

Draft Prerequisite Assignment

1. You know who your readers are, and why they should care about your problem.

My readers will be upper level cognitive science students and professors who have been involved with the cognitive science program here at SUNY Oswego. They will have been exposed to many of the concepts and theories commonly found in the cognitive science curriculum and more specifically the field of semiotics. Their prior knowledge in the field, will allow them to relate directly to the ideas and theories discussed in my project. My readers should care about the problem of understanding how cinematographers use semiotic techniques to instill a certain message or feeling within it viewers for a variety of reasons. For starters, there are many similarities between the techniques used in the cinema and many other forms of media we interact with every day, like advertisements and art. By understanding the role semiotics plays in the development of film, will allow my reader to understand more about sign manipulation and the high-level cognitive processes that go into analyzing and examining film. Lastly, my reader will begin to understand how their subjective experiences and the messages they received from a film, shape the construction of conceptual representations.

2. You know what kind of ethos or character you want to project.

The ethos or character that I want to project through my paper is that of an experienced researcher and student, within the field of cognitive science, who not only makes apparent the knowledge I have within the field, but shows how I have used this knowledge to dissect and analyze a problem posed before a community of researchers, who also understands and appreciates the many different approaches and theories found in the field of semiotics, who want to break down the science that goes into the art of film making, and who wants to show how different high-level cognitive processes and computational representations are involved and shaped by an individual's understanding of a film's hidden message or meaning.

3. You can sketch your question and its answer in two or three sentences.

Does examining the different semiotic approaches and techniques used in cinematography allow for a better understanding of the computational representations and high level cognitive processes, within humans, involved in receiving and interpreting a film's message? For starters, Semiotics is the study of signs, sign manipulation, and the meaning individuals assign to each. With that said, examining how someone's subjective experiences affect their high-level cognitive processes will allow for a more in-depth understanding of the interpretation an individual assigns to a film's message. Secondly, cinematographers use their films as a medium to send a message to their viewer, and the way the viewer interprets and breaks down that message affects the computational representations formed within their minds. By understanding more about the cognitive processes of the human mind and the foundational

ideas and concepts found in semiotics, it will make more apparent the ways in which a film's message shapes someone's computational representations.

4. You can sketch the reasons and evidence supporting your claim.

- **Claim:** Examining the different semiotic approaches and techniques used in cinematography allow for a better understanding of the computational representations and high level cognitive processes, within humans, involved in receiving and interpreting a film's hidden message or overall meaning.
 - **Reason:** Semiotics is the study of signs, sign manipulation, and the meaning individuals assign to each. With that said, examining how someone's subjective experiences affect their high-level cognitive processes will allow for a more in-depth understanding of the interpretation an individual assigns to a film's message.
 - **Evidence:** Langer (1953) says: "We may, of course, look for any kind of expression we like, and there is even a fair chance that, whatever it be, we shall find it. A work of art is often a spontaneous expression of feeling, i.e., a symptom of the artist's state of mind. If it represents human beings it is probably also a rendering of some sort of facial expression which suggests the feelings those beings are supposed to have. Moreover, it may be said to "express," in another sense, the life of the society from which it stems, namely to indicate customs, dress, behavior, and to reflect confusion or decorum, violence or peace. And besides all these things it is sure to express the unconscious wishes and nightmares of its author. All these things may be found in museums and galleries if we choose to note them."(P.25)
 - **Evidence:** Horton (2017) says: "semiotic theory espouses the idea that there's no actual relationship between the signifier and the signified. This means that the word "dog," the signifier, doesn't actually have anything to do with your four-legged furry friend, the signified, it's just an interpretation we've come up with. When you read that word in quotations above, your mind interpreted the image of a dog because that is what you've been trained to do by language... Essentially then, semiotics allows us to make unspoken leaps, to infer things we aren't told, which makes it a very helpful theory indeed for filmmakers, whose first tenet should always be "show, don't tell."
 - **Reason:** Cinematographers use their films as a medium to send a message to their viewer, and the way the viewer interprets and breaks down that message affects the computational representations formed within their minds. By understanding more about the cognitive processes of the human mind and the foundational ideas and concepts found in semiotics, it will make more apparent

the ways in which a film's message shapes someone's computational representations.

- **Evidence:** Wollen (1972) says: "Photographs, especially instantaneous photographs, are very instructive, because we know that in certain respects they are exactly like the objects they represent. But this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature. In that aspect then, they belong to the second class of signs, those by physical connection." (P. 123-124)
- **Evidence:** Deleuze (1986) says: "This subdivision is what Pasolini calls a 'free indirect subjective'. We will say not that the cinema which claim to be objective or subjective – but here something else is at stake: it is a case of going beyond the subjective and the objective towards a pure Form which sets itself up as an autonomous vision of the content. We are no longer faced with subjective or objective images; we are caught in a correlation between a perceptive-image and a camera-consciousness which transforms it"

5. You know the questions, alternatives, and objections that your readers are likely to raise, and you can respond to them.

- **Issue:** If the mental representations and the interpretations humans create are dependent on subjective, personal experiences, how could an individual begin to understand the mental representations and interpretations of others without having the same experiences?
 - **Response:** Even though most of the experiences people have are subjective, humans still react to certain stimuli from the environment in a similar enough ways, that allow for a similar interpretations between two people. As mentioned in Deleuze' novel "The Movement-Image", when discussing film we are focused on the "perceptive-image and a camera-consciousness which transforms it." With that being said when dissecting film, the creator often play on these common experiences that many humans encounter. Allowing us the opportunity to begin to understand the interpretation of others, even if they are the results of a subjective experience.
- **Issue:** If someone is attempting to understand the way film makers instill a particular message within their viewer, why wouldn't they take a psychological approach, or even a linguistic approach, instead of a semiotic one?
 - **Response:** This issue is one that can be looked at from multiple different angles, by many different fields. This is often the case when you attempt to find answers to long standing problems in an interdisciplinary field like cognitive science. Whether it be a linguistics, psychology, or any other given field, each field has

their own theories and ideology they turn to for answers. I choose to take a semiotic approach because of the fact that sign and sign manipulation can be seen in any and all aspects of day to day life. I believe the field of semiotics is very versatile and a lot of the core concepts in semiotics can be seen in many of the other fields of study previously mentioned. With all that said, a semiotic approach is not the only route one could take to answer this issue. Many of the approaches used in related fields are quite similar to the semiotic approaches I will discuss and those similarities will be highlighted in my project.