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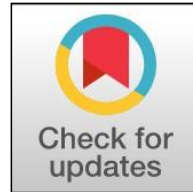
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## FILM DISCOURSE IN THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD: SEMIOTICS AND ANALYSIS

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The most complete characterization of film discourse as a sign system is given below:

1. Film discourse refers simultaneously to optical (perceived by sight) and auditory (perceived by hearing) sign systems.
2. Film discourse is non-biological (cultural) natural semiotics, the occurrence of which is not planned or organized.
3. Film discourse refers to complex multi-level semiotics. It has subsystems of signs that form a certain hierarchy. Signs in such semiotics are combined according to certain rules, and changing the order of the location of one sign we change the meaning of the whole combination of signs.
4. Film discourse is an open semiotics that has the ability to interact with the environment.
5. Depending on the approach to research, the units of cinema discourse can be considered the minimum non-discrete image units; large segments (frame, plan), which in addition to the visual component include movement, sound, etc.; chain of frames.
6. Cinema discourse is a multi-code semiotics, which is based on several codes that operate within each generating system. There are also codes that control the combination of different semiotic systems in the movie and work at their junction, genre emotiveness (drama, comedy, tragedy, thriller, etc.), an artistic chronotope in the form of a temporal perspective of a retrospective (futurological film, historical drama) and localization of events - both fictional and real ones (alien life and events of an abandoned God of Texas town). The cinema discourse also reflects the ethno-cultural specific features of both the creators of the film itself and the habitat, coupled with the socio-cultural environment of their artistic creations.

Finally, film discourse contains concepts on the basis of which a distinct value component of the message of the director, cameraman and screenwriter is formed - masters of the image and word all rolled into one. Their formation is also facilitated by the imaginative worldview of film artists - the general and his assistants (decorators and costume designers, make-up artists, etc.).

Following the Lumière brothers' invention in 1895, considerable disagreement prevailed among critics, journalists, and the pioneer cinematographers on the social function that they attributed to, or predicted for, the moving visual spectacle : whether it was a means of preservation and medium for creating archives, whether it was an additional techno graphs for research and exploration in sciences like biology or physics, whether it was a new form of journalism, or an instrument of sentimental devotion, which could perpetuate the living image of the dear departed one. Amazingly though, over all prospective possibilities, the evolvement of motion picture into the medium of genuine story telling had never been really considered. The fusion of cinema and narration by no means was predestined nor was it strictly fortuitous. Rather it was a historical and social fact, that in turn conditioned the later evolution of the film as a semiotic reality. "Reading" a film, irrespective of the critical methodology applied to the process, is to index and emphasize the manifestation of linguistic turn. Like books, films are regarded as texts for reading by viewers or critics concomitantly implying the activation of the semiotic decoding. The founder of semiotics of cinema, Christian Metz in mid-20th century initiated research on arranging different levels of filmic expression and reckoned that the cinema is a language without language system. An insight into this significant statement requires an introduction to the Saussure's thought on linguistics structure and semiotics. Admittedly, Saussure's account of the sign representing an arbitrary and unmotivated

relation of its structural components has been championed by the multitude of film theorists. One effect of the argument for the basic conventionality of cinematic images was to open the way for a utilization of the ideal of difference in cinematic signification. The presence of differential interpretation of signifier in film theory emphasized communication as discourse, culturally patterned activity by the unique social worlds of diverse groups of viewer. Signs, whether linguistic or cinematic is to be considered as cultural instantiation incapable of producing meaning outside of the social and cultural context from which they have evolved. Such concept of the sign made it possible to explicate many aspects of cinematic coding, from discrete optical devices like dissolves to more complex structures such as reverse-shot cutting and other subjective aspects of point-of-view editing. Symbolic codes enabled the construction of cinematic discourse, that is, the use of an elaborate semiotic system whose address, and effects, could be comprehensible. Peter Wollen, British film theorist, teacher, and screen-writer, finds several problems with Christian Metz's film semiotics. His influential work, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema*, written in 1969, is a response to Metz's *Film Language*, in particular his essay "The Cinema: Language or Language system". Semiotics as a general theory of signs, and to the specific development of a film semiotics.

The semiotics of the cinema can be conceived of either as a semiotics of connotation or as a semiotics of denotation. Both directions are interesting, and it is obvious that on the day when the semiotic study of film makes some progress and begins to form a body of knowledge, it will have considered connotative and denotative significations together. The study of connotation brings us closer to the notion of the cinema as seventh art. The art of film is located on the same semiotic "plane" as literary art: The properly aesthetic orderings and constraints — versification, composition, and tropes in the first case; framing, camera movements, and light "effects" in the second — serve as the connoted instance, which is superimposed over the denoted meaning. In literature, the latter appears as the purely linguistic signification, which is linked, in the employed idiom, to the units used by the author. In the cinema, it is represented by the literal (that is, perceptual) meaning of the spectacle reproduced in the image, or of the sounds duplicated by the sound-track. As for connotation, which plays a major role in all aesthetic languages, its signification is the literary or cinematographic "style," "genre" (the epic, the western, etc.), "symbol" (philosophical, humanitarian, ideological, and so on), or "poetic atmosphere"—and its signifier is the whole denotative semiotic material, whether signified or signifying. In American gangster movies, where, for example, the slick pavement of the waterfront distills an impression of anxiety and hardness (signification of the connotation), the scene represented (dimly lit, deserted wharves, with stacks of crates and overhead cranes, the signification of denotation), and the technique of the shooting, which is dependent on the effects of lighting in order to produce a certain picture of the docks (signifier of denotation), converge to form the signifier of connotation. The same scene filmed in a different light would produce a different impression; and so would the same technique used on a different subject (for example, a child's smiling face). Film aestheticians have often remarked that filmic effects must not be "gratuitous," but must remain "subordinate" to the plot. This is another way of saying that the signification of connotation can establish itself only when the corresponding signifier brings into play both the signifier and the signification of denotation. The study of the cinema as an art—the study of cinematographic expressiveness—can therefore be conducted according to methods derived from linguistics. One must not indeed forget that, from the semiotic point of view, the cinema is very different from still photography whence its technique is derived. In photography, as Roland Barthes has clearly shown, the denoted meaning is secured entirely through the automatic process of photochemical reproduction; denotation is a visual transfer, which is not codified and has no inherent organization. Human intervention, which carries some elements of a proper semiotics, affects only the level of connotation (lighting, camera angle, "photographic effects," and so on). And, in point of fact, there is no specifically photographic procedure for designating the signification "house" in its denotative aspect, unless it is by showing a house. In the cinema, on the other hand, a whole

semiotics of denotation is possible and necessary, for a film is composed of many photographs (the concept of montage, with its myriad consequences)—photographs that give us mostly only partial views of the referent. In film a “house” would be a shot of a staircase, a shot of one of the walls taken from the outside, a close-up of a window, a brief establishing shot of \* I am speaking here as a semiotic specialist and not as a psychologist. Comparative studies of visual perception, both in “real” and in filmic conditions, have indeed isolated all the optical distortions that differentiate between the photograph and the object. But these transformations, which obey the laws of optical physics, of the chemistry of emulsions and of retinal physiology, do not constitute a signifying system. Thus a kind of filmic articulation appears which has no equivalent in photography: It is the denotation itself that is being constructed, organized, and to a certain extent codified (codified, not necessarily encoded). Lacking absolute laws, filmic intelligibility nevertheless depends on a certain number of dominant habits: A film put together haphazardly would not be understood.

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