

Cog468 "Cognitive Science Capstone Seminar" First Notes Assignment

Pass 3

PRIMARY SOURCES

1. Signs and Meaning in the Cinema

1. “The study of film must keep pace with and be responsive to changes and developments in the study of other media, other arts, other modes of communication and expression. For much too long film aesthetics and film criticism, in the Anglo-Saxon countries at least, have been privileged zones, private reserves in which thought has developed along its own lines, haphazardly, irrespective of what goes on in the larger realm of ideas. Writers about the cinema have felt free to talk about film language as if linguistics did not exist and to discuss Eisenstein's theory of montage in blissful ignorance of the Marxist concept of dialectic.” (P. 17)
2. “in sociology, emphasized that signs must be studied from a social viewpoint, that language was a social institution which eluded the individual will. The linguistic system-what might nowadays be called the 'code'-pre-existed the individual act of speech, the 'message'. Study of the system therefore had logical priority... Saussure stressed, as his first principle, the arbitrary nature of the sign. The signifier (the sound-image o-k-s or b-6-f, for example) has no natural connection with the signified (the concept 'ox'). To use Saussure's term, the sign is 'unmotivated'. Saussure was not certain what the full implications of the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign were for semiology.” (P.117)
3. “Roland Barthes, * as a result of his researches into the language of costume, concluded that it was impossible to escape the pervasive presence of verbal language. Words enter into discourse of another order either to fix an ambiguous meaning, like a label or a title, or to contribute to the meaning that cannot otherwise be communicated, like the words in the bubbles in a strip-cartoon. Words either anchor meaning or convey it.” (P.118)

2. Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema

1. “One of the most important of the many problems in film theory is that of the impression of reality experienced by the spectator. Films give us the feeling that we are witnessing an almost real spectacle— to a much greater extent, as Albert Laffay has noted, than does a novel, a play, or a figurative painting * Films release a mechanism of affective and perceptual participation in the spectator (one is almost never totally bored by a movie). They spontaneously appeal to his sense of belief—never, of course, entirely, but more intensely than do the other arts, and occasionally films are, even in the absolute, very convincing. They speak to us with the accents of true evidence, using the argument that "It is so." With ease

they make the kind of statements a linguist would call fully assertive and which, moreover, are usually taken at face value.” (P.4)

2. “What we call the "meaning" of the event narrated by the filmmaker would in any case have a meaning for someone (since no others exist). But from the point of view of the means of expression, one can distinguish between the "natural" meaning of things and beings (which is continuous, total, and without distinct signifiers: the expression of joy on the face of a child) and determined signification. The latter would be inconceivable if we did not live in a world of meaning; it is conceivable only as a distinct organizational act by which meaning is reorganized: Signification tends to make precise slices of discontinuous significates corresponding to so many discrete signifiers” (P.37)
3. “The rule of the "story" is so powerful that the image, which is said to be the major constituent of film, vanishes behind the plot it has woven—if we are to believe some analyses—so that the cinema is only in theory the art of images. Film, which by nature one would think adapted to a transversal reading, through the leisurely investigation of the visual content of each shot, becomes almost immediately the subject of a longitudinal reading, which is precipitous, "anxious," and concerned only with "what's next." The sequence does not string the individual shots; it suppresses them.” (P. 45)

3. The Symbolic Relationship Between Semiotics and Cinema

1. “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.”
2. “To go even deeper, semiotic theory breaks down signifiers or signs into three sub-classifications: the icon (something that represents an object by resembling it, like the nondescript male and female figures on restroom signs)...”
3. “the index (something that has a logical and causal relationship with what it represents, how smoke indicates fire because it is a product of fire)...”

4. The Imaginary Signifier

1. “Nevertheless, this as it were numerical ‘Superiority’ disappears if the cinema is compared with the theatre, the opera and other spectacles of the same type. The latter too involve sight and hearing simultaneously, linguistic audition and non-linguistic audition, movement, real temporal progression. Their difference from the cinema lies elsewhere: they do not consist of images, the perceptions they offer to the eye and the ear are inscribed in a true space (not a photographed one), the same one as that occupied by the public during the performance; everything the audience hear and see is actively produced in their presence.” (P. 43)
2. “Thus film is like the mirror. But it differs from the primordial mirror in one essential point: although, as in the latter, everything may come to be projected, there is one thing and one thing only that is never reflected in it: the spectator’s

own body. In a certain emplacement, the mirror suddenly becomes clear glass.” (P.45)

3. “In this respect, the cinema is already on the side of the symbolic (which is only to be expected): the spectator knows the objects exist, that he himself exists as a subject, that he becomes an object for others: he knows himself and he knows his like: it is no longer necessary that this similarity be literally depicted for him on the screen” (P.46)

5. Feeling and form: A Theory of Art Developed from Philosophy in a New Key

1. “Yet, the more one reflects on the significance of art generally, the more the music theory appears as a lead. And the hypothesis certainly suggests itself that the oft-asserted fundamental unity of the arts lies not so much in parallels between their respective elements or analogies among their techniques, as in the singleness of their characteristic import, the meaning of “significance” with respect to any and each of them. “Significant Form” (which really has significance) is the essence of every art; it is what we mean by calling anything “artistic.” (P.24)
2. “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)
3. “For in language we find two intellectual functions which it performs at all times, by virtue of its very nature: to fix the pre-eminent factors of experience as entities, by giving them names, and to abstract concepts of relationship, by talking about the named entities. The first process is essentially hypostatic; the second, abstractive. As soon as a name has directed us to a center of interest, there is a thing or a being (in primitive thinking these alternatives are not distinguished) about which the rest of the “specious present” arranges itself. But this arranging is itself reflected in language; for the second process, assertion, which formulates the Gestalt of the complex dominated by a named being, is essentially syntactical; and the form which language thus impresses on experience is discursive.” (P. 236-237)

6. Elements of Semiology

1. “The institutional and the systematic aspect are of course connected: it is because a language is a system of contractual values (in part arbitrary, or, more exactly, unmotivated) that it resists the modification coming from a single unit, and is consequently a social institution.” (P.14)
2. “The schema, the theory of which merges with that of the form and of the linguistic institution; ii). The group norm-usage-speech, the theory of which merges with that of the substance and of the execution.” (P.18)

3. “Let us first state the element which is common to all these terms: they all necessarily refer us to a relation between two relata. This feature cannot therefore be used to distinguish any of the terms in the series; to find a variation in meaning, we shall have to resort to other features, which will be expressed herein the form of an alternative (presence/absence)” (P.35)

7. Cinema 1: The Movement-Image

1. “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)” (P.12)
2. “If the frame has an analogue, it is to be found in an information system rather than a linguistics one. The elements are the data, which are sometimes very numerous, sometimes of limited number. The frame is therefore inseparable from two tendencies: towards saturation or towards rarefaction.” (P.12)
3. “Thus movement has two facets, as inseparable as the inside and the outside, as the two sides of a coin: *it is the relationship between parts and it is the state [affection] of the whole*. On the one hand it modifies the respective positions of the parts of a set, which are like its sections [*coupes*], each one immobile in itself; on the other it is itself the mobile section of a whole whose change it expresses. From one point of view, it is called relative; from the other, it is called absolute.” (P.19)

8. Cinema 2: The Time-Image

1. “The historical fact is that cinema was constituted as such by becoming narrative, by presenting a story, and by rejecting its other possible directions. The approximation which follows is that, from that point, the sequences of images and even each image, a single shot, are assimilated to propositions or rather oral utterances: the shot will be considered as the smallest narrative utterance. Metz himself underlines the hypothetical character of this assimilation” (P.25)
2. “Substituting an utterance for the image, he can and must apply to it certain determinations which do not belong exclusively to the language system [langue], but condition the utterances of a language [langage], even if this language is not verbal and operates independently of a language system.” (P.25)
3. “language features which necessarily apply to utterances will be found in the cinema, as rules of use, in the language system and outside of it: the syntagm (conjunction of present relative units) and the paradigm (disjunction of present units with comparable absent units). The semiology of cinema will be the discipline that applies linguistic models, especially syntagmatic ones, to images as constituting one of their principal 'codes'.” (P.25-26)

SECONDARY SOURCES

1. Semiotics

1. “Peirce’s seminal work in the field was anchored in pragmatism and logic. He defined a sign as “something which stands to somebody for something,” and one

of his major contributions to semiotics was the categorization of signs into three main types: (1) an icon, which resembles its referent (such as a road sign for falling rocks); (2) an index, which is associated with its referent (as smoke is a sign of fire); and (3) a symbol, which is related to its referent only by convention (as with words or traffic signals). Peirce also demonstrated that a sign can never have a definite meaning, for the meaning must be continuously qualified.”

2. “Saussure treated language as a sign-system, and his work in linguistics supplied the concepts and methods that semioticians applied to sign-systems other than language. One such basic semiotic concept is Saussure’s distinction between the two inseparable components of a sign: the signifier, which in language is a set of speech sounds or marks on a page, and the signified, which is the concept or idea behind the sign.”
3. “Saussure also distinguished *parole*, or actual individual utterances, from *langue*, the underlying system of conventions that makes such utterances understandable; it is this underlying *langue* that most interests semioticians.”

2. Signs of Feeling: The American Journal of Semiotics

1. “Starting at the beginning of her career with the problem of the ‘logic’ of signs and meanings, and passing, by way of a critique, indeed demolition, of semiotic logocentrism through the semiotics of art, ritual, and myth, Langer arrived at feeling as the heuristic key to mind or minding. The principal questions that Langer forces us to face, and which she tries to answer, are the following. What are we attending to when we attend to feeling? What does the foregrounding of feeling bring to semiotics and to a semiotically relevant image of mind or minding?” (P.45)
2. “Feeling, on Langer’s fundamentally naturalist, but non-reductive, conception, characterizes physiological systems, not as an additional ‘reality’ or ontologically distinct ‘level’ of reality but as a distinctive lived through dimension or phase of the system. In the cases of physiology and psychology, as understood by Langer, the “overlapping of the two fields is patent” (P.45)
3. “Mentality and feeling, for Langer, are synonymous. Mentality, in the most general sense, is a field of “felt impingements and activities” (1967: 9) and covers not just the normal notion of feeling, but also thought, sensation, dream, and actions — and any other felt modification of the field of consciousness” (P.40)

3. Diegetic Sound and Non-Diegetic Sound

1. “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.”
2. “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.”

3. “When diegetic and non-diegetic sound are combined, it’s called trans-diegetic. 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.”

4. Classics of Semiotics

1. “The syntagmatic opposition, i.e. the value position which an element takes on within a linear sequence, is therefore especially characteristic for language as a sign system. A typical sign system in the semiology of communication such as a road sign system contains equally rudimentary linear syntagms (e.g. the sequence of pre-warning and warning signs). As a rule, however, nonlinguistic sign systems are based on spatial syntagmatics (for example adjacency on a surface).” (P.73)
2. “The coordination between signifier and signified in the sign as a whole may also be based on arbitrariness. There is no reason one can think of why the same concept, say, “housing device,” should be coupled in one language with the signifier /house/, in another with the signifier /Maison/. As has been suggested before, however, there exist relationships between signifier and signified which are “motivated” to different degrees, meaning that “there is the rudiment of a natural bond between the signifier and the signified” (Saussure, 1964)” (P.74)
3. “For Barthes, the connotation is the “tone” of a text, the manner in which it has been “doctored”... the signified of a “connotative sign” is for Barthes the “fragment of an ideology,” the signifier, in turn, a “rhetoric,” both going back to a “real system” via metalanguage.” (P.75)