Media Studies Component 2: Section A

Media language – Sitcom

Overview

Media language refers to how media products express and communicate meaning. Within audio/visual media products, meaning is communicated via the use of:

- camera distance/angles
- music
- dialogue
- setting
- colour codes
- iconography (props, costumes)
- editing.

Mise-en-scène

In the analysis of sitcom, the term 'mise-en-scène' refers to everything in front of the camera, including the set design, lighting and actors.

When evaluating how the mise-en-scène creates meaning, you should focus on:

Lighting: usually soft, with key/fill/back light used.

The set: bright colours/props to construct verisimilitude.

Costumes: what characters wear/what this tells us.

Characters: how the characters interact with the above/hyperbolic performance codes.

Barthes's semiology theory

Barthes identified **five** 'codes', which media products use to create meaning.

Referential/cultural code: part of a text mentions something outside of the text, for example, scientific, historical or cultural references.

Hermeneutic/enigma code: a mystery within the narrative.

Proairetic/action code: this code refers to how action is sequenced in a narrative.

Semantic/adjectival code: gives more information about a character.

Symbolic code: a part of a narrative that has extra meaning.

Todorov

Todorov proposed that narratives follow **five** steps wherein the character develops:

1. The narrative starts with an equilibrium.
2. An action or character disrupts the equilibrium.
3. A quest to restore the equilibrium begins.
4. There are attempts to repair the disruption.
5. Resolution occurs and equilibrium is restored.

Sitcoms are tightly organised narratives that are built upon a character and a situation, so we can often identify this structure in the genre.

Semiotics

The fundamentals of semiotics are built upon the principle of the **sign and what it communicates**. For example, a full moon is a celestial body reflecting sunlight (**the denotation**), but within a horror film it could mean supernatural danger (**the connotation**).

Propp's theory of character functions

Vladimir Propp observed that re-occurring characters are present in most narratives and help move the action forward. Sitcoms often rely on variations of these character functions within episodes to construct narratives. These archetypes are:

Hero: the protagonist who leads the narrative.

Villain: the antagonist who challenges and attempts to defeat the protagonist.

Princess: any character that needs to be found or saved by the protagonist.

Donor: they provide the protagonist with something.

Helper: helps the protagonist as a sidekick to complete the quest.

Dispatcher: an authority figure who offers a reward for the protagonist's success. They may also help the hero to overcome obstacles at the start of the quest.

False hero: a character who seems helpful but ends up betraying the hero.