



*The Testament of Dr. Mabuse* (Fritz Lang, 1932)

# Alternation, Segmentation, Hypnosis: Interview with Raymond Bellour

*Janet Bergstrom*

The interview which follows came at the end of a year-long seminar which Raymond Bellour gave at the Centre universitaire américain du cinéma in Paris (1977-78) and is indicative of the kinds of issues which were raised there. Bellour has published extensively in France on film analysis and on 19th century literature – Dumas, Verne, the Brontës. He has conducted important interviews with such figures as Barthes, Lévi-Strauss, Foucault, Metz, Laplanche and Pontalis, Rosolato, and Francastel, which have been collected in *Le Livre des autres*. He has co-authored film scenarios (currently with Philippe Venault on Michelet's life) and cultural radio programs (e.g. a recent series with Venault on the discourse of historians). He has edited or co-edited numerous collections of essays including the well-known *Communications 23 (Psychanalyse et cinéma)* with Christian Metz and Thierry Kuntzel, and the review *Artsept*. In the next year, three new books will appear: *L'Analyse du film*, Bellour's collected textual analyses, *Le Cinéma américain*, a large volume of new analyses of American films edited by Bellour, and *Lévi-Strauss*, a collection of unpublished essays and interviews, edited with Catherine Clément.

The movement of the interview brings out the connections between these preoccupations, in particular between Bellour's work on 19th century fiction and the American classical film. The interview provides the first extended discussion of Bellour's theories about alternation and segmentation per se and as exemplified in Griffith's *The Lonedale Operator* and avant-garde film (Kubelka, Snow). Bellour treats in a succinct and illuminating way the symbolic significance and movement of the Oedipal trajectory in the classical American film through a discussion of Wyler's *The Westerner*. He puts in writing here for the first time his extremely interesting ideas about hypnosis and the apparatus, which continue the metapsychological studies of Baudry and Metz, and the importance of the social and historical confluence of the beginnings of hypnosis, psychoanalysis and the cinema at the end of the 19th century. Throughout, the interview is concerned with Bellour's views about the place of woman within the enunciation of classical textual systems, those created by the director as well as those constructed by the analyst.

I would like to thank Raymond Bellour for his cooperation during the interviewing and rewriting process, for his unusual attentiveness to the text of classical film and literature, and for the pleasure of his friendship. A selected bibliography of his work follows the interview.

Textual analysis is irreducible in that it cannot be summarized, unless it be to offer the bare skeleton of a structure which, although it is not nothing, will never be the multiple whole built up in it, around it, through it, from it, beyond it. In their different modes of experience, which some are tempted to call contradictory but which are so only in part, Lévi-Strauss and Barthes have never ceased stating and restating this. The analysis itself engenders a second text which it would be futile to try to reduce in turn.

“Le blocage symbolique”

JANET BERGSTROM: *I'd like to begin by asking you to situate your work within the more general context it forms a part of, particularly with respect to two important influences—Lévi-Strauss and Barthes. Although the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss is often today compared negatively with Barthes's emphasis, at least since the publication of S/Z in 1970, on the processes of reading which work to open out a plurality of possible meanings across different levels of meaning—the opposition is thus abbreviated to that of structure vs. structuring (structuration)—you suggest in this passage from your analysis of North by Northwest that this is a false dichotomy. Could we begin by talking about the continuing importance of their work for your conception of textual analysis?*

RAYMOND BELLOUR: You have to distinguish two things, one more historical, the other more personal.

When structuralism first began in France nearly twenty years ago, it appeared to be a phenomenon with a certain degree of homogeneity. Between Lévi-Strauss and Barthes in particular there was a certain community of thought, partly because of the overriding importance that the linguistic model had for both of them; partly also because of Lévi-Strauss's incursions into literature based on his own experience in anthropology and Barthes's references to Lévi-Strauss in his structural analyses of literature, not to mention the articles, some of them dating quite far back, that Barthes devoted to Lévi-Strauss, and in particular to *The Savage Mind*. That was, you might say, the classical age of structuralism.

Subsequently, Lévi-Strauss has maintained (at least in appearance) his adherence to what might be called an orthodox structuralism,

throughout the development of his *Mythologies*, which constitutes the most substantial part of his work and also his masterpiece. In other words, in keeping the notion of structure as central, he has pretty much retained the initial positions he affirmed in *Structural Anthropology*. Barthes, on the other hand, has gradually evolved—and his evolution became perfectly clear starting with *S/Z*—toward a position where he emphasizes the theoretical opposition between structure and structuring (*structuration*): whereas the former seeks to designate an order in the text that is both regulated and, in the last analysis, always reducible, the latter seeks to circumscribe the perpetual effect of displacement and dispersion takes place in the text. So in this second phase, one can oppose Barthes and Lévi-Strauss. But it is, I think, to some extent a false opposition. In the *Mythologies*, for example, one finds such a complicating of the notion of structure that one moves gradually toward what could very well be called, as far as myths are concerned, an effect of structuring; in *S/Z*, on the other hand, the endless movement of structuring can only be explained as the result of a continuous interaction with, or passing-through, effects that can only be called effects of structure.

To be sure, Lévi-Strauss has constantly reaffirmed the need for a rigorous, scientific methodology that might bring the social and “human” sciences as close as possible to the strict scientific procedures of the exact sciences; whereas Barthes, although he began by flirting with the idea of a science of semiotics, has never stopped displacing himself with respect to it; indeed, he now rejects it completely in favor of the notion of play, of simulacrum, in order to show that in the last analysis it makes no sense to speak of a science of literature, and that any work of commentary, analysis, or reading is never anything but a textual production which leads itself on indefinitely. But despite these differences in theoretical position, or in mood in a very broad sense (differences that remain important, since they imply a conception of the analyst’s relation to his work, and therefore a whole ideology of one’s relationship to oneself and to social institutions), I don’t believe that there exists as strong an opposition as one might think between the work of analysis as it has been carried out by Lévi-Strauss in the field of anthropology and by Barthes in the analysis of literary texts.

But there is also a personal side to the question. Barthes and Lévi-Strauss are two of the authors who have influenced me most and who have contributed the most to the development of my own work, both in the analysis of film and in that of literary texts. They have influenced me on the level of methodology, of course, through their diverse ways of “lighting up” a text, each in his own field; but even more so by the example they set, by what could be called the material

74 management of the work of analysis, which they have both pushed to a rare degree of perfection and even of excess, through modes of writing and of composition that are fundamentally different from each other. Lévi-Strauss's minute and restricted analysis of Baudelaire's "Les Chats" (done in collaboration with Jakobson), which saturates and articulates all the levels of the text, the monumental analysis of his *Mythologies*, moving on the sole level of the signified into ever deepening spirals over a space of more than two thousand pages in order to recompose the mental frameworks of a whole civilization; the five great fields or codes of *S/Z*, with which Barthes proposed for the first time to account for *everything* in a text, his luminous essays on Sade, some of the essays in his *Nouveaux essais critiques* (I'm thinking in particular of "Par où commencer?"), that marvelously fine first *découpage* of Jules Verne's *Mysterious Island*—all of these texts seem to me to form the bases of any reading experience. To give you an example, it was through Lévi-Strauss (read in the light of an article by André Glucksmann, "Les déductions de la cuisine et les cuisines de la déduction") that I first became fully aware of the problem of the radical impossibility that any analysis faces in reducing its object: I mean by that the absolute fatality by which every analytical operation is always obliged to reflect its object laterally, through the double play of quotation and commentary. Whence the obligation for the analysis of never doing anything other than continuing, in its own way, the process begun by the text itself, of constituting itself as a second object. We are dealing here with the problem of the strategy of analysis, which Barthes has so admirably orchestrated in *S/Z*, and which Lévi-Strauss, in the *Mythologies*, despite his scientific ideology, places within the field of aesthetics. For film analysis this is of course a particularly difficult test, perhaps even its most difficult test: for if a film can be more or less summarized, it can never really be quoted, and that fact carries with it consequences for the whole strategy, the whole mode of writing, of the analysis. This was the basic question that I tried to situate in "The Unattainable Text."

### Binary Oppositions

JB: *The use of binary oppositions, which is perhaps another aspect of Lévi-Strauss's influence, is very marked in all your textual analyses. In the articles on The Birds (1969) and North by Northwest (1975), you use the same three oppositions: voyant/vu (who is seeing/what is seen); proche/lointain (near/far camera distance); and movement/non-movement of the camera. By what criteria are these particular opposi-*

tions selected? And to what extent does the choice depend on the “content” of the narrative? 75

RB: It is inevitable that textual analysis, which developed in the context of the general movement of structuralism and semiology, should encounter the problem of binary oppositions, a problem that lies at the heart of both Saussurean linguistics and Jakobson’s poetics. I have neither the desire nor the capability of entering here into a substantive full-scale debate over the validity or the non-validity of binary oppositions (the question being the following: does the use of binary oppositions bring about an unjustified reduction of the reality of the object in favor of its structure and its meaning, at the expense of its multiple phenomenality, its “true” system of desire as the latter has been spoken of by Lyotard or Deleuze in terms of intensity, flux, etc.?).

Whatever the case may be, it is a fact that binary oppositions are at work on a certain fundamental level in the filmic text, and particularly in the classical film. That’s why from the very beginning my own work became organized around a certain number of oppositions which I did not recognize at the time as corresponding to specifically cinematographic codes (I’m referring here to my analysis of a fragment of *The Birds*; at that time the notion of a specific code had not yet been proposed by Metz). It was around three basic oppositions: who is seeing/what is seen, near/far (an opposition constructed on the basis of variations in framing), and movement/non-movement of the camera, that the possibility of an organization of the textual logic in these 81 shots of *The Birds* became evident (and textual logic implies, of course, the presence of other codes which are essentially narrative, not specifically cinematographic). And you are right in emphasizing that it is these same oppositions (especially the first two) that one finds in the analysis of segment 14 of *North by Northwest*.

You ask me by what criteria these oppositions are selected. I could reply that it depends on the films or the parts of films chosen for the analysis, on the operational value of these oppositions in each individual case. If in the analysis of the segment from *North by Northwest* I did not insist as much on the movement/non-movement opposition as I had in the fragment of *The Birds*, it was simply because in *North by Northwest* the camera was fixed in the great majority of shots, and also because the use of camera movement was less systematic. Similarly, in the segment from *The Big Sleep* I introduced an opposition determined by the angle of the camera (full face/profile) because that opposition entered fully into the overall system of the segment by emphasizing the difference between the representation of the hero and that of the heroine. That shows you very well that if the choice of codes does not

76 directly depend on the content of the story, it is obviously linked to it, since the difference emphasized by the code of camera angle between the hero and the heroine is one of the ways whereby the narrative ensures a certain representation of the diegetic couple in this particular film. In a much more obvious way, it's clear that the choice of the code of point of view in the case of Hitchcock is practically inseparable from my choice of his films in the first place, since that code is what organizes the relationships between the characters and thus supports the whole textual system.

But I can answer you in a different way: the choice of film segments or fragments is determined by the type of oppositions one can bring into play in them, that is by the concern of the analysis to recognize those which are the most fundamental, more or less specifically cinematographic, codes at work in the filmic text, constituting so many basic elements (the latter being obviously variable both in scope and in nature, depending on the period and on the types of films) of what can be called cinematographic language. There is a two-way effect there that one most often becomes aware of only afterward, but which is certainly one of the motives for the choice of object.

### Segmentation, Alternation and *La Grande Syntagmatique*

JB: *You spent several weeks of the seminar on segmentation and alternation in The Lonedale Operator, and then you continued the discussion using a sequence from Marnie (not the film's beginning, which you analyzed in other terms in "Hitchcock, The Enunciator," but a later sequence, when Marnie goes to see her mother at her home in Baltimore). Would you say that your ideas on alternation have come out of a study of early narrative film, or your work on Hitchcock, or that they have evolved more generally through other interests?*

RB: Quite simply, I gradually became aware that my segmental analyses of Hitchcock's films (among others) always ended up by emphasizing a serial form of composition, or alternation, which systematically distributed the oppositions from one shot to the next. We may define alternation as the extension of an opposition a/b which is continued through a more or less prolonged process of serialization (a1/b1, a2/b2, etc.) until it breaks off, but which the existence of initial opposition is enough to establish as possible, as long as the two terms appear in continuity in the filmic chain. Thus segment 14 of *North by Northwest* is constructed in its entirety according to the alternation seeing/seen

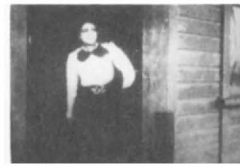
between the subject and the object of his vision; this alternation is regularly interrupted by a coming together in a single field of the subject and the object, according to a very complex hierarchization of repetitions and differences, all of this being continued for 133 shots. Similarly, in *The Birds* the narrative—that is, Melanie's journey, her meeting with Mitch, and their return journey together—is wholly determined by the criss-crossing and the superimposition of alternations on the levels of point of view, of framing, and of the opposition movement/non-movement of the camera. The same way in the segment from *The Big Sleep*, the various code levels are constantly bringing into play phenomena of alternation, more or less combining the six codes, which ensure the diegetic representation of the couple.

So I gradually came to realize that we were dealing here with what I would call a basic form of filmic discourse and of cinematographic language. In a way, this comes down to taking account of the obvious: the camera, which cuts out its units in space also cuts them out in time, by means of a serialization comparable to the model of classical music, where the alternation of segments orchestrated on different levels assures the cohesion and the progression of the text. I do not mean by that that every film is automatically governed by a structure of alternation. Nor do I mean, obviously, that alternation is an intrinsic property of film (that is, of a strip of filmed images projected on a screen), even though alternation is made possible by the discontinuity of photographic inscription. But it is nevertheless a fact that this is what happened historically—in other words, the film medium soon found itself segmenting the narrative material it was using globally as object (and this is also true of non-narrative material, as for example in avant-garde and experimental films, which I will talk about later), by forming interlocking levels of alternation whose function was to ensure the complexity of a textual space.

### Alternation in *The Lonedale Operator*

Take for example *The Lonedale Operator*, which we worked on in the seminar. From the very beginning we see the setting up of a diegetic alternation: he/she/he, up to the point where they join in shot 4. Then, after a few shots that show them together (shots 4-7, which in turn play on what could be called a near/far alternation within the frame), the couple separates. The three shots that follow are on the woman, but starting with the third (shot 9) the alternation begins again, this time on the basis of point of view: she sees him leave, they say good-bye to each





*The Lonedale Operator* (D.W. Griffith, 1911)

other, she follows him with her eyes (shots 9/10/11). But the alternation continues on the diegetic level starting with their separation and with the train entering into play: shots 12 and 13 show something else happening in another train station, only to return (shot 14) to the heroine, who is then followed for several shots (14-17). One can observe, in the transition from 14 to 15, an opposition in framing (near/far) which constitutes the starting point for an alternation that the filmic text does not really develop, but whose potential pressure is very strong. Then, in shot 17, the alternation begins again, through a shot/reverse shot (*champ/contrechamp*) opposition determined by the point of view, which is then followed, within the shot itself, by a joining of the two terms (she/the train). In shot 19, we see a new term appear: the thieves. And so it continues: the text of the film goes on dividing, joining up and redividing its elements through a succession of varied alternations over 96 shots, until the final joining up which shows us in a single last shot the majority of the elements involved: she, he, the other driver and the thieves.

Thus it is absolutely clear that already in Griffith's first films alternation plays a primary role among the procedures used to construct and elaborate the cinematographic form, and that it does so on several levels. This latter point is the essential one. Alternation can work both on the level of the various specific codes we've discussed (especially in the various forms of shot/reverse shot which bring together several codes) and in more general and multiple ways on the level of the diegesis. What we must understand is that the force of alternation is entirely due to the fact that it always works more or less on the two levels at once, which means that it is constantly at the point of articulation between expression and content—indeed that it is, in a sense, one of their major common grounds. The theorists of film had located this specificity in the forms of alternating montage and parallel montage. Metz in turn realized that there was a much more general problem involved here when he remarked, in a self-critical and programmatic footnote to his syntagmatic analysis of *Adieu Philippine*, that it was necessary to take into consideration “the whole set of problems posed by the fact of alternation.” But he immediately restricted the scope of his remark by limiting the definition of alternation to the area of a single code which preoccupied him at the time, namely the *grande syntagmatique*. In fact, the extraordinary power of alternation lies in that it can work simultaneously and in complementary fashion both on the level of the diegesis and on the level of the specific codes, and that it can do so on multiple dimensions of the textual system going from the smallest to the largest elements. In this perspective, alternating and parallel syntagmas represent merely a particularly striking illustration

80 —one that is at the exact point of juncture between the specific and the diegetic—of a fundamental principle.

The classical cinema, especially the American cinema, thus uses alternation very specifically as a kind of formal basic principle which is constantly and organically at work in the film, setting itself up, breaking off, re-establishing itself on various levels, displacing itself constantly from one level to another in order to ensure the movement which leads the film from its beginning to its end. The process of repetition-resolution, which I have shown to be in various ways the governing process in the organization of the classic American film, is thus determined, both on the level of the film as a diegetic whole and on the minimal level of the internal organization of the segment, by the phenomenon of alternation as the generalized form of narrative.

I have found a confirmation of this mode of textual functioning in the analyses of others working on film. I'm thinking in particular, as far as American cinema is concerned, of Stephen Heath's study of *Touch of Evil*, and of the work done by one of my students, Ann West, on *Swing Time*, where one can see very well how this alternating division of the elements literally ensures, on a global level, the distribution and the engenderment of the narrative. I'm also thinking of the sequential analyses done by Marie-Claire Ropars (on *Muriel*, on *October*) or Jacques Aumont (on *The General Line* and on *Ivan the Terrible*), which are especially interesting since they concern films from totally different cultural contexts. And of course one need but think of some of Resnais's short films (*Night and Fog*, for example) or of *Hiroshima mon amour* to realize to what extent alternation is a structuring principle, a kind of fundamental given of filmic elaboration.

### Alternation in Avant-Garde Film

Actually I think it is very important to insist on the fact that this principle of alternation is in no way specific to the classical film, even if it manifests a particular dynamic in that kind of film. Indeed, the purest examples of alternation are to be found in so-called avant-garde or experimental films. Experimental cinema is exemplary in that it can on the one hand totally by-pass the function of alternation and thus show that it is not consubstantial with cinema as such. Take a film like Warhol's *Sleep*, for example, which institutes an infinite duration of the fixed shot, or else Snow's *La Région centrale*, where alternation is reduced to an oscillation effect on the clouds—right-left, left-right—at a given moment in the midst of that endless movement in a single shot.

The effect in such cases is to bring into play, but by reducing it to its “degree zero,” a principle determined by the breaking up of the shots and their systematization.

That is why, on the other hand, a very large majority of avant-garde films exploit to the maximum the possibilities inherent in alternation. Such films come much closer in fact to the musical models, playing much more freely on the seriality of the elements than narrative films do (but we must not forget that many avant-garde films are narrative, simply treating the narrative differently), given that narrative films are always more or less forced to make a plot progress and are thus also forced constantly to vary and interrupt the processes of alternation. One could say that these processes are impure in the narrative film, since they are always subjected to the differences of the story (*récit*): if the story (*récit*) is to go forward, there can never be an absolute identity between the different shots. On the other hand, the avant-garde film, which is often infinitely less bound to the narrative content (*signifié narratif*), can carry the principle of alternation to its purest level. Take Kubelka’s *Arnulf Rainer* for example: that film is a pure alternation of rhythmic effects, between effects of black and effects of white.

JB: *And of noise and silence. Kubelka, too, speaks of his films as musical compositions, especially Arnulf Rainer.*

RB: Yes, that is precisely the point where the film becomes written like music. This is more or less true of most avant-garde films, even those that are very strongly subjected to the realism of representation. *Man with a Movie Camera* is thus a web of alternating series constituted out of elements displaced from one end of the film to the other, which thus form a kind of generalized paradigm with multiple entry-points. This film is one of the clearest illustrations of what I call the principle of alternation.

### The Repetition-Resolution Effect

JB: *When you describe how alternation structures North by Northwest (in “Le blocage symbolique”), you emphasize that alternation obeys the “rule of repetition-resolution.”*

RB: We must distinguish two different things here. First, what I call the repetition-resolution effect, by which I refer to the fact that the film resolves itself, moves from its beginning to its end by means of differen-

82 tial repetition or the final integration of a certain number of elements given at the beginning and in the course of the narrative. This, incidentally, goes both for the film as a whole and, to a greater or lesser degree, for some of the parts that compose it—its segments or fragments. This repetition-resolution, with all its richness, breadth, and systematic organization, seems to me to be a quite specific trait of the classical American cinema, even though it obviously manifests itself in other films as well and even though within the American cinema it is more clearly present in some directors and genres than others.

Secondly, this repetition-resolution effect is not a necessary corollary to the alternation effect. In the classical American cinema, repetition-resolution is constituted only through the multiple systematization of the principle of alternation. But there are many other films, such as the avant-garde films we've discussed or else Resnais's films, for example, in which alternation appears as a structuring principle but which are entirely foreign to the rule of repetition-resolution. These films are ruled by repetition, of course, since there can be no alternation without repetition (alternation is but a special form of repetition). But they still remain totally foreign to that particular effect which superimposes repetition on resolution in order to allow for the development of the film, and which seems to me to be linked above all to the form of the hermeneutic narrative characteristic, on the whole, of the classical American cinema. All of which does not exclude, let me repeat, the possibility that this effect is also at work, more or less, in other broad areas of filmic narrativity. I'm thinking in particular of the classical German cinema. Here would be one way of elucidating, starting with the textual functioning itself, the historical continuity between the German and the American classical cinema.

JB: *This hypothesis about the classical German cinema—does it come from your work on Lang?*

RB: Yes, since he's the filmmaker who allows us to establish this link most concretely, and since I've been working on him more or less continuously ever since my first attempts at textual analysis. For example, this is the kind of effect we were able to observe this year in the seminar on *Spies*. But one could also find in Murnau (I'm thinking especially of *Nosferatu*) effects of textual resolution determined by structures of repetition and alternation, both on the intersegmental level and on the intrasegmental level.

JB: *These different levels of alternation correspond, then, to what you called in the article on Gigi ("To Analyze, To Segment") the segmental,*

RB: Yes, of course, and both in a very general and very subtle way. *Gigi*, for example, is constructed around a kind of general alternation which it's obviously impossible to reduce to a strict a/b/a/b model but which nevertheless belongs to the kind of rhythm and construction based on an alternation between men and women. There is a whole series of segments organized around women only, another whole series organized around men only, and finally a third series which ensures the meeting of the men and the women, up to the final meeting (in the last shot) sealed by the marriage of *Gigi* and Gaston, which brings the film to its resolution. Now if one wanted to submit the segments of *Gigi* to the same kind of analysis I did on the segments of Hitchcock or Hawks, that is an analysis on the level of their micro-units, one would again find a series of alternations on multiple levels: the level of the various models of shot/reverse shot and of point of view, the level of camera movement, of diegetic motifs within the segment (presence or absence of a character within the frame), alternation of two settings within a given place, as for example the kitchen and the living room in *Gigi*'s apartment, etc.). So we have here a film that constantly and throughout varies the principle of alternation which constructs it, through an effect of reflection and reciprocal implication between its different levels.

JB: *To what extent would you generalize from your analysis of Gigi? Would you say that this kind of construction is basic to classical film?*

RB: It's obvious that with *Gigi* I fell on an example where this phenomenon is particularly emphasized (which I think is pretty much characteristic of the genre of musical comedy). But I can almost say that I chose it because it allowed me to place a particular emphasis on a type of construction that must have certainly struck me, though in a more vague way, in a great number of classical American films. Having worked for years now on a certain number of films in my seminar and having also followed very closely the work of other analysts on films belonging to the same cultural context, I have the impression that the hypotheses I advanced using *Gigi* as my example can pretty much be recognized as valid for the classical American cinema as a whole. Naturally this is true only if one admits that they are not the less rich in implications for not being as obviously, as perfectly, one might even say as overdeterminedly, present in every film as they are in *Gigi*.

JB: As I understand your interest in the *grande syntagmatique*, I would say that it differs from Metz's in that for you segmentation is closely linked with alternation, which you see as a structuring principle of the classical American cinema (as well as others). So segmentation comes to account for, as well as describe, the logic of the production of the narrative—whereas I think Metz used the *grande syntagmatique* primarily to describe the different kinds of syntagmas (principle narrative units) the classical film contains or consists of. In other words, your interest in the *grande syntagmatique* seems to be closely linked to the notion of a textual system in the sense of a dynamic, structuring logic according to which the narrative extends, complicates, and resolves itself, although segmentation serves a descriptive function as well.

RB: I want to emphasize first of all that there is no contradiction whatever between the way Metz posed the question of the *grande syntagmatique* and the way I encountered the problem through textual analysis. But it's natural that our interest in the *grande syntagmatique* should be different, since for Metz, who elaborated the notion, it constituted an example of a code within a problematic focused on cinematographic language, whereas for me the *grande syntagmatique* is a kind of operational device for approaching a single text, even if some general propositions can later be inferred as a result.

The analysis of classical film can really hardly avoid encountering this problem. The moment one considers a film in its totality, one runs up against the necessity of naming the units, if for no other reason than to be able to refer to a given moment of the film. And so one ends up with a kind of segmentation, of *découpage*, which in any event conforms to the criteria of the *grande syntagmatique*; the validity of the *grande syntagmatique* remains very strong in the case of the classical film, despite its imperfections. When Stephen Heath in his *découpage* of *Touch of Evil*, or I myself in my *découpage* of *North by Northwest*, segmented the film in a semi-erratic way in order to avoid having to confront the practical and theoretical problems of the *grande syntagmatique* in setting up our schemas, we still ended up in fact with something that was often very close to a *découpage* done according to a strict application of the *grande syntagmatique*.

What I wanted to do in my study of *Gigi* was to carry the challenge to its logical conclusion, by doing the *découpage* strictly in function of a double strategy: on the one hand, my aim was to pinpoint the limitations of the *grande syntagmatique* in the actual determination of the segmental units, which don't always correspond exactly to the types

defined by Metz; in so doing, I was simply continuing Metz's own *auto-critique* in his notes to the syntagmatic analysis of *Adieu Philippe*. On the other hand, though, my aim was to displace the *grande syntagmatique*'s point of application. I was not concerned with judging the validity of the *grande syntagmatique*, but rather with showing how the problem of filmic segmentation presented itself in textual terms. In other words I tried to show, as a first step, that the large syntagmatic units, that is the autonomous segments, are on their own level the object of a systematic arrangement which allows one to say, even if only by analogy, that the segments are organized in the film in the same way that the shots are organized within each segment.

Take for example the repetition-resolution effects that I've analyzed in minute detail in the fragment from *The Birds* and the segment from *North by Northwest*. It's fascinating to see that they work exactly the same way in the films as a whole. In *Gigi* we move from an initial situation (on the one side a young girl, Gigi, who lives alone with her grandmother, on the other side a young man, Gaston, surrounded by mistresses) to the final resolution (the marriage of Gigi and Gaston). Now this narrative transformation is very precisely determined by the repetition-resolution effect which organizes a certain number of segments. The fifth part of the film is composed exclusively of segments which repeat, one by one, each of four previous segments that occurred in the four preceding parts; the result is an effect of condensation which operates in a particularly exemplary way on the level of the segmental signifier itself.

JB: *Since there is presently a great deal of uncertainty, at least in the United States, as to the possible usefulness of the grande syntagmatique, I would like to ask you what, in your view, are the different ways in which one might use it as a tool for analysis?*

RB: One could, if one wished, distinguish four working positions as far as the *grande syntagmatique* is concerned.

The first would seek to perfect it, that is to transform it by pursuing further the theoretical problems involved. See for example Metz's *auto-critique* in his notes in *Film Language*, or our joint discussion (reprinted in his *Essais II* and by me in *Le Livre des autres*), or my article on *Gigi*.

The second position is still concerned, but on another level, with the *grand syntagmatique* as such: it would consist in an attempt to verify to what extent the *grande syntagmatique* is universally applicable to all classical films, by means of a series of more or less highly developed test cases. The criterion of validity used here would be the



86 one defined by Metz himself (this criterion might be shown to be historically circumscribed by the very process of verification).

Thirdly, one can adopt what might be called a "stylistic" position. By using the *grande syntagmatique* to segment a certain number of films belonging to a specific period, genre, director, etc., one could classify them stylistically according to the type of segment they emphasize. It's obvious that a film can be very different depending on whether it's constructed more or less by means of scenes or sequences, or by means of alternating syntagmas and episodic sequences.

Finally, there is the fourth position which is the one adopted by Stephen Heath in his analysis of *Touch of Evil* or by me in my essay on *Gigi* (even though our analyses were not conducted on the same level). This position consists in using the criteria of the *grande syntagmatique* in order to arrive, beyond these same criteria, at the principle which founds them, that is at the fact of segmentation itself, the fact that the film tends always to organize itself into more or less small or large units that are segmented and isolated from each other. And from this fact one can go on to bring into play the problem of the constitution of the textual system, which I prefer more and more to call the textual volume in order to emphasize the complexity and the multiplicity of the operations that exist within the film.

We can thus show how the operation of segmentation, which is a function both of the reality of the object and of the analyses' construction, is an operation that never ceases displacing itself in relation to itself, reproducing itself in a *mise en abîme* within the film in order to ensure its textual productivity. That is what I tried to suggest by the terms "subsegmentation" and "micro-segmentation." If it is true, as Metz has shown, that the classical film tends to constitute itself in segments, it's also true that the segments thus constituted are constantly entering into multiple relations with units that are segmentally inferior to them going as far as the limit of the shot and even within the shot. We thus realize that the segmental units established by means of the *grande syntagmatique* can be subdivided according to criteria that are both less precise and more subtle; these criteria are essentially micro-diegetic, bringing into play ever smaller units which in turn are found to be related to each other in multiple ways. The inferior and superior segmentations (the two are sometimes confused) of the shot and of the segment are in a dynamic relationship of divergence and overlap with the diegetic segmentation, which distributes the succession of actions throughout the length of the filmic chain. And this goes on endlessly, through a process of derivation, of complexification which touches the film as a whole, in the organicity of its details. Segmentation is thus a process that never stops, that has no end either in theory or in fact, but

which ends up bringing into play, and in every part, the textual system in its plurality, its global volume of relationships, like a piling up of systems of various dimensions, each one caught in the others like a series of concentric rings and waves. 87

### Fictional Representation, the Woman's Symbolic Position, Enunciation

*JB: Already in the collective book *Le Western* (1966), while other contributors chose elements like "Indian attack," "sheriff's office," "fistfight," "gambler," or "ranch" to discuss and place, of the many elements in the "Mythologies" section of the book, you chose to write about "woman." And in this article one finds already closely linked an analysis of the woman's symbolic position as crucial in determining the narrative structure, the system of fictional representation carried over from the 19th century novel, and enunciation as the principe producteur of the narrative. Could you sketch the development of this matrix of interests, perhaps in terms of your ideas about what constitutes a textual system, throughout your work?*

**RB:** Your question gives a lot of importance, retrospectively, to a quite modest and by now very old article in which I tried to set up a kind of comparative chart of the great feminine figures brought into play by the western. It seemed to us at the time that one way to get closer to the stylistic and ideological reality of the genre was to bring together a set of partial approaches, in a manner somewhat inspired by the example of Barthes's analyses of socio-cultural reality in his *Mythologies*.

I've been particularly interested in the problem of the representation of the woman, which is much more than a mere mythology among others. I was struck by a statement of Anthony Mann's: "In fact a woman is always added to the story because without women a western wouldn't work." This remark touches on something very profound. On the one hand it conforms with the purely historical fact that there were women in the West, that the economic, territorial and family system obviously required the presence of women, since what was involved was the creation of a society. But Mann's remark also tells us something much more important: namely, that the narrative couldn't function if this place assigned to the woman in the diegesis and in the representation of society weren't at the same time metaphoric, that is a place which assigns to her a specific role in the set of representations organized by the film.

88 JB: *And it's the woman's symbolic role that gives her this structural importance.*

RB: Yes, and we must specify exactly what that means. Going back to the example of the western, there is thus a whole organized circuit of feminine representations (the young heroine, the mother, the saloon girl, the wife, etc.) without which the film cannot function—in two ways, which articulate the two places, real and metaphorical, that I've talked about. On the one hand, the function of the woman in the organization and the motivations of the narrative is far more determining than is often thought (examples: in *The Searchers*, it's the kidnapping of a little girl by the Indians which gets the narrative started and which sustains it to the end; in *The Naked Spur*, it's the presence of Janet Leigh at Robert Ryan's side which determines, as much and even more than the reward on his head, the vicissitudes and above all the final twist of the scenario). On the other hand, the western is subtended from one end to the other by what one can call the problematic of marriage. If you think about it, you notice that after a certain situation posed at the start as a problem or as an enigma, the film gradually leads to a final solution which allows the more or less conflicting terms posed at the beginning to be resolved, and which in the majority of cases takes the form of a marriage. I've gradually come to think that this pattern organizes—indeed, constitutes—the classical American cinema as a whole, but I first became aware of it through the western, where one might have thought a priori that it played a less determining role. If you take westerns as different as those of John Ford or Anthony Mann, Samuel Fuller or Delmer Daves, you notice that the problematic of the formation of the couple is absolutely central in all of them (in *The Searchers*, there is the marriage of Jeffrey Hunter and Vera Miles, and in *The Naked Spur*, the marriage of James Stewart and Janet Leigh).

Let's take for example William Wyler's *The Westerner*. It shows very well how the territorial formation of Texas is absolutely determined by the formation of the couple. The segmentation (*découpage*) in the film carries the repetition-resolution effect to an exemplary point. First shot: a map of Texas, in a fixed shot. Last shot: another map of Texas, starting from which a backward camera movement discloses the conjugal bedroom where the heroine is moving toward the window, followed by her young husband who is holding her by the waist—the wild, untamed hero whose matrimonial education is the subject of the film. The hero's fate is shaped by the feminine figure, but only to the extent that the representations organized around this figure allow for the two of them to be inscribed together in a symbolic framework.

JB: *And these symbolic representations are linked, in your opinion, to a system of representations which constitute the 19th century novel?* 89

RB: Indisputably. It has often been said, generally speaking, that the classical American cinema continued in the 20th century the great tradition of the 19th century European novel. But once you have pointed out that filiation, which is obvious . . .

JB: *By obvious you mean . . .*

RB: I mean that the American cinema, like the 19th century novel, very clearly sets into play an art of narrative founded on representation, conflict, enigma, hermeneutics, suspense, all the things that Barthes defined so well in *S/Z*. That's why, incidentally, so many 19th century novels have been able to be adapted directly to the screen by the American cinema, without for a moment breaking the continuity with films adapted from recent works or made from original scenarios, which on the whole continue to belong to this tradition. What we must try to understand is the basis of this filiation, which is manifested by a certain formal unity in the broadest sense, in the functioning of the textual systems. (We should obviously, if we want a minimum of precision, qualify things here quite a bit. The first thing is to understand that from the novel to the cinema there occurs a kind of displacement: film comes to satisfy a general demand for narrativity which the novel today fulfills only in part, which it has turned away from—at least the more serious novels have—even if it continues to serve it. Next, this displacement is effected at the price of a certain leveling of the text which is clear in the adaptations of the great classical novels. The novels are in fact more diversified, more different from each other than the films. The American cinema is a machine of great homogeneity, due to its mode of production which is both mechanical and industrial. In this sense it exists at the level of maximum narrativity which in the 19th century was that of the serialized novel—the latter being precisely the point at which literature became an industry.)

But it nevertheless remains true that we can speak of a profound unity, founded on a general system of fiction, between the 19th century novel and the classical cinema (above all the American cinema). This unity seems to me to be due essentially to a certain type of articulation between the imaginary and the symbolic as it has been systematically elaborated by Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, starting with the socio-historical situation opened up by the simultaneous development of the bourgeoisie, of industrial capitalism and of the nuclear family.

- 90 This unity, this very strong articulation between the American cinema and the 19th century novel, seems to me therefore to be the result of a general, socially and historically determined phenomenon of representation founded on a scenarization of the psychic conflicts caused by the massive presence of the Oedipus complex and the castration complex. That's why this scenarization is organized around a very insistent and very strong representation of the feminine figure, starting from the relatively new situation of difference and identity, or what I call the structure of narcissistic reduplication, which, since the 19th century, has manifestly ruled over the relations between the two sexes.

### Desire and the Law in the Western

JB: *In your essays in Le Western you weren't yet speaking from within a psychoanalytic framework. Since your analysis of The Birds (1969) you have become increasingly taken within the interests you are talking about now. Could we go back a few steps?*

RB: Well, to try and clarify things a bit I'll start with an example that will be a good link between the two, since it's a western: it's once again *The Westerner*. Just now we saw how the film is organized around a territorial path: that of the couple, which represents as such both Texas (it occupies a parcel of Texas land) and more generally the United States, or the national community that Texas represents. But this parcel of land can be materially occupied by the couple only if it is occupied symbolically. Obviously, that's the basic thing. Let's try to see what it means. The film brings into play four characters: the hero, Cole Martin (Gary Cooper), the judge, Roy Bean (Walter Brennan), and two women — Lily Langtree (Lilian Bond), a famous actress in the West, and the heroine Janet Ellen Mathews (Doris Davenport), who will become Cole's wife at the end of the film. What is the condition that makes the final marriage possible? That is really the question asked by the film. We can answer it as follows: at the end, the hero must accept as his own a positive relationship between desire and the law; that means that he must accept the woman, who is the object of desire, but without eluding the threat of castration that looms doubly, in her and through the father.

The hero: an adventurer, apparently outside desire and outside the law. When the film opens he is about to be condemned to death for the theft of a horse that he didn't steal, by the Judge Roy Bean who represents the derision of the law, the law as unrestrained and non-



*The Westerner* (William Wyler, 1940)

92 symbolized desire. The young woman, who tries to testify on behalf of the hero, can do nothing against the speedy justice of Roy Bean: she is one of the farmers terrorized by the judge (he prevents them from farming so that he can have grazing land for his herds, acquired by a series of thefts). One thing alone saves Cole: Roy Bean's passion for Lily Langtree, whose posters cover the walls of the saloon. Cole claims he knows her and that he owns a lock of her hair, which he holds out as a bait for the judge. Here the narrative substitutes the two women for each other: to make good on his promise to the judge, Cole asks Ellen on one of his visits to her to give him a lock of her hair which he cuts off with a great stroke of the scissors. In return, he makes the judge promise to respect the farmers' land. This pact, once it's sealed, accelerates the formation of the couple: first kiss of Cole and Ellen. But in vain: Roy Bean burns down the farmland and Ellen's father dies in the fire at his farm. Cole is then obliged to resolve the terms of the conflict by choosing his side. To that end the narrative uses a show given by Lily Langtree in the next town. The judge, dressed in full military uniform and thus carrying to its extreme the derision of the law, has bought up all the seats so that he can be the only spectator at the show. But instead of Lily, it's Cole who appears on stage when the curtain rises. Gunfight: the judge is fatally wounded. Cole carries him to Lily's dressing room so that he can pay her his respects; her idealized image gradually fades out to signify his death. Total fadeout, followed by the reappearance of the couple in the conjugal bedroom.

Why this narrative logic, why this play of relations and substitutions, if not to allow the hero to stabilize his desire, which functions in relation to the woman, the image of the woman, within a social and historical space. On the one hand, Cole must find himself inscribed within a filiation over which he must triumph: that is why his relationship with Roy Bean, placed under the sign of a confrontation between men (drinking bouts, fistfights) is metaphorically marked as a father-son relationship (Roy Bean constantly refers to Cole as "son"). The bad father (the idealized father according to Freud and Lacan) must die, in the final confrontation, so that the couple can be formed; he even has his double, his reverse image: the good father (Ellen's father, the dead father, the symbolic father according to Lacan), who makes possible the entry into the genealogy, the continuity between generations. On the other hand, the two women must be identical through the metaphor of the lock of hair: the actress, a double image comprising both lawless sexuality and extreme idealization (in the sense in which Freud speaks of it in the chapter on "Love and Hypnosis" in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*), the woman as the very image of castration; and the heroine who reverses the image, through whom the masculine

subject will find, in contrast, the positivity of a regulated sexuality and a measured idealization, the woman who permits the fixation of his desire—in a word its symbolization—through the conjunction of his entry into the social order and the internalized, finally bearable image of his own castration. It's the movement from the adventurer, lawless and faithless as we say in French (*sans foi ni loi*), to the husband, the future father and good citizen. (In this case we have a film with a "happy ending." But even films that "turn out badly," either because of internal tension within the couple or through a romantic idealization of the ill-starred lovers, are obviously complementary forms of the same problematic.)

This type of progression, which I've of course outlined much too quickly in a film like *The Westerner*, seemed to me exemplary when I saw the film for the first time two years ago. But I think that it struck me so strongly only because I had gradually realized by then that the majority of American films were thoroughly subject to a kind of symbolic pressure. The American cinema thus finds itself enacting, in what is at once a very direct and indirect way, the most classic paradigms elaborated for the subject of Western culture by Freudian psychoanalysis. Its massive attempt at socio-historical representation is basically shaped by the type of subjectivity, and above all by the type of scenarization of subjectivity, whose logic was first recognized and imposed by psychoanalysis.

My constant surprise, while I was working on *North by Northwest*, was to discover to what degree everything was organized according to a classic Oedipal scenario which inscribed the subject, the hero of the film, in a precise position in relation to parricide and incest, and to observe that his itinerary, his trajectory—that is, the succession of actions which constitute the film—corresponded to a strict psychic progression and had as their function to engage the hero in the symbolic paths of Oedipus and of castration: namely, in this instance, to make him accept the symbolization of the death of the father, the displacement from the attachment to the mother to the attachment to another woman. Which simply means accepting the place of the subject in the Western family as it massively constituted itself during the 19th century. And what strikes me as absolutely fundamental in this perspective is that the American cinema is entirely dependent, as is psychoanalysis, on a system of representations in which the woman occupies a central place only to the extent that it's a place assigned to her by the logic of masculine desire.



94 The Woman's Symbolic Position, Enunciation, the Logic of Masculine Desire

JB: *It was that aspect you concentrated on in your analyses of Marnie and Psycho.*

RB: Yes. In these two analyses (the first segments of *Marnie* and *Psycho* as a whole), I tried to assess how, in two films in which women occupy a central place (Marnie is the heroine, and Janet Leigh is the star of *Psycho*), this place was determined by properly filmic means according to a very precise logic of enunciation: the same logic which in classical psychoanalysis is founded on a necessary differentiation between masculine and feminine sexuality, in order to finally fall back on the dominant model of masculine sexuality.

This gets crystallized in a particularly striking way in Hitchcock's films, but I think it's a determining factor in the American cinema as a whole. Of course one would have to draw fine distinctions between specific directors, genres, periods or films. But a number of precise analyses (of Hawk's films, of Minnelli, of Lang, of westerns, of musical comedies, of horror films, films of the fantastic, etc.) show clearly that the central place assigned to the woman is a place where she is figured, represented, inscribed in the fiction through the logical necessity of a general representation of the subject of desire in the film, who is always, first and last, a masculine subject.

JB: *And more and more you mark that subject as the enunciator.*

RB: The term "enunciator" as I use it marks both the person who possesses the right of speech within the film, and the source (*instance*) toward which the series of representations is logically channelled back. Metz has very rightly invoked, as far as the Hollywood film or fiction film is concerned, Benveniste's distinction between story (*histoire*) and discourse (*discours*), and he has shown that the fiction film is a film that always tends to disguise itself as story by effacing its own marks of enunciation. But I think it's important to point out that this effacement, which can be more or less strong (in the American cinema, it's probably least strong in the films of Hitchcock), is precisely the means, at once subtle and powerful, whereby a very strongly marked process of enunciation manifests itself, which defines and structures a certain subject of desire.

JB: *You might say that there are three levels operating here: first, the male characters within Hitchcock's films who very often act as relays*

for his point of view (as you show in your analysis of *Marnie*); second, Hitchcock as enunciator, le sujet du désir du film, le sujet masculin, the director; third, the male film analyst. Would you agree that, at a second remove from the fiction, you as the male film analyst continue this same fascination with a particular logic of desire and the law, which continues to accord the woman a place only insofar as she is an accessory to the male's Oedipal trajectory?

RB: That's a very difficult question—first because it's difficult in itself, second because it hides a trap.

JB: I'm asking about your motivation because I can't imagine a woman carrying out an analysis like "Le blocage symbolique," that is, having the same investment in following step by step, in minute detail, the Oedipal trajectory of the male hero. The desire to carry out the analysis must be linked to the logic of the enunciation as you construct it, or perhaps reconstruct it. You must have an interest in interrogating this sujet du désir du film.

RB: Obviously. That's exactly what I had in mind when I chose the words *blocage symbolique* (symbolic blocking) as a title, for they try to delimit the effect of endless interlocking and reflection which gets established between the different levels and the different dimensions of the filmic text, thus conferring a maximum textual expansion of the psychic trajectory of the hero. If I've wanted to go to the furthest possible point in understanding the power and subtlety of this textual pressure, it's quite simply because I myself am caught in it. It was as the subject whose desire is the prisoner of this machinery that I tried to demonstrate its functioning. In this sense the desire to analyze cannot help but manifest a certain ambiguity, since the analysis repeats the movement of the film in order to understand it, until inevitably it sets up a kind of second *blocage* in the writing itself, in the systematicity of the analysis. But in another sense it's also the only condition under which a certain *déblocage* (unblocking) can really occur, for me: by showing, in a way at once broad and precise, how and why and to what point this *blocage* occurs.

### Oedipus and Castration

JB: In the recent article on Dumas published in *L'Arc* ("Un jour, la castration"), you made a distinction between two Oedipal structures:

96 (1) *the structure which is the basis of human society, the universal prohibition on incest; and (2) the structure which psychoanalysis accounts for and which motivates the systems of representation that constitute the 19th century novel and classical film. You become increasingly critical of this second "complex."*

RB: My studies of certain 19th century literary works (in particular the Brontës a and Dumas's cycle of novels on pre-revolutionary and revolutionary France: *Joseph Balsamo*, *Le Collier de la reine*, *Ange Pitou*, *La Comtesse de Charny*) enabled me to understand and to experience concretely how during the 19th century a set of representations became elaborated largely founded, for a variety of historical reasons, on a profound transformation of the status of subjectivity. (This point is borne out not only by Foucault's "archeological" works but by the works of historians of collective mentalities and representations such as Philippe Ariès, Norbert Elias, or Jean-Yves Guioimar). This involves at the same time what seems to me a major reversal as far as psychoanalysis is concerned: to work in a psychoanalytic perspective on texts that more or less immediately precede the moment when psychoanalysis itself makes its appearance and becomes constituted allows one to understand psychoanalysis historically, to effect certain cleavages, to relativize the basic postulates which in psychoanalysis are endowed with a transcendental value of retrospective and atemporal truth. It especially allows one to see the Oedipus complex, and the castration complex which is linked to it, in an historical dimension. In this sense my work is part of a more general movement taking place in France, characterized by a certain putting into question and putting into perspective of psychoanalysis. One finds this in various forms and above all in various "tones" in the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault, and Castel, as well as in a feminist like Luce Irigaray, all of whom are attempting to question the status of psychoanalysis in order to understand how we find ourselves today in a society where it has taken on such importance. What I try to do in this book on Dumas is to understand the historical crystallization of a certain number of representations which from the 19th century on became increasingly internalized, in particular the representations tied to the problematic of the family and to the imaginary relationship between the sexes.

JB: *Although you are critical of this system of symbolic representations, when I read your articles, I feel a greater and greater sense of claustrophobia and frustration at being trapped within your reconstruction of it. As a consequence, it is hard to see what future textual analyses of classical film could bring, in your view, to an understanding*

*of how women function there since all possibilities collapse into one: the woman plays one or another role with respect to the male hero as he works through his conflicts about desire and the law.* 97

RB: How can I answer you? It seems to me that the classical American cinema is founded on a systematicity which operates very precisely at the expense of the woman, if one can put it that way, by determining her image, her images, in relation to the desire of the masculine subject who thus defines himself through this determination. Which means that the woman too finds herself involved, for herself, in relation to desire and the law, but in a perspective which always collapses the representations of the two sexes into the dominant logic of a single one. If women want to and are able to do analyses of these films and find representations both of themselves and of the relations between the sexes which will satisfy them, by all means let them do so: I would be very eager to see the results, even though I can't help feeling a bit skeptical. The great American fiction films constitute a universe with which I felt and still feel completely taken and fascinated, even if it's in a different way. "I loved the cinema. I don't love it anymore. I love it still."—that's what Metz used to say, most aptly, in trying to situate in a general way his relationship to the cinema-object and the place of theoretical work in the management of this relationship. Analysis has been for me a kind of distantiating, a disentangling of the fascination, which can only be effected through the reconstruction of what founds it, that is the reality of *blocage* in the very power of its textual development. If you, as a woman, don't find you have a place in this, I can perfectly well understand it. But you ought to ask yourself about what seems to attract you too so strongly in these films, and also about the attention you accord to my work. To put it a bit hastily, for of course things are somewhat more complicated than that, I think that a woman can love, accept and give a positive value to these films only from her own masochism, and from a certain sadism that she can exercise in return on the masculine subject, within a system loaded with traps. All of which is far from being negligible!

JB: *I can see how this follows from your line of reasoning, but I think the play of identifications in classical film allows for more possibilities than that.\* Since we haven't the space to pursue this here, let me change the subject. What, in your view, does the concept of enunciation bring to textual analysis?*

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\*See in this issue "Enunciation and Sexual Difference," Janet Bergstrom.

98 RB: It is fundamental. All the studies of literature which have been inspired by linguistics and particular by the works of Benveniste have shown the importance of the concept of enunciation. In cinema as elsewhere, one must know who is the subject of discourse.

When I use the word "enunciator" to designate the subject of discourse who is at work in the cycle of novels by Dumas that I'm working on, I'm designating a type of subject that established itself very strongly, very imposingly, in romanticism and especially in French romanticism. A subject endowed with a kind of infinite power, constituted as the place from which the set of representations are ordered and organized, and toward which they are channeled back. For that reason, this subject is the one who sustains the very possibility of any representation, of any historical reality. Balsamo/Cagliostro is the enunciator to the extent that throughout the narrative there is formed between him and the narrator-author, Dumas, a relationship of duplication, of identification and of projection which virtually attempts to re-center the body of the narrative around a central power defined by his subjectivity, his being in discourse.

JB: *So enunciation is very closely related to the notion of textual system for you.*

RB: Yes. If one analyzes Dumas's novel in some detail, for example, one observes that everything in the novel—events, actions, relations between characters—is ultimately channeled back, through a series of carefully built networks, to the character of Balsamo, and also that it's through the expansion of his own words that everything is diffused throughout the narrative.

The same way in Hitchcock's films it's striking how one can constantly move back, through the insistence on point of view and subjective shots, on vision and on the places assigned to each of the characters in the organization of the narrative, to a central point from which all these different visions emanate: the place, at once productive and empty, of the subject-director. It's to the extent that Hitchcock himself has been extremely conscious of this crisscrossing effect between his vision (the vision of the *mise en scène*) and that of the different characters, that he's chosen to appear within his films to mark ironically by a kind of initial a certain place which is precisely the place of the enunciator. This shot, as I showed in "Hitchcock, The Enunciator," always inscribes him more or less at a certain point of the phantasmatic logic of the narrative, and that is how, jokingly, he seeks to signal that there is indeed a subject of filmic discourse as he, Hitchcock, enunciates it.

Doubtless this subject is more clearly determinable in certain narratives, certain films, than in others. But there always exists, more or less masked or more or less marked, a certain place of enunciation. To repeat myself, the effacement of the marks of enunciation that Metz talks about when he says that the classical film always tends toward “story” (*histoire*) is the specific process by which classical narrative in most cases ends up designating, beneath the apparent “naturalness” of the narrative but often more vividly than one thinks, the place of a certain subject of discourse and consequently of a certain subject of desire.

JB: *It seems to me that, much as one hears about the effect of naturalness in Hollywood films, the films you are most interested in are in fact very abstract. I'm thinking not only of the Hitchcock films you've written about, but also of other favorites of yours—Under Capricorn, Moonfleet, The Thousand Eyes of Dr. Mabuse.*

RB: It's true that I've generally been interested in films that already found themselves in a more or less discursive position toward their object, both on the level of the process of enunciation and on the level of the effects of crystallization of what I call the *blocage symbolique*. It's as if the films had already done some of the work that analysis had to continue, to order and to reconstruct. That may be the reason why these films appear very abstract.

But I think that this is also to some extent an illusion. In fact the abstraction of these films increases proportionately with the theoretical work that has been done on them, or that might be done on them: after a certain point in the development of the work, there comes into being a shadow that's constantly thrown by the theory on its objects. Actually, many more American films than one might think manifest, in the most various ways, a very high degree of abstraction. That's precisely the *tour de force* of this cinema—that it's been able to pass off this abstraction as part of what is “natural” or “believable” (*vraisemblable*). I'm thinking here of the exemplary readings done by Thierry Kuntzel on films that seemed at first glance totally different, genre films and serials like *The Most Dangerous Game* or *King Kong*, which have led him within his own perspective to very similar conclusions.

JB: *What connection do you see between the way you conceive of Lang or Hitchcock as enunciators and the politique des auteurs?*

RB: The *politique des auteurs* taught us, at a given time which was already a while ago, to look more carefully at a certain number of films,

100 to see them independently of sheer chance and the contingencies of production; it showed us that there existed a logic, an autonomy specific to certain works and certain authors. What I'm trying to do by insisting on enunciation is to show that a certain subject is speaking under certain conditions in particular films. This logic of enunciation can more or less correspond to the category designated by the name and the work of an author (it certainly corresponds perfectly in the case of Hitchcock and Lang). But it can also apply much more generally to a genre or to the production of a given company at a specific moment in their history. Let's say that textual analysis both specifies and revitalizes the question raised by the *Cahiers du Cinéma* under the heading of *politique des auteurs*.

### Hypnosis and the Cinematographic Apparatus

JB: *You have been working on hypnosis and its relation to the cinematographic apparatus for several years. To what extent did this work come out of particular textual analyses of Lang's films (the Mabuse series, for example) or Dumas's novels?*

RB: My interest in hypnosis came about as a result of my work on Dumas's cycle of novels. The enunciative mastery of the hero, Balsamo/Cagliostro, which determines the organization of the narrative, is in fact wholly determined by his hypnotic power. He accedes to knowledge and from knowledge to discourse only through the mediation of a feminine character, his seer, who in turn inscribes him in a general network of symbolic representations in which I find the logic of Oedipus and of castration as the very foundation of the possibility of discourse. It was at that point that I began to ask myself about hypnosis and to envisage the possible relationships between the hypnotic apparatus and the cinematographic apparatus. By the hypnotic apparatus I mean the therapeutic-scientific situation which began with Mesmer at the end of the 18th century and developed throughout the 19th century up to Charcot and Bernheim, which was first used and then conceptualized by Freud (especially in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*), and which since then has been the object of a certain number of historical, theoretical and experimental works, especially in France (Chertok, Rausky, Lacanians like Nassif and Miller) and in the United States (Kubie, Margolin, Gill, Brennan, etc.), not to mention the many Soviet works I haven't read.

Obviously my thinking has also been stimulated by certain films such as those of Lang of course, especially the Mabuse cycle, which accord a primary importance to the hypnotic apparatus in terms com-

parable to those of Dumas, to the extent that Lang endows Mabuse with a kind of power in the production of the narrative due to the hypnotic powers he possesses. Here was yet another link between the art of the 19th century novel and the classical cinema, German or American.

But it is also clear that these fictionalized filmic representations of hypnosis are the manifestations, the pre-theoretization, of a fundamental relationship between the cinematographic apparatus and the hypnotic apparatus. One can see it very well in Minnelli's *The Pirate*. If Lang endowed the character of Mabuse with a hypnotic power that makes him the enunciator of the narrative, it was because he was acutely aware of the link between cinema and hypnosis.

JB: *In Lang's films, you see this represented as an insistence on vision as power—within the fiction, and by analogy beyond it. You wrote about this in slightly different terms, and about Lang's particular use of point of view shots, in "On Fritz Lang" (1966).*

RB: Yes, these point of view shots seem perpetually to reinscribe within the filmic system the hypnotic power concentrated in the character of Mabuse, that sovereign and theoretical figure in whom Lang concentrated all the power of vision which he subsequently redistributed throughout his films, thus attributing to him the strictly hypnotic power of the cinematographic apparatus.

Starting with these reflections and these points of reference, I've thus moved to a position where my work, similar in that respect to the recent works of Metz and of Baudry, is on a level at once very general and quite specifically metapsychological. On the one hand my work rejoins Metz's and especially Baudry's analyses of regression, whereby the film state comes very close to the dream state. But the notion of hypnotic regression carries with it a quite interesting element of precision, since in the film as in hypnosis one is at a level of simulation which allows for a more exact comparison between the cinema-effect and the hypnotic process than between the cinema-effect and the dream. On the other hand, I establish the connection between the film state and hypnosis by referring to the psychoanalytic notion of the ego ideal as it is developed by Freud in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*. This allows us to understand more clearly how the cinema produces a deep identification, both subjective and social, which explains the very great fascination it exercises.

This approach, which it is impossible for me to describe in detail here, is also interesting from an historical point of view. As I mentioned earlier, my research led me to try to understand how over the course of the 19th century there developed a new form of subjectivity which



102 resulted in an increased internalization of the Oedipus complex and the castration complex. It seems to me that one has a better grasp of this movement the moment one realizes that it's part of a generalized extension and redistribution of the function of the image in the 19th century.

JB: *Would you elaborate on that?*

RB: Yes, but briefly, because we are entering here into the very problematic field of a global history of representations. It was the period between the late 18th and the late 19th century that saw the invention of hypnosis and photography, psychoanalysis and cinema. These are the signs of a very strong epistemological configuration which assigned a rather new place to the subject in Western culture—a place that was increasingly linked to the formation of certain images of time, of the past and of memory. Throughout the 19th century, we can in fact see the gradual formation of a very important, very powerful image-making tendency that became radicalized at the end of the century by two inventions which seem to have inherited, each on its own level, all of the elements that were crystallizing during those years around hypnosis, both medically and mythically. One was a mechanical invention that made possible for the first time the imaginary reproduction of movement and life; the other was a psychological theory which explained the destiny of the human subject in terms of the formation of a set of representations, of phantasies, and in terms of the subject's attachment to certain images determined and welded together by the logic of the family romance, itself gradually structured by the development of the bourgeois family and in particular by all the elements associated with the bourgeois family's representation of the child.

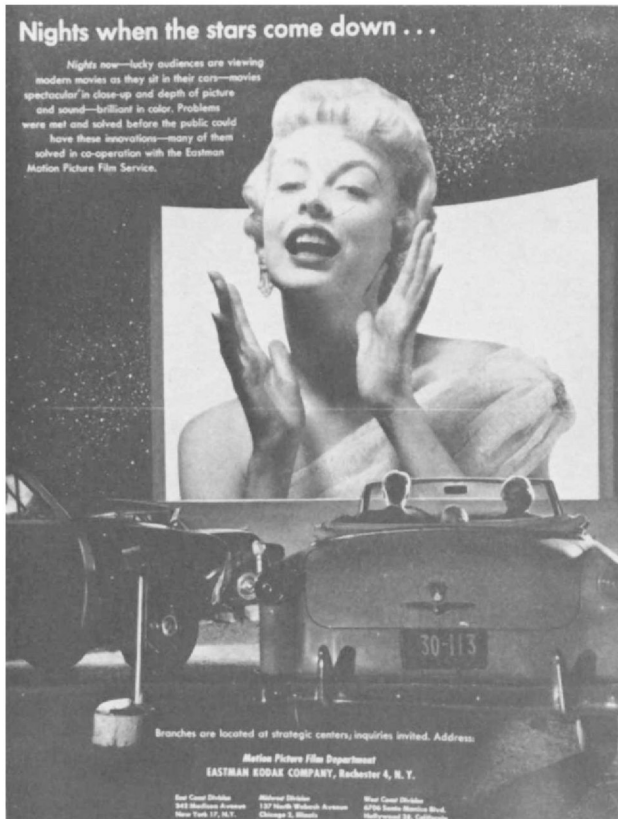
If there exists such a link between psychoanalysis and cinema, I think we have to understand it on two very closely articulated levels. First of all, there was in both cases the invention of an apparatus (*dispositif*), of a stage or scene (*scène*): the filmic apparatus on the one hand, the unconscious on the other. Both of these bring into play, each according to its own logic and the former in reference to the latter, a production of images and words which classical psychoanalysis organizes around the desire for a lost object. (On this point, for the cinema-apparatus, see Baudry's analysis in "The Apparatus.") We have here, if you will, what is most fundamental in both psychoanalysis and in cinema (even if one doesn't conceive of this production of desire in terms of a lack, as Deleuze or Lyotard do, but rather in terms of pure positivity). Then there is also a link one could call secondary (even if it is a determining link) between this stage of the unconscious and its structuring (*structuration*) by the forms of the family romance, just as

there is a link between the invention of the cinema-apparatus and the enormous, immediate hold exercised over it by narrativity—in particular by the repeated scenarizations of the family romance, which became the object of classical cinema, especially of the American cinema.

It is within this framework that one can situate and find the points of articulation between hypnosis and cinema, as well as the various other things we've talked about, the moment one poses the problem which I can see has been more and more important in my own work: the problem of the status of woman and of the masculine subject who defines himself in relation to her, both in the classical cinema and in classical narrative.

JB: *And the relationship between hypnosis and falling in love?*

RB: I will answer, if you will allow me, with an image that will condense the liveliest moments of our conversation.



*The Film Daily*, Oct. 2, 1953

Translated by Susan Suleiman