

# LIGHTS, CAMERA, SIGNIFIERS.

## Codes:

In Semiotic terms a mystery story is a coded message to the reader, listener or viewer. In any media production all kinds of signs and signification's are present and observable. A good writer will make the connections between them less obvious. However, once we see how they are related and 'break the code', the mystery is solved. Codes then, are signifiers; we must assemble these clues and interpret them properly to make sense of things, to achieve clarity or to find the guilty party.

They are also present in all the various media genres, such as westerns and sitcoms where they are commonly referred to as 'formulas'.

- Later this week look at some popular television series and observe the signs used to make you understand what is intended. For example, in a space programme they will travel in spaceships, use matter transmitters and fire ray guns. You will know that this is not a cowboy programme.  
It may not be prudent to assume that media signifiers will always be honest or resist the chance to manipulate us. Umberto Eco ('The Name of the Rose' author) suggests that if signs can be used to tell the truth, they can also be used to lie. "...if something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to tell the truth; it cannot be used 'to tell' at all".
- Eco's point is an important one. If signs can be used to communicate they can be used to communicate lies. Look at some of the debate around the way the media is used, particularly in war situations.

You can also watch this video about semiotics.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEgxTKUP\\_WI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEgxTKUP_WI)

## Grammar of media and culture.

- Codes are difficult to discern because they are so much part of our social life and of our mediated experience. They are all pervasive; they are part of every life, every day, which makes them almost invisible.  
These codes of behaviour exist in how we behave in bars, in elevators, at sports events and in dating, for example.

## Community Media and codes.

It is quite possible for a media production to be misunderstood if those who produce it offer codes that are different from those who receive the message. Often the transmitters of media messages, because of their social class, education level, political ideologies, worldview and ethos, etc, do not share the same codes as their audience. Community Broadcasters generally share largely similar codes to their listeners, which open up the potential for more coherent communication between a community media service and its community.

## The potential of Semiotics.

Semiotics is a fascinating and powerful analytic tool. You can apply it to film, radio, television and the Internet. Indeed, everything we do sends messages about us in a variety of codes; we also receive innumerable messages encoded in vast paraphernalia of social life.

What Semiotics does is help us to decipher these rules and bring them into consciousness. It can also help us to develop a more critical awareness of the ways the various media manipulate our consciousness with encoded messages.