Cinema Studies: A Personal View

The Impact of Christian Metz in Anglo-Saxon

Keyan G. Tomassi
I soon realized that I would never make sense of Mertz unless I also studied linguistics. A crash course in linguistics brought me back to film theory. I decided that I would read more Christian Mertz’s work.

The first books I was told to read were Christian Mertz, *Semiotics: A Panacea for Anything*.

Semiotics: A Panacea for Anything...

In my course in the School of Dramatic Art at the University of Cape Town, I was teaching television and film production. Although I had registered as a Master of Arts student in the new field of drama, I knew absolutely nothing about film theory, cinema history, or film cinema. I chose the latter course. I had been educated as an full-time student who had to earn his education by registering as a full-time student. I could obtain exemption by registering as a full-time student. I could obtain exemption by registering as a full-time student. I could obtain exemption by registering as a full-time student.

Two immediate options were open to me: whether I dodged the draft or left the country.

My first encounter with Christian Mertz was entirely unexpected.
Though I personally failed to form a long-term relationship with Lives, I claimed that they did not need such conceptual complications in their student actors and even those who were training to be film directors, philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists — firmly, not drama, linguistics, philosophy, and philosophy, in other, as being like faculty alike. These works were disciplinary, and as being like readings such as Meyer's prescribed to the film students by Van Zyl. My move from the film industry into drama, film, and TV teaching raised my understanding of drama and storytelling as never quite drama students. As you might know, it seemed to have an English-speaking world, this adoption of his method by our film students in South Africa, and drama students, worse, as seemed to have the students' problem, I focused upon uncommunicating drama and film. I was quite interested in Meyer and what appeared to be the blanket method. On meeting Pars, our students began to tear for the worst — semiotics

\[
\text{as found at least two South Africans and one institutional applying the University School of Dramatic Art in 1986 and, to his amazement,}
\]

\[
\text{of course, Parteke (1980) from Paris visited the Waterstein}
\]

261
Solve.

more systematic terms was the problem that Merz helped us to re-
tools, genres, styles and historical contexts in more general and much
kinds of expressions only. How to analyse films across historical pe-
their work seemed to apply to specific historical periods and specific
Yes, we had read all the earlier pre-semiotic theories of cinema, but
drama not previously found in South African drama and film courses.
Mertz and Paris seemed to offer ways of making sense of cinema and
School's mission was.

Arnoldian discourse when asked in 1980 what he thought the
our University Principle, a surrogen, would so naively reproduce this
nor than know from whence this ghostly discourse derived, nor any

did remain, nothing could claim to be, studied, or criticized. I did
was a whole caused me considerable anxiety for, while apartheid
of the School of Dramatic Art having a "stilingy effect" on the cam-
whether of dramaturgy, literary, cinematic or technical origian. The idea
versal unposed meaning was held to be self-evident in the text,
ishing are made, shielded,3, and decoded and decoded. Some uni-
stage direction had, however, removed any concern with how mean-
eculiarities of performance, voice projection, acting and
-dimensions were not the problem. The academic disciplinary empha-
had been making films for seven years, so the artistic and technical
searchers into cinema was for me something of a paradigm shift. I
Moving from Geography (and brief spells as a town planning re-
where the very foundations of "Speech and Drama?"

1969), was that these speech teachers an arising attempt to under-
By Van Zyl's introduction of Mertz (in tandem with Peter Wolfen,
me was a necessary theoretical and methodological rigor facilitated
systematic, cogent, and theoretically trained mind. What for
critical reconstruction in the South African context, I asked my more
19th Century writings in the 1970s, anthropologically informed
Tromps) by the rest of the academy. Pre-Arnoldian descriptive his-
The issue of "Speech and Drama? an identity paradox as "Speech and

262
and analyzes of film theory in a slightly altered form. He concluded
that theory, if it did not offer a critique of that theory. Rather, semiotic-
and adequate theory of film supplements the findings of constructional
logic with inadequacy because, though its users claimed it to be a "full
logic of another Bazin and Sergei Eisenstein, Henderson asserted that semi-
ical response to them is one of cinema ending in the classical film theories.
assessment of Woz. His objective was an evaluation of the semiotics.
ec attack was led by Brian Henderson in Film Quarterly (1970).
There have been numerous attempts to kill film semiotics/semiotics.

Academic Wars: Woz vs. the Rest

arts programs are very particular about their pedagogy.
disciplines though it draws extensively from many of them. Indeed,
indeed, semiotics is much older than most of contemporary
Hypothetical semiotics, early Greek poetry and music (Eco
Western-decked semiotics can be traced back to Plato, but
film and media studies cannot be directly traced back to Plato, but
now obtaining academic legitimacy as an art form (Harcourt 1988).
theatre departments (Danno 1988: 28) univeristy-based film studies
soft option, an adjunct of literature, communicaion, journalism, and
inclusion to change film language with verbal grammar. Previously
Woz's work was a reaction to the tendency of earlier Soviet film

reception and rhetoric.

be developed to eliminate the charge that all media studies is mere in-
profile of epiphany to media scholars. A unified theory could now
axon world by storm. Woz's unique and semanrich writing offered the
French to English in the early 1970s. Each section of the Ang-le-
gene studies. The translation of Woz's L'anges-deux anglo-axon universities in the guise of
Sausserian-directed film semiotics made its first extensive penetra-

Saussurian-decked film semiotics?
work entailed to attain that knowledge."

must know Lacan, Althusser and Deleuze as well,

cr are limited to a reading of Freud, Marx, and Saussure; now one

can maintain an ethic: separatist policy: initiation rights no long...

The American Frenchspeal Etheo has completed things by

asshlying those. More cynically, Charles Altman (1977: 1) observed

which knew little and cared less about forty years of Anglo-American

film theory, British scholars also imported the "French parenthesis"

cinema (1982), Durand (1979: 39) argued that in important French

As he review of Metz's The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the

In this review of Metz's The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the

Durand (1982: 1983) thoughtfully revisited Metz's propositions in a

With Not Even a Whimper" well ahead of any sign of its function.

The Death of Censorship

A sustained debate occurred in Cinema later in the decade. Rich

vances in cinema semiology and semiotics made in the interhit-

1977 reappeared in 1980 in book form. Without addressing ad-

early papers published by Henderson in Film Quarterly between 1970 and

exist that theory to present in general colonisation by semiotics. The

160.

the core of film theory, presenting it in a new guise (Henderson 1980:

that film semiotics does not dismiss film theory, but that it absorbs
Nicholls (1975), and James Roy Macdonald (1975) as reason to „reduce
Quarterly’s" editor, E. Callenbach (1975: 19), cited Henderson, Bill
encumbered by the invasion of other disciplines like semiotics. The
molecular arguments for a „resonantative purity of film theory un-
Films Quarterly’s reception of Meier was based on Henderson’s critique.
would have necessitated it adopting the same myopic narrative language.
was reluctant to embrace it because this
books on semiotics, it was reluctant to examine this
and democracy itself. Though this magazine continued to review
did a disservice to the cause of critical, but accessible film criticism,
tractable semiotics/ideology/interpretation of the text, whose expressions
requires, for example, had set itself against what it saw as the impure-
within cinema studies.
stance of semiotics was not humbled, and remains a bone of contention.
arrived judgment in film and communications studies. But the art-
years of these prominent scholars, semiotics/semiotic/semiotics concepts
argued or not, the field refused to be crowded. Indeed, within a few
markers on film theory and semiotics from its earliest issues in 1975.
work, had concluded a continuous debate between critics and film
name—other filmmakers in the previous decade. The British Journal, Frame-
Challen 1975), many of whom had applied semiotic principles to
numerous ethnographic film makers (e.g., Worth and Adair 1975;
American cinema, hadn’t spoken to Wolman, D. P. Passolin (1976) or
film maker who understands it, Browndoor, who wrote on classical
unhelpful — to the point of arrogance „that he could not find a single
Browndoor (1980: 20) further complained that „Semiotics is
d shuttles between the first (and unfortunately the most rigid) theory
theorize about the first (and unfortunately the most rigid) theory
ion with theory but its shallowness, its weakness, in thinking
best it can. The tragic flaw of Chinese semiotics is not its proconcupa-
which it is only now finally beginning to walk away, saying „face as
potted most of its energies into linguistics explorations from
Half of the young film culture, in the U.S. as in Britain, has
Durgnat (1980: 10) concluded of Meier:
someone who writes incorporated Robly's work which defines com-

but Chresses held firm, stating that cinema is written by

contributions from without, and to criticism and question.

semiological spirit, he argues, is modern and particular, open to con-

form him into synagogues, lexias, and articulations. The line

67, which reads all available texts into a semiotic machine, trans-

Lucan and approximations. He denies the "p causa"

work scores what he calls delirious semiotizations and pseudo-

selves such criticisms. In a recent interview in Cinema,

What Diurgen does not point out is that semiology (sic) them-

sues of Riffel does not, at times, take on the smell of Riffel mortis,

purfruit of Riffel does, at times, take on the smell of Riffel mortis.

the conceptual routine reaches extremes worthy of Searle. The

criticisms into "scientific and political," and that, in an occasional art-

pace, are sometimes wielded like magic wands which turn garbled

semiotics. It is true that those words coined and "shifting pace of

which coal of rigid to acapulo which clamps its output a feeling of

mature minds, semiotics becomes a pretext for sophism, the

Diurgen does occasionally myself in its turn. It is true, then, for some im-

that semiotics, considered as an instrument of demystification,

since Diurgen sprays the opposition with the random machine-

spoke. Robert Swaim (1960: 13-14), for example, replied:

invasion of Chresses to enter the debate, some individuals did re-

screen, Cahiers du Cinema. Cinema Opossum and jump on declared an

Marx's allies fought back in subsequent issues. Though the editors of

solved specific films as the object of study (Callendar's 1974/5: 2).

plains against screen and Cahiers thatlengthy articles rarely given men-

simulacra of them. This comment encapsulated the of-ficial com-

further discussion on Marx at least, to low priority, and that theo-

266
different emphasis in Cadbury and Payne (1982: 14-5).

and the field that defines it. This criticism of Werz is found with a
series of Marxism which stipulates that theory must construct its object
understood and analyzed directly. This approach conflicts with Althus-
ser and his followers. Therefore, the object exists prior to the analysis and therefore can be appre-
certion (1990: 34), succumbed to empiricism because it assumed that
an adequate Marxist theory of development in the 1960s and 1970s' work are based on
development are contrary to Marx's theory of development and are in
opposition to contemporary Marxist theories.

A comprehensive critique of Werz's work by MacBean (1974: 307) ar-

This than the ones that formulates Mearns's contradictions with the criticism of Werz's Marxism.
approach to art, is what happened, but we would have less in common
ideology. Paradoxically, Henderson's (1980) call for a psychodynamic
the British journals, however, intended Althusserian Marxism to be used for the British journals, and the articles, particularly those written in
Larousse and Heath (1978) and others, particularly those written in
chauvinistic to which writers like Stephen Heath (1961) and Theresa de
Mere offer two corners of the conceptual triangle (semiology, psy-

Academic Interventions: Means and Ideology

Second Semiology based on Lacan rather than Saussure,

Those authors are specialists of structuralist semiotics as they are of
about the nature of language or, by extension, of human nature.
no longer taken seriously by linguists themselves as a proposal
ian ways formed the foundation for modern linguistics, but that
made on the basis of a theory of structural linguistics that in cer-
logical enterprises that are actually for teaching conclusions are

Chair among the drawbacks in the basic arguments of the semi-

Perhaps the most telling criticism came from Cadbury and Payne
prehension to all but a handful of 'semioticians' (The Editors

267
and published studies and discussions on the method. The most nota-
teachers’ notes, or requested to see any merit in one-sentence, received
One by one, with the exception of Garrett’s, the journals which are-
edging their dissonant.

limbs. Providing the fiction of control, priorities arise. From and
with the represses and enjoy representing the unconscious vice-
what they see, and the act of looking is essentially sadistic. Spectators
who the spectator (like his/her doppelgängers) want to control
pen on theasseinne nature of the act of looking. The assumption is
of the paradigm of the psychoanalytical semiotics of media of the ‘80s –
Meez,’ mirror and Mulvey’s gaze (together constituting the dominant

mirrors/dreams, without progressing to new levels of insight.
could easily argue the similarities and dissimilarities between film and
comparison once noted. Psychoanalytical semiotics seems to be able to
though it seems obvious that film is somewhere like and somewhat
dream remain the best, most suitable consideration of these metaphors.
course, Meez’s (1982) seminal works on both the mirror and the
course, have not provided a fruitful foundation for further dis-
the emphasis on metaphors (that film resembles both mirrors
Perhaps the strongest argument concerning psychoanalytical media

of reference and Lacan’s dislike of inscription theory.
the material in the analysis due to the absence in Guattari of a theory
regulation of sexuality. But he points out that a real was the loss of
and social history; the use of signs, the organisation of labour and
based on Chomsky’s hierarchies. In contrast, Wallon (1982: 211)

s’s language (Caldwell and Poege 1982: 74), they present a theory
stricture. Like a language” and to Lacan’s “language means exactly the
remains as Lacan has transcended Freudian semiology. “The unconscious is
Caldwell and Poege (1982: 74-5) argue that the empiricist project
It is an open question whether Ch.5. Péroce would have been devel-

Thomaselli! 1988).

1982: Keler Elam 1980: even my original field of Geography has since
wto barked. Others were doing the same vis-a-vis drama (Paris 1980,
so it was in the 1970s a philosophically respectful thing that it had high-

 Anglo-Saxon cinema studies is monumental. He gave to the discipline
In summary, I love him, I love him, I love him, Metz’s legacy, in

problems.

In other kinds of approaches to resolve similar, and other kinds of
fully appropriate where remains useful from Metz and articulated this

it was from cultural studies is one such discipline which has success-
aspect of his methods into other kinds of analysis. Metz’s media studies de-


useful in-and-of-themselves, or in the implications required to transport

communication. Nevertheless, much of what Metz wrote remains
when one concentrates on the motivated visual and iconic aspects of

Diverging from Metz

of Metz’s deciphering legibility in France itself.

achieved a belated legitimacy in France itself.

This finally concerned upon the legacy

In Metz (1991), the editor and publisher, Metz’s Fellow,

were breakthroughs in this regard was the special issue of the presti-
This section is developed from Tomasselli and Smith (1990).

Clear exceptions which used a critical semiotics include Steedman (1985) and Derrida's (1989) poststructuralist linguistics.

I make a distinction between semiotics, based on Peirce, and semiotics as systems of reference. I refer to this as semiology, or the study of signs. Today, we...
Semiotics Around the World

Jeff Berndt, Gloria Withalm, Jolelle Reinhole (eds.)

International Association of Semiotics Studies

IASS-AINS