



MEDIA THEORISTS

NARRATIVE



Roland Barthes

Roland Barthes was a French literary theorist, philosopher, critic and semiotician (study of cultural signs and symbols). He was born in 1915 and died in 1980.



Narrative media texts = storytelling.

Barthes' Theory

Barthes identified a key difference between media texts with open and closed meanings:

A text can either be **open** or **closed**:

OPEN "Writerly"	CLOSED "Readerly"
<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Open to interpretation- Can have many different meanings individual to the viewer due to own experiences.- The viewer is in a position of control, taking an active role in determining the meaning of the text.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Produced with one, single meaning in mind.- Presented in the 'linear', traditional manner of style; the meaning is pre-determined.- This renders other interpretations of the text incorrect or inaccurate.

Barthes' Theory

- Barthes said that all narratives share similar structures but are moulded in different ways.
- He believed that a text was essentially a tangled ball of threads that needs to be unravelled.
- Once unravelled, it is obvious that we can begin to look at a text at any angle we choose.
- We start to look at a text in one specific way, from one viewpoint and voila, one meaning for a text.
- But this can be repeated several times. By continuing to unravel texts, different meanings appear.

The Five Codes

Barthes concluded that any one of the Five Codes can be woven into any text and they are integral to interpreting them.

- The Hermeneutic/Enigma Code (HER)
- The Action/Proairetic Code (ACT)
- The Semantic Code (SEM)
- The Symbolic Code (SYM)
- The Referential/Cultural Code (REF)

The Hermeneutic/Enigma Code

(HER)

- **Snares**: When the truth is purposely avoided.
- **Equivocations**: Technique used to give the viewer partial or incomplete answers as to how the text would end.
- The mysterious element of the text to be solved *by* audience and then eventually *for* them.
- The ambiguity of this code draws the audience in.

Refers to any part of the story unexplained.

The Action/Proairetic Code

(ACT)

- Action and suspense used traditionally for escapism.
- Used to entertain the audience and immerse them in the text.
- Tension builds up and leaves the audience guessing.

Refers to any part of the story that builds interest and suspense.

The Semantic Code

(SEM)

- Elements of the text which imply, suggest or refer to additional meanings in the media text.
- These are called 'Sememes'; they connote an extra meaning aside from literal denotation.
- Usually done through props and dialogue.

Refers to any part of the story that has additional meaning.

The Symbolic Code

(SYM)

- Very similar to the SEM code but it's on a deeper level.
- This code is about the symbols found in media texts.
- Symbolic codes are called 'Signifiers' and they are used to convey meaning through symbolism, as well as emphasising character development, contrasts and tensions.

Refers to any part of the story that has a heavy focus on symbols.

The Referential/Cultural Code

(REF)

- This code deals with references to an external body.
- It looks at the audiences wider cultural knowledge, morality and ideology; can be scientific, historical etc.
- Can also consist of intertextuality.

Refers to the part of the story that tends to point out our shared knowledge.

<u>CODE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>	<u>EXAMPLES</u>
<u>HER</u>	<p>‘Reservoir Dogs’</p> <p>Quentin Tarantino</p>	<p>The narrative isn’t in chronological order which makes it a more difficult to follow. This links to using equivocations as the viewer partially understands what is happening after the diamond heist goes wrong , but still leaves them in the dark about many of the issues raised.</p>
<u>ACT</u>	<p>‘Rope’</p> <p>Alfred Hitchcock</p>	<p>Brandon and Philip murder their friend David and place him inside a chest. Later in the scene, they host a dinner party with the unlocked chest inside the same room, as a central feature. This creates tension because the camera angles create suspense as the chest stays in shot for the majority of the film , which makes the audience wonder whether a guest will eventually unearth what is hidden within. At the party, Brandon prides himself in the open innuendo of the discussion which makes sense if one knows about David's murder.</p>
<u>SEM</u>	<p>‘Rope’</p> <p>Alfred Hitchcock</p>	<p>A letter through the door that disrupts the scene early on had a number code attached to the back of it. The connotations fuel and develop the story into further points. For example, these numbers have connotations of such things as phone numbers/map co-ordinates/ addresses. This can also act as part of the ACT code.</p>

<u>CODE</u>	<u>TEXT</u>	<u>EXAMPLES</u>
<u>SYM</u>	<p>'Rope'</p> <p>Alfred Hitchcock</p>	<p>The murder Brandon and Philip commit has obvious connotations to the viewer of a wrongful and illegal act. However, the fact that the pair host a dinner party straight afterwards suggest that they are attempt the 'perfect murder'. As the film continues, the two men seem to be successful as no one clocks on to the fact that there is a dead body in the trunk in the room. This uses the symbolic code because their murder does not connote any wrong-doing or punishment but achievement and victory for the two main characters. This symbolises what is wrong with justice systems as well as society – the two killed David because they thought he was 'inferior' to them. This deeper interpretation draws the audience in.</p>
<u>REF</u>	<p>'Pulp Fiction'</p> <p>Quentin Tarantino</p>	<p>A religious speech is quoted by Samuel L Jackson's character Jules right before he kills another character. He quotes the bible and is as follows:</p> <p><i>'and I will execute great vengeance upon them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the Lord, when I shall lay my vengeance upon them.'</i></p> <p>This religious reference includes words such as 'vengeance' and 'execute' which have obvious connotations of violence and death and this is solidified by Jules killing the character.</p>