

Literary Theory and Literary Criticism
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Lecture - 20
Part B
Semiotics Theory

Welcome back to this second part of semiotics, we have been talking about semiotics as where meaning is sign. So, and it is a product of signifying system, according to semiology. Communication here in semiology or semiotics depends on signification that includes the encoding transmission and decoding of signs. We have also been introduced to the works of Saussure and Peirce.

We have also seen Roman Jakobson's one particular model of communication between the addresser and addressee, coding, how message is coded and how it is always used in a certain kind of a context. So, please refer back to your previous notes. We have also referred to Saussure's set of binaries elsewhere in this course. Much of the modern theoretical practice starts off from here. We talk in terms of binaries and when we talk about works of the latter day theorists, such as Michelle Foucault and Fredric Jameson, they two derived from these binaries.

The difference between them was where meaning was located, Saussure's binary axioms, account for the dividing slash as seen in Roland Barthe's famous work *S by Z*. Remember this slash and this is the slash we use, when we talk in terms of binaries. Now, among Saussure's most well known binaries or binarism or synchronic and diachronic, langue and parole, signifier and signified. Synchronic and diachronic, langue and parole, which we have already talked about, we have already discussed signifier and signified to some extent.

So, what is synchronic and diachronic? This kind of binarism observes that there are two ways of looking at language, historically or ahistorically. The distinction synchrony and diachronic refers to is the difference in treating language from different points of view. Synchronic linguistics is not concerned with the historical development of languages, it

confines itself to the study of how a language is spoken by a specified speech community at a particular point in history.

So, though the historical character of a language cannot be ignored, its present form being the result of definite historical processes, changes and transformations, it is necessary for a complete understanding of it, to concentrate on the units of structure at the present moment. Synchronic statements make no reference to the previous stages in language or in the language rather linguistics.

Studies in the 19th centuries and earlier also were historical in character, they originated as part of the general historical investigations into the origins and development of cultures and communities. Such philological researchers viewed language at different stages of its progress and attempted to understand relations among different languages. Saussure's was interested in synchrony; that is how our system works.

For Saussure historical considerations are irrelevant to the investigation of particular temporal states of a language. So, this is what we mean by synchronic and diachronic, synchronicity of a language has got nothing to do with the historical development of a language. But, rather would consider the development or system of language at some particular time.

Now, this may be a little digression for you, but I would still find it interesting at this point to bring in this semiotician, Emile Benveniste, who lived between 1902 and to 1976, who was a French linguist and who was one of the first to extend psychoanalysis into structural linguistics. He is often credited with unmasking the mythology of signifying systems. He argued that it was only in and through language that man constitutes himself as a subject.

So, human subjectivity is constituted or expressed only through language, and then with particular reference to the use of pronouns or shifters, which he refers to and he feels that, these are necessary to signify subjectivity and it also splits the subject.

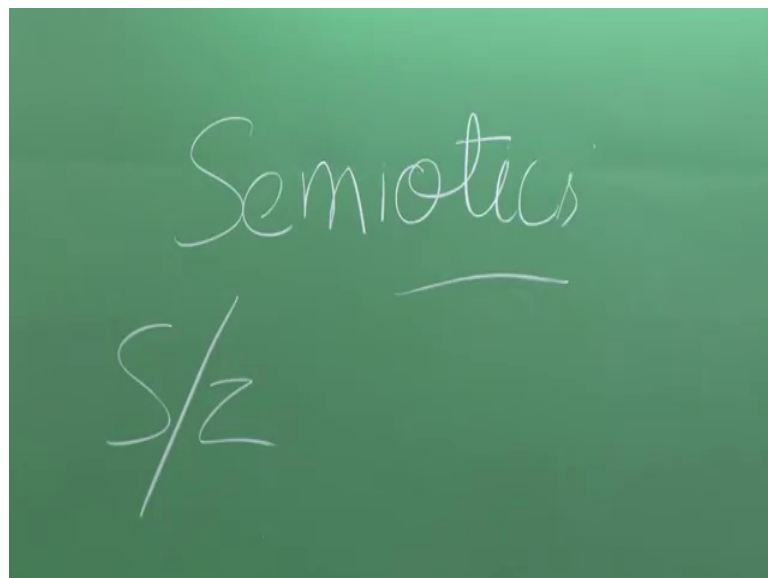
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To quote Beneviste

- 'I' is a signifier that designates the subject, but does not define it. 'I' is context dependent: when I say it, it does not mean the same person as when you say it. 'Ego is he who says ego'. When 'I' speak the language, I am also being spoken *by* the language. I am thus not separate from the language. I do not stand separate or behind it, but appear *through* it.

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Now, coming to Barthe's S by Z, Barthe's S by Z is a major contribution into the domain of semiotics. This essay is a comprehensive reading of Omar de Balzac's, short story Sarasin. The essay emphasizes on plurality and combines all possible semiological approaches of language. Its insights also owe a lot to Julia Kristeva's influential collection of work on semiotics and it is called semiotica, which was published in 1969, this is what Barthe says in S by Z, this is a quotation.

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S/Z

- "Meanings can indeed be forgotten, but only if we have chosen to bring to bear upon the text a singular scrutiny. Yet reading does not consist in stopping the chain of systems, in establishing a truth, a legality of the text, and consequently in leading its reader into "errors"; it consists in coupling these systems, not according to their finite quantity, but according to their plurality (which is a being, not a discounting): I pass, I intersect, I articulate, I release, I do not count. Forgetting meanings is not a matter for excuses, an unfortunate defect in performance; it is an affirmative value, a way of asserting the irresponsibility of the text, the pluralism of systems (if I closed their list, I would inevitably reconstitute a singular, theological meaning): it is precisely because I forget that I read."

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Now, Barthe gives us five quotes and I will now recount those quotes for you, particularly as given in S by Z. He gives us the hermeneutic code, the hermeneutic code refers to any element of their story; that is not fully explain and therefore, becomes a

mystery to the redirects enigmatic. And the full truth is often avoided, for example, in the way, snares are laid, which are deliberately avoiding the truth, I am using the language that Barthe has used.

So, snares, he also uses another term equivocation that is partial or complete answers, and then jamming's openly acknowledging that there is no answer for a problem. So, Barthe's terms, snares equivocation and jamming's. The purpose of the author in this is typically to keep the audience guessing arresting the enigma, until the final scene, when all is reveal and all loss ends are tied off and closure is achieved.

The second quote is pro erratic code and we also have the semantic code. Now, pro erratic code is the action code, we will look at it soon. The semantic code refers to connotation within the story that gives additional meaning over the basic denotative meaning of the word. So, connotation and denotation and the code is the semantic code. So, the semantic code or the connotative code is, it is by the use of extended meaning that can be applied to words that authors can paint rich pictures with relatively limited texts and the way, they do this is a common indication of their writing skills.

We will talk about Barthe's fourth quote; that is symbolic code, this is very similar to the semantic code, but acts at on a much wider level, it organizes semantic meanings into broader and deeper sets of meaning. This is typically done in the use of antithesis, where new meanings arises out of opposing and conflicting ideas. We also have something called a cultural code.

Now, I will apply all these areas to let us assume a film, so how do films use size, because cinema derives heavily from visual science, cinema is a visual medium. So, the semiotics of cinema is a very well trodden area of research and academics. Now, as we know film is an art of or is the art of visual abbreviation. Cinema is kinesthetic as it arouses senses and Roland Barthe states in mythologies, the trivial aspects of everyday life can be filled with meaning. This includes a characters hairstyle of clothes or even their smiles.

So, hairstyles, smile, clothes all can be given a meaning, which and we can read into these sets of meanings. Now, the basic premise of semiotics is that a sign has two parts as we have already been seeing all this while, the physical or the sign has object and the psychological or the sign as concept. This is what you should remember, the sign as

object and the sign as a concept, filmmakers show and we understand visual signs. Let us assume as I have already talked about hairstyles, smiles, sometimes even scars and guns and benches and pieces of furniture. So, all these are loaded with meaning.

At this point an important term that you should be familiar with is Saussure's sign or Saussure's sign, whatever way we pronounce; that is relationship of a part to a whole. For example, when we say use the word, the crown will say, you it may represent the king or the queen, likewise the bench symbolizes law and order. So, it is the little things of life that fill our everyday life with meaning and the same holds true for films also.

Film images are sign and if you look for any film poster, you will notice how posters and publicity materials, send signals that tell you about, what kind of film you can expect. We have also been talking about construction of meaning through signs and again films use them beautifully. We have already seen, how sign has two parts signifier and signified, signifier is the physical part or the tangible thing, we see or hear and what we perceive.

Signified on the other hand is the psychological part, the reaction to the object, the mental picture, a signifier evokes, the internal response to the signifier. Signifier could mean different things to different people, this is important too mean it is our mental perception, the signifier is the vehicle and the signified is the meaning of it. The key aspect here is that, the relationship between the signifier and signified is arbitrary. For example, when we consider a scenario, where a man gives a woman a red rose in most cultures, this signifies romance a beginning of attraction.

We have already seen how Gertrude Stein has declared a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose; still we know the symbolism, which is inherent in this kind of a gesture. Against consider for example, a movie like American beauty, where the protagonist Lester Burnham, Lester Burnham played by Kevin Spacey, he fantasizes about his teenage daughter's best friend Angela. And here, how Angela is covered in roses, which are in saturated sheets of red and what does it symbolize his growing passion and attachment towards Angela.

Going back to Barthes' concept of denotation and connotation, we know that denotation is the primary direct meaning and suggests, whatever we see in a picture. Connotation however is the secondary indirect meaning and depends on collective cultural attitudes

and personal associations. So, if rose denotes just a flower, we can connote that, it is meaning is something deeper, which can be romance, for example, in American beauty.

There is a film semiotician called Christian Metz, who says the study of connotation brings us closer to the notion of the cinema as an art. And cinema, therefore, has acquired the status of being the 7th art. So, we were talking about Roland Barthe and his *S by Z* published in 1970. He gives us the hermeneutics or the enigma code and the enigma code is, what is it going to be about, you know a mystery is presented to us or the way, the plot unravels itself.

So, what is it going to be about, what is going to happen next, who did it, what happened at the end. So, these are all hermeneutic codes also known as the enigmatic code. We also know the connotative code or the semantic code as Barthe calls. It is about the signs that imbue characters and setting which meanings these signs include speech clothing moment and gestures. This code creates illusions of a real people having real experiences in a real world.

We were also talking about the pro erratic code, again given to us by Barthe, also the action code and it corresponds to actions of behavioral patterns of characters. The hermeneutic and pro erratic codes, they work as spare to develop the stories tensions and keep the readers interested. Barthe describes them as dependent on two sequential quotes, the revolution of truth and the co ordination of the actions represented.

There is the same constraint in the gradual order of melody and in the equal gradual order of the narrative sequence. Coming to the symbolic code, this refers to the way an audience receives texts by organizing all experiences into a binary patterns and we have already seen binaries as written in slashes, good, bad, master, slave, hero, villain, true, false, high, low, etcetera. This helps in our understanding of what the text means filmic or literally.

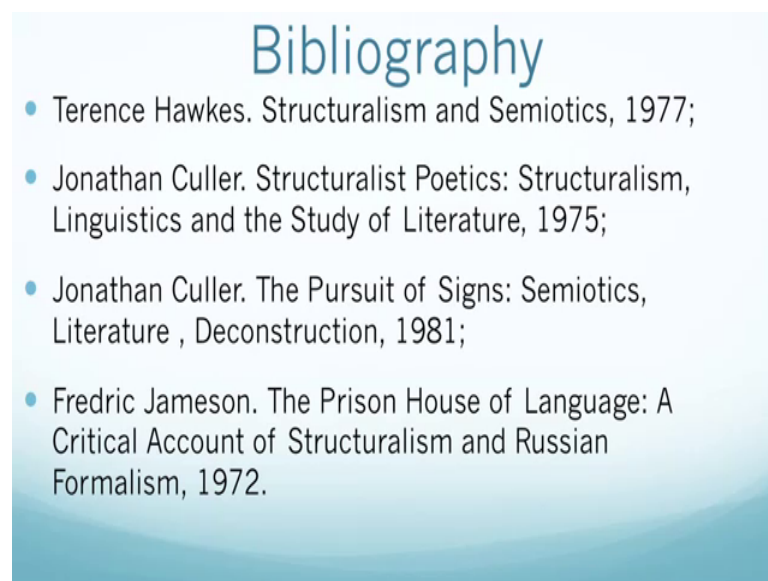
Claude draws primarily on Freud and Claude Levi Strauss to describe the symbolic economy of a narrative and defines the major symbolic rhetorical device in literature as antithesis. Now, coming to the last and very significant code proposed by Barthe; that is a cultural code. The cultural code encompasses the texts references to things already known, it depends on certain shared assumptions of cultural behavior, morality and politics. Culture not only constitutes the self, but also constraints the self.

So, our text a film or literature, it raises questions about the code of conduct in a particular social order. For Barthe all five of these quotes are bound by the weight of convention, what he calls what is already being written and done apply to works of literature or films, these signs and quotes are like grammar to a language and are used to construct meaning.

So, apart from these greats, we also have more recent scholars working in the area of semiotics. So, semiotic theory has been redefined, revisited, revised by contemporary scholars, such as Donald Maddox and Eugene Wenzel's also important is Michael Riffaterre, who has helped in advancing poetic theory by integrating a theory of intertextuality with semiotic theory.

Vladimir Krasinski combines theory and practice and analyses the works of Henry James, Dostoevsky, Andrew Carnegie, Thomas Mann and John Dos Passos. Again, we have a semiotics, a semioticians such as Teresa de Laureates and Kaja Silverman, who have made contribution to the semiotic analysis of film text. So, what I am trying to tell you that is that, the theory has been used by an array of scholars to explore a variety of texts. So, literary texts, visual texts, cinematic texts, everything, nothing is beyond the scope of semiotics.

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We will look at bibliography now.

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Thank you very much and we meet for our next lecture.