

UDK BROJEVI: 791.221.9(73) ; 791(73)"198"
ID BROJ: 179518476

Jean-Marie Lecomte
Nancy Université (I.U.T.)

POSTMODERN VERBAL DISCOURSE IN COPPOLA'S *BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA*

Speech as a formal component of film has rarely been studied. It is all the more surprising as most films rely on verbal language and its screen modalities (dialogue, voice-overs, off-screen speech, diegetic written signs, etc.) to anchor images and to further plot, character, and theme.¹ Film genres are usually tied to specific speech styles and language aesthetics, although directors and their screenwriters adapt these conventions to suit both cultural sensibilities and authorial intentions. Filmic speech has yet to become an independent field of study with its own methodology and theoretical tools. Its scope is eclectic and interdisciplinary, drawing on linguistics, stylistics, discourse analysis, and film studies. Within that broad approach, the subject of postmodern discourse in Coppola's *Dracula* raises many difficulties.² First, "postmodern" is to be understood here in its temporal sense referring to a Hollywood cinema born roughly in the 1980s and departing from modernity by being less politically articulate and addressing the senses rather than the intellect.³ And second, "verbal discourse" describes the form and function of filmic speech taken either in isolation as text, or, more satisfactorily, integrated into the overall cinematic style of the film as "visual sound." It is a matter of choice (stylistic, semantic, and phenomenological) made by Coppola, together with his screenwriter and his team, to give the hearer-viewer a particular aural and phenomenological experience, addressing both the ear and the eye. My aim is to show that the filmmaker's choices partake of the aesthetics and poetics of postmodern film discourse.

The aesthetics of postmodern soundscape

Dracula starts with a historical prologue and a voice-over narrative anchoring animated images. It throws us back to the earliest days of cinema when magic lantern projections needed a

storyteller, but Coppola's hidden narrator is obviously more complex. A voice without a face transcending images is often endowed with divine powers.⁴ Anthony Hopkins's, however, comes short of what Sarah Kozloff calls the classical invisible storyteller by coming in and out the screen in different guises as the extra-diegetic storyteller, the Orthodox priest and Van Helsing the metaphysical philosopher.⁵ Hopkins's distinctive vocal timbre haunting several bodies could, in theory, call attention to itself as a form of metalepsis.⁶ It does not break the illusion in this particular case because a gossamer thread holds the three cinematic personae together: the actor's voice inhabiting several screen bodies acts like an occult sonic presence, challenging Dracula's mystic bodies and uncanny voices.

Although a postmodern allusion to Hannibal Lecter's sinister phonic image is perhaps intended here,⁷ the opening voice-over is more akin to a film noir technique where an acousmatic character sets up a close, almost intimate vocal relationship with the viewer.⁸ We are reminded of the dead man's commentary in Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard*, sharing his confessional narrative with the spectator, and we feel on his side of the aural space, in a kind of dark limbo.⁹ Together with Mina's and Jonathan's epistolary voice-overs, the plurivocal storytelling in Coppola's *Dracula* envelop viewers in a surreal soundscape, like a many-voiced Scheherazade mesmerising the audience.

The significance of voice-over discursive levels

Vampire movies always tread on thin ice; they constantly teeter on the edge of parody through overexposure. Already in 1935, *Mark of the Vampire*, Tod Browning's remake of his own *Dracula*, was wrapped up by an illusion-breaking epilogue showing Bela Lugosi in his vampire outfit and telling Luna, his associate, that "this vampire business has given [him] a great idea for a new act".¹⁰ Browning already felt that the genre had exhausted its horror potential, as the disenchantment caused by the fake Dracula's closing lines shows. Dialogue in horror movies tends to be difficult to integrate as speech may easily dispel the climate of fear, induced by visuals and sound effects. In *Dracula, Prince of Darkness*, the unimaginative dialogue sounds silly and redundant.¹¹ This Hammer picture is saved from burlesque solely by the silent and elusive presence of Christopher Lee's Dracula. In the late seventies, John Badham directed a successful version of *Dracula* by avoiding all manners of Gothic effects that threatened his vampire with ridicule: out went fangs, bats, coffins, garlic, and crosses.¹² The film's language was ironed-out accordingly, and most of the usual rituals associated with the vampire myth were meticulously done away with to prevent disbelief.

The virtual world of vampires comes across a postmodern audience as camp, kitsch, or vaguely ridiculous; direct dialogues within that remote universe may appear either too realistic, archaic, or simply absurd. When contemporary speech jars with visuals representing a Victorian past, irony—this most didactic figure of speech—raises its modernist head, that is, a Gorgon shunned by postmodern cinema which aims above all at diverting and entertaining audiences, not alerting and educating them. Speech trying to mirror the language of the age of Dracula (both fifteenth century and Victorian) puts the viewer in the place of a distant overhearer, his rightful place in classical Hollywood cinema.¹³ A mock period dialogue style can easily become burlesque and equally interfere with viewer involvement that remains, despite claims to the contrary, an essential tenet of postmodern entertainment in its neo-classical variety.¹⁴ In Coppola's *Dracula*, direct, synchronous dialogue is balanced and often displaced by voice-over narration (extra-diegetic authorial, diegetic epistolary, diegetic telepathic, inner speech) which takes over the soundtrack. Apart from the limited "add-on value"¹⁵ of the extra-diegetic narrator's

comments, most of the voice-over discourse of the film expresses the internalised speech of Mina, Jonathan, and Dracula, verbalising diary entries, fragments of letters, and private thoughts. These literary voices ghosting the postmodern screen appeal to the affective ear of the viewer. They ensure that the hearer-viewer is personally addressed to in a virtual sound space, between screen space and the "real world." This linguistic "in-betweenness" is peculiar to Coppola's vampiric world. It creates an intimate, subjective soundscape— voices from without, often reinforced by sound motifs. This shifts the role of the viewer from overhearer or eavesdropper to confidant. This in-between soundspace comes to the attention of the hearer when Dracula, in the guise of a young prince, watches Mina walking in the streets of London. He addresses her in direct speech: "See me. See me, now!" (BSD 76). But the point of audition is outside the diegetic world, for neither Mina nor the passers-by react to his voice. This swift, surreal mobility of speech, transcending visuals, crossing all cinematic frontiers (diegesis, screen, shot, sequence) "vampirises" subjectivities and energises the verbal power of postmodern film.

As these voices overlaying the screen tend to speak a literary language, they are vested with the authority of a written text, heralding the decay of the spoken word and rediscovering the efficacy of literature. Equally in *Interview with the Vampire*, a 1994 Hollywood production, the undead hero (Brad Pitt) recalls, in voice-over, his picaresque adventures through centuries, in explicit David Copperfield fashion.¹⁶ Should we conclude that, in the world of effete postmodern images, the text alone matters? Perhaps not, but we may wonder whether contemporary *auteurs* are not too conscious of their literary masters. Dracula's speech in particular departs from the Hollywood canon of realism (even found in the horror genre) and stands out as strangely stylised.

Vampiric tropes

It is difficult to refer to a dialogue genre specific to horror movies. Sarah Kozloff has pointed out the features of film dialogue common to a genre (in Westerns or melodramas, for example). The language of individual filmmakers may also exhibit formal characteristics as essential as their visual style (e.g., the Coen Brothers or John Cassavetes¹⁷). But language in the horror genre is not easily reducible to formulas, however flexible. Keeping to Hollywoodian Draculas, one may venture to select out fragments of "vampire discourse" that are common to the Dracula sub-genre. Bela Lugosi, the 1931 vampire archetype, spoke in a foreign accent, with a very slow delivery, carefully picking out each word. His discourse is constructed to sound over-polite and is laden with cryptic sentences. His main rhetorical tropes are metaphor, paradox, enigma, and silence. As a figure of speech personified, Browning's Dracula is a monstrous anti-logos playing upon a refusal to speak, contradiction, and figurative language. Examples abound. When Renfield climbs up the stairs of the castle, Dracula alludes to the spider spinning its web for the unwary fly and juxtaposes a literary enigma: "the blood is the life". Oblique discourse drives Renfield mad. "To die, to be really dead, must be glorious" rejoins the Transylvanian Count to Lucy's Gothic/Romantic speech. Nearly all of Lugosi's utterances have a rhetorical twist. The rhetoric of John Badham's vampire, half a century later, is similar but considerably toned down. "I have buried many friends and I, too, am weary. I am the last of my kind, descended from a conquering race. My family was its heart's blood, its brains, its swords. But the war-like days are over", Dracula announces to Lucy, in a calm, ice-cold voice. His style lies more in schemes or syntactic arrangement and in prosody than in florid tropes. He has no foreign accent, but he briefly speaks to Lucy in Romanian to seduce her, for the vampire has suddenly turned romantic lover.

From the vantage point of language style and content, Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* appears closer to Bram Stoker's text in representing dialogue with Harker in the famous castle se-

quences. Visually, Gary Oldman's vampire bears little or no resemblance with the Count portrayed by Stoker, but his lines display no semantic creativity or variation. In adapting scenes from the novel, cinematic codes may take liberties with the original, but linguistic codes remain faithful to its dialogue lines. In addition, true to the postmodern trope of hyperbole, Coppola's Prince Vlad heightens nearly each rhetorical trait to make it more "spectacular" to the ears. But the scope of these Victorian vampiric tropes is drastically limited to the verbal transactions between Jonathan and Dracula in the Gothic Transylvanian setting. Thereafter, verbal discourse runs its own original course.

Dracula: foreignness made beautiful

The movie confronts the viewer-hearer with an immediate convention of the horror genre, that of the polymorphic body and voice. Dracula's body polymorphism is taken for granted even in the era of primitive special effects of the early thirties, where he would turn into a giant bat or materialise out of vapour. Badham's vampire keeps visual polymorphism to a minimum, ever conscious of the ridicule that overexposure of the bat/wolf/vapour would trigger. Yet the filmmaker does come up with a visually-striking snaking movement down a wall – a trick that, incidentally, Coppola shamelessly plagiarises (or filmically nods to). Coppola's vampire goes through so many shapes and forms, monstrous or otherwise, that, surfeited, the viewer may sicken and so die. But there are interesting developments in the use of vocal polymorphism. The vampire can muster an impressive semiotic range. Cultural polyglossia and the ability to call upon various modes of communication (ranging from distorted voice, animal groans, and primitive cries to the polished speech of a prince) are his vocal imprints.

Polyglossia deserves more than a passing remark here, as it seems to be a characteristic of the postmodern soundtrack in general. Traditionally, Hollywood has considered that film heroes would naturally speak English, occasionally tolerating a foreign accent, provided it was not too intrusive. Foregrounded foreign accents or tongues had comic or satirical potential. Lucy, in Browning's *Dracula*, makes fun of Lugosi's eastern accent, threatening for a moment the horror potential of the vampire. In the 1979 *Dracula* version, Langella speaks perfect Standard English, and he briefly whispers a few sweet words in Romanian, which enhances his romantic appeal to love-struck Lucy. Since then, Hollywood has had a remarkable change of linguistic and ideological heart, enlisting and even prizing foreignness in film heroes. Recently, *The Passion of Christ*, which has been shot like a horror movie, boasts a soundtrack with an exotic language, relegating English to subtitles.¹⁸ A strong Spanish accent, like that of Antonio Banderas, is aesthetically desirable in postmodern Hollywood.

The function of diglossia in Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* is possibly related to the idea that the speaker's native tongue stands for his or her affective language (expressing the heart and soul), while English as a learnt language corresponds to acculturation and civilised logos. This is certainly borne out in *Bram Stoker's Dracula*. Whenever the Prince switches to his native tongue, his dialect works like a subterranean language linking past and present, stirring emotions in Mina and soothing beasts. English is mainly used as a transactional or argumentative vernacular and is never pragmatically successful, often leading to verbal confrontation. Foreignness, sounding a deeper affective note, is looked on favourably in the Hollywood of the post-1990s. This is the new age of affective cinema, devoid of the "tear-jerking" overtones of classical melodramas. The vampire's "style switching" can be associated with a mystical sound motif that reverberates in the limbo of the viewer's language consciousness.¹⁹ Even in Dracula's English, there are degrees of foreignness that are subtly exploited by Gary Oldman's voice.



DRACULA
BY FRANCIS
FORD COPPOLA,
1992

Vocal and body mutability

From the dawn of sound, matching body with voice has always been coded in Hollywood, any departure from an expected norm being the ruin of a character or an actor. It is well-known that voices carry cultural, ideological, and sexual overtones, and their inhabiting bodies have the same implications. What voices started to inhabit monstrous bodies in early horror movies is a fascinating field of study beyond the scope of this essay. Early talking human monsters are almost always foreigners, their English being possessed of a monster within. With the notable exception of Mr. Hyde in 1932, their physical appearance remains hardly atypical, only vaguely disquieting.²⁰ But their speech is definitely fearsome, so much so that monstrosity could be defined solely in terms of speech and vocal features. In the days of silent cinema, human monsters had to be visually nightmarish (e.g., *Nosferatu*, the *Phantom of the Opera*) and reduced linguistically to a few intertitles. Coppola's new vampire is a compound of both silent and talking Draculas, and the filmmaker plays consciously upon this cinematic mutability. The vampire's dumb shadow is like "a symphony in grey": he groans and raves in his werewolf or reptilian self, talks like a novel as an elderly Count, and socialises like a Victorian dandy. All these guises tend to cancel each other and lose the name of fear. What started as a horror movie ends up being an erotic melodrama incorporating fabulous elements. The vampire softens into a neo-romantic lover and, for an undead monster, espouses a new lyrical phraseology.

Figures of evil discourse

One of the first statements of Dracula *qua* historical figure is a performative one which creates the allegorical figure of Dracula, the personification of death. The filmic Prince is primarily a linguistic creation and no more, and, as a text, he incorporates many lines from Bram Stoker's novel. These lines have been dutifully relayed by many Hollywood screenwriters and repeated verbatim by actors in their own tone and timber. But there are subtle variations within this textual model. Coppola introduces many variants in the cinematic representation of his vampire that amount to ideological shifts, and therein lies the postmodern novelty. The Dracula myth is culture-bound because it tells us how a community faces death at a given point in time. In the twentieth century, cinema expressed that attitude most powerfully. And the way a culture deals with death speaks volume for its ideology.

At no time does Tod Browning give the viewer a full exposition as to the motivation, teleology, and overall modal functions (knowledge, belief, desire, etc.) of his vampire. Lugosi's Dracula impersonates man's age-old fear of death and dying, especially in one's prime (vampires prey exclusively on the virginal young). Browning's basic Hollywoodian message is that you must face death, defeat the fear of death, and not be seduced by its gaze, an essential American belief at the time. The filmmaker stresses the role of willpower, science, and reason to dispel the age-old spectre. In the thirties, Thanatos could still be looked in the eye, and Van Helsing, as the conscience of the age, would not flinch from it. In the Dracula world of Tod Browning, only wise old men can lead the ideological battle; women are weak and unreliable because of their sentimental outlook.

Andy Warhol's *Dracula* departs from the myth and shows the fall of the House of Dracula, the end of an old order that has become socially and sexually incompetent.²¹ In that Dracula of the 1970s, death has been evacuated by a new soft-porn hedonism. Van Helsing has metamorphosed into a young Adonis who deflowers every virgin courted by the inept vampire, who throws tantrums like a spoilt child. This is a reflection of the iconoclastic ideology of the 1970s which turned old fears into derision, a sort of artistic Bacchanalia that, in the end, proved intellectual truancy.

Badham's undead Count brings us closer to Coppola's in semiotic and linguistic development. The vampire's sensual hand caressing Mina's on a moon-lit beach is a visual metonym that ushers in a more desirable Death. The hand of death grasps the willing hand of life: Mina is sick and dying and her Keatsian self is "half in love with easeful death". Later, Lucy dances with Dracula in a cinematic dance macabre and laughs under the jealous eye of her fiancé. The film gives an ambiguous view of Dracula as an allegory of both love and death. Yet Lucy makes a conscious, existentialist choice to rebel against her father and lover. Badham makes it clear that Lucy (unlike Mina) is never under a spell and is determined to follow her own light and be Dracula's lover. A feminist twist is introduced in the old myth – an ideological intimation that the New Woman will elect the course of her own sentimental life, even unto death. Lucy is clearly the main narrative spring, upstaging a frail-looking Van Helsing and the Pickwickian physician, Dr Seward. Her will-power remains strong, even under the withering gaze of Dracula. Old death carries no sting in the comforting presence of new womanhood.

The three faces of death

It seems that Coppola tries to incorporate all the ideological facets of previous Dracula allegories and attitudinal reactions to them. In teleological terms, like the 1930 vampire, he aims at making the young and foolish his disciples and encounters the old wily Van Helsing. He cuts erotic capers like Warhol's soft-porn fop lusting after virgins, and he falls under the spell of re-

demptive feminine love, like Badham's suave Thanatos. Coppola's hero reflects the three faces of death of western culture: the monstrous Victorian figure spirited away by an alliance of pseudo-science and religion (Dracula vs. Van Helsing), the medieval phantasm of death lusting after life-blood (Dracula raping Lucy), and the romantic sad knight exorcised by the mystique of feminine love (Prince Dracula in love with Mina). What makes him postmodern is that he is a compound of the various allegories of death throughout the history of western art and culture. When it comes to his discourse, he obviously becomes a more complex allegory. In other words, as a verbal allegory, the postmodern Dracula is not that easily reducible to a mixture of figures past.

The voice of disenchanted mankind

Coppola introduces a reason for death (or Dracula) to plague the lives of mankind. In a verbal move, unusual in vampire movies, the Prince of Darkness provides the viewer with the whys and wherefores of vampirism. All Dracula myths are underpinned by the biblical doxa that death is the blight laid on man and woman for their transgression; therefore, the blame falls on them. Coppola subverts this premise and puts the blame on God's arbitrary justice. God has wronged Dracula, the warrior, in his flesh and blood by denying him true love for a woman, so he has rebelled and pledged to take revenge on God's creatures. This resonates well with postmodern audiences, who have been steeped in the modern worship of Love yet have been angered by the chaotic spectacle of planetary wars and arbitrary cosmic events. The disillusioned cry of all mankind seems to be distilled in the crusading Knight's grieved interrogation: "Is this my reward for defending God's church?" (BSD 18). And his antichristic pledge: "I shall rise from my own death to avenge hers with all the powers of darkness!" (BSD 19). As a result, Coppola's Dracula should be interpreted as the resurrected Antichrist, the forlorn spirit of man labouring under a sense of cosmic wrong. No cinematic visuals can impart abstract thought, and the spectator gathers the ideological drift of the movie solely by listening to Dracula's discourse. So much for the visual "grammar" of cinema.

The reluctant vampire

The vampire also echoes a sensitive chord in the heart of western ideology. When he claims that "the happiest man on earth is the one who finds [...] true love" (BSD 44), he expresses a tenet of neo-romantic thought that is today tinged with materialist humanism: human love is more redeeming than divine love. That is why the movie is closer to Romanesque or fabulous tales like *Beauty and the Beast*²² or *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*,²³ a Hollywood movie based on the legend of a seventeenth-century adventurer who, after killing his wife in a jealous fit, curses God and his fate. He dies and resurrects as an immortal sailor on a ghost ship wandering the seas. He can only be saved from his tormented restlessness by the love of a woman. Centuries later, anchoring off the coast of a Spanish harbour, he falls in love with a *femme fatale* (Ava Gardner), who happens to be the reincarnation of his seventeenth-century wife. Her sacrificial love gives him eternal peace. Similarly, Dracula is given peace by Mina's love "in the presence of God". Dracula is a sensitive, reluctant vampire when it comes to Mina, his true love, which makes him more like a Romanesque Beast hankering for Beauty. Although one should not stress too much the shallow philosophy of Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, it is nevertheless interesting to note how it tallies with postmodern viewers' expectations per love, sex, and death in their humanistic, neo-romantic dimension. Another aspect of the complexity of that vampire can be derived from his unusual dialogic interaction with other characters and how it is screen-managed.

The ghost talks: the visual dynamics of Dracula's film dialogue

So far, I have assumed that filmic speech could be analysed as text (narrative voices, rhetoric, and ideological discourse). When language comes alive as cinematic dialogue, it undergoes many changes and turns into a specific mode of communication. The horror genre raises many difficulties for the writer of film dialogue, which is a stylised imitation of realistic speech as social semiotic (differing from the norms of speech representation in novels and dramas). Although film conversation has (mercifully) little to do with everyday exchanges, writing a dialogue for fictional characters involves necessarily certain choices in terms of social interaction. Language puts characters on a social map, whether they are Western villains, melodramatic heroines, or phantasmic vampires. Furthermore, the study of film language as social interaction must take on board art direction and camera work, which screen-manage dialogue and make it an audio-visual experience. Friedrich W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* is, for the most part, a silent figure, a flickering shadow on a screen. He does not yield easily to social comment and retains his eerie potential even today. Tod Browning's *Dracula* ceases to be a frightening psychic or surreal representation as soon as he enters into social talk with spectators in the opera house, especially in that stagy, medium-shot style of the early talkies. Talk kills ghosts, as Oscar Wilde demonstrated all too well.²⁴ In Hollywood movies, a garrulous spectre, like the Ghost in Mrs Muir's house, always ends up being a loser in the cut and thrust of dialogic interaction.²⁵ The dead in cinema ought to remain figures of elective mutism, yet Coppola's vampire is a master of discourse. His desire to seduce, to control, and most of all to bare his heart sets him apart in the gallery of vampires. His confessional voice marks him out as a new Dracula. In that respect, he is the father of postmodern confessional vampires, the likes of Louis or Lestat in *Interview with the Vampire* or Max Schreck, the metaleptic *Nosferatu* of E. Elias Merhige's *Shadow of the Vampire*.²⁶

Dialogue enables the Count to give a social voice to evil, to integrate adverse discourse into the body politic for rehabilitation purposes. The first verbal exchange of Coppola's vampire occurs after he has appeared in the asynchronous guise of an epistolary voice. This cinematic convention kindles the viewer's desire to see the visual source of the sound, but that event has another important purpose, that of electing Jonathan and (later) Mina as his main addressees in two-shot dialogue scenes. As social man, Dracula never talks to anybody else, except, briefly, to the vampiresses and, in an inhuman shape, to Van Helsing. The opening conversation with Harker in the castle consists nearly entirely of textual lifts from the Victorian novel and reflects Bram Stoker's original tenor of discourse: the vampire asserting and transmitting the language of power and control. He stands for a symbolic order which equates verbal mastery with verbal mystery. His insistence on hierarchy, family, caste, and status, interspersed with figurative epigrams and enigmas, meets no pragmatic resistance from Jonathan, whose mercantile and literal discourse is submissive. For a late Victorian readership, the world of the vampire was a vivid allegory of their medieval past, revived by the Pre-Raphaelites that had held it in both fear and fascination. They had to lay that cultural ghost to rest; they put a metaphorical axe through its heart and made their entry into the twentieth century. For movie-goers in the early 1930s, Dracula was the ghost of their western past from which they had to sever links, especially the romantic phylum personified by starry-eyed Mina. For postmodern audiences of the early 1990s, the vampire was but a complex, polysemic, and confused abstraction that had suffered from overexposure.

The Americanisation of evil

The Americanisation of Dracula, the evil undead, is what characterises the pragmatic and discursive evolution of Coppola's Count. Discourse shifts from the Victorian model of power domination between the old aristocrat and the young middle-class clerk to the reversal of roles

and relationships in the dialogues between Mina and the vampire Prince. Early on, Mina takes verbal control in many ways, especially at the micro-level of conversational turns where she handles "toppers" ("If you seek culture, then visit a museum: London is filled with them", BSD 78), contrary assertions ("How can you call this science?" BSD 83) and mild mockery ("A prince no less!" BSD 78). At this stage, Mina is closer to a feminist voice and therefore a vehicle for modernity and definitely not for postmodernity. But the main postmodern shift occurs not on a dialogic level but on a cinematographic level. Having dragged Mina in a corner of a London cinematograph, Dracula metamorphoses into the evil-good vampire and his "beastly selves" (be it AIDS, death, sex, violence, evil, animality, or all these rolled into one) are visualized as a wolf. The kinesic allegory of Mina's petting the wolf is unmistakable: she acknowledges, soothes, and falls in love with that obscure object of fear, which is not so much polysemic or polymorphic as preverbal. Its many faces and voices in Coppola's movie precisely cancel themselves out or, in postmodern parlance, constantly displace one another and find no semantic stability. Dracula stands for a dreadful cinematic flux, an abstract audio-visual nightmare, arrested and made stable by the hand of woman.

Americanisation of that abstract fear comes with a whimper, a sigh, a kiss, and a tear. Coppola tackles the poly-semantic nightmare with affective cinematography. From then on, the film will be hard put to resist the melodramatic pull, that gremlin that haunts any Hollywood production. Yet again, this "sissifying" strain, so characteristic of postmodern discourse, will mostly manifest itself on a verbal level, not in Coppola's cinematography.²⁷

Dialogue in melodramas wavers between heightened self-expression and repressed emotions.²⁸ The language of melodrama seeps into the dialogue scenes between Mina and Prince Dracula, but the visuals interfere and set up a counterpoint of dissonance which pulls back the movie into the realm of horror ambivalence. The restaurant scene, when Mina and the Prince drink absinthe, provides one instance of an embedded allegory, a trope commonly found in melodramatic discourse: the star-crossed lovers talk in parables, bringing together past and present to refer to their subterranean love. The *mise en scène* of the dialogue and the visual style are quite intricate. On paper, the dialogue is an imitation of fairy tale phraseology. When it is brought to the screen, it is integrated with cinematographic metaphors that run contrary to the simplistic language of love. The tableaux-like composition of the dialogue scenes, together with the contrived posturing of the characters, the superimposed "flashback" pictures, and the claustrophobic lighting give an early cinema feel and a late-Victorian aesthetic denseness to the sequence. This would certainly fit in well with the language of idealised love. But visual symbolism, pattern of editing, body language, shifting points of view, and shot scales reveal a dark side to the ideal of love and over-emphasise lust. In the stylised opening shots – an extreme close-up view of an eye and an overhead shot of a decanter filling a cup – the formal figure of the circle functions as an opening into which the male gaze and the intoxicating fluid can permeate. The closing shot of this inceptive sequence lingers on Mina's sensual mouth absorbing the absinthe-soaked lump of sugar. The shots dissolve into one another, a very apt editing metaphor, given the obvious "fluid-and-fill" symbolism of the whole sequence.

Later, in a similar editing pattern, the Prince's male gaze penetrates into Mina's life-blood through the inlet of her eyes. The camera intent on the male character's eyes and his relative facial immobility creates a sense of disquiet. Mina's body movements and posturing conjure up an ambivalent ballet of attraction and evasion. The geometrical lines drawn by their body and gaze alignment never bring them into close, face-to-face contact (until the final scene where they are seen dancing in a candle-lit room.) During brief tantalising moments, their faces do turn towards each other and their lips nearly brush one another, only to be frustrated by Mina's sup-

pressed desire.²⁹ Coppola's visual aesthetics here tend to break down the barriers between good and evil. The evil, libidinous eye of the dead Count is as intense as it is pathetic when tears flow down his dead cheeks. Mina is both tantalising and inhibited, wavering between two axiological poles yet resisting male invasiveness. This cinematic play of seduction is intercut by a shot of Jonathan (the official fiancé) escaping from his prison. The parallel editing here interferes with the erotic thrust of the parlour sequence, thus articulating the taboo theme. What is clearly shown by the interplay of visual metaphors and film dialogue is the relatively simple neo-romantic nature of the verbal language compared with the complex cinematography of the sequence. What semantics is imparted by the spoken content, though, tends to "dumb down" the disturbing ambivalence suggested by the images. "Language as non-commitment" or "consensual discourse" seems to be a feature of postmodern discourse, while images are allowed to impact the viewer.

Yet, in the bed sequence when Mina arouses the divided vampire, the power of language comes into its own again, but with a difference. Mina, the woman, articulates the dangerous words "make me yours" (BSD 135). This is not safe sex (or text). But in the world of Coppola's *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, Mina certainly sets the ideological tenor of discourse. Whether her words are challenging, Romanesque, subversive, or eventually therapeutic (in the closing sequence), she robs both Van Helsing and the male vampire of real verbal power. She is both the light and the word, quite literally the cinematic light and speech on the screen. But in the end, while her voice is soothing, her body discourse is ambivalent and aggressive: after saying, in angelic voice-over, the Christian words of redemption, her hand violently cuts off the phallic head of male evil, the source of all diseases. In all other *Dracula* versions, this symbolic gesture was the privilege of a man. Here, Mina, in one fell swoop, reverses the ancient myths of Eve and Pandora. Had she not dealt the final blow, the film, ending with her therapeutic discourse, would have merely sounded a neoclassical note. Mina ceases to be a guiding light – Van Helsing's ideal woman – and becomes instead an annihilating force. Viewers can hardly fail to notice the final dissonance between Mina's verbal and gestural communication.

Conclusion

The linguistic and verbal component of Coppola's motion picture is a complex stream of dialogues, monologues, a-synchronous storytellers, foreign speech, and other sundry vocalisations. Nearly all the medium's possibilities in terms of cinematic discourse have been harnessed, like a summing-up of what can be achieved. This eclecticism and inventiveness partly reflect the various levels of discourse found in *Bram Stoker's* novel, but it also circumvents the difficulties raised by writing film dialogue for horror movies. The hearer-viewer is confronted with several narrative and discursive stances, until the very end when Mina's viewpoint dominates. Film discourse carries overtones of abstract thought that visual codes cannot express. The evolution of the Count's discourse runs from the traditional language of evil duplicity to the language of Hollywood melodrama in the dialogue scenes with Mina. The vampire gradually loses the tenor of discourse, and Mina takes over as the main vocal master and voice-over narrator. A new cinematic duplicity, in both aural and visual codes, arises. Mina's verbal discourse exerts an ambivalent dialogic and perlocutionary influence on the Prince. Ultimately, kinesic codes, to borrow Keir Elam's term, and verbal behaviour are not easily reconciled in Mina and her realm of postmodern ambivalence.³⁰

Endnotes:

This essay first appeared in *Post/modern Dracula: From Victorian Themes to Postmodern Praxis*, edited by John S. Bak (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2007).

¹ Sarah Kozloff, *Overhearing Film Dialogue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

² *Bram Stoker's Dracula*, dir. Francis Ford Coppola, perf. Winona Ryder, Gary Oldman (Columbia, 1992).

³ Laurent Jullier, *L'écran post-moderne* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1997), 71-96.

⁴ Michel Chion, *La voix au cinéma* (Paris : Éditions de l'Étoile, 1982), 29.

⁵ Sarah Kozloff, *Invisible Storytellers – Voice-over Narration in American Fiction Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

⁶ A filmic metalepsis occurs where the real world breaks into the world of screen illusion (for example when a character suddenly drops his screen persona and reverts to the person he or she is in life).

⁷ *The Silence of the Lambs*, dir. Jonathan Demme, perf. Jodie Foster, Antony Hopkins (Orion Pictures, 1991).

⁸ Michel Chion 25.

⁹ *Sunset Boulevard*, dir. Billy Wilder, perf. Gloria Swanson, William Holden (Paramount, 1950).

¹⁰ *Mark of the Vampire*, dir. Tod Browning, perf. Bela Lugosi (Universal, 1935), and *Dracula*, dir. Tod Browning, perf. Bela Lugosi (Universal, 1931).

¹¹ *Dracula, Prince of Darkness*, dir. Terence Fisher, perf. Christopher Lee (Hammer Films, 1966).

¹² *Dracula*, dir. John Badham, perf. Frank Langella, Kate Nelligan (Universal, 1979).

¹³ Sarah Kozloff, *Film Dialogue*, 21.

¹⁴ Laurent Jullier, 26.

¹⁵ Sarah Kozloff, *Film Dialogue*, 17.

¹⁶ *Interview with the Vampire*, dir. Neil Jordan, perf. Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt (Greffen Pictures, 1994).

¹⁷ See Todd Berliner, "Hollywood Movie Dialogue and the 'Real Realism' of John Cassavetes," *Film Quarterly* 52.3 (Spring 1999): 2-16, and Paul Coughlin, "Language Aesthetics in Three Films by Joel and Ethan Coen," available at <http://www.thefilmjournal.com/issue12/coens.html> (6 July 2006).

¹⁸ *The Passion of Christ*, dir. Mel Gibson, perf. James Caviezel (Icon Pictures, 2004).

¹⁹ In sociolinguistics, "style switching" refers to a multilingual speaker's ability to switch from one language to another in multi-code situations.

²⁰ *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, dir. Rouben Mamoulian, perf. Fredric March, Miriam Hopkins (Paramount, 1931).

²¹ *Blood for Dracula*, dir. Paul Morrissey, perf. Udo Kier (CFS Kosutnjak, 1974).

²² *La Belle et la Bête*, dir. Jean Cocteau, perf. Jean Marais, Josette Day (DisCina, 1946).

²³ *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*, dir. Albert Lewin, perf. Ava Gardner, James Mason (MGM, 1951).

²⁴ *The Canterville Ghost*, dir. Jules Dassin, perf. Charles Laughton (MGM, 1944).

²⁵ *The Ghost and Mrs Muir*, dir. Joseph Mankiewicz, perf. Gene Tierney, Rex Harrison (Twentieth-Century Fox, 1947).

²⁶ *Shadow of the Vampire*, dir. E. Elias Merhige, perf. John Malkovich (Lions Gate Films, 2000).

²⁷ This emotive streak is admittedly more prevalent in the discourse of the press than in contemporary films.

²⁸ Sarah Kozloff, *Film Dialogue*, 235-66.

²⁹ The screenplay states: "He kisses her tenderly, passionately" (BSD 98). The actual scene in the film does not follow the screenwriter's directions.

³⁰ Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980), 57.

Žan-Mari Lekont
Univerzitet u Nansiju

POSTMODERNI VERBALNI DISKURS
U KOPOLINOM *DRAKULI BRAMA STOKERA*

Sažetak:

Pojam „postmodernog“ koristi se ovom prilikom kao vremenska odrednica vezana za holivudske filmove 80-ih godina 20. veka koji su se od „modernog“ odvojili napuštanjem dominantne političke artikulisanosti i obraćanjem više čulima nego intelektu. „Vrebalni diskurs“ opisuje formu i funkciju filmskog govora shvaćeno ili kao autonomni tekst ili, još uspešnije, integrisanog u sveukupni filmski stil kao „vizuelni zvuk“. Reč je o Kopolinom izboru (stilskom, semantičkom i fenomenološkom) da slušaocu-gledaocu ponudi iskustvo u kome će se podjednako obratiti i uhu i oku.

(KATEGORIJA ČLANKA: NAUČNI ČLANAK – KRITIKA)