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Understanding how films are understood requires thinking the cinema as a language, that is as a structured communication between individuals, in this case, usually in the form of entertainment. This social function of the cinema, however, is changing and the cinema is becoming more and more openly an ideological tool. Recurrently, theories of the cinema revolve round the notion that film is intrinsically a means of reproducing external reality. The camera's mechanism obeys the laws of optics and the reality reproduced in the image depends on these laws, on the choice of object at which the camera is pointed, and how the camera is pointed. Thus the techniques of film-making since they involve the conscious or unconscious direction of the camera's eye are by nature ideological.

Since each film creates its own signs and system of signification, and as its aesthetic message is to some extent self-focussing, but also since its pro-filmic event consists usually of elements taken from external reality (ie conventions of visual representation or socio-cultural symbols), the 'realism' of the images inevitably will be transformed by their organisation into the fictional filmic text,¹ ie the narrative discourse. Realism therefore is partly determined by the balance achieved between aesthetics and ideology, their interaction constituting the structural form of the film, itself produced by how the technical apparatus alters the pro-filmic event. It is also partly determined by the relationships the viewer establishes between the fictional world presented by the finished film and the 'real' world. In each case the frameworks of ideological and aesthetic reference fashion the analogical relation seen between the visual message² and reality. Thus the criteria defining realism³ vary with the evolution of social organisation, economic, social and cultural differences, the role of cinematic education, and with the introduction of different cinematic techniques.

It is therefore important to examine the type of pro-filmic event chosen, and not only the cinematic treatment. Unlike a stage set or a piece of prose, a filmic image tends to be ambiguous and over-descriptive. Not all that enters the filmic event is essential to the fiction and its narrative structure, unless, of course, the film-maker constructs his fiction, hence his images, according to the Brechtian concept of realism. The pro-filmic event, in that case, is not taken from external reality and the filmic discourse is not developed purely within the realism allowed in the image by the technical apparatus; instead the filmic event is constructed on the same principles of economy as is a stage set. This can be seen in

60 Oshima's *Diary of a Shinjuku Thief* (1968) and *Ceremony* (1971), or in Ichikawa's *An Actor's Revenge* (1963), where two policemen hold on to a tight rope, vibrating across a black empty screen, only to discover that the thief has attached the rope to a tree trunk and fled. All Ichikawa employs with constructive editing are an abstract space, three actors, a tree, and a rope. Usually though, the selection and subsequent arrangement of the elements of the pro-filmic event rely heavily on a relationship of analogy with the 'real' world. The use of the cinematic language is then so discrete it seems non-existent. The mediation between the real world – cum – pro-filmic event and filmic reality is obscured and the plane of expression or substance of content seems unmodified, thus leading to the ideological concept of realism, that film reflects reality 'directly'.

Most narrative films are realistic in the conventional sense though, not only does the film-maker present his work as a 'truthful depiction of reality', but the viewer also makes the subjective judgement that the image is or is not a 'truthful depiction of reality'.⁴ The viewing situation then, is defined by the possible confrontations of different concepts of realism and by the viewer's general ideological, aesthetic, and cultural frameworks of reference. Moreover, the textual system of many narrative films displays a considerable amount of 'superfluous' details and an accumulation of repetitive codes, partly in order to reduce the intrinsic ambiguity and polysemy of images, and partly in order to achieve an optimum realistic effect. Thus the 'iconic context'⁵ within which the narrative discourse is finally organised requires as much attention as does the type of pro-filmic event selected. Recognising the form and the substance of content of the image in a visual message corresponds to the 'intra-iconic' context, while the 'inter-iconic' context is defined by the process governing how the images are linked together into sequences of one or several images, according to the meaning conferred to them. Hence particularly relevant is the type of editing chosen for establishing spatio-temporal contiguity and different types of transitions between images (either the substance or the form of content), but also the transitions and relationships between the constituent codes of the visual message.⁶

Finally, the 'extra-iconic' context, or general framework of reference (ideological, cultural, aesthetic) of the viewer is of paramount importance to film. Because images are not arbitrary signs, they bear some relation to the reality a film uses as its pro-filmic event, hence the influence of, and, in some cases, the real need for the cultural knowledge and experience of the spectator, plays an essential part in the reading of a film. *Ceremony* (1971) or *Red Psalm* (Jancsó, 1971), for instance, become difficult to understand without some knowledge of Japanese or Hungarian history, while *Ceremony* presents the added complexity of a cultural and aesthetic iconography unfamiliar to a Western viewer.

To exemplify these aspects, part one of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (Resnais, 1958-9) will be discussed at some length. The organisation of the film shows a remarkable possibility of combining visual, verbal and non-verbal codes to produce a narrative text that mingles traditional realism with a more creative form of cinematic discourse; thus the filmic text has a more complex (and at the time quite rare) concept of the visual message.⁷ There is much less redundancy between the verbal and visual codes constituting the visual message and between the visual codes themselves, while the non-verbal codes are integrated purposefully into the overall structure of the narrative.

The opening sequence combines several types of pro-filmic elements: newsreel material, shot after 6th August 1945, fictitious newsreel documentary made by the Japanese,⁸ and museum documents (mainly photographs and specimen). Some of this pro-filmic material is therefore already a filmic event; moreover its arrangement is generally thought to conform to what was considered reality at that time. The audience receives these images as genuine recordings and faithful reconstructions of that historical event, yet within the narrative structure their presence is not necessarily intended to truthfully depict that reality. Rather this visual information forms one element of the visual message, which in turn may or may not refer back to the form of content of that constituent visual image (code). In other words, the effect of reality produced by some of the pro-filmic material is sometimes reinvested into the visual message apparently unmodified, and the other codes, verbal and non-verbal, only reinforce that effect, which is then the signified, or meaning, of that particular visual message.

Without the knowledge provided by the 'extra-iconic' context that 'Hiroshima' means the first city in history to have been destroyed by an atomic explosion, the opening sequence of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* suddenly becomes meaningless since the relationship between the Hiroshima sequence and the Nevers sequence is lost, and the fundamental conflict between opposing values upon which the film is constructed (ie substance of content) disappears. Moreover, the notion of extra-iconic context, not only encompasses Metz's distinction of extra-cinematic codes, it also includes the cinematic codes that organise different types of filmic texts (newsreel, documentary, fiction, commercial), hence the ability to distinguish between different types of cinematic treatment of the pro-filmic event. The 'extra-iconic' context therefore largely determines the kind of realism a film is thought to present. For instance, the newsreel footage Resnais uses as pro-filmic event is read as newsreel, ie unmodified, 'real', because the content of those images corresponds to those other visual and non-visual sources established as true documentation of that historical event (the film's commentary only corroborates this judgment, it does

62 not command it), and uses the different grain and at times wobbly camera peculiar to newsreel techniques. Thus the viewer's subjective judgement is founded on the form of content of the pro-filmic event, on a mimetic or 'direct' correspondence set-up between the filmic event and external reality.

On the other hand, the realism presented by the first hospital sequence or the exterior shots of the museum is induced primarily through a specific use of the cinematic language and arrangement of the pro-filmic event, ie internal coherence of the fictional reality of the filmic text. Elsewhere, however, the transformation of the pro-filmic event is determined less by cinematic treatment than by the structure of the narrative text. The relation between the 'intra-iconic' context and the visual message is a metaphorical one. The substance of content of the image is a constituent of the visual message, here completed by the verbal code. Images of the streets of contemporary Hiroshima combine with expressions of physical love to form a visual message that relies on the choice of frontal shot angle and tracking forward of the camera, emphasised by the composition of the images. The relation, then, between image and visual message is not defined by the analogical representation of reality the image offers, but by the rhythm and mood created by the combination of a particular cinematic code and spatial configuration, interacting with the verbal code, and thus determined by the narrative context.

Crucial then to the discussion is an analysis of what constitutes the narrative context of a particular film. In determining this for *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, several distinctions concerning the structure of narrative discourse proved fruitful.⁹ These are: diegesis, narration, and narrative discourse. 'Narrative discourse' is the telling, the narrative signifier, the film in toto. It includes what is being told, that is the narrative content or narrative signified, ie the 'diegesis', and how the diegesis is told, the creative act itself which is 'narration', encompassing all the techniques that go into producing the diegesis. The narrative discourse, however, is the only one of these distinctions immediately accessible to textual analysis, since, narration and diegesis exist only by virtue of the existence of a narrative text; on the other hand, narrative discourse only exists by virtue of a twofold relation, as narrative, with the diegesis it tells, as discourse, with the narration producing it.

The diegesis of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* might be summarised as follows. A Frenchwoman is in Hiroshima working on a propaganda film for peace in the world. She meets a Japanese man and they make love in Hiroshima. During their brief encounter, she tells two stories: the first concerns her view of what happened in Hiroshima some fifteen years ago; the second is the story of her youthful wartime love affair in Nevers. The diegesis includes these two stories, each a metadiegesis,¹⁰ ie a story within the diegesis told by one of its protagonists. In the opening section of *Hiroshima*

Mon Amour, transition from one narrative situation to another is never made explicit. Images of lovers embracing intermingle with images that tell the history of Hiroshima. Only later, during the next scene, is any kind of causal relation suggested to explain the narrative context of that first part of the film.¹¹

The transition then, is achieved by the narration, itself the very process by which knowledge of a new situation is introduced within another situation already known. In other words, narration refers to the selection of the pro-filmic event and to its chosen cinematic treatment at any one point in the narrative discourse. By acting upon the pro-filmic event, ie action on the image as analogical representation of reality, narration defines the iconic context of the visual message and the type of realism presented in the filmic text by establishing the relations between the filmic event and the points of reference (filmic and/or in reality).

Hiroshima Mon Amour is not a documentary film about the fate Hiroshima met in 1945, but a fiction, and Hiroshima's history is as much part of the narrative as Nevers and the two lovers. Yet, this fate is a true historical event, whose 'image', documented by various media (newspapers, photographs, books, films), constitutes part of the cultural knowledge (ie extra-iconic context) the viewer refers to when reading this sequence. This extra-iconic context, moreover, enables the viewer to establish that the images showing the after-effects of the bomb are not realistic, but 'real'. The filmic event carries an effect of reality already provided by the pro-filmic event, itself a filmic event believed to be a truthful recording of reality.¹² As form of content of the visual code, however, the effect of reality of this filmic event is sometimes modified by the specific narrative situation. Thus the effect of reality produced or intended to be produced by the visual codes of visual messages in the metadiegesis is often undermined by the counter-effect achieved by the simultaneous presence of diegetic codes. Sometimes, the effect (an effect of narration) is achieved by using the verbal code alone as when the man says: 'What museum at Hiroshima?' over an exterior shot of the museum building, one of a series of single static shots cemented by quick montage.¹³ Sometimes though, verbal code and treatment of the pro-filmic event are combined as presence of the diegesis interacting with the meta-diegesis to affect the filmic reality of the images in the sequence. Thus, the effect of reality offered by the visual codes of the first hospital sequence is undermined by what the man says and by the correlation between cinematic treatment and intra-iconic arrangement of the pro-filmic event. To the constant tracking forward movement of the hand-held camera, itself occasionally slightly tilted (inter-iconic context), corresponds the movement – at a similar pace – of the patients who turn away as the camera approaches them (intra-iconic context).¹⁴

Therefore, whereas the 'reality' of Hiroshima's history, as

64 present in this particular filmic discourse, can be a matter for dispute within a diegetic context (the subject of the conflict between the two characters), within a metadiegetic context, and this applies to the viewer as well (a Western viewer at any rate),¹⁵ the images are indeed believed to be truthful recordings, ie 'real'. The effect of reality already produced by the pro-filmic event (ie newsreel footage) is reinvested into the filmic event – the form of content of the visual message in a metadiegetic sequence – as in the previously discussed newsreel sequence showing images of the first survivors among the ruins,¹⁶ or in the sequence showing women and children in a hospital, the mutilated survivors of the catastrophe.¹⁷ Thus the form of content of the metadiegetic visual message is founded on the relation (on a syntagmatic plane only) between the signifieds of visual and verbal codes. The verbal code might almost be said to be redundant since it only confirms the reading given the visual code by the perceptual code and the extra-*iconic* context.

Nevertheless, the metadiegetic visual messages do not always reproduce the effect of reality provided by the pro-filmic event. Instead, this effect of reality, the form of content of the visual code, is played against a verbal code, whose relation with it is neither relay nor anchorage, but incompatibility. Images of wounds and mutilations are juxtaposed with words that tell of the extraordinary vitality of flowers springing up from under the ashes and of the illusionary belief that memory is everlasting.¹⁸ Here, the form of content of the visual message is constituted by the complimentary relation between opposite signifieds – ie a paradigmatic *and* a syntagmatic discrepancy between visual and verbal meanings – hence a mental metamorphosis producing an emotional meaning, rather than a notional meaning.¹⁹ Therefore, the effect of reality of the visual code is not the signified of the visual message at that particular moment in the narrative discourse. Instead, it functions as one of two connotators, constituent of the metadiegetic visual message.

In another sequence,²⁰ the metadiegetic visual message is formed by the complimentary relation between word and image. The verbal code tells how oblivion is unavoidable, despite the universally recognised necessity to remember, while the visual code acts as relay by 'illustrating' remembrance with images of souvenir gift-shops, memorials, ruins, and tourists visiting them, – an objective analogy between the codes on a syntagmatic plane. On two occasions,²¹ however, the analogy is a subjective one since the relationship between word and image is a metaphorical one, while the emotional meaning produced concerns oblivion. In the first instance, the word 'oblivion' heard over the previous image is immediately followed in the next shot by the image of a memorial in the background and a cat strolling by, whose conspicuous presence in the foreground draws attention to the empty open space

in the middle distance. The last image of the sequence repeats in closer shot the spider-like framework of the glass roofed dome of a ruined building and is held for four seconds instead of the one second in the previous shot, while finally are spoken the words 'Listen to me' (no verbal code over the previous two shots). Cinematic treatment and arrangement of the pro-filmic event and organisation of the codes within the narrative discourse produce here a visual message whose function is to induce a subjective effect in the viewer. This emotional meaning might well be judged 'realistic' by the viewer, though, unlike the realism produced by the effect of reality provided by the visual code and deemed so by the extra-iconic context, this type of subjective realism is conferred to the visual message essentially through the consistent filmic structure peculiar to this narrative discourse.

Therefore the narrative context determined by narration – ie action on the pro-filmic event chosen (cinematic and intra-iconic) – produces the iconic context of the visual code first, then of the visual message, hence the interplay between real and objective information and metaphoric description (which are fundamentally opposed) and how these factors lead to the total depiction of a filmic reality, hence the type of realism presented by the narrative discourse. The 'real', then, is metaphorically used to create the filmic reality, which in turn induces potential reality for the spectator so that the specific ideology arising out of the film is then infused back into the culture.

Realism therefore involves ideology on the part of the filmmaker in his choice of material (*what* he films), ideology in the effect (of reality) he wants to produce (*how* he films), and in the viewer – *what he sees and interprets*. Realism is thus the product of conscious and unconscious manipulation and ultimately relies on the fact that the viewer (for whom the film is made) erroneously believes the 'camera does not lie'.

Notes

1. Not only is the textual system of a film a connoted system (an already existing system of signification forms the plane of expression), but its plane of expression is itself constituted by several systems, themselves connoted systems, since as soon as they form the pro-filmic event, they are transformed by their interaction on the plane of expression of the filmic system.
2. Following the practice of Umberto Eco, 'visual message' refers to what in fact are composite texts; strictly speaking, 'visual message' should only refer to the image, in this article, the 'visual code'. It seems reasonable to continue to refer to the composite text as 'visual message', since, as in the image where not everything structuring it is 'visual', a filmic message is structured by a combination of words, images, and sounds, and moreover its image is particularly composed of non-visual codes. Cf Metz's introduction to *Communications* 15 (1970), 'Au-delà de l'analogie, l'image', and Umberto Eco in 'Towards a Semiotic Enquiry into the Television Message', *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* no 3 (1972 Autumn),

- p 111 ff.
3. Cf Paul Willemen, 'On Realism in the Cinema', *Screen* v 13 n 1.
 4. Cf Willemen, *ibid* p 37.
 5. In *Langage de l'Image*, A M Thibault-Laulan makes the helpful distinction of three types of iconic contexts characterising images: extra-iconic, intra-iconic, and inter-iconic. Cf Introduction, Chapter 2, pp 25-30, Editions Universitaires, 1971.
 6. Particularly helpful here are Barthes' notions of 'relay' and 'anchorage', in 'Rhetoric of the Image', translated in *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* no 1 (Spring 1971).
 7. 'Sound seen as a new element of *mise-en-scène*, as a factor independent of the visual image, will necessarily introduce new and amazingly powerful means for expressing and solving the most complex problems.' Eisenstein, Pudovkin, and Alexandroff in their *Manifesto on the Coming of Sound*, July 1928, translated from *Tu n'a rien vu à Hiroshima*, Séminaire du Film et du Cinéma, ed by R Ravar, Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1962, p 199; quoted by Paul Davay, 'L'Expression du souvenir et le contrepoint sonovisuel: quelques étapes qui ont conduit à Hiroshima'.
 8. Evidence by Resnais given in an interview: 'There are newsreel extracts and extracts from films. I wished to make as it were a quotation. They come from a film called *Hiroshima*'. *Ibid* p 210.
 9. G Genette, *Figures III, Discours du Récit*, Seuil, Paris 1972, p 72 and pp 255-6.
 10. *Meta-* here indicates that the narrative discourse has switched to a different narrative plane. Unlike its logico-linguistic model (meta-language) metadiegesis refers to the world of another story contained within the world of the first one, the diegesis. *Ibid* pp 238-9.
 11. *Lui: Et pourquoi voulais-tu tout voir à Hiroshima? Elle: Ça m'intéressait, J'ai mon idée là-dessus. Par exemple, tu vois, de bien regarder, je crois que ça s'apprend.* Script by M. Duras, Gallimard, Paris 1960, p 30.
 12. Cf. *supra* p 4.
 13. Shots No 14-19. The numbers refer to those given to the shots in the shot description published with the findings of the Bruxelles Seminar on Hiroshima (*op cit*) which proved a useful and usually reliable transcription of the film.
 14. Shots No 6-12; *Lui: Tu n'as pas vu d'hôpital à Hiroshima. Tu n'as rien vu à Hiroshima*'. (12); script p 17.
 15. Cf the twofold role of the extra-iconic context.
 16. Shots No 46-52; cf *supra* pp 4 and 5.
 17. Shots No 63-73.
 18. Shots No 53-61.
 19. Or 'cognitive' and 'emotive' as these different modes of meaning are also called; cf J Lyons, *Introduction to Theoretical Linguistics*, Cambridge University Press, 1968, pp 448-9, p 489 note; also C K Ogden and I A Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning*, 8th edition, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1946.
 20. Shots No 88-105.
 21. Shots No 94 and 105.