



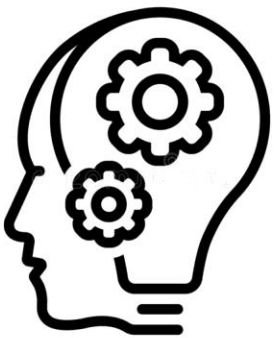
# The Semiotics of Cinema: How Cinematographers Use Semiotic Concepts and Techniques to Elicit a Feeling or Message Within its Viewers

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# The Main Claim or Problem

Examining How Cinemaphotographers  
Use Semiotic Techniques and  
Approaches to Elicit a Certain Message  
or Feeling Within Its Audience.



Subjective experiences complicate this process



# Why You Should Be Interested

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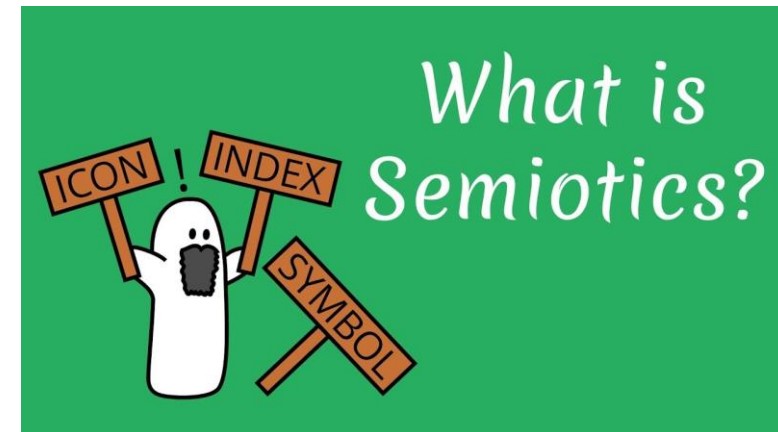
There are many reasons to be interested in my topic:

1. Your LOVE for the field of Cognitive Science
2. You enjoy the art of cinema and want more insight into the design and creative process
3. You are interested in how cinemaphotographers are capable of eliciting a certain message or feeling by using their film as a medium for communication



# What Is Semiotics?

- “Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and their meanings and interpretations” (Horton, 2017).
- Signs are all around us and they don’t always have to be a physical sign, that directs someone to do something.
- A sign is used to represent or communicate meaning.
- The process in which an individual interprets a given sign allows insight into the cognitive processes used to derive meaning and form conceptual representations.



# What Is Cinemaphotography?

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- Cinematography is “the art and technology of motion-picture photography” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2011).
- There is more to cinematography than just a director and a camera
- “The differences between photography and cinematography are many. A single photograph may be a complete work in itself, but a cinematographer deals with relations between shots and between groups of shots” (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2011).
- Each part of a films frame have various aspects that are strategically placed and portrayed to get a desired reaction from the viewer.

# Concepts/Theories/Critical Thinkers

☐ Ferdinand de Saussure

☐ C.S. Peirce

☐ Christian Metz

☐ Roland Barthes

☐ Susanne Langer

☐ Embodied Cognition

☐ Categorization

☐ Conceptual Metaphors

☐ Image Schema

☐ The Camera

☐ The Frame

☐ Diegetic Sounds

☐ Non=Diegetic Sounds

☐ Trans-Diegetic Sounds





# Ferdinand de Saussure

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Ferdinand de Saussure was a foundational contributor to the field of semiotics, who took a linguistic and structuralist approach when developing his theories and ideology

Saussure saw natural language as a system of signs, where meaning is derived through discourse and no symbol within the system could stand alone and still withhold meaning

Ferdinand de Saussure was one of the first to break down a sign into a two-part construct

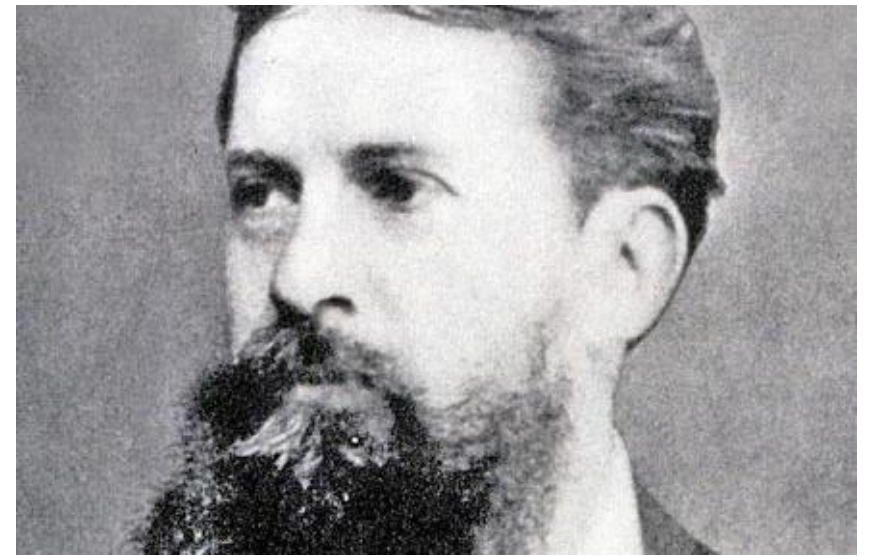
1. Signifier – is the sign itself or the object in the physical world being observed/examined
2. Signified – is the interpretation or meaning derived from the sign

When applying this concept to linguistics, Saussure uses *la parole* to stand for the individual utterance in a language and *la langue* to stand for the underlying conventions and context that makes the utterance understandable.

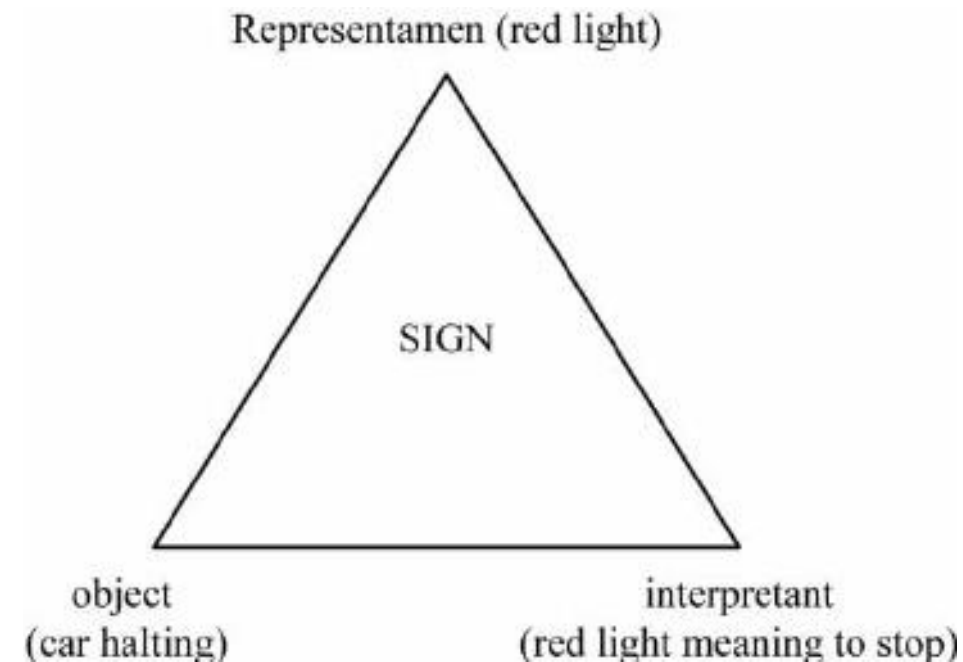
Much of the work done by Saussure can be related to the idea of a universal and generative grammar proposed by Noam Chomsky

# C.S. Peirce

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- Proposed a triadic view to understanding semiotics
- Categories of Signs:
  - Firstness = **quality of feeling or qualia of a sign**
  - Secondness = **the reaction or relation of the sign**
  - Thirdness = **the representation and discourse of a given sign**
- Sign Types:
  - Icon = **resembles the signs referent**
  - Index = **associated with its referent**
  - Symbol = **related to its referent by convention**





# Christian Metz and Film Theory

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- ❑ Christian Metz = French Film theorist and semiotician
- ❑ Believed that film should immerse its audience, appealing to all senses and influencing perceptual systems.
- ❑ Denotational Elements = visual elements of a frame or scene
- ❑ Connotational Elements = requires context when interpreting denotational elements.
- ❑ Syntagma's = Film as a sign system where each frame is considered a sign adding meaning to the whole system.
- ❑ Imaginary Signifier = Film is a mirror and the cinematic signified is imaginary due to subjectivity of the individual.

# Roland Barthes and The Coded Message

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❑ Roland Barthes was a French theorist, philosopher, and semiotician, who was very interested in the structuralist movement of his time.

❑ Structuralism is a method of interpretation, that analyses different background experiences and ways of thinking, to see the relationships between the different parts of the conceptual system (Barthes, 1968)

❑ Linguistic Message: linguistic words or elements found within an image

❑ Denotational element: language the message is encoded in

❑ Connotational: elements: information and context about the culture the text is encoded in

❑ Coded Message: a series of discontinuous signs in a non-linear series

❑ First Sign – What idea does the scene represent (signified)

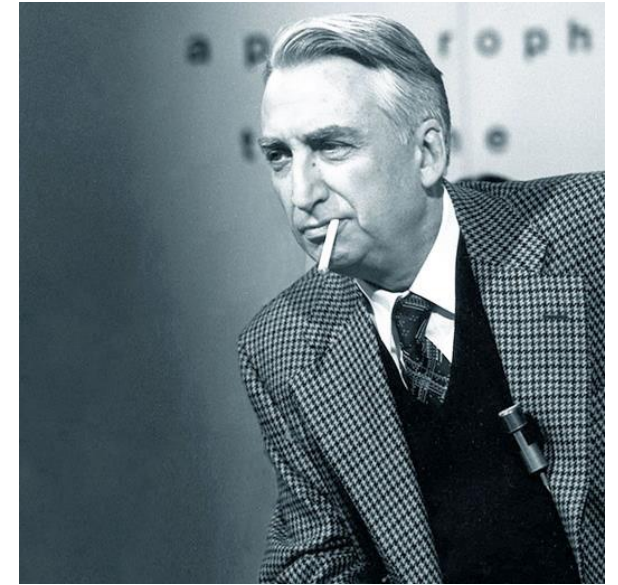
❑ Second Sign – (Signifier) with relation to the linguistic message, what the colors on the ad stand for

❑ Third Sign – what idea does the series of objects transmit to the viewer

❑ Fourth Sign – arrangement of elements to form something aesthetically pleasing (Aesthetically signified)

These four signs band together to form a coherent whole

❑ Non-Coded Message: No connotational information needed, this ad is a photo and there are a variety of different food products within.





# Susanne Langer: Art and Expression

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- ❖ Susanne Langer = Philosopher and Semiotician fascinated with art, aesthetics and expression
- ❖ Langer placed a special emphasis in her semiotic theories to first examine how the individual aspects of art and signs add meaning to the system as a whole.
- ❖ Presentational Symbolism = emotional significance of individual features (Signifier)
- ❖ Discursive Symbolism = implied message (Signified)
- ❖ Aspects of a films frame add different aspects of meaning to the whole film.
  - ❖ Lighting, object placement, color scheme, setting, characteristics of actors, etc.



# Embodied Cognition

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- ❖ The process in which humans derive meaning relies on the fact that cognition and cognitive processes are embodied
- ❖ Embodied Cognition = “appeals to the idea that cognition deeply depends on aspects of the agent's body other than the brain. Without the involvement of the body in both sensing and acting, thoughts would be empty, and mental affairs would not exhibit the characteristics and properties they do” (Wilson & Foglia, 2015).
- ❖ Understanding any film involves processing both auditory and visual stimuli
- ❖ Allow for conceptual representations to be created

# Categorization

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❑ Categorization is a process that allows for reasoning and understanding by our cognitive systems, as we try to make sense of the world around us

❑ “In moving about the world, we automatically categorize people, animals, and physical objects, both natural and man-made. This sometimes leads to the impression that we just categorize things as they are, that things come in natural kinds, and that our categories of mind naturally fit the kinds of things there are in the world. But a large proportion of our categories are not categories of things; they are categories of abstract entities. We categorize events, actions, emotions, spatial relationships, social relationships, and abstract entities of an enormous range: governments, illnesses, and entities in both scientific and folk theories, like electrons and colds. Any adequate account of human thought must provide an accurate theory for all our categories, both concrete and abstract.” (Lakoff, 2008)

❑ As humans we categorize everything we do or experience.

❑ Categorization of experience and information is what allows us to perform cognitive processes like perception, efficiently and effectively.



# Conceptual Metaphors

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- ❖ Conceptual metaphors are another way in which meaning is derived and relies on cognition being embodied
- ❖ Conceptual metaphors can be seen or heard in film
- ❖ Conceptual metaphors “are frame-to-frame mappings, with the roles of the source frame mapping to corresponding roles of the target frame. In conceptual metaphors, source and target frame mappings are not necessarily one to one. In some cases, not all roles or role fillers are mapped, and in others metaphorical roles are added to the target domain” (Lakoff, 2012).
- ❖ “The price of peace is rising.”
- ❖ Information and meaning is lost if the audience watching cannot comprehend the conceptual metaphor being conveyed.





# Image Schema

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- ❖ Images schemas are another concept that relies on categorization of stimuli or information and the process of cognition being embodied
- ❖ An image schema is an embodied recurring prelinguistic structure within human's cognitive process that establishes a pattern of understanding and reasoning
- ❖ As a human experience the same stimuli or are placed into similar situations multiple times, a pattern of understanding is established around the information and environment being perceived
- ❖ Allows for new information to be obtained and understood and old information to be recalled and manipulated with efficiently.
- ❖ Allow conceptual metaphors to be understood because they rely on patterns of understanding developed by image schema's

# The Camera and Frame

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- ❑ Frames are individual signs that are apart of a much bigger system of frames or signs, that create the motion pictures you see in theaters today.
  - ❑ “The frame therefore forms a set which has a great number of parts, that is of elements, which themselves form subsets. It can be broken down... This is why Jakobson calls them object-signs, and Pasolini ‘cinemes’... (cinemes would be very like phonemes, and the shot would be like a moneme)” (Deleuze, 1986).
- ❑ The camera must interpret the elements found in each frame, considering both auditory and visual information about the individual aspects and properties, and structure and categorize it in a way that is meaningful to the audience watching.
- ❑ The camera, under the instruction of the director, is designed to compile the sequences of meaning syntagma’s to form a congregate “whole”, or the completed film.





# Diegetic Sounds

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“Diegetic sound is any sound that emanates from the story world of the film. The term comes from the word diegesis, which is the evolution of a Greek term that means narration or narrative... The source of diegetic sound doesn't necessarily need to be seen on screen, as long as the audience understands that it is coming from something within the film”  
(MasterClass, October 2019).

Diegetic sounds often involve characters from the film and manipulate the world created within a motion picture



# Non-Diegetic Sounds

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“Non-diegetic sound, also called commentary or nonliteral sound, is any sound that does not originate from within the film’s world. The film’s characters are not able to hear non-diegetic sound. All non-diegetic sound is added by sound editors in post-production” (MasterClass, October 2019).

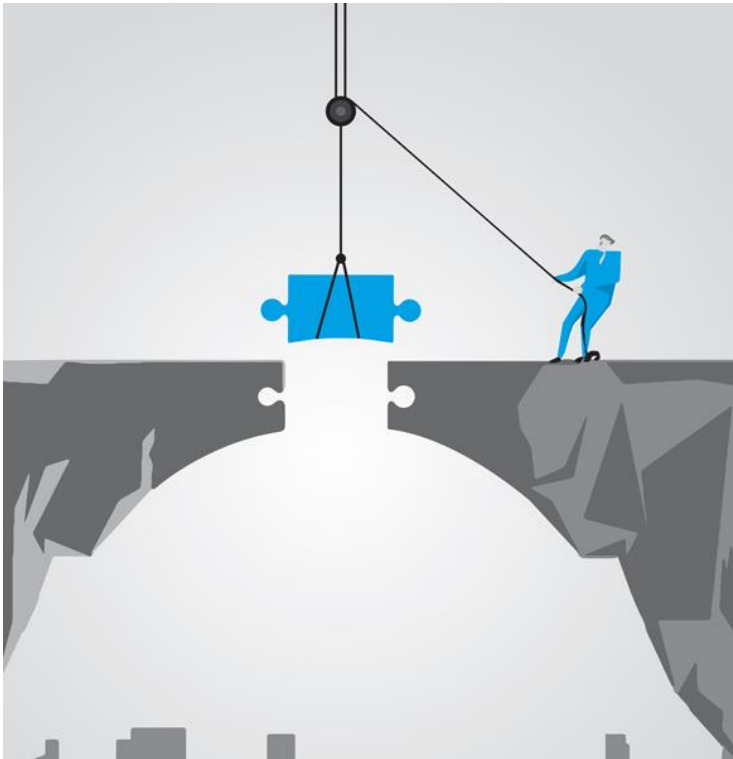
Non-Diegetic sounds are used in different frames and scenes to set the mood or tone for the viewer watching

Jaws is one of the most ominous and well-known background music ever created

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BX3bN5YeiQs&ab\\_channel=GoldenApple%E2%9C%94](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BX3bN5YeiQs&ab_channel=GoldenApple%E2%9C%94)

# Trans-Diegetic Sounds and Object Sounds

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“Trans-diegetic sound refers to any sound that moves in between non-diegetic and diegetic, or vice versa. Trans-diegetic sound helps **bridge or link** two things, like transitions between scenes”

Trans-diegetic sounds are used to set a certain mood within the audience watching the world, while also influencing the plot in which the film takes place.

Object sounds make a movie more realistic by adding depth and intensifying the mood created within a film.

# Conclusion

1. By understanding cognitive science and semiotics, it will provide insight into the ways in which filmmakers use their films as mediums to deliver a particular message or elicit a certain feeling within its audience
2. Regardless of experiences being subjective, Film makers have the capabilities of influencing embodied cognitive processes within humans, affecting the creation of conceptual representation and the process in which meaning is derived, by playing on common experiences and societal views had by individuals belonging to similar cultures/societies.
3. Cognitive Semiotics – Why be stuck in one Disciplinary?



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