



Semiotics, Culture & ID

A semiotic approach to cultural symbolism
in the short movie ID

Viktor Sohlström

Degree Thesis
Cultural Management
2018

EXAMENSARBETE	
Arcada	
Utbildningsprogram:	Kulturproduentskap
Identifikationsnummer:	17397
Författare:	Viktor Sohlström
Arbetets namn:	Semiotics, Culture & ID
Handledare (Arcada):	Nathalie Hyde-Clarke
Uppdragsgivare:	
<p>Sammandrag:</p> <p>Syftet med följande forskning är att identifiera koderna som användes för att skapa tecken och texter i kortfilmen ID. Den kommer att fokusera sig på kulturella koder, de som är konventionella bland stora delar av befolkningen, i detta fall en eventuellt internationell filmpublik. För jämförbara resultat används i denna examen viktiga semiotiska koncepten, såsom Saussures tvådelade definition av tecknet, den Barthesiska myten, Metziska strukturella indelningen av "la grande syntagmatique", dess komplementära part av paradigmet och binär gruppering. Metoderna baserar sig på en översikt av semiotiska teorin där bland annat Saussures, Peirces, Metz och Lacey's tankar upplyses, med särskild fokus på ämnet kod. Eftersom denna examen är starkt beroende av kortfilmen ID, är flera avsnitt inriktade på sammanfattningen och allmän bakgrundsinformation av filmen samt en saklig beskrivning av dess relevanta delar. Helheten av dessa delar skapar kontexten för den kvalitativa analysen av totalt sex delar med resultatet av flera tydligt identifierbara teman, såsom återfödelse, familj, död och mer abstrakta begrepp som tid, tänkande och minne.</p>	
Nyckelord:	Semiotik, Tecken, Kulturella Koder, Metz, Kort Film, La Grande Syntagmatique, Barthesiska Myter
Sidantal:	44
Språk:	Engelska
Datum för godkännande:	

DEGREE THESIS	
Arcada	
Degree Programme:	Cultural Management
Identification number:	17397
Author:	Viktor Sohlström
Title:	Semiotics, Culture & ID
Supervisor (Arcada):	Nathalie Hyde-Clarke
Commissioned by:	
<p>Abstract:</p> <p>The purpose of following research is to identify the codes that were used to create the signs and texts of the short film ID. In that, it will focus on <i>cultural</i> codes, those, that are convention among broad parts of the population, in this instance a possibly international film audience. For comparable results this exam employs essential semiotic work concepts, such as Saussure's dyadic definition of the sign, the Barthesian myth, the Metzian structural division of "la grande syntagmatique", its complimentary dimension of the paradigm and the binary grouping. The methodology stems from an overview of semiotic theory where the discourse of Saussure, Peirce, Metz and Lacey is illuminated, with special focus on the topic of codes. As this exam heavily relies on the short film ID, several sections are dedicated for the summary and general background information of the film, as well as a factual denotation of its relevant segments. The sum of these parts informs the qualitative analysis of totally six segments with the result of several clearly identifiable themes, such as rebirth, family, death and more abstract concepts like time, thinking and memories.</p>	
Keywords:	Semiotic, Sign, Cultural Code, Metz, Short Film, La Grande Syntagmatique, Barthesian Myth
Number of pages:	44
Language:	English
Date of acceptance:	

INNEHÅLL / CONTENTS

1 Purpose	7
1.1 Semiotics	7
1.2 The production of ID	12
1.3 Short film ID	13
2 Semiotics in film	14
2.1 Codes	16
3 Methodology	17
4 Findings	19
4.1 Denotation, shot by shot.....	20
4.1.1 Segment 00:00-02:33 – Glass cage & Countdown	20
4.1.2 Segment 04:55-06:27 – Choice of identity	21
4.1.3 Segment 06:50-08:11 – Pedestals & Flowers	22
4.1.4 Segment 08:08-09:09 – Mirror & Tattoos	22
4.1.5 Segment 09:25-11:17 – Kael & Loni	23
4.1.6 Segment 11:28-12:45 – The Clam & Ocean sounds	24
4.1.7 Segment 12:35-13:18 – Blood, Key, Music Box & the colour Red	24
4.1.8 Segment 13:26-13:55 – Broken Mirror	25
4.1.9 Segment 13:56-15:49 – Memories, Family & Death	26
5 Analysis	28
5.1.1 Segment “Glass Cage & Countdown”	28
5.1.2 Segment “Pedestals & Flowers”	31
5.1.3 Segment “Mirror & Tattoos”	32
5.1.4 Segment “The Clam & Ocean Sounds”	33
5.1.5 Segment “Blood, Key, Music Box & the colour Red”	34
5.1.6 Segment “Memories, Family & Death”	37
6 Conclusion	39
Källor / References	41
APPENDIX	42
Svenska sammandrag av slutarbete	42

Figurer / Figures

Figure 1. Short film ID.....	7
Figure 2	20
Figure 3	20
Figure 4	21
Figure 5	21
Figure 6	22
Figure 7	22
Figure 8	22
Figure 9	22
Figure 10	23
Figure 11	23
Figure 12	24
Figure 13	24
Figure 14	24
Figure 15	25
Figure 16	25
Figure 17	25
Figure 18	26
Figure 19	27
Figure 20	27

FOREWORD

My path as cultural management & sciences student has often crossed that of the Film & TV department students'. These common experiences have left a sustainable effect and I eventually got the chance to participate as main producer for two short film productions and other smaller video projects. It was therefore the most natural choice to also combine these two fields of activity in my final exam. As a result, this study will take my most recent short film production, ID, as basis for semiotic analyses of signs and texts that occur around and within the movie.

While the decision of the area felt natural, the choice of semiotics was less obvious. At the suggestion of my supervisor, Nathalie Hyde-Clarke, I looked into the matter and was compelled by its immense applicability to, well, every form of communication. In context of the incredibly wide scope of semiotics this final exam also merely marks the beginning of an intellectual journey instead of its point of conclusion.

1 PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to show, using semiotic means and theory, how signs, texts and sequences of the short film ID convey (cultural) meaning. Sharing the intention with most other moviemakers, ID's film team want their film to be seen, preferably also by an international and culturally diverse audience.



Figure 1. Short film ID

Throughout this research, it will become evident that different context allows different interpretations. Hence, it is highly useful to take an analytical look at the film material and find out which codes and meaning are identifiable. Ideally the results of the analysis will be compatible with the film team's intended (or signified) meaning. As the results of present research will have no effects on the finished film "ID", they will substantially grow my understanding of and consciousness for careful semiotic design for future film and arts projects.

A summary of semiotics and an explanation of the methodology of semiotic analysis will be followed by a detailed denotation of the short film's relevant texts. These three parts then, form the background for the actual analysis where theory and methodology will be applied on the findings section. The resulting data shall be evaluated and reflected on in the conclusion.

1.1 Semiotics

"Semiology aims to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all of these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment: these constitute, if not languages, at least systems of signification" (Barthes 1967, p. 9)

While basic semiotic principles were already discussed by Aristotle, Plato and Socrates (Richards 1932, p. 32/ Harris 1987, p. 67) it was the swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure that coined the term semiology in the early 20th century. The nowadays wider common

term of semiotics was defined at about the same time by the US American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. After them many more philosophers and linguists as well as anthropologists (Claude Lévi-Strauss), psychoanalysts (Jacques Lacan) and writers (Umberto Eco) joined the discourse and developed semiotics. Especially interesting for this present research are the comprehensive works of French film theorist Christian Metz, who as first ever applied Saussurean Semiotics to the art of films and cinema.

Up until the invention of the graphic sign (such as films, written texts, statues, paintings, emojis), meaning was only conveyed through sounds or words, as well as facial and body expressions (and is up to this day the most important way of communication). This form of communication requires spatial proximity otherwise you would simply not perceive meaning at all. The advent of cave paintings around 40,000 years ago marks a dramatic change, as suddenly communication becomes unidirectional and uninfluenceable by the receiver. The process of sensemaking of the graphic sign is therefore even more dependent on codes and conventions. As the example of the ancient Greeks shows many have thought about signs and their meaning, but it was Saussure who tried to conceptualise sense-making. In his attempt to put this process into words he created the dyadic model of the sign, according which any sign consists of a signifier and a signified.

The signifier is the form a sign takes and the signified is the concept it represents. Saussure stated that in real life these two are never separated and furthermore that there can neither be a formless signified nor a meaningless signifier (Saussure 1974, p. 102f). The word “tree” is obviously not the plant itself but a symbol for the tree. The word evokes the concept of the plant when we read or hear it. An icon of a tree on the other side could perhaps evoke the concept of nature in general which in return causes a new signified. Signs, the combination of signifiers and signifieds, can in return become a wholly new signifier that again evokes a new signifier. These are then called “second order systems of signification” or alternatively *connotations* (Lacey 1998, p. 58f). Connotations are usually subject of some code. Especially strong connotations are called *Barthesian Myths*. Defined by Roland Barthes these myths are signs that through recurring convention have been coded so much that they go beyond its first set (or first few sets) of signifier/signified couplings. The icon of a tree on a map would signify a forest or natural recreational area, but an icon of a tree on a packaging of toilet paper would signify eco-friendly or recycling

paper; instead of a singular tree the icon signifies, depending on the context, much broader concepts.

Eventually, Saussurean Semiotics lead to the realisation of the so called “arbitrariness of the sign”. As the name suggests, according to this definition signifier and signified have no “necessary, intrinsic, direct or inevitable relationship” (Chandler 1995, p. 20). The arbitrary nature is also the reason why there are different words in different languages in the first place: “if the signifier determined the signified ... there would probably only be one language” (Lacey 1998, p. 57f). This concept, though, shall in the course of this research again slightly be relativized.

One could also argue that innovators like Ray Kurzweil, as not-acknowledged semioticians, unintentionally contribute to the semiotic discourse. So did Kurzweil in his quest to create a sentient artificial intelligence describe the *Pattern Recognition Theory of Mind* or PRTM in short (Kurzweil 2012). According to that theory, the human brain (more precisely the neurons in the Neocortex, the part responsible for abstract cognitive activities, such as art, speech, etc) consists of hierarchically structured pattern recognizer that act according algorithms. His claim somewhat contradicts Saussure’s principle of inseparable signifier/signified: he describes that any sensory perception is (unconsciously) broken down into its smallest parts and then triggers pattern recognizers that in return trigger other pattern recognizers until a final interpretation or a thought is created. Kurzweil describes the “sensemaking” process on a denotational, systematic and neuroscientific level while Saussure said that denotation and connotation in the real world are always linked.

In that context the example of the letter “A” might elucidate Kurzweil’s claim: one pattern recognizer identifies the left stroke, another the right stroke and a third one the middle dash, however, not necessarily in that order. The activity of these three recognizers triggers a recognizer on the next level, which identifies the input as letter A, which in return might trigger yet another recognizer to identify it as part of a word, and so on, with ever growing degree of abstraction (Kurzweil 2014). In fact, this is how most children learn to write the letter A. It stands to debate then, that the input of the same or at least similar data should also result in same or similar results from brains that have the same (or similar) “algorithms”.

This idea is what the film team behind ID tried to apply in the film making process: construct coded signs and texts that strongly convey a certain meaning to the audience for it to make sense out of the story line. This seems true for most film makers but as we know this is only to some extent reality, due to the ability of an audience to interpret a sign differently, as most various interpretations of any art piece make evident. There seems to be more to what Kurzweil calls algorithm and that is what semioticians and sociologists refer to as *culture, convention* or *code*.

These codes form the context in which we interpret the world. Context is also the decisive factor to be able to interpret in the first place, as Lacey states that “meaning cannot exist in individual signs ... but all signs have value because they are different from other signs.” (Lacey 1998, p. 59f) A word means what it does to us only because we collectively agree to let it do so (Chandler 1995, p. 24).

To illustrate, that meaning is perceived through differences and conventions, structuralist semioticians often use the examples of similar or opposite binary groupings, such as day/light, which is in itself the antinomy to another binary grouping night/dark (Roth 1983, p. 5). Through education and convention these groups become larger “bundles of relations” (e.g. day/light/good/life or night/dark/bad/death) (Roth 1983, p. 5) or codes that bear structure and conventionalised meaning. Roth explains that this “structure has real but no physical existence” (Roth 1983, p. 5) and is entirely constructed. This illustrates that signs mean by what they are not.

Two major concepts in Semiotics are also those of “paradigm” and “syntagm”, which organize the *langue*. The former describes its vertical dimension and the latter *langue*’s horizontal dimension. Usually, the syntagmatic organization is more intuitive as it mirrors the more natural way of perceptions (concerning the positioning), as relationship of transformations. A very figurative example from Roth’s research on film semiotics clarifies this concept: “the shark bites the woman” means something else than “the woman bites the shark” (Roth 1983, p. 4). The Paradigm instead is the a “vertical” set of associations (concerning the substitution), as in:

the shark bites the >Woman<
the shark bites the >Queen<
the shark bites the >Girl<

Again, by replacing the sign >woman<, which belongs to the paradigm of female human being, with another one, the signified of the sentence changes. Alterations in these two dimensions can lead to more or less intelligible results and may or may not signify meaning. Very much the same is true for movies. These examples illustrate also that without context there can be no meaning. Even the absence of words does not hinder the interpreter to place the signifier into another context, e.g. the font style, the colours of font and background, the medium, social situation, etc. As stated earlier, *context* is quintessential for the signification process because it is the factor which differentiates signs from each other. Syntagmatic relations refer to other signifiers present in the text and paradigmatic relations refer to signifiers that are absent in the text (Chandler 1995, p. 55).

Yet, another important concept in the field of semiotics originates from Peirce. Aside from his triadic perception of the sign, he also contributed the triadic division of the sign into (1) *symbol*, (2) *icon* and (3) *index*. This categorization somewhat relates Saussure's principle of arbitrariness in that regard that some signs do bear a more or less strong resemblance or direct relationship with what they represent. With increasing mode of the sign, the arbitrariness decreases.

- (1) Symbol – the most arbitrary sign, that without consensus, code and convention does not work, e.g. all languages
- (2) Icon – a sign with some degree of arbitrariness, that visually or aurally resembles what it represents, e.g. photo, recording, maps
- (3) Index – a sign, which is causally linked to what it represents, e.g. smoke -> fire, vane -> wind in general, but also its direction

It should be noted at this point that what is treated as symbolic by one person, can be iconic to another and indexical to a third:

”When we speak of an icon, an index or a symbol, we are not referring to objective qualities of the sign itself, but to a viewer's experience of the sign.” (Grayson 1998, p. 35)

To refer to the beginning of this chapter, semiotics is at the heart of every form of communication between sentient beings.

1.2 The production of ID

The short movie ID was written, produced and filmed in late 2017 and early 2018 by students at Arcada University of Applied Sciences. Written and directed by Rebecca Kurén the short film is the final production of the third years' film students and was produced by me, a fourth-year cultural management student. The creative process also involved director of photography Robert Sjöblom, sound designer Tommy Karlson and gaffer Sara Forsius as well as a set designer, make-up artist, costume designer and of course the actors. There were also other specialists and assistants involved, bringing the total team size to 29 people, which may or may not have directly contributed to the creative design. However, unlike many other artforms, film does not offer every team member equally much creative freedom. While anyone can suggest ideas, only hierarchically high crew members can actually make decisions. Nevertheless, each one was essential to the realisation of the project and it is very critical that all these people mentioned need to have a common interpretation of the story and its signs – they need to agree on the same codes and conventions - in order to construct them properly for the audience. Communication was then also ubiquitous, about how everything should be realised and executed, from early pre-production, through filming and up until post-production.

On many occasions the script writer stated that she wanted to challenge herself with a science-fiction based story. She set the story in a dreamlike/nightmarish/surreal escape room in some generic dystopian future of Earth. The escape room is a context, a confined space to examine cultural symbolism, especially so, when it bears the stated qualities.

One example of how different interpretations can be and how codes work, is right away the film's title: ID. The signifier consisting of the two letters "I" and "D", in that particular diachronic order, initially evokes the signified of identity, or identity card. In reality though, the title refers to one of the agents in the Freudian model of the psyche. While the context – or code - of science fiction movie suggests the former, it is only careful attention to the narrative, that implies the latter meaning of the signifier ID. The Freudian

Id is, compared with the Ego and Superego, already from birth present, which implies that it is independent of culture and code. The Id is also the source of bodily needs and desires, like survival. The analysis of the opening scene shall underpin that particular signification of the title. The problem of “wrong” or unintended signification would through oral utterance be evaded, as the pronunciation of both signs (ID vs *ID*) is different. The same is true for the signifier ID in the title of this very research: in the context of especially the word “culture”, the concept of *identity* (rather than Freud’s model of the psyche) is the preferred signified.

1.3 Short film ID

This movie, ID, follows the main character, Loni, as she embarks on a journey of re-discovery. With her memories wiped, Loni is trapped in an intricate psychological experiment and the only way of escaping is by solving riddles and puzzles. After waking up, locked in a glass box placed within infinite darkness, Loni notices a digital clock counting down and instinctively realises that she is in danger of losing her life. The clock presents a highly coded symbol which can signify several meanings, especially in the context of this opening shot. The analysis section will pick up this element again.

As the film evolves Loni and the audience discover that the riddles are closely connected to the main character’s past. Many of the riddles are directly designed around her memories, which she needs to recover in order to be able to solve them. However, the movie’s intention is to make the audience experience the same world as the main character. By sharing the same associations of signs as the main character, or even better by having an own memory awoken by a sign, the viewer might identify more with Loni or at least become engaged in the urgency of solving the puzzles themselves. These signs, that can take the form of objects, concepts or whole film scenes are the subject of this study. With the help of semiotic theory and methodology this research is not only going to show what these signs mean, but foremost how these signs take meaning in the greater narrative.

The short movie’s length is planned to be around 15 minutes long. At the point of research, the film is still in post-production with the consequence that the length is not finalised, yet. The length may or may not have direct consequences for the analytical part,

since the movie's internal time plays out in one hour. However, several memory flashback scenes might distort the perception of filmic time.

Another major factor that may or may not influence the analysis is the absence of speech in wide parts of the film. This will most likely increase the amount of symbolism and might allow even more possible interpretations, if the texts are not carefully enough designed.

2 SEMIOTICS IN FILM

The general semiotics section already introduced major figures and some essential concepts of semiotics. This section will go further and explain additional concepts that are necessary for the analysis section.

Christian Metz, who fundamentally influenced film semiotics, was very careful with correct terminology. He analysed the signifieds of the words "film/filmic" and "cinema/cinematic", as well as "code" and "message" and puts them into intricate relationships. The considerate and accurate application of these terms (and many more for that matter) in this research will for reasons of practicality be ignored. It is still important to be conscious of the many meanings that "film" can bear: an economic enterprise; the rolled-up physical, plastic or celluloid medium; censorship; technical and sociocultural factors. These factors are considered "filmic" and play a subordinate role to the semiotician. Instead he or she considers the "cinematic" dimension, "cut off from both the complexities, which brought it into being, as well as which result from it" (Roth 1983, p. 8). While Metz and Dudley exclude sociocultural factors from semiotic analysis, this research will explicitly combine both dimensions.

A major role in Semiotics is another of Saussure's models. Aside from the dyadic model he also described the concept of *langage*, *langue* and *parole*. Initially this was designed for linguistic purposes.

Langage - describes the mental and physical capability to communicate

Langue - describes the code, rules and conventions that govern communication and expressions

Parole - is the directly observable communication

The sum of the three aspects is what is commonly referred to as *language*. This concept can be broadened and also be applied to other signification systems, like for instance the “language of film”. Albeit being called language and adhering to the same Saussurean definition, a speaker of the film language is not using literal vocabulary to lead a discourse.

Unlike linguistic semiotic analysis, cinematic discourse engages five sensory perceptions: the visual image, the musical sound, the verbal sounds of speech, sound effects, and the graphic form of credits (Metz 1974, p. 16). The depth of the semiotic analysis gets therefore wider and more complex. In that context it is also important to mention, that from the point-of-view of individual language-users, language is a 'given' - we don't create the system for ourselves. Saussure refers to the language system as a non-negotiable 'contract' into which one is born (Saussure 1974, p. 14)

At this point it makes sense to describe the semiotic process for the creative act from the other side: at the beginning of each creative process the artist starts with an idea or inspiration in mind. From a semiotic angle this *idea* is nothing else than a *signified*. In succession the artist tries to find a signifier that (in his/her opinion) fits best the original concept. In that, the artist makes syntagmatic and paradigmatic choices which result in art, books or as in this instance, a film.

Before we go to next and final chapter of the theory section it is imperative to mention that these are but few concepts and theories. A huge bit has to be omitted from this text for obvious reasons. Even though the field is still relatively young, many analysts and thinkers have extensively contributed to the discourse. From that discourse minor and major schools have come up, like formalism, structuralism, “Chomskyan performance models”, the Soviet school, etc. with each their own understanding of that field. During the active research I have acquainted myself with more than I would be able to reproduce

in this confined space. In the analytical section however, it might very well happen that some of that unmentioned material informs the analysis to some degree.

2.1 Codes

Nick Lacey chose to open his book with Jakobson's model for speech communication. One of the six constituent factors is code (Lacey 1998, p. 6), which Lacey considers the most important of Jakobson's dimensions (Lacey 1998, p. 22). The code in this context is identified as the English language. This example right away establishes that without code there could not be communication and he points further out that we (subconsciously) are coding and decoding on an everyday basis. This becomes evident in other areas than language as well: a doctor will be recognized by his or her white coat, and a red light generally means "stop". Lacey defines code then as "objects or symbols which have a generally agreed meaning" (Lacey 1998, p. 22) and augments his statement by adding that codes are "combinations of signs" (Lacey 1998, p. 77). The analysis of codes without context and message, he warns, might deliver falsified results. However, through the means of connotation it can still be shown what codes conventionally mean (Lacey 1998, p. 24).

According to Metz' research and conclusions, the "number of codes of language systems increases with the richness of the system as a whole". He continues by stating that for instance "specialized systems, which are in use only in certain very restricted contexts of social life, are [...] protected against the large amount of complex and constant fluctuations of meaning in cultures" (Metz 1974, p. 37).

These statements illuminate two interesting points: for one, that codes, conventions and therefore languages can change; and for the other, that cultures are different from each other. The implication of the latter is that different cultures (read that as social, ethnical, professional, religious, etc. cultures) have some congruent but more importantly individual set of codes. In that context it makes sense when Metz explains following:

"Through its affinity with the arts the cinema is comparable, rather than to specialized systems of communication, to those vast, complex, and, so-to-speak, fundamentally socio-cultural 'language systems' which cannot be reduced to a single code, namely, the oldest arts such as myths, social rituals, beliefs, collective representations, tales, symbolic behaviour, ideologies, etc." (Metz 1973, p. 38)

Metz considers images in film a statement rather than a “word”. In that light it makes also sense when Metz defines the process of going from one statement to another (films move from one image to the next) as a narrative or a language.

Yet, another statement by Metz finds that a Semiotic analysis (of film [sic!]) “is closely associated with the aesthetics of film” (Metz 1974, p. 17).

”For the semiotician, the message is a point of departure, the code a point of arrival. The semiotic analysis does not create the film, which it finds already made by the cineast. On the other hand, we can say that, in a certain manner, the analysis 'creates' the codes of the cinema; it should elucidate them, make them explicit, establish them as objects, while in nature they remain buried in films, which alone are objects which exist prior to the analysis. It should, if not invent them, at least discover them (in the full sense of the term). It should 'construct' them, which is in one sense to create them.” (Metz 1974, p. 49)

In that context it is appropriate to reiterate that also the creators of texts employ codes to “structure their message and give them meaning” (Roth 1983, p. 14) while the semiotician (according to before citation) “reverses” this process and (re-)constructs these codes. Before concluding this part, it is still important to note that during the “reversal” process the analyst must be careful to distinct between cinematic and extra-cinematic codes: if a rose is shown in the context of Valentine’s day then this forms an extra-cinematic code, while editing, lighting, technical exposition, the lack of interactivity with the sign and many more form cinematic codes.

3 METHODOLOGY

As previously mentioned, this research will apply syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis tools in order to identify code systems. The identification process can analyse the text along the temporal (or narrative, sequential) plane, which deals with before and after, or the spatial plane, which includes following relationships (Chandler 1995, p. 60):

- above/below
- in front/behind
- close/distant
- left/right (which can also have sequential significance)
- north/south/east/west
- inside/outside (or centre/periphery)

The vertical and horizontal dimensions in visual texts are by no means neutral, as different cultures write and read in different orientations. Also, religious, ethical, social values are often hierarchically (along an imaginative vertical line) structured.

About the temporal line is still to say that it does not necessarily have to correspond with our natural perceived flow of time (past – present - future). Instead a film can freely break temporal continuity to construct tension, narrative and meaning.

Metz presented “la grande syntagmatique”, eight key syntagms that help structuring narrative in space and time (Chandler 1995, p. 68). Syntagms, which in Metz’ opinion were analogous to sentences in verbal communication, are structured as in the list below and are a helpful tool for the analysis of films.

- The autonomous shot (e.g. sequence shot, insert: nondiegetic, subjective, displaced diegetic, explanatory)
- The parallel syntagm (montage of motifs)
- The bracket syntagm (montage of brief shots)
- The descriptive syntagm (sequence describing one moment)
- The alternating syntagm (two sequences alternating)
- The scene (shots implying temporal continuity)
- The episodic sequence (organized discontinuity of shots)
- The ordinary sequence (temporal with some compression)

Aside from Metz’ structural syntagmatic divisions, this research will follow Roth’s example in also including Montage and Mis-en-scene. The former describes here the “relationship between shots” and the latter “the relationship within each shot” (Roth 1983. P. 59)

While syntagmatic analysis deciphers the superficial codes of a text, paradigmatic analysis studies the “manifest content of the text” (Chandler 1995, p. 69). In that regard, theories like that of the binary grouping can be applied as an analytical tool. This in return, often results of defining meaning through focusing on paradigms that are absent. What this in practice means can be shown with for example a “commutation test” – replacing the present signifier with another one (however, from an associated set of paradigms) to see how the meaning changes. This can be applied to every aspect of the filmic text:

background/set, props, characters, lighting, music, sounds, etc. The commutation test though often associated with paradigmatic analysis can also be applied to the syntagmatic dimension.

For the analysis, the film will be dissected into smaller logical units of signification, following Metz' structural division. Thereafter, a synthesis of syntagmatic and paradigmatic analysis shall be attempted and applied to these segments. The intention is to show how these segments create cultural signification through:

- 1) The relationships between shots
- 2) The content of utterance and their structural design
- 3) The use of cinematic codes

The commutation test lends both latter factors extra validity, as the signification of the chosen signs becomes more evident.

4 FINDINGS

This section is dedicated to the denotational description of nine segments that will partially be discussed in the analytical part. "Shots" (or images/statements) are the smallest unit of film exposition and are by the viewer not perceived as singular unit. Instead, the audience experiences longer syntagmatic units like a series of shots, segments, sequences or scenes. This shall be reflected in the denotation. Additional to written text, however, screenshots of the referred examples shall be presented, taken from the not yet finished film. In this instance, the material will still be very raw, to say the least. Some incomplete shots filmed with green screen might even be unsuitable all together. The film has obviously not yet been through colour grading, which also might break the transparency of the medium film. While this might lead to unintended significations, these denotations will ignore the preliminary state and describe what is going to be visible.

In that regard, it is redundant but necessary to point out that the form of this final exam cannot authentically reproduce aural signifiers, especially music. Still, it shall be denoted, where suitable. The denotation will furthermore refrain from listing filmic codes

since they are generally considered “transparent” to the audience. Of course, they will be factored into the analysis.

A complete denotation and analysis of the entire film might for analyst and reader alike turn out to be rather exhaustive. Therefore, it is recommended to sample a set of representative texts. A traditional textual analysis needs to be representative of the film in following regards: genre, narrative, style, atmosphere and possibly more. For this semiotic analysis, these aspects are undoubtedly important as they provide context for codes and conventions in the signification process. However, the angle of this research puts the primary emphasis on the identification of cultural codes within key parts of the film.

4.1 Denotation, shot by shot

4.1.1 Segment 00:00-02:33 – Glass cage & Countdown

- Electronic opening music, with distant object in the centre of the screen
- Long zoom in on sitting, blond person inside a not completely enclosed glass box, centred, with a faint reflection of the box on the ground
- Surrounded by blackness
- Blue tilted digital clock starts on the right-hand side appears showing 00:00:00
- Starts counting down from 59:59:10
- Unconscious female character who regains consciousness, gasps for air, padlock visible, logo of ID on clothing of character, piercing in through her right nose wing
- Detects environment, seems to realize countdown and investigates padlock, realises it is locked
- Tries to move, comprehends her confinement, notices blue shining cord tied around her ankles, which does not move, her naked legs and feet are established
- Heavy breathing, perhaps concentrating

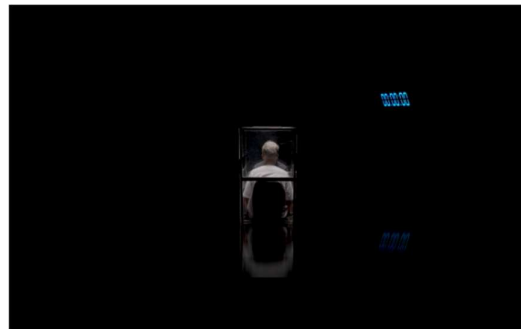


Figure 2

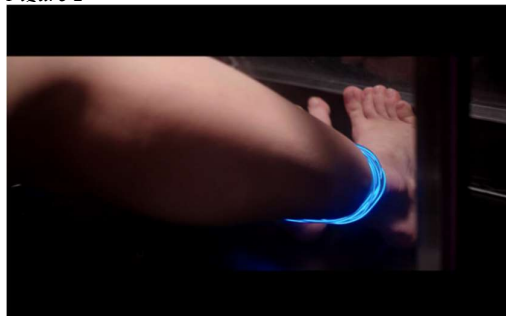


Figure 3

- Forcefully trying get out of the box, shouting and hammering
- Inhales deeply, eyes quickly shut open
- Starts untangling cord, bended legs in the centre of the shot
- The cord's shine illuminates blue, holographic triangles on the front glass panel, which correspond with triangles on the padlock
- Tries the code on the padlock but does a mistake, does not open
- Stares at the clock, which shows 50 minutes left
- The code is hovers in front of the character's face, with one hand touching the padlock, the other holding the glowing cord, eyes are closed
- The padlock in the centre of the shot we see a second attempt in entering the code, this time successfully, the clicking sound of an opening padlock
- The character stands with bent shoulders surrounded by infinite blackness,
- Her white, wrinkly, short-sleeved shirt reaches just to the legs, which are still naked



Figure 4

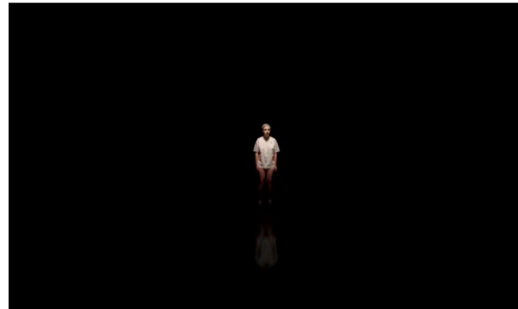


Figure 5

4.1.2 Segment 04:55-06:27 – Choice of identity

This segment is due to its incompleteness not suitable for this research. Sections with unfinished green screen break the immersive experience of the film. At this point, it is due to VFX post production not entirely clear what the finished result will look like.

Important in that segment is that the character has to choose herself from a set of pictures. 32 persons that have the same shirt. Each has a different numeric tag and look different. She chooses the wrong picture (1.0.1) and thereupon changes the outer appearance with the person from the photo, a brunette-haired woman of similar size, equal body and same hair length.

4.1.3 Segment 06:50-08:11 – Pedestals & Flowers

- She approaches a set of three white pedestals, each with a white box on top, two of them seem to be locked
- She investigates them, discovers a padlock with numbers
- She takes a closer look at the third one
- She kneels in front of flowers and smells them, a total of four vases on four glass and metal tables, each filled with different flowers and different amounts of flowers, she reacts to the scent
- She replaces to vases and counts them
- She enters the numbers into the padlock, it does not open
- She reorganises the flowers again and enters the new code, it still does not open, she tries to force it open
- She grunts at the box



Figure 6



Figure 7

4.1.4 Segment 08:08-09:09 – Mirror & Tattoos

- She stands in front of the mirror, her reflection starts to laugh
- Looking behind herself, frowning into the mirror
- Reflection is teasing her, indicating to follow, walking away and taking of her shirt
- She turns her back to the mirror, lifts her shirt, notices a black figure on her lower back, the clock runs in the background
- She lifts her shirt all the way and looks at it in the mirror, reveals tattoos of four different flowers
- She sorts the flowers on the glass tables according her tattoos, counts the flowers
- Enters each amount in the padlock, unlocks it

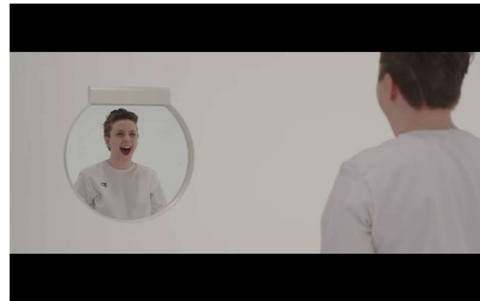


Figure 8



Figure 9

- She opens the lid quickly, stares in the box, her facial expression changes, she contemplates
- Closeup of the box, inside a red big button, slowly she leads her hand to the button and pushes it
- She looks around herself, nothing happened, she looks back at it

4.1.5 Segment 09:25-11:17 – Kael & Loni

- A sound makes her turn around
- A man in white clothes appears and searches something, discovers her, lifts slightly his hands and says with a unnaturally distorted voice: “Vet du vem jag är?”
- She looks at him with the mouth slightly opened, the head somewhat diagonally nodded, the eyebrows knitted
- Slowly she approaches him and blinks the eyes
- He steps towards her, she steps hastily backwards
- Closeup of him, he says with the distorted voice: “Förstår du mig?”
- She has changed: instead of the brunette, there is the blond from the beginning, she looks around and then at the red button in the box, he says with a clear voice: “Jag har inte mycket tid på mig, jag får inte vara här.”, she turns quickly around and walks towards him, he calls her name
- Again the brown haired character, she searches him, his mime changes, he says with the distorted voice: “Älskling, lyssnar på mig.”
- He continues with clear voice to the blonde girl: “Jag är inte en gåta, jag är verklig.”, the continues searching him
- The brunette stops searching, starts looking around, the man takes her head and kisses her long, then says: “Jag älskar dig.”
- The brunette, a tear runs over her cheek, she inspects him, then she gasps
- Without influence a second box opens



Figure 10

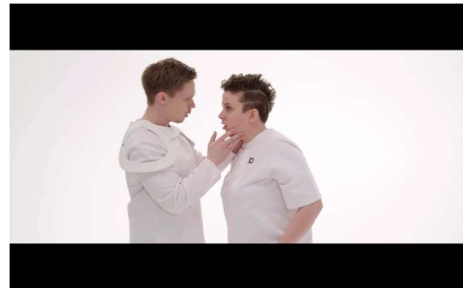


Figure 11

- The blonde laughs, the man smiles, she hugs and kisses the man
- They hug, the boxes in the background, she says: “Vem är jag?”, “Tag mig ut härifrån.”, a sound makes the man turn around
- He disappears, she calls his name (Kael) and looks for him
- The brunette, she calls his name, her utterances and body language intensify, the movements faster, culminates in a scream



Figure 12

4.1.6 Segment 11:28-12:45 – The Clam & Ocean sounds

- The clock shows little over ten minutes
- She breaths deeply, shakes a little, holds her head and then dedicates her attention to the recently opened box and walks over
- Closeup of the opened box, inside a blue-silvery clam
- She sits on the ground and investigates a small item in her hands
- The clock runs in the viewer’s right-hand background
- She touches her lips with the clam, then puts it to her temple, the sound of waves, she reacts intensely, with her eyes and mouth wide open
- She looks around, looks into the distance and smiles
- The sound of waves, birds, then a man’s voice off-screen: “Havet är det vackraste jag vet.”
- She opens her eyes and gasps, takes the clam off and looks behind her back, the sounds disappear
- She looks at the item and puts it back, she closes her eyes, the sounds appear
- Sounds of waves, the voice: “Havet är det vackraste jag vet.”, she listens



Figure 13

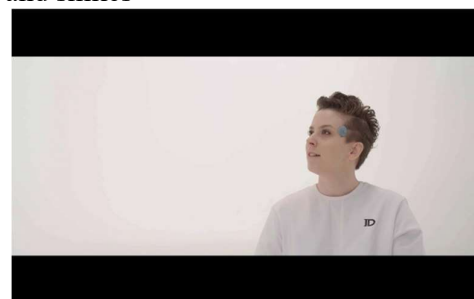


Figure 14

4.1.7 Segment 12:35-13:18 – Blood, Key, Music Box & the colour Red

- She takes the clam of her temple and heavily reacts to something

- She kneels on the ground and holds her stomach and then her mouth
- She bends over and throws up blood
- Closeup of her bloody, trembling hands, she holds a key
- She looks at her hands, her body is shaking
- An alarm sound surprises her, she looks around, the clock shows five minutes
- The white background has turned red



Figure 15

- Slow-motion, she wipes her hands on her shirt, shakes her head, stands up
- She tries the key on the still locked box
- Closeup, the lid opens, a figurine starts turning and metallic music playing
- The character, shaking intensifies, she investigates the box
- She is at the door and rattles it



Figure 16

4.1.8 Segment 13:26-13:55 – Broken Mirror

- The alarm sounds, she has the clam applied to her temple, hears the man's voice off-screen saying: "Havet är det vackraste jag vet.", "Jag kommer aldrig å glömma dig.", "Jag älskar dig."
- She is looking around, closes her eyes and concentrates, man's voice off-screen: "Havet var nästan så blå som dina ögon."
- She opens her eyes and looks straight into the camera while holding her head
- She stands in front of the mirror
- She holds her head, utterances of tension
- She forms fists with her hands, she hits the mirror
- She stands in front of the broken mirror, a smile hushes over her lips as she goes away



Figure 17

4.1.9 Segment 13:56-15:49 – Memories, Family & Death

- Close-up on her hands picking one of each flower, grabbing the musical box, alarm sound in the background
- Sitting on the ground surround by the items, the clock is running in the red background, covered in bloodstains
- She holds the clam to her left temple
- White background (hereafter the backgrounds will be referred to only by their colour), she opens her eyes, they are blue, she trembles, no blood stains, the clam on her temple (new)
- Black, she wakes up in the glass box in the black setting (new)
- White, she investigates her face in the mirror, touches her lips (old)
- She investigates the first of the three boxes on the pedestals (old)
- Red, she opens the music box
- White, she watches herself in the mirror (new)
- Red, she reaches for a flower
- White, she walks towards the four flower vases, she smells one (old)
- Red, raises her head
- White, her reflection in the mirror is laughing at her (old)
- Red, looking upwards
- White, Kael talks to her: “Förstår du mig?” (old)
- Red, she holds the music box tight and is visibly shaking
- White, Kael is gently holds her face and saying: “Jag älskar dig” (old)
- Red, still trembles and holds the music box
- White, he is kissing her (old)
- Red, she starts to cry
- White, Kael is gone, she calls his name and looking for him (old)
- Red, she cries
- White, she holds her mouth and stomach (old)
- Black, the clock is counting down 10 seconds
- White, she stands in front the broken mirror, covered in blood (new)
- Closeup of white flowers and green leaves (new)
- Red, cries while holding flowers to her face
- Black, glass box filled with smoke, with bouquet of white flowers on top (new)
- White, her with blue eyes and clam on her temple, staring right into the camera, mouth slightly opened (old)



Figure 18

- A young, blond girl with a blue hair-band, surrounded by a female with white clothes, a black cubistic necklace and a nose piercing, male in white clothes with a greyish beard, the girl is looking puzzle piece and visibly reaches somewhere, the adult persons smile



Figure 19

- The girl puts the puzzle piece to the right spot
- The girl smiles, she wears some necklace and white and black patterned clothes
- The three persons sit in a white room with a staircase in the right-hand background, the woman has brown-silvery hair, the man has short hair, both smile while the girl works on the puzzle
- Black, closeup of a white music box, the figurine turns in front of a mirror
- Dimmed, closeup of the woman, she has blue eyes and sings to the camera her song continues hereafter
- Bright, the girl and the man sit next to each other, look at each other and smile
- They sit on a sofa, he has a clam on a temple and reaches for a box, she anticipates something
- He carefully attaches the clam on her temple, she looks into his eyes
- Dimmed, the woman continues singing
- Bright, the girl and man relax with their eyes closed
- Black, the glass box filled with smoke, the flowers on top
- Dimmed, the woman continues singing
- Black, the girl stands in black clothes and a red rose in her hand next to another person dressed in black in front of the smoke-filled glass box with the flowers on top
- Black, the girl puts the rose onto the box, next to the white flowers
- Black, the girl looks behind the camera where the glass box is located and then up to the other person
- Black, we see the man from below, his visible eye is blue, and a tear runs down his cheek, he wipes it away
- Black, a closeup of the man's fist, the girl reaches for his hand, the tension releases, they hold hands
- Black, the girl looks down from him and stares into the camera
- Flickering several times of black (young girl) and white (the blonde woman we saw in the beginning of the film, holding flowers)
- White, she laughs, looks at the clock, which has stopped at second 1



Figure 20

5 ANALYSIS

As producer of the short film ID, it is my desire for the film to be seen. Preferably by a wide audience. This of course implies that viewers will identify all sorts of different codes due to their own individual and cultural references. Still, it should be argued that through careful design the film team constructed a film whose signs carry enough unambiguous signification for the audience to understand the greater and the more detailed picture.

The objective for the analysis then is clear: identify the codes of the film ID through semiotics by what is visible and audible on the “screen”. Hereby, the reconstruction of cultural codes is of special focus. In order to deliver the most valid result possible, it is imperative to consciously distinct between the role of producer and analyst and rely entirely on the texts at hand, with as little influence from the creative process as possible.

Obviously, all the previous sections, set up this analytical part. It should be restated that this present analysis can neither cover the whole film nor the complete denotation. Instead, it will closely investigate a sample of signs from six segments. The exact number of signs is difficult to quantify because each shot is a sign, which itself consists of various numbers of signs. It is furthermore important to mention, that the segments of the analytical section do not correspond with those of the denotation. As this is a qualitative research there is hardly (if at all) quantifiable evidence to support following analyses.

5.1.1 Segment “Glass Cage & Countdown”

According Metzian syntagmatic taxonomy, this first segment is an “episodic sequence”, opened with a short “sequence shot”, establishing the scenery. The segment is furthermore crosscut with “explanatory inserts” in the form of cut-ins and reverse angle-shots, e.g. the padlock and the cord around her feet.

The special relevance of the clock is cinematically emphasised by its prominent introduction as it glitches and illuminates in the darkness and thereby draws the attention of the viewer. Also, on a syntagmatic level it has striking properties as the screen-filling shot of the clock starting to count down meets the conditions of both the “explanatory” as well

as the “displaced diegetic insert”. The clock is also the optical divisor between the episodes to make evident that the filmic time does not coincide with the actual screen time. Another argument that suggests the choice of the episodic sequence.

The immediate and direct confrontation with the clock signifies that time is of the essence. As the clock starts counting down this particular reading of the sign is reinforced. While it also signifies, that the movie will be sixty minutes, this reading quickly gets revoked, as the timer starts jumping over time. In context of the desperate situation of the character (sitting locked up in the glass box with pure darkness all around) the clock signifies also that *something* will happen once the time runs out. This pressuring, stress-creating aspect is the desired signified: for one, it creates room for the narrative as it forces the character to do something, and on the other side it engages the viewer who wants to find out what is going to happen when the time runs out. The former point might also give a (first) filmic clue for the already explained meaning of the title ID: the clock creates a subconscious threat, that the character without memories has to react to, rather the character’s id.

The sign of the clock evokes in this text the concept of urgency. This solely relies of course, on the deeply rooted meaning of time to man. The construct of time is an omnipresent and nearly transparent code that however, not even all human beings understand. Unlike wide parts of the *civilised* world, a native inhabitant of the South American jungle rarely has a signified for the signifiers: *the sun sets at 8 o’clock*, or *5 minutes until the food is ready*. This validates the fact that without initiation into the *code* of time, it simply is unintelligible. On the other hand, most of the world’s population that does watch movies is also acquainted with the concept of time and familiar with its code. This in return means that all developed civilisations have a common signified for *time counting down*. To them, counting time in that particular way can signify nothing else than time is finite. This fact heavily relies on a cultural code that is shared by wide parts of the world. This signification is needed to create the movie’s suspense, especially when the viewer sees it switching on.

On a syntagmatic level the gravity of this particular signification would change if this sign were to be introduced at a later point in that sequence. The urgency of the situation would not be equally high.

To create a similar signification (the paradigm of looming terminality) with a different sign could be accomplished with for instance a fire, that with each shot slowly grows bigger, or perhaps a doctor that reveals a character's disease and how long the life expectancy is. Both examples though, would create a whole different context for the rest of the short film.

This first segment conveys with its particular set of signs yet another connotation, which also incorporates the aspects of finite time and terminality, however in a more symbolic and metaphoric way: the concept of birth. To achieve this reading, each sign needs a different vertical set of paradigms. The establishing shot can signify difference in distance between the viewer (rather the camera) and the object. But it can also signify the centre point being cellularly small, which grows in size until a human is recognisable. The glass box can be a sign in the paradigmatic set of *transparent encapsulation*, which then allows it to signify *womb*. The character's quest to get out of there through hard work (even kicking and hitting, the symbolized inability to walk – the cord around the feet, the cord as the mean for her survival) bears high similarity with the concept of a baby in the womb. The clock still signifies finite time but, in that context, the connotation is rather the concept of lifetime. It should be added that of course the real Id has no concept of time as observable in babies. This implies that factually the time factor could not really form a threat for the captive character. The fact that it does though, implies that the character is familiar with the convention of time. This detail shall be overlooked and regarded as artistic interpretation.

A last point in the analysis of this segment can be made with the theory of the binary groupings. If the whole sequence signifies "birth" then this will also evoke the connotation of death, which in return connects with the sign of "finite time". Subconsciously, this too creates tension.

5.1.2 Segment “Pedestals & Flowers”

The segment of the pedestals and flowers is perceived as a “scene”, but also here filmic time does not match screen time, which also makes it an “episodic sequence”. Nevertheless, the viewer perceives this segment as spatially and temporary continuous. It is garnered with “explanatory inserts” of a four-digit padlock and her reaction to it not opening.

The syntagmatic structure suggests that the closed boxes (especially the one with the lock) are the focus of the segment. This gets reinforced by the literally central placement of the box and the closeup of its padlock. The lock that needs four digits to be opened, forces the narrative to develop. The fact that they are deliberately exhibited on pedestals gives them extra importance, as they get the aura of “gallery” or “museum”, which in return connotes *pieces of art* or alternatively *pieces of history*. Her inappropriate interaction though (touching and picking them up), signifies that she is not familiar with the code of behaviour around pieces of exhibits. The convention of not touching exhibits, is a learned system of behaviour, which often enough gets reinforced in galleries and museum, by signs that read “do not touch”. On a side note, this could again be construed as the character’s behaviour informed by the id, rather than her ego or superego.

Following the introduction of the boxes, the sequence goes over to introduce the next sign: four vases with four different sorts of white flowers. White flowers are a typical Barthesian myth: they signify in western civilisations often the concept of “innocence” or “funerals”, which again evokes “death”. Of course, this statement is to some degree subject of context, as for instance chamomiles by no means signify “funeral” but instead “summer”, “childhood” and “innocence”.

The juxtaposition of flower- and box episodes then, initially seems arbitrary. In fact, while the viewer still might try to make sense of the shot’s signification in context of the previously presented, it is only the character’s abstract realisation, that the flowers’ order might be construed as a code for the padlock. The consecutive sorting of the flowers and trying of the resulting code completely nullifies the immediate signification of the flowers. In that regard, any other quantifiable sign had equally well sufficed to be the bearer of a code.

5.1.3 Segment “Mirror & Tattoos”

This segment is yet again at the border between a “scene” and an “episodic sequence”, But, it compresses filmic time and presents the viewer with “episodic capsule summaries of the character’s development” (Roth 1983, p. 57), which make it the latter category. Additionally, this sequence contains a “bracket syntagma”, a crosscut montage of several of her facial expressions.

The mirror is usually a sign that evokes many different signifieds, often dependant of context. Some more conventional are “truthfulness” or “narcissism”. In the context of the previously failed riddle it signifies however, much more the concept of “help” or “advice”. The subsequent montage of crosscut facial and body expressions signifies the concepts of “intense thinking”, “despair” and the “passage of time”.

The sign of the laughing mirror is for the viewer a clear break of reality. Even though the whole film has so far been surreal to say the least, the viewer is probably more inclined to read the sign as insanity of the character, than the mirror having an own personality. This depends majorly on the viewer’s own experiences with mirrors, that they do not behave in that fashion. This fact though, does not qualify as code or convention, because there is no communication involved. Still, the sign of the “unilaterally communicating reflection” teasing and helping the character, could be even be read as an analogy of the film’s relationship with its audience.

As a result, the character finds out about the tattoos on her back, which correspond with those in the vases. While the tattoo conveys significance in many regards, it is unknown at this point whether or not they were created with her agreement. The code of tattoos is very complex as it involves cultural and artistic dimensions. Therefore, this particular sign will signify differently depending on social and ethnic origin. Tattoos have been used to tag cattle or like the Nazis did their victims. But, tattoos can also indicate membership to ethnic or social groups, which again follows own conventions and requires codes to identify. The sign of the tattoo is generally of high symbolic significance to those familiar with the code, but in the context of the film it transpires a practical use, namely for the solution of a puzzle.

A change of the tattoo, with a sign from the same associative set could involve the reveal of a piece of paper carrying the solution, or more faithful to the paradigm of science fiction a hologram. However, the tattoo is often an emotion-laden, strong sign that reaches into the realms of the Barthesian myth in the sense that the even the detection of “ink on skin”, even without denotation of the tattoo’s actual signifier, can create ostracism or inclusion. Had the tattoo, or only a part of it been introduced earlier in the movie, it had also created a context for the importance of the flowers as a whole.

5.1.4 Segment “The Clam & Ocean Sounds”

A proper scene, which has spatial and temporal unity and continuity, which starts with an “explanatory insert” of a blue-silvery clam. The overt semiotic significance of this sign is unmistakably emphasised by the closeup and its prominent diachronic position right at the opening of the scene. Also, the *mise-en-scene* points out the importance of this item: solitarily located in the centre of the picture, encapsulated in a box that is reminiscent of a jewellery box, on top of a pedestal. Another sign validating the item’s importance is its colour difference to the all-white background, which draws all attention. Syntagmatically, this box’s importance was already established in previous segments: when she caresses the box in the “pedestals & flowers” sequence, and in the (not analysed) “Kael & Loni” scene, where it opens by itself in exactly the moment when Loni, the main character starts to remember things.

While this does not belong to the segment at hand, the previous appearance shall still be briefly discussed: this cut-off, showing the box opening without any outside force qualifies to be simultaneously a “displaced diegetic insert” and a “non-diegetic insert”. It does advance the narrative of the story but also it symbolises the abstract process of remembering.

While the massive importance of this sign nearly is spelled out to the viewer, the context of the film so far does not allow an unambiguous interpretation of it. Nothing earlier suggests any connection to either sea or beach related reading. As the proper scene starts, the viewer is again presented with hardly intelligible signs, when the character first puts the clam to her lips and then on her temple. The conventional thing to do with a clam is

put it on the ear and listen to the ocean. In that regard the clam is also a Barthesian myth as it does not signify bivalve molluscs, but instead “ocean”, “vacation”.

Upon placing the clam on her temple, the character hears then ripples of waves on a shore. The sudden swell of volume indicates that the sound does not fill the room but instead is only audible by her. This gets confirmed as she takes off the clam and the sound disappears.

The reading of the sign “ocean” gets somewhat confirmed by visual and aural indicators. While the ocean connotes with “freedom”, “purity”, “nature” or “raw” it is the fact however, that the viewer is *not* presented with a picture of the ocean which implies a whole different meaning. Instead, the combination of her gazing into the void and listening to the sound of ocean signifies the abstract process of “wallowing in memories” or the equally abstract concept of “nostalgia”. Whether the ocean in this context is figurative or metaphorical is not clear, yet. The appearance of a man’s voice expressing the ocean’s beauty reinforces the signification of remembering. The clam appears then as a symbolic key to access memories, which are represented by the symbol of the ocean. The term “ocean of memories” validates moreover the described codification of the ocean.

5.1.5 Segment “Blood, Key, Music Box & the colour Red”

A short “episodic sequence” again on the border to a scene, that to some degree compresses filmic time. Several “explanatory inserts” depict the key in the bloody hands, the corresponding padlock, a closeup of the musical box and again a screen filling shot of the clock. This sequence again features a “bracket syntagma” in the form of a montage of lumped slow-motion shots. The high density of syntagms and the introduction of important symbols, as well as the marking of the film’s finale, make this evidently an important segment.

The Colours

At this point it makes sense to pick up the film’s colour code, which consists of black for the beginning, white for the middle section and red for the ending. An unwanted (and certainly unintended) signified of this particular colour code in that order, is that of the

“third Reich national flag”. Though, for this identification to happen it needs viewers that are familiar with German history and are presented with the three colours in immediate spatial proximity (like in the findings section of this research). As this does not occur in filmic reality this signification is rarely going to happen. This example again shows how differently signs can signify.

The real colour code instead bases upon the cross-cultural understanding of colours. The film starts out with black which connotes “emptiness/nothingness”, “unknown”, “threat” and “death”. Many of these connotations are in line with what is presented throughout the first segment.

The binary antinomial grouping of black would result in white, which is the prominent colour throughout the middle part. This colour evokes in return different signifieds, such as “clean”, “pure” and “innocence”. Due to these particular connotations of the colour white, laboratories and especially hospitals heavily utilise it. This in return created a second order system of connotations for the colour white: “sterile” and “clinical”. This is also the intended signification for most of the middle section, which is in line with the unnatural, nearly *experimental* set up of the scenery. This reason gets furthermore validated by the uniform clothing with its logo and the numeric labelling of the persons on the screen, as briefly discussed in the second segment in the denotation.

In this research the aspect of the colours is late the item of discussion but subconsciously, this codified sign system informs right from the start the whole perception of the film.

Towards the short film’s end the backdrop changes from white to red, when the timer’s last five minutes begin. At the same time an aural signifier in the form of an alarm starts sounding. Each of these signifiers by themselves indicates urgency: the colour red, as earlier mentioned connotes with “stop” or “danger”, the aural signal connotes “danger” as well and the signifier “5 minutes” connotes “little time”. In combination they even signify a high degree of danger. The slow-motion montage of her appearing disoriented signifies the concept of mental and sensory overload.

Each of previous signifiers (also the other two colours) has culturally been coded. While a person (probably even an animal) instinctively would react to colour change or the start of the alarm sound, it is only cultural convention that these signifiers signify life danger and vice versa, that the other two colours convey their particular meaning.

Blood & the Key

The colour red plays also an important role in the opening episode of this sequence. The character bends over and throws up, what appears to be blood. This very strong sign connotes “lethal disease” and “disgust”. However, the bodily reaction has to be interpreted as a direct consequence of the intense emotional stress from the clam scene before, when the character starts remembering more of her previous life. Throwing up is a common reaction to stress, the fact that it depicts blood (instead of regurgitation) in the film can depend on aesthetical and dramatic reasons.

The sign of the key, that gets thrown up, is plausible, despite not having experienced it by most people. This sign is connotated with children or pet animals, which is in line with the id-informed behaviour of the character. The key turns out to be for the last of the three boxes.

The Music box

The music box is time again a Barthesian myth and therefore a culturally convened sign. The visual and more importantly aural signifier of the box do not evoke the signified of just a music box but instead they evoke the concept of a stylised, sheltered childhood. This is even true for people that did not own a music box themselves, like for instance boys and men but probably also a huge group of girls and women, which in return validates the cultural convention of music boxes.

In the movie, the music box is introduced in a conglomerate of signs: the colour of the room has changed to red, the alarm sounds distractingly in the background, the blood covered main character and the melody blend into a multi-sensory cacophony. However, the signification of the box is so strong that all these interferences do not distract from the above-mentioned connotation.

5.1.6 Segment “Memories, Family & Death”

Memories

The climatic finale of the short film consists of three parts, has nearly two minutes screen time and yields two pages of denotation alone. With three different parts, this segment has a more complex syntagmatic structure than any previous segment: the first part of the flashback scene is a “parallel syntagma”, the second an “episodic sequence” and the third a “parallel syntagma” again.

The two alternating motifs of the first syntagma are that of the character’s filmic present and that of the character’s earlier experiences. These two motifs are crosscut with increasing speed, until they culminate into the second part. The crosscutting of both timelines signifies the concept of “remembering”. This technique also gives the viewer a context to identify content as memory, which breaks with established aesthetics (that seemingly does not take place in the familiar room). The episodic sequence is garnered with “explanatory” and “nondiegetic inserts” and the final “parallel syntagma” employs two alternating memory motifs. The two final segments carry especially many cultural signs and therefore stand in the focus of this part.

Family

The second part begins factually with the sign of a “young, blond girl sitting in between two attentive adults”. As this sequence follows right upon the signifier of a flashback, strongly suggests the following sequence also to be a memory of the character.

The signifiers are so deliberately constructed that they only allow the interpretation of the signified of “family”. The sign strongly reflects the world-wide common convention and in mammal biology rooted concept of family: mother, father and child. While modern societies slowly break these conventions, it is still this particular constellation that conveys the signified of family. Additional signs were implanted to amplify each role in the family and lead to an iconisation of the presented characters: the mother has a necklace, which in western culture is rather associated with females, the father is depicted with a beard, which signifies male and the child has a headband in her hair to underline her cuteness. The mise-en-scene furthermore confirms their cohesiveness by placing them in

close proximity with each of the parents' attention and bodies turned towards the child in the centre of the shot and they all share the same colour code of white with black elements.

The sign of family gets expanded by the concept of "love" and "sheltered childhood". While the closeup of the music box suggests the locality of a children's bed room it is the black background of the shot that negates that connotation and instead gives it a symbolic meaning, signifying rather the concept of childhood as whole. The closeup of the newly introduced woman, singing a lullaby into the upwards angled camera, with dim background lighting which signifies the girl laying in her bed with the mother by her side, underlines the signification of family and shows that the girl has been cared for. Subsequent signs of father and daughter spending time together again confirm this reading. The overall white colour theme of that episode (with its connotation of innocence) furthermore underlines the connotation of safe childhood. The signified meaning soon also incorporates "loss" and "death".

Death

Together with the introduction of the latest concepts, starts also another short parallel syntagma. The two alternating motifs are those of the mother singing and of a funeral. It is the juxtaposition of these two elements that signifies the mother's death. While death is treated differently in different cultures, the colour black still seems to connote with the concept of "tragedy", "loss" and ultimately "death". Still, this filmic funeral largely employs, with some variations, western cultural codes. A major variation is the coffin, which conventionally is made of wood, but in this instance seems to be made of glass, which is filled with smoke. The positioning of the box signifies that it has special meaning to those looking at it. In addition with the context of black clothes, the white flower arrangement on top of the box and the absence of the mother, all signify the funeral of the mother. This signification gets amplified with additional signs, such as the girl putting a red rose on top of the box. This sign is commonly connotated with romance but in this context, it signifies the love between a daughter and her mother. The loss of the mother is furthermore signified by the tear running across the man's cheek, which by itself only signifies "sadness" but again, in the context of the black clothes, the black backdrop and the other previously mentioned signs, the tear forms a Barthesian myth of "loss".

6 CONCLUSION

This research had as purpose to identify cultural codes of signs and texts presented in the short film ID. With the complex theory of semiotics and its practical application it has created a catalogue of signs, each with a description of its context and an identification of the different codes and conventions at work. Culturally important codes such as time, family, childhood, birth and death have been identified. Moreover, the working ways of some more abstract codes such as finality, memory and the colour codes of black, white and red have been identified and explained.

It is undeniable that the process of decryption and the interpretation of signs is highly subjective. After all, it is, like communication in general, subject to factors, like the analyst's experience, dependent on the "resolution contexts" of signs (especially in film: how long is the coherent segment), interferences between sender and receiver, etc. As this seems to contradict the value of the whole research, it is important to remember that the objective was to identify cultural codes, that, as the name suggests, are familiar with wide population parts. Furthermore, semiotics introduces standardised guidelines, according which the analyst gets more comparable results.

In line with previous statement, this research has clearly shown that the signs have been constructed according certain codes and conventions. It is arguable that different readers of this research will agree to different extent with the results, but everybody should be able to follow the argumentation and will surely comprehend the reasoning.

Semiotics are for me still widely uncharted territory, as the partially rather old sources make evident. Therefore, it is recommendable to continue on the path of film semiotics. The highest priority in that regard should be to refine the technique through regular application but also through the studies of later contributors of the semiotic discourse.

It has been mentioned several times that especially the medium of film is transparent in the experience of the viewer. Very much the same is true for cultural and other familiar codes. This means that the signification process and the decryption of the signs into codes often does not happen consciously.

Finally, it should still be discussed that the semiotic analysis might be considered to be biased due to my double role as producer, with deep knowledge of the creative process, and as impartial analyst. As earlier explained the semiotician has to analyse the film in its own context, independent of the circumstances that brought the film into being. However, I argue that the analysis of the flowers and the tattoo, which do not clearly transcend any certain meaning, and the main character's initial behaviour with the clam, should show that the analysis was executed independent of the *intended* meaning of those scenes. The only way to properly confirm this though, would be to show the film to an audience and let them reconstruct the used cultural codes.

KÄLLOR / REFERENCES

Books:

- Barthes, Rolande. 1977. *Elements of Semiology* (trans. Annette Lavers & Colin Smith). London: Jonathan Cape, p. 112
- Harris, Roy. 1987. *Reading Saussure: A Critical Commentary on the 'Cours de linguistique générale'*. London: Duckworth, p. 248
- Kurzweil, Ray. 2012. *How to create a mind*. New York City: Viking Press, p. 352
- Lacey, Nick. 1998. *Image & Representation*. England – China: Palgrave, p. 256
- Metz, Christian. 1974. *Language & Cinema* (Trans. Donna Jean Umiker-Sebeok). The Hague – Paris: Mouton, p. 304
- Richards, Ivor A. 1932. *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. London: Oxford University Press, p. 144
- Roth, Lane. 1983. *Film Semiotics, Metz, and Leone's Trilogy*. London – New York: Routledge, p. 248
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. 1974. *Course in General Linguistics* (trans. Wade Baskin). London: Fontana/Collins, p. 240

Electronic sources:

- Chandler, Daniel. 1995. *Semiotics for beginners*. Available: <http://s3.amazonaws.com/szmanuals/bb72b1382e20b6b75c87d297342dabd7> received: 18.4.2018
- Kurzweil, Ray. *Get ready for hybrid thinking*. Published: 2.6.2014. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P VXQUItNEDQ&app=desktop> received: 19.4.2018

Articles:

- Grayson, Kent 1998. *The icons of consumer research: Using signs to represent consumers' reality*. In *Representing Consumers: Voices, Views and Visions* New York: Routledge, p. 27-43

APPENDIX

Svenska sammandrag av slutarbete

Forskningen med titeln "Semiotics, Culture & ID" är en naturlig följd av fyra år kulturproducentstudier som berikades med praktiska erfarenheter inom filmproduktionens område. Konkret betyder det att denna undersökning använder min senaste kortfilmproduktion som bas för en semiotisk analys med som bakgrund teorier av Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Peirce och Christian Metz.

Analysens huvudsyfte är identifieringen av främst kulturella men också andra koder som användes för att konstruera tecknen och texterna i kortfilmen ID. Kulturella koder är de som är konventioner bland stora befolkningsgrupper. Fokus på det ämnet har stor aktualitet för att både lång- och kortfilmer, tack vare nätet, har nu mer än någonsin den realistiska möjligheten att bli sett av en internationell publik. Som sekundärt och mer personligt ändamål kan forskningsresultatet bidra till att utvärdera framgången eller misslyckandet av byggandet av nämnda tecken och texter. Detta kan förbättra medvetenheten för framtida konstprojekt.

ID var en samproduktion av filmstuderande på Yrkeshögskolan Arcada och studenter på Teaterhögskolan Helsingfors, som planerades och producerades under vintern och våren 2017/2018. Den ungefär 15 minuter långa science-fictionfilmen berättar om Loni, som måste fly från ett psykologiskt experiment genom att lösa pussel och gåtor som är formgetta kring hennes raderade minne. Konfronterad med saker som symboliserar händelser i hennes förflutna, återvinner hon långsamt sina minnen och kan småningom fly.

Dessa objekt konstruerades och kodas noggrant av produktionsgruppen för att förmedla viss mening. För att uppnå målet med denna forskning (identifiera kulturella koder i tecknen och texterna i kortfilm ID) drar jag från den rika semiotiska teorin som diskuterades av språkforskaren Ferdinand de Saussure, filosofen Charles Peirce, språkforskaren Roland Barthes, filmteoretiker Christian Metz och forskare som Daniel Chandler, Nick Lacey och Lane Roth. De viktigaste teoretiska begreppen är Saussures tvådelade uppfattning av tecknet, enligt vilket något tecken består av en fysisk manifestation (*signifier*) och dess motsvarande mentala konnotation (*signified*). I den normala världen är dessa vanligtvis oskiljbara men skiljas för analysen. Den Barthesiska myten beror mycket på

detta konceptet, eftersom den beskriver så kallade "högre order av konnotation" där en viss betecknad betyder ytterligare ett nytt koncept. Dessa starka konnotationer bestäms av kultur och delas av stora delar av befolkningen. Peirces bidrag i form av den syntagmatiska och paradigmatiske inbäddning av tecknet (alternativt: tecknets kontextuella och associativa dimensioner) är en annan hörnsten i denna forskning. Slutligen är Metz "la grande syntagmatique" ett nyttigt verktyg för att dela filmen in i flera sammanhängande segment som kan analyseras. Teoridelen omfattar också ett eget avsnitt för teman koderna, deras betydelse (särskilt i kulturella sammanhang) och hur de kommer att bli.

En detaljerad beskrivning av filmens varje bild föregår det själva analysavsnittet. Beskrivningen listar upp alla synliga och i viss utsträckning också hörbara tecken som kan vara viktiga för analysen.

Analysen använder slutligen alla de tidigare nämnda koncepten på sex olika segment med syftet att identifiera de kulturella koderna som användes för att konstruera dem. Den kvalitativa forskningen baserar sig på följande segmenten: filmens öppnande och finala scenen, två från mellansektionen och de två segmenten som leder in i filmens slutscen.

Segmenten har olika mängder av tecken och texter, som är olika komplex att dekryptera och har därför olika mängder tvetydighet. Öppningsscenen introducerar många olika symboliska tecken som endast kan dekrypteras med hjälp av kulturella koder, till exempel tid eller mer exakt ändlig tid. En annan starkt symbolisk läsning av hela det första segmentet kan vara begreppet återfödelse som också överensstämmer med begreppet ändlig tid.

Några av tecknen, fastän mera uppenbarligen kodad, har en hög tvetydighet som till exempel blommorna i det andra segmentet eller musslan i fjärde. Trots att de har en mycket tydlig kulturell beteckning, till exempel oskuld och frihet, och därför passar tematiskt till filmen som helhet, i deras mer direkta syntagmatiska sammanhang har de ingen klar betydelse annat än en bärare av en nummerkod och en konstig ljudapparat. Signifikansen blir dock förklarad i filmens senare förlopp.

Mycket tydliga tecken å andra sidan kan identifieras i de senare delarna av filmen. Beaktaren introduceras där med en speldosa och senare med den visuella avbildningen av en "konventionell" familj. Dessa exempel räknas som Barthesiska myter, eftersom de

mycket tydligt förmedlar koncepten av en skyddad barndom och i detta fall föräldrakärlek.

Hela undersökningen kommer till slutsatsen att de flesta tecknen är så konstruerade och kodade att de kunde läsas som tilltänkt, oberoende av kulturell bakgrund, dock några lite enklare och andra mindre uppenbara.