Varia

Christian Metz and the mediatization

Professor Oscar TRAVERSA
Universidad Nacional del Arte (UNA), Universidad de Buenos Aires (UBA)
ARGENTINA
oscarcesartraversa@gmail.com

Abstract: This paper makes reference to a series of controversial aspects which were awakened by Christian Metz's work over the course of his active life and are still in the spotlight thirty five years after his demise. The persistence of the wide array of points of view regarding his insights may very well have resulted from both his importance and the epistemological difficulty the different discursive objects entail, especially those of a mixed nature as is the case of cinematography, which unleashed his inquiries. Within the framework of three works dedicated to the author by Dominique Chateau and Martin Lefebvre, Charlotte Bouchez and Omar Hachemi and Eliseo Verón, a set of issues concerning the interplay between Metz's work and phenomenology, semiotics and discursive specificity are discussed. Finally, this work aims to deal exclusively with those central aspects of the author's realm which are essential to address the mediatisation processes arising nowadays.

Keywords: film semiotics, mediatisation, enunciation, discursive specificity, phenomenology

***

Christian Metz et la médiatisation

Résumé: Le présent travail aborde un ensemble d'aspects polémiques suscités par l'œuvre de Christian Metz tout au long de sa vie active et qui perdurent vingt-cinq ans après sa mort. Il est possible que la persistance des points de vue sur les progrès qu'il a accomplis s'explique aussi bien par leur importance que par les difficultés épistémologiques que comportent les objets discursifs, notamment ceux de caractère mixte, tel que le cinéma, objet de ses recherches. À partir de trois travaux se rapportant à l'auteur, produits par Dominique Chateau et Martin Lefebvre, Charlotte Bouchez et Omar Hachemi, et Eliseo Verón, nous discuterons certains aspects des relations entre l'œuvre de Metz et la phénoménologie, la sémiotique et la spécificité discursive. Pour finir, nous chercherons à circonscrire, parmi les aspects centraux de l'œuvre de cet auteur, ceux qui s'avèrent indispensables pour aborder les processus de médiatisation dans l'actualité.

<p align="center">***</p>

Introduction

A few years ago we saw the rise of a series of reflections upon Christian Metz's work emerging from different disciplinary fields. Not only did all the voices agree on his outstanding personal qualities but they also coincided on the transcendence of his enquiries. However, there was some hesitation about how to intertwine his advances with the latest developments and current issues at stake. This paper seeks to discuss a series of aspects concerning Metz's work which may support and even offer an array of tools to shed light on both current phenomena and his legacy. Throughout his work, his taxonomic endeavour, aimed at circumscribing cinematographic specificity, involves a substantial comparative tool to set the main differences with respect to discursive circulation processes without setting them apart from the somatic and empirical conditions of a wide range of communicational modalities. This epistemological requirement concurs with the indissociable bond between individual social actors –or subjects– and collective social actors –either institutional or non-institutional– which calls for a *semio-anthropologic* (Verón 2014) approach to mediatisation.

1. Metz in 2013

The year 2013 saw the rise of a particularly wide array of top quality texts regarding Christian Metz. Of special note were two articles issued by 1895, the Journal of the French Association of Film History. Written by Dominique Chateau and Martin Lefebvre, the former is entitled "Christian Metz et la phénomenologie" while the latter is the review of a meeting with Metz on the premises of the Zurich University called "Le paradigme sémiologique et la pensée 'cinematographique' de Christian Metz". A third text was included in Eliseo Verón's *La semiosis social, 2*, where the author dedicated to Metz an extensive chapter entitled "Mediatisation and enunciation". All three texts have two properties in common. The former involves two attributes, namely intellectual respect and great, profound esteem, a two-fold condition referred to over the course of the colloquium since it is not a very frequent combination on these occasions. The latter, on the other hand, accounts for the great excitement arising from the scope of Metz's work. Concerning his future perspective, he is considered either a precursor after his delimitation of a study field or an example of epistemological rigour in view of his quest for coherence.

2. About the Zurich colloquium

Yet, these general statements do not overshadow the existing differences with respect to their argumentative substance or the reservations arising from certain

aspects. Concerning the colloquium, what can be stated seems to be rather limited since it is an overall remark giving rise to precise –though fragmented– points of view written in stone by a view to the past, sometimes with no reference to the present and some other times with no future perspective either. The themes (and notions as well) which bought about marginal discussions already present at the beginning of Metz's enquiries are quite recurrent. Among the most frequent issues was the concept of *cinephilia*, a curious text-related phenomenon which led him to particular reflections, such as the Kleinian-inspired good-/ bad-object status, partly present in cinematographic criticism or in certain amateurism in an acute manner. Throughout the text circumscribed to that meeting, there is no critical core related to the semiotic field and its advances, especially those arising from enunciative concerns, of which Metz undoubtedly made an issue in a singular manner in the last stages of his research. On the other hand, there is no reference to the circumstantial "core" of his theoretical developments –namely psychoanalytic articulation– which entails a particularly distinctive aspect of his theoretical contributions.

The article comes to an end in a curious manner since it surprisingly raises the answer to the question *"What remains of Metz today"*. The answer might very well arouse expectancy in the reader in view of the story organisation: "*in a whisper, throughtout the colloquium, this question is finally answered at the crossroad of multiple interventions. Is it posed differently today from that in 1989 in the aftermath of a first-time colloquium in Cerisy?* The answer lies in the mounting importance of the disclosure of its content, which might turn it into a historical object rather than a theoretical model. The surprising effect we refer to implies that there is no such a contradiction between historicalness and theoreticalness. They are not either/or categories unless the concept of historicalness is thought to be past with respect to its validity. If it were so, the answer would deserve a more substantial justification than just "whispering", as stated in the article.

We will now formulate a hypothesis: it is not unfair to regard the article on the Zurich colloquium as the draft script of two attentive, though distracted, participants facing adversity. Metz's endeavour involved (and it still does) a difficulty that has never been rightfully considered since he managed to circumscribe the cinematographic complexity, a discursive object with no anthropological background whatsoever. This textual object has devoured most of the discursive procedures developed by the *Homo sapiens* species until present time, thus taking charge –at least, to see the difference– of the discursive production conducted by them. These procedures, in turn, lacked – somehow this scarcity still persists– a suitable methodological framework and even a set of acceptable descriptive models. Moreover, this discursive phenomenon did not evolve into a marginal component within the social system. Quite on the contrary. In no time did it turn out to be a universal collective habit, thus resulting in a cultural adjustment which is rooted in the cornerstone of the species development (the term "anthropological" has not been pointlessly used).

This scenario saw Metz's founding act, which is historical in terms of the concurrence of individual and institutional actors involved in this contingency in diffe-

rent manners. I think that approaching the other two events held in 2013 might very well enable us to shed light on Metz's contributions.

2. Chateau and Lefebvre's approach at Metz

These authors' proposal has awakened the most interest since they seek to discuss the emergence of certain fields of knowledge, in particular the *phenomenology-semiology dynamics*, with regard to his enquiries, comprising his very first papers – including those issued by the *Christian Metz* Endowment of the French Cinematheque – to *The Imaginary signifier* (1975). In this respect, the authors divide their proposal into three stages. The first is coloured by Mikel Dufrenne's work and a set of heterogeneous approaches at the film industry of French descent while the second stage, during which Umberto Eco plays a vital role, is referred to as the "pansemiologic" shift which opens up to the semiologic field. Finally, the thirst stage articulates semiology with Freudian psychoanalysis in the light of Lacan[1]'s interpretation. The authors aim to determine the patterns by means of which Metz establishes epistemological relations between phenomenology and semiology, for the perspective which favours the configuration of the film industry as an autonomous discursive object is semiologic rather than phenomenological.

I agree with Chateau and Lefevbre on the fact that the act of stating the issue at stake does not resolve it. It is necessary to unravel its relations. Yet, I do not think I agree on how they addressed it. In fact, I believe it has brought out an intricate concern for the *Semiotic*[2] field, which is Metz's own merit. As for my interest in Chateau and Lefevbre, I have focussed my attention on the last paragraph of their text, where the authors take note of the strained Metzian approach at two forms of idealism: on the one hand, the phenomenological view –crystal clear in Husserl's work– favouring the conception of a subject and their intention and, on the other hand, a perspective which rejects a subject-centred approach by means of invisible structural configurations to be reconstructed by the power of reason. Added to these remarks, the authors make reference to the authority at stake, thus casting doubt on this concern. Merlou-Ponty's willingness to approach other epistemological frames is evident in her posthumous work: Wittgenstein and Peirce, whose legacy had not been applied to cinematographic enquiries.

Towards the end, it is evident to see his uneasiness in pursuing –or deepening– that enquiry. I think that such a doubt has been persistent in Metz's work. His clari-

---

[1] When Metz wrote one of his psychoanalytical papers, one of Lacan's most renowned enquiries was under way. It is unfair to indicate that Metz's prevalence derived from a circumstantially privileged position; rather, it was his unique approach at Freud's findings that should be noted. However, in Lacan's work, we can observe a discourse-oriented approach at the Freudian enquiry, deploying a wide variety of linguistic terms and notions.

[2] We resort to the most-widely used term to refer to this discipline differing from *semiology*, used in France in the early stages of this field. It is worth mentioning that this issue at stake has no boundaries.

fications, limitations and scope specifications –whether they be for the academic audiences or for those involved in production and criticism– have always raised suspicion in him and many of his favourable readers. I understand that Chateau and Lefevbre's text should be highlighted about the reflections over this aspect.

3. An approach to semiology and phenomenology

It seems impossible to have a close look at the singular processes which Christian Metz unravelled to give rise to his research work; however, we can approach a "printed-paper Christian Metz", which does not involve episodes of his life but text episodes framed within a world of texts guiding his career path over roads of paper that, in Metz's case, we find difficult to go along. The underlying reason of this difficulty should be traced back. Perhaps because such roads comprise "staging the difficulty" regarding the so-called "construction of a scientific object", or the circumscription of the singularity of an unprecedented phenomenon. This scenario becomes evident in *Does cinematography comprise a code or a language?*[3] Who are the actors summoned up to appear in this text? Undoubtedly, they come from diverse fields –most probably honourable and brilliant, though none of them seems to be concerned with the same issues that kept Metz awake, not in the slightest. We emphasise this idea: perhaps not even Metz himself realised that he was addressing an unprecedented phenomenon to human experience since he explicitly stated it a few years later.

Chateau and Lefebvre's question should be paraphrased in such a way that it maintains its spirit but modifies its point of view, as follows: *what kind of semiology and what type of phenomenology* does Metz make reference to? O rather, *what kind of semiology and what type of phenomenology* do Metz's readers make reference to? For these questions to make productive sense, we need to consider that something (or lots of things) may occur between the production process and the reception of texts. It is possible to think that Metz's phenomenology was epochal, i.e. that respected by the academic world as if it were *doxa*. Yet, we lack the necessary elements to accurately determine its specific domain. Metz's proximity to eminent aesthetics specialist Mikel Dufrenne seems to be a world apart from the semiologic enquiry. Even Metz himself kept the two disciplines wide apart (refer to the 1971 conference)[4] from aesthetics.

---

[3] This text will be referred to in the following sections since it is central to Metz's work. Besides, within the semiotic field it poses a core discussion to analyse complex discourses.

[4] This text was retrieved by Martin Lefevbre. It comprises a 1971 conference held by Metz in which the author sets the main distinctions between semiotics and aesthetics. While the former seeks to study configurations —namely, code deconstruction according to the prevailing notions of a given period–, the latter tends to analyse taste configuration, i.e. taste construction, taste mutilation, to name a few processes.

On the contrary, Metz's proximity to semiology is explicit, though somehow re-defined or better suited. According to Chateau and Lefevbre, Metz was close to Umberto Eco; however, this seems to have been rather problematic as it is necessary to consider the distinctive moments and relations. Eco thought that the cinematographic object holds a triple articulation as opposed to the double articulation attributed to language. In this respect, Metz opposed Eco's perspective since he sought to drift apart from the linguistic domain. Given their wide array of components, films may be multiply-articulated. Eco's analysis corresponded to a period during which the Italian author was closer to structural linguistics, a proximity he restrained years later.

It might be necessary to indicate that the terms attributed to the scientific disciplines of any domain tend to veil the very nature of a given practice, a kind of institutional self-defence mechanism since academic life tends to call for some sort of affiliation. Affiliations usually contradict research practices and lack the necessary tools to address the diversity and complexity underlying the different objects of study. In "Le signifiants quite surprisingly imaginaire"[5], Metz dealt with this issue with respect to phenomenology. One of the main aspects concerns the moment at which the *Classical Film Theory in France*[6] since it was affiliated to phenomenology. With certain reservations, Metz, in turn, indicated that a totalising philosophical approach could be pertinent although he also urged for an object phenomenology (in my view, his own) and the receptive description of its appearances. Only then is it possible to pave the way for film criticism and reviewing.

4. Verón's text: linguistics and semiotics

Verón's analysis does not come from either the film studies domain or aesthetics phenomenology ory other. Rather, it comes from a *semiotic* perspective. This lexical shift is not a minor detail since it shows the author's evident distance from structural linguistics of Saussurean descent, particularly as far as the sign configuration and its effects are concerned, and even as a theory of knowledge. In his posthumous *La semiosis social, 2* (also in 2013), the author, driven by this clear divergence, stated a series of reproachful remarks concerning Metz's work which can be divided into three groups: 1. those concerning Metz's adoption of linguistic concepts to single out the cinematographic object; 2. with respect to enunciation; 3. aspects referring to the viewer's status and the consumer. It is worth mentioning that this excessive reduction overshadows both authors' original arguments. Thus, we highly recommend reading the original texts.

Metz's adoption of Saussurean-inspired linguistic notions operates in fact to discard categories since none of the properties assigned to language can be applied to the study of films. Therefore, this discipline serves a particular purpose: it indicates

[5] Communications 23, p. 37.
[6] Metz refers to Bazin when considering this heterogeneous conglomerate.

what really films are not. Yet, translinguistic semiology will provide a set of analytical tools while putting linguistics aside, thus widening the gap between the two disciplines. This gap seems to be impossible to bridge after the notion of code was included and dealt with extensively in *Langage et cinéma* (1971) as a systematic organiser of the film components. In turn, this notion seems to be fragile, a property which is a constituent of social conventions beyond highly conventionalised horizons (such as lexicon, job jargons, signposting for public order, to name just a few examples).

Within the linguistic domain and moved by personal affection, Verón reveals an audacious interpretation of Metz's legacy: "a good deal of his work could be considered an exquisite double-bind aimed at linguists: '*how wonderful your concepts are and we are grateful for being able to use them to understand our objects of study. Yet, to tell the truth, they do not work.*'"

As for enunciation, this notion entails aspects which are deeply rooted in the linguistic domain of that period and still remains. It involves the deictic nature of enunciation first discussed by Emile Benveniste. The anthropomorphic approach which this notion entails is not suitable for cinematographic discourse, since the Other's space is filled by a machine and not an individual agent, which is crystal clear throughout the conversation. For example, if I say: "I'll hand you over the money right now", I'll expect my interlocutor to put their hand in their pocket. The statement indicates the moment at which the action is to be performed and who is expected to carry it out. Therefore, this means that it is the organisation of the statement that establishes the bond and enables us to relate (or not) with the world outside the text. In general, it is deixis that binds the singularity of a signal to what effectively articulates it (their body, their background, and other aspects).

Even though this conception seems to be inadequate even to explain conversation phenomena, it has raised the illusion of an immanent analysis. Despite his criticism against the claim to stretch the anthropoid enunciative model, thus considering the origin of sense in a personal source, Metz shifts this view in a particular manner in an effort to address the cinematographic object. Verón's criticism lies in that shift, as a kind of single ticket, since Metz criticises Benveniste's model by making it explicit in the last stages of his work and fostering an *impersonal enunciative model*. However, he reverted to his previous perspective, thus restoring a certain immanent nature in cinematographic discourse. According to Metz, such discourse seems to be self-contained and apparently is not included in any context beyond its boundaries. This aspect led Verón to develop a third group of reproachful remarks. In this respect, Verón states that amidst mediatisation (and the film industry is part of this phenomenon) not everything rests in the machinery and the gadgetry at stake. We should bear in mind that Metz insisted on the person-machine substitution. Yet, although these play key roles, on the other side there is a large number of individual agents, such as analysts, those who perform different tasks (the viewing public). If analysts observe distinctive features in the text which are different from the ones

noticed by the viewing public, these distinctive features are as heterogeneous as those considered by the rest.

The attribution of these distinctive features holds a theoretical status which was not considered by Metz, namely the differences between production and reception, which refer to asymmetric positions within the viewing public and the producers. This is constitutive of any communication process, thus rejecting any instance of immanence. This analysis removes the traces of any individual interpretation (of each text processing). The individual standings of the critics or analysts (each of them holding an observing position) come from singular, individual experiences. It is then impossible that a text of any nature can be assigned an immanent sense as it is the reception process (either critics or the viewing public at large) that can actually assign the text a given sense.

When Metz recognised these two vacant positions, those of production and reception, he was at a loss in the realm of impossibility, thus undermining his own work. Verón makes reference to an article issued in 1968 entitled "Le dire et le dit au cinéma", "where he develops a model grounded on the historical possibilities which paved the way to the evolution of fiction films[7]".

5. Metz against all odds

Verón's contributions are no doubt very useful tools to assess Metz's work nowadays since they emerge from a scientifically consistent domain which is different from others. These contributions have been –are and will be – referred to from various disciplines such as those focusing on film analysis and those centred on cinematographic history –as we have seen. Nevertheless, the second group poses a question that cannot be overlooked: what is the aim and the scope of a scientific theory if this is thought to make reference to a practice circumscribed to the artistic domain?

Bearing in mind the above question, we will refer back to Metz and Verón although we know there is no single answer to that question. Yet, no answer will be legitimate enough if it disregards the main features of sense production and its different properties from those of other procedures –either close or remote– such as the literature-to-theatre shift, among others. What is known as *specificity* –evident throughout Metz's work– is the cornerstone for all analytical practices.

Metz's epistemological strategy consisted –from our perspective– in meeting that first criterion to turn to what is often called "*film theory*". This strategy can be observed in the intersection of his theoretical advances, especially those in the 1960-1970 period. It is worth remembering that "*Does cinematography comprise a code or a language?* was published in the fourth issue of a journal called Communica-

---

[7] *Communicatións 11,* 1968 "Le dire et le dit au cinéma…".

tions[8], where Barthes published his "Semiologic Elements". An emblematic text for Europe-based semiology, it cautiously supports Ferdinand de Saussure's stance. In the same journal, Metz drifts apart from the linguistic model to circumscribe the specificity of cinematographic discourse. This distance is observed in the dissolution of the isomorphism between language properties and film attributes, which, according to Metz, does not imply drifting apart from the basic dichotomies involved in the principles of the rising semiology (following Saussure), whose cornerstone (Barthes supports this view) will be –consider its concision– a sort of *binary system*.

The notions of code, paradigm, syntagm, form, matter and substance – these last three according to Hjelmslev[9]– will turn out to be central in *Language and Cinema* to circumscribe the boundaries of cinematographic specificity. This can be confirmed with a close look at "Notional Index"[10]. This book was published in 1971, after he submitted his doctoral thesis. In turn, the twenty-third issue of *Communications,* devoted to cinema and psychoanalysis, dates back to 1975. Over this short period, there is a reformulation of the cornerstone concept in *Language and Cinema: the specificity of sense production from a psychoanalytical viewpoint*.

On the very first pages of "The Imaginary Signifier", Metz develops the justification of the cinema-psychoanalysis articulation. He makes special reference to the source of knowledge, that is to say, the space where phenomena emerge. He also refers to anthropology but in this respect the only source of knowledge is the native. As for psychoanalysis, the only feasible source is the analysed patient while in his cinema-psychoanalysis articulation the only source is the individual.

Perhaps, Metz's analogy to refer to the source of knowledge is not the best alternative. When anthropologists study the native inhabitant, they analyse a well-defined feature located at least in the spatial domain. This means it is a different pursuit since they aim at a generic relation which will be valid for the species. The same problem arises in the case of psychoanalysis. In view of this, we should turn to Verón's[11] reproachful remarks. Is it adequate to compare it to psychoanalysis and its expertise to address such a far-reaching phenomenon? This difficulty is not overcome if we turn to a given scientific field –in this case psychoanalysis– instead of resorting to how certain discursivity at stake has been socially grounded.

---

[8] Its fourth issue includes valuable voices: Bremond, Todorov, Barthes and Metz. These authors' legacy paved the way for new enquiries and has contributed to them until present time. The text written by Barthes is a fully-fledged manifesto of his time but basically a crucial project.

[9] We have made reference to this author since Metz analyses his work to see the main differences with other authors with respect to specific notions such as matter, form and substance. Refer to *Langage et cinema*, p.159.

[10]   Refer to *Langage et cinema*, p. 220.

[11] *La semiosis social, 2,* p. 102

It would be suitable, for the time being, to turn the problem upside down and analyse the conditions under which films emerged as discursive phenomena –with multiple economic and social consequences– and even the frenzy of their global introduction since the world was flooded with cinema theatres over the course of twenty years. Such a success took place under very difficult conditions concerning technique, scope and text variety, which now leads us to bind this discursivity to a set of conditions related to the *Homo sapiens'* general, constitutive attributes. If we consider it from this perspective, a pursuit of structural presuppositions underlying behaviour, which constitutes the species genesis, seems to account for Metz's endeavour. Therefore, this should be regarded, at least, from two different viewpoints.

Let us have a look.

6. Metz and the uniqueness of the cinema viewer

In its 23rd issue, *Communications* published another article written by Metz entitled "The Fiction Film and Its Viewer" (a metapsychological study) in which the author puts forward a set of contributions about the cinema with a different perspective – at least if we consider the type of hypothesis we can arrive at– regarding the cinematographic meeting with the Other, viewers and specific circumstances, such as age, social habits and cultural spaces[12]. This work contains a set of dimensions which characterise cinema functioning in terms of collective activity –explicitly stated– while his depictions adjust to films for mass consumption and the recurrent text features which appear in most of these productions. Metz will then seek to determine the specific features of the cinema viewer with respect to the viewer-screen attachment. Within the framework of Freud's mental performance conception, the intrinsicate circumstances which unfold over this time span will be articulated with metapsychoanalytical states: sleep, wakefulness, daydreaming. Metz's endeavour was to circumscribe the main distinctive features corresponding to the viewer's standing amid an anthropological experience: cinema visualises the objects actually performing it through *in absentia* movement. This passage is then studied with respect to its sense production process. The 1971-1975 period –previously referred to– involved articulating the distinguishing observable features concerning the film industry within the framework of the psychoanalytic theory.

We will now turn to reviewing those distinguishing observable features and set the theory aside for a while. The aim is to highlight the descriptive force and the taxonomic scope of the features selected to suit the needs of this analysis, in line with Metz's final remarks in his work[13]. When he establishes the scope and states the limitations to the Freudian theoretical body in other cultural spheres, a completely different scenario will eventually emerge with respect to the distinguishing observable features in other procedures. Therefore, this will defínetely apply to the

---

[12] Communications 23, p.109 onwards.

[13] "Le film de fiction et son espectateur", p. 134-135.

potential taxonomic observations arising from other sense production devices (TV, video, installation art, the functioning modes of IT networks of multiple signifying matter).

Metz's effort to relate the viewer to the great figures of consciousness –the already mentioned sleep, wakefulness and daydreaming– force him to follow three steps: 1.to describe the overall cinema conditions as opposed to other sense-producing practices, 2. to locate the type of organisation of the stimulus at stake (fiction film), 3. to establish a set of similarities and differences which –in view of the conditions mentioned in 1 and 2– emerge with respect to the three metapsychological positions.

While the first two steps make reference to the phenomenological universe of the cinematographic object, the third one corresponds to the interpretative universe –by means of psychoanalytical tools– which will be set aside. This operation is not at crossroads with the final stages of Metz's work. In view of this, we should turn to *L´enonciation impersonnelle ou le site du film* (1991) to have a look at it. To have an overall view of his work, it is necessary to read the final[14] lines of his bibliography, where psychoanalytic theory is practically non-existing.

"Le film de fiction et son spectateur"[15], in turn, involves an extensive paper, which might be seen as a brief synthesis of the differentiating criteria applied to circumscribe an emerging scenario. It is worth noting that from *"Le cinemá langue o langage? (1964)* to "Quatre pas dans les nuages" (1991), we can read Metz's ideas about the cinematographic object in a proper, well-organised manner and focus on each of his contributions. Added to this, we can observe discussions and shifts in criteria lacking theoretical support or just mistaken views. This whole background will be present during steps 1 and 2 in "Le film de fiction et son spectator".

It is precisely in this latest article where the author deals with two epistemologically detached spaces within the field of humanities, the belief in plain sense (either dream or fantasy) and the body moves and states since –when it comes to cinema– we speak of body and architecture (space). In this sense, Metz faces trivial and inelegant beliefs emerging from the cinematographic showing: crying over a second-rate film or putting one's hands over one's eyes in horror when the interplay of lights and shadows draws a monstrous figure on the screen, thus ensuring *an impression of reality*. In view of these two phenomena and in consideration of the object specificity, we might very well explain the need of a behaviour theory though we have already mentioned (and so did Metz) that these aspects correspond to what is known as *reception plasticity* both in the individual social actors and the collective social actors, including time and space (this will be discussed further in another paper devoted to Metz's work).

---

[14] Op.cit p.217

[15] *Communications 23, 1975*

Wakefulness, sleep and daydreaming have tropes as exclusive features and so does the cinematographic object, particularly that of fiction. This has given rise to a particular architecture style, suited to its viewership, techniques and the rise of emotion. The film theatre combines these properties, derived from *the Italian drama stage,* many times imitated in the early stages of the film industry, but over the course of a few decades the properties of a modern architecture were outlined. The new film theatres got rid of any hierarchical, baroque features and they were later rectified and replaced by a non-hierarchical distance from the screen. Metz described which viewers prefer the first rows and who like to be seated at the back.

This space ensures individual delight in a collective scenario, where the necessary complement to the anthropological novelty takes place: body posture. This means that stimulated by a thread of images and sounds, the viewer remains seated while focusing on the same site for a long time with no cervical movement. These features drift this activity apart from any other discursive manifestation. It is close to the dramatic arts though they are radically different in terms of stimuli and present and absent bodies. Briefly speaking, these considerations refer to step 1 mentioned above while step 2 refers to text substance. Its characterisation will be concise but will not leave the most problematic aspects aside. What are the boundaries restricting the scope of fiction? We wonder whether the film industry might or might not be so. What features can turn a film appealing or uninteresting? Taste is not a minor concern. In fact, overcoming this opposition involves the role that cinema has always played, like those practices seeking to be included in the artistic domain, or at least those which can give rise to discursive habits in the light of their formal qualities.

This synthesis –extremely brief perhaps– zooms in the analytical approach Metz has been driven to develop since the beginning of his film enquiry (let us remember his work in 1964) since it entails a textual surface holding both production and consumption operations which escape from the ordinary use (namely daily life) of the body faculties in terms of posture and attention. Besides, we should remember that amid the production and the consumption processes complex artefacts are required, thus calling for collective participation –technical teams amid production or social diversity over the consumption process, indissociable productive instances of the film industry.

This factual dilution of the focus on the actors' singularity will be one of the flagships in our quest for *impersonal* cinematographic enunciation. Undoubtedly, having reached this state of affairs implies a set of considerations regarding central linguistic and semiotic concepts – the cornerstone in Verón's analysis of Metz's legacy. Yet, we will set these considerations aside for while –as we did with respect to psychoanalysis in earlier paragraphs– to focus closely on Metz's contributions. It is worth noting that the manner the author articulates certain components to account for the cinematographic modes of sense production is quite singular. What we mean by sense production entails the distinctive processes of discourse phenomena which

form a chain by means of an immediate or mediate experiential link with gestural, dialogical, written and figurative texts, among others.

The components mentioned above can be split into two different groups. The former will involve the distinctive resources of the stimulus (films) – in this respect, Metz concentrated on fictional films– while the latter entails the set of components which give way to the experiential link between a given textual substance (images and sounds) and the viewers, comprising the distinctive features of the film theatre and the specific functioning of film showing. Needless to say, the very same text will not remain the same in the following discursive events. If it is consumed by someone who is glued to the screen in his living room or by someone over the mobile phone in the middle of a park, there will eventually be quite a number of similarities and multiple differences; that is to say, there will be a very diverse range of reception instances. Metz's endeavour has given us the possibility of, at least, enquiring into these current concerns and formulating a set of hypotheses about any possible shifts and consequences that these phenomena might eventually unleash.

7. Inferences

I. In the aftermath of semiotics, or rather, with the advent of discourses which had long been overlooked but now started to be considered by the academic scenario (mass media, films, mainstream music, urban life, to name just a few), Metz's work turned out to be a difficult endeavour although most probably he might not have been the only one. European semiotics –especially French and Italian– played a central role in such a shift by prevalently applying de Saussure-inspired structural linguistics particularly over the 1960's and the 1970's. Ferdinand de Saussure had already foreseen the development of a general discipline encompassing all the sign systems –coined *semiology* by the author– which turned out to be quite difficult to introduce in the academic world. On the other hand, this discipline found it difficult to deal with the cinematographic world as it was widely misunderstood and rejected. Those skeptical of *semiology* thought that the series of systematic tests opposed the ineffable subtleness of the fine arts, which was being questioned by a discipline struggling to be part of the artistic domain. This, no doubt, turned it into a flagrant enemy. This rejection led Metz, as the best representative in this field, to make greater effort to attain more specificity and accuracy.

II. We have looked at Metz's work and have especially focused on the scope of his enquiry in terms of his object of study, thus setting aside his efforts to analyse more general concerns. Our reference to Verón's remarks is the most evident exception with respect to Metz's enquiries into issues of general scope. It was thought – especially the least sensible observers– that the author had drawn definite conclusions. This idea was nourished by "Le signifiant imaginaire" since some of its excerpts unwillingly contributed to a closure effect (let us consider these words: "*this is all we can say about it*"). His work was bound to his time and his quest for discursive specificity, during which he delved into enunciative aspects as an articulated

set of functioning conditions of a given discursivity, was ignored. In other words, he studied the different dimensions comprising a kind of *pragmatics of links*. Without explaining the concept or formalising it, Metz put the notion of *device*[16] at work.

III. Having considered that Metz definitely paved the way for this notion, especially with regard to body participation in sense production processes, we conclude that the author's legacy is relevant to current concerns. *Mediatisation*[17]itself, considered in its long-term dimension, regards the body and its perception faculties as an essential participant to explain changes. Further to this, the technological dimension of the processes of discursive production and circulation turns out to be immensely important, added to a high degree of unpredictability affecting the body in multiple dimensions: from the world of work to the health sphere. It is precisely in this intersection where a set of enquiry tools comprising the multiple dimensions which converge into the growing complexity of the issue at stake should be considered vital. Metz is an author who can definitely help us reflect upon it.

References

Bouchez, C. & Hachemi, O. (2013). Le paradigme sémiologique et la pensée ´cinématographique´de Christian Metz. *1895 Mille huit cent cent quatre vingt quinze 70*. 172-175.

Chateau, D. & Lefebvre, M. (2013). Christian Metz et la phénomenologie. *1895 Mille huit cent cent quatre vingt quinze*. *70*. 82-119.

Lefebvre, M. & Metz, C. (2013). Existe-t-il une approche sémiologique de l´esthétique?. *1895 Mille huit cent cent quatre vingt quinze 70*.154-167.

Metz, C. (1964). Le cinéma: langue ou langage?. *Communications*. *4*.52-80.

Metz, C. (1968). Le dire et le dit au cinéma: vers le déclin d´un vraisemblable? *Communications*. *11*. 27-33.

Metz, C. (1971). *Langage et cinéma*. Paris: Langue et Langage. Larousse. 159.

Metz, C. (1975). Le signifiant imaginaire, *Communications*. *23*. 3-55.

Metz, C. (1975). Le film de fiction et son spectateur. *Communications*. *23*. 108-135.

Metz, C. (1991). *L´énonciation impersonnelle, ou le site du film*. Paris: Meridiens Klincksieck.

---

[16] Refer to Traversa, O. "An approach at the notion of device". This text highlights the fact that certain authors, among whom we should mention Metz, have made a non-explicit, non-organic use of the notion with very interesting findings. It is in this text that paved the way for a systematisation of the notion.

[17] It was Eliseo Verón who particularly focused his attention on long-term mediatisation since it has led to the converging co-evolution between the semiotic and the biological processes in the *Homo sapiens* species.

Traversa, O. (2001). Aproximaciones a la noción de dispositivo. *Signo y Seña*. *12*. Revista del Instituto de Lingüística, UBA. 231-248.

Verón, E. (2013). *La semiosis social, 2*. Buenos Aires: Paidós

Verón, E. (2014). Mediatisation theory: a semio-anthropological perspective. *Mediatization of Communication*. Vol. 21. 163-174.