



Unpacking Codes and Meanings in *Blink Twice* (2024): A Barthesian Semiotic Analysis

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Abstract

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This study aims to examine the types of code and their implied meanings in Zoe Kravitz's film *Blink Twice* through the lens of semiotic analysis. Utilizing Roland Barthes's five-code theory (1974), the research investigates how various narrative codes operate within the film's visual and verbal elements to convey layered meanings. In semiotics, a code is understood as a structured system of signs that communicates meaning—whether through objects, gestures, language, or visual elements. Codes can appear in both verbal and nonverbal forms, making them ubiquitous in cinematic storytelling. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, analyzing 19 selected data points consisting of both visual and verbal codes from the film. These codes are categorized according to Barthes's five narrative codes: 5 hermeneutic codes (enigma or mystery elements), 3 proairetic codes (sequential action-driven cues), 2 semantic codes (connotative meanings in dialogue or text), 7 symbolic codes (associated with objects, colors, gestures, or costumes), and 2 cultural codes (references tied to broader cultural knowledge or norms). The findings are systematically presented in tabular form, outlining the frequency and function of each code type. The analysis reveals that *Blink Twice* constructs meaning through a complex interplay of these narrative codes, inviting viewers to interpret hidden messages embedded within the film's visuals and dialogue. The study concludes that Barthes's semiotic framework is effective for decoding the multilayered communication strategies used in contemporary cinema, particularly in films that engage with cultural, psychological, and gender-related themes.

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INTRODUCTION

In the digital and media-saturated world of the 21st century, meaning is no longer derived solely from spoken or written language. Instead, visual cues, symbols, gestures, and cultural codes serve as central forms of communication. This is especially evident in cinema, where the convergence of visual and auditory elements provides a fertile ground for semiotic analysis. As Bender (2020) asserts, language—both verbal and nonverbal—is grounded in real-world knowledge and shaped by cultural experience. In film, this interplay of signs and codes constructs not just narrative, but also meaning systems that reflect, reinforce, or challenge cultural ideologies. Semiotics, the science of signs and their interpretation, therefore offers a compelling framework for dissecting how films communicate layered messages beyond dialogue.

The concept of semiotics, first articulated by Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce in the early 20th century, was later expanded by Roland Barthes, who introduced a more culturally embedded view of signs. Barthes' (1974) structuralist approach recognizes that signs do not operate in isolation but within codes—sets of cultural conventions that govern meaning-making. Danesi (2020) defines a code as a systematic network of symbols and rules that guide interpretation within specific cultural contexts. These codes—linguistic, symbolic, cultural, semantic, hermeneutic, and proairetic—enable the transmission and negotiation of meaning in films, allowing audiences to decode not only narrative developments but also social critiques and ideological subtexts.

Film, as an audio-visual medium, is especially suited for semiotic analysis. It orchestrates an array of symbolic tools—from mise-en-scène to costume design, color, lighting, and camera angles—to construct meaning and provoke interpretation. Paulsen and Kvale (2018) argue that modern semiotics must account for how digital and visual media transmit meaning through evolving symbolic forms. In this regard, Zoe Kravitz's film *Blink Twice* (2024) emerges as a significant case for semiotic inquiry. The movie presents a narrative layered with mystery, deception, and social commentary, all conveyed through tightly constructed visual and narrative codes. Following the protagonist Frida, the film invites audiences to interpret scattered signs and unspoken cues as she uncovers hidden truths about her environment and companions on a secluded island.

What makes *Blink Twice* particularly suitable for semiotic study is its deliberate use of ambiguity, tension, and aesthetic symbolism to address deeper themes such as gender politics, power asymmetries, and survival. Ide (2024) describes the film as a “slickly efficient thriller” that cleverly integrates feminist and cultural concerns beneath its suspenseful narrative. This aligns with Barthes' (1974) theory that films operate through multiple narrative codes—each contributing to a layered web of meanings. The Hermeneutic Code, for instance, creates enigma and drives suspense, while the Symbolic Code reflects abstract themes like entrapment or rebellion. Through these frameworks, the film not only tells a story but also constructs an ideologically rich semiotic field that engages its audience in an interpretive process.

Several recent studies underscore the effectiveness of Barthesian semiotics in media and film analysis. Malik, Zaib, and Bughio (2014) explored the functions of hermeneutic and proairetic codes in contemporary cinema, revealing how suspense and action propel narrative engagement. Similarly, Danesi (2022) emphasizes how cultural and semantic codes bridge linguistic gaps and help decode visual texts in multicultural contexts. However, despite the proliferation of semiotic studies in classic and mainstream films, there remains limited academic attention on new releases like *Blink Twice*, which skillfully blends genre entertainment with subversive social messaging. This gap opens space for further inquiry into how contemporary films mobilize semiotic systems to reflect cultural anxieties and

provoke critical reflection.

This study seeks to examine the types of codes and embedded meanings in *Blink Twice* through the lens of Roland Barthes' semiotic framework. It focuses on identifying the presence and function of Barthes' five narrative codes—Hermeneutic, Proairetic, Semantic, Symbolic, and Cultural—within selected scenes. Through qualitative analysis of the film's visual and narrative elements, the study aims to uncover how meaning is constructed and how audiences are guided, consciously or subconsciously, to interpret the film's ideological undercurrents.

The contribution of this research is twofold. Theoretically, it enriches semiotic discourse by applying Barthes' model to a contemporary film that reflects current sociopolitical dynamics. Practically, it equips scholars and viewers with interpretive tools to engage more critically with visual media. By dissecting how signs and codes function in *Blink Twice*, this study also highlights how filmmakers like Zoe Kravitz use semiotic strategies not only to entertain but also to challenge cultural assumptions and stimulate discourse.

METHODS

This study adopts a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the representation of codes and meanings in the 2024 film *Blink Twice*, directed by Zoe Kravitz. As Bhandari (2023) states, qualitative research is instrumental in understanding experiences, opinions, and non-numerical phenomena through the analysis of text, audio, or visual content. In line with this approach, the researcher applies Roland Barthes's (1974) semiotic theory of the five narrative codes—hermeneutic, proairetic, semantic, symbolic, and cultural—to interpret the layered meanings embedded in selected scenes from the film. The primary data were drawn directly from *Blink Twice*, with particular attention given to moments in the narrative that visually or verbally encode meaning.

To collect data, the researcher watched the film repeatedly, identifying scenes that exhibited clear signs of Barthes's codes. Screenshots were taken to capture visual elements, while key dialogues were transcribed and annotated. Each scene was then analyzed for its semiotic value, highlighting the presence of specific codes and their corresponding meanings. This process allowed the researcher to extract 19 distinct data points: 5 hermeneutic codes, 3 proairetic codes, 2 semantic codes, 7 symbolic codes, and 2 cultural codes.

Following Kumar's (2024) principles of qualitative data analysis, the information gathered was systematically categorized and interpreted. Through this analysis, the study explores how each code contributes to the film's construction of narrative complexity and cultural meaning, ultimately revealing how *Blink Twice* engages its audience in decoding symbolic and ideological messages through cinematic storytelling.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. RESULTS

This section is the analysis of codes and symbol that appears in "*Blink Twice*" movie that the writer describes and explains. *Blink Twice* is a movie directed by Zoe Kravitz and produced by Metro Goldwyn Mayer Company and released in 2024. Furthermore, this movie will be analyzed with the five codes theory by Barthes (1970). Here is the finding and analysis that found in *Blink Twice* movie. The writer found all five types of code by Barthes in this movie, every code picked from the several scenes that the writer did to watch and analyze. There are 19 several scenes that divided into several parts depending on the types of code.

No	Code	Frequencies
1.	Hermeneutic	5
2.	Proairetic	3
3.	Semantic	2
4.	Symbolic	7
5.	Cultural	2
	Total	19

Table of Types of Code Found in *Blink Twice* Movie

This passage explains five types of narrative codes that help shape the meaning and structure of a story. The hermeneutic code, also known as the enigma code, is used to create mystery or suspense in a story. It encourages the audience or reader to actively think about what will happen next by presenting clues that must be interpreted. The goal is for the audience to ask questions and try to solve the mystery based on the information given throughout the plot. The proairetic code, on the other hand, focuses on the actions taken by characters. These actions build anticipation and keep the audience engaged by making them wonder what the character will do next. This code contributes to the tension and pacing of the story, as it drives the plot forward through sequences of events. Next is the semantic code, which involves all textual elements in the story, such as dialogue or on-screen text. These elements carry meaning that helps the audience better understand each scene or event. In many cases, semantic codes add depth to the storyline by providing context or emphasizing important themes and ideas. The symbolic code operates on a more interpretive level. It involves symbolic elements such as settings, costumes, colors, or gestures that represent broader ideas. These symbols often carry multiple meanings and require the audience to interpret their significance in relation to the story. For example, a particular location or a character's attire may symbolize their personality, social status, or emotional state. Lastly, the cultural code is related to the cultural knowledge shared between the story and the audience. It includes references to customs, traditions, beliefs, and social norms that are part of a specific culture. These cultural elements help convey meaning in ways that may not be immediately obvious but are crucial for fully understanding the context of the story. Together, these five codes enrich a narrative by engaging the audience on multiple levels—logically, emotionally, and intellectually—allowing for a deeper and more meaningful experience of the story.

2. Discussion

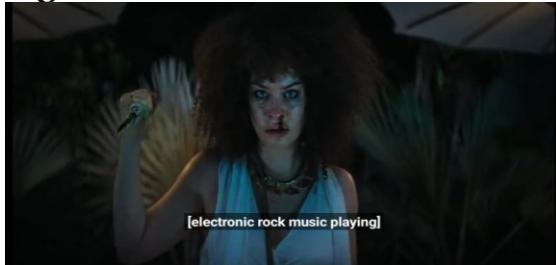
The first code that the writer will explain is the hermeneutic code, hermeneutic code also known as the enigma code. The writer found 5 of the hermeneutic code from several scene in the movie. This code is shown in the first scene of the movie and has an implied meaning of suspicious action that will make the audience wonder about what happened. The first picture is the scene when Frida gets confused about her get dirty nails and cannot remember about what happen. The analysis will be explained below.

Figure 1

The first example of the hermeneutic code in the film appears in a scene where Frida begins to feel uncertain about the condition of her fingernails. After spending a few days vacationing on Slater's private island, she notices dirt under her nails—an unusual and alarming discovery. What deepens the mystery is that she cannot recall any activity from the previous night that could have caused this. This memory gap becomes a central enigma for both Frida and the audience. She remembers everything up to the group's dinner, but beyond that point, her recollection fades completely. This sense of confusion and loss of memory immediately engages the audience, prompting them to question what really occurred during the night.

This scene effectively triggers the audience's curiosity and marks the beginning of a larger mystery within the plot. It raises several key questions: "What actually happened that night?" "Why is Frida's memory blank?" and "What does the dirt under her nails signify?" These unanswered questions are classic features of the hermeneutic code, as described by Roland Barthes. This narrative device is used by the writer to generate suspense, encouraging viewers to piece together the clues alongside the protagonist. Moreover, the writer subtly plants visual and narrative hints within the scene—such as the dirt under the nails and Frida's confused expression—which act as clues for the audience to interpret. These elements serve to heighten the sense of mystery not only for the character but also for the viewers, making them part of the investigation. The writer deliberately withholds information to maintain ambiguity, pushing the audience to critically analyze the events and remain suspicious of the surface-level narrative.

This approach creates a strong connection between the audience and the character, as both are left uncertain and searching for answers. The scene encourages viewers to think deeply and consider multiple possibilities, such as: "Did Frida do something during the night that she doesn't remember?" or "Is there a larger, hidden truth behind the island experience?" This kind of narrative strategy is characteristic of the hermeneutic code, as it delays the resolution of key plot points in order to sustain tension and deepen audience engagement. The next instance discussion will be the scenes from the proairetic code.

Figure 8

This scene shows Camilla (one of the girls) standing with holding a knife with her hand. This is when Camilla finally found out about what happen to them because she finally remember anything. The affect when the girl drinks the snake venom is various, Frida and

Sarah effect to them like in a minute, meanwhile Heather and Camilla took a long hour to finally the snake venom hits their memories. Although with this looks appears, the audience already know about the tension in this movie getting serious and darker than the beginning. The audience will be shock and more curious about what the plot really is and the ending with this movie.

This is indeed the proairetic code because after this scene shows up, the audience already predict about what will happen in the next scene. Because they are already remember everything again, it is a best timing for them to take a revenge and try to fight for the men. Camilla shot in this scene also can be implied that the girl rises their hand to fight and don not want to being controlled by the men even they are still does not know about the results. Although the knife itself beside being a useful object to human, this can be a symbol as protect or even attack so that is why the knife can be known as a weapon. The audience will expect more about the girl character too take an action at the end at the movie. The next code after proairetic code is semantic code.

Figure 10



The last semantic code has two meaning either it was connotative or denotative parts from the semantic. This scene only shows with Blink Twice title in the full screen. Actually, this words really makes confused about what was the meaning from the title from this movie. While this scene appears there are also had some flashlight like the camera flashlight after the title itself. It makes the audience thinking with two meaning either the literal meaning or had a second meaning itself. The literal meaning which is the real blink twice, when the eyes blink or the implied meaning from the famous reference “blink twice if you are in danger” that always used to in emergency situation.

Also, this word had two meaning itself either in connotative or denotative. This word also appeared in the dialogue when Frida makes a joke to them when she said “Blink twice if I’m in danger”. After that Dr. Rich (who is Slater therapist) response to her with do some blink his eyes to her. This scene clearly makes some ambiguous scene that the audience barely notice about that because while re-watched this scene again the audience will finally understand about the whole story. In here, Frida context just makes a joke for lighten the mood. If used Frida context so the connotative meaning is they are just a joke nothing serious about that words, but if used the denotative meaning the literal meaning she is in really dangerous because Dr. Rich indeed blink his eyes to her. The next code the writer will be explained the symbolic code.

Figure 17



The last for the symbolic code, is a red colour itself. Red colour is a dominant colour that always appeared in every scene in this movie. Red colour is the important colour in this movie, because it always had meaning in every scene. For example, at the beginning in the movie it shows Frida who wears the red dress, this can be implied as Frida passion to approached her crush that indeed her CEO Slater King. The red colour also covers up the island, because the buildings itself full of red colour, it can be implied as the intimidate that people in the island.

Not only that, red colour also can be a sign for dangerous hints for Frida. Because almost every furniture or object is a red colour in Frida environment. Also, the colour red is used symbolically to depict the contrast between the opulence of the surface and the darkness hidden beneath. For example, it can be seen at the picture above. There is a red sofa in Slater's lodging, the sofa itself really stand out because only the object had the red colour, it turns out the Slater's place become the "execution" place, where the trouble girls get their punishment. For the next and last code that the writer will be explained is the cultural code.

Figure 19



The last scene of the movie as one of type of code is presents a disturbing image: a young woman is shown tied up, surrounded by a group of men. This visual moment symbolizes a much larger theme that runs throughout the narrative—the imbalance of power between men and women. The plot of the movie subtly, and at times explicitly, reveals how the male characters, especially Slater and his associates, exert dominance and control over the women brought to the island. This dynamic can be interpreted as a reflection of patriarchal power structures, where men hold authority and women are rendered passive or subordinate.

Slater, a wealthy and influential man, is at the center of this power dynamic. He is not alone—his close circle includes Cody, a renowned chef; Vic, a wealthy businessman; and Tom, his personal friend. Each of these men, except for Lucas, plays a role in orchestrating the events on the island. Notably, Lucas is the one who personally invites each woman, effectively acting as a liaison or recruiter. The women, on the other hand, are drawn to the island under the pretense of luxury, temptation, and the appeal of being hosted by someone as prestigious as Slater King. However, they are unaware of the true intentions behind the invitation and do not truly know the men who brought them there. The abuse of power becomes explicit in scenes that depict sexual violence. The men, excluding Lucas, commit acts of harassment and abuse against the women, tying them up and silencing them—both literally and symbolically. This portrayal of forced submission and control serves as a critique of how power can be exploited in private, secluded environments where the perpetrators feel untouchable. A particularly harrowing example is the image of Camilla, one of the victims, restrained while Rich, Slater's bodyguard, casually reads a book as if nothing is happening. This shocking contrast emphasizes the normalization of violence and the complicity of those who stand by. Furthermore, the film implies that the women are manipulated into forgetting the trauma through the use of a special perfume that erases their memories. This adds another layer of horror, as the perpetrators erase the evidence of their

crimes while maintaining their reputations. The so-called "holiday" is revealed to be a carefully planned and cruel deception, designed for the pleasure of powerful men who exploit their social and economic status.

This entire sequence reflects both symbolic and cultural codes. Symbolically, the setting—a luxurious private island—represents a deceptive paradise that masks violence and control. The actions, clothing, and body language of characters reflect deeper meanings about dominance, manipulation, and gender roles. Culturally, the film comments on real-world issues such as gender-based violence, male entitlement, and the misuse of power in elite circles. By embedding these codes into the narrative, the writer forces the audience to confront uncomfortable truths and question the systems that allow such abuses to occur.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the semiotic analysis, the writer draws several inferences from the application of Roland Barthes' five codes theory (1970) in the film *Blink Twice*, directed by Zoë Kravitz. The analysis reveals that the film effectively incorporates all five narrative codes proposed by Barthes: hermeneutic, proairetic, semantic, symbolic, and cultural. A total of 19 scenes were identified as containing at least one of these codes—5 scenes reflect hermeneutic codes, 3 involve proairetic codes, 2 feature semantic codes, 7 demonstrate symbolic codes, and 2 include cultural codes. The selection of *Blink Twice* for this study is justified by the film's rich use of all five codes, making it a suitable object for semiotic analysis.

Throughout the film, each code functions to convey different layers of meaning to the audience. The hermeneutic code, or enigma code, stimulates curiosity and suspense by posing questions that remain unanswered until later in the plot. The proairetic code drives the narrative through characters' actions, building tension and anticipation. The semantic code highlights linguistic and textual signs, such as dialogue and on-screen text, that contribute to the storyline. The symbolic code uses images, objects, colors, and settings to convey deeper meanings or abstract ideas. Finally, the cultural code refers to signs that are linked to cultural knowledge, norms, or values embedded within the plot.

This semiotic analysis highlights how each code is intentionally placed to support the film's themes and narrative structure. A key message inferred from the analysis is the idea that appearances can be deceiving—characters may not be who they seem, and trust can be dangerous. The film repeatedly conveys that every action, behavior, and visual element carries a hidden meaning or symbolic message. In other words, everything in the film functions as a code, consciously crafted by the filmmaker to communicate specific ideas to the audience. By focusing on the signs and codes embedded in the visual and narrative elements of *Blink Twice*, the writer emphasizes how semiotic theory can be a powerful tool for uncovering deeper meanings in film. The application of Barthes' five codes theory provides a comprehensive framework to interpret how meaning is constructed and communicated to viewers through cinematic language.

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