

# Towards a *grande paradigmatique* of film: Christian Metz reloaded

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## Abstract

*This paper synthesizes and extends all previous accounts of filmic montage made within the broadly Metzian semiotic tradition in order to demonstrate that the semiotics of film and of verbal language share major features of their organization. Drawing on recent advances in formal and functional linguistic discourse semantics, the paper provides an analysis scheme that supports a film-as-discourse perspective along both the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes of semiotic description. Previous approaches are shown to have been restricted to views of compositional semantics only appropriate for syntax. This has compromised their effectiveness for providing an appropriate empirical basis for investigating film.*

*Keywords: film; linguistic discourse semantics; film semiotics; relation between film and language; language of film; montage.*

## 1. Introduction

It may seem paradoxical to go back to the *grande syntagmatique* of narrative film developed by Metz twenty years ago . . . which has now been discarded for no real reason and without having been proved wrong . . .

—Colin (1995: 45)

In 1966, the film semiotician Christian Metz produced an abstract classification of the meaningful possibilities available to a filmmaker when joining shots in narrative film that has continued to structure discussions of the relations between film and semiotics to this day. This system, called the *grande syntagmatique* (cf. Metz 1966, 1974a: 119–133), took as its

starting point a broadly linguistically-inspired semiotics in order to synthesize a wide range of previous approaches to ‘film montage’ within a single unified framework. However, despite the longevity of Metz’s approach as a teaching aid and as an academic example of approaching film semiotically, it appears to have been both the first example of such detailed work and simultaneously that work’s apotheosis. Subsequent refinements and extensions of Metz’s account, of which there are several, have received little attention; James Monaco, in his introductory textbook on film, writes: ‘... despite its idiosyncrasies and occasional confusions, it remains the only recent attempt to comprehend the complex system of montage’ (Monaco 2000: 220).

In discussions of the semiotics of film, the issues have become broader and more abstract, while those who carry out detailed analysis of individual films and film sequences now generally draw little inspiration from Metz. Indeed, the relationship is quite strained; David Bordwell sums up his views on the interaction between film analysis and semiotics thus:

Despite three decades of work in film semiotics ... those who claim that cinema is an ensemble of ‘codes’ or ‘discourses’ have not yet provided a defence of why we should consider the film medium ... as plausibly analogous to language. (Bordwell 1996: 18)

The general aim of this paper will be to return attention to the task that Metz began with the *grande syntagmatique*. I will demonstrate that film is very much more than ‘plausibly analogous’ to language by developing a reasonably explicit account of how film creates and structures meanings, and which draws crucially on semiotic mechanisms derived on a linguistically-inspired basis.

I will also draw attention to the fact that those who continue to criticize the relevance of linguistically-inspired mechanisms for film interpretation typically base their arguments on a view of linguistics that has scarcely changed since the time of Metz, and which has little to do with the current state of the art (a prime example of this kind of discussion is that of Currie 1995). Moreover, some of the best practitioners of detailed film analysis today — Bordwell among them — are moving steadily closer to the kind of strongly empirical approach that a linguistically-informed analysis would support while simultaneously continuing to deny linguistic relevance. There is, in fact, a considerable disillusionment to be observed in film theory when discussing linguistic semiotic approaches to film and this needs to be explicitly addressed — especially since the kinds of results that Bordwell is seeking in the quote above are indeed few and far between.

The position defended in detail in this paper is that the lack of results following on from Metz has not been due to a semiotic gulf between film and language as unrelated systems. The problem is far more that both Metz's *grande syntagmatique* of narrative film as presented in *Film Language* (Metz 1974a) and the even more striking construction of a broadly Hjelmslevian functional semiotics of film in *Language and Cinema* (Metz 1974b: originally published in French in 1971) presented challenges that the linguistics of the late 1960s and the work building on it was simply not able to meet. Rather than providing a basis for insightful descriptions across a range of semiotic modes as then hoped (cf., e.g., Carroll 1977), the construction of phrase structure grammars, transformations, and the modules of the language system postulated within the Chomskyan paradigm instead tied linguistics, and linguistically-inspired moves into other semiotic modes, to an overly narrow *syntactically*-based view of language that was impossible to profitably reuse across semiotic modes. It was then largely with the brush of this narrowly conceived 'structural linguistic-semiotics' that the broader film semiotics of Metz came to be tarred, leading directly to the disillusionment mentioned above.

It is only relatively recently that sufficient progress has been made to provide the theoretical tools necessary for developing further the semiotic of film that Metz began. In particular, the foundations for the approach taken in the present paper are drawn from a combination of theoretical advances made over the past 20 years in systemic-functional linguistics, with its own broadly Hjelmslevian socio-semiotic basis (cf. Halliday 1978; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004), and more recent accounts of discourse semantics, both formal (e.g., Asher and Lascarides 2003) and functional (e.g., Martin 1992; van Leeuwen 2005). I will show how a thorough revision of the Metzian position undertaken within the broad semiotic framework that these approaches provide is able to contribute significantly to an understanding of how film functions. Within these approaches we have a far more robust basis for developing accounts of various semiotic modes without imposing mechanisms that are relevant only for linguistics.

## 2. Making meanings

Since the position that I will be developing throughout this paper is one rooted in functional approaches to language and semiotics, it will be useful to set out briefly before embarking on the main discussion the particular view that will be taken on film and filmic 'meanings.' The functional approach to language makes the basic premise that language 'forms' have evolved in order to carry particular functions, or generalized meanings

(cf. Halliday 1978; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). The same approach will be taken to film and so when we consider the resources that film engages for making its meanings, it will have been useful beforehand to have considered briefly just what kinds of meanings are relevant.

My starting point, one also adopted by Metz — and for which he was substantially criticized — grants an important role to *narrative*. We will quickly see, however, that that role is one of ‘guide’ rather than definition and so should not be taken to be limiting the account *a priori* or to marginalize non-narrative films. Narrative is useful as a guide because of the position reached in narratology that ‘narrative itself is a deep structure quite independent of its medium’ (Chatman 1992: 403). This means that some abstract organization is to be ‘actualized’ or ‘realized’ in an expressive medium, and that medium can be language, drawing, dance or, most relevant here, film. Most writers on film, and particularly of course narrative film, have adopted some version of this dual characterization: Bordwell (1985), for example, adopts the terms *fabula* for the ‘underlying’ events and *syuzhet* for the filmic articulation of those events, while Metz and his successors commonly make reference to issues of plot and its events and characters as a distinct level of description to their descriptions of montage: all such units are placed ‘*in* the film but *in relation* to the plot’ (Metz 1974a: 143).

Crucial, then, is the following:

A salient property of narrative is double time structuring. That is, all narratives in whatever medium, combine the time of sequence of plot events, the time of the *histoire* (‘story-time’) with the time of presentation of those events in the text, which we call ‘discourse-time.’ What is fundamental to narrative, regardless of medium, is that these two time orders are independent. (Chatman 1992: 404)

Distinguishing the narrative-as-such and the filmic construal of narrative to occupy distinct semiotic strata, each with its own possible unfolding development, opens up the door to an approach to filmic meaning that goes far beyond narrative, while also establishing a commonality between language and film too great to be ignored. The basic organizing assumption will be that we are working with a stratified semiotic loosely of the kind envisioned by Hjemslev (1961) and that this can be used directly for predicting some of the abstract properties that a semiotic of film will need to have.

Starting with the most basic Hjemslevian distinctions, we will need to be able to identify for film at the very least a plane of expression and a plane of content and, within each of these, characterizations of form and substance (cf. Hjemslev 1961: 102). Expression-substance presents particular

problems for film, which was, as we shall see, one of the main motivations for Metz to construct his *grande syntagmatique* in the first place. In short, in order to carry the meaningful distinctions constitutive of the semiotic, it is necessary to have substance available that is capable of being formed in ways that can render those distinctions recoverably; I shall return to the particularities of filmic ‘controllable substance’ below.

For the content plane, I will begin by applying the functional semiotic interpretative framework set out by Halliday (1978) and others. From this we can predict that film will carry meanings of three very generic kinds: meanings concerned with articulating some ‘content’ (which may be simple narrative or arbitrarily abstract), meanings concerned with how the filmmaker is disposed towards that content and how the filmmaker intends the viewers of the film to be disposed towards that content (also called *evaluation* or *appraisal*), and meanings concerned with structuring the presentation of both that content and its appraisal. These kinds of meaning are sufficiently abstract to have already been applied to several semiotic modes other than language (cf., e.g., Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; O’Toole 1994). In the present paper, I will focus primarily on the first of these three, since articulating ‘content’ is one of the main roles taken up by montage.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, we need to import the narratological notions of discourse time — i.e., the textual development or ‘unfolding’ of a ‘text’ — and consider explicitly how a semiotic provides resources for managing this unfolding. In accounts of verbal language, this falls within the area of *discourse semantics* (Martin 1992; Asher and Lascarides 2003), an area that has seen major advances since the time of Metz and of which accounts of film semiotics have so far shown little awareness. Using notions of discourse semantics lets us move the entire discussion of similarities between film and language to a new degree of detail: although film semioticians such as, for example, Colin (1989: 166), Heath (1981: 26), and Metz himself (1974b: 21), have maintained from very early on that film be treated as discourse, just how this could be done in anything but broadly metaphorical terms remained unclear. This in turn supported further attempts to drive language and film apart by pointing, on the one hand, to the fact of apparently ‘ungrammatical’ sentences in language and, on the other, to the apparent non-existence of ‘ungrammatical’ films.

When we move to discourse, this difference disappears: there are no ‘ungrammatical’ films in precisely the same sense as there are no ‘ungrammatical’ texts: there are ineffective, poorly-structured texts, but they are not ungrammatical in the same sense that sentences can be. Moreover, and more importantly, the way that *semantics* operates in the realm of sentences and in the realm of texts is quite different. Modern approaches

to the mechanisms developed for discourse semantics describe in detail how meanings can be assigned to dynamically unfolding sequences of units without positing some notion of ‘text grammar’ or syntax. While there is no sense in which the kinds of meaning-making mechanisms operational in film resemble those of the compositional semantics found within sentences, they *do* resemble precisely the kinds of mechanisms that are observed in discourse. This advance, showing how meaning construction works in the face of moment-by-moment contingency, is arguably one of the most significant advances that linguistics, construed broadly, has made in recent years.

It is then of considerable importance to note that these mechanisms of discourse semantics do not reduce to general principles of intelligent behavior or purposeful action. Asher and Lascarides (2003) describe clearly how a *distinct* level of discourse semantics with its own operations and brand of defeasible logic based on abduction (cf. Wirth 2005) appears necessary to intervene between the semantic configurations delivered by compositional sentence semantics and the characterizations of general knowledge and rational action of a full contextualized interpretation. This also takes us beyond the confines of narrative: the operations and categories of discourse semantics apply across *all* texts — not just narrative — and therefore appear to be a general property of the linguistic semiotic. Without this intervening level, discourse interpretation remains radically underconstrained and there could be little expectation that text interpreters would come to the highly focused and shared interpretations that they evidently do.

The very real question that remains for us here is whether there is a similar level of discourse semiotics at work for film. Authors such as Bordwell have suggested that much of film interpretation and filmmaking is simply akin to solving everyday practical problems (e.g., Bordwell 2005); this would be the position that there is no additional discourse semantics of film. Such approaches have considerable difficulty, however, in producing revealing accounts of the mechanisms of change in filmic ‘styles.’ For Bordwell, filmmaking employs ‘craft practices,’ which can go through fashions, and which also provide a repository of standard solutions to filming problems — problems, for Bordwell, of how to tell the story given particular constraints of production and circumstances (cf. Bordwell 2005: 249). But the fact that such ‘standard solutions’ can, on the one hand, be expressed and, on the other, receive particular values and meanings in their own right, argues strongly for a treatment within a framework of semiotic codes, one which necessarily ties in a diachronic view, relating history to system. Valorizing particular selections of expressive resources — in short, developing various layers of connotative

semiotics — appears a generic property of sufficiently sophisticated semiotic systems and, again, points to a deep similarity, rather than difference, between verbal language and film. Precisely such a framework is offered by the Hallidayan social semiotic adopted here. It remains, however, to do the work and show that setting out an account of film in these terms can contribute to a useful characterization of how films mean. That is the task taken up in the remainder of this paper.

### 3. The *grande syntagmatique*: Revisions and rebuttals

In this section, I show the respective strengths and weaknesses both of the original *grande syntagmatique* and its successors in terms of their treatment of the fundamental axes of description: the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic. Although these notions are most familiar from linguistic accounts, I will argue that they are essential for dealing with the meaning making possibilities of any sophisticated semiotic. Doing justice to *both* axes is then crucial for taking Metz's account further.

#### 3.1. *The original model*

'Going from one image to two images, is to go from image to language.'

— Metz (1974b: 46)

Metz's grounds for formulating the *grande syntagmatique* are a direct consequence of the point made above concerning the need for 'controllable substance' in order to construct recognizable distinctions capable of carrying meaning. If it is accepted, as seemed at the time of Metz to be the case, that the individual images that make up film are infinitely variable in a way that, for example, words are not, then there is a considerable problem of interpretation. Within this infinite variation, how can an interpreter of a film know when something *meaningfully* 'different' or 'similar' has been said? *Language and Cinema* also relates this closely to Hjelmslev's argument that messages are only messages with respect to codes: if there is no code (because there is infinite variation and thus no distinctive distinctions), there is no message. This appeared to Metz, given the manifest meaningfulness of film, to be clearly untenable. And so he argued that there has to be some *other* level of characterization that can explain the meaningful options for creating film structure that reoccur again and again in all narrative films.

This, for Metz, can be found in the ‘large’ units, i.e., shots and sequences of shots, of the image track of the narrative film (1974b: 120). It is precisely here that we find the possibility of substitution, commutation, and other semiotic/linguistic operations constructing recognizable *alternatives* that provide the basis for meaningful messages. The alternatives thus recognized then correspond broadly to the informal notion of ‘sequence’ and reaffirm in many ways the traditional importance given within film theory to the notion of *montage*, the deliberate placing together of shots for discursive effect. Montage was first given central place in film theorizing by Pudovkin (1926) and Eisenstein (1963), and has remained a defining aspect of what constitutes film ever since. The *grande syntagmatique* is therefore first and foremost classifying possibilities for constructing sequences and is explicitly contrasted with frame-by-frame analyses or analyses within shots (‘internal montage,’ ‘internal editing,’ ‘staging’), on the one hand, and with larger scale analyses that consider ‘parts’ of films or the reoccurrence of ‘extended motifs,’ on the other. Its main aim was to provide a generic classification that sets out within a single systematic description all the possible ways in which filmic segments can be meaningfully combined.

The starting unit for Metz’s classification of alternatives<sup>2</sup> is what he terms the *autonomous sequence*. This is the filmic realization of what, on the narrative level mentioned above, can be described or is being constructed as a single ‘episode’ with some ‘unity of “action”’ (1974a: 124). When such an autonomous sequence is broken into smaller scale units, we obtain a structural whole, the *syntagma*, between whose elements particular kinds of relationship hold. These varied *internal relationships* determine to which subtype the syntagma as a whole belongs:

It appears that the different types and subtypes . . . can be redistributed into a system of successive dichotomies, according to a procedure commonly used in linguistics. This scheme gives us a better outline of the *deep structure* of the choices that confront the filmmaker for each one of the ‘sequences’ of his film. (Metz 1974a: 123)

As we note again below, the mention of ‘deep structure’ here is unfortunate but symptomatic of the time when this exploration was being made.

The subtypes of the classification then set out how a narrative episode can be discursively articulated by means of distinct combinations of shots to add particularly filmic meanings. The sequences thus characterized then stand in a *realizational* relationship to the events of the narrative: i.e., starting from a given ‘event,’ the filmmaker can decide to decompose this event into a variety of kinds of sequences. The resulting system of



successive dichotomies organizing these syntagmas then builds the *grande syntagmatique*, set out graphically in figure 1 and following Metz's numbering of the individual types.

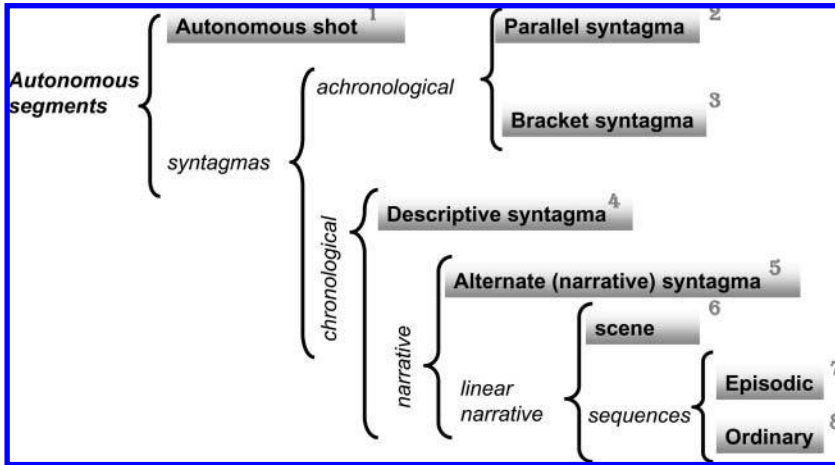


Figure 1. Metz's grande syntagmatique of the image track of narrative film; adapted from Metz (1974a: 146)

The decomposition of possible renditions stand in contrast to an autonomous sequence is organized, following their assumed relationship with issues of plot, primarily around time, space, and topic. The first major discrimination among the syntagmas is accordingly between those whose elements are related by time (chronological: subtypes 4–8) and those whose elements are not (achronological: 2–3). The latter consists of elements related by topicality where the elements of the syntagma show some kind of connection in terms of the topics or values relevant for the film such as, for example, presenting shots indicating wealth, or poverty, or authority, or injustice, etc.; the crucial defining characteristic is a lack of intended temporal commitment. The two subtypes, the *parallel syntagma* (2) and the *bracket syntagma* (3) are themselves distinguished in terms of more complex properties. Metz describes the parallel syntagma as bringing together ‘two or more alternating “motifs”’ (1974a: 126) but without temporal or spatial relationships; whereas the bracket syntagma provides brief scenes selected as ‘typical examples of the same order of reality’ (1974a: 126) to illustrate some point made by the series rather than the individual shots.

The chronological subtypes include pure description, where there is generally spatial continuity but no entailed forward progression in time, and narrative, where time moves forward across the elements of the syntagma. For the latter, there are further discriminations made between syntagmas where time moves continuously and without breaks across the shots of the syntagma (subtype: 6), syntagmas where time can jump forward between consecutive shots, for example cutting ‘dead time’ because nothing of interest to the film is happening or to speed the progression of the narrative (subtype: 8), and syntagmas where there is a general forward progression in time but the elements are selected according to some particular organizational feature important for the film (subtype: 7).<sup>3</sup> There is also considerable complexity hidden in the only ‘non-syntagma’ of the *syntagmatique*, the ‘autonomous shot.’ I will provide an account of ‘insertions’ into autonomous shots drawing on the detailed classification of Fledelius (1979) below.

Many of these categories have, at various times and by various authors, been criticized or debated (e.g., Colin 1995: 59–60; Monaco 2000: 223). More problematic than individual variations in definitions, however, is the general agreement that it is sometimes quite difficult to distinguish certain syntagmas. The analysis then depends on how a particular film has been structured and what criteria for categorization the analyst prioritizes. This is not a good basis for reproducible analysis and more analytic precision is required.

### 3.2. *Syntagmatic developments*

Most of the refinements and extensions that were made of Metz’s account in the 1970s and 1980s were overwhelmingly syntagmatic in orientation. This is due to there being few alternatives in the linguistic descriptive frameworks sufficiently well known to film semioticians at that time. The characterizations drew principally on techniques and representations then emerging in linguistics, and these were almost exclusively syntagmatic. The results were occasionally voiced as criticism, in that Metz’s syntagmatics did not meet the standards of rigor set by the emerging Chomskyan account (e.g., Möller-Naß 1986), but more often they were simply taken over as part of the developing method of a linguistic-based approach, thus inheriting the inherent limitations of those mechanisms as we shall see.

Nevertheless, several approaches made it clear that there was an awareness that paradigmatic issues needed to receive more attention, despite

the lack of technical resources for capturing them. Colin (1995), for example, takes as his starting point standard phrase structure rules, but modifies the notation so that the relations between siblings in the described phrase structure trees are understood as disjunctions rather than the usual concatenation (which he described not entirely appropriately as conjunction). Thus, a traditional syntagmatic phrase structure rewrite rule such as:

$$A \rightarrow BC$$

was simply reinterpreted to mean: if A then B *or* C. Dominance in the resulting tree then construes subtype relationships instead of syntagmatic constituency. This perpetuates a basic problem of the original Metzian description: the *grande syntagmatique* is actually a *paradigmatic* description of syntagmatic possibilities; that is, it is expressing *alternatives* between possibilities. Both Metz and Colin are therefore attempting to get at a paradigmatic description but do not have the technical means to do so.

In Colin's case, the result of respecification is what he terms the *selection-tree* available to the filmmaker; this is summarized by Colin (1995: 67) in the tree structure shown in figure 2. In this structure, the terminal nodes are intended to label syntagmatic types; the non-terminal nodes are in contrast intended to provide definitional attributes, or as we will label them consistently below, *features*, that hold over the subordinated parts of the tree.<sup>4</sup> Making the definitional attributes explicit is an important advance and enables Colin to attempt a more rigorous and discriminating definition of the syntagmatic categories.

This he does by giving more weight to their diegetic import — i.e., their role for the film's narrative. First, he distinguishes between the parallel and bracket syntagmas by proposing that the former does not play a role in advancing the narrative. Second, when there are consequences for the narrative, these can either be generic, i.e., concerned with general facts or states of affairs involved in or important for the narrative, or specific, i.e., relating particular events of the narrative. Generic narrative syntagmas then characterize the bracket syntagma. Third, specific narrative syntagmas either concern some 'hero' or main protagonist(s) or describe particular states of affairs supporting the narrative — this distinguishes descriptive syntagmas from narrative syntagmas proper. And within the narrative syntagmas proper, there can be either linear or alternating syntagmas.

Conflating the definitional features of the syntagmas with the syntagmas themselves in a single structural representation leads to some

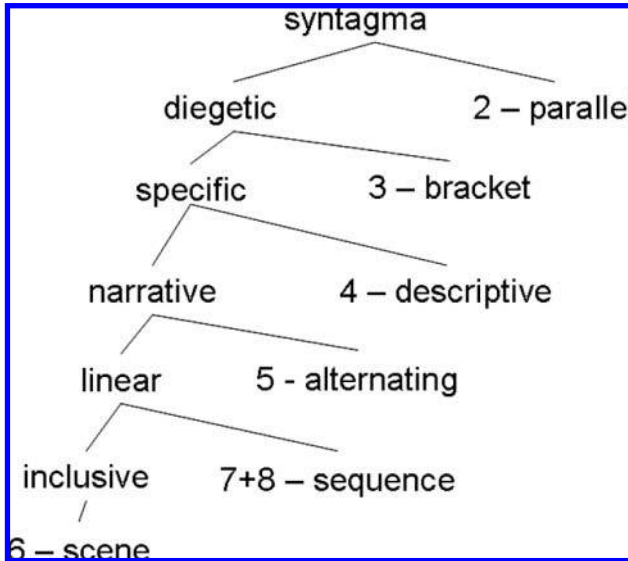


Figure 2. Michel Colin's reworking of the *grande syntagmatique* as a 'selection-tree'

significant problems, however; this is entirely symptomatic of the problem of only having a syntagmatic representational scheme available. When Colin explores the definitional features of the syntagmas more finely, he finds that their applicability does not appear to respect the dependencies entailed by his hierarchical tree structure. And so to move beyond this, he tries to employ the linguistic descriptive resources of Chomskyan syntax and defines lexical subcategorization rules that associate particular syntagmatic types with a vector of feature values. His account of the Metzian categories is then as follows (Colin 1995: 73):<sup>5</sup>

parallel syntagma →	<−diegetic, −linear>
bracket syntagma →	<+diegetic, −specific>
descriptive syntagma →	<+diegetic, +specific, −narrative, +linear>
alternating syntagma →	<+diegetic, +specific, +narrative, −linear>
scene →	<+diegetic, +specific, +narrative, +linear, +inclusive>
sequence →	<+diegetic, +specific, +narrative, +linear, −inclusive>

The feature 'inclusive' is newly added by Colin in order to indicate a relationship between the spaces involved in the juxtaposed shots: the space of

the second shot may be *included* within a common spatial framework provided by the first. What distinguishes a sequence from a scene is then some ‘itinerary’ that a main protagonist follows; this can range over a variety of distinct locations and so receives the spatial feature of not being ‘inclusive’ (Colin 1995: 74).

These rules make it clear that the syntagmatic types are no longer positioned simply as nodes within a dependency tree. They also, however, raise issues concerning the dependencies that actually do hold between the features employed. Again drawing on the Chomskyan model, Colin attempts to capture these dependencies using the lexical redundancy rules developed in early Chomskyan views of the lexicon. This is partly to describe the co-occurrence possibilities more effectively and partly to escape the requirement imposed by his tree representation that certain features are automatically excluded at one branch even though they appear to be potentially relevant along the other branch. A syntagma is then characterized by feature combinations and dependencies as follows:

- (1) syntagma           → <+/-syntagma, +/-diegetic>  
     <+syntagma>       → <+/-linear>  
     <+diegetic>       → <+/-specific, +/-narrative, +/-inclusive>

Colin accordingly and correctly notes that this ‘cannot be expressed as a tree,’ raising the representational problem that it is not a strict hierarchy — a requirement he cites from Chomsky. We shall see below, however, that when we turn to a proper treatment and separation of syntagmatic and paradigmatic descriptions, this is by no means a problem — quite the contrary, it is to be expected.

Finally, having now used his syntagmatic resources to cope with the paradigmatic description, he has little room left to capture the syntagmatic axis of film in its own right and ends up with two kinds of structuring, standing in an uncertain relationship to one another: *categorization* (which we can assign to the paradigmatic axis) and *segmentation* (assignable to the syntagmatic axis) (Colin 1995: 75–77). While this enables Colin to make some interesting points about how certain sequences of film are functioning (because the two structures can contradict each other), this is actually more in spite of the formalization rather than because of it.

Another characterization in terms of phrase structure appears in Möller-Naß’s (1986) critique of Metz’s entire approach. A substantial component of this criticism centered on the assumed nonsensicality,

inherited from Chomskyan syntax, of ‘meaning’ without ‘grammaticality’; I mentioned in section 2 above that advances in discourse semantics have rendered this particular issue obsolete. However, still apposite is Möller-Naß’s discussion of Metz’s formalization from the perspective of the more formal foundation for linguistic structural representations then emerging. In particular, Möller-Naß criticizes the ‘tree’ organization employed by Metz, correctly observing that there is an equivocation concerning the features that are used to classify syntagmatic types and the types themselves — precisely as we saw in Colin’s ‘selection-tree’ in figure 2. Möller-Naß’s approach to improving this is then to reorganize the hierarchy so that it properly reflects features and to explain that each syntagmatic type should be characterized by a unique feature combination. He then shows that there are two kinds of features at work, those concerning segmentation and those concerning temporal relations. He places each of these in the form of a tree and states that, to do proper justice to the independence of the two dimensions represented, the tree concerning segmentation should be placed as a subtree of *all the nodes of the other tree* (Möller-Naß 1986: 338).

Both Colin’s proposals for employing lexical redundancy rules and Möller-Naß’s reorganization of the Metzian hierarchy are illustrative of the original paradigmatic nature of the *grande syntagmatique* attempting to express itself; the descriptions developed could in some sense be called ‘proto-paradigmatic’ in that they strain to capture paradigmatic options within the mechanisms of syntagmatic representations.<sup>6</sup> Both Colin and Möller-Naß draw attention to what they saw as the explosive complexity involved in combining features running along different dimensions. Möller-Naß goes so far as to suggest that that complexity shows that there is *no* overall system that can be described (Möller-Naß 1986: 349). Cross-classification is, however, a common property of properly paradigmatic descriptions of verbal languages and is a consequence of the fact that the features proposed are independent of one another: i.e., they can be ‘chosen’ independently in the description of a single unit. Modern paradigmatically organized grammars, such as those commonplace in systemic-functional linguistics (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2004), have hundreds of such combinations of features and remain useful and powerful representations of the grammatical systems of natural languages.

Möller-Naß’s conclusion is then perhaps understandable but it is also a direct result of attempting to squeeze paradigmatic properties into a syntagmatic representation. Experience with this kind of representation was not available at that time and it is because of this that they found the direction that an adequate account would force them daunting. Möller-

Naß's suggestion that film semiotics profits from linguistics and linguistic methods in terms of the 'general principles' of syntax — constituency, production rules and transformations (Möller-Naß 1986: 353) — is then problematic. Although his criticism not only of Metz, but of semiotics in general, that too little attention has been paid to the details of structure may be true, such details of structure are not to be obtained from production rules and transformations.

A further alternative syntagmatic approach whose implications have been considered far too infrequently is the more developed view of *filmic* structure set out by Fledelius (1979). Metz had already drawn attention to structural configurations that appear to go beyond the scale of his own 'large' structures and his typology, but a simple statement that there are sequences of various scales does not take us very far in creating a more comprehensive account. In contrast to this, Fledelius states not only that there may be larger syntagmatic organizations, a position that Metz was quite willing to countenance, but, more usefully, that these larger syntagmatic structures may *also* be subject to the *grande syntagmatique*, thereby bringing the smaller and larger scales into relation:

A further development of Metz's system consists in the perception of the film in its entirety not as a single string of paratactic syntagmas, but as a pyramid-like hierarchy of superior and subordinate syntagmas . . . [Our] analysis led not only to the identification of units larger than the syntagmas, but also to the conclusion that these units can be classified according to the same categories as the syntagmas, only with the difference that they are syntagmas of syntagmas, not syntagmas of shots. (Fledelius 1979: 48)

This observation gets at the heart of syntagmatic structure in a way that the simple admittance of phrase structure, for example as by Colin (1995: 78), does not and is sufficient to turn the *grande syntagmatique* into a powerful framework for the analysis of entire films.<sup>7</sup>

It also brings us back to the semiotics of language where this is a crucial property. When a linguistic syntagmatic unit, such as a clause, may contain further such units within itself as sub-constituents, then a necessary part of the complete picture is that both the containing and contained units may make use of the same system of *paradigmatic* options. That is, a clause may contain nominal phrases with relative clauses inside them, and the paradigmatic description of the possibilities for the relative clause will be largely shared with that for the containing clause. Being able to reuse complex paradigmatic systems of classification at various points in a structure is a crucial design feature of sophisticated semiotic

systems such as language. The options of the contained unit may be further constrained by its occurrence as a constituent, but the general space of possibilities for both is usefully held common. While the acceptance of full recursivity both of structure (syntagmatic) and paradigmatic options is an important advance, it also necessitates a thorough reevaluation of the options that are presumed to be available for building syntagmas. Metz had not followed through related units of this scale with his apparatus and it was not yet known to what extent the *grande syntagmatique*, considered paradigmatically, is sufficient.

The final and much more recent syntagmatic reconstrual I consider has also made an attempt to deal systematically with larger structures. Schmidt and Strauch (2002) aim to reduce the interpretative load placed on the analyst by reducing the appeal made to narrative concerns in the basic classification. They do this by focusing more explicitly on audiovisual clues actually present in a film being analyzed, concentrating on recognizable spatial or object-based anchors available in shots that can be used by interpreters for linking subsequent shots together. This is, therefore, a useful move in the direction of empiricism — a move also favored by Bordwell and others.

Schmidt and Strauch also go considerably further than Metz in untangling notions of hierarchy and, on the basis of a detailed analysis, conclude that three levels of structure are required for treating film (Schmidt and Strauch 2002: 92):

- autonomous segments (of three kinds: ‘plan sequence’ or sequence shot, diegetic insert and non-diegetic insert),
- base denotative syntagmas (two ground in spatiotemporal interrelationships: scene and sequence; and one atemporal: descriptive),
- higher-order syntagmas (including all sequences related in ways that go beyond simply observable spatio-temporal relationships).

The last category differs most from those of Metz and includes *narrative* sequences, with alternating sequences of various kinds as a special case. Their characterization is therefore one possible continuation of the program initiated by Fledelius. Rather than allowing all of the *grande syntagmatique* classifications to apply to all syntagmas regardless of their own internal complexity, however, Schmidt and Strauch allow full recursion only to set in with the higher order sequences. Two examples of the kind of syntagmatic structures that Schmidt and Strauch then set up to deal with such ‘higher order’ organizations are presented in figure 3; I return to how these structures are treated in the approach proposed here below.



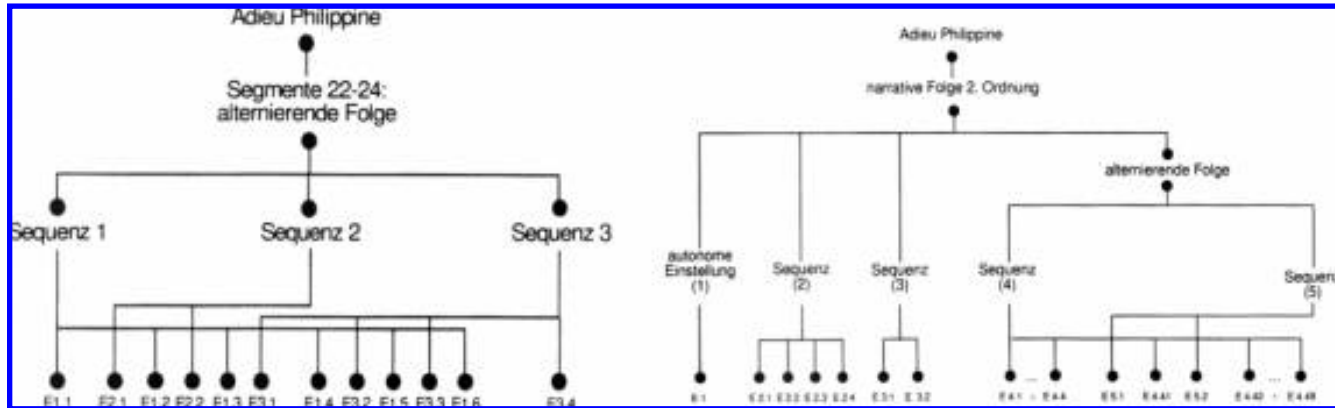


Figure 3. Example syntagmatic structures showing alternation and narrative as higher order structural organization (Schmidt and Strauch 2002: 80, 84)

3.3. *Paradigmatic developments*

Turning now to explicitly paradigmatic accounts, one of the earliest approaches to characterizing the alternative relations available between segments in film is that of Burch (1973: 3–16). This is not strictly a reconstruction of Metz at all but its own parallel development. Burch succinctly sets out the rather restricted range of possibilities for the relationships that might hold between two shots, working purely deductively from the assumption that both temporal and spatial relationships must hold. The full system that Burch devises is shown in figure 4 in the form of a *systemic network*, the representational device developed within systemic-functional linguistics specifically for showing paradigmatic descriptions (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). In this representation, classification is expressed in terms of ‘systems’ of alternatives (e.g., either ‘continuous’ or ‘ellipsis’) arranged in a dependency network. Cross-classification, or *simultaneous choice*, is indicated by rightward facing braces. Here, therefore, we can see that there is a parallel classification along the paradigmatically independent dimensions of space and time. This cross-classification across spatial and temporal relationships gives a basic repertoire of 15 (i.e., 5 temporal  $\times$  3 spatial) shot relations. Questions of how larger structures than two related shots may be constructed were not addressed however.

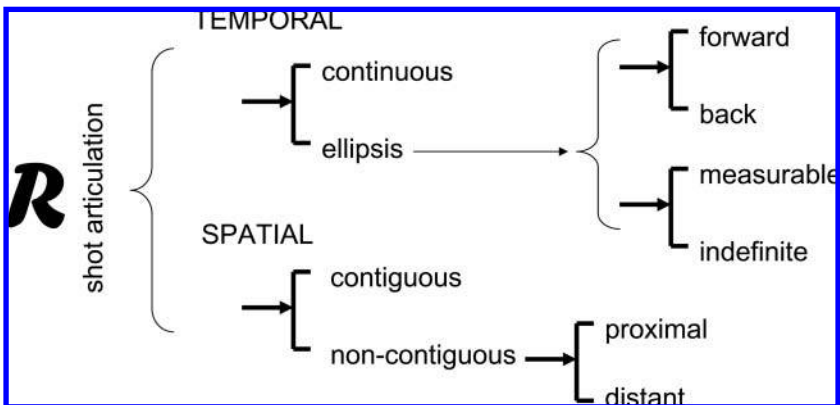


Figure 4. *Paradigmatic overview of articulations according to Burch (1973)*

More recently, van Leeuwen (1991) has attempted to bring out the purely paradigmatic aspects of the possibilities of montage, including Metz’s account, explicitly using the resources of systemic-functional linguistics.

Here he applies, on the one hand, the systemic network notation for pure paradigmatic description and, on the other, the approach to *conjunctive relations* developed for discourse semantics by Martin (cf. Martin 1983, 1992; Martin and Rose 2003). Conjunctive relations describe how the distinct messages constituting a text may be related to one another along a restricted number of dimensions. This illustrates, therefore, the notion mentioned above in section 2 concerning the existence of a level of discourse description separate from general notions of knowledge of action. Language provides means for expressing a relatively restricted range of connections between messages, typically divided into addition, comparison, time, and consequence subclasses; linguistically, these typically occur as discourse connectives or conjunctions and not all of these have been found to apply to film.

Van Leeuwen describes the conjunctive relation options that have been taken up in previously proposed theories of montage, thereby offering a useful contrast and critique of existing theories. Pudovkin, for example, is taken by van Leeuwen to have conflated a ‘principle of non-narrative conjunction and the principle of non-linear narration’ (van Leeuwen 1991: 85), and both Timoshenko and Metz confuse, or conflate, ‘the relations between shots or sequences of shots, and a typology of sequences’ (van Leeuwen 1991: 86). This latter is again the confusion of syntagmatic and paradigmatic organization mentioned several times above but seen here from the vantage point of the paradigmatic axis.

The result of van Leeuwen’s discussion is a further proposal for the relations possible between shots; this is shown, again as a systemic network, in figure 5. Here we find distinctions similar to those identified by Burch as well as several further categories motivated by the conjunctive relation analysis of verbal texts.<sup>8</sup> The options under ‘elaboration’ capture some of the functions of insertions into autonomous segments (cf. section 3.1 above), whereas those under ‘comparison’ capture some of the symbolic meaning attributed to bracket and parallel syntagmas, including contrast and similarity.

This network differs from that of Burch in that there is no cross-classification. This may be a consequence of taking over the description from verbal language too closely. Within the linguistic system of conjunctions, the classification network describes the possibilities for a *single* conjunctive relation holding between ‘conjunctively relatable units’ (CRU, Martin 1983). There it is possible to state that a relation is either temporal (e.g., ‘A *after* B’) or spatial (e.g., ‘A *where* B’). This exclusive either-or choice does not hold for film, however, as indicated in our paradigmatic representation of Burch’s classification above in figure 4. A relation between images may need to be classified *simultaneously* along its temporal

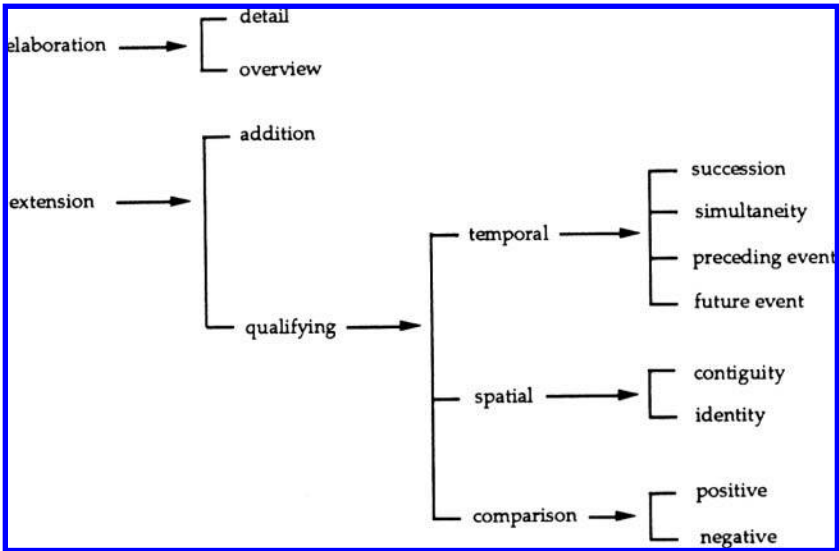


Figure 5. Van Leeuwen's characterization of the possible conjunctive relation articulations in film (van Leeuwen 1991: 111)

relationship *and* along its spatial relationship. This issue may also be usefully related to the very different nature of the expression-substance for film: information concerning spatial and temporal continuity is almost obligatorily present in successive shots. This kind of simultaneity is not directly available for language, although similar inferences can often be drawn implicitly. It may then be the case that, as van Leeuwen argues, fewer *kinds* of relationships are signalled between images than between linguistic messages. However, among these fewer relations, it is possible for more than one to hold at the same time.<sup>9</sup>

There is also a sense here, this time analogously to Burch, that the notions of structure that we have seen in the syntagmatic approaches and in Metz himself have moved too far into the background. On van Leeuwen's part, this is quite deliberate. Since he is looking for conjunctive relations between (generally) successive units, the attention that Metz places on the 'structure of sequences' appears to him out of place and at odds with an account of montage. However, Metz's *grande syntagmatique* was not proposed as a classification of relations between shots; its syntagmas formed, as Buckland emphasizes, 'a paradigm to the extent that they offer eight different commutable ways of constructing an image schema' (Buckland 1991: 211; also Metz 1974b: 170), drawing on Hjelmslevian principles of dependence and commutativity. The *syntagmatique* therefore includes

mention of sequences of particular kinds for a reason and this is lost in van Leeuwen's reformulation.

Van Leeuwen's take on this is very clear:

... Metz bases many of his distinctions on the conjunctive relations between shots, but presents his theory as a typology of sequences, rather than as an account of the ways shots and sequences can conjunctively relate to each other ... Typologies of sequences could certainly have a place in theories of cinematic genre, but do not belong in a theory of the 'language' of cinema, such as Metz claims to be writing. (van Leeuwen 1991: 86–87)

Although this removal of characterizations of sequences from the 'language' of cinema is consistent with van Leeuwen's position as a whole, it is in the last resort less than convincing. Applied to linguistics it would claim that studies of grammatical and discourse structures, including genres and appropriate generic structures, do not belong as part of a theory of language. While various theoretical positions on this issue are no doubt possible depending on how far we wish to extend the notion of 'language,' we will see that such a dismissal of the role of sequences and their properties compromises an effective description of how filmic sequences function. There are important issues to be raised along the syntagmatic axis of sequence structure that fall out of the picture within a purely paradigmatic-centered construal, regardless of the semiotic that is being considered.

#### 4. Towards a *grande paradigmatique*

I have mentioned at several points in the paper so far aspects of systemic-functional linguistics (Halliday 1978; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004) that are being drawn on for the account being developed. In this section, I apply the framework in order to construct a revised version of a Metzian characterization that does full justice to the original intent and the requirements of appropriate paradigmatic *and* syntagmatic representation.

The systemic-functional mode of linguistic description is distinctive in that it has, throughout its life, always placed significantly more weight on the paradigmatic axis of description than other current linguistic theories. Here linguistic potential is captured as a paradigmatically organized network of possibilities for syntagmatic expression. Descriptions are set out first and foremost as networks of choices: the systemic networks seen above. These choices are purely paradigmatic — they are accordingly organized into minimal 'paradigms,' or systems of choice,

which relate alternatives of functional choice signalled by minimal syntagmatic discriminations. This gives us a strong foundation for reconstructing the *grande syntagmatique* in a way that does not compromise its essentially paradigmatic nature. Doing so, however, requires us to make certain aspects of the account more explicit because systemic-functional descriptions also maintain the syntagmatic axis as a crucial component.

Paradigmatic organization and syntagmatic units are formally related as follows. Each major class of syntagmatic unit is the site of operation for its own network of paradigmatic options. The paradigmatic options taken up determine the internal structure of that unit by associating with each choice collections of *syntagmatic* realizational constraints. The precise nature of these realization constraints does not concern us here because there are important differences between language and film in this respect. There is no need, for example, to look for exact correlates of internal clause structure within film (e.g., the notion of Subject, Verb, and Object ridiculed by Currie 1995) because they are not there. What opponents to the use of linguistics as a model for film semiotics miss, however, is that the essential more abstract properties of paradigmatic-syntagmatic descriptions *are* present and immediately provide a very tight hold on filmic articulations that goes well beyond loose metaphorical connections.

We will see below how the paradigmatic proposals of Burch and van Leeuwen, augmented by the paradigmatic components implicit in accounts such as those of Colin, can be used as a foundation for the paradigmatic description. For the syntagmatic axis, however, it is still necessary to define the units that are being described more clearly. Once this refined syntagmatic description has been reembedded appropriately in a paradigmatic account, the model as a whole will have combined the distinct approaches of the previous section in a way that not only maintains the distinctiveness of the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes but which also allows them to interact properly, thus providing the foundation for an effective treatment of the meaning-making role of sequences of shots in film.

#### 4.1. *The nature of filmic syntagmatic structure*

We have seen that the syntagmatic axis of film has remained seriously undertheorized in Metz's writings and, although there have been several acknowledgements of the necessity of admitting 'larger' structures within film, just how this is to be achieved is still an open issue. Approaches such as those of Colin and Möller-Naß above were not appropriate in that they import too many notions of linguistic phrase structure. We need then to take the step of making the units that we analyze much clearer. This

question is one that frequently reoccurs: it is well recognized that the parts of a film that are to be identified and related by a framework such as Metz's are by no means self-evident.

The 'minimal unit' for the approach that I take here will be the traditional one of the film shot, understood phenomenologically/perceptually as the apparent result of continuously running the camera. I say 'phenomenologically' rather than relying on a technical-material definition based on a single continuous 'take' because the basic data that I assume film analysis to have to rely on are the *film as perceived* rather than as technically constructed. With modern technology, including morphing practices and computer image matching, it is no longer difficult to turn separate takes into a phenomenologically seamless single 'shot.' Semiotically, and therefore differing somewhat with respect to the position to film taken in Eco (1976, originally presented in 1967), we are primarily concerned with the perceptible, not with the mechanics of production: individual frames are not perceptible and so will not be considered. Moreover, we will take each change in shot as *necessarily* requiring a treatment in terms of the syntagmas that we now describe. There is then no need to consider other interpretations for basic segmentations, such as Colin's categorization segmentations mentioned above in section 3.2, for example; nor to allow simplifications such as Metz's own proposal that segments may be treated as autonomous segments if they 'are not interrupted by a major change in the course of the plot, by punctuation or by the abandonment of one syntagmatic type for another' (Metz, cited in Bellour 2000b: 195). *Any* perceivable shot boundary is required to correspond to a unit boundary in our account in order to reduce the potential for analytical variation and to establish a firm basis for empirical validation and exploration.

Restricting the minimal unit of analysis to shots is also, however, already a severe simplification. It is therefore particularly important here to stress that the current framework nevertheless leaves open the possibility of expansion so as to include montage *within* shots at a later point. The main criterion for positing units for syntagmatic treatment is that a perceptually clear segmentation can be made sufficiently precise to guarantee recognition by the analyst. This is relatively unproblematic for the shot,<sup>10</sup> but there is also very much in favor of recognizing precisely the kinds of distinctions that will be drawn here as functioning potentially within shots also (cf. Eisenstein 1963; Metz 1974a: 134, 133n; Fledelius 1979: 42, and others). The restriction to shots is then in no way an analytic 'dead end,' although further discussion of this is beyond the scope of the present paper.

I will also for the purposes of the present paper adopt a further simplification with respect to the sound track, particularly to that of diegetic

sound, i.e., to sound or sound effects of any kind belonging in the ‘world’ of the narrative and not to an accompanying music track. Semiotically, it is necessary to consider this as an independent structuring device — one of the two essential ‘dialectics’ in film according to Burch (1973: 90). Thus, I take it as a semiotic *choice* as to whether sounds heard correspond temporally and in style (distant, near, etc.) with objects and events seen. And so it will in general be necessary to maintain the possibility that both sound and visual tracks can carry similar structuring possibilities independently of one another and that an *additional* semiotic choice is that these, in certain respects, are ‘tied’ together. A double anchoring in perceptual modes serves both to reduce cognitive processing loads (by off-loading) and to increase ‘reality’ or ‘emersion’ (object and events make sounds), while more or less subtle ‘counterpoint’ between the combined tracks points to their independence. For an initially simplified account, however, the image track will be discussed as primary, although the possibility of extending the account to consider it in parallel will also be maintained.

I term the unit described by the evolving description as simply being a *segment*. A segment, following the *grande syntagmatique*, may have internal structure. I term the individual parts of these structures *elements*. A segment is then made up of some combination of elements. Moreover, segments are taken to be recursive, following Fledelius, and so one of the possible kinds of *fillers* for an element is, again, a *segment*: Segments may contain as subconstituents other segments. Each segment, regardless of where it is in a hierarchical decomposition of a film, may be characterized paradigmatically as being of a particular type. With the smallest scale parts of a film’s structure, we find segments whose elements are *not* further segments but simply ‘shots.’ With shots we pass across a semiotic boundary: we are not dealing with larger or smaller structural segments but with a realization of a segment into a physically constituted piece of film. For current purposes, we will never talk of the physically constituted piece of film itself but only of a semiotic abstraction over the film. This will allow us to use the same terms of abstraction for both single shot elements and for elements constituted by syntagmas.

To provide the basis of this abstraction, I distinguish a ‘basis level’ of scenic interpretation that provides a host of cues for interpretation. This gives the starting point for considerations of relations between shots and cohesive ties across shots.<sup>11</sup> This description is essentially and only an *interpreted* reading including both ‘story’-related elements and technical *figurae* such as lighting, camera angle, camera movement, lens length, framing, color, etc. This may be overridden and changed by our interpretation of higher-order structures within the film and by subsequent information



becoming available as the film progresses. Formally, this does not present a problem because, as indicated in section 2, our discourse semantics necessarily assumes a defeasible logic in any case: we are working only with 'best hypotheses' (Wirth 2005). The basis level interpretation is therefore itself modifiable by more abstract interpretations and so may bootstrap itself towards or away from particular interpretations in particular circumstances. Again, we see exactly the same phenomena regularly occurring in linguistic discourse interpretation.

Metz defines syntagmas on the basis of the kinds of relations holding between elements in the syntagmas. He distinguishes between simple sequences (types 4 and 6–8), alternating sequences (types 2–3 and 5), and insertion sequences (subtypes of 1). We will attempt to make the criteria for classification homogenous across all types in that we require as much as is possible indications of which category holds from the film itself, i.e., from the signifier and from denotation as revealed in the basis-level interpretation. We then look for patterns of regularity that can be defined over these interpretations and which, at the same time, abstract away from *particular* contents. This is what allows us to fill in the syntagmatic specification of the consequences of paradigmatic choice. Again, by comparison to grammar, we can only recognize a clause classified paradigmatically as interrogative by means of certain details of its syntagmatic form (e.g., that the finite verb precedes the grammatical subject or that a Wh-word is placed as grammatical Theme) that *distinguish* it from its paradigmatic alternatives. We can state options, but only by operating at a sufficiently abstract level of description. Simple sequences, for example, are carried by continuities in spatio-temporal scene and characters and objects that are recognizable; here progressive change is required. Alternative sequences, in contrast, require separated elements to be recognizably continuations of one another, whereas insertion sequences require a recognizable diversion followed by a return to the interrupted element.

This is similar to the descriptions given by Colin (1995: 57) when distinguishing sequence shots from inserts; here, however, we need to deal with the possible forms of syntagmas *in general* and separately from their classification according to types in the *grande syntagmatique*. This is one of the natural advantages of a proper separation of the syntagmatic/paradigmatic axes: on the one hand, we identify syntagmatic configurations and, on the other, search for classificatory features to distinguish between them. In distinction to Möller-Naß (1986) and Colin (1995), however, we do not need to place these within a single representational straightjacket.

More formally, then, we can posit four broad syntagma types: (1) simple elaboration, whereby each element builds on the previous ones and

adds new information; (2) insertion, whereby a new element intervenes suddenly into a segment followed by a return to that segment; (3) simple sequences of segments, without an apparent elaborative element; and (4) multitasking, whereby two or more sequences of elements are woven together so that their individually contributing sub-elements are no longer consecutive. These abstract syntagma types can be represented in the following style, often adopted for more formal approaches to film structure, where each *W*, *X*, *Y*, *Z* represents a recognizable sequence, and each  $X_i$ ,  $Y_i$ , etc. is some element of the identified sequence. In addition, I label these adopting terminology established in grammatical treatments of syntagmatic dependency structures (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). Within such structures, participating elements are standardly characterized in systemic-functional linguistics along two dimensions: the dependency relation itself and the *degree* of interdependence, i.e., whether one element is reliant on another (hypotaxis) or both elements play an equal role (parataxis); Greek letters are used to indicate dependence (hypotaxis) and numbers independence (parataxis). Hypotactic structures are then structures where the relatively dependent segment  $\beta$  requires and builds on the relatively independent segment  $\alpha$ ; paratactic structures are where the contributions are not mutually dependent but simply follow one another.

1	[taxis:hypotactic, open-ended]	<i>W</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Z</i> ...		
		$\alpha$	$\beta$	$\gamma$	$\delta$ ...		
2	[taxis:hypotactic, closed-off]	<i>X</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>X</i>			
		$\alpha$	« $\beta$ »	$\alpha$			
3	[taxis:paratactic]	<i>W</i>	<i>X</i>	<i>Y</i>	<i>Z</i> ...		
		1	2	3	4 ...		
4	[taxis: multitasking]	$X_1$	$Y_1 \dots Z_1$	$X_2$	$Y_2 \dots Z_2 \dots$	$X_n$	$Y_n \dots Z_n$
		$1_1$	$1_2 \dots 1_n$	$2_1$	$2_2 \dots 2_n \dots$	$3_1$	$3_2 \dots 3_n$

This gives us a repertoire of recognizable structures independently of any particular content that any of the related shots may have and also independently of any allocation to a *grande syntagmatique* categorization. All that is required is the ability to recognize difference and similarity supporting judgments of continuity, discontinuity, and temporary suspension. There are also several constraints on recognizing sequences of these forms that can be applied from their internal nature. It is not possible, for example, to definitively recognize an insertion (type 2) in less than 3 shots. It is also not possible to recognize an alternating multitrack in less than 4 shots, since *two* returns are required. Moreover, as we shall see below, the complete system only permits paratactic multitasking — otherwise the

contributing sequences would not be sufficiently independent to constitute separate tracks.

In addition, and following on from the recursivity argued for by Fledeilius (1979) and the detailed analysis of Schmidt and Strauch (2002) introduced above, I postulate that this characterization of possible structures holds at each level of structure that is obtained. For example, a multi-track segment requires at least two ‘tracks’ to be intermixed within it but then *each* of those tracks can be classified further in terms of the structural possibilities set out here, and so on. This corresponds directly to the structural diagrams of Schmidt and Strauch seen in figure 3 above. More empirical work may well uncover constraints in this general recursivity, just as is the case with verbal language, and this is then to be captured in the same way as with verbal language — by restricting the options taken up in the accompanying *paradigmatic* description that we will see in the next subsection.

Although these structures are similar in many respects to the dependency structures that occur in language and, indeed, all of these patterns can also occur naturally in texts, the use I have made of the terms here is still intended to be suggestive in that there are significant differences between filmic and linguistic syntagmatic structures. It remains for further research, therefore, to see just how justified and extensive the similarities drawn are. One line of development that differs considerably from how such structures are taken to operate in verbal language — although having recognized it for film it may also feed back into descriptions of discourse — draws on the crucial role that time plays in the unfolding of the structures shown. It is indicative of the potential influence of the very different expression-substance that film makes available for making meanings in comparison to that for language. The structures shown here in fact represent ‘qualitative’ categories that can be stretched, or ‘deformed,’ in various directions.

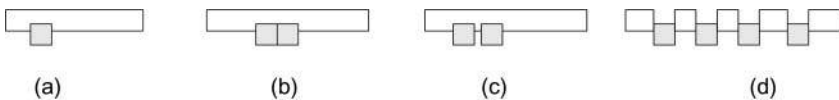


Figure 6. *Deformable sequences showing fluid transitions between types*

We can see this by following through one particular series of deformations very similar to one pointed out by Bellour (2000b: 195, originally published 1976), starting from the simple insertion; we will see that the account here provides a natural home for this kind of fluidity. In the prototypical case, the insertion is a brief digression in an ongoing

development — either providing elaborative detail, as in a close-up on a visual element of a scene, or a temporally/spatially displaced ‘flash’ of memory or premonition (cf. figure 6a). As just mentioned, it follows from the position set out by Fledelius that this insert can also take on some of the properties of segments in general: for example, it may consist of two hypotactically dependent shots, such as *two* brief views from different angles of the visual element that we are getting a close-up of (figure 6b). We may then also return to the main track briefly between those two views, while keeping a strong visual connection between the two inserts. The stronger the visual connection kept between the shots, the more an analysis in terms of a single ‘complex’ insert will be appropriate; if the visual connection is less strong, then there may be two inserts (Figure 6c). However, if the frequency of the insertions increases there may come a point when what is shown has more properties of a multitracking sequence than of a dependent insertion. The track shown in the ‘insert’ has by then taken on a life of its own and loses its dependent status (Figure 6d). Here we do not need to talk of some ‘transformation’ of the insert as sometimes attempted in early approaches — instead we have an ongoing reassessment of the features that hold as more information becomes available (cf., also, Schmidt and Strauch 2002: 68). This reassessment can retroactively reassign structural configurations as is generally the case with accounts of discourse building on defeasible logic. Crucially for both film and language, this retroactive reassignment is *itself* an effect that is deliberately created and utilized as part of the intended meaning of a text.<sup>12</sup> A similar progression can occur in an originally multitracking segment, such as the prototypical pursuit scene, which allows the pursuer and pursued to get closer and closer until, finally, they are engaged in heated dialogue, followed perhaps by physical contact. The initial multitrack is modified to a dialogue multitrack to a dialogue where both interlocutors are present in frame engaged in physical action.

The film medium therefore regularly allows the transitions between these presentational styles to be far more fluid than is usually considered the case for language. Managing and describing this flexibility becomes much easier and informative, however, when we augment our account with its proper embedding within the paradigmatic axis, to which I now turn.

#### 4.2. *Paradigmatic description*

The paradigmatic axis description allows us to consider the functions carried by the kinds of sequences identified in the previous subsection in

detail. Simply adopting the relationships posited to hold between two shots by Burch or van Leeuwen is too limited, however. We can also include the contribution of Colin by re-representing his dependencies between features, shown as lexical feature redundancy rules in section 3.2 above, in the form of a systemic network such as that in figure 7. Whereas this corresponds directly to Colin's syntagmatically-anchored rules, this representation, in contrast, says nothing directly about structure or segmentation: it is a purely paradigmatic description. The network brings out clearly Colin's proposal that there are two primary dimensional distinctions in segment classifications that must be made in parallel: syntagma or not (i.e., segmentation into subunits) versus diegetic or not.

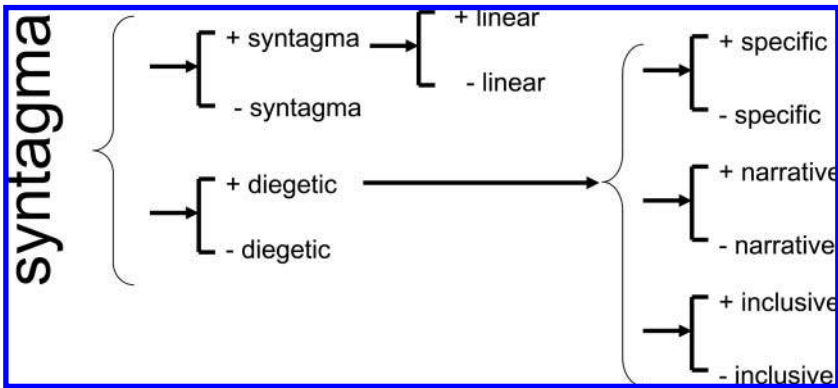


Figure 7. *Paradigmatic overview of the articulations as organized by Michel Colin (1989)*

This account differs slightly from the distinction made by Möller-Naß, who describes the two dimensions relevant for an account as segmentation and temporal relations. The motivation for the two accounts is, however, clearly related. In addition, we can see from the figure and from the representation of Burch's view on these relationships that whereas it is notationally very awkward to represent further parallel classifications in a tree-based representation such as that drawn by Colin or Möller-Naß, the paradigmatic representation naturally supports these and far more complex dependencies. In Colin's case, for example, we have a further set of three parallel subclassifications that must all be made in parallel: narrativity, inclusion, and specificity. Thus, while the paradigmatic representation remains relatively simple, figure 7 already moves on to provide a classification of 24 distinct syntagmatic types ( $3 \times 2^3$ ). Such cross-classifications represent the usual manner of working of natural language

grammars and it would be surprising if this semiotic resource were not also made use of in film. It is a direct reflection of the fact that rich syntagmatic structures can be organized so as to display multiple simultaneous selections of motivating features. And, as suggested above, the more complex the syntagmatic substrate used, the more opportunities are provided for expressing simultaneous options.

All that remains is to combine the proposals made to date, drawing out their individual contributions, in order to characterize the distinct kinds of sequences recognizable in terms of their paradigmatic functionality.

#### 4.3. *The grande paradigmatique proposed*

Combining all of the considerations so far allows the definition of a *grande paradigmatique* as set out in figure 8, which also indicates the sources used for the component parts of the network. I will first describe how the network is constructed and then, in the following subsection, illustrate its use.

The network as a whole consists of a top-level, three-way cross-classification along the dimensions of *projection*, *taxis*, and *plane*. The main contribution to syntagmatic possibilities is covered by the *taxis* subnetwork in the central band of the figure and so I will describe this first.

Each option in this subnetwork calls for a differently structured filmic sequence selected from the syntagmatic possibilities described above. These realizational consequences of the choices made are shown in boxes associated with their controlling features. These differ from those for language in just two respects: the explicit inclusion of the ‘insertion’ structure (under ‘hypotactic: embedding’) and the multitracking facility (under ‘paratactic: contrast’). Both of these are quite possible within language but do not appear to require mention as major structuring devices; for discourse this may at some stage require closer consideration. For film, these structures are so frequent and so established that an account requires them from the outset. The options under ‘hypotactic’ are relatively straightforward. The kind of dependence required here is found particularly clearly when there is a spatiotemporal development, such that the location and/or time of a subsequent element can be related directly to that preceding.

The options under ‘paratactic’ require more explanation. Here we have a cross-classification along two dimensions that makes use of the paradigmatic organization’s freedom from the syntagmatic to cover both Metz’s achronological parallel syntagma (2) and the chronological alternate syntagma (5). Both cases establish a ‘comparison’ of kinds: one of topics, one of events. Precisely which of these applies is given by the ‘internal’/

‘external’ distinction, which draws on van Leeuwen’s (1991) discussion and reflects in more general terms the division between *histoire* and discourse-time from narratology (section 2). External relations construct relations between the ‘world of events in the story’; internal relations construct relations in the telling of the story. By virtue of the cross-classification, we can have alternation creating a comparison on both of these levels: an internal comparison is one of topics, an external comparison one of events. Although taking their material from different sources, in both cases the function of the sequence is to make a comparison and not to advance a storyline.

That comparison can then simultaneously be one of ‘contrast’ or of ‘similarity.’ Under ‘similarity’ there is a sequence of segments that do not stand in any dependency relationship to one another — they are non-dependent (i.e., [1 2 3 . . .]); this then corresponds to Metz’s achronological bracket syntagma (3): ‘typical examples of the same order of reality.’ That reality can be either drawn from the narrative-line of the film (‘diegetic’) or from elsewhere (‘nondiegetic’), as in metaphorical comparisons. Decisive is that the sequence expresses a similarity in the *relation* holding between the elements of the segment. This does not mean that the denotative interpretation of the elements is the same: there could, for example, be a clear contrast between any two successive elements (e.g., ‘becomes worse,’ ‘improves,’ etc.). What is stated by the similarity expressed in unitrack syntagmatic structures is that the relation that holds across elements, whatever that may be, is held constant. The situation is then different under ‘contrast,’ where we require a constant repeated relationship that is itself already intrinsically contrastive in nature; this then requires a multitrack segment in order to support at least two tracks making up the multitrack to support that explicit contrast.

The top subnetwork in the figure, *projection* adds a possibility that has not been provided adequately in the accounts we have seen so far — although it is in fact so common that it needs to be properly represented. Here we support the possibility that, in moving from one shot to another, we may also move from a participant in the film to the ‘mental world’ of that participant; we see this in language in clauses such as ‘She saw *the dog*’ or ‘She saw *that it was raining*.’ In systemic-functional linguistics this relationship is generally referred to as ‘projection.’ Projection has often been addressed in considerations of the relations between text and static images (cf., e.g., Kress and van Leeuwen 1996: 67; Martinec and Salway 2005: 340, 358) but has not been incorporated appropriately within accounts of montage. This may be due indirectly to Martin’s quite appropriate exclusion of projection from the *linguistic* account of conjunctive relations.<sup>13</sup>

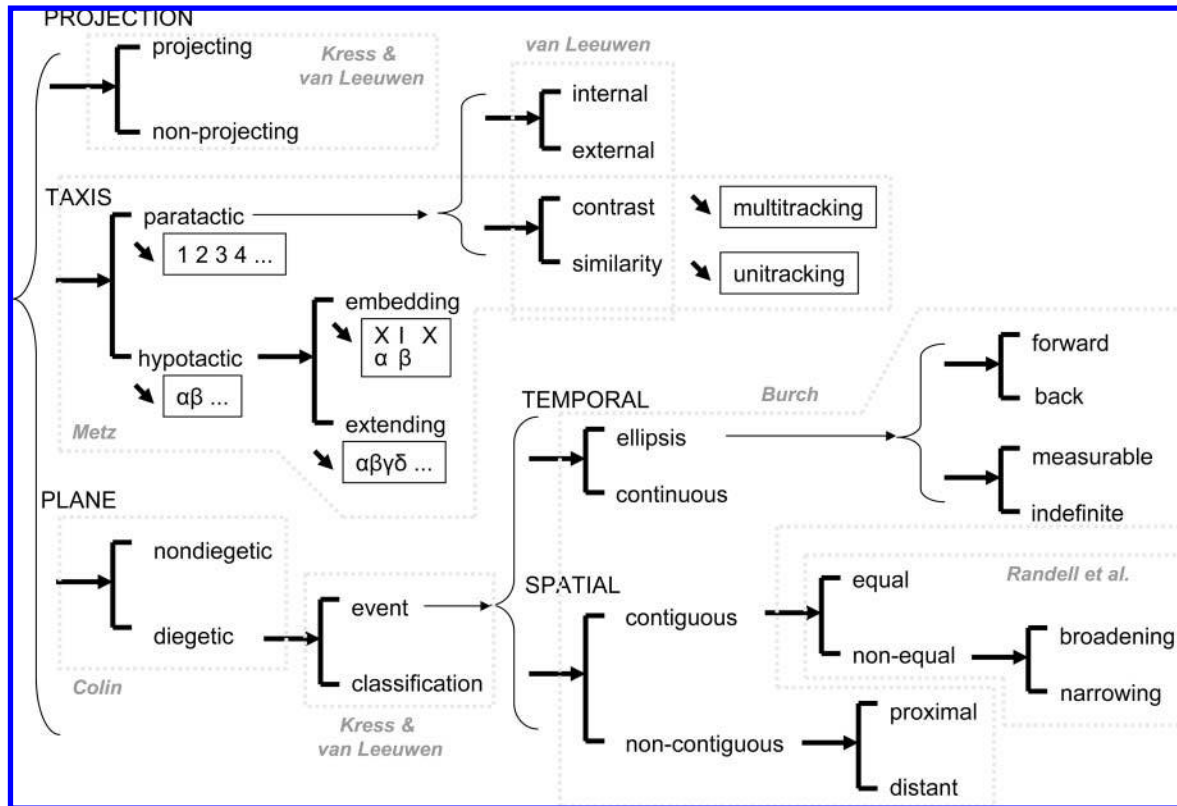


Figure 8. Proposed grande paradigmatique for film



The situation is quite different for film, however, where projection straightforwardly offers a further way of relating sequences together that is quite analogous to the other supported conjunctive relations. Moreover, instances of projection in film can either constitute a straightforward process of sensing that is contiguous and continuous in time and space with the participant, in which case we have the filmic structure called a *point of view* shot, or it can be remote in time or space, as in the case of memories, premonitions, dreams, etc. A non-projective displacement in time and/or space supports standard flashbacks, flash-forwards and the like that may be inserts, etc. but are not attributed to any participant in the film.

Finally, the lower subnetwork, *plane* consists mainly of the temporal/spatial area from Burch (1973) as described above. Burch's characterization is, however, placed under a further distinction, between 'event' and 'classification,' drawn from Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) extensively motivated discussion of the various types of 'visual processes' possible in static images. This distinction is itself placed under Colin's 'diegetic'/'nondiegetic' alternation as only diegetic segments have the opportunity of expressing topic events, classifications and spatiotemporal relations.<sup>14</sup> Under Burch's portion of the network, I also adopt an extension under the condition that spatial contiguity holds: here it is useful to distinguish between contiguity that either broadens or narrows the spatial focus; this corresponds to the spatial relations 'proper-part' and 'equal' (cf. Randell et al. 1992). With these finer distinctions in place, we can characterize the spatial contribution of 'detail' inserts as well as the use of pullbacks from particular details often used as part of establishing shots.

It is worth noting that the network differs from those for conjunctive relations proposed for language (Martin 1992) and largely taken over for film (van Leeuwen 1991) in several respects. We have discussed above the need to re-include 'mental' connections of mental processes that were originally excluded for language because they are not (in English) expressed conjunctively; we also see here that there are many more simultaneous options. As suggested above, this is due to the much richer semiotic base offered by the film medium: whereas there are no lexicalized conjunctions or connectives in language expressing simultaneously various relations of time *and* space, this is straightforward for the denotationally rich images that are placed in sequence in film. The situation is therefore one of a language in which conjunctive relations are *always* implicit — i.e., there are no explicit film connectives corresponding to words — and where it is necessary to recognize the temporal and spatial relations present in each consecutive utterance. This information would normally not be captured in terms of a conjunctive relation analysis because there one

needs to maintain the distinction between a relation being expressed or not; implicit relations are recognized only when absolutely necessary. With film the situation is different: there are only implicit connectives and so this is no longer a meaning-carrying choice. Moreover, it could be argued that with film precisely these relations *are* explicit in a particularly filmic sense — each shot includes a wealth of spatial-temporal information that is not readily present in a linguistic utterance unless explicitly put there. Therefore, the current proposal accepts this information as central in the classification of consecutive slots and directly incorporates it as one of the basic simultaneous dimensions of choice describing intershot relations in sequences.

Table 1. *Correspondence between Metz and the account presented here*

	<i>grande syntagmatique</i>	<i>grande paradigmatique</i>
2	parallel syntagma	contrast, internal
3	bracket syntagma	similar, internal
4	descriptive syntagma	extending, classification
5	alternating syntagma	contrast, external
6	scene	extending, continuous
7	episodic	similar, external
8	ordinary	extending, ellipsis

The correspondence between the categories of this *grande paradigmatique* and those of Metz is summarized in table 1. The correspondences with the accounts of Colin, van Leeuwen, and others follows directly from the inclusion of their categories as portions of the network given as indicated by the dashed boxes in figure 8. The network naturally generates very many more possible relationships than the eight of the *grande syntagmatique* and so it is interesting to consider the various gaps that are then revealed. The claim is that all of the possible combinations covered by the network occur in filmic sequences: this is an empirical issue and may lead to changes in the network when more data, i.e., films, have been treated in its terms. It may also be the case that dependencies between feature choices are revealed: for example, that external comparisons always require diegetic selections. This may also lead to changes in the network. The important step that has been taken here is to reach a classification of possibilities that is fine enough to support explicit testing against data. As the lengthy debates following the *grande syntagmatique* have shown, this was not the case with Metz's original proposal.

4.4. *Using the system: The emergence of filmic constructions*

As a final stage in the presentation of a *grande paradigmatique*, I need to show how the system functions in context. In particular, I will show its use in characterizing certain developments of filmic 'style.' I will also draw explicit attention to the fact that the mechanisms invoked are precisely those that have also been found necessary for explaining similar properties of verbal languages. These rely on certain properties of a combined paradigmatic-syntagmatic description within a systemic-functional linguistic setting and involve the theoretical dimension of *instantiation* of the system.

When the system is instantiated in use, a particular set of features selected from the network co-occurs with a particular syntagmatic structure. When, however, *combinations* of feature bundles occur with sufficient clarity and regularity to be recognized by viewers and conspicuously deployed by filmmakers, a mutual expectancy relationship is established. A bundle of features in the first shot makes relevant potential bundles in the second shot, which are then indicative of particular kinds of intershot relationships. These mutual expectancy pairs can, in time, lead to extensions in the meaningful *structure* supported by the medium and, at the same time, to increasingly 'delicate,' i.e., more specific, paradigmatic options. As part of this process, particular clues exhibited within the shots of the structure can be mobilized as structure indicating devices. This provides a strong foundation for treating a *grande paradigmatique* as a historically specific statement of the meaning potential of the film image that nevertheless includes within itself the potential for development and change over time. Combining all the contributing components of the approach so far, therefore, we take a step towards a more general, historically flexible, account of possible film articulations.

I illustrate this with a suggestive treatment of some of the standard filmic idioms that have emerged in film, showing the relation of system and structure and the regular tendency of change over time. We will see that this is precisely analogous to the emergence of constructions in language. I will begin with the point-of-view shot and then turn to the family of alternating sequences, chases, dialogues, and so on. Many examples of these kinds of developments are provided from the first films and the gradual development of narrative devices that they brought with them (cf. Bordwell 1997). Since this is already a rich and interesting area of film research, the account here will do no more than scratch the surface: the main point of the discussion is to bring out clearly the relationship between filmic development and the establishment of register and genre well known from linguistic accounts.

One of the earliest ways of breaking an ongoing action in film into several shots showed the basic text-building function of directing attention: one or more details of an unfolding event are picked out in relative close-up (cf. the discussions of Griffith's *The Lonedale Operator* [1911] in Bordwell 1997: 15 and Bellour 2000a). This is an early form of insertion structure: the image is dependent on its surrounding context and has no possibility of further independent development. The function of the shot alternation is relatively iconic perceptually: it is diegetic and spatiotemporally 'continuous/contiguous: narrowing.' Although projection may or may not have been present in the network of possibilities by that time, there had already been substantially earlier films where projection was being explicitly signalled. G. A. Smith's *Grandma's Reading Glass* (1900) is a standard example where the film shows enlarged views of objects around a table where a boy and his grandmother are engaged with a large magnifying glass.

Typically the shots that are *projected* — i.e., showing the phenomenon of perception — were signalled quite unambiguously by employing a framing device in the second shot suggesting a view through a telescope, a microscope, a keyhole, etc. This kind of additional information provided the viewers of the time with clearly marked instructions for interpretation, where interpretation is seen as selecting the relevant intershot relations from the complete system. This detail of the shot highlights that 'we' as viewer are seeing what the participant sees.<sup>15</sup> Insertions of this kind are therefore being used as 'projecting' inserts rather than simple detail inserts. And, moreover, they are projection of a particular kind: perception.

This is, therefore, one of the first filmic constructions. A shot working structurally as an insert is embedded in a structure and mobilizes visual

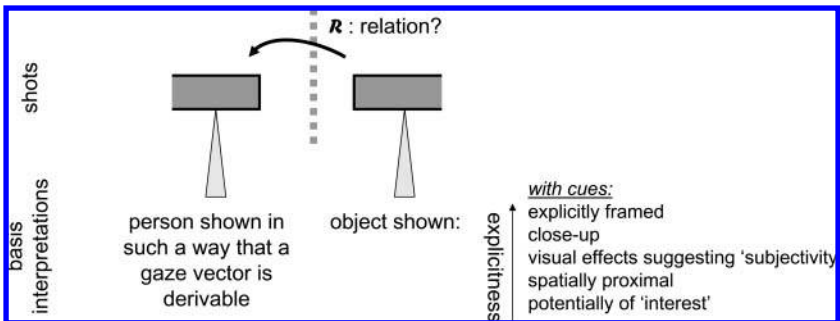


Figure 9. Schematic representation of the 'point-of-view' construction

clues that perception is involved. This kind of inter-connection, once established, can then be signalled visually with a broader range of features: most obviously, the explicit framing can be replaced with more 'subtle' indications such as a character looking off-screen followed by an object apparently looked at. Such 'eyeline matches' also very quickly established themselves. In all cases, we have a similar constructional makeup at work, as indicated in figure 9.

This provides a theoretical and developmental foundation for the rather different kinds of syntagmatic structures holding across filmic elements proposed in van Leeuwen's (1996) dynamic 'visual configurations.' Visual configurations were originally defined by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) in order to capture the visual expression of 'clause'-like meanings within static images. Just as clauses in grammar are made up of participants and processes (cf. Halliday and Matthiessen 2004), Kress and van Leeuwen suggest that visual elements can serve similar roles in graphic depictions. An obvious illustration related to the example above would be a single static picture in which one person looks at a bottle: the graphical representations of the person and the bottle correspond to participants, while the inferred 'vector' of gaze between the two entities corresponds to the process (in this case, the process of looking). Van Leeuwen's extension of this for film simply assumes that the elements carrying the configuration do not all need to be present in a single shot. Thus the classic 'point of view' shot is brought about by showing the 'senser' (the person who is looking) and the process (the gaze) in one shot and the element looked at in the next. Visual configurations then take up a further possible way of creating syntagmatic structure that cross shot boundaries while holding them together into encompassing wholes; a very similar account is presented in terms of 'visual transitivity frames' such as [gaze ^ gaze vector ^ target] in Baldry and Thibault (2006: 237). In the terms being developed here, we can see the emergence of visual configurations as semi-fixed constructions involving three aspects: (1) structural sequences, (2) their functional role (in terms of the features selected from the *grande paradigmaticque* network), and (3) identifiable sets of visual clues regularly adopted in the contributing shots.

This approach readily extends to the emergence and development of another classical film construction: the 'chase' sequence. Chase sequences were attributed particularly early to the films of Griffiths and there is much discussion of just how original an innovation this was (cf. Bordwell 1997: 130). Such sequences appear under Metz's scheme as examples of alternating syntagmas, and under the scheme presented here as 'contrast, external,' i.e., contrastive comparison relying on material in the world of the film. Contrastive comparison requires multitrack structures as we

have seen. These are quite different in structure to the cross-cutting between aspects of a single unfolding scene that might be taken up in a single-track extending sequence and are usually described as expressing ‘simultaneity’ of the events portrayed. The idea is that the individual tracks continue to run, off-screen as it were, *while* the shown track appears. The idea of an off-screen track continuing to run can already be seen in the insert, and we saw the fluid transformation of an insert into a multitrack in figure 6 above. We can now add to this additional features from the *grande paradigmatique* that allow us to explore various developments of the basic chase/pursuit schema further.

For example, in addition to the external contrast, we can also draw on the spatiotemporal subnetwork to state that the pursuer and the pursued should be spatially separated, possibly ‘distant.’ However, as a chase continues, the pursuer may gain on the pursued, gradually moving the selection of feature across the segment to ‘proximal’; there may be indications of reducing ranges of temporal ellipsis or even continuity also. Now, if the protagonists become spatially co-located, there are alternatives between showing them both together or continuing the separate tracks of the pursuit. Moreover, if there is dialogue (even implicitly as in exchanged glances), then we have a further motivation for maintaining separate tracks: the relative close-up views possible allow an easier reading of facial expression, etc. Thus we can see dialogue shot/reverse-shot sequences also as a kind of ‘contrast, external’ segment: however, one in which the spatial feature is contiguous and the temporal feature continuous. Various clues can be called into play to reaffirm these features: the typical ‘over the shoulder’ view of the dialogue partner affirms contiguity, while a continuous sound track affirms continuity. Thus we can fairly quickly see that the resources available will support dialogic interaction of this kind.

That these sequences are properly seen as paratactic rather than embellishments on hypotactic extensions can be seen from the visual independence of the contrasting tracks. If the unfolding of the story is being carried by the sound track, for example, then it is perfectly possible to leave out the ‘reaction’ shots of one of the dialogue participants. The result is simply a single sequence, ‘extending continuous,’ with the other dialogue participants off-screen. An example of this can be seen in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Notorious* (1946) during the ‘morning after the night before’ scene near the beginning of the film with Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman: Cary Grant does most of the talking but the camera stays on Ingrid Bergman. This sequence also shows exactly the kind of fluid transition shown in figure 6; by its end, the sequence has become an almost normal dialogue.

We can see, therefore, how the resources developed so far support the emergence and growth of standard ‘expressions’ such as the dialogue shot/reverse-shot series, pursuit, point-of-view, and so on. This basic functionality provides a foundation for ever more complex figures and it is a matter of continued empirical study to uncover them. That is, although in ‘theory’ it may be possible for a sequence of two shots to exhibit any of the possible relations defined by the *grande paradigmaticque* classification, additional factors will play a role in making certain classifications more likely and others less likely. Just what those factors are is a historically specific statement; it can develop and change over time.

## 5. Defeasible discourse structures and Metz reloaded

In the final example shown in this section, I bring the above mechanisms together and show how they combine to provide a powerful formalization of the semantic interpretation of film in which *uncertainty* of interpretation plays a central role. This represents an essential step beyond earlier approaches that have attempted to relate the syntagmatic structures of film to *sentence* syntax and offers a treatment of film-as-discourse fully consonant with current linguistic positions.

I will analyze a brief extract of Andy and Larry Wachowski’s *Matrix Reloaded* (2003) where there is extreme uncertainty about how the individual shots are related to one another and which larger segments are being constructed. Indeed, one of the reasons for selecting this extract is its blatant violation of the kind of *intensified continuity* described by Bordwell for the modern Hollywood-style film. According to Bordwell:

... the greater number of shots [in intensified continuity] strengthens the reliance on classical continuity principles; because each shot is so brief, it needs to be more redundant in indicating who is where, who is speaking to whom, who has changed position, and so on. (Bordwell 2005: 26)

This is precisely what the selected extract does *not* do despite its fast cutting:<sup>16</sup> we do not know who is where, who is speaking to whom or what position they have — at least for a short time; the film is a standard narrative and so it would be unlikely that this uncertainty be maintained for very long. However, while it is being maintained, we can show the function of the paradigmatic organization of syntagmatic possibilities for supporting the particular interpretations of the unfolding structures as they occur. This shows very clearly how meaning is created during that unfolding and how uncertainty of interpretation is *actively maintained*.

Table 2. *Shot-by-shot breakdown of the example from Matrix Reloaded (2003). ELS: extreme long shot, VLS: very long shot, LS: long shot, MS: medium shot, MCU: medium close-up, CU: close-up, ECU: extreme close-up.*

Shot (length)	Focus	Type	Image	Dialog
1 (2.4s)	Cityscape at night, large glass building reflecting cityscape off-center right	ELS	v. slow zoom	KM: 'There is a building'
2 (7.6s)	KM sitting in red chair	MCU	v. slow zoom	KM: 'Inside this building there is a level where no elevator can go. And no stair can reach.'
3 (6.5s)	= 1, cityscape and reflection in building, building fills screen	LS	v. slow zoom	KM: 'This level is filled with doors. These doors lead to many places.'
4 (8.5s)	= 2, KM	→ CU	v. slow zoom	KM: 'hidden places. But one door is special. One door leads to the source...'
5 (6.2s)	= 3, reflection in building, red balls of fire form in glass, cracks across building, explosion into white	LS	slow pan right	KM: '... ce' [cracking sounds, explosion, non-diegetic music louder]
6 (0.9s)	Neo center, turns, looks down right	CU/ECU		[non-diegetic music crescendo]
7 (2.2s)	Neo and Trinity both facing half-left, Neo looking down, Trinity turns to Neo	MCU		KM: 'This is protected ...'
8 (5.7s)	= 4, KM	CU/ECU		KM: 'by a very secure system. Every alarm triggers the bomb.'
9 (1.7s)	Man (M1) standing behind woman (W1)	MS	center-left	M1: 'Bomb? Did he say bomb?'



Table 2. (Continued)

Shot (length)	Focus	Type	Image	Dialog
10 (2.2s)	Room with all 9 protagonists visible	VLS/LS	viewer's gaze continuity would focus KM in distance, camera behind M1 and W1, now center- right	KM: 'But like all systems, it has a weakness.'

The short fragment that will be analyzed here takes place 94 minutes into the film and marks the beginning of a critical central phase of the action prefigured right from the film's opening seconds. Later in this phase there are accordingly scenes which are repetitions and extensions of scenes from the beginning of the film, which are thereby revealed to have been flash-forwards of some kind. The status given those earlier flash-forwards was ambivalent: varying primarily between dream and premonition. Precisely this uncertainty is created and maintained in microcosm in the fragment to be analyzed. The shot-by-shot breakdown of the fragment is shown in table 2. For orientation, graphical versions of shots 2, 7, 9, and 10 are shown in figure 10.

The fragment shown is centered on two characters, the 'Keymaker' (KM) and Morpheus (M), who are giving instructions to a small audience of 7 people scattered in three groups around a room (cf. figure 10, shot 10). The Keymaker and Morpheus are seated in identical red leather armchairs. Around them are arrayed the three groups consisting of: (1) Neo and Trinity, the main characters of the film, standing; (2) three people, Soren, seated in a sofa and two of his crew (M1 and W1) standing behind him; and (3) two further people, Niobe seated with one of her crew standing behind her (M2). In the course of the phase of the film that the shown fragment begins, all of the people present react to the instructions given and, intercut, are seen carrying those instructions out. The precise point where the 'current' time in the film changes from the scene where the instructions are being received to the scenes where the instructions are being followed is not distinctly marked as it occurs, although by that time the 'flash-forwards' have become frequent enough to readily take over the main narrative line. We see here again, therefore, a fluid transition of the type illustrated above; the precise interrelation of the two 'tracks' is therefore interesting but not a point central for the current discussion.

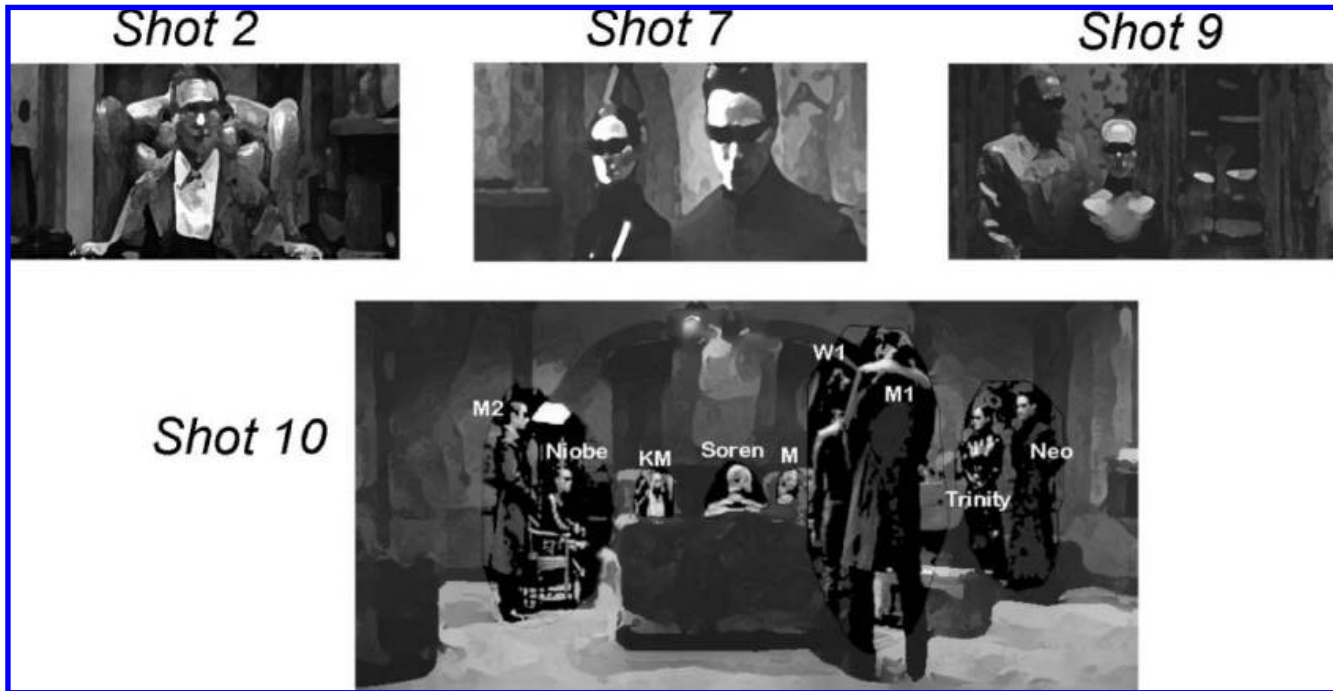


Figure 10. Recreated stills from the Matrix Reloaded fragment analyzed

Our focus here is provided by the first shots which inter-cut instructions being given by the Keymaker and, apparently, the building that the Keymaker is verbally describing. The problem with this interpretation is that the building's behavior quickly diverges from the description that the Keymaker is giving (it explodes) and there is another character, Neo, who, apparently, *reacts* to the explosion. After a few shots uncertainty (albeit minor: the lighting, colors, and texture of the background are consonant with the shots of the Keymaker) concerning where Neo is when he reacts, he and Trinity are placed explicitly in the room as one of the audience listening to the Keymaker's instructions. The nondiegetic music track, mostly not shown in the table, quietly accompanies and phrases the dialogue, apart from in shot 5, where the building explodes; I will not discuss it further here therefore — although it does add independence and prominence to the shots of the building.

I now run through the interpretation that the *grande paradigmatique* of the previous section constructs for the fragment shot-by-shot.

The first 5 shots run without problem. In each case there are several clear hypotheses generated by the structural development and one of these is taken up in the next shot without complication. This is shown in detail in figure 11. The nodes of this tree correspond to individual shots and the arrows connecting those nodes correspond to possible shot transitions sanctioned by the *grande paradigmatique*. The transitions that actually occur in the film are shown in bold; those that were possible but which did not occur connect to crossed-out nodes. The position of each node in the tree captures a particular sequential development of the film across the shot transitions necessary to reach that node. Each such sequential development then entails a corresponding syntagmatic structure, or structural interpretation, which is shown within square brackets alongside each transition. Here, node/shots that occurred in the film prior to a node are shown connected to their corresponding syntagmatic elements by bold vertical lines; the structural interpretation predicted for the next shot by a given transition is connected by a dashed vertical line. The paradigmatic classification is shown above each structural configuration in italics. The box in the upper-right of the figure shows the features that hold for all the segments and interpretations, as does the repeated projection holding between shot 1 and shot 2 until shot 6.

As a concrete illustration, then, we can see from the diagram that between shot 3 and shot 4 there are two main likely continuations identified: one on the left, [X I X X], in which the next shot (shot 4) would be a continuation of shot 3 (i.e., we stay with the building), in which case the syntagma continues to include an *embedding* insert of the Keymaker identifying who is giving the description of the building; and one on the right

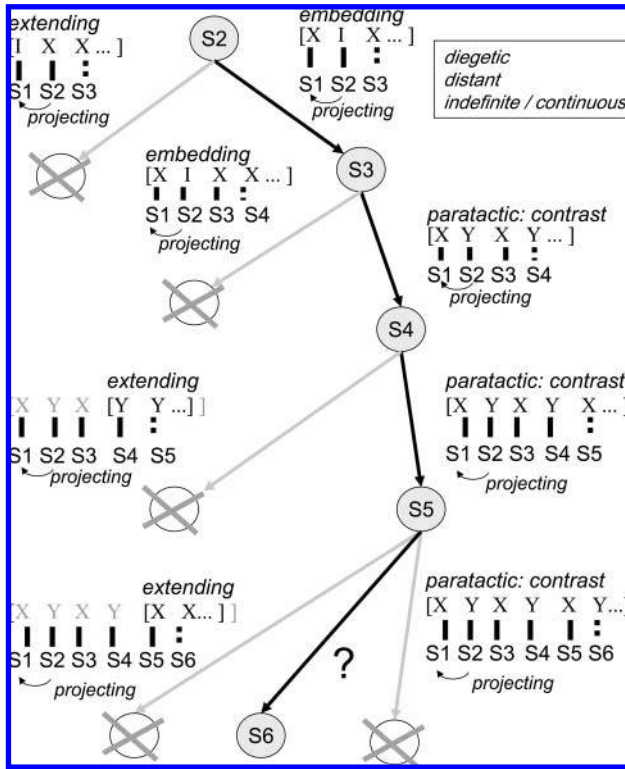


Figure 11. Analysis tree of the Matrix Reloaded fragment: Shots 1–5

[X Y X Y], in which shot 4 returns us to the Keymaker, thereby establishing the minimal conditions for a multitrack *paratactic contrast*. As shown in the figure, shot 4 then actually takes this latter path.

At several points in the figure, we show that there would be an option of beginning some substructure by developing one of the tracks further — e.g., extending on shot 4 (left branch) and extending on shot 5 (left branch) — but the actual options taken up by the film differ. And for all shots, there is also the option of simply ending the segment and going on to the next part of the film: this, as well as several other less likely continuations, are not shown in the diagram to avoid unnecessary clutter.

The main point of interest for our dynamic interpretation then comes after shot 5. We can see that both of the likely continuations suggested by the development so far are not taken up by what actually occurs in shot 6. Moreover, shot 6 serves to undermine the abductive ‘best hypoth-

eses' (see above) that held up to that point. When, instead of either the building or the Keymaker, we are shown another character, Neo, reacting to the building's explosion, this gives explicit cues that the building sequence is in fact related by projection to Neo and not to the Keymaker. This suggests that the entire building track of the multitrack established by this point is to be claimed as an internally extended projected sequence linked to shot 6. The multitracks then hold not between the building and the Keymaker, but between the Keymaker and Neo, with the building sequence dependent on Neo rather than the Keymaker. This continuation of the 'discourse' tree is shown in Figure 12.

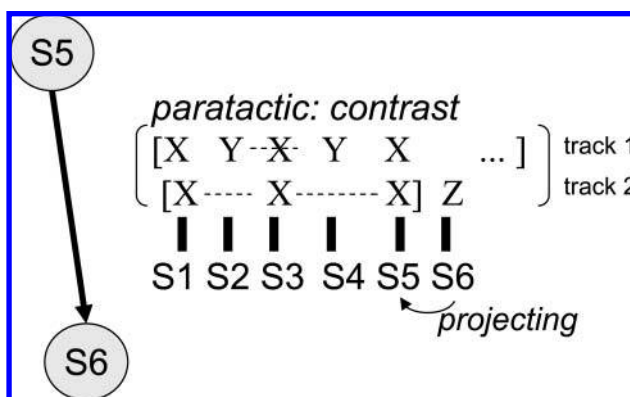


Figure 12. Analysis tree of the Matrix Reloaded fragment: transition between shots 5 and 6

The next shot, shot 7, then strengthens the preceding restructuring by extending shot 6, with time continuity and spatial broadening, while shot 8 places a final stamp on the multitrack reading by returning to the other track (track 1 of figure 12), that of the Keymaker. The final two shots bring in other members of the group and, in shot 10, show what more traditionally might have been an establishing shot for the entire Keymaker track: the entire room with everyone present visible — including Neo and Trinity of shot 7. This then anchors their co-presence within the Keymaker track also and prepares the ground for alternations between Keymaker and the others, including potentially Neo and Trinity, as the kind of multitracking seen in dialogue shot/reverse-shots rather than a true 'doubling of the narrative' (Bellour 2000b: 195). This leaves us with a set of uncertain interpretation possibilities formally carried by the development of the shots in this fragment: is there a multitrack development

involving the room and the building, both diegetically ‘real’? Or is there a multitrack development involving the Keymaker and the building? Or Neo and the building? The situation is not resolvable at this point in the segment: there is no semiotically viable ‘best’ hypothesis that clearly wins. This is depicted in figure 13.

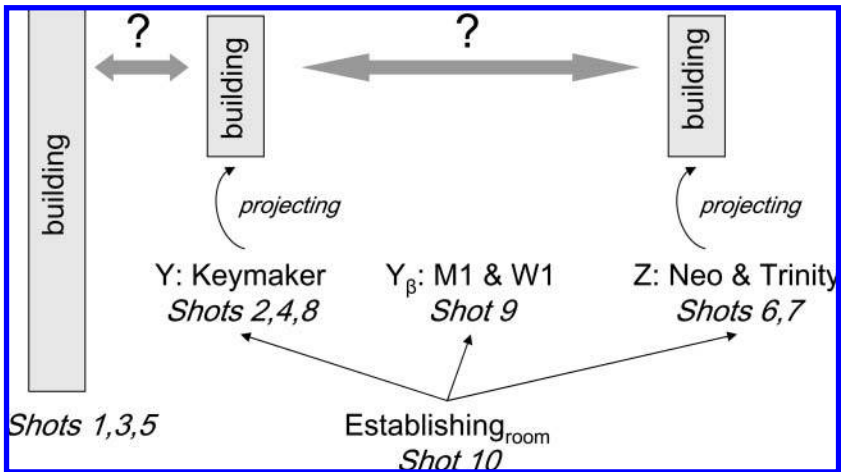


Figure 13. *Three possible lines of interpretation constructed semiotically as uncertain by the Matrix Reloaded fragment*

As the sequence continues beyond the fragment shown here, and it becomes clear that the hero of the film, Neo, will have to go into the building that is being discussed, the question of whether it actually explodes or not becomes one of central narrative concern: does it actually explode or was this simply a, possibly false, premonition on Neo’s part? The film could just leave this uncertainty with us, but instead actually chooses to problematize the relationships between tracks evident here further over the following 5 minutes of the film by repeating superficially identical structuring devices. First, there is a subsegment where the Keymaker says ‘There is a power station . . .’ accompanied by a view of this power station — again precisely analogue to shot 1. The *next* shot is, however, not of the Keymaker (cf. shot 2) but a pullback and zoom-in to show Niobe, one of the figures in the room of shot 10; there are no visual cues present to suggest that this is either a projection on the part of Niobe or, in this case, on the part of the Keymaker. We are left with an interpreta-

tion of nonprojecting, diegetic, distant, ellipsis and *forward* indefinite — i.e., a flash-forward — synchronized (discourse internally) by multimodal cohesion across the image and dialogue tracks. A little later, the film repeats this structure with the Keymaker's 'There is an emergency system ...' and a further flash-forward involving different members of the group in the original room acting in a third locale. And after this, yet another flash-forward, this time where the Keymaker himself appears. This is repeated several more times over the course of the instruction session. Is then the original exploding building sequence to be seen as the first of a series of several flash-forwards, showing future occurrences, or was it simply a premonition? The structural parallels support the former, which presents a dramatic problem for the hero, while leaving open enough doubt about the latter for hope to continue — an effective and particularly filmic narrational strategy therefore.

In short, we see a precise management of uncertainty through the structural options taken up and supported by the various visual and audial cues deployed over the segment. All of which is placed into concrete relief by the analytic categories and structuring mechanisms that the *grande paradigmatique* lays out for us.

## **6. Conclusions and outlook**

In this paper, I have argued that the failure to construct a satisfactory linguistic-semiotics of film has largely been due to the application of an inappropriate mode of linguistic theorizing, one which did not provide sufficient semiotic dimensions for dealing with the complex nature of film and films. The resulting accounts could then do little more than provide analyses of film structure that brought film into relation with sentence structural accounts rather than with the more sophisticated linguistic notions of dynamic discourse and interpretation that are necessary for film.

With the move to properly founded mechanisms for discourse interpretation, this situation is changed. It is now widely accepted in linguistics that earlier views of compositional semantics are not appropriate when we move to discourse. It is, then, hardly surprising that compositional, syntax-oriented semantics is not going to be appropriate for film either — despite its still being used by some to criticize the relevance of linguistics for film interpretation (e.g., Currie 1995: 134). Again, this has nothing to do with any fundamental difference between film and language. The issue is whether the area of concern is syntactic or discursive. In the

approach developed here, I have related shots in film most closely to turns in a discourse: their precise relationship to preceding turns is not a matter of compositional semantics but of discourse semantics. Speakers/hearers can then be uncertain about ‘correct’ interpretations because the meaning that we ascribe to sequences of shots is always *defeasible* — for example, a sequence consisting of a scientist looking through a microscope followed by an irised view of microorganisms *may* turn out in the next shot to have been a point-of-view shot, but then again, it might not. There is no absolute binding possible because the kinds of meaning construction mechanisms operating are those of conversational interaction and discourse construction, not those of phrase structure.

This by no means reduces, however, to a general ‘free-for-all.’ Just as with verbal discourse, the actual moves taken up are always placed against a background of what is sanctioned by the relevant semiotic system. That is, the essential semiotic codal tenet, that there is no interpretation without a code for interpretation, must still be maintained. What varies is the extent to which code, system and instance combine to enact trajectories of change — both within texts (logogenesis) and across texts (intertextually and historically). This has been captured in this paper in terms of a paradigmatically-based account of filmic discourse development that cleanly separates the paradigmatic and syntagmatic dimensions of description. Change in the system over time is considered in precisely the same way that change in language is considered: i.e., by repeatedly associating particular paradigmatic selections with concrete realizational consequences. I illustrated this above with reference to some standard filmic idioms such as point-of-view shots and alternating sequences. The account also emphasizes an empirical orientation that aligns well with current linguistic inquiry: it is only by attending to the fine detail of realizational consequences that such analysis becomes possible.

Finally, the fact that film provides an extremely flexible medium for the establishment and use of new constructional idioms — considerably more in the course of a film than in the course of a normal text — suggests a particular value for semiotics for examining the development of film beyond the concerns purely of film semiotics. We can readily observe how particular constructional sequences are established and varied for discourse purposes over the course of a film whereas the same process operating in language may span years if not decades. This allows us to return attention to *generic* properties of sophisticated semiotics and their associated artifacts, while still remaining sufficiently anchored in detailed analyses for empirical validation. The account that I have set out here is intended both to further such investigations in general and to support further rounds of systematic and detailed semiotic explorations of film.



## Notes

1. As is well-known from their study in language and other semiotic modes, there are also complex relations *between* these different kinds of meanings, or *metafunctions*, but discussion of this goes beyond the scope of the present paper.
2. The description here draws exclusively on the account given in *Film Language* (Metz 1974a: 119–146), rather than the earlier version of Metz (1966).
3. The standard example given for subtype 7 is the indication of the progressive deterioration of Kane's marriage in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) by presenting in sequence selected scenes at the breakfast table: the elements are necessarily temporally ordered (otherwise a deterioration would not be recognizable) but they are selected according to this overarching topic rather than narrative consecutivity.
4. To ease the exposition, I have changed this diagram to maintain Metz's numbering of the syntagmatic types rather than adopting Colin's renumbering.
5. The definitions given here differ slightly from those presented by Colin; sometimes logically entailed features are missing in his presentation. Also, the alternating syntagma was assigned +linear, which does not correspond to the feature dependencies he defines and so is presumably not what was intended (cf. figure 2).
6. We can, in fact, also view the transformations of transformational generative grammar in precisely this light.
7. It is also more than interesting to note here that Fledelius' conclusions were reached on the basis of analysis of *non-narrative* films. This weakens somewhat the force of arguments against Metz that his focus on narrative films is descriptively unsound.
8. As well as providing a single coherent system for describing a very wide range of possible relations between shots, the conjunctive relation approach also allows van Leeuwen to naturally extend his account to take in relations *across* modes, including similar relations across, for example, the image and the sound track, or the image and the dialogue, etc. Further discussion is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the current paper.
9. Within the conjunctive relation approach, this may be signalled by assuming two conjunctive links to hold between the same units. This is not the same statement, however: the position I will adopt follows Burch and holds that both classifications are *necessarily* present and co-classify the intershot relationship.
10. But not entirely so: there have always been examples of very fast cutting, for example, that achieve effects that are not simply assimilable to the syntagmatic structures that will be described here — e.g., the time dilation and emphasis achieved in the 'plate smashing' scene of Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925).
11. This can be usefully related to Bordwell's (1985: 113–119) account of the *scenographic space* of film out of which interpretations are constructed. It also takes issue with the position that there are no minimal units within the film image and the conclusion that there are no paradigmatic relations within shots. The recognizable features assumed for constructing syntagmatic relations can be as abstract as required or as concrete as a particular film sequence allows. It is their reoccurrence that makes them function for building syntagmas. Their closer study forms a part of *multimodal cohesion* (cf. Leeuwen 2005; Royce 2006).
12. Although this goes beyond the scope of the present paper, it should be emphasized that this retroactive interpretation is a *necessary semiotic feature* of the unfolding discourse analysis, not a statement about psychological processes.

13. As we shall see below, both van Leeuwen (1996) and Baldry and Thibault (2006: 237) consider projecting filmic sequences but without adding them to a systematic account of paradigmatic sequence alternatives.
14. For a fuller treatment, diegesis has to be understood as a relative construct: that is, non-diegetic is seen as relative to the 'current' story track. There is nothing to prevent filmmakers presenting arbitrarily many levels of apparently non-diegetic material — something used extensively to comic effect in, for example, the sketches of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (1969–1974).
15. Grammatically, there is a difference between projection as *locution*, which includes direct speech, and projection as *idea*, which includes indirect speech. It is interesting to consider these early examples of filmic projection as locutions due to the explicit marking of their projected status.
16. Although this is, in fact, a relatively leisurely segment of the film, its average shot length of 3.8 seconds still falls within the 'modern Hollywood-style' described by Bordwell.

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