



Coding and Signification in Cinema: Semiological Perusal of The Film *In The Shadows*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to reveal how the art of cinema narrates stories through visual and auditory elements and the role of signs in the process of meaning production. Cinema communicates various messages to the audience through its unique language and encodes these messages using signs. In this context, film language is evaluated as a communication system that plays a central role in the production of meaning. The study adopts a semiotic film analysis method based on the production and transmission of meaning and applies this method to examine the 2020 dystopian film *In the Shadows*. Signs within the film, including characters, settings, color usage, and narrative structure are analyzed to elaborate on the multilayered nature of cinematic language in meaning-making. The findings demonstrate that film language is not merely composed of visual and auditory elements but also conveys deep meanings to the audience through cultural codes and symbols. Thus, this study clarifies the semiotic function of cinema in meaning production and how this function is encoded.

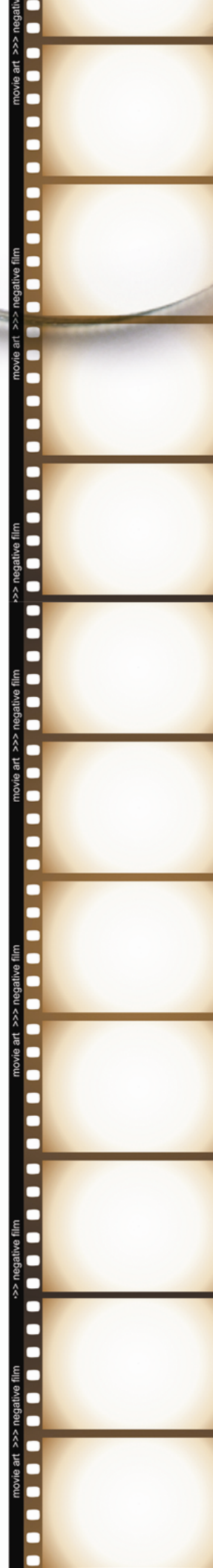
Keywords: Cinema; meaning; semiotics; signifier; signified



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Introduction

Semiotics is an interdisciplinary field that studies how meaning is produced through signs and symbols. Originating from the Greek word “symptom” (trace, sign), semiotics focuses on understanding the visual and linguistic systems used in communication. Based on structuralist thought, this discipline is widely used across social sciences as a method to help individuals make sense of their surroundings and the world (Quoted by Taylan from Cevikbas, 2000, p. 222). Semiotics assumes that every stimulus in human life is a sign, developing a unique language that enables people to create meaning in their relationships with themselves, others, and nature.

Signs such as sound, writing, photographs, images, and film frames cover both cultural and social phenomena as well as linguistic studies. Today, linguistics is an interdisciplinary field intersecting with philosophy, literature, cinema, and other disciplines. Cinema is a unique form of communication that creates meaning through moving images. Beyond language, cinema language is enriched with symbols, signs, and metaphors, producing meaning through

cultural and ideological codes. In this way, cinema closely relates to semiotics by encoding narratives that represent social life.

Cinema semiotics examines how cinematographic elements in film frames build meaning within context. Meaning in film is shaped by camera angles, shooting techniques, and color (Bağder, 1999, p. 58). Semiotics aims to reveal not only explicit messages but also hidden and metaphorical meanings.

This study explores the relationship between semiotics and cinema through the perspectives of thinkers such as Saussure, Peirce, and Barthes. It also discusses elements of meaning in cinema based on the pioneering approaches of Vladimir Propp, Christian Metz, Peter Wollen, and Umberto Eco. The originality of this research lies in its semiotic analysis of the 2020 film *In the Shadows* by Erdem Tepegöz. The film, positioned within science fiction and dystopia genres, offers a political narrative that challenges dominant ideologies and exposes weaknesses in the system.

In the analysis section, visual sequences in the film are evaluated using concepts such as the signifier-signified relationship, denotation, and connotation. It is emphasized that meaning does not arise from single elements alone but from their combination. The narrative structure and metaphors in the film play a critical role in conveying its political message.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the fields of cinema and semiotics by demonstrating how coded images and signs acquire meaning through a semiotic approach. The analysis of the film offers an important perspective for understanding the multi-layered process of meaning-making in cinema.

The Process of Making Sense of Communication with Concepts

Practical and theoretical discussions on the problem of meaning emphasize that meaning is not only a field related to language, but also the need to focus on the non-linguistic field. In the process that begins with culture, the problem of meaning lies at the basis of religions, myths, beliefs, institutions, rules, norms, traditions and customs. In this respect, meaning, which is a concept as old as human history, becomes visible in the primary actions of people when they start thinking, writing, speaking and conveying. The effort of people to make sense of everything that happens around them is related to the process of mentally producing meaning. Meaning, which we can define as what people understand from a word, statement, event, situation, context and behavior, is the thought or object that manifests in the human mind regarding the knowledge of something or that thing reminds or evokes in the human mind. The way a person interprets these phenomena that they perceive becomes meaningful with many different variables. A person who is conscious of the experiences they have gained in the outside world, who comprehends and perceives these experiences, codes all their knowledge with their

opposites in their minds in an intuitive or rational way. Coding and decoding, one of the basic processes of communication, are related to the practice of producing meaning in almost all types of narratives.

The coding stage, where information is transformed or translated into a processable form into memory, is then explained by recalling the information recalled into memory. While the conversion of content into symbols, signs, figures and words is defined as coding, decoding means the analysis of coded symbols, signs, figures and words. Like literature, painting, music, photography and advertising, cinema also uses symbols as a means of conveying meaning. Each of the symbols that humanity has used in communication and interaction throughout history is a sign. Reading the content with these signs, making sense of the content codes, and being able to analyze and distinguish between open or masked meanings is the job of semiology, a transdisciplinary field of research. Semiology, which is a field that defines sign systems and describes the relationship between signs, has a very wide conceptual network in this sense. The concept of sign, which generally means “any object, being or phenomenon that shows something other than itself because it can take the place of something else” (Vardar, 1998, p. 11), is, in broader terms, the language and extra-linguistic activities that enable human beings, who are social beings, to communicate and communicate with nature and all other living things.

Here, the thing that enables communication can be systems that can be expressed in language and that emerge by the combination of sounds, as well as the alphabet of the deaf and dumb, various gestures and facial expressions, narrative tools of disciplines such as literature, music, painting and cinema can also be considered as signs. The figures drawn on cave walls by the first human beings to enter the stage of history as the first form of communication, the fire-making and smoke-producing techniques they used to communicate with each other, traffic signs and signs, the image, sound, writing and movement systems of art and literary units such as painting, music, cinema, photography and literature are also signs. On the other hand, the color used in a painting by a painter, the behavior of a character in a movie, a theater show, the way a sweater, skirt, or blouse is used in fashion also have the feature of a sign as units of a meaningful whole (Rifat, 1992, p. 118). The important point to emphasize here is that signs have a feature that does not always correspond to linguistic expressions. Any physical expression with a narrative function, any language or non-linguistic element that has the ability to reveal meaning is also a sign. Signs are everything that represents an object, event, or situation other than itself, and replaces it. From this perspective, words, symbols, signs, and objects are considered signs. Signs are a unit of language formed by the unity of the signifier and the signified in the process of creating meaning. While the signifier is the physical entity of the signifier, the conscious existence of the signifier is the signified. In other words, the

sound that points to a concept or object is the signifier, and the concept or object that appears in the human mind after hearing that sound is the signified. In the relationship between meaning and sound, according to Saussure, language is "a system of signs that denote concepts" (2013, p. 45).

Signifier	Formal plane, Physical-Material entity, Marker, Word-Sound symbol	S-H-E-P-P
Signified	Content plane and Mental entity, Concept-Object	The sheep design in our minds

Table 1: Elements Creating Meaning in Saussure.

Language, which is a system of signs, consists of the signified and the signifier, while linguistic analysis is the decoding of these components. Although these three concepts that constitute the process of meaning are thought of as separate concepts, “the bond that unites the signifier with the signified is arbitrary. Since we see the sign as a whole resulting from the union of a signifier with a signified, we can say more simply: The sign of language is arbitrary” (Saussure, 1998, p. 73). Therefore, the sound image and the object are interconnected and evocative parts. Each structure that constitutes language is meaningful in proportion to its relationship with each other. While the units alone do not convey any meaning, the meaning of the parts can be determined in relation to other parts. Therefore, the meaning of a sign conventionally gains existence through its relationship with other signs within the system in

which it is defined. To give an example of this situation, we know the meaning of 'black' through its relationship with the meaning of 'white' and cannot conceive of one without the other. The fact that certain signifiers are associated with certain concepts in every language can be explained by the principle of the invariance of the sign in Saussure. While speech is a personal vocal act, language is a social institution that depends on the agreement between members of society. Sharing common codes is possible with social consensus. Signifiers cannot be arbitrarily changed by the individual; therefore, this situation emphasizes the social aspect of language. When viewed from a social context, the process of meaning is affected by culture. Because language is a phenomenon that feeds culture and is fed by it. Language, which has an important place in the society it belongs to's meaning of the world, not only provides communication but also contributes significantly to the formation of social identity. Peirce is one of the theorists who thought about the concept of sign and tried to make sense of the communication process by classifying signs. According to Peirce, the sign is "a thought that takes the place of something, produces or qualifies that thing" (1982, p. 339). Based on this definition, the sign shows a triple structure: signifier, interpretation and object. In the model, the form of the sign; signifier, the meaning created by the sign; The interpretation is the thing that the sign refers to, and the object. The fact that the sign is a form of representation and that every thought opens the door to another thought as a sign necessitates the evaluation of meaning

in the context of semiotics. “If we understand the light of external realities, the conditions that we can find in thought are the conditions of thoughts determined by signs. Clearly, there is no other thought that finds evidence by starting from external realities. But we have seen that thought can only be known by external realities. Therefore, the only truth that can be perceived is the thought that appears with signs. But unperceived thought cannot exist. Therefore, all thought must be determined by signs” (Peirce, 2014, p. 103).

Based on concrete reality, the interpreter is the one who makes the connection between the sign and the object visible and gives meaning to the process. The narrative of “Friday’s footprints” in Daniel Defoe’s work “Robinson Crusoe” is a process of meaning-making in which Robinson, who ends up on a deserted island after a shipwreck, realizes that there are other people there than himself with the footprints he encounters while he is alone. While thinking that he is alone on a deserted island, Robinson sees footprints belonging to a person on the beach one day. He thinks about the relationship of these footprints to reality and comes to the conclusion that these footprints were formed in a certain period of time. These footprints, which belong to his object, the character Friday in the novel, are a reference to the existence of someone else on the island as a sign, trace or indication. The fact that there is someone who will interpret the situation as it is, that is, an interpreter, gives the footprints the feature of being

a sign (Yücel, 2013). The process of meaning, which is random in Saussure, is based on the meaningful integrity of parts that are compatible and evoke each other on a logical level for Peirce. In the process of interpretation, which corresponds to mental activity, the individual's capacity to remember, habits or ability to evaluate are important. The unit of interpretation, where meaning will be made, is shaped by the logical inferences of the interpreter, considering the possibilities and realities.

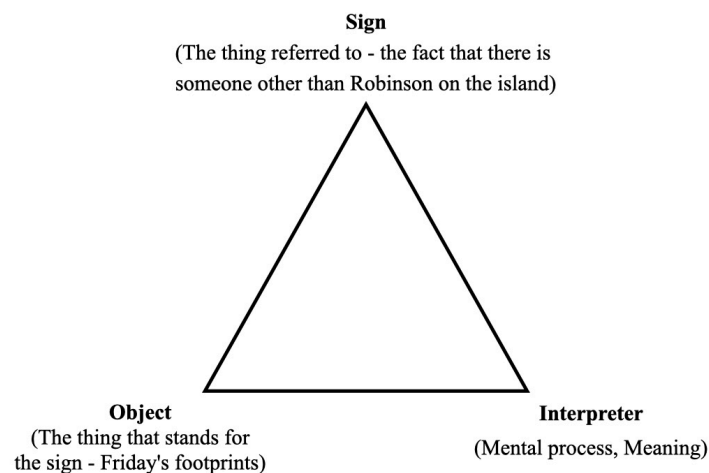


Figure 1: Elements that Create Meaning in Peirce.

The first of the triple model that constitutes meaning, the sign shows a separate triple structure within itself as qualitative, singular and rule sign. In a qualitative sign, the sign is the quality of something; the tone-tone of a human voice, or its smell-color are all qualitative signs. Again, a unique rhythm belonging to a piece of music, the unique smell of a baby are examples of qualitative signs. On the other hand, singular signs are signs that refer to a single situation,

object, or entity. “A single sign can be formed through its qualities, and therefore also includes or to some extent includes a qualitative sign. However, these qualitative signs are a privileged form of qualitative signs and only take the form of a sign through being related” (Peirce, 1982, p. 291). When we look at a painting of Marilyn Monroe, if the face we see only reminds us of her, this is a singular sign. The last leg of the triad, the rule sign, emphasizes the legal or rule feature of the sign. Again, when we look at the example of Marilyn Monroe, if her attractiveness has become a criterion of beauty in the same painting, this is a rule indicator. When evaluated at the level of representation, the triple structure in which content analyses are made through abstraction or symbolization acts in all disciplines of social sciences consists of visual, indexical and symbolic indicators. An iconic indicator is “a sign that refers to its object due to the qualities it possesses” (Peirce, 1982, p. 291). An iconic indicator that is visually similar to the object it replaces or refers to does not physically replace its object, but directly represents it. A person’s passport photo can be given as an example of an iconic indicator that can also be defined as an Icon. When a girl who is angry with her boyfriend tears the picture she is holding in her hand, it means that the girl reflects her anger on the visual representation of her boyfriend, who has a physical presence, that is, on the painting. Peirce defines the indexical sign as follows: “A sign is a sign that loses the qualities that make it a sign when its object disappears” (Peirce, 1982, p.

304). The indexical sign, which has an invisible but natural connection with its object, is based on the interpretant and object relationship.

After we see smoke somewhere, we develop the idea that there is a fire there (Smoke does not rise where there is no fire). Therefore, smoke is a sign of fire (Büker, 1985). Peirce tries to concretize the indexical sign with the following example: “I see a man walking with a stagger. This is a feature that makes it probable that the man is a sailor. I see a bow-legged man with gaiters on his shoes and a thick corduroy suit on top. These are probable signs that the man is a jockey or something of that kind” (Pierce as cited in: Wollen, 2014, p. 110). The sign form based on a consensus among people is finally the symbolic sign in Peirce. Therefore, signs, words, concepts or objects on which a social consensus has been reached are symbols. The meaning of symbols that emerge as a result of people's common views and opinions in the communication process that provides understanding is shaped by the relationship between them and their recipients. The bird object's emphasis on freedom or marriage, and the scale's reference to justice are symbolic signs. The symbolic sign is random. The symbolic sign's relationship with its object does not contain a logical and existential relationship, it only has the power of a conventional norm.

Another name that resembles Peirce's approach to semiotics is Roland Barthes. With his pioneering views in communication and media studies, especially in literature, Barthes used semiotics as a basic method in ideological criticism. Barthes uses the structural analysis method in the analysis of various meaningful cultural elements with his unique approach. Focusing on the relationship between sign and culture, Barthes emphasizes that myths are important cultural realities. According to him, myth is a cultural way of conceptualizing something, thinking about that concept or understanding the concept. The image of the apple extends to the forbidden fruit in the sign system or the narrative of Adam and Eve. Again, the fact that the traditional view of a nation's law enforcement forces (police) may include concepts of friendship, trust or hostile approach, ruthlessness, intolerance is a reference to the meanings related to myths. In this context, myths also contain ideological discourses. Whatever the dominant ideology within a society is, the thought structures reflected in the myths of that society are also reflections of these ideologies. "In his work titled *Principles of Semiology*, Barthes gathers the principles of semiology under four headings and in the form of binary oppositions: I- Language and Speech; II- Signified and Signifier; III- Syntax and System; IV- Plain Meaning and Connotation." (Rifat, 1992, p. 61). Here, language is the language that a person learns. Speech is each of the words, concepts, speech, and sound units belonging to the language learned. It is important in reading and making sense of the signifier and signified sign systems that correspond to the narrative

and contextual planes, respectively. On the other hand, Barthes, who touches upon the concepts of plain meaning and connotation in the process of making sense of visual elements, emphasizes that the main function of semiology is to create meaning, while expressing that the process of meaning is a process that progresses from the visible, the known to the unknown, the unseen.

At this point, plain meaning is the clearly known meaning within the sign. Whatever concept or object the sign points to, this “thing” is clearly visible in the real world. Connotation corresponds to the secondary level meaning that evokes. Connotation is shaped by the interpreter’s worldview, cultural background and unique interpretations. Barthes describes his “semiotics as the ‘dissolution’ of linguistics or, more clearly, the study of all aspects of meaning that have been discarded by a scientific linguistics as impure” (Barthes’s quote: Culler, 2008, p. 81). When considered specifically in terms of photography, the object photographed is the main meaning, while how that photograph was taken is the connotation (Fiske’s quote: Chandler, 2007). What Barthes means by impure meaning is how hidden and masked meanings that cannot be clearly seen at once are attempted to be given. The concept of the sign, which emerges as a result of the mutual relationship between the signifier and the signified, gains meaning and reality through language in Barthes. The sign consists of the signifiers that form the ‘form plane’ and the signifieds that form the ‘content plane’. The cycle between the signifier and the signified is what determines meaning.

One of the methods that semiotics uses to give meaning to objects and human actions is the system of distinctions and conventions (rules). When we start from the example of the food system, while the soups, appetizers, salads, stews or desserts on the menu in a restaurant provide syntactic details, the meaningful and regular association of the dishes among themselves expresses the system of conventions. The issues of which dishes can be eaten together, which food can be included in which meal of the day, include linguistic contrast, association or naming in the field of semiotics in the explanation of codes (Bircan, 2015). Emphasizing another dimension of meaning, Barthes emphasizes that an object becomes a symbol when he states that it is possible for an object to replace something else through use or convention. An object becomes a symbol when it acquires a meaning that enables it to replace something else through convention and usage. In a narrative, the presence of a man with a Rolls-Royce car is a symbolic representation of this man's wealth, while the same man's attempt to sell this car can be a symbol of that person's failure in his job and the loss of his wealth (Fiske, 1990). In addition to symbolic meaning, the concepts of metaphor and metonymy are also fundamental elements that create meaning in Barthes. Metaphor, which means establishing a similarity between two things at a relational level, is the transfer of the known to the unknown. Everything that can be described as a metaphor is an image. Through metaphors, mostly subtle, difficult to understand,

abstract contents, masked discourses that are not intended to be revealed immediately emerge in the form of transferring meaning based on the principle of association.

The expression “mouth of the river” describes the place where the river and the body of water into which the river flows meet through the metaphor of “mouth” (which is a human organ). In metonyms, on the other hand, there is a transfer between two things on the same level syntactically. In metonymy, also known as literal metaphor, any flag symbol is a reference to the nation it belongs to.

Semiology as a Means of Meaning in Cinema

Cinema, which has its own language and methods of expression, benefits from the possibilities of semiology in the process of creating meaning. Cinema, which is a special form of communication with its cinematographic structure and narrative features that include technical features, is an important field of representation. The relationship between semiology and cinema, which deals with and processes general rules regarding how filmic narrative is established, how the plot is constructed, and how film images are formed, is meaningful in this respect. All linguistic and non-linguistic units of expression, from the script written in the pre-production phase of the film to the camera angles, shooting scales, lighting and sound to be used in the scenes during the production phase, serve a purpose in the process of creating meaning. Semiology, which is a system of signs regarding how the content presented in the

cinema is coded, how messages are processed and how they should be analyzed, looks at the cinema text with a holistic eye. Semiology, which presents the process of conveying meaning in cinema as a text reading practice, also aims to establish certain connections by analyzing the content from different perspectives in the reading process.

On a narrative level	On a cinematographic level
Characters, Characteristics of the characters and their level of relationship with each other, their actions, interactions	Lighting and darkening techniques (Coloring)
Dialogues between characters	Editing types (Chaining, overlapping, cutting, parallel editing, etc.)
The plot on which the film is based	Camera movements (Horizontal-Vertical movement)
Chronology of events	Image framing techniques
Places where the story takes place	Shooting scales (general, height, shoulder, far, etc.)
Time of the story	Audio and visual effects

Table 2: Elements Creating Meaning as a Means of Signifier and Expressing in Cinema.

Based on the fact that each narrative in cinema contains a code and a sign, semiotics is an important field in making hidden, suppressed or masked meanings visible as a method. It undertakes the task of being a semiotic tool in ensuring communication between the audience of a movie and the creator. The language used in cinema as a means of signifier and expressing consists of images and sounds. “Cinema is a language, this metaphor is also made for other arts: Theater language, poetry language, novel language, painting language, fashion language etc.

The “language” here does not mean the articulated and natural language we know, linguistic (Fr. Linguistique) language consisting of signs (Fr. Langue), but the ability to speak (Fr. Langage).” (Öztiñ, 1999, p. 144). Therefore, signs in cinema are given meaning with symbols, icons or signs. In films that encode and convey various forms and figures of social life, which are the representations of the culture they emerged from, at the narrative level, each scene is a sign. Signs that can replace everything and present something other than themselves are important parts that reveal and make visible the characters, dialogues, action, plot of a film, and also the shooting scales, camera movements, and lighting elements. In this context, the way each image projected on the screen is perceived by the audience as a sign and how it is interpreted is related to the field of semiotics. Various technical elements used by the director in cinema are important in terms of the messages the film wants to give. To give a brief example, if a colored image turns into black and white in a scene, this situation is evaluated as remembering the past. If the camera shows a person from a low angle, it means that this person is a great and sublime person, while if the angle shows the person from above, this situation can be interpreted as the person being belittled. On the other hand, the two consecutive images given by the camera with the cutting movement are a synchronized rush. The details that the filmmaker includes or removes from the image while framing the image provide important clues about the message that is ideologically intended to be given.

Semiology has been applied to the field of cinema with the pioneering approaches of Vladimir Propp, Christian Metz, Peter Wollen and Umberto Eco. Propp, who argues that signs should not be considered alone but together in proportion to their relationships with each other in both linguistics and semiotics, has positioned fairy tales in a separate place from other narratives. Propp emphasizes that all fairy tales told in the world have two fundamentally important characteristics. The first of these is that all fairy tales are quite colorful and show variety in terms of appearance. On the other hand, all fairy tales have common functional units with uniform characteristics despite their quantitative abundance. These units carry 31 functions and 7 action areas that can be accepted as valid for all folk tales. These functions follow the same sequential order in all fairy tales (Propp, 1971). Defining the names and characteristics of the characters as changing units, Propp states that the unchanging units consist of person actions and functions. According to Propp, in the cinema, the audience can comment on the course of a movie they watch or find hidden meanings by knowing the 31 clichéd functions of the fairy tale. Another name working on semiotics in cinema is Metz. Proving that cinema is an effective language, Metz emphasizes that this language is a different language skill than the known verbal language. He points out the elements of the signifier and the signified that form the image in the meaning of a film content in cinema and says that both elements are raw materials. In other words, each shot in the film is based on certain codes as a sentence. These codes can be common

cultural expressions that the culture it emerged from has agreed on in terms of meaning, or they can be specific codes learned later in the process (Metz as cited in: Bükér, 2012).

According to Metz, there are five elements on which meaning is built in cinema in particular and in other communication channels in general. These are photographic, moving and images that combine them; Graphic drawings that include all the written matter we read on the screen; Recorded speeches; Recorded music; Recorded noise or sound effects (Andrew, 1976). Metz, who focuses on certain characteristic features of filmic signs, also touches upon codes that reveal meaning at the level of generality and specificity-singularity. Namely, within the classical narrative structure, there are general and specific codes in each genre film. Each film takes place in a location, this is a general sign. However, the endless deserts where westerns take place are a special code. On the other hand, the clothing element that the characters wear in each film is a general sign. However, in westerns, pointy-toed shoes, a cowboy hat or a horror character wearing a black cape in horror films are singular sign representations. The iconographic structure of genre films can be evaluated with these general and specific codes. In addition, each code has a sub-code.

According to Eco, who was influenced by Saussure's approach, every text has an infinite number of meanings and interpretations in terms of semiotics. Here, it is evaluated according

to the culture, past experiences, knowledge and accumulation of the interpreter. In this respect, every work is clearly available for its receiver and interpreter. The concept of “theory of lies” in Eco’s book “A Theory of Semiotics” is important in terms of basing his views on semiotics on a foundation. With this concept, Eco emphasizes that a sign is something that can be substituted for something else, but that the existence of this other thing is not necessary. Seeing things that do not exist in a film through fiction or the meeting of two people who do not meet in reality are examples that can be given for the concept of “theory of lies” (Eco, 1985). With this feature, a narrative shows cultural content. The fact that the function of a sign will emerge with the correspondence of an expression and content is reinforced by the example Eco gives under the name of the ‘Watergate Model’. “Thus, a code (a) is established between the expression level and the content level; (b) the sign function is formed by the relationship between the abstract unit of the expression system and the abstract unit of the content system; (c) thus a code creates general examples (types), thus producing laws that generalize concrete signs (tokens), like signs that occur in communicative processes” (Eco, 1976, pp. 51-52).

The meaningful relationship between the signifier and the signified in the sign system is established between the expression and content plane in Eco. Wollen, another name who adapted Peirce’s logical semiotics to cinema, states that instead of verbal codes, the film

language has its own, unique syntax. In Wollen's words, "signs vary on a line extending from signs where the symbolic dimension is clearly dominant, such as letters and numbers, which are random and discontinuous, to signs where the indexical dimension is dominant, such as documentary photography" (Wollen, 1969, p. 126). The three dimensions of the sign, image, sign and symbol, emphasize the aesthetic aspect of cinema. In this sense, it is the language of cinema that makes visible how visual signs are processed within the narrative structure and what each piece basically means.

Method

This study is based on the premise that meaning production is not only a linguistic practice but also provides important data in the analysis of non-linguistic texts. After outlining the key concepts related to meaning-making, the 2020 film *In the Shadows* was selected for analysis using the "purposeful sampling" technique from qualitative research tradition. Purposeful sampling allows the selection of cases rich in content that align with the study's aim, enabling an in-depth examination of events and establishing relationships between them (Quoted by Taylan from Cevikbas, 2000). The cinematic and narrative codes present in the film were systematically categorized according to semiotic methodology. For instance, camera angles, color palettes, and character postures were analyzed within the signifier-signified relationship

framework. This allowed uncovering how these elements function to create cultural and ideological meanings (Bağder, 1999).

Christian Metz's approach to cinema language guided the understanding of how visual and auditory elements work together to produce meaning. As Metz highlights, cinema communicates through visual images, speech, music, and sound effects; hence, the film's use of dark colors and silence reflects the psychological states of the characters (Monaco, 2009; Büker, 2012). Through this approach, implicit and connotative meanings in selected scenes were revealed via their signs (Çağlar, 2012).

For example, the use of tight framing to emphasize the protagonist's helplessness and wide shots symbolizing the oppressive system illustrate the function of cinematographic codes in meaning production. In this context, each scene was evaluated holistically, and both denotative and metaphorical meanings were layered and analyzed (Adanır, 2012; Güçhan, 1992). In conclusion, the semiotic method was effectively applied to systematically analyze the narrative and cinematographic elements of the film. This enabled a detailed unveiling of the film's multi-layered meaning structure and ideological messages through its signs.

Semiotic Analysis of the Film *In the Shadows*

In the Shadows is a 2020 Erdem Tepegöz film. After his first film *Zerre* was released and

won many awards in thirty different countries, the director's second feature film in the science fiction genre, *In the Shadows*, presents the audience with a universe adorned with dystopian elements. The film, which takes place in an old and large factory that was abandoned a long time ago, takes place in a closed environment where it is not clear which period is emphasized. When the living conditions of the factory and the workers working in the factory are considered, it is obvious that the narrative contains clues about the early periods of the transition to heavy industry. On the other hand, apart from the security-observation cameras that appear in front of the audience in every corner of the factory and a technological device that we understand is subject to health checks of the workers, there is no other technology in the factory. In the film, the factory, where workers only meet their basic needs such as feeding themselves and finding a place to sleep, emphasizes the early periods of capitalism, while the fact that production and workers' work performances are monitored through cameras reminds us of the next stage of capitalism. In fact, the gloomy and dystopian world in which the film is essentially trapped stems from this dilemma. All workers in the same factory, presented under inhumane conditions, work like cogs of heavy machinery. The standard of living in the barracks where workers sleep, where they are given limited food, drink and provisions at certain times of the day, is also quite low. The narrative structure of the film, which takes shape when the main character Zait's machine breaks down, is again brought to an end by his sense of curiosity and

his subsequent rebellion. The questioning that begins with the mysterious attitude of the repairman he meets after his machine breaks down increases further when Zait hears strange sounds coming from a pipe in the barrack where he is staying. Throughout this process, their doubts about the existence of a power that has frightened and intimidated them until that day give way to a rupture and dissolution with the main character's questioning and tinkering with the system. In this dissolution process, Zait realizes that other workers like himself are representatives of the government that ensures its continuity and develops an action against this situation. In the movie *In the Shadows*, there are many different indicators related to the domination established by the invisible eye of the government over the workers and this situation. The indicators included in the analysis and interpreted by taking sections from the movie are presented in Table 3.

Throughout the film, cameras are installed in many locations within the factory where the workers operate — from the vast stone processing area to the small, narrow compartment where they eat, and the shed where they sleep at night. These cameras create a visual representation of constant and multi-directional surveillance. In the context of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon and Michel Foucault's theory, surveillance is "the most effective mechanism of disciplinary

power” (Foucault, 1991). The cold, sharp gaze of the camera lens disciplines the workers’ bodies by making them feel watched by an invisible yet omnipresent authority at all times.

Visual Indicators		
Signifier	Signified	
	Plain Meaning	Connotation
Camera (Object)	Receiver that allows the image to be taken	The eye of power
Same type of worker clothes (Object)	Clothing worn in workplaces	The things that the system standardizes
Closed compartment (Object)	Thin wall separating two places	The limited relationship with power
Hamster wheel (Object)	Toy, wheel that allows hamsters to run	The exploitation of wasted energy and labor
Pipe (Object)	Metal-plastic cylinder with two open ends, through which liquid or gas passes	Beginning to question the system
Body wound (Sign-Situation)	Deterioration in skin integrity after trauma	The way the system punishes
Horse (Object)	Mounted animal	The breaking-dissolution in the universe constructed-coded by power
Worker child (Human)	Child worker working (Children's curiosity)	Questioning, disobedience
Worker with cables in hand (Human)	Worker shouting with cables he has unscrewed in his hand	Rebellion, rebellion against the system
Workers together (Situation)	Workers gathered around a pit	The victory of resistance, class consciousness

Table 3: Movie Indicators.



Figure 2: Camera Monitoring Workers.

Close-up shots of cameras hanging in tight spaces symbolize how the act of watching invades even the most private areas. This parallels Gilles Deleuze's concept of "control societies," in which power extends beyond spatial boundaries to establish a continuous and seamless network of observation (Deleuze, 1992). The cameras monitoring these spaces from various angles visually convey the message "I am everywhere," encouraging self-discipline and internalized obedience among the observed individuals.

This visual tool concretely demonstrates the power's strategy of "knowing." The workers' actions are known and recorded instantaneously through the cameras, keeping their behavior under constant supervision and making adherence to norms compulsory. This serves as a visual reflection of Foucault's theory of the "disciplinary society," where modern power reshapes bodies and produces obedient subjects (Foucault, 1991).



Figure 3: Workers' Community with Same Type of Clothing.

The workers, who are standardized by the government, wear the same clothes and do the same jobs. The workers who are stripped of their identities by the government in the film are objectified and stereotypical people who are turned into “things”, regardless of whether they are men or women. The form of power in the film categorizes each individual and determines their sphere of influence, and intervenes in their daily lives by molding them into the way it wishes and how it wishes others to recognize them. (Foucault, 1994). One of the most distinctive features of capitalism, alienation from labor, can be explained in the film by the fact that workers are forced to work as mere cogs of the system, without knowing what job they are doing and for what purpose. This is actually the fundamental contradiction of the workers. The exploitation of labor in capitalist society has a quality that alienates the worker from his own nature, the product he produces and his socio-cultural environment.

In the mechanism designed to deliver food and provisions to the workers, the government never engages in direct communication with any of them. This deliberate lack of interaction serves as a strategy of dominance, whereby the state maintains its authority through absence, rather than presence. By concealing itself, the government sustains its legitimacy not through open dialogue, but through opacity and unreachability. This invisibility, juxtaposed with the complete visibility of the workers, creates a power dynamic in which the government induces behavioral conformity by fostering fear, uncertainty, or anxiety.

This configuration strongly echoes Michel Foucault's notion of the panoptic gaze, where power is most effective when it is unverifiable but potentially omnipresent (Foucault, 1991). The workers are seen, but the seer the government is never seen. As Foucault argues, "visibility is a trap"; those who are constantly visible internalize the presence of power and begin to regulate themselves accordingly. The state, from this privileged position, not only presents itself as the sole source of knowledge but also compels individuals to accept its regulations as natural or inevitable, thereby manufacturing consent (Gramsci, 1971).

A key example of this occurs when the protagonist, Zait, begins to reject the legitimacy of the government's authority. At that moment, the food compartment ceases to deliver provisions. This is not merely a withdrawal of material support; it is a symbolic enactment of

power demonstrating that the state is the gatekeeper of life's essentials and can impose sanctions on disobedience at will. The compartment through which food is distributed is deliberately designed to prevent any reciprocal contact or communication, reinforcing the idea that the state is untouchable and unquestionable.



Figure 4: The Government's Way of Distributing Provisions.

Importantly, the potential for the government to become visible in the film is framed as a danger to its authority. Visibility, in this context, would undermine its carefully constructed position of surveillance and control. As in panoptic logic, the effectiveness of power lies in its asymmetry: to see without being seen is to rule without being contested.

The mechanization process that began with the Industrial Revolution has long served as a critical engine of capitalist development. In the film, this historical trajectory is reflected in the way the workers are portrayed: they possess minimal knowledge of the overall production process or their individual contributions to it, yet they continue laboring incessantly until the machines halt and the system collapses. The uninterrupted operation of machinery becomes

synonymous with the survival of the system itself production must not cease. As a result, each character is visualized as a mechanical extension, a living limb of the factory apparatus.

Within this framework, the factory operates as a site of dehumanization, where workers endure brutal labor conditions solely in exchange for basic sustenance and a place to sleep. Karl Marx's concept of alienated labor is particularly relevant here; workers become estranged not only from the product of their labor but also from the very act of laboring and from their fellow human beings (Marx, 2016). Poverty, in this context, is not just a socioeconomic condition but a visual and spatial reality rendered through a series of stark indicators throughout the film: limited food rations, the lack of clean water, the eventual cutting off of the water supply, and the dilapidated state of the barracks. These representations evoke the harshness of early capitalist exploitation as theorized in classical Marxist thought.

The film's underground setting, where workers are condemned to live and work, serves as an allegorical reference to totalitarian regimes in which laborers are stripped of rights and visibility. The subterranean space symbolizes both political suppression and systemic invisibility a world governed by control, where resistance seems futile.

The hamster wheel metaphor powerfully encapsulates the exploitative and repetitive logic of capitalism. The workers are signified exerting immense effort without recognition, reward,

or real progress an endless cycle of production for production's sake. This visual metaphor resonates with Guy Debord's critique of the "spectacle" in late capitalism, where real social relations are replaced by abstract systems of control and image (Debord, 1994). The phrase "rowing their boats in vain" visually reinforces the futility and alienation that define the workers' condition, illustrating the loss of meaning and autonomy within the capitalist system.



Figure 5: Hamster Wheel.

The main character of the film, Zait, seeks help from a figure known as the Repairman when his machine breaks down. Their cryptic and layered conversations serve not only as a narrative device but also as the catalyst for Zait's awakening. This interaction initiates a cognitive rupture a moment of disruption that leads Zait to question the system he has long accepted as immutable. The sound that emanates each night from a pipe in his shed, once ignored and normalized, begins to disturb him. What was previously a background noise becomes a trigger for critical reflection.

Initially, Zait responds in a routine manner: he buries his head in his pillow and continues sleeping. This act can be read as symbolic of ideological interpellation in Althusserian terms. Zait behaves as a “subject” hailed by the ideological apparatus of the factory-state (Althusser, 1971). However, the moment he begins to wonder where the sound is coming from marks a significant turning point: curiosity evolves into action. By putting his hand into the pipe, attempting to block it with cloth, and later trying to trace its origin, Zait begins to interfere with the seemingly closed and self-sustaining system.

This action represents not only a literal disruption but also a symbolic one — Zait challenges the material and ideological conditions of his existence. In Foucauldian terms, he is resisting the disciplinary mechanisms that structure his daily life, no longer functioning as a docile body within the machinery of surveillance and labor (Foucault, 1991). The pipe, which at first mediated a one-way imposition of power (sound), becomes the conduit through which resistance begins. Zait’s gestures, though small, carve out a space of agency within a totalizing structure.

This moment of rupture is what Walter Benjamin might call the “messianic moment” a break in the homogeneous flow of time and oppression, where history might be reconfigured through individual awareness (Benjamin, 2007). From this point onward, the narrative begins

to unravel: Zait, once integrated into the factory's logic as a mere extension of its machinery, starts opening a breach in the system. He transitions from being a passive subject to an active seeker of truth, probing the boundaries of the reality imposed upon him.



Figure 6: Transition to Interrogation with Discovery of Pipe in the Shed.

Questioning the existence of the power that does not show itself, Zait tries to prove to other workers that the power of the power is not absolute. However, what the power desires is the existence of obedient individuals who have internalized the rules of the management without questioning. The character of Zait is seen as a danger because he shakes the authority of the sovereign. In this context, the way the power warns the main character is quite meaningful. Zait, who had wounds on certain parts of his body after a liquid splashed on his neck while trying to figure out the source of the sound coming from the pipe, was punished by the invisible

eye. Torture, which was known as the punishment method of the management until the 19th century, was important in terms of reestablishing the shaken authority. However, in the following period, the behavior of harmonizing with the system, which was developed for the rehabilitation of the body by eliminating torture and creating subjects who have submitted, is important in terms of creating. Similarly, the death of the worker child who questions the existence of the power together with the character of Zait is also a form of punishment. On the other hand, the fact that Zait did not receive food in the food compartment, the water supply was cut off suddenly, the workers did not get to work on time, and the shock in the factory when the cameras' field of vision was blocked can be given as examples of the methods of the government to reform bodies. In the form of power referred to by the concept of disciplinary power in Foucault, the body is trapped within the system of obligations and prohibitions by the new method of punishment, by forcing and depriving (Foucault, 1991). Therefore, punishment, which is the way power appears, is also a reason why the workers in the factory target Zait or want to get away from him. The wound, which is signified as the material trace of punishment in the film, is symbolized as the price of the criminal's mistake.



Figure 7: The System's Punishment Method.

Zait, who is deprived of food and drink and whose wounds are getting bigger on his body, continues to question the controlling domination of the government despite all these negativities. The scene where Zait-Mechanic-Horse enters the frame at the same time during his short journey with the repairman carries important cinematographic codes. From the beginning of the film, the director tries to create an aesthetic and psychological effect on the audience with the use of predominantly black, brown and gray colors and the lighting techniques related to them. The use of color, which is an important narrative element especially in visual arts in terms of strengthening the dramatic effect, carries various codes within the narrative. The scene where the soft colors that give the gloomy atmosphere of the dystopian universe turn into spring green shows that the colors are consciously chosen by the director in creating meaning. The fact that the spring green color represents a brand new life, renewal, rebirth and revival (Sharma, 2018) symbolizes all the workers reaching a new consciousness in

the case of the character Zait. Again, the horse metaphor in the same scene represents freedom, being on the road, and being on a journey in time and space. While Zait's journey with his doubts about whether there is someone managing the factory where he works or the stage he has reached finds meaning with the symbols of horse and spring green, the message that the domination of the government is shaken and that there will be dissolutions in the universe they have constructed is also clearly seen in this sign.



Figure 8: Use of Horse and Vivid Colors - Break in Narrative.

In the film, we see a child worker who later comes to work in the factory, just like Zait, denying the existing system. The worker, who tends to control the cameras watching them at every opportunity by taking them in his hands and often getting stuck in Zait's obstacles, takes action and develops behavior with the concept of "curiosity", which is a more childish characteristic. The character, who thinks that the uncertainty in the middle will be resolved with

the feeling of curiosity, carries an intense desire to discover. On the other hand, it can be said that the feeling of curiosity is related to some actions such as taking risks, disobedience, defiance, rebellion, and rebellion. When the worker goes to him and picks up a camera, he realizes that its cables are actually loose, not connected to anything, in other words, it is not working, which constitutes one of the important moments where the narrative breaks. In this context, the positive feature of curiosity in terms of accessing information is a competence that makes the dark lives of the workers meaningful.

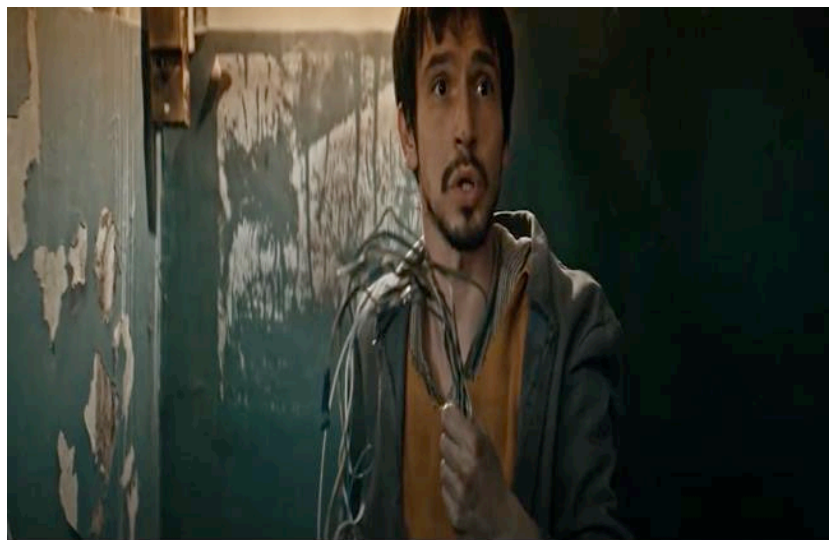


Figure 9: Disobedience of the Newly Arrived Worker Child.

Zait, having undergone a profound transformation within the confines of the factory a microcosm of state authority begins to challenge not only the physical structures but also the ideological constructs imposed on the workers. As he comes to understand the mechanisms of control and the illusion of governance, Zait attempts to deconstruct the meanings ingrained in

the consciousness of his fellow workers. His journey from passive compliance to active dissent culminates in a radical gesture: he picks up an axe and systematically dismantles the surveillance apparatus — the cameras scattered throughout the factory.

This moment of physical destruction is a symbolic rupture: Zait is not merely damaging objects, but confronting the regime of visibility and control what Michel Foucault describes as the panoptical function of modern disciplinary power (Foucault, 1991). The destruction of the cameras signifies an assault on the technologies of surveillance that discipline bodies and produce obedient subjects.

Zait's rebellion escalates as he breaks through the iron door believed to be under the control of the management a door whose authority is based more on fear and myth than physical strength. His act of setting parts of the factory on fire is both literal and metaphorical: it is an attempt to incinerate the ideological edifice that has governed the workers' lives. For the other workers, witnessing the absence of the power figures they once believed in despite their exploitation — represents a moment of disenchantment. What they had accepted as real is now revealed to be a constructed illusion, echoing Žižek's notion of ideology as a false appearance sustained by collective belief (Žižek, 1989, p. 45).

Zait's bodily engagement with the system his rage, destruction, and defiance also signals

a shift from docile subject to revolutionary agent. His rebellion becomes a visual spectacle: a character once submerged within the hierarchy now re-emerges, framed cinematically like a warrior returning from battle. The image is that of a figure who has reclaimed agency and now stands in opposition to the very mechanisms that once subdued him.

The film's visual narrative, until this point saturated with gestures of obedience, submission, and conformity to political power, is turned upside down through Zait's actions. His final gesture — discarding the removed cables and surveillance devices into a pit — functions as an act of symbolic burial. It is the disposal of the tools of control, an attempt to erase the visibility of power and open up the possibility of imagining a different order.



Figure 10: Victory over Power.

“...The changes that occur in society after the rebellion result in the restructuring of society, but also in the emergence of different social situations and the beginning of a process that cannot be returned to before. Successful rebellions are seen as one of the important factors in terms of social change.” (Budak, 2020, p. 562). In the last picture, which is an indication that Zait’s struggle against the government has been successful, inferences can be made about solidarity and class consciousness, which are the natural extensions of the concept of class. Class consciousness, which is a result of capitalist production relations, is one of the key concepts of Marxist terminology. It means that individuals belonging to the same social stratum gather around common interests and relations with the same consciousness. The labor movement, which is a driving force for the progress of society and the change of historical course, is based on the production relations on which society rises. The working class, which emerges from production relations and carries all the extensions of production relations, is related to the position and consciousness of the individual in the material production structure. The workers we see in the film, again in the same type of clothes around the same pit, are an indicator of this consciousness. In addition, the question they ask to the workers who come to them and are like them, whom they have never seen before, "Did you also work here?" is the response to the concept of class being a phenomenon that has existed in every period of history. The pit in front of the workers at the moment when the final scene is designed as a picture is an

important metaphor. The pit, where all the crumbs of the past are thrown, refers to a new classless society structure.



Figure 11: Grade Consciousness, Solidarity.

Conclusion

Semiotics has become a method used in many disciplines of social sciences as a result of pioneering works by names such as Saussure, Peirce, Barthes. Vladimir Propp, Christian Metz, Peter Wollen and Umberto Eco are important names who have applied this method to film studies. The aim of semiotics, which is a scientific method within the axis of the structuralist paradigm, is to reveal how signs contribute to the process of creating meaning. In the same parallel, when considered specifically for cinema, it is a known fact that a film creates valid meaning systems by using certain signs from the beginning to the end, both technically and in terms of content. In this context, cinema semiotics starts from the assumption that all signs that give birth to and feed the narrative, from the use of the camera to sound and light, have a

meaning. Because cinema encodes all the dynamics of social life that can be addressed at the level of representation through films and presents them to the attention of the audience in the form of a cinema narrative. At this stage, the audience defines the discourses, ideologies and signs presented to them according to the culture they are in and their own way of perceiving the world. Here, in the cinema where moving images are presented to the audience continuously one after another, each scene is a sign and each sign is a symbol that needs to be analyzed. In the real world, signs that have material existence are meaningful symbols that can replace everything and show other things than themselves. The characters in the film, character traits, the relationship patterns of the characters with each other, the plot, music, and action are the signs that form the language of cinema. In Erdem Tepegöz's political film "Gözcüler İçinde", workers living in a mining factory work under harsh conditions for only a living and are convinced by the system that they are being observed by the ruling power with cameras. There is a dictatorial regime where social harmony is a prerequisite, freedoms are destroyed in the existence of dystopia, and people are standardized. In this context, dystopia, which indicates a fictional universe, clearly warns people while drawing all the pessimistic pictures of the near future within certain limits when considered in the time and space diagram, and continues the suppression system by causing them to establish a relationship between the current situation they are in and the possible situations that await them on an intellectual level.

However, in the film, when the character Zait begins to question the system, the suppression and intimidation mechanism that the government has been implementing until that day slowly begins to disappear. Finally, the victory of the rising working class against the disappearance of the government's power is at stake. It has been observed that there are indicators that refer to the dystopian universe in the film examined within the scope of the study. Some of these are the cameras that are the oppressive eyes of the government, the same type of clothes that the workers have to wear because they do not have any spares, limited food and drink, in short, indicators of deprivation. On the other hand, the main character Zaid, who is the symbol of resistance to the government, and the child laborer, and the ways in which these two characters are punished by the dominant power are also represented in the text in relation to other "things" accompanied by indicators. The use of colors in the film, the metaphors of horses and pits are also specially designed signs that have connotations other than their real meanings and that will help the audience decipher all the codes in the film narrative.

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