THE ROUTLEDGE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF FILM THEORY

Edited by
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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

RHETORIC, FILM AND

Rhetoric is the technique and theory of discourse composition, with particular reference to persuasive speech. It originated in classical Greek and Latin culture, and was revived in the context of the linguistic and semiotic wave in the 1970s (*see* SEMIOTICS OF FILM). Rhetoric has been applied to film studies with three different meanings: (1) The study of film as a persuasive discourse, that is, as a kind of discourse implying, conveying, and naturalizing ideologies (for instance within the colonial film studies field). David Bordwell (1989) argues that many theories and analyses of film are determined by networks of underlying assumptions. (2) The study of film as narrative discourse, both in its fictional (Chatman 1990) and non-fictional (Plantinga 1997) manifestations. (3) The study of rhetorical figures present in the film; within the modern film studies field, this trend implies an analogy between the discourse of the film and conscious or unconscious mental processes. In this entry we focus on this third sense, as it constitutes the most original contribution of film studies to the renewal of rhetoric.

Christian Metz introduced the debate with his essay 'Metaphor / Metonymy, or the Imaginary Referent' (1982), based on linguistic and psychoanalytic studies of rhetorical figures. Many scholars commented on Metz's arguments during the 1980s, and pointed out both the limits and the potentiality of his essay. However, the most radical criticisms of Metz's work (as well as a more profitable recovery) were made in the 1990s, after the so-called 'visual turn'.

Metaphor, metonymy, condensation, displacement

Linguist Roman Jakobson (1956) argues that each utterance requires two operations: the 'selection' of units within a repository of possibilities, and their 'combination' in the context of a discourse. Therefore, every word is related to the other units of language on the basis of two sets of relationships: 'substitution' and 'contexture'.

Within each set, two kinds of relations are possible: similarity or contiguity. On the axis of selection, the words are linked by similarity (I can say 'fire' instead of 'gaslight') or by contiguity, spatial, temporal, and causal (I can say 'glass' for 'window'). Otherwise, on the axis of combination, the connections of concepts in the discourse can be made by similarity (as in poetry) or by contiguity (as in narrative prose or film). There are, therefore, two methods of connecting words and concepts; Jakobson uses rhetorical terms and calls them respectively 'metaphor' (connection by similarity) and 'metonymy' (connection by contiguity).

Lacan (2006, originally published in 1966) recovers some of Jakobson's ideas in the context of his own rethinking of Freud's theories. Lacan argues that Freud's concept of the unconscious is to be reformulated as 'the Other's discourse' (436), that is, a discourse uttered by a Subject Other than ourselves who nevertheless is 'the core of our being' (437). The laws of the unconscious are manifested especially in the analysis of dreams. Here the discourse of the unconscious appears as a flow of signifiers (equivalent to letters and words of verbal discourse) which refer to their meanings through two major operations of distortion (Freud's concept of *Entstellung*): 'displacement' (*Verschiebung*) and 'condensation' (*Verdichtung*). As the unconscious is identified with a discourse, and since this discourse is essentially modelled on verbal speech, Lacan identifies displacement with metonymy and condensation with metaphor. More generally, Lacan assimilates metonymy into the wish or desire, as a force of constant and infinite progress which moves the discourse of the unconscious, and metaphor into the symptom, as a form of expression which can use either the body or the words of the subject (for example, in slips of the tongue or in jokes).

Lyotard (2011, originally published in 1971) radically criticized Lacan's thesis from a philosophical point of view. According to Lyotard, two opposite types of spaces are present in written text: the 'discourse', represented by the conceptual and formal entity of the letter, and the 'figure', linked to the energetic and innovative line. Western culture has been dominated by the model of knowledge and thought of the discourse (logocentrism); indeed, the figure has intervened just to distort the forms of discourse with its vital strength (for example, in medieval miniatures, graphic experiments of Mallarmé, drawings by Paul Klee, etc.). Lyotard identifies the figure with Freud's psychic primary processes (*Primär-vorgang*) and the discourse with the secondary processes (*Sekundärvorgang*): the figure is the blind and free energy of the unconscious desire, which the discourse must 'bind' and organize at a conscious level.

From this point of view, the unconscious and the dream cannot be assimilated to a discourse whose model is verbal speech – as in Lacan's theory. The unconscious is purely figurative and a-discursive, while the 'dream-work' (Freud's *Traumarbeit*) is the distortion of the traces of secondary materials (discourse) handled by the primary process (figure). Lacan, by recovering Jakobson's linguistic categories, confuses the 'signified' with the 'signification', that is the meaning as formally encoded with the meaning as constantly reinvented.

Christian Metz's 'Metaphor / Metonymy, or the Imaginary Referent'

In his essay, Metz applies the ideas of Jakobson, Lacan, and Lyotard to film studies. This shift of concepts is legitimized by a homology between verbal utterances, the unconscious, and films; indeed, these three 'machines' all adopt the same operating principle: the discourse. Metz exposes this framework both in the introduction and in the conclusion of his essay.

In the first part of the essay, Metz discusses Jakobson's ideas. He introduces a distinction that is not always so clear in Jakobson. On the one hand, there are the modes of appearance of linguistic terms within the discursive string (i.e. the 'positional' or 'discursive' axis, also called 'syntagm' by structural linguistics). On the other hand, there are the kinds of relationship between their meanings (i.e. the 'semantic' or 'referential' axis, or 'paradigm'). Metaphor and metonymy are defined within the referential axis: in the case of metaphor,

we find a relation of 'comparability' (a term which Metz prefers to that of Jakobson's 'similarity') between meanings; otherwise, in the case of metonymy we find relations of 'contiguity'. Yet, the two rhetorical figures may have different positions within the discursive axis. Here, Metz retains the same locutions of 'contiguity' and 'similarity', not without a slight confusion and imprecision; accordingly, he defines 'discourse contiguity' as the presence of two contiguous terms of the rhetorical figure within the discursive chain, and 'discourse comparability' as the substitution of one term by another.

A typology with four terms derives from here: (1) 'Referential comparability and discursive contiguity, that is, a metaphor presented syntagmatically' (189): for example, the flock of sheep juxtaposed to a crowd of workers in the opening of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* (1936). (2) 'Referential comparability and discursive comparability. This is the metaphor presented paradigmatically' (189). For instance, the stereotyped representation of flames in the place of a love scene. (3) 'Referential contiguity and discursive comparability, or metonymy presented paradigmatically' (190), as in the case of the lost balloon which stands for the murdered child in Fritz Lang's *M* (1931). (4) 'Referential contiguity and discursive contiguity, or metonymy presented syntagmatically' (190), as in the preceding images of the same film, when we see the child still alive and holding the balloon.

In the second part of the essay, Metz discusses the psychoanalytical approach to rhetoric. First, he borrows the Freudian distinction between primary and secondary processes; furthermore, he borrows from Lyotard the equivalence between the primary processes and linguistic innovations, on the one hand, and the secondary processes and coding, on the other. However, in contrast to Lyotard (and in the wake of Lacan) Metz believes that the two processes are not reciprocally opposite and isolated. On the contrary, innovation and coding define a common space of mutual action: 'the word then appears as a secondarised deposit – this is the moment of the code – forever "positioned" between two primary forces of attraction, one of which has preceded it in the history of the language, the other (the same one, resurrected) having the capacity to "take it back" at any moment, in poetry, in dreams, in spontaneous conversation, and set in motion again' (240).

Second, Metz discusses the concepts of condensation and displacement. In this case his thinking deviates from Lacan, as Metz argues that the two concepts cannot be identified with metaphor and metonymy. Indeed, condensation and displacement are kinds of movement of meaning – that is, ways of building relationships between referential elements – while the rhetorical figures are the results of such movements and processes. As a consequence, we can find both a movement of condensation which produces a metonymy (e.g. when the image of a face overlaps with that of the subject's recollections) and a movement of displacement which produces a metaphor (e.g. when a tracking shot or an editing cut puts a human face and a resembling animal side by side).

In conclusion, psychoanalytic tools provide two new axes for the analysis of filmic figures. Scholars have to situate figures 'in relation to four independent axes: any one figure is secondarised to a greater or lesser extent; closer to the metaphor, or closer to metonymy; manifests condensation especially or displacement especially, or an intimate combination of the two operations; is syntagmatic or paradigmatic' (275). As an example, Metz analyses the lap-dissolve.

In the final part of his long essay, Metz observes a further possibility: that condensation and displacement operate directly on the visual signifier. In this case 'a semantic trajectory brings about an alteration, however slight or localised, in a previously constituted and stable unit of signifier' (284). In other words, we find a manipulation of the visual signifier

which de-secondarizes already coded figures. Regarding this point, Metz reapproaches Lyotard's key idea: primary processes directly work on and distort the products of secondary processes in a creative and unusual way.

The development of the debate

Marc Vernet claims that Metz's essay has been little utilized within film theory (1990, 223). Nevertheless, many scholars discussed the essay during the 1980s.

Williams (1981) retrieves Metz's categories within her analysis of surrealist films; at the same time she revisits many of Metz's positions. Firstly, not all films are homologous to the discourse of the unconscious: surrealist films reproduce the dynamics of dream better than ordinary fiction movies. Second, this peculiarity is due to the disturbed hierarchy between 'figures' and 'diegesis' (that is the usually coherent fictional narrative world): 'the peculiar emphasis of figure over diegesis … reverses the usual function of the figure in narrative film' (214). Thanks to such proceedings, the 'figures of desire' rework and distort the film diegesis. Williams then borrows Lyotard's opposition between discourse and figure; however, she replaces the verbal with the narrative on the side of discourse, and the iconic with the rhetorical on the side of the figural.

Andrew (1984) also points out, in opposition to Metz, the value of 'innovation' of filmic rhetorical figures, in particular to metaphor. Andrew borrows from the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur the idea that metaphor constitutes an event of reconfiguration and reinvention of the discursive semantic spaces. In this sense, 'we may say that metaphor can occur as the calculated introduction of dissonance into any stage of the film process [i.e.] into perception, signification, structure, adaptation and genre' (Andrew 1984, 167). As a consequence, metaphor shifts the theory from the structural approach of the 1970s, such as that of Metz, to a hermeneutic one: 'structuralism will not recognize the event of cinematic discourse. It will always and only provide a description of the system, which is put into use in the event. If, as I claim with Ricoeur, the system is altered by the event, if (to make a stronger claim) the system was born and exists only as a residue of such events of figuration, then we need a broader vision of the creation of meaning in films' (170).

Rhetorical figures and film after the 'visual turn'

During the 1990s, the humanities were involved in a 'visual' or 'pictorial' turn. Within this new framework, images are studied as spaces of development and manifestation of invisible forces and events, such as sensory, mental, psychic, or intellectual processes. Hence, the logocentrism is radically deconstructed: image produces signification by its own means; it neither reproduces verbal signification, nor needs to distort verbal discourse (as Lyotard thought). This new intellectual environment has had a contradictory effect on Metz's positions. On the one hand, it implies a critique of the transfer of linguistic-rhetorical categories to the film; on the other hand, however, the visual turn allows film scholars to recast several issues introduced by Metz.

Aumont (1996, especially chap. 8) is an exemplary intervention. He insists that images, and therefore films, 'think': images are sensory and material objects that are able to visualize the process of creating, combining, manipulating concepts. Aumont calls this force of thought of the image 'figure'. The film work is figural and figurative: therefore, film produces concepts.

However, Aumont distinguishes between the term 'figure' as designating iconic, material objects and the same term as referring to rhetorical tropes: in particular, Aumont traces (in the wake of the philologist Eric Auerbach) two different developments of the same term. Moreover, figural processes of signification are completely independent of the verbal rhetoric.

In conclusion, most recent interventions radicalize both Metz's intuitions and the critiques of the 1980s scholars. As a consequence, they recast the rhetoric of film in two respects. First, they locate processes of meaning on the filmic signifiers, which are seen in all their sensory richness and conceptual inventiveness. Second, they transform the kind of relationship between film and psychic processes. This relationship is no longer based on homology, but on causation: film figures neither reproduce nor reveal psychic process; they produce and drive the movements of thinking. Using the key terms of this entry, we can say that the relationship between cinema and thought has shifted from a metaphorical to a metonymical position. On this basis, the project of a new rhetoric of film is still largely to be built.

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