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Meaning-Making in Environmental Awareness Animation:

A Semiotic Analysis of *The Turning Point* (2020) by Steve Cutts

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Abstract

As environmental degradation escalates in the 21st century, animation has emerged as a powerful medium for raising ecological awareness through symbolic visual storytelling. This study offers a semiotic analysis of *The Turning Point* (2020), a short animated film by Steve Cutts, drawing on Roland Barthes' framework of denotation, connotation, myth, and the five narrative codes. It addresses four key questions; first, it explores how denotative and connotative signs interact to communicate ecological concerns. Second, it examines the ideological myths embedded within the film's symbolic framework. Third, it considers how Barthes' narrative codes contribute to the construction of environmental discourse. Finally, it investigates how the symbolic role reversal between humans and animals serves as a critique of anthropocentrism.Using a qualitative methodology, the film is broken down into thematically rich scenes reflecting issues such as consumerism, capitalism, ecological justice, and power. Visual elements, composition, motion, color, character symbolism, alongside music and textual components, are closely examined. Findings reveal a multilayered discourse where denotative and connotative signs intertwine to construct and critique cultural myths. Barthes' narrative codes structure meaning while exposing dominant ideologies. The human-animal role reversal functions as a deliberate semiotic strategy to challenge anthropocentric perspectives and prompt reflection on ecological responsibility. This study affirms the potential of animated media to foster environmental consciousness through nuanced semiotic storytelling and meaning-making.

Keywords: animation, semiotics, environmental discourse, anthropocentrism, meaning-making

Table of Contents

Abstract……..ii

Table of Contents ……;……....iii

List of Tables ……...vii

List of Figures ……..……..viii

Acknowledgements ……..…….ix

Dedication ……...…….……..…x

Dedication…….…....xi

General Introduction

Background of the Study…….....1

Statement of the Problem…….....3

Research Questions…….....3

Research Aim and Objectives…….....4

Significance of the Study…….....4

Research Methodology…….....5

Structure of the Dissertation…….....6

Chapter One: Theoretical Foundations of Semiotics and Visual Media

Introduction……...8

1.1 Section One: Semiotics……...8

1.1.1 An Overview of Semiotics……9

1.1.1.1 Definition of Semiotics……...9

1.1.1.2 The Scope of Semiotics……11

1.1.2 Historical Development of Semiotics……..12

1.1.2.1 Early Foundations: Origins in Linguistics and Philosophy……...12

1.1.2.2 Modern Development: Ferdinand de Saussure vs. Charles Sanders Peirce…..14

1.1.2.3 Expansion into Cultural Studies…….15

1.1.3 Roland Barthes' Contributions to Semiotics……...18

1.1.3.1 Denotation & Connotation: How Meaning is created Beyond the Literal……18

1.1.3.2 Mythologies: How Cultural Narratives Shape Ideology……...23

1.1.3.3 Applications to Media and Film Studies……...……24

1.1.4 Semiotics in Visual Media……..…….26

1.1.4.1 Signs, Codes, and Symbols in Film, Advertising, and Digital Media……..26

1.1.4.2 The Role of Iconography, Intertextuality, and Representation…….27

1.1.4.3 Case Studies of Semiotic Applications in Various Media Forms…….28

1.2 Section Two: Visual Media, Short Films, and Environmental Narratives……..29

1.2.1 Introduction to Visual Media and Storytelling…….……...30

1.2.1.1 The Power of Images and Film in Shaping Narratives…….31

1.2.1.2 Evolution of Film as a Medium for Communication……31

1.2.2 Defining and Classifying Short Films……...……...33

1.2.2.1 Historical Background of Short Films……..…33

1.2.2.2 Key Characteristics: Duration, Structure, Storytelling Styles……...33

1.2.2.3 Classification of Short Films by Genre, Purpose, and Artistic Approach…….34

1.2.3 Cinematic Techniques in Short Films……..35

1.2.3.1 Narrative Techniques and Role-Setting in Short Film……..35

1.2.3.2 Visual Aesthetics……. ……39

1.2.3.3 Use of Sound and Music to Enhance Meaning…….41

1.2.4 Environmental Narratives in Short Films…….……...42

1.2.4.1 The Rise of Eco-Cinema: How Film Contributes to Environmental Awareness Through Short Films…….42

1.2.4.2 Themes in Environmental Short Films: Climate Change, Pollution, Sustainability…….44

1.2.4.3 Notable Examples of Environmental Storytelling in Short Films…….45

1.2.5 The Role of Audience Interpretation in Visual Media…….……...…47

1.2.5.1 Active vs. Passive Viewing…….. ……...…47

1.2.5.2 Semiotics and Audience Reception Theories……....48

1.2.5.3 How Different Cultural and Ideological Perspectives Shape Interpretation….48

Conclusion…….....…50

Chapter Two: Research Methodology, Analysis, and Discussion

Introduction……...……51

2.1 Section One: Research Methodology……..……51

2.1.1 Study Design……52

2.1.2 Unit of Analysis……...……52

2.1.3 Film Selection……..53

2.1.4 Film Description and Formal Elements……...55

2.1.5 Analytical Framework…….……57

2.1.6 Procedures for Analysis……..….58

2.2 Section Two:Semiotic Analysis of *The Turning Point*…….....59

2.2.1 Analysis in Terms of Denotation and Connotation…….....60

2.2.2 Analysis in Terms of Ideological Myths…….....…82

2.2.3 Analysis in Terms of Barthes' Narrative Codes…….....…85

2.2.4 Analysis in Terms of Role Reversal……....88

2.2.5 Synthesis of Findings…….....……90

2.3 Section Three: Discussionof the Semiotic Findings…….....……92

2.3.1 Interpreting Denotation and Connotation in Environmental Context……..92

2.3.2 Unpacking Ideological Myths in the Film……..…….95

2.3.3 Insights from Barthes' Narrative Codes……..….97

2.3.4 Role Reversal and Critique of Anthropocentrism……...…….99

2.3.5Implications of the Study…….....…101

2.3.6 Limitations of the Study ……102

2.3.7 Recommendations for Future Studies ……...……103

Conclusion……..……104

General Conclusion……...……105

References.....108

Résumé.....114

ملخص……115

List of Tables

Table 1: The Comparison of Connotation and Denotation ……...……..20

List of Figures

Figure 1: Barthes' two Orders of Signification……19

Figure 2: Short Animated Film Happiness (2017) ……..…40

Figure 3: Short Animated Film Wall-E (2008) ……...…46

Figure 4: The Illusion of Normalcy Scene ……..…60

Figure 5: Title Introduction Scene ……...……...…61

Figure 6: Consumer Culture Among Animals Scene ……...…..63

Figure 7: Pollution and the Human Underclass Scene in ……...…64

Figure 8: Corporate Decisions Scene …….....……65

Figure 9: Environmental Consequences Scene…….…….66

Figure 10: Forced Displacement and Environmental Violence Scene……67

Figure 11: Humans in Waste, Bulldozer Driven by Beaver Scene ……68

Figure 12: Bear Family Watching TV News Scene ……69

Figure 13: Drowning Humanity and Trapped Infant Scene ……...70

Figure 14: Beached Human Consuming Trash Scene…….71

Figure 15: Animal Protest and Police Repression scene .....……...73

Figure 16: Exploitation and Human Suffering .....……...74

Figure 17: Drink type 2 advertisement ....……...75

Figure 18: Corporate Excess & Celebratory Destruction scene ...……..76

Figure 19: Climate Crisis, Denial, and Doom scene ....……...77

Figure 20: Washed Ashore—Humanity and Oceanic Waste scene.....……78

Figure 21: Forest Destruction & Human Displacement scene ……..……79

Figure 22: Homo Sapiens & Extinction Exhibit scene 80

Figure 23: Title in Red, Final Scene .....……81

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Dedication

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This work is for the thinkers, the watchers, and all those who dare to ask not only *what* something means, but *why* it was ever made to mean it.

BRAKNI Raouia

Dedication

To the Earth, our oldest mother, who bleeds silently beneath our concrete pride, yet still cradles us in forests, in winds, in tides.

To the animals, our forgotten kin, who ask for nothing but space to exist, whose innocence humbles our intellect, and whose gaze, though wordless, speaks of truths we've long buried beneath our own noise.

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HADHAR Rayene

General Introduction

Background of the Study

The 21st century has witnessed an alarming acceleration of environmental degradation. From climate change and deforestation to mass extinction and ocean acidification, the natural world is undergoing profound transformations, most of which are the result of human activities. Industrialization, overconsumption, and the global pursuit of profit have pushed ecosystems toward collapse, posing a threat to biodiversity and the viability of future generations. Environmental issues are no longer abstract scientific problems; they are inherently political, ethical, and cultural (Dryzek, 2013). Consequently, they often invite global debates, activist movements, and creative expressions intended to raise awareness and provoke change.

In response to such immediate concerns, media has emerged as a powerful platform for environmental communication. Visual narratives, in particular, play a critical role in shaping public understanding and perception of ecological crises (Lester, 2010). Among these, short animated films have gained prominence for their ability to condense complex themes into emotionally charged and symbolically rich narratives. Without relying on spoken dialogue or extensive exposition, such films employ visual storytelling to engage diverse audiences across linguistic and cultural divides (Wells, 2002). Through techniques such as metaphor, allegory, and exaggeration, they often deliver pointed critiques of environmental destruction, consumer culture, and human dominance over nature.

To understand how these films communicate deeper meanings, it is crucial to examine the semiotic processes through which visual texts convey ideological messages. Semiotics, originally developed by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, provides a framework for analyzing signs and the systems through which meaning is constructed (Chandler, 2017). Roland Barthes (1972), building on these foundations, applied semiotics to

cultural texts, particularly in the realm of visual media. His layered model of signification includes denotation (the literal meaning), connotation (the cultural or emotional association), and myth (the ideological meaning that naturalizes a worldview). As Barthes explained, myths transform historical or constructed meanings into "natural" truths, making media texts powerful tools for reinforcing or subverting dominant ideologies (Barthes, 1972).

In addition to his theory of myth and layered signification, Barthes (1970) also introduced five narrative codes that help uncover how meaning is constructed and communicated within texts. These include the Hermeneutic code (enigmas), which refers to the elements of mystery and unanswered questions that drive the narrative forward; the Proairetic code (actions), which involves sequences of behavior and events that create suspense or anticipation; the Semantic code, which relates to connotative meanings carried by particular signs within the narrative; the Symbolic code, which involves deeper symbolic oppositions and meanings often tied to broader ideological structures; and the Referential code, which draws upon shared cultural or scientific knowledge to enrich meaning. Together, these codes form a systematic lens for analyzing how narratives function beyond surface-level interpretation, allowing researchers to uncover embedded ideologies and layered messages within visual media such as short films.

Within this context, visual media emerges as a critical site for ecological critique. Scholars such as Nichols (2016) and Hansen (2018) argued that media representations shape environmental consciousness and public discourse. The present research responds to this growing scholarly interest by exploring how animated films function as visual critiques of anthropocentrism and ecological injustice. Specifically, this study analyzes *The Turning Point*, a2020 animated short by Steve Cutts, which depicts a dystopian reversal of roles between humans and animals. Through the Barthesian semiotic framework, the research investigates how meaning is layered within the film, from immediate symbols to embedded

ideological messages about environmental collapse. The study ultimately seeks to demonstrate how visual semiotics can reveal the communicative power of media in shaping ecological awareness and cultural critique.

Statement of the Problem

While extensive research has explored the role of visual media in raising environmental awareness, particularly through documentaries and feature-length films, less attention has been paid to the semiotic potential of short animated films as tools of ecological critique. Although scholars have recognized the capacity of media to challenge anthropocentrism and convey environmental concerns, few studies have examined how symbolic strategies, such as the reversal of roles between humans and animals, function within short, non-verbal animations to communicate ideological messages. This gap is especially evident in the limited scholarly attention given to *The Turning Point* (2020) by Steve Cutts, a film that powerfully critiques human dominance through visual metaphor and role reversal. Moreover, existing literature rarely applies Roland Barthes' layered semiotic model, comprising denotation, connotation, and myth, to such animated texts, leaving a need to understand how meaning is constructed and reinforced within these concise yet impactful narratives. Addressing this gap is important not only for expanding the scope of environmental media studies, but also for uncovering how visual storytelling can disrupt anthropocentric worldviews and foster ecological awareness through symbolic and ideological expression.

Research Questions

This study seeks to explore the semiotic and ideological dimensions of Steve Cutts' 2020 short animated film *The Turning Point* by addressing the following questions:

1. How do denotative and connotative signs interact in *The Turning Point* to construct and communicate environmental messages?

2. What ideological myths are conveyed through the film's symbolic representations?
3. In what ways do Barthes' five narrative codes function within the film to shape its environmental discourse?
4. How does the reversal of roles between humans and animals operate as a semiotic strategy to critique anthropocentrism?

Research Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate how semiotic elements are employed in Steve Cutts' short animated film *The Turning Point* (2020) to construct and convey environmental messages and critique anthropocentrism. Grounded in Roland Barthes' theory of semiotics, the study seeks to uncover the layers of meaning encoded in the film through signs, narrative structures, and ideological myths.

To achieve this aim, the study pursues the following objectives:

1. To analyze the interaction between denotative and connotative signs in the film and how they work together to communicate environmental concerns.
2. To identify and interpret the ideological myths embedded in the film's symbolic representations.
3. To examine the application of Barthes' five narrative codes in the construction of the film's environmental message.
4. To explore the semiotic function of role reversal between humans and animals as a critique of anthropocentric worldviews.

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing interdisciplinary dialogue between environmental discourse, media studies, and semiotics by highlighting the communicative potential of short animated films as powerful vehicles for ecological critique. By applying Barthes' semiotic theory to *The Turning Point* (2020), the research offers a deeper

understanding of how visual media can construct layered meanings that challenge dominant anthropocentric ideologies and raise environmental awareness. The study emphasizes the importance of symbolic representations and narrative structures in shaping public perception and attitudes toward ecological issues. It also brings attention to the often-overlooked role of short animations in environmental communication, positioning them as accessible yet complex texts that can engage diverse audiences through emotional and symbolic storytelling. Furthermore, the study provides a framework for analyzing similar media texts, offering valuable insights for scholars, educators, and activists interested in the intersection of visual culture, environmental advocacy, and ideological critique.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology, appropriate for uncovering the nuanced layers of meaning embedded in visual and symbolic representations. The analysis centers on *The Turning Point* (2020), a short animated film by Steve Cutts, and draws on Roland Barthes' semiotic theory as the primary analytical framework. The concepts of denotation, connotation, myth, and the five narrative codes guide the exploration of how the film constructs and communicates its environmental critique.

The analysis begins with a scene-by-scene examination of denotative signs, those that represent the literal and immediately recognizable aspects of the film. These are then interpreted at the connotative level to uncover deeper cultural and ideological meanings. Particular attention is given to how these signs collectively generate ideological myths, especially those reinforcing or challenging dominant worldviews related to environmental destruction, consumerism, and anthropocentrism.

Barthes' five narrative codes, hermeneutic, proairetic, semantic, symbolic, and cultural, are then used to analyze how meaning is structured and unfolded across the narrative. This step addresses how storytelling devices contribute to the film's overall ecological

message.Importantly, the study also analyzes the reversal of roles between humans and animals as a central semiotic strategy. This inversion is examined not only in terms of its symbolic impact but also in how it challenges anthropocentric ideologies by placing humans in subordinate or endangered positions typically reserved for animals. This role reversal becomes a critical visual and narrative device that reinforces the film's critique of human supremacy and ecological irresponsibility.

In sum, the methodology enables a layered analysis of *The Turning Point*, revealing how verbal and non-verbal signs, visual codes, and narrative structures function together to critique environmental exploitation and provoke reflection on humanity's place within the natural world.

Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is organized into two main chapters, preceded by a general introduction and followed by a general conclusion. The General Introduction outlines the background of the study, identifies the research problem, states the research questions, objectives, and significance, and provides an overview of the methodology and dissertation structure.

Chapter One lays the theoretical foundations for the study and is divided into two sections. The first section introduces the field of semiotics, tracing its origins, key figures, particularly Roland Barthes, and core concepts relevant to the analysis of visual texts. The second section focuses on visual media, offering a conceptual framework for understanding short films and their use of cinematic techniques, with special emphasis on environmental storytelling and audience interpretation.

Chapter Two addresses the practical component of the study. The first section details the research design, including the selected analytical framework and a description of the short film *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts. It also outlines the unit of analysis, data collection,

and analysis procedures. The second section presents a detailed semiotic analysis of the film, organized according to the study's four research questions. And the final section includes a discussion of findings, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

The General Conclusion summarizes the key findings, reflects on the contribution of the study, and suggests directions for further inquiry.

Chapter One: Theoretical Foundations of Semiotics and Visual Media

Introduction

Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, offers a powerful lens through which to analyze how meaning is created and interpreted across various forms of communication. In visual media, semiotics extends beyond images to encompass gestures, sounds, spatial arrangements, and cinematic techniques, each contributing to the construction of meaning beyond verbal language. As visual texts increasingly shape contemporary culture, semiotic analysis becomes essential for interpreting the complex ways media influence perception, convey ideology, and tell stories. In film studies in particular, this approach reveals the deeper symbolic and ideological dimensions of cinematic narratives. Short films, with their condensed storytelling and visual richness, have emerged as particularly effective tools for environmental advocacy, combining aesthetics with persuasive messaging to raise awareness and provoke reflection on ecological issues.

This chapter lays the theoretical groundwork for the study by dividing its exploration into two main sections. The first section provides a comprehensive overview of semiotics, tracing its origins, highlighting foundational theories, and focusing on the contributions of Roland Barthes to the analysis of visual and cultural texts. The second section shifts to visual media, with an emphasis on short films and their communicative power, especially in the context of environmental narratives. It explores the defining features of short films, their narrative techniques, and their role in shaping public discourse around ecological concerns. Together, these sections establish the conceptual tools and analytical framework that underpin the semiotic analysis presented in the subsequent chapter.

1.1Section One: Semiotics

This section introduces semiotics as a critical framework for analyzing how meaning is constructed through signs. It outlines the field's evolution from its linguistic and

philosophical origins to its development by key theorists such as Saussure, Peirce, and Barthes, whose concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth are particularly relevant to visual media. The section concludes by highlighting how semiotic tools are applied to decode meaning in visual content, laying the groundwork for the next section's focus on short films and environmental narratives.

1.1.1 An Overview of Semiotics

1.1.1.1 Definition of Semiotics. Semiotics is broadly defined as the study of signs, symbols, and the processes through which meaning is constructed and communicated. The term originates from the Greek word *sēmeion*, meaning "sign", and it encompasses any entity, whether visual, verbal, auditory, or gestural, that stands for something beyond itself. As Chandler (2017) put it, "semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as 'signs' in everyday speech, but of anything which 'stands for' something else" (p. 2). Thus, semiotics explores how these signs operate within structured systems to convey meaning, often beyond their literal form.

Eco (1976) also proposed an interesting approach to define a comprehensive program for general semiotics, suggesting that it could be understood through a "theory of the lie". He explained, saying:

> Semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. A sign is everything that can be taken as significantly substituting for something else. This something else does not necessarily have to exist or to actually be somewhere at the moment in which a sign stands for it. Thus semiotics is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie. If something cannot be used to tell a lie, conversely it cannot be used to the truth: it cannot in fact be used 'to tell' at all. (Eco, 1976, p. 7)

By framing semiotics as a discipline that studies the potential for both deception and truth, Eco highlighted the fundamental role of signs in shaping reality not only by representing it but also by distorting or constructing it. This perspective underscores the critical power of semiotics in analyzing how meaning is manipulated across different communicative contexts.

Notably, the terms “semiotics” and “semiology” are often used interchangeably when referring to the study of signs. However, they carry distinct regional associations: *semiology*, introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure, is more commonly used in Europe, while *semiotics*, associated with Charles Sanders Peirce, is more widely recognized in the United States. In 1969, the International Association for Semiotic Studies adopted *semiotics* as the umbrella term encompassing all theories related to signs, without excluding the use of *semiology* (Chandler, 2017). To maintain clarity and consistency, this research adopts the term *semiotics* throughout.

Two foundational theorists shaped the field’s early development: Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure viewed language as a system of signs composed of the *signifier* (the form of the sign) and the *signified* (the concept it represents), emphasizing that the relationship between them is arbitrary and based on social convention. He asserted that “the linguistic sign is arbitrary” (Saussure, 1983, p. 67) and that meaning arises not from the sign itself but from its difference in relation to other signs.

In contrast, Peirce offered a triadic model, consisting of the *representamen* (the form of the sign), the *object* (what it refers to), and the *interpretant* (the understanding it evokes). He famously wrote: “A sign... is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign” (Peirce, 1955, p. 99). These two conceptual frameworks, Saussure’s structural linguistics and Peirce’s pragmatic semiotics, continue to underpin much of semiotic theory and analysis today.

After establishing the foundational definition of semiotics, it becomes crucial to explore subsequently the broader applications of this field. While the concept of signs and signification serves as the basis for semiotics, understanding its expansive scope across various disciplines reveals the power and versatility of semiotic analysis.

1.1.1.2 The Scope of Semiotics. Over time, semiotics has expanded beyond its linguistic origins into a wide array of disciplines, becoming a powerful tool for analyzing meaning in virtually all areas of human communication. As Johansen (2002) stated, "Semiotics comprises the study of all forms of formation and exchange of meaning which have been coded as signs" (p. 3). This inclusive view has enabled semiotics to be applied to various domains, including literature, visual arts, media, popular culture, film, advertising, and even fashion.

In media and cultural studies, semiotics helps scholars decode how messages are constructed and how they reflect or challenge cultural ideologies. Berger (2010) argued that media texts do not simply mirror reality; they construct it through signs, codes, and conventions. This is especially relevant in today's image-driven media landscape, where visual signs often communicate more powerfully than words.

Film studies are one of the most prominent fields where semiotic analysis has flourished. Metz (1974) described cinema as a language with its own grammar and syntax, asserting that "cinema is a language in which each message is a complex of signs, and each sign a complex of meanings" (p. 40). Through this lens, elements such as camera angles, lighting, editing, costume, and sound are treated as signs that contribute to a film's overall meaning.

Moreover, semiotics intersects with critical and cultural theories including psychoanalysis, structuralism, post-structuralism, and postmodernism (Eco, 1976; Hall, 1997). Barthes extended semiotic analysis to everyday cultural products and media,

developing a theory of *myth*, a second-order signification where culturally constructed meanings are presented as natural. As he observed (1972), “myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of things” (p. 110). His theory of *denotation* and *connotation* provides a framework for interpreting both literal and symbolic layers of meaning in texts and images.

Ultimately, semiotics offers critical insight into how meanings are created, interpreted, and contested across different contexts. Its interdisciplinary nature makes it an indispensable tool for understanding complex sign systems in contemporary culture, especially in visual and digital media where symbols and aesthetics often convey powerful narratives and ideologies.To fully grasp the depth and application of semiotics today, it is essential to trace its historical development, examining how foundational thinkers shaped the field and how their ideas continue to inform current semiotic analysis.

1.1.2 Historical Development of Semiotics

1.1.2.1 Early Foundations: Origins in Linguistics and Philosophy. Semiotics, a field primarily concerned with the study of signs and sign systems, is considered relatively modern, but, its core concepts and foundational ideas can be traced back to ancient times. It connects to linguistic, medical and philosophical traditions that influence etymologically the contemporary notions of semantics and semiotics (Prior, 2014).

Tracing its roots to ancient Greek, the word “semiotics” itself is derived from a Greek wordmeaning “sign” or “symptom”. The emergence of semiotics first started from the scientific study of physiological symptoms that are caused by specific diseases or physical states (Cobley & Jansz, 1999). Moreover, semiotics began to capture the interest of philosophers and emerged in non-medical fields around the time of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.).

Plato and Aristotle, two foundational figures in Western philosophy, contributed early insights into how symbols and language shape human understanding. Plato, in his *Cratylus* dialogue, questioned whether words were inherently connected to the objects they represented or if they were purely conventional. This early philosophical inquiry into the nature of language and signs set the stage for later semiotic theories. Plato posited that names could have a natural connection to their referents, an idea that would be later criticized and expanded by semioticians (Plato, trans. 1997).

Aristotle, too, offered foundational thoughts on the nature of language and communication in his *Poetics*, where he discussed how words, as symbols, represent objects, actions, and ideas in a way that allows people to convey meaning. Although Aristotle's work was more concerned with rhetoric and literature, it laid the groundwork for understanding how language functions as a system of signs. In this sense, his ideas about language as a tool for persuasion and meaning-making prefigured later semiotic explorations (Aristotle, trans. 1996).

Nevertheless, while various theories on the nature and communicative properties of signs have emerged throughout history since ancient times, semiotics in its contemporary form began to take shape around the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. This development was in large part attributed to the works of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913) and American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) (Şen, 2014). By their pioneering contributions, they laid the ground for establishing the basic principles of semiotics, turning it into the modern field of study we know today. The next subsection delves into the contrasting approaches of these two thinkers, highlighting their respective and contributions to the study of signs.

1.1.2.2 Modern Development: Ferdinand de Saussure vs. Charles Sanders Peirce.

The modern development of semiotics is largely attributed to two intellectual giants: Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, whose divergent theories would shape the trajectory of the field.

Saussure, a Swiss linguist, is often considered the father of modern semiotics. His work on structural linguistics laid the foundation for much of contemporary semiotic theory. Saussure's most influential contribution is his distinction between the *signifier* (the form of a sign, such as a word or image) and the *signified* (the concept or meaning that the sign represents). Saussure argued that signs gain meaning not in isolation but through their relationship to other signs within a system. As Saussure (1983) famously stated, "The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, and meaning is a function of differences within the system of signs" (p. 67). This structuralist view emphasizes that meaning is relational and depends on the network of contrasts between signs in a given system, rather than on any intrinsic connection between a sign and its referent.

Conversely, Peirce, an American philosopher and logician, offered a more pragmatic approach to semiotics. Semiotics did not establish itself as an independent science until Peirce's work. He expanded the concept of the sign by introducing a triadic model, which involved three components: the *representamen* (the form of the sign), the *object* (the referent or thing the sign stands for), and the *interpretant* (the effect or meaning created in the mind of the interpreter) (Peirce, 1955). Unlike Saussure's binary system, Peirce's model allowed for a more dynamic and interpretative view of signs. He famously stated, "A sign... is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity" (Peirce, 1955, p. 99). This model emphasized the relationship between the sign and the interpreter, highlighting how meaning arises through interpretation and interaction.

Peirce (1931) also took a purely intellectual approach and formulated a triadic classification of signs: Index: Sign that has a direct causal relationship with its referent. Icon: A sign based on resemblance between the sign and its referent. Symbol: A sign that relies on conventional and arbitrary associations rather than resemblance or causation.

The distinction between Saussure's structuralism and Peirce's pragmatism reflects broader shifts in semiotic thought. Saussure's focus on the system of signs and their interrelations laid the groundwork for structuralist approaches in literature, culture, and media. Meanwhile, Peirce's more fluid and context-dependent approach has influenced fields like communication studies, philosophy, and cultural studies, where the interpretant plays a key role in meaning-making. Together, the theories of Saussure and Peirce represent the dual foundations of modern semiotics.

Building on the theories of Saussure and Peirce, semiotics expanded beyond its linguistic roots into cultural studies, a transition that was marked by the work of key figures such as Umberto Eco, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Julia Kristeva. Their interdisciplinary approaches allowed semiotics to engage with broader cultural texts, ranging from myths and literature to mass media and advertising. In this next subsection, we will explore how these scholars used semiotic theory to address cultural phenomena and expand the applicability of semiotics to various domains of human expression.

1.1.2.3 Expansion into Cultural Studies: Umberto Eco, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Julia Kristeva. The development of semiotics continued to evolve throughout the 20th century, particularly with the expansion into cultural studies. Scholars like Eco, Lévi-Strauss, and Kristeva brought semiotic analysis into the realm of cultural and social theory, using it to examine how signs function within cultural systems and contribute to the construction of meaning in society. These thinkers advanced the study of semiotics beyond language and the

structuralism of Saussure, integrating it into broader analyses of culture, ideology, and society.

Eco, an Italian philosopher and semiotician, played a pivotal role in bridging semiotics with cultural studies. In his work, Eco explored how signs and codes function within mass media, literature, and everyday life. He argued that semiotics could be used to understand how meaning is constructed in cultural texts, which are often influenced by historical and ideological forces. Eco's *A Theory of Semiotics*(1976)emphasized the idea that signs are dynamic; they are not only structured within systems but also engage with social practices, cultural codes, and historical contexts. As Eco (1976) asserted, "The meaning of a sign is a process of interpretation, dependent upon a collective system of codes that are socially and culturally constructed" (p. 7). This view expanded the scope of semiotics by applying it to the analysis of cultural phenomena like literature, films, and advertisements, positioning semiotics as a tool for uncovering the deeper layers of meaning embedded in cultural products.

Lévi-Strauss, a French anthropologist, integrated semiotics into the study of culture, particularly through his structural analysis of myths. Lévi-Strauss (1963) argued that myths are systems of signs that convey universal human truths and that the structures of these myths can be analyzed using semiotic principles. In his seminal work *The Structural Study of Myth*, Lévi-Strauss (1963) demonstrated how myths function as a kind of language, where different elements, characters, actions, and events, operate as signs within a system of meaning. By examining myths from different cultures, Lévi-Strauss revealed how the underlying structures of mythic narratives reflect the universal ways in which humans construct meaning and organize their experiences. He suggested that these structures, like those found in language, could be understood as a set of rules or codes that govern how meaning is created across cultures.

Kristeva, a Bulgarian-French philosopher, psychoanalyst, and literary critic, further expanded semiotics into the field of psychoanalysis and literary theory. Kristeva (1980) introduced the concept of *intertextuality*, which is the idea that all texts are interconnected and gain meaning through their relationships with other texts. This concept drew heavily on semiotic theory, positing that meaning does not exist in isolation but emerges through the network of references, signs, and codes that interlink various cultural and linguistic expressions. Kristeva's (1980) work influenced feminist and poststructuralist thought, where she argued that signs in literature and culture are imbued with ideological and emotional significance, which can be unpacked through semiotic analysis. She argued, "The signification of any given sign is never final, it is always in the process of being interpreted, shifted, and understood within a dynamic system of signs" (Kristeva, 1980, p. 66).

Together, these scholars helped push semiotics beyond its linguistic origins and into the realm of cultural studies, where it became an essential tool for examining how meaning is created, disseminated, and consumed in society. They enabled scholars to analyze everything from literature and cinema to advertising and fashion. Their work laid the foundation for the interdisciplinary nature of semiotics as it is applied in contemporary media studies, offering deep insights into the ways that cultural narratives and ideologies shape our understanding of the world.

As semiotics continued to evolve within cultural studies, the work of Roland Barthes marked a significant turning point in its development. Building on the contributions of Eco, Lévi-Strauss, and Kristeva, Barthes pushed the boundaries of semiotic analysis by applying it not only to high cultural texts but also to everyday phenomena. His revolutionary ideas, particularly around the concepts of denotation and connotation, as well as his exploration of cultural myths, would become central to the study of signs in media and popular culture. The

following subsection examines his contributions in greater detail, focusing on his ideas of meaning-making and how they apply to both media and film studies.

1.1.3 Roland Barthes' Contributions to Semiotics

Roland Gérard Barthes (1915-1980), or commonly known as Roland Barthes, a French well-known structuralist, philosopher, writer, and literary critic, who developed a framework for analyzing signs and their meanings in the study of communication, literature, and cultural analysis. He is one of the most influential figures in modern semiotics. Barthes (1967) stated that the semiotics purpose is to include any system of signs such as: images, gestures, musical sounds, and objects regardless their content and limits, these signs constitute a system of significance. His work focused on how meaning is not inherent in signs but is constructed through cultural processes. In his book *Elements of Semiology* (1964), he introduced the concept of orders of signification, which categorizes signs into different levels of meaning: Denotation, Connotation, and Myth.

1.1.3.1 Denotation & Connotation: How Meaning is created Beyond the Literal.

One of Barthes' most influential contributions to semiotics is his distinction between *denotation* and *connotation*, which explains how meaning is created and communicated through signs. Denotation, for Barthes, is the first order of signification; it refers to the literal, surface-level meaning of a sign, the straightforward identification of what something is.Barthes (1977) explained, "Denotation is the first meaning, the simplest one, the one that goes immediately 'to the eyes'" (p. 27). In this sense, denotation concerns itself with the most apparent or dictionary-level meaning.Panofsky (1970), the art historian, proposed the denotation as a representational visual image that is what all viewers from any culture and at any time would recognize the image as depicting. For instance, a photograph of an apple denotes an apple, it is simply a fruit in a literal sense, without any deeper association.

However, the concept of *connotation* introduces a more complex layer of meaning that extends beyond the literal. It is wider than the first order. Barthes stated, “The connotation is what the image tells us about the world” (1977, p. 33). It refers to the secondary, often cultural, emotional, or ideological layers of meaning that are associated with signs, influenced by social and historical contexts. Associative meaning is the meaning that has relationship with situation outside the language. In the case of the apple, its connotations might include themes of temptation, knowledge, or even health, depending on the cultural narrative surrounding the symbol. Barthes (1972) argued that these connotative meanings are not inherent in the object itself but are socially and culturally constructed through shared experiences and media representations. This distinction between denotation and connotation is essential for understanding how signs in everyday life, including those in media, are imbued with meanings that go beyond their immediate, surface-level identification.

Barthes explained the process of moving from the first order to the second order by making planes of two concepts, a plane of expression and a plane of content, and he showed the relationship between them to come up with the meaning of the statement (Cobley & Jansz, 1999).This process is visually represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Barthes’ Two Orders of Signification

<table>
<tr><td>1. Signifier</td><td>2. Signified</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">3. Denotative Sign</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">4. CONNOTATIVE SIGNIFIER</td><td>5. CONNOTATIVE SIGNIFIED</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">6. CONNOTATIVE SIGN</td></tr>
</table>

Note. Reprinted from *Semiotics: The Basics* (p. 51), by P. Cobley & L. Jansz, 1999, Routledge.

As shown in Figure 1, the first three components represent denotation: box (1) is the signifier, and box (2) is the signified. Together, they form the denotative sign (1 + 2), which then serves as the connotator, the signifier (4) in the process of connotation. The connotative signified (5) builds upon this, producing the final connotative sign (4 + 5), which reflects broader cultural or ideological meanings beyond the literal level.

Berger (1995) offers a clear comparison of denotation and connotation to highlight their distinct functions. Denotation captures the literal, surface-level meaning of a sign, what is directly observable through its signifier—and belongs to the realm of existence. Connotation, by contrast, operates at a deeper, more abstract level: it is figurative, relies on one or more signifieds, and conveys inferred or suggested meanings within the realm of myth. This distinction is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

The Comparison of Connotation and Denotation

Connotation	**Denotation**
Figurative	Literal
Signified(s)	Signifier
Inferred	Evident
Suggests meaning	Describes
Realm of myth	Realm of existence

*Note.*Adapted from *Cultural Criticism: A Primer of Key Concepts* (p. 86) by A. A. Berger, 1995, Thousand Oaks, SAGE.

The theory of denotation and connotation enables a deeper understanding of how meaning is shaped. This process of meaning-making, however, doesn't exist in isolation. As Barthes' work evolves, it becomes clear that these layers of meaning are not only significant in individual signs but also contribute to broader cultural narratives. To explore this further,

Barthes introduced his theory of narrative codes, which allows for a deeper understanding of how meaning is constructed in both individual signs and larger texts, such as films, advertisements, and other media forms.

Barthes' structuralist approach to textual analysis emphasizes the plurality of meaning in texts, arguing that authorial intent is secondary to the reader's interpretive role. To systematize this, He proposed five codes in *S/Z* (1970), which serve as analytical tools for deconstructing the underlying structures of narratives. These codes provide a framework for identifying how texts generate meaning through interplay with the reader's cultural and interpretive faculties (Vivec, 2019).The five codes are:

- **The Hermeneutic Code:** This code refers to the aspect of a narrative that creates suspense and mystery, guiding the audience's curiosity by withholding certain pieces of information. For instance, a detective novel might delay revealing a murderer's identity, compelling the reader to engage with the text's unresolved tensions (Barthes, 1970).
- **The Proairetic Code:** This code is concerned with the actions and events in a narrative. It encompasses the sequence of actions and how these actions propel the narrative forward.
- ***The Semantic Code*:**The semantic code involves elements that carry secondary, culturally specific meanings. For example, descriptions of "wealth" might be connoted through symbols like luxury cars or private jets. Barthes posited that such codes enable texts to evoke abstract concepts (e.g., freedom or corruption) without explicit explanation, relying on the reader's ability to decode cultural associations (Zaib &Mashori, 2014). It focuses on connotative meanings that are often symbolic or suggestive of broader themes.

- **The Symbolic Code*:*** This code refers to the deeper symbolic meanings that are constructed through oppositions, metaphors, and analogies within the narrative. The symbolic code organizes meaning through binary oppositions (e.g., life versus death, masculine versus feminine), which structure the text's deeper thematic conflicts. For instance, a basketball game might be used to symbolize masculinity through its display of aggressive physicality. Barthes noted that while this code overlaps with the semantic code, it operates at a more abstract level, shaping the text's ideological framework (Zaib &Mashori, 2014).
- **The Cultural Code*:*** This code reflects the societal and cultural references embedded in a narrative, drawing upon shared knowledge, beliefs, and ideologies including historical events, scientific facts, or literary allusionsthat shape how the audience interprets the text. For example, referencing the French Revolution can invoke a reader's pre-existing understanding of its socio-political significance. Barthes argued that this code reinforces the text's credibility by aligning it with "common sense" assumptions about the world (Zaib & Mashori, 2014).

These codes are integral to how meaning is constructed and interpreted in a narrative, as they guide the audience through both the literal and the deeper connotative meanings embedded within the text. By analyzing these codes in films and other media forms, we can uncover how seemingly simple signs are imbued with complex ideological and cultural significance.

The application of the previous codes in the analysis of visual media enhances our understanding of how meaning is generated not only through the direct content of the sign but also through its cultural, symbolic, and narrative dimensions. In this way, denotation and connotation serve as foundational concepts for exploring broader cultural narratives. To build on this framework, we now turn to the concept of mythologies**,** where these connotative

meanings accumulate to form larger ideological systems that influence societal perceptions and beliefs.

1.1.3.2 Mythologies: How Cultural Narratives Shape Ideology. Another critical area of Barthesian semiotic theory is his analysis of *mythologies*, which refers to how cultural narratives and ideologies shape the way we understand the world. In his famous work *Mythologies* (1972), Barthes explored how seemingly neutral signs, such as images, products, or even events, are loaded with ideological meanings. According to Barthes, "Myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things" (p. 110). This means that myths are not inherent or naturally occurring; rather, they are historically and culturally produced narratives that are embedded into society's consciousness.

Barthes (1993) explained that myth functions as a structured set of widely accepted concepts within a culture, serving as a form of popular belief that organizes and naturalizes cultural constructs. By exposing these signs, myth reveals how what appears historically determined is, in fact, a constructed, ideologically loaded narrative. In doing so, myth not only organizes cultural experiences but also conceals the underlying ideological operations of sign systems and codes.

Barthes used the example of a French magazine cover featuring a black soldier saluting the French flag to demonstrate how myth works. On the surface, the image merely denotes a man saluting a flag, but its connotation is much deeper. Barthes argued that the image mythologized colonialism and presented it as a noble and positive aspect of French identity, thus reinforcing nationalistic and colonial ideologies. For him, myths often operate covertly in the media and in other cultural artifacts, shaping public perception and reinforcing power structures. He wrote, "Myth is the message that has been chosen by history to symbolize, to naturalize, and to impose an ideological meaning" (Barthes, 1972, p. 121).

Furthermore, Building on Barthes' work, Hartley (1994) noted that myth operates as a central mechanism within media and cultural texts to encode and decode cultural messages, thereby reinforcing dominant social ideologies. Barthes (1972) further illustrated in *Mythologies* that myth is not merely an additional layer of meaning but an advanced interpretative process. It transforms denotative and connotative readings into a cohesive ideological narrative

The concept of *mythologies* expands on the idea of connotation by exploring how cultural narratives and ideologies shape how we interpret signs. Myths, as Barthes argued, are not neutral; they are the product of historical and cultural contexts that shape our worldview. These myths serve to naturalize certain ideologies, making them appear as universal truths. While connotation reveals how meaning is layered into signs, myth takes it a step further by demonstrating how these layers come together to influence societal beliefs and norms. With this understanding of myth, we can now turn to how this semiotic theory was applied in the study of media, particularly in film, where such myths are often constructed and communicated to audiences.

1.1.3.3 Applications to Media and Film Studies. Barthes' semiotic theories have had a profound impact on media and film studies, offering critical tools for analyzing how meaning is conveyed through visual texts. One of the key ways Barthes' work influences film studies is through his conception of cinema as a language, a complex system of signs. As Barthes (1977) noted, "Cinema is a language in which each message is a complex of signs, and each sign a complex of meanings" (p. 40). This statement reflects his belief that films are not mere entertainment but rather rich cultural texts that operate on multiple levels of meaning.

In film, denotation and connotation are at play through various cinematic elements, such as mise-en-scène, camera angles, lighting, and sound. For example, the denotation of a

film scene might be the portrayal of a character walking through a forest, but the connotations could involve themes of isolation, danger, or even spiritual enlightenment, depending on how the scene is shot and framed. The Barthesian framework allows film critics to analyze these layers of meaning, revealing how visual and auditory signs create ideological narratives and emotional responses from the audience.

Additionally, Barthes' ideas on mythology have been crucial in understanding how films often construct and perpetuate ideological messages. For instance, films can be seen as vehicles for mythological narratives that reinforce cultural norms, such as the portrayal of gender roles, race, or class. This framework encourages scholars to decode these myths and explore how films might challenge or reinforce societal ideologies. As he stated, "Film gives us a vision of reality that is mediated by signs, symbols, and myths, and it is through decoding these layers that we come to understand the ideological messages embedded in films" (Barthes, 1977, p. 53).

Barthes' semiotic approach is also instrumental in advertising, where visual elements and symbols are carefully crafted to communicate not just the utility of a product, but its cultural and emotional significance. For instance, a car advertisement might not just show a vehicle but imbue it with connotations of freedom, status, or success. In both film and advertising, semiotic analysis reveals how meaning is constructed through visual and verbal signs, contributing to the shaping of social and cultural ideologies.

Through Barthes' semiotics, film studies have developed more nuanced ways of interpreting films as cultural products that are deeply embedded with ideological content. As we will see in the following sections, His ideas continue to serve as a foundation for examining the ways in which short films, as a specific form of media, use signs and symbols to communicate complex meanings and engage with audiences on ideological and emotional levels.

In sum, the application of Barthes' semiotic theory to media and film studies is crucial for understanding how the concepts of denotation, connotation, and mythologies manifest in visual media. In the realm of film, these semiotic processes work to communicate not just the literal meaning of images but also the underlying ideologies and cultural narratives. As we transition to the next subsection, we will explore how semiotics is applied specifically to visual media, focusing on the signs, symbols, and codes that structure meaning within cinematic and other visual forms. This will deepen our understanding of how semiotic analysis reveals the complexities of visual storytelling and media communication.

1.1.4 Semiotics in Visual Media

Semiotics has become an essential analytical tool for understanding the complex systems of meaning embedded in visual media. Through the study of signs, codes, and symbols, semiotic analysis allows us to decode the layers of meaning present in films, advertisements, and digital media. These forms of media do not merely convey surface-level messages; they are rich in connotations and ideologies that are crucial for a deeper understanding of their societal impact.

1.1.4.1 Signs, Codes, and Symbols in Film, Advertising, and Digital Media. In visual media, signs, codes, and symbols function as vehicles for meaning, representing not only the literal message but also underlying cultural and ideological narratives. As Chandler (2017) explained, "A sign is anything which can stand for something else" (p. 2), and this is particularly true in the case of film and advertising, where visual elements communicate a complex web of meanings. In film, signs include not just the dialogue or narrative but also the visual cues such as lighting, color, and framing that guide the audience's interpretation. According to Barthes (1977), these visual elements are never neutral but always carry cultural and social connotations that reinforce particular ideologies. In advertising, symbols such as logos, brand names, and even colors function to construct a specific identity or message

intended to persuade or influence consumers. These symbols are part of a broader code that advertisers rely on to communicate meanings in ways that often bypass rational interpretation, targeting emotions and desires (Eco, 1976).

In digital media, the rise of social platforms and online content has added new layers to this semiotic landscape. Emojis, hashtags, and memes serve as contemporary signs that communicate feelings, opinions, and cultural references in ways that are instantly recognizable across global digital communities (Manovich, 2001). In this way, visual media, from traditional film to digital platforms, relies heavily on semiotic systems to convey meanings that extend beyond words alone.

1.1.4.2 The Role of Iconography, Intertextuality, and Representation. An essential aspect of semiotic analysis in visual media is the study of iconography, intertextuality, and representation. Iconography refers to the use of recurring symbols and visual motifs that carry significant cultural meanings. As Hall (1997) noted, “Iconography is not just about what is shown, but how it is shown, and the meanings that are encoded through its repetition” (p. 57). In films, the use of iconography helps construct characters, settings, and narratives in ways that resonate with the audience’s cultural understanding. For instance, the color red in many films can symbolize passion, danger, or power, depending on the context.

Intertextuality, on the other hand, refers to the relationships between texts and how they influence one another. Kristeva (1980) argued that “any text is a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another” (p. 66). This is particularly important in film, where directors and producers often draw on previous works, whether through visual references, themes, or narrative structures, to create new meanings. A good example of intertextuality is the way contemporary filmmakers often allude to classic cinematic tropes or literature, enriching the narrative by inviting audiences to make connections with other cultural texts (Stam, 2000).

Representation, a key component in semiotics, involves how certain groups, ideas, or ideologies are depicted in media. In films, advertisements, and digital media, representation shapes how we view gender, race, class, and other social categories. According to Butler (1990), “representation is not simply a reflection of reality but a construction of it” (p. 32), meaning that the way social identities are represented in media influences the collective understanding and perpetuation of those identities. In visual media, the selective representation of characters and stories serves to reinforce dominant cultural narratives and can either challenge or perpetuate existing power structures.

1.1.4.3 Case Studies of Semiotic Applications in Various Media Forms. The power of semiotics in visual media can be further explored through specific case studies that demonstrate how signs, symbols, and representations function within particular media forms. For instance, a well-known semiotic analysis of film is found in the study of the *Star Wars* franchise, where scholars have dissected the use of iconic symbols like the light saber, the force, and the duality of the Jedi and Sith to explore themes of good versus evil, power, and identity (Barker, 2004). The use of these symbols reflects broader ideological debates, such as the tension between individual freedom and authoritarian control.

In advertising, semiotic analysis has been applied to the study of visual campaigns, such as Coca-Cola’s iconic holiday ads, which use imagery of family, joy, and togetherness to evoke emotional responses and align the product with positive, universal values (Lindstrom, 2008). These advertisements rely heavily on the connotations of certain images, such as the polar bear or Santa Claus, to reinforce a message of warmth and tradition, while also promoting consumerism as part of the holiday experience.

In the digital age, social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter also offer rich case studies for semiotic analysis. Memes, for example, have become powerful tools for communicating social commentary, political opinions, and cultural critiques. As Shifman

(2014) argued, “Memes are not just humorous or viral; they are part of the broader culture of communication that allows people to participate in and shape collective ideologies” (p. 16). Memes often rely on layered intertextual references, iconography, and irony to communicate meaning, making them an ideal subject for semiotic analysis in contemporary digital media.

In conclusion, semiotics provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how meaning is produced, communicated, and interpreted through signs, symbols, and codes across various forms of media. Rooted in the works of Saussure and Peirce, the field has evolved into a powerful tool for analyzing cultural texts, from language and literature to visual media such as film and advertising. By examining denotation and connotation, mythologies, and representation, semiotics reveals the layered nature of meaning-making and the ideological forces at play in the media we consume. This theoretical foundation sets the stage for a more focused exploration of how semiotics operates in visual media, particularly in short films, where the manipulation of signs and symbols is central to conveying narratives and shaping audience interpretations. As we move forward, the second section will delve into the specific role of visual media in the creation of short films, with a particular focus on environmental narratives. Through this lens, we will explore how these films serve as powerful tools for communicating environmental messages and shaping public perceptions.

1.2 Section Two: Visual Media, Short Films, and Environmental Narratives

This section explores the intricate relationship between visual media, short films, and environmental narratives, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding their roles in storytelling. The section begins by introducing the power of visual media as a storytelling tool, focusing on how images and film shape narratives and the evolution of film as a medium. Following this, it delves into the concept of short films, examining their historical background, key characteristics, and classification by genre, purpose, and artistic approach. Subsequently, it focuses on the cinematic techniques and visual aesthetics that enhance short

films' narrative impact, including plot structure, role-setting and character development, pacing, cinematography, sound, animation and its evolution and finally editing. Building on this, it turns to environmental narratives in short films example, highlighting how eco-cinema has become a prominent medium for addressing ecological issues like climate change, sustainability, and pollution such as in animated visual works. It then considers the role of audience interpretation in visual media, particularly how different viewers construct meaning based on their cultural and ideological perspectives. Finally, the section concludes with a summary of the key points and a transition to the practical chapter, setting methodological framework for analyzing short films using semiotic theory.

1.2.1 Introduction to Visual Media and Storytelling

Visual media encompasses a wide array of communication forms that primarily utilize visual elements, such as images, videos, graphics, illustrations, and symbols, to convey meaning, elicit emotions, or disseminate information. These forms can be static (e.g., photographs, paintings, posters) or dynamic (e.g., films, animations, digital presentations), and they hold a prominent position in contemporary communication, education, advertising, and cultural expression. As a powerful tool of representation, visual media stimulates perception, shapes social narratives, and facilitates both artistic and informational expression.

Among these forms, film stands out for its unique capacity to shape narratives and communicate ideas through a combination of images, sound, and movement, creating immersive experiences that engage audiences emotionally and intellectually. According to Metz (1974), film is distinctive because it "conveys meaning through a combination of visual and auditory elements, making it a language in itself" (p. 39). This ability of images to evoke emotions and convey complex ideas without words underscores the narrative strength of visual media.

Filmmakers, as visual storytellers, employ various techniques, including composition, lighting, editing, and sound design, to direct the audience's attention and shape their understanding of the story being told. Through these methods, visual media transcends mere representation of reality, enabling the creation of alternate worlds, emotions, and perspectives.

1.2.1.1 The Power of Images and Film in Shaping Narratives. Images and film possess a unique ability to shape narratives, influencing how stories are told and received. Film, as a visual medium, transcends language barriers and has the power to evoke emotions, provoke thought, and communicate complex ideas through images alone. Metz (1974) argued that "film is a language in itself"(p. 39), capable of conveying meaning through a combination of visual and auditory elements. The power of visual storytelling lies in its capacity to engage the audience's senses, creating a dynamic interaction between the story and the viewer. Images, whether through a single shot or an entire sequence, can evoke feelings of fear, joy, sadness, or excitement, making them indispensable in constructing narrative meaning.

Furthermore, images in film can convey nuanced meanings quickly, often eliciting immediate reactions from the audience. As Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) emphasized, "visuals offer a powerful way of conveying meaning in ways that can be more immediate and emotionally engaging than written or spoken language" (p. 15). Through cinematographic techniques like lighting, framing, and movement, filmmakers manipulate visuals to steer the viewer's emotions and perceptions, enhancing the storytelling process. The combination of these elements not only enhances the narrative but also deepens the viewer's engagement with the story, ensuring that visual media is a potent tool for communication.

1.2.1.2 Evolution of Film as a Medium for Communication. The evolution of film as a medium for communication has transformed its role in shaping narratives, making it one of the most influential forms of media. Early films, such as those produced in the silent film era, relied heavily on visual cues, body language, and physical expressions to convey

meaning, as there was no spoken dialogue. This early style of filmmaking focused on the ability of images and gestures to communicate emotions and actions, creating a form of universal language that could be understood across cultures and languages. Bordwell and Thompson (2013) noted, “Silent cinema depended on visual storytelling, creating a lexicon of gestures, expressions, and visual metaphors to convey emotions and plot” (p. 72).

However, with the introduction of synchronized sound in the late 1920s, film gained a new dimension, incorporating dialogue that enriched the narrative. This technological breakthrough allowed filmmakers to experiment with not just visuals but also sound, music, and voice to enhance storytelling. The inclusion of dialogue and sound effects enabled filmmakers to convey subtext, mood, and tone more effectively, adding depth to character development and plot structure (Thompson & Bordwell, 2013). As a result, film evolved from a purely visual medium to a dynamic combination of sight and sound, where each element worked in tandem to communicate complex ideas and emotions.

As film technology continued to advance, filmmakers gained new tools for manipulating narrative structures and exploring different forms of communication. The introduction of color, special effects, and digital technologies has further expanded the possibilities of what film can achieve in storytelling. Today, film is a multifaceted medium capable of conveying intricate narratives and emotions, engaging audiences both intellectually and emotionally. The evolution of film has solidified its place as a dominant form of visual media, capable of exploring a broad range of themes, from social issues to personal identity, and continuing to shape narratives in profound ways.

Following this exploration of the evolution of film as a communication medium, the next section will delve into defining and classifying short films, examining their historical background, key characteristics such as duration, structure, and storytelling styles, as well as how short films are classified by genre, purpose, and artistic approach.

1.2.2 Defining and Classifying Short Films

1.2.2.1 Historical Background of Short Films. Short films, as a distinct form of cinema, have a rich history that dates back to the very beginnings of filmmaking. The early pioneers of cinema, such as the Lumière brothers, Georges Méliès, and Thomas Edison, produced films that were often short in duration. These early films were simple, often capturing everyday life or fantastical stories, and usually lasting no more than a few minutes. As film technology advanced, filmmakers began to explore new ways to tell stories within the confines of shorter runtimes.

Historically, short films were often associated with experimental cinema, serving as a testing ground for innovative ideas and techniques that would later influence feature films. For example, in the 1920s and 1930s, the avant-garde movements in Europe, such as Surrealism and Dadaism, used short films to express abstract concepts, political messages, and personal visions. This tradition continued throughout the 20th century, with filmmakers using short films as a medium to experiment with form and content (López, 2005). As the medium evolved, short films became more widely recognized for their ability to convey powerful narratives in a condensed time frame, offering a unique opportunity for creative expression.

Transitioning from the historical context, it is important to now explore the key characteristics of short films, particularly how they are defined by their duration, structure, and distinctive storytelling styles.

1.2.2.2 Key Characteristics: Duration, Structure, Storytelling Styles. One of the defining features of a short film is its brevity. Typically, short films have a runtime of under 40 minutes, with many lasting between 5 and 20 minutes. This limited duration requires filmmakers to condense their narratives into a compact structure, often focusing on a single theme, character, or idea. According to Rabiger (2014), short films offer an economy of

storytelling, which is their defining strength. The compressed format necessitates a focused and direct narrative, making short films an ideal medium for conveying emotions, ideas, or social commentary without the need for extended exposition.

The structure of short films is often more flexible than feature-length films, with many experimenting with unconventional narrative forms. Short films may present linear stories, but they are also frequently non-linear, relying on techniques such as flashbacks, fragmented timelines, or non-traditional narrative arcs. This freedom allows filmmakers to explore a wide range of storytelling styles, from dialogue-driven narratives to visual or experimental works that emphasize mood and atmosphere over traditional plot development.

Additionally, the storytelling style in short films often aligns with the medium's inherent constraints. Short films are often characterized by a departure from conventional narrative techniques, instead placing emphasis on evocative imagery and emotional resonance to engage viewers (Meir, 2012). This approach results in films that focus more on capturing a feeling or moment rather than adhering to a traditional three-act structure. This brevity and immediacy make short films particularly effective in conveying powerful messages or emotions in a short span of time, often leaving lasting impressions on viewers.

With an understanding of the core characteristics of short films, it is now essential to consider how they are classified by genre, purpose, and artistic approach.

1.2.2.3 Classification of Short Films by Genre, Purpose, and Artistic Approach. Short films are a diverse form of media, and their classification depends on various factors such as genre, purpose, and artistic approach. Genres in short films can range from drama, comedy, and animation to experimental, documentary, and horror. Each genre offers distinct opportunities for filmmakers to explore different emotional tones, narrative structures, and audience experiences. For instance, in a short drama, the focus may be on emotional depth

and character development within a limited time frame, while an animated short might prioritize visual storytelling and creative expression (Buckland, 2003).

In addition to genre, the purpose of the short film plays a crucial role in its classification. Short films can serve a variety of purposes, such as entertainment, social commentary, education, or advocacy. Many filmmakers create short films with the intent to convey a particular message, often relating to political or cultural issues. For example, environmental short films may focus on raising awareness about climate change or sustainability. As noted by Nichols (2010) that documentary shorts, for instance, often serve as a platform for educating the public and invoking social change.

Artistic approach is another important factor in the classification of short films. Many filmmakers choose to approach their work from an avant-garde or experimental perspective, which can lead to films that defy traditional narrative conventions and explore more abstract or symbolic forms of expression. These films may focus on visual aesthetics, sound, or mood rather than linear plot development (Elsaesser, 2005). On the other hand, some filmmakers use short films to experiment with genre-blending or hybrid formats, combining elements from multiple genres to create innovative and dynamic works.

Having discussed the historical background, characteristics, and classification of short films, the next section will explore cinematic techniques in short films, focusing on the narrative methods, visual aesthetics, and use of sound that contribute to the unique storytelling potential of the medium.

1.2.3 Cinematic Techniques in Short Films

1.2.3.1 Narrative Techniques and Role-Setting in Short Films: Plot Structure, Pacing, and Character Development. In short films, narrative techniques are essential for shaping stories within a limited runtime. One of the foremost challenges faced by short filmmakers is the ability to craft a compelling plot within a brief duration. Unlike feature

films, which benefit from extended runtimes for building complex, multi-layered plots, short films are typically forced to rely on a simpler structure, often centering on a single conflict or a pivotal moment of change (Turan, 2008). In these films, the narrative frequently follows a compressed version of the traditional three-act structure, exposition, conflict, and resolution, though these stages are condensed and tend to be more fluid due to time constraints.

At the outset, the exposition or beginning phase quickly introduces the main character and establishes the central conflict. The main character is typically presented early on, giving audiences an immediate understanding of their inner thoughts, goals, and the challenges they are likely to face. Every line of dialogue and action is carefully crafted to advance the narrative, ensuring that even supporting characters contribute meaningfully to the overall story (Liu, 2021). The middle section of the narrative is dedicated to exploring difficulties, interactions, and contradictory conflicts. During this phase, characters confront various challenges and navigate conflicting forces, propelling the plot toward its climax. This section often introduces a turning point or unexpected twist that shifts the direction of the narrative.

Techniques such as obstacles, psychological struggles, and unexpected events heighten dramatic tension, while the use of coincidences and dramatic irony, where seemingly positive events lead to negative consequences, further accentuate the emotional stakes (Liu, 2021). In the climax and resolution phase, the narrative reaches its most intense point. The climax represents the culmination of the story's tension, where the most dramatic conflicts are resolved. This moment is critical, as it not only summarizes the underlying themes of the film but also provides a clear, often twist-laden, conclusion that delivers the central message. As noted by Liu (2021), the resolution should involve handling a challenging question or presenting an unexpected result that reflects the film's core implications. Bruce Block's theory (2020) further emphasized that the narrative structure of exposition, conflict, and

resolution can be equally applied to the visual dimension of a film, highlighting the importance of visual exposition, visual conflict, and visual resolution.

In addition to these structural elements, role-setting plays a crucial part in plot development. Short films frequently depend on the activities of their characters (their roles) to drive the plot forward. Effective roles allow audiences to identify with characters and experience their emotional journeys as if they were part of their own inner world. Liu (2021) remarked that a well-established role enables viewers to share in the character's happiness and pain, as well as to witness significant transformations. Since there is little time to develop complex plots, filmmakers often focus on what characters do, through their actions, movements, and gestures, to convey meaning and emotion. In classic cartoons like "Tom and Jerry", for instance, the simplicity of the storyline is offset by the strong visual impact and iconic imagery of the characters. Their physical actions, which reflect their internal states and transformations, become the primary means of storytelling, reflecting the film's overall narrative economy.

Pacing is a fundamental element in short films, driven by the need to compress a narrative into a limited time frame. The brisk pace often necessitates rapid unfolding of scenes and swift transitions between key events to ensure that the narrative arc is completed. Filmmakers use quick, impactful cuts not only to provide essential narrative information but also to create a sense of urgency that maintains audience engagement (Grant, 2014). This tight pacing must be balanced with clarity and coherence to allow the audience to follow the story despite the rapid sequence of events. Visual storytelling techniques often supplement dialogue, ensuring that every moment serves a dual purpose: advancing the plot and underscoring the film's thematic concerns.

Character development in short films presents its own set of challenges. With little time to devote to extensive back stories or intricate psychological exploration, filmmakers

rely on visual shorthand and concentrated moments of action to reveal essential character traits and emotional shifts. As Berenstein (2010) suggested, short films often capture significant transformations within a very limited narrative scope, making each brief moment of character evolution essential to the overall impact of the film. The concept of role-setting is intricately linked with character development. In short films, character roles are critical in reflecting the inner world of the individual and in establishing an emotional connection with the audience.

A well-cast and well-developed role helps audiences identify with the character and experience their emotional journey firsthand. For example, Liu (2021, p. 98) noted that the most compelling characters often undergo drastic transformations that reflect profound emotional changes. Since there is insufficient time for lengthy expository dialogue, filmmakers focus on what the character does, their movements, gestures, and physical expressions, to reveal their inner state. Such non-verbal cues are effective in conveying nuanced aspects of personality, including responses to joy, fear, or conflict. The integration of these subtle cues enriches the overall narrative, contributing depth and authenticity to the characters' journeys.

In summary, narrative techniques in short films hinge on a carefully orchestrated interplay of plot structure, pacing, and character development through role-setting. The streamlined nature of short films necessitates a focus on essential narrative elements, where every aspect, from the initial exposition through to the dramatic climax and resolution, is meticulously designed to maximize meaning and emotional impact. This integrated approach ensures that even within a brief runtime, short films can deliver a powerful and resonant storytelling experience.

Having discussed the narrative strategies that define short films, it is essential to consider how visual aesthetics further enhances storytelling, providing filmmakers with the tools to express tone, mood, and emotion beyond dialogue

1.2.3.2 Visual Aesthetics: Cinematography, Animation, Editing. Visual aesthetics in short films are a powerful means of storytelling. Cinematography, which includes the composition, lighting, camera movement, and shot selection, serves to establish the film's mood and atmosphere. In short films, where time constraints prevent long scenes of exposition, cinematography often conveys crucial narrative information. The use of close-up shots, for example, can intensify emotional moments, while wide shots can establish context or create a sense of isolation or grandeur. Bordwell and Thompson (2013) claimed that cinematography is central to how films communicate meaning, as the visual composition can symbolize emotions or ideas in ways that dialogue cannot. Through careful manipulation of light and shadow, color palettes, and framing, filmmakers guide the viewer's emotional response and can create a visual shorthand for narrative development.

Animation, a fundamental aspect of visual aesthetics in short films, presents a unique mode of storytelling by generating motion from sequential images rather than capturing real-world action. Unlike live-action cinema, which maintains an indexical connection to physical reality, animation operates through iconic and symbolic representations, making it a constructed illusion (Peirce, 1931; Stam, 2000). As Wells (2005) observed, animation is "a craft that transforms static images into a dynamic narrative experience" (p. 47), while Furniss (1998) noted that it achieves the illusion of movement by manipulating interframe spaces, thereby highlighting its artificial nature.

The development of animation has profoundly influenced its visual language. Its roots can be traced to pre-cinematic devices such as the phenakistoscope (1832) and zoetrope (1834), which produced motion by displaying a rapid succession of still images. Early

narrative animations like Émile Cohl's *Fantasmagorie* (1908) rejected realism in favor of abstract, dream-like visuals that invited symbolic interpretation (Furniss, 1998). During the golden age of theatrical shorts (1920s–1950s), studios like Disney and Warner Bros. cultivated distinctive visual styles: Disney emphasized anthropomorphism and emotional realism to convey cultural values (*Steamboat Willie*, 1928), while Warner Bros. employed subversive humor and exaggerated visual forms to create a more irreverent tone (*Looney Tunes*) (Gabler, 2006).

In contemporary cinema, animation has embraced digital tools and hybrid techniques. Pixar's Luxo Jr. (1986) brought emotional depth to minimalistic forms, symbolizing familial dynamics through lifelike lamp movements. Meanwhile, independent creators like Steve Cutts use a mixture of 2D, 3D, and collage aesthetics to produce pointed critiques of consumerism, environmental degradation, and modern alienation (Rushworth, 2021). Figure 2 illustrates a scene from Cutts' short animated film *Happiness* (2017), which exemplifies his visual style and thematic focus on societal disillusionment.

Figure 2

Short Animated Film Happiness (2017)



Note. Screenshot from *Happiness* by Steve Cutts, 2017, *YouTube*.https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eRLJscAlk1M

Editing, another critical element in visual aesthetics, plays a vital role in shaping the rhythm, continuity, and emotional impact of short films. The way a short film is edited can significantly influence how the audience perceives time and narrative progression. Techniques such as jump cuts, cross-cutting, or montages are often used to create fast-paced sequences or to juxtapose different narrative elements within the film. According to Dancyger (2011), editing is not only about the technical aspect of piecing together shots, but it also serves as the primary means of constructing narrative flow and building emotional resonance in the viewer. Through the careful manipulation of time and space in the editing process, filmmakers craft a narrative that is both impactful and efficient.

Now that we have examined the role of cinematography, animation, and editing in shaping the aesthetic and narrative experience of short films, it is essential to explore the use of sound and music, which further enhances meaning and adds depth to the storytelling process.

1.2.3.3 Use of Sound and Music to Enhance Meaning. Sound and music are integral to the emotional and narrative depth of short films. In short films, where there is often little room for dialogue, the soundtrack and sound design can take on even greater significance in communicating meaning. Sound effects, ambient noise, and musical scores can set the tone, indicate transitions, or even symbolize internal states of characters. For example, the use of silence or muted sound in specific scenes can create tension or draw attention to a character's isolation, while a swelling score can evoke a powerful emotional response from the audience.

Music, in particular, plays a significant role in underscoring the emotional beats of short films. A carefully chosen piece of music can enhance the themes or mood of the film and evoke particular cultural or emotional associations. The music in films functions not only as an emotional trigger but also as a narrative tool, reinforcing what is happening on-screen or providing an ironic contrast to the imagery (Leech, 2012). Whether it is a minimalist score or

a more complex orchestral arrangement, music in short films can be used to create an immersive experience, guiding the viewer's emotional journey and highlighting the subtext of the narrative.

Moreover, sound design, such as the use of foley effects, voiceovers, or soundscapes, contributes to the realism and texture of short films. In films with minimal dialogue, sound design can help to establish context or convey emotions that may not be explicitly stated. For instance, the sound of footsteps, wind, or distant voices can communicate a sense of space or urgency, heightening the immersive experience (Chion, 1994).

Having explored the various narrative techniques, visual aesthetics, and use of sound and music in short films, it is now clear that these elements work together to create a cohesive and impactful storytelling experience. In the next subsection, we will delve into the role of environmental narratives in short films, examining how filmmakers address themes such as sustainability, climate change, and ecological awareness through cinematic techniques.

1.2.4 Environmental Narratives in Short Films

1.2.4.1 The Rise of Eco-Cinema: How Film Contributes to Environmental Awareness Through Short Films. The concept of eco-cinema has emerged as a significant movement in contemporary filmmaking, particularly within short films. Eco-cinema refers to films that address environmental issues, either directly through narratives focused on ecological crises or more subtly through imagery that critiques human impact on the natural world. This rise of eco-cinema can be traced to growing global concerns over environmental degradation, climate change, and unsustainable practices. Eco-cinema emerged as filmmakers increasingly sought to engage audiences with pressing environmental concerns, using the medium of film to catalyze social change (Anderson, 2012). Short films, with their ability to focus on single, powerful moments, are well-suited for encapsulating the urgency of environmental issues in ways that resonate emotionally with audiences.

In the realm of eco-cinema, short films often take on the responsibility of providing a snapshot of a larger environmental narrative, emphasizing the personal and localized consequences of global issues. As opposed to feature-length films that may tackle a range of subplots and characters, short films zero in on a singular aspect of the environmental crisis, offering poignant, impactful statements about the state of the planet. For example, *The Lost Forest* (2018) uses compelling imagery and a limited runtime to convey the heartbreaking depletion of natural resources, urging viewers to reflect on the unsustainable paths humanity is taking (Morrison, 2019). The brevity of short films allows them to present stark, clear-cut messages, often appealing to the viewer's sense of urgency about environmental conservation.

Within this framework, animated short films have gained prominence for their distinctive visual language and symbolic richness. Animation allows filmmakers to construct eco-critical narratives using metaphor, anthropomorphism, and surreal imagery. For instance, a polluted river, often stylized in animation, may denote ecological neglect and simultaneously connote the exploitative consequences of industrial capitalism, demonstrating animation's potential as a tool for "environmental storytelling" (Ivakhiv, 2013).

Moreover, animated films often rely on the symbolism of nature to critique human-centered worldviews. In *Over the Hedge* (2006), anthropomorphic animals are used to denote habitat loss while connoting the broader ecological consequences of anthropocentrism (Ivakhiv, 2013). These techniques not only reinforce environmental messages but also provide audiences with imaginative entry points into urgent ecological discourses.

Transitioning from the rise of eco-cinema and how short films and animation contribute to environmental awareness, we can now examine the themes explored in environmental short films, which serve as powerful narratives for addressing critical environmental challenges.

1.2.4.2 Themes in Environmental Short Films: Climate Change, Pollution, Sustainability. Environmental short films typically revolve around central themes of climate change, pollution, and sustainability, each of which highlights critical aspects of the ongoing environmental crisis. Climate change is a pervasive topic, often depicted through visual metaphors or narratives that dramatize the devastating effects of rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and environmental instability. Short films about climate change frequently illustrate the direct consequences of human actions on the planet's ecosystem, such as melting glaciers, forest fires, and floods. According to Giddens (2011), climate change films capture not only the visible destruction of the environment but also the emotional toll it takes on individuals, families, and communities. These films often encourage viewers to question their relationship with the natural world and provoke a sense of collective responsibility.

Pollution, in its various forms, air, water, plastic waste—is another prevalent theme in environmental short films. Filmmakers use stark imagery of polluted landscapes, oceans littered with plastic, or smog-choked cities to depict the grim consequences of unchecked industrialization and human negligence. In *A Plastic Ocean* (2016), a documentary-style short film, the filmmakers expose the scale of ocean plastic pollution, making it impossible for the viewer to ignore the environmental damage caused by single-use plastics (Eriksen, 2017). These films highlight how pollution not only harms ecosystems but also impacts human health, triggering calls for systemic change in waste management and consumer habits.

Sustainability, meanwhile, is often presented as the hopeful counter-narrative in environmental short films. Sustainability-themed shorts tend to focus on solutions, highlighting efforts to restore damaged ecosystems, reduce carbon footprints, or implement sustainable agricultural practices. These films often celebrate innovation in green technologies or alternative energy sources, offering an optimistic view of how collective action can make a positive difference. For example, short films like *The Green Machine* (2017) showcase

emerging technologies, such as vertical farming and renewable energy, illustrating the potential for positive environmental change (Barrett, 2018). Through these narratives, filmmakers emphasize the importance of sustainable living and the hope that small, grassroots actions can lead to large-scale environmental reform.

With a better understanding of the themes explored in environmental short films, we can now turn to notable examples that have used these themes to convey powerful environmental messages.

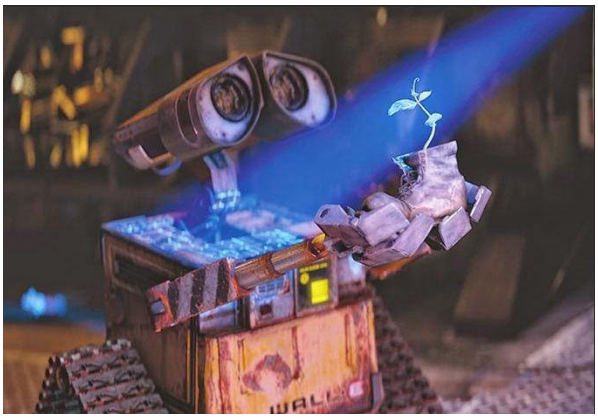
1.2.4.3 Notable Examples of Environmental Storytelling in Short Films. Several short films have become iconic examples of how the medium can be used effectively to address environmental issues and raise awareness. These films often employ a combination of narrative, aesthetics, and thematic exploration to bring the issues to life. One such example is *The Silent Child* (2017), which, while focusing on the story of a deaf child, also addresses the environmental impact of noise pollution. The film has been praised for its use of sound and silence as a means of conveying the disruptive nature of noise pollution in modern urban life. As Greenfield (2018) pointed out that through its subtle narrative and sound design, *The Silent Child* challenges viewers to consider how environmental factors affect our sensory experiences and wellbeing.

Another example is *Wall-E* (2008), a well-known short animated film that blends a futuristic dystopian vision with a clear environmental message. Set in a post-apocalyptic world where Earth is abandoned due to overwhelming pollution, the film tells the story of a lone robot tasked with cleaning up the planet. The film's poignant critique of consumerism and environmental neglect, alongside its depiction of a damaged Earth, underscores the urgent need for sustainable living (Cohen, 2017). Although technically a feature film, *Wall-E*'s impact as an environmental narrative resonates with short-form storytelling as well, using

visual and narrative elements to communicate the dire consequences of unchecked human activity.

Figure 3

Short Animated Film Wall-E (2008)



Note. Screenshot from *WALL-E* (2008), Pixar Animation Studios. Retrieved from Charlotte Lozier Institute (2018).

Further, the short film *Revolutions* (2019) explores the theme of renewable energy through the lens of a futuristic society that has transitioned away from fossil fuels. It portrays a world where wind and solar power are the primary energy sources, showcasing how technological advancement can support .a more sustainable way of life. This film highlights the importance of innovation in addressing global environmental challenges while offering a hopeful vision for the future (Hughes, 2020).

In summary, environmental short films have become powerful tools for conveying urgent ecological issues. Through themes of climate change, pollution, and sustainability, these films not only raise awareness but also offer potential solutions, making them a crucial part of the broader eco-cinema movement. By examining notable examples of environmental storytelling, it becomes evident how short films can blend narrative, aesthetics, and thematic elements to inspire viewers to engage with the environmental challenges of our time.

Having explored environmental narratives in short films, the next section will turn to the role of audience interpretation in visual media, examining how audiences engage with and interpret the messages conveyed by these films.

1.2.5 The Role of Audience Interpretation in Visual Media

1.2.5.1 Active vs. Passive Viewing: How Audiences Construct Meaning. The way in which audiences engage with visual media has been a central point of study in media theory, particularly in distinguishing between active and passive viewing. Active viewing refers to the process in which audiences actively construct meaning from the media they consume, critically engaging with the content, questioning its messages, and interpreting its underlying ideologies. Hall (1973) viewed that the audience is not a passive receiver of messages but an active participant in the process of constructing meaning. This concept aligns with the idea of a 'negotiated' or 'oppositional' reading, where viewers decode media texts in ways that may either align with or challenge the dominant narrative presented.

In contrast, passive viewing is associated with a more uncritical consumption of media, where audiences passively accept the meanings embedded within the content. In this sense, media producers can be seen as possessing more control over the audience's interpretation, with little engagement or reflection on the part of the viewer. However, scholars like Fiske (1990) argued that even passive viewers are influenced by their own personal experiences, which shape how they understand the content, thereby complicating the binary between active and passive consumption. This suggests that, while some viewers may not engage with media critically, they are still active participants in the construction of meaning based on their backgrounds, experiences, and contexts.

Thus, the mode of viewing, whether active or passive, has a profound impact on how media is interpreted. The next component is about how semiotics and reception theories inform these processes.

1.2.5.2 Semiotics and Audience Reception Theories. Semiotics, the study of signs and symbols, plays a crucial role in understanding how audiences decode and interpret media messages. In visual media, signs such as images, colors, and sounds carry meaning beyond their literal form. According to Barthes (1972), the meaning of a sign is not inherent but constructed through cultural and social contexts. Semiotics helps to explain how viewers make sense of these signs, interpreting them through a web of cultural references, historical contexts, and personal experiences. For example, the use of the color red in film may be interpreted differently depending on the cultural significance of red in the viewer's society (e.g., danger, passion, or power).

Audience reception theories complement semiotics by focusing on how different viewers interpret the same media text. These theories emphasize that audiences are not homogenous and that individual background, culture, and social position influence the way media is understood. Reception theory suggests that the meaning of a film or visual media is not fixed but varies depending on the viewer's perspective. Jensen (2015) explained that audiences bring their own experiences, ideologies, and assumptions to the text, thus shaping the meanings they extract from it. This theory aligns with the concept of encoding and decoding introduced by Hall (1973), where media producers encode messages into their works, but audiences decode them in a variety of ways.

As we move from semiotic analysis and audience reception theories, we turn to explore how cultural and ideological perspectives further influence the interpretation of visual media.

1.2.5.3 How Different Cultural and Ideological Perspectives Shape Interpretation. Cultural and ideological frameworks play a significant role in how audiences interpret visual media. These frameworks are shaped by factors such as nationality, religion, gender, socioeconomic status, and political beliefs, all of which affect how media content is

perceived. For instance, a film with political overtones may be interpreted differently by viewers from different political affiliations, with some reading it as a critique of the status quo and others as a reinforcement of existing power structures. According to Storey (2003), ideology is a central component in how media shapes and reflects social values, and viewers' interpretations are deeply influenced by their ideological position.

The influence of cultural context is also significant in determining how visual media is understood. What might be considered humorous or ironic in one culture could be perceived as offensive or inappropriate in another. In *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980), for example, the humorous portrayal of a remote African tribe encountering Western technology is deeply shaped by the cultural context of both the filmmakers and the intended audience. The film's satire may be read as a commentary on the absurdity of modern civilization, but interpretations will vary significantly based on cultural backgrounds and personal experiences. This exemplifies how cultural nuances can radically shift the meanings drawn from the same media text (Morley, 1980).

Furthermore, globalized media has resulted in audiences from different cultural contexts interacting with the same films, sometimes leading to varied interpretations based on local customs, values, and beliefs. As global audiences engage with Hollywood blockbusters or internationally produced films, they bring their own cultural and ideological frames to their interpretation. This dynamic highlights the importance of understanding the intersection between culture, ideology, and media consumption, and how these factors shape the meaning of visual media in a globalized world.

In summary, Audience interpretation of visual media is a complex and multifaceted process, influenced by the mode of viewing (active or passive), the semiotic codes embedded in the content, and the viewer's cultural, ideological perspectives and other key aspects.

Conclusion

Visual media plays a crucial role in storytelling by using images, sounds, and narrative techniques to convey complex messages and engage audiences emotionally and intellectually. The power of visual media lies in its ability to transcend language barriers, evoke emotions, and communicate layered meanings, making it a versatile tool for both artistic and ideological expression. From the historical evolution of short films to the intricate cinematic techniques employed in their production, visual media continues to evolve, shaping how stories are told and how audiences engage with them. As we move to the practical chapter of this dissertation, the focus will shift towards a detailed exploration of how these theoretical concepts are applied, particularly in the context of semiotic analysis of short films and their role in environmental storytelling.

Chapter Two: Research Methodology, Analysis, and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter bridges the theoretical foundation established in the previous chapters with the practical implementation of the research. It applies Roland Barthes' semiotic framework to the analysis of *The Turning Point*, a 2020 short animated film by Steve Cutts, with the aim of uncovering the denotations, connotations, ideological myths, and codes embedded in both the visual and narrative signs of the film. Particular attention is given to how the reversal of roles between humans and animals serves to expose and critique anthropocentric worldviews. Through this semiotic lens, the study explores how environmental, cultural, and ideological meanings are constructed and conveyed in the animation, positioning it not merely as an artistic medium, but as a site of critical reflection and cultural commentary.

The chapter is structured into three main sections. The first section provides an overview of the research methodology and design, outlining the qualitative and interpretative nature of the study, along with the rationale behind the choice of the video as the primary unit of analysis. The second section presents the core of the analysis, focusing on selected scenes from the film to examine the system of signs employed by the animator. The third section offers a critical discussion of the key findings in light of the research questions, outlines the implications of the study, identifies limitations encountered during the analysis, and proposes recommendations for future research, particularly in the field of semiotics and the study of environmental ideologies in visual media.

2.1 Section One: Research Methodology

This section outlines the research methodology adopted to analyze *The Turning Point* in semiotic terms. It begins by presenting the study design, including the identification and justification of the chosen methodological approach. Next, essential background information

about the unit of analysis, Steve Cutts' short animated film *The Turning Point,* is introduced. This is followed by a detailed description of the film's thematic context, visual style, and symbolic components. Finally, the section sets out the procedures used for data collection and analysis and highlights the interpretative strategies that were applied.

2.1.1 Study Design

This research employs a qualitative, descriptive design grounded in interpretive semiotics. Guided by the research questions and overall objectives, the study uses Barthes' layered model of signification to conduct a systematic analysis of *The Turning Point* (2020) by Steve Cutts. Drawing on Barthes (1972), semiotics is understood as the study of signs within cultural contexts and how they generate meaning. Accordingly, the method consists of a scene-by-scene content analysis in which denotative and connotative signs are identified, classified, and interpreted; underlying ideological myths are then uncovered; and the interrelations among signs are examined through Barthes' five narrative codes. This approach enables a rich, nuanced understanding of how the film communicates its environmental critique and cultural commentary.

2.1.2Unit of Analysis

This study centers on the semiotic analysis of *The Turning Point* (2020), a short animated film created by British animator Steve Cutts, renowned for his socially critical works that target themes such as consumerism, environmental degradation, and modern alienation (Rushworth, 2021). The film was released on January 1, 2020, via Cutts' official YouTube channel, which has amassed a substantial following, reflecting the broad public engagement with his animation as a form of digital activism (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). Since its release, the corpus has accumulated over 10 million views, 560,000 likes, and 16,000 comments as of April 2025, highlighting its viral impact and widespread resonance in contemporary digital culture.

The short video functions not only as an artistic expression but also as a powerful critique of ecological collapse, capitalist consumption, and human complacency, central issues within the genre of eco-cinema (Rust, Monani, & Cubitt, 2013). The film's haunting atmosphere is enhanced by an original score by Wantaways, whose music has independently gained traction, with one track surpassing 140,000 views. Its dialogue-free structure and use of anthropomorphized animals in human roles subvert traditional human-animal relationships, a common strategy in animated allegory to expose societal flaws (Wells, 2002).

The film's construction relies heavily on visual and auditory semiotic elements, such as symbolic imagery, metaphorical actions, and atmospheric soundscapes, that align with Roland Barthes' (1972) framework of denotation, connotation, and myth. The narrative progression follows a linear cause-and-effect sequence: from hyper-consumerist urban life to environmental devastation and eventual human extinction. This trajectory not only illustrates a moral arc but also mobilizes visual metaphors to communicate urgent ideological messages (Stam, 2000). The absence of spoken dialogue intensifies reliance on universal semiotic signs, icons, indices, and symbols, making the film accessible across linguistic and cultural boundaries (Peirce, 1931).

Given its integration of symbolic representation, narrative economy, and emotionally resonant aesthetics, *The Turning Point* serves as an ideal unit of analysis for a qualitative, semiotic investigation. It allows for a nuanced exploration of how cultural and ecological ideologies are embedded in visual and auditory signs, and how these signs work together to construct a critical narrative of environmental consciousness.

2.1.3 Film Selection

The corpus selected for this study consists of a single short animated film, *The Turning Point* (2020), created by Steve Cutts. This film was chosen purposefully based on several criteria aligned with the aims of the current research. First, the film directly addresses

critical environmental issues, such as ecological collapse, deforestation, pollution, and the impact of consumerism, making it highly relevant to the investigation of environmental ideologies in visual media.

Second, *The Turning Point* employs a rich and complex network of signs, visual, symbolic, and auditory, making it an ideal candidate for semiotic analysis using Barthes's (1972) framework of denotation, connotation, and myth. Its unique narrative structure, use of anthropomorphism, and absence of dialogue intensify its reliance on semiotic devices, allowing for a deeper interpretive reading of its ideological messages.

Third, the film has achieved wide circulation and cultural impact since its release on YouTube, where it has amassed over 10 million views. Its viral status and reception across digital platforms, along with coverage in mainstream media and scholarly discussions, further validate its significance as a cultural text worthy of academic inquiry (Jenkins et al., 2013; Rust, Monani, & Cubitt, 2013).

Fourth, the film comes in a time where the world is more aware of mankind's effect on the planet. The anthropomorphic portrayal of animals doing human-like activities is a reflection of the current unsustainable practices of society. The film interrogates the ethics of consumerism and resource exploitation. The film's minimalism and symbolic imagery appeal to the audience and invite personal and collective contemplation about our environmental responsibilities.

Lastly, the choice to focus on a single, self-contained film aligns with the qualitative nature of this study, which prioritizes depth of analysis over breadth. By narrowing the corpus to one thematically rich and semiotically dense text, this research seeks to provide a detailed and nuanced examination of how environmental ideologies are encoded and communicated in contemporary animated media.

2.1.4 Film Description and Formal Elements

Cutts' *The Turning Point* (2020) is a 3-minute and 27-second short animated film that employs a minimalist yet emotionally resonant visual style to depict the cyclical consequences of environmental degradation, consumerism, and anthropocentric ideologies. The film is notably silent, with no spoken dialogue, relying entirely on its visual and auditory design to construct meaning and deliver its ecological message.

The animation is executed in a stylized 2D digital format, characterized by smooth transitions, clear outlines, and exaggerated proportions. Cutts uses anthropomorphized animal characters dressed in human clothing to satirically reverse roles between humans and animals. These figures engage in familiar human activities, working in factories, engaging in warfare, using technology, thereby highlighting the destructive habits of modern industrialized societies. Humans, who appear only in the latter half, are shown in vulnerable and endangered positions, creating a powerful inversion of species hierarchies.

Composition plays a central role in reinforcing the film's narrative and ideological structure. Cutts carefully arranges each scene to guide the viewer's eye and highlight thematic contrasts. Foreground and background elements are often juxtaposed to depict the imbalance between nature and industrial development, for example, factories and billboards dominate skylines while green spaces recede or disappear altogether. The use of framing and spatial organization accentuates isolation or congestion, depending on the narrative need: tightly packed urban environments suggest overpopulation and chaos, while open, desolate landscapes emphasize desolation and ecological collapse. Symmetry is sometimes disrupted intentionally to create visual tension, and compositional choices often direct the audience toward key symbols, such as dying trees, burning buildings, or surveillance screens, thus embedding ideological critique within the spatial logic of the animation. Through this deliberate orchestration of visual elements, composition in the film functions not only as an

aesthetic device but also as a semiotic tool, helping structure meaning and elicit emotional engagement from the viewer.

Color plays a vital narrative and symbolic function. The film opens with vibrant, high-saturation colors depicting the bustling scenes of anthropomorphic animal civilization. As the story unfolds, the palette gradually desaturates and darkens, moving into muted grays, browns, and reds, visually reinforcing the progression from overconsumption to collapse, and finally, extinction. This chromatic shift mirrors the environmental and emotional decline presented on-screen.

Sound and music also contribute significantly to the film's impact. The haunting instrumental soundtrack by the band Wantaways accompanies the film's narrative arc, shifting in intensity to underscore emotional and thematic developments. The music is melancholic and ambient, lacking lyrics, yet providing a rhythmic structure that enhances the film's visual storytelling. The absence of dialogue invites viewers to engage more deeply with the non-verbal semiotic cues presented in the animation.

Language and textual signs are limited but symbolically potent. The film incorporates visual texts such as corporate logos, advertisements, digital screens, and signage, familiar cultural symbols that reinforce themes of consumer capitalism, technological dependency, and social apathy. These textual elements serve as intertextual references, embedding the narrative within recognizable contemporary settings and ideologies.

Body language and movement function as critical tools for conveying character emotion and social dynamics. The anthropomorphized animals exhibit distinctly human postures, gestures, and facial expressions, allowing viewers to attribute human characteristics such as greed, fatigue, aggression, or despair. These physical cues are stylized but legible, offering semiotic insight into behavioral norms and systemic patterns within the depicted society. Human characters, when introduced, are marked by exaggerated expressions of fear,

disorientation, and vulnerability, signaling a reversal of traditional power relations and evoking viewer empathy.

Altogether, the film orchestrates a complex interplay of visual design, textual language, music, composition, color, character animation, and body language to construct a silent but eloquent commentary on the environmental consequences of modern civilization. This section outlines the formal components of *The Turning Point* to contextualize the semiotic analysis presented in the next chapter, where these elements will be decoded through Barthes' framework of denotation, connotation, and myth.

2.1.5 Analytical Framework: Barthes' Semiotic Model

This study adopts Roland Barthes' semiotic framework as the basis for analyzing *The Turning Point*, focusing on the three levels of signification, denotation**,** connotation, and myth, to uncover how visual and auditory signs communicate meaning and ideology. Denotation refers to the literal content of the sign, connotation involves the cultural and emotional associations it evokes, and myth reveals the broader ideological messages that the sign naturalizes within society (Barthes, 1972). To deepen the analysis, the five narrative codes (1970) are also integrated: the hermeneutic code (enigma) generates suspense and interpretive curiosity, the proairetic code (action) structures the sequence of events, the semantic code imbues signs with additional layers of meaning, the symbolic code explores binary oppositions (e.g., nature vs. industry, animal vs. human), and the cultural code draws on shared knowledge and intertextual references. Together, these tools enable a comprehensive reading of the film's visual and narrative strategies, shedding light on how it critiques environmental degradation, capitalist excess, and cultural inertia through layered symbolic expression.

2.1.6 Procedures for Analysis

The semiotic analysis was carried out in a series of methodical steps designed to systematically identify and interpret the signs within *The Turning Point* using Barthes' framework:

1. **Viewing and Familiarization:** The film was watched multiple times to ensure thorough familiarity with its narrative flow, visual motifs, and auditory cues.
2. **Scene Segmentation:** The film was divided into distinct narrative segments based on shifts in action, setting, or thematic focus. This segmentation helped structure the analysis and ensured comprehensive coverage.
3. **Identification of Key Signs:** Within each segment, significant visual and auditory signs were identified. These included characters, colors, settings, symbols, sounds, music, text elements, and body language.
4. **Denotative Analysis:** Each sign was first described in its literal, observable form (denotation). For example, a factory emitting smoke or an animal wearing a suit was first recorded as a literal visual event.
5. **Connotative Analysis:** The signs were then interpreted in relation to their broader cultural meanings, drawing on social, historical, and environmental contexts. For instance, the factory may connote industrial exploitation or environmental harm.
6. **Myth Analysis:** Finally, the ideological significance of the connotative meanings was explored to uncover the "myths" or dominant cultural narratives conveyed. For instance, the reversal of human-animal roles might be seen as a critique of anthropocentrism or capitalist exploitation of nature.
7. **Application of Barthes' Narrative Codes:** To deepen the analysis, the five narrative codes were applied: the hermeneutic code (enigmas and narrative questions), proairetic code (actions and sequences), semantic code (symbolic meanings), symbolic

code (binary oppositions), and cultural code (shared cultural knowledge and references). These codes helped uncover how narrative meaning and ideological messages are constructed and conveyed throughout the film.

8. **Analysis of Role Reversal as a Semiotic Strategy:** A targeted analysis was conducted on the role reversal between humans and animals. This narrative device was examined as a deliberate semiotic strategy to subvert anthropocentric perspectives and underscore the consequences of human exploitation of nature.
9. **Synthesis of Findings:** Finally, findings from all previous steps were synthesized into overarching thematic and ideological patterns. This synthesis served as the foundation for the discussion section, in which the results are interpreted in light of relevant literature from semiotics, environmental humanities, and media studies to contextualize and reinforce the analytical conclusions.

All in all, this section outlined the qualitative methodological framework employed in this study, including the research design, unit of analysis, film selection, film description and formal elements, analytical framework, and detailed procedures for conducting semiotic analysis. The following section presents the analysis of the film *The Turning Point*, offering a detailed interpretation of its visual and auditory signs, narrative structure, and symbolic elements. The analysis aims to uncover how these semiotic components work together to critique anthropocentric ideologies and convey the film's ecological message.

2.2 Section Two: Semiotic Analysis of *The Turning Point*

This section presents a detailed semiotic analysis of *The Turning Point* (2020) through the lens of Roland Barthes' theoretical framework. It explores how visual and auditory signs operate within the film to convey environmental messages and ideological critiques, focusing specifically on denotation, connotation, myth, and narrative codes. A particular emphasis is placed on the symbolic role reversal between animals and humans, which serves as a

powerful semiotic device to critique anthropocentrism and challenge dominant species hierarchies.

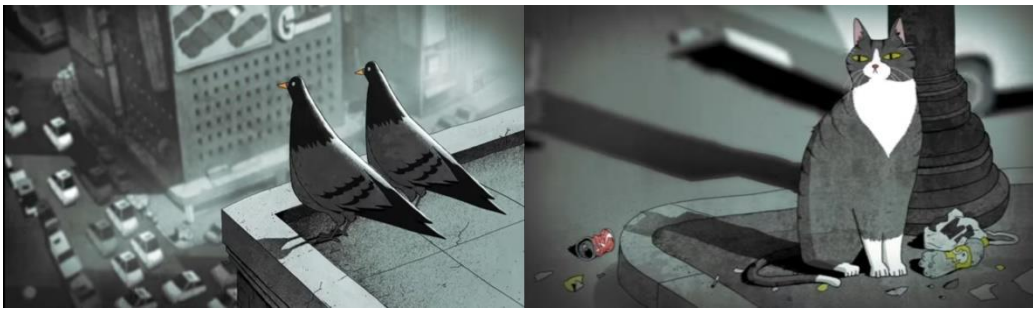
2.2.1 Analysis in Terms of Denotation and Connotation

This subsection examines the denotative and connotative meanings embedded in the film's visual and auditory elements. By distinguishing between the literal content and the associative, cultural meanings of signs, the analysis reveals how *The Turning Point* constructs layers of environmental significance and emotional resonance. For clarity and depth, the film is divided into thematically distinct scenes with corresponding timeframes, allowing for a systematic exploration of how meaning evolves across the narrative arc.

2.2.1.1 The Illusion of Normalcy Scene. The first scene [00:00–00:20] fades from darkness into a gray scale city filled with high-rise buildings, large advertisements, and littered streets. Humans drive cars and go about their routines, while pigeons fly overhead and cats and dogs move naturally through the urban space. An elephant sitting at a bus stop reading a newspaper introduces an unusual anthropomorphic touch that subtly disrupts the normal city atmosphere.(see Figure 4).

Figure 4

The Illusion of Normalcy Scene



Note. Screenshots from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

This initial scene suggests a typical urban morning but hints at a deeper unease beneath the surface. Familiar images of traffic, ads, noise, and daily human routines, create an illusion of normalcy that masks environmental damage and emotional detachment. The gray

tones emphasize monotony and social numbness. The unexpected sight of an anthropomorphic elephant reading a newspaper adds a surreal element that subtly mocks society's complacency and highlights what people have normalized. Litter and urban decay, ignored by the humans, point to cultural indifference toward environmental decline. Overall, the scene portrays a quiet dystopia where dysfunction blends into routine, setting the film up as a visual critique of passive decline hidden in everyday life.

2.2.1.2 Title Introduction Scene. The second scene [00:20–00:24] presents a sudden visual shift: the image of the elephant remains faintly visible in the background, now overlaid by the bold, centered title "THE TURNING POINT" in all capital letters and large yellow font against a grey backdrop. Beneath the title, the phrases "A FILM BY STEVE CUTTS" and "MUSIC BY WANTAWAYS" appear in significantly smaller and more subdued font, creating a clear visual hierarchy. The plain, glowing typography stands in sharp contrast to the grayscale polluted urban backdrop. The minimal composition and bright color create a visual interruption that feels both like a pause and a jolt in the narrative (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Title Introduction Scene



Note. Screenshot from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

On the surface, this moment is straightforward: the film's title appears, marking the start of the narrative. However, its connotation reveals a deeper narrative irony. The title "THE TURNING POINT" connotes ironic contradiction, introduced not as a promise of hope

but as a warning within a visually decayed world. While the phrase typically implies change or renewal, its placement in a lifeless, grey setting suggests further collapse. The sudden appearance of bright yellow acts as a semiotic rupture, normally symbolizing clarity or joy, here it feels artificial, excessive, and out of place, evoking toxicity, anxiety, and hollow optimism. Besides the title, the other textual signs are not just technical credits; they also function as authorial and compositional markers. These textual elements frame the work as a deliberately crafted artistic statement, prompting the viewer to consider its ideological and aesthetic positioning from the outset. The reduced size of these elements visually reinforces the primacy of the film's message over individual authorship, subtly directing the viewer's focus to the ecological theme rather than the creators. The elephant, traditionally a symbol of wisdom and memory, remains inert under this supposed call for change. This reinforces the idea that transformation can happen without awareness or effort. All together, the scene reinforces themes of resignation, inertia, and the normalization of dysfunction. The title thus becomes a central semiotic anchor, embodying the film's critique of modernity's illusions and setting the tone for an unraveling disguised as transformation.

2.2.1.3 Consumer Culture Among Animals Scene. The third scene [00:25–00:40] portrays a bustling urban setting inhabited by anthropomorphic animals engaged in daily routines. The camera pans over vignettes of traffic jams, cafés, fast-food restaurants, office spaces, and supermarkets. Animals such as the rhinoceros, zebra, dolphin, frog, parrot, chicken, gorilla, pufferfish, and polar bear mirror human behaviors, commuting, working, shopping, and consuming. The imagery includes lipstick, laptops, uniforms, processed food, and glowing signs. A banner advertising "Human Things and Drumsticks" features a roasted human limb. The environment remains largely grayscale. Buildings, streets, and the sky are all rendered in muted, monochromatic tones. In contrast, certain items, such as soda cans,

makeup products, and fast food packaging, are depicted in bright, saturated colors. Trash overflows, and marine animals outside appear exhausted and indifferent (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Consumer Culture Among Animals Scene



Note. Screenshots from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

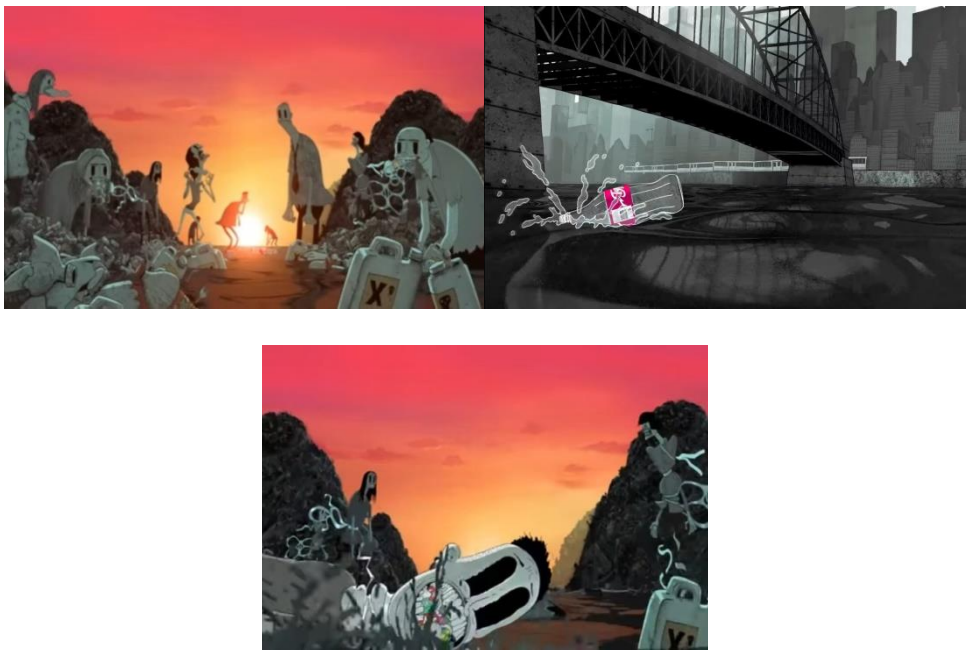
This scene offers a biting satirical portrayal of modern urban life through anthropomorphic animals that embody distorted human traits and societal roles, exposing how consumerism, labor, and identity are warped by capitalist systems. From the rhinoceros adorned with makeup critiquing gender performativity, to the pufferfish symbolizing toxic stress, and the mouse representing overworked labor, each figure reflects aspects of a dehumanized, consumption-driven world. The grotesque irony of dolphins queuing for fast food and a chicken serving its own kind highlights how capitalism commodifies even the oppressed. In the supermarket, where a banner reads “Human Things and Drumsticks”, the reversal of predator-prey roles underscores the ultimate dehumanization, humans becoming the product. The city’s grayscale monotony, interrupted only by artificially vibrant consumer goods, reinforces emotional emptiness masked by commercial stimulation. Altogether, the

scene delivers a dystopian critique where nature is subverted, identity is manufactured, and humanity is consumed by the very systems it created.

2.2.1.4 Pollution and the Human Underclass Scene. The fourth scene [00:41–00:54] begins with the plastic bottle, previously discarded by the dolphin, floating down a polluted river and into a sewer filled with garbage. The setting changes dramatically as the bottle emerges in a new environment: a toxic wasteland under a scorching orange-red sky. For the first time, humans are introduced, thin, filthy, and visibly sick. They scavenge through towering piles of waste, wearing ragged clothing and showing signs of malnutrition and environmental damage. Some are tangled in trash, unable to move. One man tries to eat a plastic bottle and chokes to death. The landscape is barren and decaying, filled with toxic waste and human suffering, resembling a massive, living graveyard (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Pollution and the Human Underclass Scene



Note. Screenshots from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

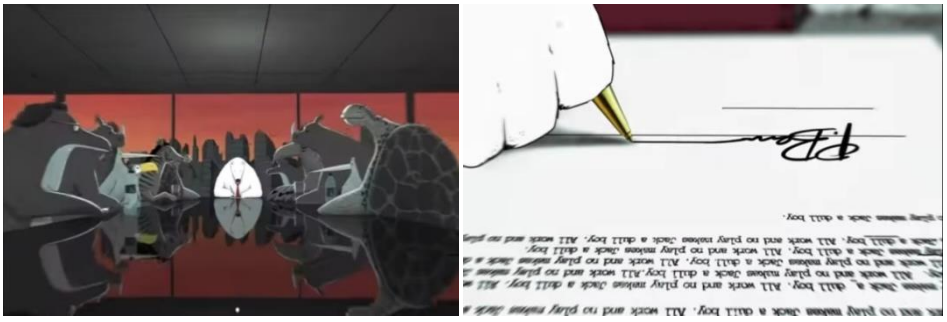
This scene delivers a powerful connotative critique of environmental collapse, social inequality, and moral decay through a vivid contrast between the consumerist animal

metropolis above and the apocalyptic human wasteland below. The red-orange glow, emaciated figures, and suffocating trash symbolize a world where humans who once dominant, have become victims of their own excess. The floating bottle and choking man illustrate the fatal return of discarded waste, showing how consumption cycles back as destruction. Dehumanized and entangled in garbage, the humans mirror marine animals once harmed by human pollution, suggesting that the oppressed now include humanity itself. The scene draws clear parallels to real-world injustices, where the poor and marginalized suffer most from the consequences of capitalist overconsumption. Ultimately, it condemns a system that protects the privileged while burying the powerless in the ruins of its own making.

2.2.1.5 Corporate Decisions and Environmental Consequences Scenes. The next scene [00:55–1:10]shows a glass-walled corporate boardroom where anthropomorphic animals in suits, led by a polar bear, silently pass and sign a contract labeled “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy”. As the polar bear signs, black ink drips down and transitions into a polluted ocean (see Figure 8). The sky shifts from gray to burnt orange as the scene moves to starving humans on melting ice consisted of a mother, her son, and a dying daughter. It ends with disfigured humans standing in toxic waste, desperately waiting for food, and one man staring at a burning figure (see Figure 9).

Figure 8

Corporate DecisionsScene



Note. Screenshots from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

Figure 9

Environmental Consequences Scene



Note. Screenshots from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

These scenes sharply critique corporate greed and environmental neglect by portraying a sterile boardroom of emotionless animal executives whose detached decisions cause massive ecological collapse. The polar bear, once a climate victim, now symbolizes power corrupted, while other animals reflect intelligence turned complicit. As spilled ink transforms into a black ocean, it visually connects boardroom choices to planetary devastation. The ironic contract phrase underscores how productivity masks destruction, reducing life to meaningless labor. The sky's descent into fiery tones signals escalating collapse, while the suffering human family on melting ice and those bathing in toxic sludge embody the real-world victims of these distant, sanitized decisions. Cheerful background lyrics starkly contrast the unfolding horrors, exposing the elite's callous indifference. Ultimately, the scenes reveal how corporate systems, under the guise of order and progress, actively produce global ruin and human suffering.

2.2.1.6 Forced Displacement and Environmental Violence Scene. The next scene [1:11–1:22] begins in a lush, green forest where human families consists of men, women, and children, are momentarily at peace, sitting on the ground or in trees, sharing smiles. This calm is suddenly disrupted by violent tremors. Panic spreads as anthropomorphic monkeys, operating heavy machinery, invade to destroy the forest. Families flee in terror as trees collapse behind them. One monkey, notably indifferent, smokes a cigarette while a family

portrait of his own hangs beside him, highlighting the contrast. The scene ends with dust, destruction, and desperate escape as the forest becomes a collapsing warzone. The soundtrack overlays the chaos with the gentle lyrics: “My heart is free, until you come to rescue me” (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Forced Displacement and Environmental Violence Scene



Note. Screenshot from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

The connotation adds a much deeper layer of meaning. This scene uses monkeys, close human relatives, to symbolize how violence and environmental destruction often come from within humanity itself, not from outside threats. The family portrait beside the destructive monkey underscores the cruel irony: perpetrators can live ordinary, even loving, personal lives while causing devastation elsewhere. The yellow machinery symbolizes industrial capitalism, typically associated with progress now twisted into a symbol of ecological harm and forced displacement. The falling forest reflects the loss of ancestral homes and identities, paralleling real-world displacement of indigenous and marginalized

groups. The contrasting soft lyrics evoke the hopeless longing of those who suffer while waiting for help that never arrives.

2.2.1.7 Humans in Waste, Bulldozer Driven by Beaver Scene. The scene [1:23–1:28] presents a vast, desolate wasteland filled with mountains of garbage of broken plastic, rotting waste, and debris stretching in all directions. Amid the wreckage, a few surviving humans appear weak, malnourished, and clothed in rags, moving slowly and with difficulty. The sky is dark and oppressive, adding to the grim atmosphere. At the center, a large bulldozer, operated by an emotionless beaver, pushes piles of trash toward towering heaps of waste and throw it on the humans. The visual contrast between the fragile humans and the massive, unfeeling machine highlights their helplessness (see Figure 11).

Figure 11

Humans in Waste, Bulldozer Driven by Beaver Scene



Note. Screenshot from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

This scene symbolizes the catastrophic aftermath of unchecked consumerism and industrialization. The mountains of garbage represent the long-term effects of material excess, while the frail humans scavenging among the waste reflect the collapse of human dignity

under a system driven by consumption. The beaver that is known as a natural builder now operates as a symbol of corrupted industrial labor, emotionlessly pushing waste and people alike, embodying dehumanized, systemic destruction. The dangling dice evoke themes of randomness and recklessness, suggesting that survival under such a system depends on luck rather than justice. Overall, the scene connotes how modern industrial society transforms innovation into instruments of extinction, leaving both the environment and humanity in ruins.

2.2.1.8 Bear Family Watching TV News Scene. The scene [1:29–1:36] shifts dramatically to a cozy, orderly living room inside a bear family's home, contrasting starkly with the previous destruction. A bear cub watches a televised news report announcing the rapid extinction of humans. The broadcast shows disturbing footage: landfills, bulldozers burying people, and humans struggling across frozen seas. Deeply affected, the cub tries to talk to his father, who ignores him, focused on a financial newspaper titled *"How to Get Even Richer".* The mother bear then enters and casually changes the channel, silencing the crisis on screen (see Figure12).

Figure 12

Bear Family Watching TV News Scene



Note. Screenshots from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

The scene powerfully critiques emotional detachment and media apathy in privileged societies. The bear family's indifference to human extinction symbolizes how comfort and consumerism can numb empathy. The child's concern represents the younger generation's awareness of global crises, while the father's focus on wealth and the mother's casual escapism highlight willful ignorance. The cozy domestic setting reinforces how distant suffering is often normalized or ignored by those not directly affected. Ultimately, the scene satirizes how systemic collapse can be reduced to background noise in a world desensitized by privilege and distraction.

2.2.1.9 Drowning Humanity and Trapped Infant Scene. The scene [1:37–1:49]shows a group of humans swimming happily in the ocean. A large net suddenly descends and captures most of them, leaving behind only an infant. The child grows into a young woman who eventually becomes entangled in plastic waste floating in the water. The plastic wraps tightly around her body, causing swelling and distress. She struggles but cannot escape and is ultimately pulled underwater. Her lifeless body floats among debris as the ocean darkens, signaling contamination and death (see Figure 13).

Figure 13

Drowning Humanity and Trapped Infant Scene



Note. Screenshots from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

This scene conveys a harrowing allegory of humanity's self-inflicted environmental collapse. It symbolizes how each new generation is born into an already-polluted world, inheriting the toxic legacy of past industrial and consumerist choices. The progression from playful swimming to capture, entanglement, and death reflects the life cycle of creatures and humans doomed by plastic pollution and ecological neglect. The fishing net and plastic waste evolves from symbols of external danger to metaphors of humanity's own destructive byproducts. The young girl growing up ensnared in tightening plastic illustrates how environmental crises intensify over time, robbing future generations of freedom and hope. The darkening sea and haunting lyrics, "You turn me bad, you turn me good, forget to hope and learn to fear", reinforce a mood of despair, showing how once-life-giving elements have turned deadly. Ultimately, the scene critiques the systemic, irreversible consequences of environmental irresponsibility and presents a chilling vision of how humanity's waste has turned into the instrument of its own extinction.

2.2.1.10 Beached Human Consuming Trash Scene. The scene [1:50–1:53]presents a disturbing and visually explicit image of environmental and human collapse. A massive, pale, lifeless human body lies face-down on a garbage-covered beach, with his mouth grotesquely stuffed with a mix of trash. His limbs are twisted unnaturally, and the beach, entirely overrun by waste, shows no signs of natural sand. In the background, an industrial cityscape looms,

filled with smoke-spewing factories under a dark, polluted sky tinged with ominous red and brown hues. The visual is accompanied by haunting music with ironically hopeful lyrics,“Tell me that it’s good if we do something, believe in something”, intensifying the contrast between the desolate imagery and the song’s tone (see Figure 14).

Figure 14

Beached Human Consuming Trash Scene



Note. Screenshot from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

This scene serves as a powerful metaphor for the self-destructive nature of consumerism and environmental neglect. The dead human, with his mouth crammed with garbage, becomes a visceral symbol of self-destructive consumerism, a being literally killed by his own insatiable appetite for meaningless, synthetic consumption. His grotesque form suggests not just physical but moral and existential bloating, representing a civilization that has overindulged, overproduced, and finally collapsed under the weight of its own waste. The fact that the garbage has replaced the sand indicates how deeply the natural world has been overwritten and replaced by the detritus of human activity, nature is not merely polluted; it is obliterated. The factories in the background represent the relentless systems of production that continue even after humanity’s collapse, underscoring the mindless persistence of ecological destruction. The dark red sky and ironic song lyrics expose the delusion of progress and belief in unsustainable growth, turning the scene into a final, haunting judgment on humanity’s failure to change.

2.2.1.11 Animal Protest and Police Repression Scene. Visually, this scene [1:54–2:04] features anthropomorphic animals holding placards in a protest line. The signs like "SAVE THE HUMAN", "WE ONLY HAVE ONE EARTH", and "STOP PLASTIC POLLUTION" are clearly legible and use all-capital letters for emphasis. The protestors are animals that looks distressed or angry, they show urgency through their body language (hands raised, mouths open). The police were depicted as animals, dressed in riot gear, helmets, and shields, using batons or physical force to disperse the protestors. There is no dialogue, but the environmental audio is aggressive filled with intense music and backgrounds of yelling and conflict. The color palette is dominated by greys and shallow browns, with occasional flashes of red or blue to further represent chaos and confrontation (see Figure 15).

Figure 15

Animal Protest and Police RepressionScene



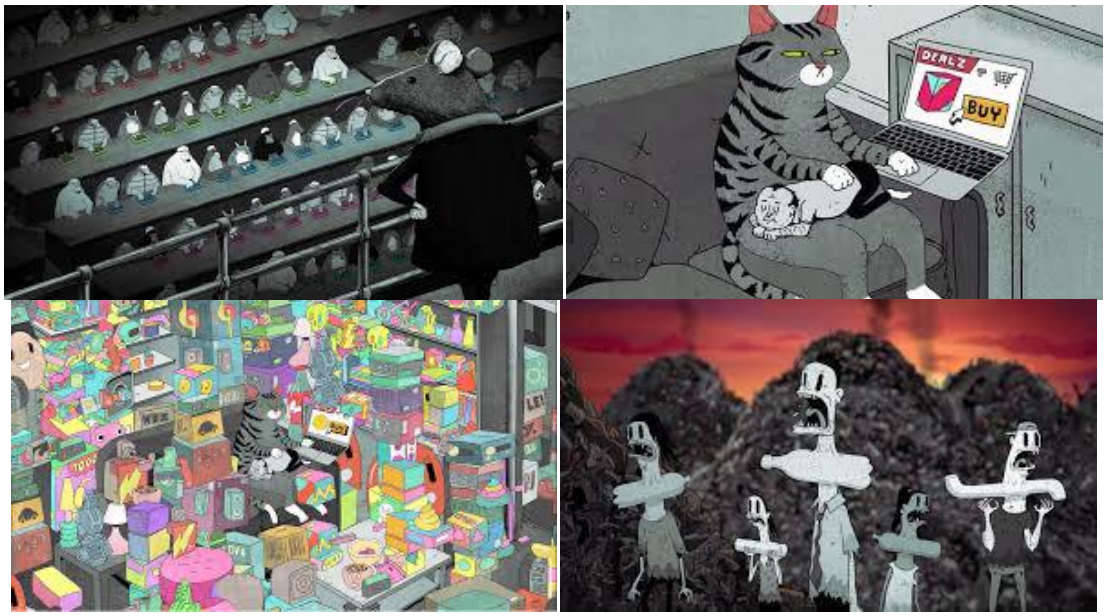
Note. Screenshot from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

This scene is a satirical reversal of real-world climate protests in which animals take the role of climate activists, such as polar bear, an animal that is affected by climate change most. The signs parody human environmental slogans while the violent police oppression by animal officers references how peaceful activism is commonly repressed through state violence. Steve Cutts portrays the police as dogs or wolves. Animals that possess domesticated instincts associated with loyalty and obedience. It reflects how enforcement systems serve those in power without question, even when enforcing injustice. While the police are visually portrayed as canines, they can also be symbolically interpreted as sewer rats. This dual reading deepens the critique: rats are creatures of filth, easy to manipulate, associated with corruption, disease, and survival in decay. By linking the police to rats, the film suggests they thrive in and enforce a rotten, toxic system. These enforcers resist change and cleanliness, preferring chaos and violence to maintain their dominance. This layered symbolism exposes the moral decay of institutional power and critiques how authority, instead of delivering justice, often perpetuates oppression.

2.2.1.12 Exploitation and Human Suffering Scenes. The visuals in this scene [2:05–2:22] show an industrial setting of metal walls and assembly lines. Humans wear uniforms and perform mechanical tasks, their expressions blank or pained. A mouse in a suit authoritatively watches from above. Then, in domestic spaces, humans are kept enclosure as pets, while animals are shopping and consuming, mirroring typical human consumer behavior. Humans are shown entangled in plastic waste. Trash surrounds them (cans, bottles, and wrappers) piled in chaotic mounds. There is no greenery or signs of comfort, only hard surfaces and machines, communicating subjugation and ecological decay (see Figure 16).

Figure 16

Exploitation and Human SufferingScene



Note. Screenshots from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

In this scene, there is a complete inversion of the exploitative system. The factories are equivalent to slaughterhouses, with human laborers. The mouse as a manager, overseeing the operation, connotes a political authority and systemic oppression. The human as a pet scene highlights the moral hypocrisy in how humans treat animals, exposing captivity and domestication as systems of control. The consumerism scene shows a chaotic mass of colorful products piled on top of each other, indicating an undisciplined consumer culture. The intense use of color captures attention and ignites desire. However, it shows a more profound sense of numbness.

The scene of a human chewing plastic shopping bag, which is an icon of consumerism and pollution, evokes the absence of organic natural food, the skinny aspect of the human in concern indicates famine and malnutrition. It connotes despair, collapse, and the erosion of human dignity. The image shows that the very materials once associated with progress become agents of death. It serves as a visual warning that unchecked consumption does not simply disappear, it accumulates and returns.

2.2.1.13 Addictive Consumerism & Illusion of Rescue Scene. In this scene[2:23–2:32] Large animals surround themselves with glass bottles. Their eyes are glazed, and mouths open

wide as they continuously drink from bright red labelled bottles. Helicopters in the background appear like they might be part of a rescue effort. However, they release inflatable rings that transform mid air into a giant ad bubble with bold white text: “Drink TYPE 2”. accompanied by slogans like “THE TASTE THAT LASTS FOREVER” and “A TASTE FOR THE NEW GENERATION” (see Figure 17).

Figure 17

Drink Type 2 Advertisement



Note. Screenshot from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

This sequence critiques the toxic consumer culture. It portrays powerful bears as passive animals with glazed expressions which suggest addiction, symbolizing how capitalism dulls even the strongest. They have drowned in their own waste, clinging to false hopes of escape. The soda “TYPE 2”, suggests type 2 diabetes and other conditions derived from diet and lifestyle, or caused by over-consumption. The slogans imply consumption is timeless and generational, promising pleasure and legacy. They mirror real ads that use emotional appeal to normalize harmful behaviors and conceal consequences. Bright, unnatural colors and upbeat jingle like music mimic real ads but feel absurd in a ruined world. Overall, it critiques how consumerism masks destruction with artificial joy and false hope.

2.2.1.14 Corporate Excess & Celebratory Destruction Scene. The scene [2:33–2:40] shows Anthropomorphic pigs in business suits raising champagne glasses and cigars in a darkened industrial space. Behind them, smokestacks pump red tinted pollution into the air. A screen displays a bright green graph arrow pointing upward, accompanied by cheering.

Paper money floats from above. The colors, primarily dark greys and reds, contrast with the green of the graph and money, anchoring the scene in excessive wealth amid environmental ruin (see Figure 18).

Figure 18

Corporate Excess & Celebratory Destruction Scene



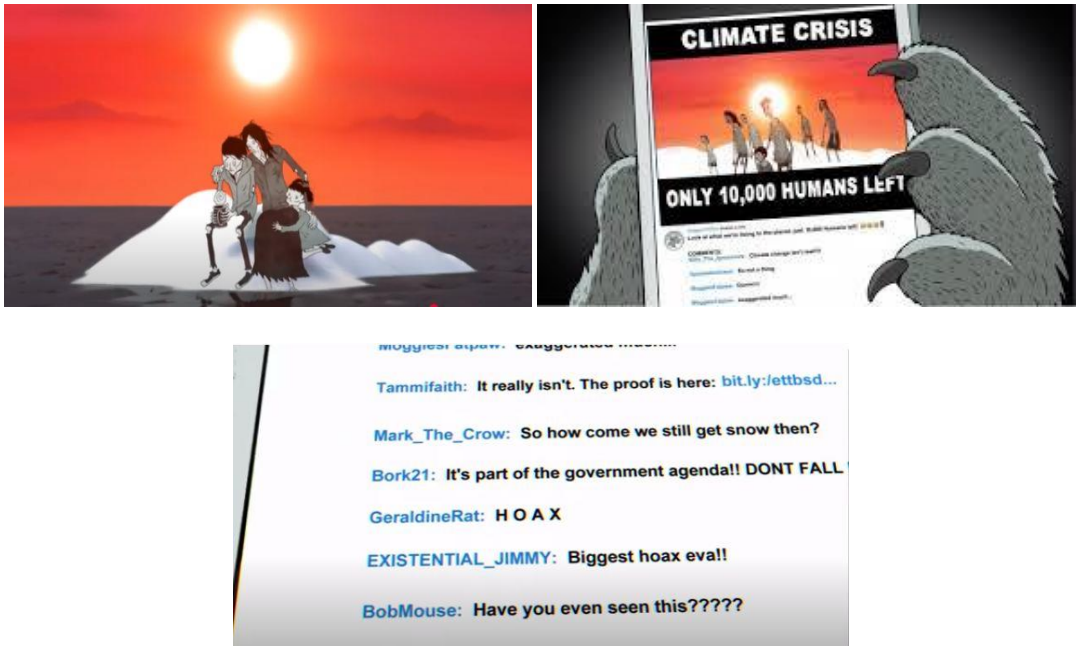
Note. Screenshot from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

Pigs in suits are a symbol of greed, corruption, and unaccountable power. Their celebration amid red smoke and factory fumes indicates how they lost all ethical restrictions. The red smoke is an alarming visual that symbolizes ecological disaster. The transformation of factory smoke into cigar smoke suggests that both industrial actions and personal indulgence play roles in the destructive cycle, revealing the deep corruption in the system. The rising graph line reveals the absurdity of equating economic growth with prosperity when it stems from environmental destruction. Imagery of cash rain and champagne toasts critiques capitalism's prioritization of profit and corporate detachment from ecological harm.

2.2.1.15 Climate Crisis, Denial, and Doom Scene. In the scene [2:41–2:51], the frame focuses on a magazine cover. A creature resembling a raccoon or similar animal reads a magazine online. The cover headline reads "CLIMATE CRISIS – ONLY 10.000 HUMANS LEFT". The title is in bold uppercase, mimicking real newsstand design. The number "10.000" is large and alarming, yet undermined by the stamp like word "HOAX". Inside the "O" of "HOAX", a human family is shown drowning, silently suffering behind the mask of denial (see Figure 19).

Figure 19

Climate Crisis, Denial, and Doom Scene



Note. Screenshots from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

The raccoon like figure symbolizes the public's tendency to seek comfort in distractions and self-deception. As a scavenger, it reflects how society consumes easy, biased media instead of facing harsh realities. The headline describes the climate apocalypse, it comes across as a passing headline among a multitude of others. This shows that critical global issues are often downplayed in media. In comments, the stamp "HOAX" represents the denial of scientific facts. It reinforces collective denial of climate change. The stamp declares the crisis as fake or exaggerated, freeing the system from any culpability.

Within the "O" of "HOAX", the scene of a drowning human family depicts the silent suffering caused by climate change, which we may not even pay attention to. The image of the family drowning in the background of this denial, is a powerful image of how real human lives are laid waste while nature is being damaged. Yet their struggle is hidden behind the mask of ignorance and apathy. This scene encapsulates how denial delays action, turning catastrophe into spectacle while victims remain voiceless.

2.2.1.16 Washed Ashore, Humanity, and Oceanic Waste Scene. This scene [2:52–2:56] opens with grey blue waves pushing debris ashore. Among this debris are clearly human bodies (limp, pale, unmoving) alongside bottles, bags, and cans. Some humans are entangled in netting or lying face-down. The beach is completely covered in litter, no clean sand is visible. The waves make a constant crashing sound, and there is no movement from the people, giving the scene a bleak finality (see Figure 20).

Figure 20

Washed Ashore, Humanity, and Oceanic Waste Scene



Note. Screenshot from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

The waves carrying human bodies and plastic waste symbolizes the self-destructive nature of consumer culture. Once a symbol of life, the ocean becomes a force of destruction, consuming its polluters. The beach, formerly a site of natural beauty, now reflects ecological collapse. This scene emphasizes that if unchecked, environmental degradation will lead to the death of both nature and humanity. The images of the scene are drawn with dark colors, greys and sickly greens showing pollution and death. The music here is minimal and haunting, which creates a feeling of mourning and inevitability, emphasizing the tragedy and silence of death.

2.2.1.17 Forest Destruction & Human Displacement Scene. The scene [2:57–3:09] shows bulldozers busting down trees, with smoke and flames in the background. Different animals operate the machines. Trees fall one after another. In the foreground, human families

run; adults carrying babies, some are falling behind. Their expressions are panicked. Fire dominates the horizon, and the palette is orange, black, and ash-grey. There is no water, no greenery, and no life. The camera tracks their retreat to five seconds and the sense of threat underscores their displacement (see Figure 21).

Figure 21

Forest Destruction & Human DisplacementScene



Note. Screenshots from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

The repeated forest destruction scenes grow heavier, showing how normalized and automatic the damage has become. It is easier to get used to collapse when it happens repetitively and worsens in slow motion. Animals controlling machines reflect a dark role reversal, emphasizing how far humanity has fallen. At this point, destruction has become so routine that even animals could carry it out. With each repetition, greenery disappears, fire spreads, and people flee in silent desperation. Their movements are more like resignation than survival. The cycle does not terminate until there is nothing left to burn, indicating total environmental collapse.

2.2.1.18 Homo Sapiens & Extinction Exhibit Scene. For this scene [3:10–3:19], the first image is pastoral, containing grass and trees. A moment later, the camera zooms out to reveal it is an exhibit, contained in a box or diorama. A plaque reads “HOMO SAPIENS”. Around it, animals stare through glass. Nearby, a human skeleton lies on display with a placard that reads “EXTINCT MAMMALS”. Lighting is artificial and museum like.

Everything is static, quiet and clinical. The species that once dominated the Earth has now vanished, becoming a subject of observation rather than action (see Figure 22).

Figure 22

Homo Sapiens & Extinction Exhibit Scene



Note. Screenshot from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

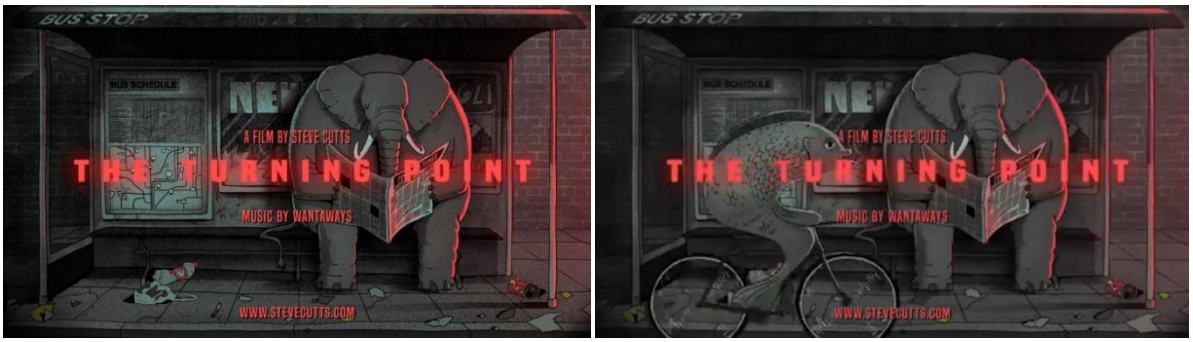
The museum reflects on human extinction, suggesting it is a likely outcome if current paths continue. The artificial, forest like setting evokes the illusion of nature, now staged for instructional or memorial purposes. The glass display connotes isolation, lifelessness, and lost legacy. It stands as both a physical barrier and a metaphorical coffin. This sterile presentation reduces complex lives and cultures to a bone structure and a label. Animals observing with neutral curiosity suggest a post-human world, it implies that nature may recover or even thrive without humans. The juxtaposition of this quiet, contemplative site, against earlier violent scenes, implies that what humanity leaves behind is a lesson not a legacy, that exploitation leads to disappearance not to mastery.

2.2.1.19 Title in Red Scene. By this final scene [3:20–3:24], the film concludes with a surreal image that mirrors the opening. The screen displays the title card: “THE TURNING POINT” in bold, all capital letters, and bright red font against a black background. Behind the text, a fish slowly pedals past an elephant on a small bicycle, reinforcing the film’s absurd and cyclical tone. The same textual elements from the opening, “A FILM BY STEVE CUTTS” and “MUSIC BY WANTAWAYS”, reappear one beneath and the other underneath the title in

smaller font. An additional element, the website “WWW.STEVECUTTS.COM”, also appears at the very bottom in red. The background remains blank, accompanied only by ambient sound or silence, heightening the dreamlike, uncanny quality of the scene (see Figure 23).

Figure 23

Title in Red Scene



Note. Screenshot from *The Turning Point* by Steve Cutts, 2020. Retrieved from YouTube.

The reappearance of the title in bold red signifies more than the movie’s conclusion, it signifies a last warning. Red symbolizes crisis, urgency, and blood, and indicates both ecological danger and moral alarm. The reappearance of the original textual elements, in smaller font may connote a return or loop, subtly implying that no real change has occurred. The inclusion of the website in matching red reinforces a call to reflect or engage further.The fish on the bicycle is a passive witness, it is placed in the same space as the elephant. This results in a surreal collision of elements that should not coexist (land, sea, and machine) but are now floating together in one world out of the order of nature. This unnatural juxtaposition connotes the disorientation created when a planet is out of balance to a point that logic, biology, and physics no longer have meaning. This final scene echoes the film’s opening, completing a cycle and implying that humanity is at a perpetual “turning point”, a moment of decision between renewal or self-destruction.

In summation, the film's carefully layered denotative imagery and connotative associations work in tandem to construct a compelling ecological narrative that critiques consumerism, environmental degradation, and anthropocentrism.

2.2.2 Analysis in Terms of Ideological Myths

The Turning Point draws heavily on ideological myths to deliver its ecological message. In this animated short, familiar symbols and scenes are infused with deeper ideological meanings that reflect and critique dominant narratives. These myths operate not only through the film's visual representations but also through its narrative structure and character roles. The following analysis identifies key ideological myths embedded within the film:

- **The Myth of Inherited Ecological Collapse**

Scenes like "Drowning Humanity and Trapped Infant", as the child ages and succumbs to plastic debris, "Washed Ashore, Humanity and Oceanic Waste", where the dead bodies drifts ashore with plastic waste, and "Addictive Consumerism & Illusion of Rescue", with slogans of "A TASTE FOR THE NEW GENERATION", depict humanity's ecological destruction as an inherited destiny. The next generation is passing on a sick planet already smothered by waste and pollution. Humans are shown as inseparable from their environmental impacts. This myth depicts an inescapable future where environmental collapse is no longer a crisis to act upon but a natural outcome of human existence and consumption.

- **The Myth of Perpetuated Sin**

Using scenes like "Exploitation and Human Suffering" and "Animal Protest and Police Repression", as well as "Title in Red Scene", we may see the myth of continuing sin and how the victims can recommit the sins of the oppressors, animals are repeating the human destructive actions. The cycle of exploitation continues even when roles are reversed. The

myth here critiques the human tendency to perpetuate wrongdoings even after becoming victims of it.

- **The Myth of Power Corruption**

In “Forest Destruction & Human Displacement” and “Corporate Excess & Celebratory Destruction”, power leads to the erasure of nature. Animals are shown destroying forests as humans once did, any species, once in power, will follow the same pattern. This illustrates how power corrupts any species. The celebration of destruction as a form of progress critiques how corporate greed exploits nature for profit. This exposes how corruption is a part of any system, regardless of who is in power. Corruption is not tied to identity but to the structure of power itself. It critically challenges the belief that simply changing the regime will induce justice, demonstrating how systems of domination persist across time, species, and circumstance. Ultimately, it exposes how, without systemic transformation, power becomes a conduit for the repetition of violence and oppression.

- **The Myth of Consumption as Salvation**

This myth is illustrated in “Addictive Consumerism & Illusion of Rescue”, “Corporate Excess & Celebratory Destruction” and “Consumer Culture Among Animals”. It represents consumption as a form of salvation, obscuring the damaging consequences of corporate greed. The depiction of the addicted, passive animals and the celebrating pigs shows how consumerism ideology provides a false notion of satisfaction and progress. Despite environmental collapse, capitalism frames destruction as success, with falling money representing the illusion of a better future through consumption.

- **The Myth of Denial and Spectacle**

The myth of denial and spectacle is sharply critiqued in scenes like “Climate Crisis, Denial, and Doom”. Media and culture turn crisis into passive observation. In the scene, “Bear Family Watching TV News”,environmental crises are reduced to spectacles. The media

and society trivialize climate disasters, presenting them as entertainment or distractions rather than urgent calls to action. In the scene, “Forest Destruction & Human Displacement”, the myth of denial is expanded, as the repeated scenes of forest destruction and human displacement become background noise. The resignation in the face of repeated disaster implies that society has accepted this devastation as an inevitable part of life, creating a myth of denial where crisis becomes normalized.

- **The Myth of Disposable Humanity**

The myth of disposable humanity is illustrated in scenes like “Washed Ashore, Humanity and Oceanic Waste” and “Homo Sapiens & Extinction Exhibit”. In the former, the image of lifeless human bodies floating amid plastic waste reflects how human life is disposable. Their passive drifting is a reminder of humanity’s slow, unacknowledged disappearance. In the latter scene, humanity is encased in a glass box as a museum display, which is symbolic of how our extinction is possibly perceived as just a segment in history. These two scenes together form a critique of the myth that in an era of mass consumption, humans are shown as indistinguishable from the waste they produce, human life has lost its sacredness and is viewed as replaceable. It suggests that progress and human belief in permanence are an illusion, revealing how quickly any civilization can be forgotten.

- **The Myth of Human Supremacy**

The “Homo Sapiens & Extinction Exhibit” scene dismantles the myth of human supremacy. By displaying humans as museum specimens, the scene critiques the idea that humanity is eternal or superior. The display reveals that human dominance is temporary and weak, presenting the falsehood of human authority or immortality as easily reduced to a historical artefact for consumption.

In summary, *The Turning Point* draws on a range of ideological myths to critique dominant cultural narratives and expose the systemic roots of ecological and societal collapse. Through visual allegory and narrative symbolism, the film deconstructs myths such as inherited ecological collapse, power corruption, consumption as salvation, and human supremacy. By reversing roles and exaggerating familiar scenes, it challenges viewers to confront the destructive ideologies that underpin modern life. In doing so, the film not only warns of environmental decline but also questions the cultural myths that normalize exploitation, denial, and disposability, urging a re-evaluation of humanity's values and place in the natural world.

2.2.3 Analysis in Terms of Barthes' Narrative Codes

In *The Turning Point*, narrative meaning is not constructed solely through plot progression but also through a rich layering of textual elements that align with Barthes' (1970) five narrative codes: the hermeneutic, proairetic, semic, symbolic, and cultural. These codes structure the way audiences interpret the unfolding events, suspense, character traits, thematic tensions, and cultural references throughout the film. By examining how these codes are activated in the short animation, we gain insight into how the film communicates its ecological critique and subverts conventional storytelling. The subsequent analysis explores how each of these narrative codes is woven into the film's structure:

- **The Hermeneutic Code**

The hermeneutic or enigma Code is activated from the outset and sustained throughout the film to create narrative suspense through unanswered questions. The grayscale city inhabited by anthropomorphic animals immediately prompts the viewer to ask: *What caused this role reversal? Why are humans absent?* The absence of dialogue enhances the ambiguity, encouraging interpretations about dystopia, symbolic inversion, or ecological revenge. As

animals mimic human destructiveness and humans later appear destitute, the film offers no clear resolution, instead provoking deeper reflection on themes of consumerism, environmental collapse, and moral responsibility. Ultimately, the unresolved ending compels the viewer to confront ethical questions such as: *What have we done? What must we change?*, turning curiosity into critical engagement.

- **The Proairetic Code**

The Proairetic Code structures the narrative through a clear sequence of cause-and-effect actions that drive the story forward. Cutts constructs a chain of visually interconnected events, such as animals commuting, deforestation, and corporate decisions that lead step-by-step to ecological and societal collapse. Each action logically triggers the next, reinforcing the inevitability of destruction. A dolphin tossing a plastic bottle, for instance, initiates a chain reaction ending in polluted slums, symbolizing the long-term consequences of small, everyday behaviors. The swift suppression of protests further underscores the deterministic nature of systemic decay. Through this code, the film not only advances its plot but also critiques the momentum of institutional and environmental neglect.

- **The Semantic Code**

The semantic codereveals connotative meanings in elements such as characters, settings, and actions. Cutts uses anthropomorphized animals to symbolize human society, reflecting on ecological destruction and capitalist excess. This symbolic reversal of animals acting like humans invites viewers to critique humanity's impact on nature from a fresh, ironic perspective. Objects like oil contracts, fast food containers, and plastic waste are imbued with meanings that extend beyond their literal function; they represent greed, overconsumption, and environmental degradation. The use of color, particularly muted and gray tones, connotes lifelessness and moral decay. Scenes of protests and violence carry symbolic weight, portraying both resistance and the suppression of change. Through this

code, Cutts infuses the narrative with ideological and environmental critique without relying on dialogue.

- **The Symbolic Code**

The symbolic code operates through binary oppositions and abstract symbolic structures that construct deeper ideological meanings. In *The Turning Point*, the central opposition is between humans and nature, it is symbolized by reversed roles, where animals dominate and humans suffer, reflecting ecological justice and critique of anthropocentrism. Other key oppositions like life and death, freedom and control, also consumption and sustainability appear visually through contrasts between polluted industrial settings and fading natural environments. Scenes of protest and violence symbolize societal collapse, culminating in the final image of a destroyed Earth as a symbol of irreversible loss. Through such oppositions, Cutts constructs a symbolic universe that critiques anthropocentrism and warns of its existential consequences.

- **The Cultural Code**

The cultural code, known also as the referential code, refers to the shared knowledge, beliefs, and cultural references that a text assumes or activates in its audience to create meaning. In *The Turning Point*, Cutts relies heavily on viewers' prior understanding of real-world issues such as climate change, deforestation, industrial pollution, capitalism, and consumerism. Scenes of animal-run corporations, environmental collapse, and socio-political repression are not explained narratively but resonate through cultural familiarity. For instance, the imagery of oil spills, sweatshops, factory farming, and mass surveillance draws on widely recognized ecological and socio-political discourses. The reversal of roles of animals acting as exploiters and humans as the oppressed, echoes traditions of allegory and satire, requiring viewers to decode the symbolism based on historical and cultural frameworks of environmental justice and post human critique.

In sum, *The Turning Point* employs the narrative codes not merely as storytelling devices but as ideological instruments that deepen the viewer's interpretive engagement. Each code contributes to a layered narrative that challenges traditional plot structures and evokes critical reflection on environmental, societal, and moral issues. Through this intricate web of codes, the film transforms a brief animated story into a powerful ecological allegory that urges viewers to question dominant cultural narratives and reconsider humanity's relationship with nature.

2.2.4 Analysis in Terms of Role Reversal

In *The Turning Point*, Cutts uses role reversal as a central technique to expose the consequences of humanity's exploitative behavior toward nature. By placing animals in dominant industrial, societal, and political roles while portraying humans as hunted, caged, and commodified beings, the film offers more than metaphor, it presents a layered critique of ecological arrogance and human supremacy.

This reversal directly challenges anthropocentrism by constructing a world where animals control factories, conduct scientific experiments on humans, stage protests, and even wear human skin. Such scenes invert normalized realities, forcing the viewer to confront the brutality typically hidden behind species-based hierarchies. By seeing humans suffer the fates animals endure daily, the viewer is pushed toward empathy and ethical introspection.

The inversion also functions as a moral critique. Practices like animal testing, deforestation, and poaching are stripped of justification and revealed as cruelty when inflicted on humans. The film destabilizes speciesist thinking by asking why suffering is acceptable for animals but not for people, promoting a call for universal compassion and moral consistency.

Satire is another tool at work. Animals engaging in human behaviors such as wearing business attire, running corporations, militarizing, forms a grotesque parody of modern civilization. The film doesn't celebrate animal domination; rather, it condemns the systems of

destruction animals mimic. The message is clear: the issue lies not in who holds power, but in the ideologies of consumerism, militarism, and industrialization that shape its use.

Cutts also warns about the cyclical nature of violence. Power, once gained by animals, does not lead to restoration but to repetition of the same abuses. The dystopian vision portrayed suggests that domination itself and not just human domination, is the root problem. The film critiques the illusion that role reversal alone could bring justice or environmental healing.

Emotionally, the film's reversal is intended to shock. Scenes of human vulnerability trigger not just horror, but guilt and self-recognition. By making suffering visible and personal, it bypasses intellectual defenses and demands moral reflection. Viewers are made to see their complicity in systems that harm other beings.

On a symbolic level, the role reversal can be seen as environmental reckoning of nature fighting back. Yet, this is no redemptive narrative. The animals' violence mirrors that of humans, showing that changing roles does not change the destructive system. The ecological crisis, the film suggests, is rooted not in who dominates, but in the ideologies of domination themselves.

Ultimately, the role reversal in *The Turning Point* serves as a powerful critique of anthropocentrism, a satire of modern civilization, and a moral indictment of systemic violence. It doesn't offer easy solutions, but instead demands a reimagining of our relationship with nature based on empathy and accountability, not hierarchy. The message is not about replacing humans with animals in the power structure, but about dismantling the very logic of oppression. It leaves viewers not with hope, but with judgment.

2.2.5 Synthesis of Findings

The Turning Point depicts a dystopian role reversal where animals adopt human behaviors in a consumerist, industrial world. Set in a polluted gray city, animals engage in

deforestation, exploitation, and oppression, while humans suffer the consequences, living in slums, drowning in waste, and ultimately displayed as extinct. With no dialogue, the film uses visual symbolism to critique environmental destruction and systemic greed. It ends not with resolution but with the return of the title, prompting reflection on whether change is still possible or if humanity is beyond saving.

At the connotative level, *The Turning Point* functions as a powerful allegory critiquing consumerism, environmental destruction, and the illusion of progress. The anthropomorphic animals represent human society, suggesting that the corrupt behaviors we associate with humanity (greed, exploitation, violence) are systemic and transferable. The lifeless colors and chaotic industrial landscapes connote moral decay and ecological collapse, while symbols such as plastic waste, money, oil, and corporate buildings stand in for destructive ideologies like capitalism and materialism. Scenes of lifeless human bodies drifting with garbage or encased in museum glass connote the loss of human value and the collapse of civilization. The repetition of destruction, even after role reversal, implies that power inherently breeds corruption, regardless of species. The reappearance of the title at the end signifies a warning: we are at a critical moment, and whether it becomes a "turning point" for change or doom depends on our response to these symbolic truths.

The mythical analysis of *The Turning Point* reveals a series of connected critiques of ideology. The myth of inherited ecological collapse represents environmental destruction as a likely outcome to be passed on to future generations, framing collapse as a natural consequence of human behavior. The myths of perpetuated sin and power corruption expose how victims can be oppressors too and how any group in power, regardless of its identity, can replicate cycles of exploitation. The myth of consumption as salvation considers consumption as an idea that hides destructive behavior as progress. Similarly, the myth of denial and spectacle explore how the media and society normalize crises through passive observation.

The myth of disposable humanity centers on devaluing of human life in a world dominated by waste, while the myth of human supremacy deconstructs the illusion of humanity's permanence and superiority. Together, these myths challenge the systems in place that allow for moral and ecological collapse, reminding us to reflect on power, consumption, and fragility of the civilization.

The film deploys Barthes' five narrative codes not simply as structural tools, but as ideological mechanisms that enrich the viewer's interpretive experience. The hermeneutic code raises questions about human absence and reversed roles, prompting reflection on ethical and ecological issues. The proairetic code links actions like littering and repression to environmental collapse. The semantic code gives symbolic meaning to animals and objects, representing greed and destruction. The symbolic code critiques anthropocentrism through oppositions like nature vs. industry. Finally, the cultural code draws on knowledge of climate change and capitalism to interpret the film's allegory. Together, these codes deepen the film's critique of ecological and moral decline.

In *The Turning Point*, Cutts uses role reversal to critique humanity's exploitative behavior toward nature. By depicting animals in power and humans as the oppressed, the film challenges anthropocentrism and exposes the brutality of human dominated systems. It critiques practices like animal testing, deforestation, and poaching, stripping them of justification and urging moral consistency. The film satirizes modern civilization's destructive ideologies, warning that power alone doesn't lead to change, but rather perpetuates violence. Ultimately, this film calls for empathy, accountability, and the dismantling of oppressive systems, leaving viewers with moral judgment rather than hope.

In sum, the film uses role reversal, symbolism, and narrative codes to critique consumerism, environmental degradation, and power structures. By dismantling ideological myths and exposing the consequences of human actions, the film urges moral reflection and

systemic change. The following discussion will situate these findings within broader critical frameworks, exploring how the film engages with eco-criticism, post-humanism, and ideology critique to deepen its environmental and ethical message.

2.3 Section Three: Discussion of the Semiotic Findings

This section discusses the semiotic findings of *The Turning Point* in light of the research questions and the broader theoretical frameworks, including environmental discourse, ideology critique, and anthropocentrism. Drawing on denotative and connotative interpretations, ideological myths, and Barthes' narrative codes, the discussion explores how the film operates as both a visual narrative and a cultural critique. It examines the implications of role reversal and symbolic imagery in challenging dominant narratives about nature, power, and human identity. The section concludes by outlining key implications, addressing the study's limitations, and offering recommendations for future research.

2.3.1 Interpreting Denotation and Connotation in Environmental Context

With regard to the first research question, which aims to analyze and determine the denotative and connotative meanings of the semiotic elements employed in Cutts' short animated film *The Turning Point* (2020), a comprehensive scene based examination of the film has been conducted. The analysis focused on various semiotic components, including characters, spatial settings, objects, actions, and framing within each of the nineteen scenes. Each scene's denotative layer, based on direct observation of what is visibly present, serves as the foundation for connotative interpretation, revealing cultural, ideological, and environmental messages encoded in the visual narrative. For instance, a scene simply depicting a group of animals in control of an urban setting denotes a reversal of roles between animals and humans. However, its connotative significance lies in its critique of anthropocentric power structures and environmental exploitation. These findings validate that

the semiotic elements operate on both denotative and connotative levels to construct a layered discourse on ecological and ethical concerns.

In relation to the denotative and connotative meanings uncovered through this analysis, the findings of this study align with previous theoretical frameworks that emphasize the interpretive nature of signs (Barthes, 1977; Saussure, 1916). The analysis revealed that the visual signs in the film, such as posture, spatial layout, actions, and character roles, carry not only literal meanings but also symbolic and ideological associations. This supports the idea that visual media, like language, operates through signifiers that evoke meaning far beyond the literal image. These findings correspond with the semiotic arguments of Chandler (2017) and Hall (1997), who assert that signs are culturally loaded and polysemic. The visual grammar of *The Turning Point* demonstrates how first order (denotative) meanings provide a base for second-order (connotative) ideologies, a dynamic articulated by Barthes in his theory of myth. For example, while no single scene is analyzed in isolation or speculation, the sequential denotative structure provided by the film's progression enables the emergence of complex ideological connotations, such as critiques of capitalism, industrialization, and ecological degradation.

Furthermore, the film's use of narrative and reversal, without the use of text or dialogue, emphasizes the power of visual semiotics in shaping interpretive meaning, resonating with findings from other studies on animated media. As shown in the semiotic study of *La Luna* by Choirin et al. (2023), symbolic representation in animation often works through color, form, and composition. However, where *La Luna* employs whimsical and fantastical elements, *The Turning Point* leans on visual irony and structural inversion to communicate urgency and moral critique. This contrast demonstrates how semiotic choices in animation can be tailored toward different rhetorical outcomes. The film can also be situated within ecosemiotics, as defined by Kull (1998), where nature is not a backdrop but a dynamic

semiotic system. The film's anthropomorphism and environmental inversion urge viewers to reinterpret human-nature relations, challenging dominant ideologies of progress, power, and ethics.

Additionally, this study aligns with Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) grammar of visual design, which emphasizes the importance of framing, spatial arrangement in meaning making, the contrasting color palettes (e.g., sterile grays in human scenes versus fiery reds in polluted ones), spatial marginalization of humans, and expressive animal gazes, all contribute to a layered semiotic system. While these elements are denotative in form, they serve connotative functions, signaling power asymmetries, environmental decay, and moral indictment. The formal arrangement of scenes, even when taken solely at a denotative level, supports the emergence of layered meaning based on culturally shared codes and expectations. As Fiske (1990) argued, signs are never neutral; their reception is filtered through social and ideological frameworks.

This study contributes a fresh perspective to existing semiotic literature. Whereas most prior work has focused on advertising (Williamson, 1978), music videos, or traditional environmental campaigns, *The Turning Point* illustrates how animated short films can serve as powerful vehicles for ecological and ethical discourse. Through anthropomorphism and dystopian exaggeration, the film challenges viewers to reconsider the human nature relationship, aligning with the principles of eco-semiotics as articulated by Kull (1998). The results of this study support the view that semiotic elements within *The Turning Point* carry both denotative and connotative meanings. These meanings are not static but emerge through the interplay of visual signs with viewer interpretation, echoing the foundational premises of semiotic theory. By constructing its environmental and ethical messages through visual signs alone, the film affirms the role of semiotics as a powerful analytical tool in uncovering ideological discourse embedded in animated media. These insights contribute to the broader

literature on semiotics and ecocriticism by reinforcing how non-verbal media can articulate complex socio-environmental concerns.

2.3.2 Unpacking Ideological Myths in the Film

The second research question unpacks how Cutts' *The Turning Point* (2020) operates as a semiotic landscape that dismantles dominant societal ideologies by encoding them into powerful environmental and sociopolitical myths. This subsection builds upon the symbolic analyses of key scenes and places the findings in dialogue with existing semiotic and ideological studies. In contrast to Barthes' foundational work in *Mythologies* (1957), which examined everyday cultural signs that naturalize ideologies, such as in advertising, fashion, or media, the film extends this critique into the ecological domain. While Barthes focused on how bourgeois ideology disguises itself as natural, Cutts exposes environmental collapse, consumerism, and speciesism as similarly mythologized structures. For example, the myth of inherited ecological collapse mirrors what Barthes termed the "depoliticization of speech", here, environmental degradation is reframed not as a product of policy or human agency, but as inevitable fate. This corresponds to more recent scholarship that addresses environmental ideology in visual culture, such as Stibbe's (2015) *Ecolinguistics*, which critiqued how language normalizes ecological destruction through metaphors of inevitability and economic growth.

The myth of perpetuated sin and myth of power corruption reveal how role reversal is cyclical. These findings resonate with the work of Žižek (2008), who warned that ideology can survive even through its critique, often re-emerging in new forms. Just as animals replicate human systems of violence and oppression, the myth of justice through role reversal is revealed as hollow. In comparison to semiotic studies of power in political cartoons (El Refaie, 2009) or animated satire (Wells, 1998), Cutts' work intensifies the critique by collapsing the binary of victim and oppressor, highlighting the ideological trap of power

itself. The myth of consumption as salvation and the myth of denial and spectacle underscore Cutts' critique of capitalism as a self-sustaining illusion. These symbolic representations recall Baudrillard's theory of hyper-reality (1994), where media and consumer culture replace genuine experience with simulations. In the film, slogans like "A TASTE FOR THE NEW GENERATION" echo the real-world advertising tropes that Baudrillard argued transform destruction into spectacle and consumption into a moral good. This aligns with studies like Williamson's (1978) *Decoding Advertisements*, which similarly identified how consumption is ideologically constructed as redemptive and aspirational, even in the face of ecological ruin.

Additionally, the myth of disposable humanity and myth of human Supremacy function as critiques of anthropocentric ideology. The display of humans in an extinction museum echoes Haraway's (2016) call for the "Chthulucene", a rejection of human exceptionalism and an embrace of multispecies interdependence. The film deconstructs the Enlightenment-era myth of human centrality, paralleling posthumanist critiques (Braidotti, 2013) that argued for rethinking human identity in the age of the Anthropocene. In this way, Cutts contributes to the broader discourse on ecological posthumanism by demonstrating that myths of supremacy and permanence are ideologically fragile and ecologically dangerous. The corpus employs symbolic representation not merely to illustrate ideological myths, but to rupture them. Its mythic structure critiques how dominant ideologies naturalize consumption, power, denial, and human exceptionalism. This study thus contributes to expanding the semiotic tradition beyond linguistics and static media, illustrating how animated narrative can dynamically engage with and dismantle cultural myths, pushing semiotics into urgent ecological and ideological territories.

2.3.3 Insights from Barthes' Narrative Codes

With regards to the third research question, this study conducted a detailed semiotic analysis of Cutts' *The Turning Point* through the lens of Barthes' (1970) narrative code

theory. The analysis reveals that the film effectively integrates all five codes to construct a layered and ideologically potent environmental message. The hermeneutic (enigma) code is introduced from the very beginning of the film, where anthropomorphized animals inhabit a grayscale industrial cityscape. This visual configuration, devoid of explanatory dialogue, immediately activates narrative questions; these unanswered questions maintain tension throughout the film and compel viewers to search for meaning in the visual progression. The unresolved ending further reinforces this code by leaving the narrative open-ended, encouraging ethical reflection on themes of accountability and future change. This aligns with Barthes' (1970) view that enigma codes serve to transform curiosity into critical engagement. Previous studies, such as Chandler (2017) and Hall (1997), emphasized the role of ambiguity in media texts as a mechanism for deeper ideological decoding, a claim *The Turning Point* clearly substantiates.

The proairetic code structures the film's narrative through a coherent sequence of visual actions, where each scene logically progresses from the last. For instance, corporate decisions lead to environmental collapse, while everyday actions like littering evolve into widespread degradation. This chain of cause and effect not only sustains narrative momentum but also critiques systemic inertia and institutional complicity in environmental destruction. Compared to traditional media texts where the proairetic code serves mostly a storytelling function (Barthes, 1970), here it becomes a tool for environmental indictment, echoing Almiron and Tafalla's (2019) argument that provocative ecological narratives must portray the structural roots of ecological harm rather than idealized natural worlds.

Additionally, the semantic code operates at the level of symbolic content embedded in characters, objects, settings, and actions. Cutts' anthropomorphic animals act as semantic signifiers, representing human societal behaviors such as consumerism, greed, and ecological neglect. Objects like plastic debris, contact paper, carry connotative meanings that go beyond

their denotative appearances. These function similarly to how Williamson (1978) identified connotative depth in advertising icons. The film's gray palette and repeated imagery of mechanization and decay visually signify lifelessness and ethical collapse, reinforcing Barthes' claim that connotative meanings arise from associations that are culturally and ideologically constructed.

The symbolic code further deepens the ideological discourse through binary oppositions. In *The Turning Point*, the primary opposition is between humans and animals, reversing expected power dynamics to critique anthropocentrism and industrial dominance. Additional binaries such as nature vs. technology, control vs. resistance, and destruction vs. preservation are structured throughout the film. These oppositions, which function symbolically, allow for abstract ideological meanings to emerge, similar to the binary structuring found in classic semiotic studies by Saussure (1916) and Barthes (1977). The film's symbolism does not merely support the narrative; it embodies the moral and ecological message, resonating with Fiske's (1990) assertion that ideological struggle is encoded into textual oppositions.

Finally, the cultural code activates shared knowledge within the viewer to contextualize the film's environmental message. By referencing familiar images, such as protest crackdowns and deforestation operations, the film invokes a reservoir of cultural awareness surrounding contemporary ecological and political crises. These references depend on the audience's prior understanding of global issues like climate change, corporate exploitation, and environmental injustice. This code is comparable to the way *La Luna* (Choirin et al., 2023) engaged cultural memory to communicate moral themes, although *The Turning Point* takes a more dystopian and satirical route. Like Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), who argued that visual meaning depends on shared social knowledge, this film constructs meaning through culturally saturated signs that invite critical reflection.

Unlike earlier semiotic studies that focus mainly on meaning in static images or texts such as posters or advertisements (Chandler, 2017; Williamson, 1978;), this study shows how *The Turning Point* applies all five of the narrative codes to create a rich and complex story. While previous research explored denotation and connotation in still visuals, this film demonstrates how moving images can deepen these meanings through action, structure, and visual progression. As a result, the film offers a more dynamic and layered way to communicate cultural, ideological, and environmental messages. Moreover, these codes operate not in isolation, but interdependently, transforming narrative ambiguity, action, symbolism, semantics, and cultural reference into a cohesive critique of ecological neglect and anthropocentric systems. By doing so, the film reinforces the potential of animated short films to serve not only as artistic texts but also as complex vehicles of socio-environmental commentary.

2.3.4 Role Reversal and Critique of Anthropocentrism

In relation to the fourth research question, how the role reversal between humans and animals in *The Turning Point* functions as a semiotic strategy to critique anthropocentrism, this study reveals a nuanced interplay of symbolic inversion, ideological critique, and emotional impact. This role reversal is not merely a visual or narrative device; rather, it serves as a layered semiotic strategy that exposes the ethical and environmental consequences of human-centered worldviews. Cutts constructs a world where anthropomorphic animals assume the industrial, political, and social functions typically held by humans, while humans are reduced to the vulnerable and voiceless roles commonly experienced by animals. This inversion critiques the normalized hierarchies of speciesism, compelling viewers to question why cruelty is tolerated for some beings but condemned when mirrored back onto humans. Such a reversal evokes Barthes' (1977) notion of myth, in which naturalized ideologies are defamiliarized and revealed as constructed. By stripping away the assumed neutrality of

human dominance, Cutts positions anthropocentrism itself as a cultural fiction, a semiotic myth that has historically masked exploitation behind moral and scientific justification.

This approach resonates with previous semiotic and cultural critiques, particularly those of Berger (1980), who in *About Looking* emphasized how humans objectify animals in visual culture, and of Lippit (2000), who explored the erasure of animal subjectivity in modern thought. While these earlier works focus on the representational marginalization of animals, *The Turning Point* inverts this dynamic. Instead of invisibility, animals in Cutts' film become hyper-visible actors in oppressive roles, thereby satirizing not only human violence but also the systems of capitalism, industrialism, and surveillance that perpetuate it. The findings also reflect broader trends in posthumanist critique, particularly as theorized by Wolfe (2010), who argued that dismantling human exceptionalism is essential to ethical theory in the Anthropocene. Cutts' use of satire, animals in corporate suits, participating in protests, and engaging in species-specific cruelty, echoes this posthumanist position. The film does not offer a redemptive vision of nature reclaiming justice, but rather presents a dystopian mirror that shows domination as a corruptive force, regardless of who wields it. This aligns with the arguments of Haraway (2008), who contended that ethical coexistence requires rejecting the binaries of dominator/dominated and instead fostering multispecies justice.

Unlike studies that focus solely on the visual coding of environmental discourse (e.g., Hansen & Machin, 2013), this analysis emphasizes the role of narrative inversion as a semiotic mechanism. The emotional intensity generated through human suffering such as the scenes of captivity and commodification, functions to bypass cognitive detachment and provoke visceral moral reflection. In this way, the film mobilizes what Bal (2002) referred to as "narrative empathy", allowing viewers to embody the pain they often ignore when projected onto nonhuman animals. Furthermore, the symbolic reversal functions ideologically by revealing how violence is cyclical and systemic. Cutts warns that merely reversing roles

does not dismantle the logic of domination. This is in contrast to utopian ecological narratives that envision nonhuman actors as inherently virtuous (e.g., Disney's *Zootopia*). Here, animals become perpetrators of the same oppressive structures, reinforcing that it is not species but systemic ideologies of consumerism, militarism, and industrialism that perpetuate violence. This finding is in line with Žižek's (2008) critique of ideological reproduction, where even revolutionary inversions risk repeating the logic they aim to undo.

In sum, the role reversal in *The Turning Point* serves as a potent semiotic strategy that deconstructs anthropocentric ideologies through a fusion of symbolic inversion, satire, and affective engagement. This aligns with and extends prior theoretical work on speciesism, posthuman ethics, and visual semiotics, while offering a unique narrative approach to environmental critique. Rather than proposing simple moral binaries, the film challenges viewers to interrogate the structures that sustain ecological and ethical injustice, regardless of the species in power.

2.3.5 Implications of the Study

The semiotic analysis of *The Turning Point* (2020) through the lens of Barthes' theory shows the implications of this kind of analysis in cultural, environmental, and media studies. By analyzing myths, the film questions the assumed naturalness of anthropocentrism and consumerism, challenging audiences to rethink the constructed nature of human superiority. This environmental critique demonstrates how visual media can subvert dominant ideologies and promote ecological awareness. Through connotation, the film also shows that animated visuals can carry powerful ideological meanings about justice, sustainability, and speciesism, positioning animation as a serious tool for cultural critique. Furthermore, the analysis reframes anthropocentrism as a harmful cultural fiction, encouraging new avenues for ecocritical thinking and action. It also assists with critical media literacy, allowing audiences to recognize how meaning is constructed, empowering more reflective and responsible media

engagement. Finally, the insights gained support interdisciplinary conversations that demonstrate how semiotic analysis helps bridge fields like media studies, ethics, and the environmental humanities in addressing pressing global issues.

2.3.6 Limitations of the Study

The current study faced some difficulties and obstacles that may have affected its result and validity; the most important ones are:

1. Lack of prior research on the topic and the availability of related studies.
2. Semiotics as a field is poorly studied in English resources and also it was introduced late in our studies with insufficient time and coverage.
3. The issue of not having dissertation manuals for qualitative researches.
4. Self-reported data which may contain several potential sources of bias.
5. The analysis is based on Barthes' semiotic theory, which is inherently interpretive and subjective. Meanings drawn from the film may vary depending on the viewer's cultural and ideological background.
6. The research analyzes only one animated short film, which may not represent broader trends in environmental or animated media narratives.
7. The study does not include technical or multimodal aspects such as animation style, sound design, or production context, due to the limited time.
8. The study focuses solely on the internal visual and narrative elements of *The Turning Point*, without exploring audience reception due to the limited time.

2.3.7 Recommendations for Future Studies

The following recommendations are proposed to guide future research:

1.Future researchers are encouraged to approach the same short animated video using alternative semiotic theories such as Saussure's dyadic model or Peirce's triadic sign system to compare how different frameworks uncover distinct layers of meaning.

2. Further studies could apply the same Barthesian semiotic model to other contemporary animation dealing with similar themes like overconsumption, extinction, or climate collapse to expand the scope of environmental and sociopolitical interpretation.

3. It is recommended that Algerian media producers and film makers draw inspiration from globally resonant visual animation like *The Turning Point*, which achieves strong ideological impact through minimalist, symbolic storytelling.

4. Future studies could explore similar short films through diverse sociological lenses, such as gender roles, capitalist critique, class division, or anthropocentrism, to uncover how visual narratives reflect and challenge different dimensions of social ideology.

5. Researchers could also study audience reception of *The Turning Point* across different age groups and cultural backgrounds, especially in Algeria, to assess how semiotic interpretation varies globally.

6. It is suggested that interdisciplinary research involving environmental science, media studies, and visual semiotics be pursued to examine how symbolic imagery influences public consciousness on climate issues.

Conclusion

In nutshell, the present chapter provided a comprehensive discussion and interpretation of the findings derived from the semiotic analysis of Cutts' short animated film *The Turning Point*. The scenes of the video were systematically described, analyzed, and interpreted using Barthes' theory, with attention to visual codes, symbols, and cultural meanings. This analytical process was directly tied to the research questions and objectives outlined earlier in the study. Through this lens, the film was revealed as a powerful ecological and socio-political critique, the findings revealed a vivid picture of how *The Turning Point*critiques modern industrial societies by portraying the devastating consequences of

human actions on the environment, and how the reversal of roles, placing animals in positions of power, exposes the absurdity and destructiveness of unchecked consumerism, corporate control, greed, and ecological apathy and environmental neglect. The results strongly align with the study's goals, offering a rich understanding of how visual semiotics can communicate critical messages about anthropocentrism and humanity's impact on the planet. This chapter concluded with a set of recommendations for future research, suggesting new theoretical frameworks and thematic lenses to further explore animated media in socio-cultural contexts.

General Conclusion

Animated short films have increasingly emerged as influential cultural texts that combine visual storytelling with ideological critique. Their compact narrative structure and symbolic richness make them ideal for conveying urgent social and environmental messages. One such film is *The Turning Point* (2020) by Steve Cutts, which presents a dystopian world through a visual narrative that critiques anthropocentrism and environmental destruction. This short film, like many works of visual media, is deeply embedded with signs and meanings that invite semiotic interpretation.

In this regard, semiotics, provides a valuable framework for analyzing the film's denotative, connotative, and mythological dimensions, and for uncovering the deeper ideological messages conveyed through visual and narrative elements. In this view, the present study aimed to investigate how *The Turning Point* constructs environmental messages through signs, symbols, and narrative strategies, and how do denotative and connotative signs work together in the short film to construct these messages and what ideological myths are revealed through the symbolic representations in the film, also how do Barthes' five narrative codes operate in the film to construct and convey meanings, to finally investigate how does the reversal of roles between humans and animals in the film function as a semiotic strategy to critique anthropocentrism.

The current dissertation is structured into two chapters following the General Introduction. The theoretical chapter reviews key literature relevant to the field of semiotics and visual media. It consists of two sections. The first section explores the origins, key figures, and main concepts of semiotics, with a particular focus on Roland Barthes and the use of semiotics in analyzing visual narratives. The second section discusses the nature of animated short films and the role of environmental narratives in visual media, highlighting

how short films like *The Turning Point* serve as ideological tools that reflect and critique real world ecological issues.

The practical chapter represents the fieldwork of the research, applying the theoretical framework to the selected film. It offers a thorough explanation of the adopted methodology and provides the results obtained from the analysis with discussion. The first section is devoted to present an overall description of the research methodology used in this study, and the second one is devoted to present detailed scene-by-scene analysis according to Barthes' denotation, connotation, myth and the five codes, providing a deep semiotic interpretation of the film and ends with an overview of the findings, implications, limitations of the research, and recommendations for future studies. Finally, the dissertation ends with a General Conclusion which makes an overall account of the research and summarizes the main research findings.

The semiotic analysis of the video yielded several findings. We identified the interplay between denotative and connotative elements and how they work together to create environmental meaning. We revealed the ideological myths that are revealed through the symbolic representations in the film. We demonstrated how the narrative codes are embedded throughout the film and play a critical role in structuring suspense, meaning, and cultural critique. We uncovered the ideological myth of human dominance and its consequences through symbolic reversals.

Based on the findings, future researchers are encouraged to explore *The Turning Point* using alternative semiotic frameworks such as Saussure's dyadic model or Peirce's triadic sign system. Further studies may use Barthes' model to analyze other animated shorts addressing environmental issues like overconsumption or climate collapse. It is also recommended that Algerian media producers take inspiration from impactful visual narratives like *The Turning Point* that use symbolic storytelling to convey ideology. Future research

could adopt sociological perspectives, such as gender roles, class, or anthropocentrism, or investigate audience reception across cultures, especially within Algeria. Finally, interdisciplinary studies combining environmental science, media studies, and semiotics are encouraged to understand how symbolic imagery shapes public awareness of climate issues.

In conclusion, by unpacking cultural myths and exposing the connotative potential of images, the film encourages audiences to think more critically about anthropocentrism, consumerism, and ecological carelessness not as natural realities, but as cultural constructs open to critique and transformation. These findings affirm the value of semiotic analysis not only in media and cultural studies but also in environmental discourse, where it can inform advocacy, education, and interdisciplinary research. As the global ecological crisis continue to grow, such critical approaches can provide valuable tools for raising awareness, developing media literacy, and imagining more equitable and sustainable futures.

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Résumé

À mesure que la dégradation de l'environnement s'intensifie au XXIe siècle, l'animation s'impose comme un médium puissant pour sensibiliser à l'écologie à travers une narration visuelle symbolique. Cette étude propose une analyse sémiotique de *The Turning Point* (2020), un court métrage animé de Steve Cutts, en s'appuyant sur le cadre de Roland Barthes : dénotation, connotation, mythe et les cinq codes narratifs. Elle explore quatre axes fondamentaux. Le premier concerne l'interaction entre les signes dénotatifs et connotatifs dans la transmission des préoccupations écologiques. Le second met en lumière les mythes idéologiques véhiculés à travers le symbolisme du film. Le troisième s'intéresse à la manière dont les codes narratifs définis par Barthes structurent son discours environnemental. Enfin, l'étude analyse comment l'inversion symbolique des rôles entre humains et animaux constitue une critique de l'anthropocentrisme. À l'aide d'une méthodologie qualitative, le film est décomposé en scènes riches en thèmes reflétant des questions telles que le consumérisme, le capitalisme, la justice écologique et le pouvoir. Les éléments visuels, la composition, le mouvement, la couleur, le symbolisme des personnages, ainsi que la musique et les éléments textuels, sont examinés de manière approfondie. Les résultats révèlent un discours à plusieurs niveaux, où signes dénotatifs et connotatifs s'entrelacent pour construire et remettre en cause des mythes culturels. Les codes narratifs de Barthes structurent le sens tout en exposant les idéologies dominantes. L'inversion des rôles entre humains et animaux fonctionne comme une stratégie sémiotique délibérée pour remettre en question les perspectives anthropocentriques et susciter une réflexion sur la responsabilité écologique. Cette étude confirme le potentiel du média animé à favoriser une conscience environnementale par une narration sémiotique nuancée et signifiante.

Mots-clés: animation, sémiotique, discours environnemental, anthropocentrisme, construction du sens

ملخص

مع تصاعد التدهور البيئي في القرن الحادي والعشرين، برزت الرسوم المتحركة كوسيلة فعّالة لرفع الوعي البيئي من خلال السرد البصري الرمزي. تقدم هذه الدراسة تحليلاً سيميائيًا لفيلم الرسوم المتحركة القصير *The Turning Point* (2020)للمخرج Steve Cutts، بالاعتماد على إطار Roland Barthes الذي يشمل الدلالة، والضمنية، والأسطورة، وخمسة رموز سردية. تتناول هذه الدراسة أربعة محاور أساسية، يتمثّل أولها في تحليل كيفية تفاعل العلامات الدلالية والضمنية بما يساهم في التعبير عن المخاوف البيئية. كما تسلط الضوء على الأساطير الأيديولوجية الكامنة في البنية الرمزية للفيلم، وتُبرز دور الرموز السردية كما حددها رولان بارت في تشكيل خطابه البيئي. أما المحور الأخير، فينصبّ على التماثل الرمزي بين الإنسان والحيوان بوصفه نقدًا واضحًا للنزعة المركزية البشرية. باستخدام منهجية نوعية، يُفكك الفيلم إلى مشاهد غنية بالموضوعات تعكس قضايا مثل الاستهلاكية، الرأسمالية، العدالة البيئية، والسلطة. يتم تحليل العناصر البصرية، التكوين، الحركة، الألوان، رمزية الشخصيات، بالإضافة إلى الموسيقى والمكونات النصية بشكل معمّق. تكشف النتائج عن خطاب متعدد الطبقات، حيث تتشابك العلامات الدلالية والضمنية لبناء ونقد الأساطير الثقافية. تعمل الرموز السردية لبارت على تشكيل المعنى وكشف الأيديولوجيات السائدة. يعكس تبادل الأدوار بين الإنسان والحيوان استراتيجية سيميائية متعمدة لتحدي الرؤية المركزية البشرية وتحفيز التأمل في المسؤولية البيئية. تؤكد هذه الدراسة على قدرة الوسائط المتحركة في تعزيز الوعي البيئي من خلال سرد سيميائي دقيق وصناعة دلالات معقدة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرسوم المتحركة، السيميائيات، الخطاب البيئي، المركزية البشرية، إنتاج المعنى