

## The Folding Conversation of Cinema

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**Abstract** For decays, cinema is considered as the practice of signs and images within the trajectory of linguistic sign functioning. Even though deciphering cinematic art in such a framework can explain the relational dimensions of the images/shots, it can not shed light on the actual affect of the art of cinema. That is because aesthetic and analytic communication is two disparate forms of language and two different communication systems. Whereas the former relies on intuitive and disinterested relations and requires un-graspable communication, the latter requires cause and effect continuity while the meaning unfolds as the signs follow one after another, either with words or images. If we consider language as a simple sign functioning, the meaning will disclose as the conversation continues. A sentence or a word or an image would designate the following one. If we consider the aesthetic dimensions of cinema, such linguistic explanation on the language of cinema is not adequate to understand neither the image-being nor the affect communicated by the work. Therefore, any analytic approach borrowed from linguistics to define a work of cinematic art can not help us understand the real value and communication that is structured by the ontic principle of the cinematic art's image-being. In this paper, to un-conceal the language cinema speaks, we will look into the structure of the cinematographic-image and decipher the aesthetic communication conveyed by the image.

**Keywords:** Language, Aesthetics, Fold, Christian Metz, Gilles Deleuze

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### 1. Cinematic Language

Linguistic semiology has an important place in film theory and criticism. It emphasizes how films convey meaning through codes and conventions, which is similar to how language is used to construct meaning in communication. Film semioticians justify using structural linguistics to study cinema by saying that natural language and cinematic language have resemblances, and with those resemblances, they disclose the underlying reality of images in cinema. According to this approach, as in language, cinematic language also has its codes, system of signs, and conventions, i.e., cinematic language builds on sign functioning.

Christian Metz is the pioneer in applying linguistics or Saussure's semiology to film. In his essays *The Cinema: Language or Language System?* and *The Problem of Film Semiotics*, he

does not simply point out the resemblances of language and cinema, but instead, through the missing part of the language, he builds his film semiotics. He argues that the smallest unit of linguistics in cinema is missing: a word. The smallest unit of any film, a shot, can only be considered a 'sentence' such as 'man is walking'. Therefore the image is un-coded; it «becomes what it shows, to the extent that it does not have to signify it» (Metz 1974: 76). For that reason, Metz argues that we can not apply linguistic semiotics to the cinema. In cinema, the image is always an actualized unit, and it is reduced to a proposition or rather a kind of oral utterance. So even though the image is always a type of speech, it is never a language unit. He says that «the image and the statement: Both are actualized units, whereas the word in itself is a purely potential unit of code» (*Ivi*: 101). According to Metz, a moving image of cinema does not have potentiality, but rather it appears as an actualized statement. Thus the shot turns into expression rather than signification. In cinema, at first, expressiveness is the expressiveness of the world, and 'meaning' naturally derives from the signifier without resorting to code. Denotation always precedes artistic expression. Only by connotation «film of Visconti's from a medical documentary» (*Ivi*: 76-77) can be distinguished. It is because of the usage of connotation a film becomes a work of art. On the other hand, the spoken language starts with inexpressive denotation and requires a response; only after the layer of the expressive connotation becomes literature. Unlike spoken sentences, a film does not automatically entail a direct answer since it is an expression. Hence cinema is not a plain conversation. Instead, similar to literature, cinema requires a connotative layer within the image, or rather through the power of montage. It is only through the composed shot that “cinematographic language” begins. Nevertheless, Metz stresses that cinematic language is not a language system, and linguistics cannot be applied to it; it is only by a montage that un-coded shots become a part of the syntactical language system and create syntactical-basis syntax rather than a morphological one. In cinema, there is a nonlinguistic system of communication in the form of discourse; i.e., cinematic language has in some way organized sentence patterns.

This application of semiotics to film, as stated previously, can explain the relational dimensions of the images/shots, but it would be feeble to search for the actual affect of the art of cinema through it. In his article *Christian Metz and Aesthetics*, Martin Lefebvre argues that Metz suggests a view on film aesthetics in his theory. According to him, «the aesthetic occupies in Metz's intellectual trajectory» (Lefebvre 2018: 151) can be divided into three aesthetic moves: expressiveness, stylistics, and poetics. He argues that regardless of all the critics on Metz's structural approach to film dismissing the artistic part, Metz follows Mikel Dufrenne and the line of thinking in Dufrenne's book *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*. According to Dufrenne, «the work of art says something directly – something beyond its intelligible meaning – and reveals a certain affective quality which may not be easy to translate but can nevertheless be experienced distinctly» (Dufrenne 1965: 326). When Dufrenne says that the work of art presents «something beyond its intelligible meaning» that “something” expressed can not be something connoted in the image that is actualized and structured like a sentence. Because that "something" is always in muteness, and it can never be translated. On the other hand, Lefebvre describes Metz's aesthetic view on cinema as:

For Metz, therefore, cinema as an art form possesses a dual expressiveness: “aesthetic expressiveness is grafted onto natural expressiveness – that of the landscape or face the film shows us” in such a way that in film '[o]ne is forever shifting from art to non-art, and vice-versa (Lefebvre 2018: 156).

Lefebvre comes to such conclusion through the examples from Metz's answer sheets which he has prepared for his own students. In that sheet, to suggest poetic dimension in the text, Metz says «secret 'relations' with the tangible features of the real event that the sentence sets out to evoke» (Metz 1965: 5). Lefebvre stresses the potential poetic, which Metz finds in language to prove there is an aesthetic dimension in Metz's film semiotics.

However, cinema has a different form of artistic expression than literature; any form of art can not be understood through another form because such perception builds on the extracted structure that is borrowed. Regardless of any attempt to unveil aesthetic moves, the method will not be adequate. Therefore, even from the view of Lefebvre, Metz's structural view on cinema is far from any aesthetic dimension. Generally the application of semiotics to film is not adequate to define cinema as an art form even though such sign functioning can decode the coded images. The reason is that such approach considers the work of cinema not as an art form but rather as a simple sign functioning process that is waiting to be deciphered.

## 2. Cinematographic Image

From cave paintings to today's visual arts, humankind always wanted to share the appearances of the mind. Nevertheless, recorded moving images, this sacred perception is not simply presented as the film of appearances in mind, but rather, as it is in the movie *Being John Malkovich* (Jonze 1999), like going into someone else's mind and watching through it, suggested itself as an alternative perception within the world of appearances. The art of cinema overlaps the actual perception as an alternative perception, and such image co-exists as another topological layer. This topological governing is the ontic principle<sup>1</sup> of cinema. Being a topological entity is only possible because of the nature<sup>2</sup> of cinema that separates it from any other visual or fine arts and gives its form.

Cinema is the art of a unique image that we call cinematographic-image; thus, to understand cinema's communicative power, we must understand the cinematographic-image in which we can find the true nature of cinema. The image-being of the art of cinema is about kinetics, i.e., motion. This most fundamental character separates cinema from any other visual or fine arts and gives its uniqueness. Light, color, and technology are the parts of visual quality, and they are the apparatuses of visual art rather than being unique to cinema. On the other hand, the narrative does not belong to cinema precisely, but rather borrowed from literature, and in time, for good or worse, it became the most critical content. Nevertheless, the narrative does not empower the cinematic art but rather the opposite: the unique artistic expression of cinema can empower the narration. The movement being the fundamental aspect of the cinematic practice is not a strange or profound statement, but we need to ask ourselves about the nature of this motion to decipher the actual cinematic language. In physical reality, the motion of a cinematic work is constituted on a series of static pictures, 24 frames per second. On the other hand, a single static shot has no cinematic communication. It is not different from any photograph. This static shot does not contain movement, even though it is a part of the movement. Any work of the art of cinema is an ongoing movement of snapshots on a celluloid film, and the image can only suggest movement. Therefore, movement is not in the image as a singular motion, but rather it resolves as the continuity. To be in the continuum is the nature of this image and conditions the ontic principle of being a topological entity. This entity can only exhibit itself as another layer on the phenomenological world of appearances rather than part of it.

As a topological entity within its movement, the cinematographic-image expresses an

idea and awaits a response. In the end, this entity can only exist if there is someone to see it as it is running. The spectator encounters the alternative perception within the forms of space and time, but the image overlaps with its reality and time. Cinematographic-image, as an alternative perception in time, interrupts the world of the spectator for a response. Thus cinematographic-image is not simply the image in motion; unlike Metz argued, the true communicative power of cinematographic-image is that it always requires a response. In such communication, an image, like an image of thought, can produce conceptual objects through the practice of images and signs. Gilles Deleuze, in his books *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, says;

Cinema is not a universal or a primitive language system [langue], nor a language [langage]. It brings to light an intelligible content, which is like a preposition, a condition, a necessary correlate through which language constructs its own 'objects' (signifying units and operations) (Deleuze 1985: 251).

Deleuze's hostile approach to the structuralist view of signs and rejecting the linguistic terms is well known. Nevertheless, in *Proust and Signs*, Deleuze constructs a circle of signs and defines a sign as the trigger behind thinking.

What forces us to think is the sign. The sign is the object of encounter, but it is precisely the contingency of the encounter that guarantees the necessity of what it leads us to think. The act of thinking does not proceed from a simple natural possibility; on the contrary, it is the only true creation. Creation is the genesis of the act of thinking within thought itself. This genesis implicates something that does violence to thought... to think is always to interpret-to explicate, to develop, to decipher, to translate a sign (Deleuze 1964: 97).

*Swan's Way* has a structural role rather than an example of literature in *Proust and Signs*. Through the characters created by Proust, Deleuze deciphers how the memory works and sets out his philosophy. For him, signs do not create a system; instead, they have different dimensions. The circle of signs starts with the world of social life. In this circle, signs replace thinking in action. These are the emptiest signs of all. They are entirely vacuous. We cannot remain in the world of social, but we cannot do without it. There is a time lost, time wasted in this world, and we are nervous here. The second circle turns inward; it is the sign of love. To love someone is to explicate to develop, and thus love drives for the interpreting. The signs of love are constitutively deceitful, and the contradiction here, which is fundamental, pushes us inward. Sensuous signs are the ones that are awaking us. They are not time remained, but through the involuntary memory, they give us joy and allow us to retrace our steps rather than be understood. Sensuous signs are works of art. Artworks are in a different time where things are preserved. They emancipate from personality and stand on their own. They transform perceptions and affections; thus, they are composite sensations. This circle of signs triggers the involuntary memory, involuntary thinking, and, unlike philosophy, involuntarily search for the truth;

Proust sets up an image of thought in opposition to that of philosophy. He attacks what is most essential in a classical philosophy of the rationalist type: the prepositions of this philosophy (*Ivi*: 94).

The concept of “image of thought” has an essential part in Deleuze’s philosophy, and we can see its evolution through his works. The concept sets in with the idea that thinking is not a natural faculty. For Deleuze, in *Logic of Sense*, the image of thought represents the dogmatic philosophy and argues that it precedes thinking. His usage of the image of thought changes, and it becomes equated with the plane of immanence. This positive view of the image of thought is like a nest that provides an encounter of being. Thought responds to an encounter; answers the situation that tears the self. There is no natural aim for the truth; it is only involuntarily in the structure of signs. First, there is a violence of lies, the violence of signs. Only after there is an interpretation as the search for the time lost, such search is temporal development, an attempt to complete time. Nonetheless, instead of reaching the unity of time, time folds in itself, searching for the lost time. This act of folding is the system of truth; «every truth is a truth of time» (*Ibidem*). The truth is not in the object nor in the subject; «truths remain arbitrary and abstract» (*Ivi*: 95). Only by chance, development of time gets triggered, and each of them has a specific point of interpretation to propose a response on the level of creation. Such development and the level of creation take place in the virtual field called memory.

Memory is an obscure territory; it is not in me but outside myself. Only through the temporal search can anyone turn the memory inward. Memory is triggered by the encounter of an object like Madaline. The object that starts the memory is just a chance, the trigger. The time of the essence, which is created as the eruption in the present, is a kind of loop. The variations give the quality of the present. The basic argument in *Proust and Signs* is that remembering cannot be an attempt to retrieve the past to achieve a unity of time. The past recovered is a retro action that is created in the event of the present, and this is the only possible unity of time; it is the synthetic whole. Creating the newly present present involuntary memory plays a supportive role and places the subject towards the sensuous signs. By such triggering, time regained can be reached; it is the time that is not remembered from any past. «The great theme of Time regained is that the search for truth is the characteristic adventure of the involuntary» (*Ibidem*). Through art, we can reach the super-logical essences more directly. Essence Deleuze talks about is pretty far from substantial essence. The essence here is not something given; the essence is different. As the principle of individuation, essence mobilizes in the subject. In other words, the virtual movement of the underlying current, *duré*, comes out as the change, the novelty.

In the case of cinematographic-image Deleuze explains this as the flow of present;

It is not quite right to say that the cinematographic image is in the present. What in the present is, what the image 'represents' but not the image itself... The image itself is the system of the relationships of time from which the variable present only flows (Deleuze 1985: XII).

According to him, the temporality of the variable present of the image cannot be defined simply with the chronological present-past-future relations and by their alterations. Even though the captured past is becoming the present of the viewer, while the present is constantly moving towards the past, it does not explain the flow of present. Instead, the relation of the cinematographic-image and its viewer can explain the flow of present. It is because what is in the present is never the image itself, but what it represents; the captured past re-plays in the present time through the viewer's re-created past and forms the present. Thus the capacity of a flat screen to communicate

through the suggestions only becomes possible because of the temporal dimension the cinematographic-image opens. Cinematographic-image as the variable present enables all other suggestions to be possible. Time becomes what is perceived in muteness and becomes the actual aesthetic value of cinema. For that reason, the affect of an image cannot be seen, deciphered, described, or classified; it is mute, and with that time as the beautiful can be experienced in the art of cinema.

The temporal fluidity of the image has its semantic structure, but this referential structure is something like Charles Sanders Peirce's triad semiotics rather than the dualistic sign functioning between the signifier and the signified. In Peirce's semiotics, there is a triadic system of sign functioning between "sign," "object," and "interpretant." According to what Peirce calls "the sign relation," the sign (also called the representamen) is the term ordinarily said to represent or mean something. Signs are qualities, relations, features, items, events, states, regularities, habits, laws; things have meanings, significances, or interpretations. The object is what ordinarily would be said to be the "thing" meant or signified or represented by the sign, what the sign is a sign of. The critical point of Peirce's semiotics is that the interpretant has a similar relation to the object with the object's original representamen, and therefore the interpretant becomes a representamen to another interpretant. The interpretant of a sign is to which the sign represents the object. In a way, it is a mental act or a state, which is a sign itself that is represented by the original sign. In other words, it is a mental signifier of the object which requires an interpretant.

Therefore, according to Peirce, if there is any sign of any object, then there is an infinite sequence of signs of that same object. So, everything in the world of appearances, which he calls "the phaneron," which consists entirely of signs, being a sign itself, begins an infinite sequence of mental interpretants of an object. If there is a sign, there is an infinite sequence of representations of an object and an infinite circulation. Thinking, for example, is a process of sign interpretation because thoughts consist of signs. Thoughts, which follow the law of mental associations, suggest something to the following thought. As a result, the former thought becomes a sign to the next thought. Every single thought is interpreted by another thought; in a sense, they feed off each other. No thought can occur in an instant. In time, thoughts continuously follow one after another, like a moment. Therefore, within different moments there are different thoughts. This never-ending cycle of interpretation is the principle of continuity of thought, as stated by Peirce.

Peirce's semiotics provides a philosophical explanation and critical understanding of the structure of cinematographic-image and the way the image communicates to the viewer. As stated earlier, the cinematographic-image overlaps the actual perception and suggests itself as an alternative perception within the world of appearances; thus, the spectator without any interest immediately encounters the alternative perception in a continuum. If the interpretant is the viewer and the representamen is the image, after viewing the image in a continuum, the viewer would create the mental content upon seeing the image. As a result, the interpretant will become a representamen to another interpretant, and the image as the interpretant will interpret the viewer's thoughts, which will follow with the cinematographic-image becoming the representamen again. As a result of this triad sign functioning, an everlasting circulation occurs within the mind of a single viewer. Thus opposite to Metz' argument, the image-being of cinema requires a constant response. The relationship of the cinematographic-image to what it represents will always be the result of such endless cycling of information and will always create its singular syntax. In the cinematographic-image, we experience referential structure that is singular to the image and derives meaning in connection to the "interpretant"; the viewer. Peirce's sign relation justifies that the actual communication of the

cinematographic-image; therefore, what is interpreted by the “interpretant” is not necessarily the coded images. The viewer does not simply decode the referential structure built by the montage process as the meaning unfolds in time. The viewer becomes the part of the syntax, the representemant.

This triad referential structure of the cinematographic-image is closer to Deleuze than Peirce. According to Peirce, through the representation and formalization of relations between terms, a future state is constructed based on an existing state, i.e., meaning unfolds. For Deleuze, on the other hand, the construction of meaning is not grounded by already existent states. Instead, it is a pure difference that generates the future state. It is the pure difference independent of the forms of representation that reduce it to the same (Kamini 2014). Thus durational differences allow communication between the image and the spectator, which means it happens virtually. In this state, nothing is actualized. The object and the subject can be involved as mere potentials. It is because the cinematographic-image always comes as a suggestion; it suggests more than what is seen. Thus, as Deleuze proposes for the sound in cinema, the image has an out-of-field appearance (Deleuze 1985). In other words, a cinematographic-image is a virtual image; it is not any recorded image in motion or captured past. A moving image can be an actualized unit, as Metz stated, but the real cinematographic-image is a kind of image that is not fully actualized and carries potentials; a potential to be something else, a potential to create another regained time, a potential to create a different present, a potential of a difference. Therefore, if the image does not suggest more than what is seen, it is not a cinematographic-image but rather a plain recording, just a plain image in motion. There is a matrix of infinite suggestions, and this quality of being suggestive has nothing to do with neither visual quality nor the narrative. Cinematographic-image involuntarily lets the spectator trace the image of thought; «... The signs of art force us to think; they mobilize the pure thought as a faculty of essences. They release within thought what depends least on its goodwill: the act of thinking itself» (Deleuze 1964: 98). «To think is therefore to interpret, is therefore to translate. The essences are at once the thing to be translated and the translation itself, the sign and the meaning» (Deleuze 1964: 101-102). It is as if the image and the spectator are interpreting each other within an everlasting cycle and are creating a mutual temporal field. Therefore, this ungraspable communication is not analytical, but instead it is an aesthetic communication and purely temporal; it is the image of thought by which time folds in itself.

### **3. The Folding Conversation of The Cinematographic-Image**

Now we have four propositions on cinematographic-image: 1) Cinematographic-image is not a simple sign, but rather it is a topological layer on the world of the phenomenon because of its continuous nature. Thus it appears as an alternative perception with its own space and time. 2) Cinematographic-image does not there just to be decoded, but instead, its being-an-image is only possible if it is seen. Thus it always requires a response, and the spectator becomes the part of the extracted meaning of such image. 3) Signs triggers the re-creation of the past to form a present present. Thus in every present of the image, there is a difference. 4) The viewer does not simply decode the referential structure but becomes part of the syntax. Thus the triad sign functioning as the everlasting circulation occurs within the mind of a single viewer. Suppose we put all four propositions together to clarify how the cinematographic-image communicates what it communicates. In that case, we can say that the cinematographic-image and the spectator forms a kind of conversation, that is virtually exist and temporally qualified. Nevertheless, in order to understand the nature of this conversation temporal aspect of cinema must be clarified.

Time as the passage from present to future offers the stage for things' successive unfolding, preventing things from being all at once. Time as the passage from past to future is just a mirage; through the creative modality of the real-time duration, the stage itself becomes change. Because of this creative modality, things exist in the productive repetition of difference. Each moment functions of difference, and the difference repeats productively. However, real-time does not act; it is the object that acts. Real-time endures; something is pressured in it, and real-time bites on reality with its preserved density. Therefore, real-time does not operate but as an active factor in making things register as the difference. Such temporality can never be explained with any spatial differences or successive instants. The external time on the other hand flows in its directness and unfolds as the mirage of temporality.

What is temporality? It is the felt sense, felt meaning without appealing to a specific location. Temporal experience is a pressure of process. What is pressured is the chunk of experiences as the tension of the past. Such a process is the process of individuation. The chunk of experiences by belonging to someone appears in space and time and becomes an event; become the "I". The pure mobility of an event of "I" unfolds beyond space; because space cannot be opened the way real-time can. As the ontological domain, the past brings novelty by stretching the present. While the present is stretched, memory folds within its planes because there is an accumulation of new memories in each present. In each individuation of the "I" while the events unfold, the self folds on itself. This virtual fold is the repetition of difference, and it eternally occurs because if it stops, the progress of life can not continue. Something in the individual always stays virtual, which is always in the movement of actualization but can never be actualized. The production of subjectivity is a way of making sense as the creative production of dynamic formation, and it is the modulation of senses. It has been stated that thought responds to an encounter and answers the situation that tears the self. Such situation is not a one-time event; the self is fractured by time again and again. Self in the present always looks at the self in the past as the other. This modulation is infinite, and it is temporal. According to Deleuze's argument in *Different and Repetition*, "I" is constituted the self as an object, which is the thing someone looks at. As a result, one can only construct themselves as a passive object. As the conclusion Deleuze argues that, "I am" not the thing, but "I" is a thing; "I" is the other. Thus, as soon as one looks at themselves as the other "I" is fractured by time; "I" is always separated from the self with the line of time.

Cinema is a temporary disposition of something flowing, and it modulates temporality; this is why the art of cinema is a strong force on the subject. Cinematographic- image, as a space, unfolds within a path as the passage of time due to the directness of time. Linear time like the vacuum of the universe, like a cone, points to a present, i.e., each causal past points different now. However, that does not mean that any event had never interacted. The continuous nature of the cinematographic-image forms the image as for another topological layer and lets the viewer convert it in time. Therefore, the duration of two dynamic systems interconnects with each other. Within a domain of the image's undercurrent tendency that undergoes like streams of information, cinematic experience forms the spectator by letting them intuitively choose a new potential to be actualized. This aesthetics of cinema is the aesthetics of time (Akbas 2012), because the actual information is the temporal information that modulates the felt sense and the felt meaning without appealing to the spatialized image per se. The durational density of the image is what communicates with the spectator. It forms not only the information, but also the communication in the form of conversation. As the image unfolds, it requires a response from the spectator. The spectator gives a response, and the new present and the new motion answer the response, and so on. This conversation as the accumulation

of new memories folds on the spectator as the part of their individuation.

All individuation processes are like that; individual folds on itself as the process continues. As the closing of the old phase, each fold opens a new phasing state and carries the causal past within its folds. As the perception of the present contemporarily falls onto the past domain, memories immediately accumulate, and the entity folds virtually and materially by a tendency for the canalizing vision in a particular way to fulfill an action. What is actualized in an individual is only action. To exist is to do something because acting produces a difference. Thus humans are pathologically action-driven entities, but the individuation process is never done. The act of watching actualizes through endless virtual processes.

In cinema spectator, as an active participant, synchronizes with the image, and by accumulating their memories while interpreting the matrix of suggestions, the spectator forms a folding conversation. Thus cinematic experience inevitably presumes individuation process through modulating temporality. The cinematographic-image creates an alternative perception, in which time is re-created virtually again and again. In its virtual field, the image and the viewer create an un-graspable pure aesthetic communication by intuitive and disinterested relation, which folds on the subject as the process of becoming. This communication is in the form of conversation. It is a conversation because the image always requires a response. To watch a cinematographic-image means that the viewer is responding and merging with it as its process of becoming. Thus what the image communicates cannot simply be systematized or structured in any conventional way. The actual cinematic communication is a profound image of thought, and it conveys pure potential. In this virtually existing communication, cinema can not form as the language or a system of language. What and how cinema communicates is an un-verbal and purely temporal everlasting folding conversation between the viewer and the image.

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