

The Structure of Signs in Awaydays Film: A Semiotic Analysis by Ferdinand De Saussure's Theory (2009)

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the structure of signs in the British film Awaydays (2009) using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory. Saussure conceptualizes signs as a combination of the signifier (the physical form) and the signified (the conceptual meaning), which together produce meaning within a linguistic and cultural system. The research treats the film not merely as entertainment but as a cultural text embedded with symbolic messages. Through a descriptive qualitative method, the study identifies and interprets various signs present in visual and verbal elements, including costumes, music, facial expressions, locations, and dialogue. These signs are analyzed in relation to themes of identity, subculture, alienation, and personal transformation. Particular emphasis is placed on how the protagonist, Carty, and his interactions with "The Pack" represent internal struggles and external pressures within the context of 1970s English football hooliganism. The findings show that the film uses semiotic structures to explore issues of masculinity, belonging, and youth rebellion. It reflects how signs operate not only to build narrative coherence but also to reinforce or challenge dominant ideologies. This analysis highlights the capacity of cinema to function as a site of meaning-making through structured sign systems. By applying Saussure's theoretical framework, the study demonstrates that semiotics can provide critical insight into the ways films communicate complex social and psychological themes.

Keywords: Semiotic, Saussure, Subculture, Hooliganism, Narrative.

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INTRODUCTION

Film is a visual communication medium that not only provides entertainment but also functions as a system of signs that conveys social, cultural, and psychological meanings through images, sounds, and narratives. In semiotic studies, film is understood as a cultural text filled with meaningful signs. Semiotics is the study of signs as a means by which humans understand and navigate the world around them (Sya'Dian, 2015). Semiotics is crucial in understanding how signs are used to communicate messages and ideologies, as well as how these signs are interpreted by audiences based on their social and cultural contexts.

One of the relevant semiotic theories used to analyze films is that of Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure defines a sign as a unity between the signifier, which is a physical form such as an image, color, sound, or word, and the signified, which is the concept or meaning referred to by the signifier (Chandler, 2002). The relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary and only meaningful within the wider sign system. In this way, Saussure's semiotic analysis emphasizes the importance of the structure and relationship between signs in constructing meaning. The film *Awaydays* (2009), directed by Pat Holden, presents an intriguing subject for semiotic study. Adapted from Kevin Sampson's novel, it is set in Wirral, England, during the late 1970s. *Awaydays* follows Peter 'Carty' Cartwright, a teenager who suffers an identity crisis and deep loneliness after his mother's death.

Seeking meaning and belonging, he becomes part of The Pack, a football hooligan group supporting Tranmere Rovers. Richard (2002) describes football fandom as a space for identity formation and subcultural expression among working-class youth, reflecting the concept of 'supporters' as traditional spectators with a strong emotional attachment to the club.

Many signs appear in *Awaydays* that can be analyzed, such as the classic Adidas costumes worn by members of The Pack that represent identity and solidarity in the soccer hooligan subculture, post-punk music such as Joy Division that present the nuances of anxiety, alienation, and rebellion of the younger generation, as well as the bleak industrial area setting that depicts alienation and socio-economic stagnation at that time.

This study will examine how *Awaydays* uses its visual and narrative elements to create meanings related to hooligan subculture life, teenage identity struggles, and the social and cultural realities of England during the late 1970s. Football fan groups like punks or The Pack are subcultures within society that have their own social and economic practices, differing from state norms. They are seen as a means to challenge social privilege and reject hierarchical systems (Ismail, 2023).

This research is important to provide a deeper understanding of how films as cultural texts represent social reality through the use of various interrelated cinematic elements. In addition, this research is expected to contribute to the development of film studies, semiotic analysis, visual communication science, and contemporary cultural studies, especially in understanding how visual media constructs and produces meaning in certain social contexts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, several scholars have examined the semiotic analysis dimensions of football hooliganism as portrayed in *Awaydays* (2009), analyzing how the film represents various aspects of this complex social phenomenon. This literature review has the key findings from different perspectives.

Narrative Theory

Narrative theory is an approach within literary and cultural studies that focuses on how stories are structured and how they function to create meaning. It examines the elements of narrative such as plot, character, setting, and point of view, as well as the relationship between the storyteller, the story, and the audience. Narrative theory explores how stories are told, what structures they use, how they represent time and events, and how they shape the audience's understanding of experiences, identities, and cultural values. It is widely used in film analysis, literature, and social sciences to interpret how narratives construct realities and convey ideologies (Lubis, 2025).

Plot

Plot is the fundamental structure that organizes the sequence of events in a film or literary work to create a coherent and meaningful narrative. Plot not only includes what happens, but also how these events are arranged to produce specific effects on the audience. In films, plots are usually constructed in a linear or non-linear manner to emphasize themes and character development within the story (Wahyudha, 2023).

Some of Writer describe plot as "*the what and the way*" of a narrative, meaning it is not only the events that occur (story) but also the way those events are presented (discourse). An effective plot structure arranges the cause-and-effect relationships between events, creating tension, climax, and resolution that satisfy the audience. This enables viewers to understand the characters' motivations and the messages the film seeks to convey.

A well-structured plot functions to connect the film's main themes with the audience's emotional experiences. In *Awaydays*, the plot is used to depict the harsh realities of working-class teenage life in late 1970s England, including issues of masculinity, violence, alienation, and the search for identity through the hooligan subculture. Through its plot, the film's meaning is built and interpreted within a broader socio-cultural context.

Characterization

Characterization is the technique used to present and develop characters so that they possess clear identities, personalities, and motivations within a narrative. Characterization can be done directly (direct characterization) through explicit descriptions, or indirectly (indirect characterization) through a character's actions, speech, thoughts, appearance, and the reactions of other characters towards them.

In film, characterization is also constructed through visual elements. Monaco explains that facial expressions, body gestures, costumes, and settings are important mediums for conveying characterization non-verbally (Monaco, 2009). For example, clothing choices and hairstyles can indicate a character's social status, subculture, or personality, while facial expressions and walking styles can reinforce the emotions a character is experiencing.

In *Awaydays*, characterization does not only function to bring characters to life, but also to emphasize themes such as masculinity, violence, group loyalty, and alienation. Through its characters, *Awaydays* is able to represent the psychological complexities of working-class teenagers trapped between their life expectations and harsh social realities, thereby adding depth to the film's meaning as a cultural text.

Semiotic Theory

Semiotics is a theory of signs and symbols used to understand how meaning is created and communicated, both verbally and non-verbally. It is applicable in various fields, including performing arts, where signs are embedded in gestures, costumes, settings, and movements. The roots of semiotic theory lie

in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce. Saussure viewed language as a system of signs made up of the *signifier* (sound-image or form) and the *signified* (concept or meaning), with the relationship between them being arbitrary and based on social conventions.

Peirce, on the other hand, proposed a triadic model consisting of the *representamen* (the sign's form), the *interpretant* (the meaning), and the *object* (the referent). He also classified signs into three categories: *icon* (resemblance-based, like photos), *index* (causal connection, like smoke indicating fire), and *symbol* (arbitrary and culturally constructed, like national emblems). These components emphasize that meaning is interpreted, not fixed, and it depends on the mental connection between the sign and its referent made by the observer.

The theory of semiotics suggests that meaning arises not directly from signs but from how those signs are interpreted within context. Ogden and Richards' "triangle of meaning" illustrates that there is no direct relationship between a sign and its object; instead, meaning is generated through the interpretant's cognitive process. Context, social norms, and personal experience all shape how meaning is derived from symbols, making meaning fluid and dynamic. Furthermore, signs must function within a system to convey meaning effectively; isolated signs often lack clarity and rely on the presence of other signs for full comprehension.

In performing arts, particularly in theater and dance, semiotics helps analyze how non-verbal symbols such as gestures, movement, and space use communicate cultural and emotional messages. Every element on stage—from a *keris* in traditional Malay theater to a stylized movement in modern dance—can act as a sign conveying identity, power, resistance, or ritual. Because of the arbitrary nature of signs, their interpretation can change depending on the cultural and temporal context. Thus, semiotics becomes a valuable framework for decoding the multiple layers of meaning embedded in artistic and performative expressions (Bakar, 2006).

Semiotic Analysis by Ferdinand De Saussure's Theory

Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory provides a fundamental framework for analyzing how meaning is constructed through signs. A sign is composed of two inseparable components: the *signifier* (signifiant), which is the physical form of the sign such as words, images, or sounds, and the *signified* (signifié), which is the mental concept or meaning associated with the signifier. The relationship between signifier and signified is arbitrary but socially constructed within a specific cultural and linguistic context (Sanders, 2007).

Saussure's structuralist approach views language and other sign systems as structured networks where the meaning of each sign depends on its differences and relations with other signs within the system. Thus, signs gain meaning not in isolation but within the entire structure of the language or cultural system in which they operate (Chandler, 2002).

In the context of film analysis, Saussure's semiotic theory allows researchers to examine how visual, auditory, and narrative elements function as signs that produce meaning. For instance, objects, costumes, settings, gestures, music, and dialogue in a film can be interpreted as signifiers that evoke particular signified concepts, contributing to the overall meaning and ideology constructed by the film. This research applies Saussure's theory to analyze *Awaydays* (2009) by examining how the film constructs meaning through its complex network of signs. By identifying the signifiers presented in the film and interpreting their signified meanings within the narrative and socio-cultural context, the analysis reveals how *Awaydays* represents themes of subculture, identity, alienation, and masculinity. This semiotic

approach enables a deeper understanding of how the film communicates cultural and social realities through its system of signs.

Review of Previous Studies

Research applying Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory has been widely conducted across various objects and contexts in film analysis. One such study was carried out by *Nuning Indah Pratiwi, Faizar Yuliansyah, I Nyoman Subanda, and Putu Suparna (2023)*, titled "*Semiotic Analysis of Ferdinand de Saussure on the Character John Doe in the Film Se7en*." This research analyzed the character of John Doe using Saussure's semiotic framework, focusing on the concepts of signifier and signified, langue and parole, syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations, as well as synchrony and diachrony. Using a qualitative descriptive approach and in-depth interviews with experts and students, the study revealed that John Doe is portrayed through various signs as a mysterious, radical, egocentric, and psychologically complex figure (Nuning Indah Pratiwi, 2023).

Meanwhile, *Iqbal Ibrahim Sungkar, Rana Akbari Fitriawan, and Asaas Putra (2016)* conducted a study titled "*Hooliganism Presentation in Film: Semiotic Analysis of John Fiske in Awaydays Film*." Although this research also analyzed the film *Awaydays*, it used John Fiske's semiotic approach rather than Saussure's. The study examined six key sequences to explore how hooliganism is depicted at the levels of reality, representation, and ideology. The findings suggested that *Awaydays* portrays hooligans as brutal football supporters who engage in both verbal and physical violence, and the film communicates an ideology of excessive group loyalty and arrogance. However, this study did not explore the structural relationships between signs as proposed by Saussure (Iqbal Ibrahim Sungkar, 2016).

In another study, *Feby Amelza Putra (2024)* analyzed the animated film *Nusa and Rara* in an episode titled "*Clean Our City, Clean Indonesia*." Using Saussure's theory, the study identified various signifiers and their corresponding signifieds to uncover moral messages embedded in the animation. The research found that both visual and verbal signs represented themes such as cleanliness, environmental awareness, and social responsibility (Putra, 2024).

Muhammad Sulthan Al Muzakky, Sabda Mahardika Munggaran, Muhammad Gibran Rabbani, and Aceng Ruhendi Syaifullah (2023) conducted a semiotic study titled "*Semiotic Analysis of Ferdinand de Saussure on the Film Srimulat: Hil Yang Mustahil – Babak Pertama*." This research used a qualitative approach to analyze scenes in the Indonesian comedy film, aiming to uncover moral values presented through visual and narrative signs. The findings revealed signifiers that reflected values such as honesty, humility, responsibility, and self-awareness (Muhammad Sulthan Al Muzakky, 2023).

Furthermore, *Winda Sari Sinaga (2023)* conducted a qualitative study titled "*Representation of Ferdinand De Saussure's Semiotics in the Film Jakarta vs Everybody*." The study focused on identifying signifiers, signifieds, and the meanings they produce using Saussure's semiotic model. The film, which portrays the life of Dom, a young migrant in Jakarta, revealed signs that communicate moral values such as perseverance, discipline, and personal struggle. The research confirmed that Saussurean semiotics is effective in revealing deeper conceptual meanings embedded within film narratives (Sinaga, 2023).

Although these five previous studies applied Saussure's theory, each focused on different objects and aspects. Pratiwi (2023) focused on character psychology in *Se7en*, while Sungkar et al. (2016) analyzed *Awaydays* through Fiske's model rather than Saussure's. Putra (2024) explored educational themes in children's animation, and Al Muzakky et al. (2023) examined cultural values in a comedy film. Sinaga (2023) focused on individual struggle and moral representation in a contemporary urban setting. In contrast,

the current research specifically analyzes *Awaydays* (2009) using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory to explore how meaning is constructed through sign systems in relation to subculture, masculinity, alienation, and identity formation within the context of British hooliganism. This study aims to fill the gap left by previous research by offering a comprehensive Saussurean analysis of the film, which has not been extensively explored in this framework. By examining the relationship between signifiers and signifieds within visual, auditory, and narrative elements, this research contributes to the academic discourse on semiotics and film studies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research adopts a qualitative descriptive design focusing on semiotic analysis to explore how meaning is constructed through signs within the film *Awaydays* (2009). The qualitative approach is suitable for this study as it allows for an in-depth interpretation and understanding of the cultural and social meanings represented through various cinematic signs (Chandler, the basics, 2002). The study employs descriptive analytical methods, which involve the identification, description, and interpretation of semiotic elements in the film, based on Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory.

The research design consists of several interconnected analytical stages. First, a subculture representation analysis is conducted to examine how the hooligan group *The Pack* is portrayed as a subculture in the film *Awaydays* (2009), focusing on their group identity, social interactions, and cultural practices within the context of late 1970s British society. This is followed by a fashion style analysis, which explores the clothing worn by group members—such as Adidas tracktops, Adidas trainers, and Fred Perry jackets—as markers of group identity and solidarity.

Next is the chants analysis, which investigates football chants featured in the film to trace the origins of the hooligan group, their nicknames, and team affiliations, emphasizing chants as symbols of loyalty and identity. A rituals of violence analysis then examines fight scenes and violent acts performed by the group, aiming to understand how violence serves as a means of reinforcing solidarity, constructing masculinity, and strengthening group bonds within the subculture.

Finally, the slang language analysis focuses on the specific slang used by the characters, using film scenes to identify unique terms and their meanings, as slang reflects group identity and the working-class subculture of the time. This research centers on *Awaydays* (2009) to explore how signifiers such as fashion, chants, rituals, and language produce signified meanings related to subculture, masculinity, alienation, and identity formation. The study acknowledges several limitations, including the fictional nature of the film as a data source, the potential dramatization of events, and the researcher's limitations in interpreting the nuances of local slang.

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Source of Data

The data sources for this research primarily revolve around the film *Awaydays* (2009) and related

materials that provide context and depth to the semiotic analysis. The primary data source is the official theatrical release of the film *Awaydays*, directed by Pat Holden, with a runtime of 105 minutes. This film serves as the foundational material for examining the representation of football hooligan subculture, identity formation, and group dynamics within late 1970s British society.

In addition, this research draws upon contemporary media coverage and critical reviews related to *Awaydays*, including film reviews, academic articles, and cultural commentaries that discuss the film's portrayal of hooliganism and youth subculture. These sources provide insights into how the film was received and interpreted within both popular and academic contexts.

News articles and interviews from the period of the film's release offer additional context about the broader social discourse surrounding football hooliganism and the cultural nostalgia associated with the late 1970s casual culture depicted in the film. Archival materials such as documentaries, historical photographs, and articles about football hooligan firms in Merseyside and Northern England are used as comparative data to analyze how accurately the film represents the realities of hooligan culture at that time.

Furthermore, digital materials including official promotional content, website archives, and online fan discussions provide additional context about how *Awaydays* was marketed and received by different audiences. These sources offer insights into the film's cultural impact, its role in shaping public perceptions of football hooliganism, and its representation of masculinity and working-class identity during the period depicted.

Data

The data for this research consists of narrative scenes, dialogues, and character interactions from the 2009 film *Awaydays*. The analysis centers on Peter 'Carty' Cartwright as the main character, whose personal journey explores themes of identity, alienation, and belonging. Particular attention is given to Carty's relationship with Elvis, a key supporting character whose presence reflects both emotional intimacy and cultural detachment within the subculture.

Furthermore, the film's portrayal of The Pack—a football hooligan group—serves as the primary object of study in examining how subcultural identity, masculinity, and violence are expressed visually and narratively. The selected scenes highlight key interactions, rituals, and symbolic elements that define group dynamics and individual struggles. This study applies Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory to interpret how signs in the form of gestures, costumes, setting, and language construct meaning within the film's cultural context

Technique of Collecting Data

To collect data for this research, the first step taken was watching the film *Awaydays* (2009). The researcher carefully observed and took detailed notes on character interactions, dialogues, and scenes that depicted football hooliganism. Particular attention was paid to the representation of subculture, masculinity, alienation, fashion styles, chants, and violence within the football supporter culture portrayed in the film.

The second step involved re-watching the film several times to ensure a deeper and more focused documentation of key scenes and narrative elements. The initial viewings were used to understand the overall storyline and context, while the subsequent viewings focused specifically on analytical categories such as subculture, fashion, chants, and the violent rituals performed by the hooligan group known as The Pack.

The researcher then gathered supporting information from media sources such as film reviews,

critical analyses, interviews, and academic articles related to *Awaydays* (2009). This secondary data provided broader context on the film's production, audience reception, and portrayal of football hooliganism and casual culture in 1970s Britain. (British Film Institute., 2009).

After gathering primary and secondary data, the researcher then selected and categorized the material based on recurring and prominent themes in the film. These categories included subculture and group identity, fashion as a cultural marker, chants as expressions of loyalty and origin, violent rituals as symbols of masculinity and group solidarity, and slang as a reflection of working-class identity.

Finally, specific elements such as dialogues, slang expressions, chants, fashion items, scenes of violence, and character interactions were identified and documented in detail. These elements were then analyzed as *signifiers* that represent deeper cultural and social meanings, using the framework of Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory (Sanders, 2007).

Technique of Analyzing Data

The data description and interpretation play a crucial role in conducting a descriptive semiotic analysis of the film *Awaydays* (2009). The analysis involved a comparative examination of multiple scenes to highlight the varying representations of subculture, masculinity, group identity, violence, and alienation among the characters. The primary aim was to explore how the filmmakers portray the internal and external conflicts faced by the protagonist, Peter 'Carty' Cartwright (played by Nicky Bell), and the members of The Pack. Through this exploration, the research sought to uncover the narrative and visual strategies used to communicate the psychological, emotional, and social complexities of these characters.

In addition, the study examined how these portrayals reflect broader real-world phenomena associated with football hooliganism, such as the formation of group identity, performances of masculinity, and patterns of aggressive behavior. The analysis also considered whether the film's representations serve a critical or reflective function—commenting on societal norms, the identity of the working class, or the dynamics of collective action in late 1970s British society. The filmmaker's use of Merseyside as a setting, combined with the cultural context of football casual subculture, provided rich material for exploring themes of alienation, belonging, and the fine boundary between solidarity and violence.

To support this analysis, the researcher categorized key words, slang expressions, chants, and visual scenes according to their thematic relevance to subculture, identity, fashion, and group dynamics. This thematic classification helped reveal recurring symbols, dialogues, and motifs that reflect the motivations and interpersonal dynamics of the characters. The film was viewed multiple times to ensure a systematic and comprehensive analysis of relevant scenes, each of which was assessed in terms of its contribution to the central themes.

Finally, the semiotic analysis employed Ferdinand de Saussure's theoretical framework to interpret how visual and narrative elements operate as signs. This involved identifying the signifiers—such as images, costumes, sounds, and language—and the corresponding signified concepts they represent. Cinematographic choices, dialogue, fashion, chants, and character development were all examined to understand how these elements work together as a system of signs to depict cultural identity, social tension, and the lived realities within the hooligan subculture.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

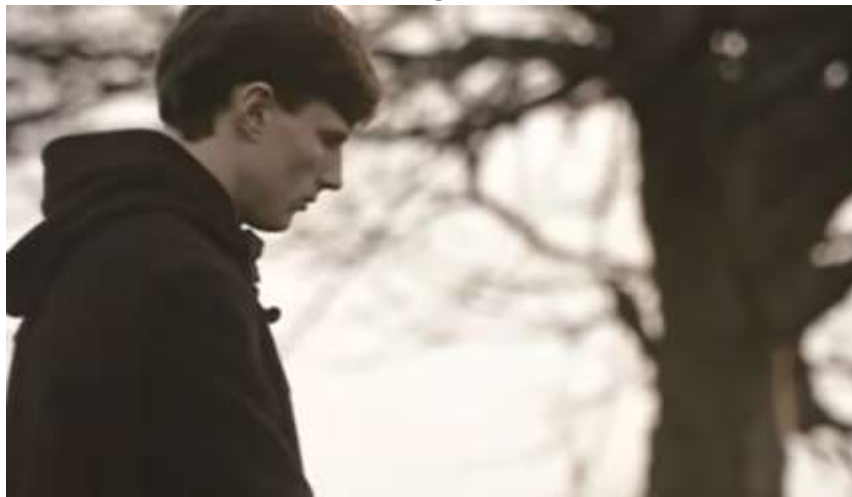
Results

After watching the film *Awaydays* (2009) in detail and analyzing all of its scenes directed by Pat Holden, this research found results that explain the presence of signifiers and signified throughout the film. The signifier, which refers to the physical manifestation of an idea, is represented through various visual and auditory elements in the film, such as fashion styles, chants, and scenes of violence among football hooligan groups. These scenes serve as visual and narrative representations of deeper themes such as subculture identity, masculinity, alienation, loyalty, and the existential search for belonging within the working-class youth of late 1970s Britain.

Below are several scenes from this film that have been analyzed using Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic analysis :

Scene 1 : Carty Staring at His Mother's Grave

Figure 1



This scene (00 : 01 : 01) occurs early in the film, showing Carty standing alone at his mother's grave on a cold, grey day. He wears a simple black coat, with his head bowed slightly and his eyes fixed downward without tears. The cemetery is completely empty, surrounded by bare winter trees under an overcast sky, creating a bleak and heavy atmosphere. The cold wind moves his hair slightly as he remains still and silent, as if frozen by his thoughts. In this moment, Carty appears deeply confused and lost, silently speaking to his mother in his mind. His facial expression shows sadness mixed with guilt, as he whispers an apology to her. He feels torn, knowing he is about to involve himself with The Pack – a football hooligan group known for violent fights – something his mother and family would never approve of.

The camera first uses a long shot, showing his small, fragile figure standing alone among the graves, emphasizing his isolation, then cuts to a close-up of his pale, expressionless face that carries the weight of his internal struggle. There is no background music, only the quiet sound of wind, amplifying the loneliness and heaviness of this moment. Here, he is not planning to leave home completely, but he knows he is about to enter a violent subculture that his family would forbid if they knew.

Signifier :

The signifiers in this scene include Carty's bowed head, his still posture, and his blank, sorrowful facial expression. His black coat signifies mourning and grief. The graveyard setting, with its grey skies

and leafless trees, creates a symbolic visual of lifelessness and emptiness. His whispered apology to his mother, along with his eyes looking downward without direct gaze at the grave, signifies his guilt and inner conflict. The absence of flowers or any other mourners around signifies his isolation. The long shot showing his small figure in the vast empty graveyard emphasizes his insignificance and loneliness, while the close-up highlights his internal confusion and sadness.

Signified :

The signifieds constructed from these signifiers include his deep sense of grief and guilt for his mother's death, combined with his confusion about his own choices. It signifies his feeling of betraying his mother's memory by joining The Pack, knowing she and his family would never approve of him being involved in violence and hooligan fights. This scene also signifies alienation and the feeling of having no emotional support, driving him to seek belonging in dangerous subcultures. His lack of tears signifies suppressed emotions, reflecting the cultural expectation that men should remain strong and not show vulnerability. Overall, this scene constructs the meaning that Carty's grief, guilt, and confusion form the psychological foundation for his decision to join The Pack – not as an act of leaving home, but as a desperate attempt to find identity, power, and a sense of belonging he can no longer find within his family.

Scene 2 : Elvis Wearing Adidas Navy-White Tracktop Walking with The Pack

Figure 2



This scene (00 : 05 : 39) shows Elvis walking confidently at the center of The Pack along a suburban street. He is wearing a navy blue Adidas tracktop with white stripes, his hands in his pockets, and his posture upright and self-assured. The other members of The Pack are dressed similarly in dark jeans and green parkas, but Elvis stands out with his Adidas tracktop, making him the visual focal point of the group. They walk in a tight formation, talking casually with each other while some look ahead and others glance sideways.

Their steps are synchronised, and their relaxed yet confident expressions suggest both unity and dominance. The background shows brick houses typical of working-class neighbourhoods in northern England, with a street sign pointing towards Liverpool and Birkenhead, grounding the scene in real geographic context. This scene visually communicates group solidarity, fashion as identity, and silent masculine pride without the need for any dialogue or dramatic action.

Signifier :

The signifiers in this scene include Elvis' navy-white Adidas tracktop, his confident upright posture, and the matching casual style of The Pack members (dark jeans and green parkas). The group's tight formation and synchronised walking are nonverbal signifiers of their unity and strength. The brick

houses and street sign in the background signify their working-class environment, while their relaxed yet assured body language signifies self-confidence and dominance. Elvis' placement in the centre of the group signifies his elevated status within The Pack.

Signified :

The signifieds constructed from these signifiers include the cultural meaning of casual fashion as an identity marker within British hooligan subculture. Elvis' Adidas tracktop signifies status, style, and membership in the casual culture that rejects traditional working-class clothing for branded sportswear as a symbol of rebellion and refined masculinity. The synchronised walk signifies solidarity and unspoken intimidation, while their relaxed yet powerful gestures signify their control over their environment. Furthermore, Elvis' central placement signifies leadership and respect within the group hierarchy. Overall, this scene constructs the meaning that fashion acts as language, communicating power, belonging, pride, and the construction of masculine identity within the subculture of football hooliganism.

Scene 3 : Elvis and Carty at the Dock Throwing Stones into the Sea

Figure 3



This scene (00:11:34) shows Elvis and Carty walking along a deserted dock by the cold, grey sea in England. Both are dressed in dark casual clothing, with Elvis wearing his signature Adidas tracktop and Carty wearing a black parka. The camera captures wide shots of the endless sea and the empty dock, creating a quiet, melancholic atmosphere. As they stand at the edge, they begin picking up small stones and throwing them one by one into the water, watching the ripples disappear into the vast ocean. While doing this, they talk about their personal dreams and desires. Elvis talks about his longing to escape the repetitive cycle of fights and find a life beyond The Pack, while Carty admits his fear of always feeling alone and his wish to belong somewhere. Their voices are calm and thoughtful, contrasting with their usual loud, aggressive demeanour. The scene ends with a silent pause as they both stare at the sea, reflecting on their words. There is no music in this scene, only the ambient sound of the cold wind and gentle waves, amplifying its solemn and introspective mood. This moment symbolises their fleeting sense of freedom before returning to the violent reality of hooligan life the next day.

Signifier :

The signifiers in this scene include the cold grey sea, empty dock, and overcast sky, creating a visual representation of isolation and emotional heaviness. The act of picking up stones and throwing them

into the water signifies their quiet attempt to release inner burdens. Their casual dark clothing signifies their working-class and hooligan identities, while their calm facial expressions and subdued voices signify vulnerability rarely shown in their usual environment. The wide shots of the endless sea signify openness and infinite possibility, while the close-up shots of their faces as they speak signify intimacy and truthfulness in their conversation. The absence of background music further signifies emotional authenticity and rawness.

Signified :

The signifieds constructed from these signifiers include longing for freedom and escape from their harsh realities as hooligans. The sea signifies openness and possibilities beyond their confined lives, while the empty dock signifies loneliness and alienation. The act of throwing stones into the sea signifies their desire to release burdens and the temporary feeling of liberation. Their calm conversation signifies vulnerability and the human need to be understood, showing that beneath their aggressive hooligan identities lie young men who fear loneliness and dream of something better. This scene also signifies their understanding that this freedom is fleeting, as they must return to the violence and rituals of The Pack the next day. Overall, this scene constructs the meaning that beneath hooligan violence lies human vulnerability, longing, and a search for freedom that their subculture life cannot provide.

Scene 4 : Carty's First Fight Experience

Figure 4



This scene (00: 23: 35) shows Carty participating in a hooligan fight for the first time. The fight takes place under a bridge at dusk, with dim natural lighting creating a gritty atmosphere. In the image, Carty's face is captured in a close-up shot, showing his mouth slightly open, teeth clenched, and eyebrows furrowed. His expression combines anger, adrenaline, and an unexpected smile of satisfaction. He is wearing a dark parka over a light blue polo shirt, his face flushed from the rush of the moment.

The background is blurred, focusing solely on his intense facial expression, while other members of The Pack can be seen fighting behind him. The chaotic sounds of shouting, punches, and grunts fill the air, with the shaky handheld camera emphasizing the raw energy of the fight. In this scene, Carty pauses briefly in the middle of the chaos to look around at his friends fighting, his gaze filled with both rage and an unsettling joy. It is a moment where he realises he is now part of The Pack's violent ritual, feeling powerful and accepted.

Signifier :

The signifiers in this scene include Carty's facial expression of clenched teeth, furrowed brows, and wide eyes, which communicate intense anger mixed with exhilaration. His dark parka and casual polo shirt signify his visual assimilation into The Pack's casual hooligan fashion. The close-up camera angle highlights his emotional state, making his face the focal point of the scene. The background blur signifies his mental focus narrowing to the violence around him. The ambient sounds of fighting, shouting, and heavy breathing function as auditory signifiers of aggression and chaos.

Signified :

The signifieds constructed from these signifiers include Carty's initiation into violence as a form of masculine identity and group acceptance. His clenched teeth and angry expression signify his release of suppressed rage and his embrace of aggression as part of belonging to The Pack. The subtle smile within his anger signifies his feeling of pride and satisfaction at finally being part of the group's ritual. The dark clothing signifies his conformity to hooligan fashion, representing solidarity and subcultural identity. This scene also signifies the dangerous allure of violence, where fear is transformed into pride and where aggression becomes a language of acceptance, power, and brotherhood. Overall, the scene constructs the meaning that violence functions as a rite of passage, giving Carty both a sense of identity and a place within The Pack, despite its destructive nature.

Scene 5 : The Pack Chanting in the Train

Figure 5



This scene (00:44:30) captures The Pack sitting and standing inside a dimly lit train carriage as they chant loudly on their way to an away football match. The image shows several members seated around tables, some shouting with wide open mouths, others laughing or smirking while drinking beer. One member is seen standing, leaning forward aggressively towards another, while others clap and cheer, adding to the chaotic atmosphere.

The background shows the interior of an old train carriage, with brown seats, luggage racks above, and metallic surfaces reflecting dim yellow lights, creating a gritty and enclosed environment. The members wear casual hooligan fashion – dark jackets, parkas, and Adidas tracktops – signifying their group identity. The loud chanting is filled with swearing and mocking chants directed at rival clubs. This scene illustrates their ritual of solidarity, intimidation, and the raw masculine energy that defines their subculture.

Signifier :

The signifiers in this scene include the aggressive and vulgar chants shouted in unison, beer cans on the table, and physical gestures such as clapping, pointing, and leaning forward to yell. Their clothing – casual Adidas tracktops and parkas – signifies their subcultural identity. The dim, yellow lighting and confined train carriage signify intimacy and secrecy, while the collective arrangement around the tables signifies unity. Their facial expressions – shouting with open mouths, smirking, or laughing – signify aggression combined with pride and joy. The overall chaotic auditory environment of chanting, clapping, and shouting signifies an atmosphere of dominance and intimidation.

Signified :

The signifieds constructed from these signifiers include the collective identity and solidarity of The Pack, as chants become a ritual to strengthen group belonging. The vulgar language signifies their aggression towards rivals and reflects their masculine performativity. The beer cans signify leisure intertwined with violence, representing the working-class drinking culture that blends with hooligan practices. Their clothing signifies their membership within the casual subculture, while their facial expressions and physical gestures signify pride in their hooligan identity. Overall, the scene constructs the meaning that chants are not merely expressions of football support, but powerful signs of loyalty, unity, masculine dominance, and intimidation within public spaces, reinforcing their group identity while excluding and frightening outsiders.

Scene 6 : Music Scene – Joy Division “Transmission”

Figure 6



This scene (01:21:17) depicts The Pack sitting inside a dimly lit bus at night. The members are scattered across the leather seats; some sit alone while others sit in pairs. One member in the foreground drinks from a bottle while looking to his left, appearing relaxed. In the background, two members stand near the fogged window holding drinks, with blurred orange street lights outside creating a melancholic glow.

One of them has drawn graffiti-like symbols on the fogged glass, showing playful distraction. The general atmosphere is quiet but filled with subtle tension, as the song “Transmission” by Joy Division plays softly, filling the space with its haunting post-punk rhythm and melancholic vocals. The ambient lighting

and reflections create a sombre and introspective mood. Despite being together, each member appears to be in his own world, processing the music with vacant or thoughtful expressions, contrasting their usual aggressive chants and violent energy.

Signifier :

The signifiers in this scene include the dim bus lighting, leather seats, fogged windows with graffiti marks, and the blurred city lights outside. The song “Transmission” playing softly functions as an auditory signifier of alienation. The members’ relaxed but distant body language, blank or thoughtful facial expressions, and casual hooligan clothing (polo shirts, jackets) signify group identity. The beer bottles signify leisure and ritual drinking. Their silent sitting posture signifies temporary calmness and introspection. The graffiti on the fogged window signifies youthful rebellion and boredom.

Signified :

The signifieds constructed from these signifiers include the alienation and inner emptiness of working-class youth in late 1970s England. The Joy Division song signifies their shared feeling of despair, disillusionment, and existential loneliness under Thatcher’s era. Their silent, introspective body language signifies vulnerability and contemplation beneath their aggressive hooligan identities. The beer bottles signify working-class leisure culture intertwined with their subcultural rituals.

The graffiti on the fogged window signifies youthful defiance and the desire to leave a mark even in transitory spaces. Overall, this scene constructs the meaning that music becomes a silent emotional language, expressing hidden fears, hopelessness, and the need for belonging that their hooligan lifestyle cannot fully provide, while reinforcing their group identity through shared cultural taste.

Scene 7 : Carty and Elvis Sitting Facing the Abandoned Industrial Docks

Figure 7



This scene (01:20:16) shows Carty and Elvis sitting silently on a metal bench by the river, facing an expansive view of the decaying industrial docks. Elvis sits forward, leaning his elbows on his knees, wearing a khaki parka, black trousers, and white-yellow Adidas trainers, while Carty sits slightly behind him, hunched, wearing a black hoodie with his hands in his pockets. In front of them stretches a grey, cold landscape: cranes, old dock machinery, rusted metal structures, and silent industrial towers under a pale cloudy sky. The distant cranes and warehouses look lifeless, emphasising the abandonment of the area. The ambient sound includes cold wind and distant industrial echoes.

This setting reflects late 1970s Merseyside, when deindustrialisation led to mass unemployment, urban decay, and a collapse of working-class identity and pride. Their silence and serious expressions suggest deep contemplation, alienation, and longing for meaning within a world that feels stagnant and hopeless.

Signifier :

The signifiers in this scene include the decaying industrial docks with rusted cranes and silent factories, the cold grey sky, and the empty railway tracks visible in the distance. Elvis' khaki parka, Adidas trainers, and forward-leaning posture signify his casual hooligan identity and masculine pride, while Carty's black hoodie and hunched posture signify his vulnerability and withdrawal. Their silent sitting position, the empty bench, and the absence of other people around them signify isolation. The minimal ambient sound of wind and distant echoes further signify emptiness and desolation.

Signified :

The signifieds constructed from these signifiers include alienation and hopelessness felt by working-class youth during Britain's deindustrialisation era. The abandoned industrial setting signifies the collapse of economic stability and the loss of pride in working-class identity. Their silence and serious expressions signify contemplation, emotional suppression, and vulnerability hidden beneath their masculine façades. The casual clothing signifies group identity within the hooligan subculture as a way to reclaim belonging amidst social decay. Overall, this scene constructs the meaning that the industrial ruins reflect their internal emptiness, cultural stagnation, and desperate search for meaning and connection within a collapsing world.

Scene 8 : Carty Buying Adidas Trainers to Assert His Identity

Figure 7



This scene (00:39:59) shows Carty entering a small sportswear shop, browsing the shelves lined with branded trainers. He picks up a pair of Adidas Trim Trab trainers, observing their white leather surface and classic three stripes with an admiring smile. The camera captures a close-up of his fingers running along the shoe's side, emphasising his desire and admiration. The next shot shows him in his bedroom, wearing the trainers and standing in front of a small mirror. He looks at himself with a proud, satisfied smile, adjusting his jacket to complete his outfit. The lighting is warm but dim, creating an intimate

atmosphere as he admires his reflection, lifting his heel slightly to check the side of his new Adidas shoes. This scene symbolises a moment of transformation for Carty, where branded sportswear becomes his tool to gain confidence and assert his belonging within The Pack before their next violent agenda.

Signifier :

The signifiers in this scene include the Adidas Trim Trab trainers themselves, with their iconic three stripes and clean design, representing casual subculture fashion. Carty's admiring smile, his fingers touching the shoe, and his body posture when checking himself in the mirror signify pride and excitement. His action of adjusting his outfit while admiring the trainers signifies preparation and transformation. The small mirror, dim lighting, and his focused gaze at his reflection signify self-consciousness and identity construction.

Signified :

The signifieds constructed from these signifiers include Carty's desire to assert his identity and gain acceptance within The Pack. The Adidas trainers signify more than fashion; they signify membership, status, and masculine pride within the hooligan subculture. His proud expression and careful admiration signify a psychological shift from insecurity to confidence, showing that wearing the shoes gives him a sense of power and belonging. The mirror signifies self-reflection, but also the construction of a new identity aligned with The Pack's casual culture. Overall, this scene constructs the meaning that fashion functions as language, where branded items like Adidas trainers become powerful signs of identity, confidence, and social acceptance within youth subcultures.

Scene 9 : Elvis Silently Watching Carty and The Pack Celebrate on the Train

Figure 9



This scene (00:44:09) takes place inside a dimly lit train carriage at night. After winning a violent fight, members of The Pack are shown shouting, laughing, and clapping in celebration. The carriage is filled with their loud voices, aggressive chants, and the sound of cans being opened. The camera shifts to Elvis, who sits quietly alone on a seat by the window. He wears his signature Adidas tracktop and dark trousers, his posture slouched slightly forward with elbows resting on his knees.

His eyes remain fixed on Carty and the others. His facial expression is serious, with a sharp gaze filled with a mixture of sadness, disappointment, and a subtle hint of envy. The lighting casts a shadow across half of his face, deepening the intensity of his eyes. Unlike the others, he does not smile or join the celebration, instead observing them in silent contemplation with a look that suggests he is emotionally detached from the group's euphoria.

Signifier :

The signifiers in this scene include Elvis' silent posture, his slouched position with elbows on knees, and his sharp, serious gaze directed at Carty and the group. His Adidas tracktop signifies his visual identity within The Pack. The dim lighting casting shadows on his face signifies emotional darkness and internal conflict. The contrast between his silence and the others' loud celebration signifies his isolation. His eyes, slightly narrowed with a downward tilt of his chin, signify disappointment and envy.

Signified :

The signifieds constructed from these signifiers include Elvis' feelings of alienation, disappointment, and envy towards Carty and the group. His silent observation signifies his emotional detachment and internal conflict, possibly feeling left behind or replaced by Carty's growing integration into The Pack. The shadows across his face signify the darkness and complexity of his emotions, including regret and sadness at the group's direction or his place within it. His Adidas tracktop signifies his identity within the group, yet his posture signifies a disconnect from their current collective joy. Overall, this scene constructs the meaning that victory celebrations conceal individual isolation and silent struggles, revealing the unspoken emotional tensions within group solidarity and the complexities of loyalty, identity, and belonging in hooligan culture.

Scene 10 : Carty Walking Alone Reflecting After Elvis' Death

Figure 10



This scene (01:36:28) shows Carty walking alone through a quiet industrial street at dawn after Elvis' death. The sky is a pale grey-blue, with faint morning light casting a cold glow over the empty surroundings. Carty wears his dark hoodie and jeans, walking with slow, heavy steps, his shoulders slightly slumped. The camera captures him in a long shot walking away from the camera, making his figure look small against the wide, empty street lined with old brick warehouses and silent parked trucks.

Close-up shots show his downcast eyes and slightly parted lips, revealing his confused, sad, and pained expression. His eyes look unfocused, as if deep in thought yet lost. There is no dialogue or background music, only the faint sound of wind and distant seagulls, creating a somber, melancholic atmosphere. This scene conveys his inner turmoil as he questions his involvement with The Pack, feeling grief, guilt, and an unspoken sadness that he cannot express.

Signifier :

The signifiers in this scene include Carty's slow and heavy walking pace, his slumped shoulders, and his dark casual clothing that blend into the bleak industrial environment. His downcast eyes and unfocused gaze signify emotional disorientation. The cold dawn lighting and empty streets signify isolation and hopelessness. The absence of music or dialogue signifies silent reflection and heaviness. His small figure within the wide empty street signifies insignificance and vulnerability.

Signified :

The signifieds constructed from these signifiers include Carty's deep grief, confusion, and emotional emptiness following Elvis' death. His body language signifies guilt and regret, while his expression signifies his inner conflict and the questioning of his violent, subcultural life. The empty street and industrial setting signify alienation and the harsh reality of his world, now devoid of meaning and connection. The dawn light signifies a transition, suggesting his contemplation of change or an uncertain future. Overall, this scene constructs the meaning that Carty's journey with The Pack has left him with profound loss, alienation, and unspoken grief, revealing the emptiness and emotional cost beneath the violent bonds of hooligan identity.

Discussion

In analyzing the film *Awaydays* (2009), it becomes evident that themes of identity, alienation, and belonging are deeply woven into the narrative of football hooligan subculture. The ten analyzed scenes reveal how visual and narrative signs construct meaning about working-class youth struggles, masculinity, and the search for acceptance in late 1970s England. Scenes such as Carty staring at his mother's grave signify grief, alienation, and a rupture in his sense of family security, pushing him towards The Pack to find a new identity. The scene of Elvis wearing his Adidas navy-white tracktop walking with The Pack highlights how fashion becomes a signifier of group membership, status, and masculine pride within the casual subculture. In Carty and Elvis throwing stones at the docks, the abandoned industrial setting and their silent gestures signify both fleeting freedom and the burden of hopelessness, as they temporarily escape their harsh reality.

The scene where Carty joins his first fight constructs meaning about violence as a rite of passage, with his facial expression showing fear and pride, signifying transformation from an outsider to a loyal member. Similarly, The Pack chanting loudly in the train signifies how chants act as a ritual to assert dominance, unity, and intimidation towards rival fans, constructing a collective identity rooted in aggression and territorial pride. In the bus scene where The Pack listens silently to Joy Division's "Transmission", the music signifies alienation, despair, and a shared emotional emptiness beneath their violent masculinity. This is reinforced by Carty and Elvis sitting facing the abandoned docks, where the industrial ruins signify social decay, mirroring their internal emptiness and loss of working-class pride.

The scene of Carty buying Adidas Trim Trab trainers and admiring himself in the mirror signifies how branded sportswear becomes a language of identity construction, giving him confidence and a sense of belonging in The Pack. Elvis silently observing Carty and The Pack celebrating in the train signifies his internal alienation, envy, and disappointment despite outward solidarity, revealing tensions within group loyalty. Finally, the scene where Carty walks alone reflecting after Elvis' death signifies grief, guilt, and the existential emptiness left by the violent subculture. His confused, sad gaze constructs the meaning that belonging to The Pack came at the cost of moral clarity and emotional security.

Overall, *Awaydays* constructs meaning through signs of fashion, violence, music, and industrial

settings to depict football hooliganism not merely as violence, but as a subcultural response to alienation, class decay, and the need for identity. The film reveals that loyalty within The Pack provides fleeting pride and belonging, but also conceals deeper isolation and suppressed grief, raising questions about how far individuals go to find meaning in a world that has abandoned them.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the analysis, *Awaydays* (2009) conveys youth subculture and identity through visual, auditory, and narrative signs. Elements like Adidas trainers, industrial settings, Joy Division's music, and football chants symbolize working-class style, alienation, and group solidarity. Acts of violence, silent reflections, and group rituals further emphasize masculinity, rebellion, and the need for belonging among 1970s British youth.

The film links signifiers—such as fashion, music, and setting—with deeper cultural meanings. Carty's Adidas shoes reflect his desire for acceptance, while abandoned locations signify social and emotional isolation. The Pack's chants and fights show unity and masculine pride, while Elvis's silence reveals hidden emptiness. These signs work together to portray the tension between identity, belonging, and emotional struggle within hooligan culture.

Suggestion

Based on the findings, this research suggests that future studies explore films on youth subculture or masculinity using alternative semiotic theories and cultural contexts. It also encourages literature students and educators to use semiotic analysis in film studies to enhance critical thinking. General audiences are invited to reflect on how films like *Awaydays* represent subcultures, alienation, and identity, fostering greater media awareness.

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