

Detecting Meaning with Sherlock Holmes*

Screening Sherlock Holmes

based on slides by Brian Bergen-Aurand

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Overview

- How (Screen) Language Conveys Meaning— Christian Metz Screens Sherlock Holmes
- Sherlock Holmes Baffled—Signs and Interpretations
- The Language of Screen Theory
- Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema
- The Adventure of the Speckled Band 1 & 2

Sherlock Holmes Baffled

Sherlock Holmes Baffled

➤ directed by Arthur Marvin in 1905 (music added)

Sherlock Holmes Baffled

Signs

- Holmes alone
- Smoking a cigar
- Holmes unkempt
- Holmes draws and fires a gun
- Holmes is “baffled”
- A crime against Holmes
- Holmes in the *domestic* sphere

Interpretations

-
- Films start in 1895
 - standard viewing position (front)
 - charge admissions
 - Early films had a fixed camera
 - So drawing rooms scenes were common
 - What does Holmes look like
 - What is different in *Sherlock Holmes baffled*?
 - What is in the center?
 - What is he wearing?
 - What is the big difference in the narrative?
 - No Watson!



Cinematic Signs / Cinematic Language

- Themes and ideas
- Film and the other arts
- Realism, anti-realism, and *mise-en-scène*
- Composition and the image
- Sound

The Language of Screen Theory

- What is cinema?
 - * Cinema is a language in the sense of a semiotic system.
 - * The system of every film is constructed on the basis of codes that a filmmaker either adopts, transforms, or works against.
- How do we understand it?
 - * Semiotics (semiology) is the science of signs and of the codes used to understand them

A Semiotics of the Cinema

“Everything is present in film: hence the obviousness of film, and hence also its opacity. The clarification of present by absent units occurs much less than in verbal language. The relationships *in praesentia* are so rich that they render the strict organization of *in absentia* relationships superfluous and difficult. A film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand. The image impresses itself on us, blocking everything that is not itself.”

Reception: A Semiotics of Holmes

- Analyze the stories as detective fiction
 - Structure, logic, and nature of detection
 - * Genre, technique, narrative
 - Story & Discourse (Enunciation)
- Analyze the stories as cultural representation
 - Social and historical implications and resonances
 - * Institutional structures and relationships
 - Race, Class, Gender, Sexuality, Technology, Law

The Speckled Band

- The Case of the Speckled Band (1/2) (12min)
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- *Sherlock Holmes and Doctor Watson* is a television series created by Sheldon Reynolds in 1979
- It starred Geoffrey Whitehead, Donald Pickering and Patrick Newell in the title roles of Sherlock Holmes, Doctor Watson and Inspector Lestrade respectively.
- It was a joint Polish-English production with 24 episodes
- How is the story different?
- Why doesn't Holmes kill the snake?
- Nice use of music to build suspense, ...

Speckled Band

- Analyze the stories as detective fiction
 - A rethinking of the detective in general, of Holmes in particular
 - The detective in relation to the villain, Holmes in relation to the Count
- Analyze the stories as cultural representation
 - Women in a society in which they cannot own property
 - Women in a society in which they can own property

Screen Language)—Signs

- The Adventure of the Speckled Band
- “Miss Stoner, you have not. You are screening your stepfather.”
- ➤ Count: Mr. Holmes do you ever hunt?
 - Holmes: In a manner of speaking, Count.
 - Count: Yes. Of course.
- Holmes: “I suppose we’ll have to think of the case of the speckled band as only partially successful.”

Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century

an animated television series in which Sherlock Holmes is brought back to life in the 22nd century. The series is a co-production by DiC Entertainment and Scottish Television and was nominated for a Daytime Emmy for Special Class Animated Program

The Adventure of the Dancing Men (22 min)

Compare / Contrast

Readership

The reader's surrogate

Holmes's methodology

Detection

Making sense of things

Viewership

The viewers' surrogates

Holmes's methodology

Detection

Making sense of things

Screening Sherlock Holmes

- In print (since 1887)
- On film (since 1900)
- On television (since 1951)
- In video games (since 1984)
- On the internet (since 2004)

Bibliography

- Christian Metz (1974) *Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema* [Essais sur la signification au cinéma], Oxford University Press, 1974