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The Perceived and the Named

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The viewer of an image feels the need to "recognize" (identify) the objects which are represented therein. When the image is figurative, as is the case in photography, painting, and film, it meets this need itself by offering objects to recognize. However, it can happen, even with strongly representative images, that the demand of the consumer remains more or less unsatisfied. For instance, the westerner who watches an ethnographic film often remains perplexed by the objects that he sees in it but cannot name or classify (e.g., cooking utensils, hunting or fishing equipment). To name, to classify: our problem starts here, with the problem of cultural taxonomies, encompassing both the taxonomy of cultural objects and the cultural taxonomy of natural objects, such as zoological or biological classification, which varies from one society to another. Phenomenology has clearly shown us that we live in a world of objects, that our immediate perception is a perception of objects, and that this arrangement is neither superficial nor transitory (so much so, I will add, that it is deeply reassuring, and that is doubtless one of the roots of its existence). So why not link this striking character of our lived world consciousness with the even more deeply embedded force of cultural classification and sociolinguistics?
The case of nonfigurative images (modern painting, avant-garde films), only confirms the initial impressions that emerge from this study. Notably, the spectator very often has the tendency to forcefully reintroduce to the image, by the way he looks at it, objects which the author wanted to leave out. The vague forms, curves, blurs, or shadings become clouds or dancing waters; the rectilinear drawings become railroad tracks. There are many fewer nonfigurative images received than are sent. And even at the sending end, the tendency toward representation is sometimes stronger than is believed by those who consciously would like to escape it. The free contours that we have in mind are often involuntary variations on objects of recognizable form. There are fewer nonfigurative images than there are images that would like to be so.

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Codes of Iconic Nomination

Work in philosophy, and the psychology of perception and observation, taught us long ago that the identification of tangible objects was closely mixed with their linguistic nomination. The semantic organization of natural languages, within certain sectors of the lexicon, overlaps with the variable margins of shifting configurations and demarcations of perception. The visible world and language are thus not without multiple and deep structural interactions, and these have not yet been studied in the detailed technical terms of intercodal relations. It is exactly to such a study that I would like to address myself. But one thing already seems certain to me: even if the connection between language and the viewed can hardly be conceived of as a complete "copy"—either one served by the other—certainly one function of language is to name the units that vision demarcates, and to help demarcate them. And one function of vision is to inspire the semantic configurations of language, and also to be inspired by them.

Recently, from the semiological perspective, these problems, which are exceedingly old in themselves, have been approached from two sides—on the linguistic front by A. J. Greimas (1968) and on the iconic front by Umberto Eco (1968, 1970). I have myself devoted some brief analytical sketches to them, where the main interest was the articulation of the two sides (Metz 1971, 1973). That is really the heart of the matter. I have proposed the term "codes of iconic nomination" for the systems of correspondence which explain that within figurative imagery, even schematics, one can instantly recognize and name objects. These codes are thus the constituent mechanisms of "analogy" and "iconicity," or the impression of resemblance and reality that give us representative images. They contribute to the creation of fiction, diegesis,† and the pseudo-real. It is now time—and the general state of previous research does not deprive the undertaking of all risk—to try one's skill at a more detailed and systematic description of these bridging devices. Between image and language, they facilitate the objective production of a whole network so interiorized by the culture that, on the one hand, the phenomenologists were able to describe them as spontaneous (which they are in effect) and, on the other, as deeply tied in the West to the Aristotelian tradition (quantitatively dominant even today) of diegetic or mimetic art, in short, representative art.

Translated by
Steven Feld and Shari Robertson
Which Part Image, Which Part Language?

It is first necessary to delimit the object of this research and establish boundaries on both its sides. The codes of iconic nomination do not relate the whole of language to the whole of imagery. Their study should not aspire to exhaust the vast question of the links between the perceptual and the linguistic but on the contrary should concentrate on one of its levels in order to attempt to better illuminate it.

Lexicon

On the side of language we will limit ourselves to the lexicon. It hardly seems possible, for the moment, to seriously establish even slightly precise correlations between the perception of objects in a society and the phonological and grammatical structures of the corresponding language. This difficulty, which perhaps will not be eternal, is connected to another one which is more general and well known to linguists: in spite of some interesting attempts no one has succeeded thus far in linking, in a convincing fashion, phonological or syntactic systems with social structures. It is across these two systems that language preserves for the moment its great relative autonomy in comparison with other institutions where the very existence of linguistics is founded, inasmuch as the discipline is distinct from sociology (but belongs to the social sciences since language is an institution). Of all the internal sectors of language it is, on the contrary, the lexicon which brings the most important and most immediately exploitable materials to those who wish to found a sociolinguistics. It is clear that words are linked to culture (and, among other things, to the faculty of sight), following a shorter and more direct circuit than do phonemes or rules of grammar. Moreover, the lexicon is the only part of language which immediately exercises the function of nomination, that is to say, which enumerates the objects of the world and gives them a name. The referential dimension, which characterizes all of language, appears in a direct fashion only within the lexicon.

The dissymmetry of the situation is certainly reflected in the concepts of a semanticist like A. J. Greimas (1966). Sèmes, as such, constitute the "semiological level," that is, that level at which language articulates about the "natural world." These are distinguished from classèmes, whose entirety forms the "semantic level," that is, the level of autonomy of the linguistic organization. Thus we see the differences between semanticisms like "in an oblong shape," "made of leather," or "belonging to the feline species," which are sèmes or "nuclear" to the degree they are as diverse and specific as the perceived objects of a culture which they designate and constitute at the same time. Units of meaning like human/nonhuman, material object/abstract notion, or animate/inanimate are classèmes, or "contextual sèmes," which have a more general significance within the lexicon and which intervene in the naming of numerous tangible objects. Furthermore, at a different level, they submit also to a second classification (whose links are in fact larger than the first operated by the nominations themselves), which extends beyond the lexicon to grammar, where they often correspond to some formal markers. Thus we have the case of human/nonhuman, the difference between qui/quoi in French, and who/which in English. Just as the classèmes within a language are common to the grammar and the lexicon, the nuclear sèmes (which I will henceforth simply call sèmes, since this study is limited to them) are suited only to the lexicon. I will not discuss all the lexical sèmes but only those which intervene in the lexicon of visual objects.

To Recognize the Object

In the domain of the image, the codes of iconic nomination no longer involve the whole ensemble of semiological material. We no longer need to review every sense and all senses of the representative image. To recognize the object is not to understand the image, even if that is the beginning of it. It is only a question of a level of meaning, that which is called the literal (= denotation or representation), and not the entirety. The apprehension of relationships between objects, or at least of their more factual relations, still participates in the literal sense, but is taken over by other codes. Notably this involves montage in the most general sense of the word, encompassing the internal composition of the still unique image. To understand that one object, in a narrative, appeared only a few minutes after another, or that they are constantly copresent, or that one is to the left of the other, or farther back, is already something more than visually identifying each of these objects. The "recognition" should therefore be understood as an operation which articulates certain sectors of linguistic activity and not directly the whole of language over the whole of perception.

From the Word to the Sémème

If one poses the problem in this way, it becomes essential to know to what sort of linguistic unit the optically identifiable object exactly corresponds, since language includes units that are very diverse in figure and status. Common-sense response leaves no doubt—it is the word. The act of nomination, considered in its concrete and directly observable form, corresponds most often to a word, that which comes to mind when our eye recognizes an object: "It's a dog," "it's a lamp."
Yet the pertinence of a word does not resist analysis. The word is a two-sided unit, with its signified and its phonetic signifier. Accordingly, that which can "correspond" to an iconic element will necessarily be a unit of the linguistic signified and therefore only a one-sided unit. The naming of visible objects is a case, among others, of transcoding. In all transcoding (translation, for example) the only direct transit is that which passes between the two respective signifieds. (I will return to this point, which is in fact more complex). Nomination is more than transcoding, though it is that also. It is clear that no direct correspondence between the signifier of an image representing a house and the signifier of the word house (or maison or casa) is conceivable. This is a consequence of the "arbitrariness" of linguistic signs. The two materials are absolutely heterogeneous; one is outlines, colors, shades, and so on, the other an emission of the human voice. The optical aspects of a house bear no relation to the fact that the French word maison has four phonemes rather than three or five, and exactly those four. These are the signifieds which articulate one another, the recognized object and the meaning of the word.

The lexeme (lexical morpheme) is another sort of linguistic unit, smaller than a word, that for the same reasons no longer suits our purposes. It is still a two-sided unit which includes phonetic elements. So, how shall we distinguish the signified of the word from the signified of the lexeme? At the level of the word or even the lexeme the signified can include several units which are quite distinct on the optical plane. For example, the French word chèvre means both the animal called "goat" and the tool called "sawhorse." That is the problem of multiple meanings.

In sum, the visual correspondence should have become established with a linguistic unit that is a pure signified, which is smaller than the signified of the lexeme—or the signified of one sense of a lexeme, or of the unique sense of a lexeme with one meaning. But the linguistic unit we are studying can in certain cases coincide with a longer segment than a lexeme or even a word, on the condition that one always pictures a single meaning for the signified of the segment. The object which one names betterave ("beetroot" in English) is recognizable in an image, and corresponds in French to two lexemes (bette and rave) grouped here in a single word. The object which one names pomme de terre ("potato" in English) corresponds to three French lexemes, which also happen to be three words. Nevertheless, as perceptual elements they are obviously at the same level as the French carotte (English "carrot"), where the nomination uses a single lexeme that coincides with a word. This is not an accident since within the linguistic order itself it is a question in this case of a sequence of several lexemes (eventually of several words) being lexically congealed and turned into a single lexeme. In the terms of André Martinet (1967) these are not syntagmes (free syntactic combinations) but synthèmes, combinations which have been formed by the language once and forever and which enter the lexicon with the same status as indecomposable segments. If a potato (pomme de terre) is red in color (rouge), one speaks of a pomme de terre rouge and not of a pomme rouge de terre. As Martinet proposes the term "thème" for jointly designating synthèmes and proper lexemes, we can ask that the visually identifiable object correspond at the level of nomination to one meaning of thème, which is to say exactly what Greimas calls a sémème.

Cultural Taxonomy of Objects

Each sémème (a specific unit at the level of the signified) denotes a class of occurrences, not a single occurrence. There exist thousands of "trains" even within the single sense of "railroad cars," and these differ greatly from each other in color, height, number of cars, and so on. But the cultural taxonomy which is contained in the language has determined to hold these variations to be irrelevant and to consider them the same object (of a single class of objects). It has also determined that other variations are pertinent and sufficient "to change" the object, as, for example, those which separate train and micheline. It is the same apportionment, so variable among different societies, of pertinent and irrelevant traits—in sum the same "arbitrary" principle of the enumeration of objects—which presides over spontaneous classifications that operate the perception of corresponding objects within the same culture. The sight itself is slightly obscured to the extent that the image does not determine whether it is a train or a micheline. Once it is demarcated, the viewer of the image has the feeling of "recognizing the object." It is notable, then, that one false perception of the color of this micheline (if it is one) or of its exact length or of the metal of which it is made does not constitute a comparable obstacle.

The traits that do not participate in this découpage of objects are culturally experienced as types of secondary qualities, determinations superimposed as something extra and not indispensable to the immediate intellection—adjectival qualities rather than substantive ones. It is most often true that linguistic expression of these visual particularities is conveyed by adjectives (a long micheline) or by certain determinants which are larger in size but syntactically interchangeable with adjectives, as, for example, the subordinate relative phrase "a micheline that goes very quickly." To the contrary, pertinent visual qualities, those which, by their grouping in "packets," determine the list of objects to recognize, express themselves in language through nouns. As we have known for a long time, the nomination of objects—because there are also those of actions, to which I will return—proceeds by nouns. Traditional grammar says that nouns correspond to objects, adjectives to qualities.
and verbs to actions. Simply, "objects" are only sets of qualities considered as definers, and what we call qualities covers only those qualities whose proper meaning does not enter into the definition of the objects.

Optically identifiable objects are, then, classes of occurrences, like the sémèmes which they name. That is why Greimas proposes naming them "visual figures" (the pertinent units) and then further distinguishes "visual signs," which will be singular occurrences, such as one drawing of a house or one photograph of a tree. But within linguistic tradition the term "sign" is too strongly evocative of the pertinent unit for it to have any chance of being made to designate the contrary. It seems preferable to me not to adopt a special term and to speak simply of "recognizable visual objects" as opposed to "visual occurrences."

About "Nomination"

One sees that the fundamental phenomenon of nomination is itself quite poorly named. In the word "nomination" the sémème nom corresponds to the English "name" and not to the English "noun." But it nevertheless designates a linguistic unit which is on the order of a word. Now it is only at the surface level that nomination proceeds by words. The real correspondences between the visible world and language are established at the level of pertinent traits, which are deeper and more invisible units. The word (nom) which designates the optical object only constitutes the emergent part of the system, a consequence that is manifest by the play of the pertinent traits and their internal organization. When an iconic item carries all the definitive traits required for us to recognize, for example, a bulb (electric light bulb), and when one has access to the corresponding sémème (ampoule = electrical accessory), this last access is carried to the lexeme where it contributes to an articulation of the signified (here "electric light bulb" in all its senses, but elsewhere "bulb" forms a word by itself). And this word, in turn, functions as a two-sided entity, which also has its own signifier and can therefore express itself. The viewer of the image explains to himself, "That's a light bulb." In the complete process of nomination, then, the word does play a role, but only at the endpoint.

The term "nomination" is not peculiar to linguistics or to modern semiology. It has come a long way, historically in languages (nominative case), and also from a whole philosophical tradition. It carries in itself, in a condensed state, a certain concept of the relationship between language and the world, a concept that has been critiqued since Saussure as what Gilbert Ryle terms "naive realism." For him, there was a sort of list of objects, preexisting their naming, and the words came to "name" (nominate) these objects after the fact, one by one. As long as we limit ourselves to the surface level (that of the word or even the lexeme) we are inevitably drawn toward faith in this view. The word, the lexeme (and on the other side of the problem, the visual object, once recognized) is not the end product, because the découpage of the world into objects (and of language into sémèmes) is a complex process of cultural production. At the heart of this process the central role has been broken down into pertinent traits: traits of visual identification on one side (Eco) and linguistic sèmes on the other (Greimas).

Determination by Social Practice

This double découpage did not exist before social activity and the features of each culture. It is determined by them, and at the same time it implements them. We know that the Eskimo employ some ten different lexemes (and thus different sémèmes) for designating snow, according to whether it is crumbly, hardened, slippery, piled up and so forth (Schaff 1965). Each of these units consists of an undecomposable lexeme, while the languages of Western Europe are obliged, in order to designate the corresponding "objects," to form a nominal syntagme, which each time combines the appropriate adjective (e.g., powdery), with a noun that is invariably "snow" (neige, Schnee, neve). Thus our culture sees a single object with variable types, where the Eskimo see ten different objects. A perceptible trait like "crumbly" or "hardened" (with its corresponding sème), while pertinent to the Eskimo, is considered irrelevant in our languages, at least when the question is the "nomination" of snow.

This variation in lexical organization is obvious in relation to a difference in the perception of snow, which is more subtle and more finely distinguished among the Eskimo. Each society lexicalizes the distinctions which it perceives the most clearly, and in return, perceives with particular clarity the distinctions which it lexicalizes. It would be a fruitless quarrel that would initially seek to know whether it is language that informs perception or perception which informs language. In fact, the one and the other have been shaped by society. In our cultures, the modes of work and production are such that snow plays a minor role, and careful attention to its different states would be without immediate utility. The Eskimo, who hunt and fish in largely snow-covered landscapes, and whose very survival depends on that, are obliged to know the diversities of the snow well: those which permit the hunt, those which represent a danger of sinking, those which announce a blizzard, and so on. A society lexicalizes and perceives the distinctions for which it has the greatest need.
The Pertinent Traits of Perceptual Identification

Vision does not identify an object as a result of the totality of its perceptible appearance, or as a result of the surface of the paper, in the case of the same object being in the state of “representation” in a drawing or photograph, which is to say, the object relayed by codes of analogy. Thus it can be explained that schematic representations of objects in which the majority of the perceptible features have been deliberately suppressed are also recognizable (and sometimes more so) than many more faithful representations which are far more complete at the level of material expression (more exhaustive in respect to details of form, color, etc.): representations in which the degree of schematization is smaller and the degree of iconicity greater (Moles 1968). It is noteworthy that highly schematized images are very identifiable (the whole of the art of caricature lies therein). Visual recognition is based on certain perceptible traits of the object and its image (to the exclusion of others), only those which keep—and for the moment, materially isolate—the schema and the caricature. If they are sometimes more implied than detailed figurations, it is because they avoid the risk of drowning these traits in the midst of others, thus slowing the marking of guidelines. On the contrary, the image which shows great detail sometimes becomes the image-jumble (l’image fouillée devient parfois l’image fouillée).

The Schematic Diagram

The traits which retain the schema—or at least the figu­tive schema, because there are also some others (e.g., diagrams)—correspond exactly to pertinent traits of the code of recognition so well described by Umberto Eco, who has cited diverse examples of them. Others could be borrowed from caricature: arms raised above the head, a tall figure, and it is enough for us to recognize de Gaulle; bushy eyebrows, a round face, and it’s President Pompidou. In certain comic drawings two protuberances on one side and two on the other are sufficient to represent the breasts and buttocks, so that we interpret it as “woman.” (Needless to say, such a choice of pertinent traits owes itself to an ideology at the same time misogynous and maternalistic, so characteristic of the world in which we live.) The codes are the formal machines, but it is precisely as such that they have historical and social content; in this example, as in others, the opposition of form and content leads to an impasse.

So, schématisme largely overlaps schématisation. The latter is a socially specific activity which consists of producing materialized diagrams (schemas, in the precise sense). The former, on the contrary, is a mental, perceptual, and sociolinguistic principle of wide general bearing, which makes possible the comprehension of schemas as well as of detailed images with a high degree of iconicity and of spectacles from real life. Even outside all schematization, this is because only certain sensible traits matter in identification; visual occurrences which differ in other traits can be perceived as multiple examples of the same object, and not as distinct objects. If several drawings have in common definite traits of the visual object “key” (e.g., a head and a shank, a certain type of serration), they can otherwise, and without disadvantage to the sociotaxonomic permanence of the item “key,” differ very widely in size, color, diameter of the head, depth of indentations, and so on.

In ordinary perception, or in that of strongly figurative images, it is the social subject, the spectator, who fabricates the schema by mental subtraction of nonpertinent traits. In the case of schématisation, it is a specialist (designer or draftsman), a “transmitter,” who performs the same subtraction in advance and materializes it. The difference is that the process of abstraction and classification—the “subtraction”—intervenes, in one case at the level of reception and in the other at the level of construction. In the former it is absent in the stimulus but reintroduced in the perceptual act; in the latter it is integrated into the artificially constructed stimulus.

Perceptual Exclusions and Inclusions

It is again the schématisme, and in a more general way the very existence of pertinent traits and occurrences, which is responsible for a rather striking structural particularity, common to both perceptual découpage and lexical découpage. Two “objects” can be contained in one another while otherwise continuing to stand for an autonomous and distinct item, so much so that one no longer knows whether or not they are of the same rank. In terms of set theory one could say that it is a matter of two classes which simultaneously maintain relations of exclusion and inclusion. Thus, for example, the sémèmes and the visual objects automobile and wheel: the wheel is a part of the automobile and can be mentioned in the entry “automobile” in a dictionary of iconic nomination, but the wheel is also an entirely separate unit of the same “rank” as the automobile: our dictionary would contain both entries, apart from each other and on an equal level. This apparent peculiarity, which establishes itself in a general and permanent fashion, is the result of the fundamentally classificatory and “arbitrary” nature of nomination. When the object to which one makes reference is
the automobile (the automobile seen or spoken of), the wheel intervenes only as a trait for recognition, on the level of the steering wheel, for example. But the object to which one refers in other circumstances can be the wheel itself (for instance, in the case of a flat tire and its repair): it then is the thing which functions as a recognized object, or that to be recognized, and requires in its turn the decoupage of the second. There never exist any objects, no more than their corresponding signified, except as such but has not yet been identified. For the named, and a sought-after signified when the object is felt to be identifiable as such but has not yet been identified.

Within the code of visual recognition, the signifier is never the marked or suspected object, but the set of material responsible for its being marked or suspected: forms, contours, outlines, shadings. This is the visual substance itself, the material of expression in the sense of Hjelmslev.

If one considers the correspondences between language and vision a result of a social process of intellectual production which exists in an active fashion precisely to establish them, the transit by the signifieds represents the final, directly observable level, the final product of this set process. Thanks to pertinent traits of the iconic signifier, the subject identifies the object; it establishes the visual signified. From there, it passes to the corresponding sème in its native language, the linguistic signified. This is the precise moment of nomination, of clearing the intercodal bridge. By the disposition of the sème, the word or the lexeme which is attached to this sème can be pronounced, producing the (phonic) signifier of the linguistic code. The loop is thus looped.

The intercodal bridge can also be crossed in another sense, from the phonic signifier to the perceptual marking of the corresponding object and then to optical traits; or, in the absence of all real or iconic "stimuli," to the mental evocation of the object; that is, again, of its pertinent optical traits. These two operations are so very common in daily life that one does not consciously think of them. Nevertheless, without them one would not be able to understand the following situations: if I say to a friend, "Pass me the pencil sharpener which is somewhere on the table," he finds it and gives it to me. Or, if someone tells me, "My sister is wearing sunglasses," I am capable of imagining a glasses-like object, even if my conversational partner's sister is absent and I know nothing whatever about the exact model of the glasses she is wearing.

When the perceptual signifier (traits of recognition) journeys to the linguistic signifier (phonic emission, itself either real or mental), this is nomination. When it goes from the linguistic signifier to the visual signifier, as in the examples given above, one is dealing with visualization, which is the inverse and inseparable correlate of nomination (that is why this last term, in a slightly larger sense, can conveniently designate the entire phenomenon independently of its orientation in each case). The point common to the two orientations is that the passage from the linguistic to the perceptual, or vice versa, lies at the level of the two respective signifieds, the sème and the object.

Insofar as the sèmes correspond to optical objects (or vice versa), the intercodal transit—the reciprocal articulation of the linguistic code and the perceptual code—proceeds through the two signifieds. In language, the sème is a specific unit at the level of a signified. In perceptual activity, the "object" is equally a signified: an already found signified once the object has been recognized, and a sought-after signified when the object is felt to be identifiable as such but has not yet been identified.

### Language Perception: Their Double Relation, Intercodal and Metacodal

The preceding reflections show that the correspondence between vision and language establishes itself at two different levels: one among the sèmes and optically identifiable objects, the other among the sèmes and pertinent traits of visual recognition. The full significance of this duality merits a slightly more thorough examination.

### Transit by Signifieds

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As long as one considers it from this vantage point, which is not the deepest but which has its own reality, the connection between the visual lexicon and visual perception remains on the level of ordinary transcodage. As a defining trait of the latter, I propose retaining the achievement of the transit by the signifieds. Transcoding is a highly ordinary sociosemiological operation, whose most typical form is translation; that is, a subcase of transcoding where the two codes are two languages. The transit by the signifieds is neither an empirical peculiarity nor an exceptional act. On the contrary, it rests on a permanent and fundamental given: if the varying codes in use distinguish among themselves—if there are several, obviously—it is through the material and the internal organization of their signifier (visual codes, auditory codes, etc.), or even by its organization alone when the material is identical (e.g., the plurality of languages), or, in any case, by the organization of their signifieds (Hjelmslev’s “form of the contents”) since it is the direct or indirect correlate of the organization of the signifier. But it is not through the material of the signified (“material content”), which is common to all codes and which is always the “sense,” the semantic fabric. The sense, also, constitutes the universal intercodal footbridge. One can switch from one code to another when two units of form of the signified, belonging respectively to each of the two codes (which are never, in fact, superimposable), nevertheless occupy an adjacent position in the material of the signified (or, as one says these days, “have very nearly the same sense”). This happens when the translator takes a word from the source language and looks for an equivalent word in the target language. In sum, there definitely exists a level of relationships between codes which always justifies saying that the passage is accomplished across the signifieds.

Compared with all nonlinguistic codes, and with itself when necessary, language is in the position of a metalanguage: a universal, nonscientific metalanguage, a “major equivalent” exchangeable with all other codes, as is money against all other goods. There are also scientific metalanguages (formalized languages, mathematical notation, chemical notation), but it is still language which is used to introduce them, to preliminarily explicate them, and to define their field of validity. And within other domains, language itself, subject to a specific task which transforms it in terminology—that is to say, in theory—directly supplies the scientific metalanguage outside all specialized notation, or in simply taking one of them as an intermittent auxiliary title. This metalanguage consists then of a body of linguistic statements of fact: it can pass for the language of science itself. Thus the metalinguistic inclination of language, universal at the nonscientific level, is strongly reaffirmed at the scientific level. The two things go together, and the current social classifications are those of science. This is the problem of pensée sauvage, “the savage mind,” so well posed by Lévi-Strauss (1962): all societies are societies of “savages,” all people are indigènes of some culture.

If language is the principal metalanguage, this is obviously so because no other code is situated so tightly in daily social communications as a certain (abstract, explicit) form of thought. This is not the only operation but is by nature the most apparent among the operations of metalanguage. Every semiologist has noted that language, through its relationship with other codes, occupies a nonsymmetrical and privileged position in that it affects the quantitative extension of the material of the signified (the total field of “things that one can say”). Language can say, even if sometimes only with approximation, what all the other codes can say, while the inverse is not true. (There exists, for example, no degree of approximation, if it were imaginable, from which one could allow that a reed pipe tune or a set of colors is capable of “saying” even so simple a phrase as “The train arrived at Lyon three quarters of an hour late.”) Each code “occupies” one part, and only one part, of the total semantic material, which is to say, of the ensemble of socially possible assertions, while language occupies them all. Between language and the nonlinguistic codes, the proportion of “translatability” equalizes itself rather badly, leaning largely to one side. The advantage of this semantic extension has a great deal to do with the social status of language as universal commentator.

The representation as metalanguage

In many cases, and notably in those which occupy us here, this level of relationships is neither the only nor necessarily the most important one. Certain intercodal relations are really more than transcodage. The relationship between language and perception is very different than that between two languages (=translation), because in this case the two codes no longer have an identical semiological status and no longer occupy the same place within the general process of socialization.

- **Visual Signifier**
  - (forms, contours, etc.)
  - with pertinent traits

- **Visual Signified**
  - recognizable object

- **Perceptual Code**

- **Linguistic Signifier**
  - phonetic emission of themes

- **Linguistic Signified**
  - séme ete designating the object

- **Observable Interodal Transit**

The diagram illustrates the relationship between visual and linguistic signifiers and signifieds, along with the perceptual and linguistic codes. This visual representation helps to understand the connection and translation between these elements.
One of the most notable consequences of this situation in everyday life (the flow of perception, deciphering the numerous images which offer themselves to view in modern cities, spontaneous conversations about them, etc.) is that language does much more than transcoded vision. Translation is another signifier of the same rank (the “verbalizer,” as it is sometimes called by audiovisual specialists). Language accompanies vision in permanence; it is the continuous gloss of it, it explains it, clarifies it, to the extent to which it accomplishes it, whether spoken aloud or by simple mnemonic evocation of the phonic signifier. To speak of the image is in reality to speak the image; not essentially a transcoding but a comprehension, a resocialization where the transcoding is only the occasion, the necessary occasion. Nomination completes the perception as much as it translates it; an insufficiently verbalizable perception is not fully a perception in the social sense of the word.

If I mentally dispose of a sémême (helicopter, for example) and then I am unable to draw the corresponding object on a piece of paper, it is not a matter of accidental clumsiness; I am someone who “does not know how to draw,” and no one suspects that I do not know what a helicopter is. But if the helicopter is drawn on another piece of paper and I am not able to name it—or, in any case, to find the sémême, lacking the phonic signifier, as when one has the word “on the tip of the tongue”—the situation, turned around 180 degrees, becomes much more serious. I have not understood the drawing, I actually do not know what it is, I am incapable of making it exist (at least at the level of representation I am discussing in this study). Language is not only another code; it is the metacode.

**To Transcode/Metacode: Relations between the Two Operations**

It is necessary then to distinguish the metacodal relationship (relationship of the metacode to its object-code) from the intercodal relationship, which unites two codes on the same level, when each can function on occasion as “interpreter” of the other, but the situation can always be reversed. In the metacodal relationship the transition by the signified (where the equality of the status of the two codes becomes explicit) is not the main point. We know, following Hjelmslev (1953:Chapter 22), that the signified of the metacode articulates itself across the total signifier/signified of the object-code. There it is another sort of transit, a dissymmetrical type, which engages, in the case of more than two signifieds, one signifier and one only (that of the object-code). As for the signifier of the metacode, it constitutes, in this “unhooked” structure that is so well known today, the part which “exceeds,” that which speaks the object-code in its entirety. Thus, in an oral statement, the phonic emissions of the English language help me to describe the signifiers and the signifieds of the iconic code.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>signified of object-code</th>
<th>signifier of object-code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>signified of metacode</td>
<td>signifier of metacode</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The simple intercodal relationship can be represented in the following manner:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>code X signifier</th>
<th>code X signified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>code Y signified</td>
<td>code Y signifier</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only the signifieds ensure the contact between the two codes. The signifiers “exceed” both of them—each one can “translate” the other. The dissymmetry cancels itself.

These theoretical reflections find a striking illustration in the problem which occupies us. Evoking the cultural taxonomy of visible objects, Greimas (1968) considers that the pertinent traits of the iconic signifier (“traits of recognition” in Umberto Eco’s terms) coincide with those of the linguistic signified—that is, with the sèmes of the sémême. This proposition seems to me of great importance. From a perspective of visual semiology I return to the linguistic analysis which Greimas made (1966:43–50) of the French word tête in one of its senses (“material object”). Permit me to simplify a little, in order to abbreviate the exposition. Greimas proposed four sèmes for this sémême: *extremity* (of a more immense object); *discontinuous extremity* (culturally felt to be distinct from the rest of what one would voluntarily call “the body”); *superlative extremity* (superior and/or anterior); and *spherical extremity* (or “swelling”).

These are four pertinent traits of the linguistic signified. But there are also—and at this point the two things become confused—four pertinent traits of the iconic signifier. If in an ethnographic film we perceive an object which is unknown to us (a hunting weapon, for example, or a musical instrument), and if this object presents at its anterior extremity a distinct part with a rounded form, we would not hesitate to perceive it as being the “head,” or tête, of this utensil which was previously impossible to identify. All that our *gaze would comprehend* would be that one of the parts of the object consists of a known object, a “head.” The four sèmes would then correspond to four physical (optical) characteristics of the visual signifier, that is, the visible “spot” which on the screen forms the photograph of this “head.” In the same way, we recognize a “house,” which could be seen in an image or next to a walkway in the countryside, thanks to certain perceptual traits which are separable from the entirety. The silhouette which we have before our eyes evokes an object constructed by man. It contains several walls, has a roof, a door, and so forth. These different features are also the sèmes of the word “house” in one of its senses (edifice).
The Return of the Signifier

It is thus confirmed that the articulation between the taxonomies of vision and the visual part of the lexicon, in the bosom of a single culture, establishes itself at two levels simultaneously. The first is between the respective signifieds (object and sémème), insofar as one considers this the ordinary intercodal relationship, simple “translation,” the terminal list of surface correspondences. The second is between the pertinent traits of the signifier (on the side of the object-code) and those of the signified (on the side of the metacode) when one envisages the cultural classification of objects as an active operation of the metacodal type in which the main point plays itself against units “smaller” than the whole object and “smaller” than the whole sémème, at the outcome of concrete nomination. One conceives of this articulation as the historical production of nomination, a production in which language, the universal commentator, comes to state the law and its partitions, even though in the final analysis it would itself be, like the visible world, entirely informed by social forces. In the following table, I represent the double relationship of language and vision. One ascertains that the two sides of the object-code (signifier and signified) articulate themselves toward the signified of the metacode, and toward it only. The signifier of the metacode, formed from phonetic sequences which designate the perceptual units, bears no direct relation to the object-code. It can only “speak” globally, and from the exterior, through the intermediary of its own signified, the metacodal signified.

From Objects to Actions

Until now I have spoken only of “objects.” But visually recognizable “actions” exist as well. The problem of nomination thus moves from the noun toward the verb, at least for Western societies and languages, where the noun and the verb, the object and the action, are clearly distinct. Except for that point, the principle of analysis remains the same. Thus, in a film in which the images are blurred and difficult to read, it is sufficient for our purposes that certain optical traits are clearly marked in order to perceive that someone has thrown something. In this example, it seems to me that the pertinent traits of the perceptible action, and of the lexeme “to throw” in the corresponding sense, are two in number (a minimal deduction but set in a potentially larger paradigm).

1 Material object which distances itself from the body of the person (the opposite of “to catch,” “to reach,” etc., in which the object approaches the person).
2 Muscular action on the part of the person (the opposite of “to let fall,” “to let escape,” “to let loose,” etc., where the object distances itself but the person is passive).

Clearly the analysis should be pushed further, moving closer and closer to the larger group of verbs of movement, and to the larger organization of the visual world (or at least the principal gestural units). For example, the two traits which I have noted as the most immediately striking presuppose two others by an implied relationship: the “material object,” or at least an inert one, here the projectile, and its opposition to an “animate being,” a person or animal, or even another material object conceived and perceived as “active” (a catapult can also throw something).

Noises... Sound Objects

The perspective which is proposed here is equally applicable to the world of recognizable noises and the corresponding sector of the lexicon. This aspect of the problem is particularly important in the case of sound film (which in our age is all cinema), television, radio broadcasting, and so on. Even so, it has been studied much less until now, because our culture grants a strong preference to the visual and does not pay attention to the auditory sphere, except when the subject is the sound of language; of the two, the “noise” is often left behind.¹⁰

How is it explainable that in the soundtrack of a film set in the countryside, or in the noisy confusion of a forest where we are walking, we would be capable of recognizing and isolating a lapping sound (clapotis), even if we did not know its origin, and even if we identify as “lapping,” from one occasion to another, noises which are very different? One must admit that the “lapping” exists as an autonomous sound object, with pertinent traits of its acoustic signifier corresponding to those of the linguistic signifier, from the sèmes to the sémème “lapping.”
appear rather quickly, resulting from the "nearest" commutations:

1 The noise is relatively weak (as opposed to an uproar, howl, din, crash, etc.).
2 It is discontinuous, which a distant hum, a whistling, or a background noise is not.
3 It is acoustically "double," or, in any case, not simple, as each of its emissions can be decomposed into two successive sounds /-/-/.../ -.../ -.../.../-/. (In this respect, the first two phonemes of the French linguistic signifier c-lapotos can be considered onomatopoeic). The communication shows that the other identifiable noises do not have this character and that each of their emissions is "simple," as in "detonation," or even "blow" or "shock" in their auditory sense. It is the opposition between floc and tac, or, to give some English examples, "plop" and "plip."'11
4 This noise is experienced as being liquid, or as being provoked by a liquid; the opposite of "rubbing" or "scrapping" in their auditory sémème, which presents the trait "solid," or even "sizzling" and "hissing," with the trait "gaseous."

These four traits, and all those of the same genre which I have forgotten, are common to both auditory perception and language. There would be no point whatever in asking whether they define the "lapping" (clapotos) as characteristic sound or as the French word clapotos, since the noise and the word exist only by virtue of each other. Our four traits constitute a level of articulation where the two things coincide, under the metacodal statute of language.

I. Ideological Reduction of the Sound Dimension

There is a difference, however, between the visual and the auditory in our cultural definition. When I recognize a "lamp" and can name it, the identification is terminated. All that could be added would be on the order of adjectives or determiners. On the contrary, if I distinctly hear a "lapping" or a "whistling," and if I can say that, I only have the feeling of making a first identification, a marking as yet incomplete. This impression disappears when I recognize that it is the lapping of a river or the whistling of the wind in the trees. The recognition of a sound leads directly to the question "What makes the noise?" There is something of a paradox there, since the sémèmes of the initial identification ("whistling," "sizzling," "rubbing," etc.) correspond to actual sound profiles, while those of the final identification (the wind, the river), which are not at all auditory, articulate the source of the noise and not the noise itself.

Within language as the metacode of noises, the most perfect identification is obviously that which simultaneously designates the sound and its source ("rumbling of thunder"). But if one of these two indicators must be suppressed, it is curious to note that it can be the sound-object which suffers the least damage in overall recognition. If I perceive a rumble, without further precision, there exists some mystery and a sense of suspense (horror films do not miss playing on this), the identification is only roughly sketched. If I perceive "thunder" without paying the least attention to its acoustical characteristics, the identification is sufficient.

One might perhaps reply that the example is tendentious because thunder is an object which is nothing other than sound (one cannot see it; lightning is what one sees). But the situation stays the same with objects which do not exhibit themselves through their noise. If I allude to the "throb of a machine," my conversational partner may consider that he does not know exactly what I am talking about and may ask, "What machine?" I have nevertheless been precise in the clarification of the noise, but remained vague on that of its source. It will suffice that I reverse my axes of precision by saying: "It's a jet airplane noise," in order for everyone to then be of the opinion that I have explained myself clearly, and to feel satisfied. From the moment when the sound source is recognized (jet airplane), the taxonomies of noise themselves (throbbing, whistling, etc.) can only be supplied, at least for our age and in our latitudes, as supplementary precisions, not felt to be indispensable, basically in the nature of adjectives, even when they express themselves linguistically as nouns. At the level of discourse, one is no longer entirely within nomination, but already is moving a little way into description.

Ideologically, the sound source is an object, the sound itself a character. Like all characters, it is attached to the object. Simply because the identification of the latter suffices to evoke the noise, the inverse is not necessarily true. "To comprehend" a perceptual given is not to grasp it exhaustively in all its aspects, but to be capable of classifying it, of putting it in a pigeonhole,12 to designate the object of which it is one occurrence. Noises are also classified much more according to the objects which produce them than according to their own properties.

But this situation is not at all natural: from a logical point of view, the "throb" is an object, an acoustical object, on the same level that the tulip is an optical object. Language takes this into account elsewhere—or at least the lexicon does, failing discourse—since a great number of recognizable noises, reduced nevertheless to the level of characters, still correspond to nouns. It is a sort of compromise, which does not prevent auditory traits from participating more feebly than others in the dominant principle of recognition of objects. Furthermore, when one wishes to name the same concept as the sound-object, it is necessary, as I have just done and as the supporters of musique concrète often do, to add to the word "object" the attributive adjective "sound," when no precision at all is required for what should logically be called "visual object." We consider it evident that a flag is an object, but we hesitate about the illusion of owls: this is an infraobject, only a sound-object.
"Sur un substantialisme sauvage"

Thus there is deeply implanted in our culture (and doubtless in others, although not necessarily all of them) a sort of wild "substantialism," which distinguishes fairly strictly the first qualities that determine the list of objects (substances) and the second qualities that correspond to as many of the attributes as are susceptible to being linked to these objects. It is a conception reflected throughout the entire tradition of Western philosophy, starting with the notions of Descartes and Spinoza, which recaptures the preceding phrase. It is equally clear that this "world-view" has something to do with subject-predicate structure, particularly strong in Indo-European languages.

One can think that for us the first qualities are on the order of the visual and the tactile—tactile because touch is traditionally the very criterion of materiality: visual because the guide marks necessary to daily life and to techniques of production emphasize naming by eye more than by any other sense (it is only in language that the auditory order, as if to compensate, finds "rehabilitation"). The subject is too immense to be approached usefully here. It is even now possible, however, to begin to encircle certain qualities which seem to be "second": thus for noises, evoked a moment ago, or the olfactory qualities (a perfume is hardly an object), or even such subdimensions on the visual order as color.

In a clothing store, if two articles are of an identical cut but distinguished by color, one considers that it is the same pullover (or the same pair of pants) in two shades. Culture feels the permanence of the object, language affirms it; only the attributes vary. But if two articles are of the same color and a different cut, no one would say or think that the boutique offers "the same color in two garments" (incorrect formula, and not by accident, in which the color will be in the position of grammatical subject). Rather, one will announce that these "two garments," this scarf and this skirt, for example, "are of the same color." The articulation restores the color to its place, that of the predicate; these are two distinct objects which have one attribute in common.

The "Off-Screen Sound" in Cinema

The division of first and second qualities plays a large role in one of the classic problems of film theory, that of "off-screen sound." In a film, a sound is considered off-screen (literally, outside the screen) when it is actually the sound source which is off-screen. So, one defines the "off-screen voice" as that of a person who does not appear visually on the screen. One forgets that the sound itself is never "off"; either it is audible or it really does not exist. When it exists, it cannot be situated inside the rectangle or outside it, since the property of sound is to diffuse more or less throughout the total environmental space. The sound is simultaneously "on" the screen, in front of it, behind it, around it, and in the whole theater.

On the contrary, when one says that a visual element of a film is off-screen, it really is. One can reestablish it by inference from what is visible within the limits of the rectangle, but one does not see it. A well-known example would be that of "the bait"; one predicts the presence of a person where one only perceives, on one side of the screen, the hand or the shoulder; all the rest is really out of the field of view.

The matter is clear: the language of technicians and studios, without their realizing it, applies a conceptualization to sound which only makes sense for the image. One pretends to speak of sound, but one in fact thinks of the visual image of the sound source.

This confusion finds itself obviously favored by a characteristic of noise which is physical and not social. The spatial anchorage of sound "givens" is much more vague and blurred than that of visual "givens." The two sensory orders do not have the same relationship to space. Sound is much more constrained, even when it indicates a general direction (but rarely an entirely precise placement, as it is the contrary of the rule for the visible). One understands that film technicians have based their classification on the less elusive of the two elements. (It must nevertheless be remembered that the phylogenetic choice of an acoustical material, the sound of a voice, for the signifiers of human language, probably derives from the same reasons: phonic communication is not interrupted by obscurity, by the night; one can speak to someone who is behind oneself, or is hidden by an obstacle, or is in an unknown place, etc. The relative weakness of the relation to space procures here multiple advantages of which the human race would lose the benefits should it choose a visual language.)

But to come back to off-screen sound in film, the physical "givens" do not suffice to explain the persistent confusion between the sound-object itself and the visual image of its source; from the most literal definition, the concept of off-screen sound lies in this confusion. There is something else behind it which is cultural and which we have already encountered: namely, the concept of sound as an attribute, as nonobject, and the tendency to neglect its proper characteristics for the benefit of those of the corresponding "substance," the visible object emitting the sound.
Conclusion

In this study I have wanted to show that the perceptual object is a constructed unit, socially constructed, and in one sense a linguistic unit. Here we are already far from the "adverse spectacle" of the subject and the object, of this there is, cosmological as much as existential (at any rate transcendental) within which phenomenology wished to establish our presence to objects, and the presence of objects to us. I am not so sure that this "distanting" is so great only on certain axes and does not carry along a complete rupture of the horizon. Obviously I spoke of sèmes, of pertinent optical traits, and so on; that is, of elements which have the property of not having one single existence and which are, on the contrary—or on the contrary or precisely?—the conditions for the possibility of real life, the structures of production which shape it and which lose themselves in it, which find in it the place of their manifestation and their negation simultaneously; the objective determinations of subjective sentiment. To concentrate interest on this inconspicuous stratum is to stray from the path of phenomenology. But the obvious stratum—apart from the fact that it has its own reality, authorizing possible studies or already having led to benefit—is equally the only one which arranges from the outset those studies which its movement will then distance itself from.

I have tried my best to comprehend why perception proceeds through objects. But I felt from the first, and still feel keenly, that it proceeds (and the phenomenologists do not say anything different) in effect as follows: in order that I try to analyze the "objects" which are so striking to the native (and from the start, in order that I be able to feel them), it was necessary that I myself be the native and that I be struck by the same things as he was. One knows that every psychoanalytic enterprise begins through a "phenomenology," following the term of the analysts themselves. That is not true in this domain. Each time that one wants to explain something, it is most advisable to begin by experiencing it.

Translation Notes

* This essay was originally published as Le perçu et le nommé, in Pour une esthétique sans entrave; Mélanges Mikel Dufrenne (Hommage collectif), Paris: Editions 10/18, 1975, pp. 345-377. It was then reprinted in Metz's collected papers, Essais Sémiotiques, Paris: Klincksieck, 1977, pp. 129-163. The present version modifies the original footnotes to separate references cited from actual footnotes relating to the text.

1 Diegesis (French, diégese) is a term coined by the French writer Étienne Souriau to indicate the denotive material of film. The concept is discussed in Metz 1968 (Eng. transl. 1974:97-98).

2 Micheline is an auroral with tires invented by the Michelin Tire Company and used for the Paris Métro.

Notes

1 I'm thinking of course of the famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and also of isolated attempts such as Sommerfelt's (1938) on the language and culture of the Arunta tribe of Australia.

2 President day sociolinguistics, situated after generative transformational linguistics, rightly tries to exceed the purely lexical stage. It also would like to exceed the Chomskyan distinction between "competence" and "performance," which rejects as pure performance important social variations in the usage of a single national language. On the intersection of these two perspectives and the idea of constructing proper grammars (syntactic and/or phonological) as for example Black English (English as spoken by Black Americans) or that of other sociolinguistic groups, cf. the work of Labov and the variationist school.

3 Is a séméme each "sense" of a lexeme (Greimas 1966: 43-45) or of a paralexeme (1966-39)? The paralexeme of Greimas corresponds closely to the synthème of Martinet (1968). Greimas does not propose a special term to commonly designate the lexeme and the paralexeme; Martinet calls this the "thème." I follow Martinet here, because his term is particularly useful to me. The perceptual object can correspond equally to either a lexeme or a paralexeme (synthèse), but only on the side of the signified and only in a single sense. Here, the Greimasián term séméme is the only one available.

4 Greimas (1968) speaks of figures and "natural signs." The context shows what he means by "natural" is "perceptual." "It is a bit like when linguists speak of "natural languages" as opposed to formalized languages or metalanguages, without a thought that these languages are also really natural." In my text I prefer not to avoid the word "natural."

5 The same idea is found in Schaaff (1965). It is that language is an "instrument" because it contributes to the découpage of perceptual units, but it is also (like perception itself) a product, a product of social life.

6 In Eco (1970:16)—a French translation of part of Eco 1968—"we select the fundamental aspects of the perceived following the codes of recognition: when we are at the zoo and we see a zebra far away, the elements that we recognize immediately (and that our memory retains) are the stripes and not the silhouette which vaguely resembles that of a donkey or mule. ( . . . ) But suppose there exists an African community where the only known quadrupeds are the zebra and the hyena, and where horses, mules, and donkeys are unknown. In order to recognize the zebra it will not be necessary to perceive the stripes ( . . . ) and in order to draw a zebra it will be more important to emphasize the form of the snout and the length of the legs, in order to distinguish the quadruped represented from the hyena (who also has stripes; the stripes thus do not constitute a factor of differentiation.)"

7 In Metz (1971:207-209) I distinguished two exactly similar cases by taking up and more precisely specifying the traditional comparison between the cinematographic image and the ideogram. I noted that in the former case it is the spectator himself who "makes" the schema; in the latter it is already made, or at least, in certain of its forms, notably the pictogram and morphogram.

8 It is direct when each formal unit of the signified corresponds to a normal unit of the signifier; without either one or the other having followed proper internal articulations (codes of the "symbolic" type following Hjelmslev). It is indirect in the contrary case ("linguistic" codes in the larger sense, formed by "signs" and not by symbols) when the level of the signifier and the level of the signified each have their "figures" (units smaller than the sign) which are not isomorphic; thus the internal organization of the signified is not transferred from that of the signifier. They are nevertheless dependent (from which I derive my expression "indirect correlate") because the form of the signifier and that of the signified continue to coincide on the level of the sign, even if this entails diverging later on the level of the figures. In this conception, the symbol is a sign without figures (or the sign a symbol without figures). Proper languages are the best example of a system of the linguistic type, with figures: there is no bi-univocal correspondence between the phonemes or the phonetic traits (figures of the signifier of a sign) and the sèmes, figures of the signified of the same sign.
(Hjelmslev 1953). The Hjelmslevian distinction between symbolic systems and linguistic systems is better known by the name "symbolic systems/semiotic systems" or "symbolic systems/languages" (which figures elsewhere in my work).

9 See Benveniste (1969:130-131). Language is the only semiotic system that can be universally "interpreted." The same idea figures in the total work of Hjelmslev; see his paper "Structural Analysis of Language," appended in Hjelmslev 1953. Different codes other than languages are "restrained languages"; languages are "non-restrained languages." A widely held view insists that the privileged position of phonetic language leads in our culture to an underdevelopment of visual richness. And this is not mistaken. But this is even more true of the sonic richness of "noises," which are very directly in competition with language by virtue of the fact that they also have an auditory signifier.

10 Onomatopoeia, which takes exception to the "arbitrariness" of linguistic signification, represents the case where a direct link exists between the signifier of the metacode (language) and the set of the object-code (perceptual code). On cases of this sort where there appears a "motivation" for the linguistic signifier, see the important work of Pierre Guiraud (1961, 1962, 1967).

11 In the field of semiology this idea has been developed in a particularly clear and demonstrative fashion by Luis Prieto (1966, especially chapter 2, "Le mécanisme de l'indication," pp. 15-27). Every indication is an indication of a class. A class only has meaning in relationship to a complementary class (or classes) in the presupposed universe of discourse.

12 I have already led up to this remark by an entirely different route in my "On the impression of reality in the cinema" in Metz 1968 (translated 1974).

13 It is not without reason that noncolor film, i.e., black and white film, was possible (culturally as a result of demand) for many years and that in large measure it still is. Smell film does not correspond to any strong and generalized expectation. Sound and talking film, ordinary film today, is almost always more filled with speech than sound, so much so that the noises found therein are poor and stereotyped. In fact, the only cinematographic elements which interest everyone, and not only a few specialists, are image and speech.

15 This is related to another characteristic fact of cinema today. The visual givens are only reproduced there by condition of certain perceptual distortions (the absence of binocular factors of relief, the presence of a screened rectangle which marks, on the contrary, the absence of real vision, and so forth). The auditory givens are reproduced on the condition that the sound recording has been properly done, and does not suffer a single phenomenal deficit in relation to the corresponding noise in the real world. Nothing, in principle, distinguishes a gunshot heard in a film from a gunshot heard in the streets. "Sounds do not contain the image" as film theoretician Bela Balazs said. Even so, the sounds of cinema diffuse within the space as do the sounds of life, or very nearly so. This difference in perceptual status between which one calls "reproduction" when dealing with the visual, and that which one gives the same name, when dealing with the audible, is discussed in my "Problèmes actuels de théorie du cinéma," pp. 57-58 in Metz 1973; also see Metz 1971:209-210.

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