

Chapter 2

Semiotics of Films

Objectives: The objective of this chapter is to familiarize the students with the grammar of films and to enable them to read the signs and codes of films.

Keywords: sign, codes, semiotics, connotation, denotation

What is semiotics?

The word 'semiotic' is derived from 'semeion', the Greek word for sign. The modern disciplines of semiotics are invented by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) and Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), later published as *Course in General Linguistics* (1906-1911). Essentially, semiotics is the study of signs. Filmmaking is choosing the precise images for the particular story, and every picture tells a story. It is noteworthy what can be read from a single image. For Peirce, there were multiple types of sign, and three main types are worth discussion. The icon, or a sign which is similar to what it signifies, the index, which is affected by what it represents, and the symbol, a sign that is connected to what it signifies by a law or convention.

How does a film use signs?

Film is the art of visual abbreviation. Cinema is synesthetic as it arouses senses. Roland Barthes, the French semiotician, states in *Mythologies*, "trivial aspects of everyday life can be filled with meaning", and this includes even a character's hairstyle.

The basic tenet of semiotics is that a sign has two parts: the physical, or the sign-as-object and the psychological, or the sign as concept. Filmmakers show and we understand visual signs such as smiles, scars, guns, badges, hairstyle etc. At this point, an important term you should be familiar with is synecdoche, that is, relationship of a part to a whole (the crown represents the king or the queen, the Oval office stands for the President, the badge symbolizes law and order). It is the little things that fill our everyday lives with meaning, and the same holds true for films. Consider Javier Bardem's hairstyle in *No Country for Old Men* (2007). Does it say anything about his character? Film images are signs, look at any film poster and you will notice how posters and publicity materials send signals that tell you about the genre of the film.

A key field of study in semiotics relates to the text (literature, film, or even a piece of music). Films construct meaning through signs. Sign has two parts: Signifier/signified. **Signifier** is the physical part, or the tangible thing we see/hear. It is what we perceive. **Signified** is the psychological part, the reaction to the object, the

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Film Theory Robert Lapsley, Michael Westlake, 1988 An account of film theory aimed at the cinemagoer and the student It ranges from the late 1960s to the present a period in which a number of conceptual strands were woven together The authors chart the construction of this synthesis and its subsequent fragmentation and elucidate the various intellectual currents contributing to it The authors trace the shift from Althusserian Marxism to Lacanian psychoanalysis as the dominant paradigms for discussing aesthetic questions From book jacket

Japanese Mythology in Film Yoshiko Okuyama, 2015-04-09 A cyborg detective hunts for a malfunctioning sex doll that turns itself into a killing machine A Heian era Taoist slays evil spirits with magic spells from yin yang philosophy A young mortician carefully prepares bodies for their journey to the afterlife A teenage girl drinks a cup of life giving sake not knowing its irreversible transformative power These are scenes from the visually enticing spiritually eclectic media of Japanese movies and anime The narratives of courageous heroes and heroines and the myths and legends of deities and their abodes are not just recurring motifs of the cinematic fantasy world They are pop culture's representations of sacred subtexts in Japan *Japanese Mythology in Film* takes a semiotic approach to uncovering such religious and folkloric tropes and subtexts embedded in popular Japanese movies and anime Part I introduces film semiotics with plain definitions of terminology Through familiar cinematic examples it emphasizes the myth making nature of modern day film and argues that semiotics can be used as a theoretical tool for reading film Part II presents case studies of eight popular Japanese films as models of semiotic analysis While discussing each film's use of common mythological motifs such as death and rebirth its case study also unveils more covert cultural signifiers and folktale motifs including jizo a savior of sentient beings and kori bewitching foxes and raccoon dogs hidden in the Japanese filmic text

A Social Semiotic Analysis of Two Malay Films (IIUM PRESS) Shazna Abu Bakar, Nora Mohd Nasir, 2017-06-22 The primary objectives of this study is to reveal how ideology is used in the film as a means to evoke emotions from the audience This not only encompasses the use of language but also other elements used such as visual camera works as well as editing Secondly the study seeks to find out a particular message found in these two films and how do they compare in relation to the historical event that they claim to portray as well as the timing in which they were produced

Basics Film-Making 04: The Language of Film Robert Edgar-Hunt, John Marland, Steven Rawle, 2010-06-04 *Basics Film Making The Language of Film* presents complex ideas in a clear and straightforward style enabling you to apply these ideas to your own analysis or film making

How to Read a Film James Monaco, 2009-05-08 James Monaco discusses the elements necessary to understand how a film conveys its meaning and more importantly how the audience can best discern all that a film is attempting to communicate

From Plato to Lumière André Gaudreault, 2009 With this lucid translation of *Du littéraire au filmique* André Gaudreault's highly influential and original study of film narratology is now accessible to English language audiences for the first time Building a theory of narrative on sources as diverse as Plato *The Arabian Nights* and

Proust From Plato to Lumi re challenges narratological orthodoxy by positing that all forms of narrative are mediated by an underlying narrator who exists between the author and narrative text Offering illuminating insights definitions and formal distinctions Gaudreault examines the practices of novelists playwrights and filmmakers and applies his theory to the early cinema of the Lumi re brothers and more recent films He also enhances our understanding of how narrative develops visually without language monstration by detailing how the evolution of the medium influenced narratives in cinema From Plato to Lumi re includes a translation of Paul Ricoeur s preface to the French language edition as well as a new preface by Tom Gunning It is a must read for cinema and media students and scholars and an essential text on the study of narrative

Reading the Movies William V. Costanzo,1992 Provides an overview of the film genre and illustrates how traditional textual analysis can be used to understand a film s themes **The Social Semiotics of Mass Communication** Klaus Bruhn Jensen,1995-07-11 This text offers a framework for understanding the key role of the mass media in the social production of meaning It draws on classic positions on the relations between communications and society and on recent work in both social sciences and humanities **Semiotic and Structuralist Analyses of Fiction** Leonard Orr,1987 A brief but very lucid introduction to the sometimes overly intricate distinctions various semiologists structuralists and post structuralists make between and among themselves ARBA *Semiotica* ,1977 **Abstraction in Avant-garde Films** Maureen Cheryn Turim,1985 *Tuning in* Ronald Wayne Rodman,2010 Television has been called the boob tube goof box and even a vast wasteland of American culture Yet for all its banality television is in many ways a mirror of culture and communicates messages within culture through the multiple channels of visual images language sound and music All of these channels contain their own unique coded messages to create the larger meaningful text of television As one of these sensory channels music contributes to meaning in television through its artistic language and through television viewers association of music with certain aspects of culture Music has always been an integral part of the American television even from its earliest days Like its parent medium of radio television broadcasts music to entertain viewers with live and video taped performances but music has also come to play a much larger role in television beyond its pleasurable performance aspects Music is used in narrative programs to evoke moods and identify characters and setting it is used to sell products through commercial jingles and most importantly music generally aids broadcast television in navigating through the continuous flow of daily programming This navigational aspect of television music is a distinctive feature and functions to transport the viewer through three spaces of TV the flow of the televisual apparatus with commercials newbreaks and promos the storyworld of each narrative program and the representational space between narrative and flow As Heard on TV is an examination and analysis of music in American television during the first fifty years of its history The book focuses on how music has functioned to serve as a navigator through the flow of television and contributing to structure narrative programs while also conveying meaning to its viewers by correlating with the images and sounds that it accompanies Drawing from

precedents of the cinema and radio the book examines music in a number of classic television genres by positing a theory of functional musical spaces adapted from theories of Charles Morris Umberto Eco John Fiske and others **Aspects of Film and Television Communication** Pieter Jacobus Fourie, Lucas M. Oosthuizen, 1989 *Studying the Usual Suspects* Judith Gunn, 2008-03 Studying The Usual Suspects is an analysis of a film that is both a ripping yarn and an exercise in virtuoso technique Communication Research Trends , 2005 **The Translator** , 2003 **American Book Publishing Record** , 2003 *Wide Angle* , 1986 A quarterly journal of film history theory criticism and practice *New German Film* Timothy Corrigan, 1994 **Drama in Contemporary South Asia** Lothar Lutze, 1984

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