

**Film Appreciation**  
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**Lecture -19**  
**The Semiotics of Cinema**

Good morning. So, we come to another very interesting point of this course and today I will be discussing Semiotics of Cinema.

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So, some of the key concepts here would be what is image, icon, index, symbol, metonymy, metaphor, etc and how does the art of cinema appropriate all this. I like to start with the quote by the great Hollywood director Frank Capra, Frank Capra who made classic such as It Happened One Night, Meet John Doe and several more and he set film is one of the three universal languages, the other two being mathematics and music, the idea is the universal language of cinema, we have been talking about the language of cinema, we have been looking at the various aspects of the languages of cinema.

In this lecture is continuation of the language of cinema, the idea is that how cinematic, how an understanding of the semiotics of cinema helps us in understanding the language of cinema. So, at this point I would like to go to read the first chapter by anthropism and his seminal book called what is cinema and it will give you an excellent introduction to the basics of cinema and what is the idea behind a moving image. So, this is what I

would like you to look at before we begin the today's class.

So, going on to moving on to semiotics, so the words semiotics is derived from the Greek word Simeon, which means sign, sign the modern discipline of semiotics are invented by two semiotician when the first one is Charles Sanders Peirce and the second one very important person Ferdinand Saussure. So, these specially Saussure and he published a general course in linguistics lectures that he gave or later published as a book in a book form a general course in linguistics, essentially semiotics is the study of science.

Now, film making is choosing the precise images for the particular story and we have to remember every picture tells us story. In today's class I am going to ask you to watch a number of images and a movie stills as well as movie scenes and then you have to understand that even a movies still, a movie poster tells us a story, it is note where the what can be read from a single image. Now, I am applying the theory of semiotics to semiotics of cinema to the concept of semiotics in cinema.

So, for pears Charles and Pears there were multiple types of sign an three main types of both discussion. Now, we will move on to that, but also let me give you a quote by great theory semiotician Roland Barthes, the French semiotician who stay in his book mythologies the trivial aspects of everyday life can be filled with meaning and this includes a number of things. So, in other words film is the art of visual abbreviation, cinema is synesthetic as it arouses different senses.

Now, when we refer to Roland Barthes in concept of trivial aspects of everyday life that can be filled with meaning, it also includes the characters hair style, a characters smile as just all these visual images can be filled with meaning and that is what we understand that what we mean by visual abbreviation, now three things. So, there is a icon which is a sign, which is similar to what it signifies when there is this index which is affected by what it represents and then there is symbol, the symbol which is assigned that disconnected to what it is signifies by a law or convention.

So, indexic indexical or index this is a direct connection between what is indicated and are understanding of that information and index is a mode in which the signifier might not resembled it is signified objects, it is not arbitrarily assigned and is directly connected in some way to the object. Now, Peirce Semiotics and Saussure Semiology have been influential in the art, in the studies of the verbal arts, in the article art as

semiotic fact Jan Mukarovsky uses the semiotic frame work for the study of art and tells us that the work of art should be considered as the sign composed of a signified and a signification, where signification is an aesthetic object, registered in the collective consciousness critics have also discuss how visual semiotics can be applied to folk art, folk songs all kinds of music and theater, theater has a medium is considered by this critics for studying the semiotic structures which includes decor, costume, voice, music in other words the troops of Moussier song.

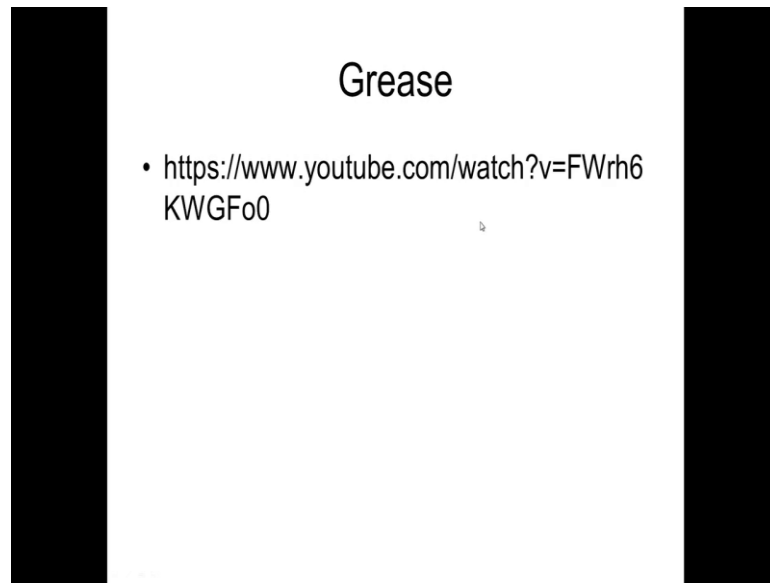
Now, as we have been talking about film has a distinctive language, it has its own grammar, its own idiom, it is composed of science it is mosaic of distinctive images and fragmented narratives and therefore, every fragmented narrative can be explain through the images that are impressive there therefore, it would be noteworthy to court Christian Metz the another great film theories or semiotician who says film is hard to explain because it is so easy to understand.

Now, this is the loaded statement film is so hard to explain because it is so easy to understand and therefore, comes the you know a part of a film's collar or someone who is interested in reading films, you see everyone has a take on films and you one you needs would know that you know they have a critic or something to offer on any film, the point is that a lesson until you are trained to it appreciate film through the theories. So, through it is sciences to understanding it is language till then you cannot claim to have complete understanding of any film.

So, we have been talking about semiotics and film images are science. Now, film making is all about choosing pre size images for the particular story Peter Valan in sciences and meanings in cinema talks of sign as a triptych it talks about index, icon and symbols I already talked about an indexical science lead to something important. For example, think of clocks in the mood for love Vancouver Vise movie. If you I have been talking about how even a hair style is worthy of reading meanings into an image and then film makers also resort to various other things such as smiles, cars, guns, badges hair style.

So, again we are talking about Roland Barthes and trivial aspects of everyday life which are loaded with meaning, at this point I would like you to watch this particular clipping, this is from a film called Grease, it is 1970's film and here is the link to you tube the film's stars John Travolta and Olivia Newton-John please watch this clipping come back to me.

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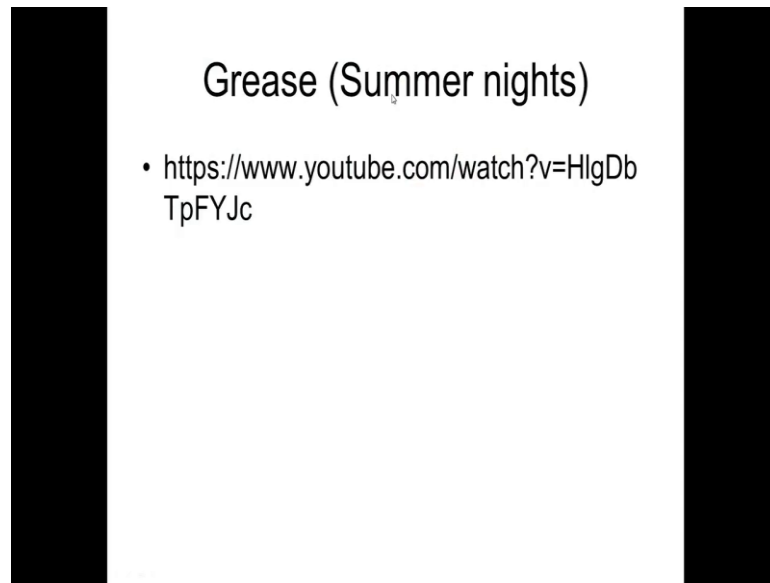


Now, what did you observe there. So, there are two people sitting in a car here, you have John Travolta you have Olivia Newton-John, John Travolta character Denny is; obviously, making advances towards Olivia Newton-John who play the character call sandy. Now, what are the two distinctive features about the appearances of this two characters, let us talk about it. So, Denny clothes and his hair style, what do they suggest they conform to the sturdier type of a rock and roll star.

So, we are talking about the movie is a period film though it was made in 1978 it is actually said during the 50's and the 60's and it is like a home us to rock and roll stars such as LV Parsla and the so called the cool stars of that period such as James Dean also this affected youth kind of roles as popularized by Marlon Brando particularly in his film the wild ones and of course, James Dean and his rebel without the cost.

So, again now distinguished John Travolta appearances with Olivia Newton-John and her hair her clothes. So, they conform to the notion of the so call good girl notion of respectability, the film has fun with this stereo types, thus what the film is all about.

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I like you about enjoy the movie and please do watch this particular song called summer nights, I am giving you the you tube link to it watch the song and come back to me here the song also say a lot about the differences between these two characters. So, we have been talking about icon. Now, icon is assign that represent the objects mainly by similarity, iconic images are those images which are very familiar to his these are stories and meaning behind there are stories and meaning behind such kind of an image and narrative close and in iconic image.

Audrey Hepburn famous little black dress and her holding long, long cigarette holder from breakfast and Tiffin meal can be called an iconic image, it remains firmly edged in her collective consciousness. So, film makers construct meaning to such sciences, sign has two parts importantly signifier and signified, signifier is the physical part you know it is also called sign as object or the tangible thing that we can touch or see or hear, signified is the psychological part, which is the reaction to the object, the mental picture a signifier evokes the internal responses to the, this is the internal responses to the signifier.

So, two things signifier signified, signifier what we see and signified is the mental picture and image or signifier may evoke signified could mean different things to different people for instance a rose physically is a rose. So, signifier if you look at rose as a signifier it is just a flower, but when we start reading meanings into it signified and it can mean different things to different people. For example, let me draw your tension to that famous scene from American beauty, Sam Mendes American beauty where rose petal

and the color red they are physical objects.

So, signifier, but the signified signifies the main different things to different people when, when we see the opening scene of the film and we see and it Bening's character she is cutting of the stems of roses red roses it may even mean that she is at one level emasculating castrating a husband has played by games passing. But, when he encounter angler his daughters teenage friend then let us burn that is the character that Calvin Spicy place and his character starts undergoing the transformation and roses and rose petals starts acquiring a different meaning. While talking about semiotic we also use the word a term synecdoche.

Now, synecdoche is relationship of part to a whole, so often we may say we may associate heroines smile and Marylyn Munroe smile we may associate cigarette with an actor like Humphrey Bogart and the Cigar with an actor like Clint Eastwood specially when he play his the hero from a western movie, the cow boy roles, this also an express term that you should know at his metonymy. Now, metonomic metonymy helps established a relationship based on association a metonym substitutes one thing with another for example, the pen stencil for the written word the sword is pen stencil for military aggression in forces as a figure of it is speech a metonym replace several changeable things with one we wed imamates.

A visual tester essentially metonomic a flag for instance is a metonymy it is stands for a cause and it is symbolizes patriotism, David Fincher's Zodiac is another interesting film that you should be watching in order to understand the concept of science it is a story about a serial killer, a psychotic killer and there are three men who are interested in finding the discovering the identity of this mysterious killer and there are several clue in science that one of the character has played by Jaclyn Herm he works out. So, that is a very interesting study in understanding science and course.

Now, as I have already talked about Peter Valance and science and meanings in cinema and he talks about index, icon and symbol. So, index for example, is a sign or an image for example, a tree is a tree and woman is a woman and a clock is a clock an icon has a story and meanings behind the image and as we have been talking about a narrative is often frozen in it is images. For example, you may recall Tom Hanks iconic picture sitting on a bench with bus stand sitting on a bench waiting for a bus and with his bag towards us and with briefcase next to him a suitcase next to him, this is from Forest

Gump and iconic seen and again think of Peter Fountain, Dennis Cooper riding away on the holiday with selves. So, that is an iconic image from Easy Rider that I also concepts of denotation and connotation when we talk about semiotics.

So, denotation is the primary direct meaning whatever we see in a picture just like signified. Now, connotation is the secondary in direct meaning depending on the collective cultural attitudes and personal associations. So, for Peter Wollen, symbol is the cultural absolute to be significant images in a film should be developed. Now, we will move on to another semiotician that is Roland Barthes and his five systems of meaning which he gives in his essay *x by z* he calls them quotes and quotes function like grammar to a language which can be used to construct meanings, but gives us five quotes namely the enigma quote, the connotative quote, the action quote, the symbolic quote and the cultural quote.

The enigma quote is when a film sets puzzles and poses problems and hints at secrets to be diverged and mysteries to be another the questions that we may ask, what is this going to be about and what is going to happen next also what happen at the end at this point I would like you to watch this clipping from Hitchcock's *Vertigo*.

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Please note down the here you tube link, watch this scene and then you may understand what is meant by enigma code. So, having watch that much part of this great film this is the movie that I would highly recommended if you have not already watched it. Now, the hero who is the detective and he has been requested by a friend of his to follow his wife,

because not that he thinks that the wife is having an affair that and the wife has been behaving very strangely affiliate and the detective hero has played by James toward he follows this lady, the wife Madeline has played by Kenovak and he follows her all over the town, the town is San Francisco and here is the famous Museum seen.

And then these are uncanny resemblance between the lady that is Madeline and the lady in the picture woman in the picture and then several clues are given to as about the identity of this woman and then we are also it is very Addictomatic we are left to ask ourselves that what is this going on and where is it, where will all this lead towards. So, that is your Addictomatic code. Now, the connotative quote or the semantic quote is about the science that in view characters and settings with meaning these science includes speech, clothing, movement and jester, the quote create the illusion of real people having real experiences in real world.

The idea of this quote is that meaning is the result of the interaction between the film and the audiences. The action quote is science belonging to a pattern of an action and after that I will take you to the symbolic quote I mean action quote is quite simple you watch a particular clipping or still. Now, let us assume that you look at the poster of a Bruce Lee, movie you know that action of the film it is going to be a master arts film. But, if you look at the poster of let us assume a Richard Gere and Julia Roberts is standing back to back in a still of pretty woman and you know that is going to be anything, but an action movie is going to be a romantic film a drama or even romantic comedy you can that is the action quote for you.

So, you read meanings into images and the symbolic quote refers to the way and audiences receive taxes by organizing all experiences into a binary pattern. For example, good versus bad, master verses slave, hero verses villain, true verses false. So, this helps in our understanding of what the film taxes means. Now, the cultural code, en compresses that text references two things already known, it depends on certain shared assumptions of cultural behavior, morality and politics, culture not only constitute the self, but also constraints the self this films raise questions about the quotes of conduct in a particular social order for, but all five of this codes are born by the weight of convention what he calls, what is already been, what is already been written in done it apply to works of literature of films these sciences quotes are like grammar to a language and I use to construct meaning.



At this point I would like you to look up the poster or the still of a film called Falling Down. It is a Joel Schumacher movie and please watch this still with Michael Douglas. So, here I will just tell you how to read meanings into a still like that now what do you see there, here is a man almost middle aged man wishing 50's or so he is standing somewhere in the middle of the park on this stills on this stars he is surrounded by this cities escape at the same time he hid in the middle of a park, which is not a very well maintained kind of a space.

What are we talking about his spaces which are not too well maintained. Now, very kind of disorderly and then this man who is dressed up like a regular may I know and all American persons is also wearing glasses and his carrying a briefcase. So, perhaps see the walking man he is someone who had a regular white color then he has also holding the gun in his another hand. So, what does it mean? So, you have why he is holding a gun, so that is your enigma quote. And because you understand and the cultural aspect of cinema, you know in a way that it raises the question about his quote of conduct, the symbolism is very clear symbolic quote that contrasts the binaries between skyscrapers and the sides which have been demolished with the all around him and then the connotative quote as understood by his clothes his hair style, glasses, very regular kind of a person. So, this is what I mean by is semiotics and you can use several meanings into an image just by looking at a picture.

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## Bibliography

- Terence Hawkes. Structuralism and Semiotics, 1977;
- Jonathan Culler. Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature, 1975;
- Jonathan Culler. The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature , Deconstruction, 1981;
- Fredric Jameson. The Prison House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism, 1972.

So, here is the bibliography I would like you to read Terence Hawkes structuralism and semiotics and another very important book is Jonathan Culler Structuralist Poetics, Structuralism, Linguistics and the study of literature. Fredric Jameson the prison house of language a critical account of structuralism in Russian formalism. So, this is your bibliographic.

So, thank you very much and we meet for our next class.