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Semiotics for Creators of Popular Culture
Semiotic Analysis # 3
Date: 2.26.14 | Revised 5.14.14
Analysis: How To Train Your Dragon - Still/Clips

Additional Media: Clips & Powerpoint Presentation.



Signifier: The signifier in this overall segment of clips/images is the mechanical mechanism that joins Hiccup's foot pedal to Toothless's left tail control. This mechanical contraption gives power and significance to Hiccup and Toothless who are useless without each other. In the context of the film, inventions weren't common, and that's what causes Hiccup to be a bit of a nerd amongst his tribe. Yet, his inventions carry the sense of new technology for something undiscovered, wondrous, and AWESOME!

Signified: The signified in this image is both Hiccup and Toothless in their own respective ways.

Hiccup as a character is the dorky Viking. As the chief's son he has a reputation for being what's known in their tribe as a "hiccup," meaning a screw up, not like the rest of the strong Viking, and utterly useless. In the movie, he's constantly trying to prove himself as the chief's son as he comes into his own.

Toothless on the other hand is a Night Fury, a breed of dragon that's respected due to its elusive nature, firepower, and furious speed. Toothless carries a level of awe and he doesn't need to prove himself in anyway. But the fact that he is unable to fly weakens his ability as a dragon and renders him useless. Sort of like Hiccup.

Overall Sign: The overall sign I received from this image is that Hiccup and Toothless complete each other, both as individual characters in their respective arcs and in this image. Their relationship has come full circle.

Toothless has lost his left tail-wing and Hiccup has lost his left foot. Toothless can't fly without Hiccup's aid and Hiccup can't fulfill his purpose as a dragon trainer without Toothless. They complete each other and the visual confirms this on the basis that they've lost an appendage on the same side of the body. Without his foot, Hiccup can't walk like he used to, and without his left tail wing, Toothless can't fly like he used to.

Visually they complete each other on these facts alone and are able to fly as one.

Image(s): Constant Images: Hiccup, Toothless, and the mechanical contraptions that join them.

Icon/Symbol/Index: Dragons have various meaning attributed to them throughout the years.

Various types of dragons represented include the Orient and the Chinese emperor, being invisible and victorious in all battles, and possessing power over nature to be able to create and destroy with fire or ice.

(- <http://livingartsoriginals.com/meaning-dragon.html>)

In the context of the film, the dragons are an icon of predatory power and Toothless is one of the most feared kinds.

Hiccup embodies the icon or characters type of the nerdy underdog. If Hiccup can train one of the most fearsome dragons in the film, then he is no doubt the greatest Viking ever.

Denotation: Here is a boy learning how to fly and train a dragon in a way a human trains a dog.

Connotation: Here is a boy who is finding a connection with this creature. In losing a part of themselves, they find themselves through the connection they have with each other through the experience of losing a limb.

Synchronic Analysis/Diachronic Analysis: This is the scene that establishes the resolution; the climax has passed and the world is establishing a new normal. Hiccup is waking up from a previous battle and Toothless is happily waiting to greet him. This scene gives us a much needed calm after the storm and allows one of the many themes of the film to resonate.

Syntagmatic Analysis: This select image that shows is the still that hit home for me as viewer. I was able to understand that the characters have come full circle and symbolically now complete each other. They had to have this moment together to strengthen their bond. Although devastated at first, Hiccup needed this moment to understand that he and Toothless are more

similar than before. Had this particular sequence not been here, I don't think the emotional level of this film would have succeeded.

Paradigmatic Analysis: Training a dragon, let alone being friends with one, is something unheard of in this world. Had Hiccup trained a horse or a yak, he wouldn't have made a difference in his community. It's the act of training the untrainable that makes this a story worth telling.

Codes: In several behind the scenes clips of the film, I've heard the creators say this movie is about a "boy and his dragon." One very cute code that I find heartwarming is the code of loyalty between a boy and his dog or the relationship humans have with pets. Toothless take on the role of Hiccup's pet in a way and his animation mimics that of a feline or canine at times. Hiccup assumes the role of the master in training Toothless and looking out for him.

Structuralism: In my opinion, *How To Train Your Dragon* is one of the best animated films I've ever seen in the genre of computer animation and from Dreamworks Animation Studio! The animation is great, the story/world is believable and leaves room for spinoffs. This to me helped put Dreamworks Animation in the same circle as Pixar Animation Studios. I'd even go so far to say that it should have beaten them this year at all awards shows.

Jingoism: *How To Train Your Dragon* was actually a book series Dreamworks acquired the rights to make into a franchise. No doubt fans of the book carried over to see the film, the TV series, and the sequel coming out this summer. But on another level, any one who has pets can relate to Hiccup and Toothless's relationship. Toothless's guttural groans seem to almost allow him to talk to Hiccup and anyone who has pets can testify that sometimes they swear their pets talk to them through barks and meows full of personality.

