deviation) clearly do not concern the semio-pragmatic model. What I *will* say is that they provide a framework for reflection that is really useful for providing a better understanding of the theoretical positioning of the proposed model.

It is true that the semio-pragmatic model can give rise to the reproach that it is too abstract: its top-down approach leads to a positing, *a priori*, of the

1 Metz, *Impersonal Enunciation*, p. 198.

2 Sorlin, *Esthétique de l'audiovisuel*, pp. 14–15.

3 Eliséo Veron, “Il est là, je le vois, il me parle,” *Communications*, vol. 38 (1983), pp. 98–120, here p. 101.

4 Bernard Miège, *La pensée communicationnelle* (Grenoble: PUG, 1995), pp. 83–86.

parameters it takes into account. My view is, though, that we should accept this abstraction without hesitation: semio-pragmatics does not try to do the same thing as historical, sociological or ethnomethodological analyses. The type of validity specific to semio-pragmatics can be compared to that which, according to Metz, characterizes the psychoanalytic approach as well as the filmic enunciative approach: "In each case, assuming the analyst has the necessary training (i.e., knowledge, methodology), the entire value of the work depends on his personal qualities, because he is both the researcher and (along with the film) the very *terrain* of research. He can declare that the specific pleasure of the fiction film is derived from a fetishistic process of splitting and a mix of belief and unbelief. He does not need to survey people who might have great difficulty in responding on such an issue. It is a truth that is general or, more exactly, *generic*. It concerns THE spectator. Everyone can find this truth in himself. It does not tell us, for example, in the case of so-and-so that belief clearly prevails over unbelief or that unbelief dominates in another case. There is no contradiction here. The generic finding remains interesting and, in my opinion, more so than findings that pay attention to its variations or local modalities."⁵

The semio-pragmatic approach aims to build *generic* tools, from large systems of production of meaning and emotion that anyone can find in themselves (*modes*), to the *spaces of communication*: as a theorist, I (re) construct spaces of communication from my own experience of reality. Their system of constraints resides within me. Thus René Loureau describes the self as a "bric-a-brac of institutions."⁶ We can say that the tools of semio-pragmatics are phenomenologically elaborated.

However, the tools proposed in the semio-pragmatic model do not claim any psychological or cognitive existence. Even if they have a phenomenological starting point (you have to start somewhere), once they are written into theory they take on a purely *heuristic* status. Their evaluation will be based on their effectiveness in shedding light on communication processes.

It seems to me that two criteria are needed to evaluate this effectiveness.

- (a) A heuristic model is all the more effective if it makes it possible to ask the greatest number of *questions*. We have seen that, from the outset, this concern guided the choice of form for the model, a model of non-communication that involves questioning the constraints that allow communication (*cf.* the Introduction).

5 Metz, *Impersonal Enunciation*, p. 23.

6 René, Loureau, *L'analyse institutionnelle*, (Paris: éd. de Minuit, 1970), p. 48.

- (b) A heuristic model is all the more effective if it makes it possible to make the greatest number of *differentiations*: semio-pragmatics thus makes it possible to show up differences among the various types of constraint (Chapter 1), among the modes of production of meaning (Chapters 2 and 3), and among the contexts of communication and the readings they generate (Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

This concern to produce questions and differentiations explains why the semio-pragmatic model is “rigid”: notions are defined in the most *restrictive* way possible. Here again, I think we must assume this reductionist position.

A heuristic model is essentially a *body of definitions*, a “methodological language, defining the descriptive concepts,” as Greimas puts it.⁷ Using the term “concept” would certainly be putting things too strongly here. As we have seen, I prefer to use “tool,” but the Greimasian formula does sum up my conception of the semio-pragmatic model. These definitions generally lead to a series of questions that serve to unpack and clarify them: What form should the model take? How should modes be constructed? How does a particular mode work? How should a space of communication be analysed? At the end of this journey, the reader thus has at their disposal a whole set of tools (*cf.* the list on the next page) that will be able to help them (or at least I hope so) to examine the functioning of communication in context. And, as the last three chapters of the book have shown, this abstract model aims to study communication as it works in reality.

7 Greimas, *Structural Semantics*, p. 15.

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