

**How (Screen) Language Conveys Meaning—
PART 1: Christian Metz Screens Sherlock Holmes
—REVIEW—**



Texts

Sherlock Baffled (short film)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmfCrlgY-c>

The Adventure of the Speckled Band

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pGT51t5xNE> (1/2)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L83Ugg8o3i8> (2/2)

Doyle, “The Adventure of the Speckled Band”

Questions to Consider

How do we treat screen versions of Sherlock Holmes? (As Adaptation or Essay?)

How does film studies help us examine screen versions of Sherlock Holmes?

How does semiotics help us consider similarities and differences across print and screen texts?

What other screen texts might we investigate?

Outline

1. “Sherlock Holmes Baffled”—Signs and Interpretation
2. The Language of Screen Theory
3. Film Language: A Semiotics of the Cinema
4. *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* 1 & 2
5. Screening Sherlock Holmes

Discussion

1. The film *Sherlock Holmes Baffled* (60 seconds) is the first of over 250 screen adaptations of Sherlock Holmes. How do the sounds and images of this 1900 film compare and contrast to our expectations of Sherlock Holmes? How does this screen version make us rethink our expectations concerning “the great detective”?
2. How do we examine screen versions? What do we look at and listen to?
 - a. Themes and Idea
 - b. Film in comparison to the other arts
 - i. Story & Discourse
 - c. *Mise-en-scène* (pictures and words on screen)
 - d. Shot composition, camera position and distance, the image
 - e. Sound (Dialogue, music, ambient sound and noise)
3. How do these parts of film, these aspects of film form, come together to make meaning? How do we work with them to explain how we understand them?

- a. According to film semiotics, cinema is a language in the sense of a semiotic system. The system of every film is constructed on the basis of codes that a filmmaker either adopts, transforms, or works against.
 - b. According to film semiotics, we understand the cinema through the signs and the codes of film language.
 - i. As film semiologist Christian Metz explains,
Everything is present in film: hence the obviousness of film, and hence also its opacity. The clarification of present by absent units occurs much less than in verbal language. The relationships in praesentia are so rich that they render the strict organization of in-absentia relationships superfluous and difficult. A film is difficult to explain because it is easy to understand. The image impresses itself on us, blocking everything that is not itself.
 - ii. Because film is easy to understand, we must work backwards from the detailed signs and codes to explain it. One of the best ways to do so, is to work comparatively—to explain how different versions compare and contrast with one another. Such comparisons help us understand our interpretations and expectations in reverse.
4. How does the screen version of *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* (1 & 2) compare and contrast with other versions, especially Doyle's print version? What aspects of the story repeat or differ? What aspects of the discourse repeat or differ? How do we view Holmes as "the great detective" before and after screening this version? Why doesn't Holmes kill the snake?



5. In looking ahead, how do we compare film analysis with other screen versions of Sherlock Holmes? Can we use the same techniques of comparative film semiotics, or will we have to adapt our methods? If so, how so? Will our methods work on these other screen versions of Sherlock Holmes:
- a. In Print (Since 1887)
 - b. Film (Since 1900)
 - c. Television (Since ~1951)
 - d. Video Games (Since 1984)
 - e. Internet (Since 2004)



**How (Screen) Language Conveys Meaning—
PART 2: Animating and Gaming Holmes
—REVIEW—**



Texts

Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century—"The Adventure of the Dancing Men"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d9Eiy5FvYO0>

Sherlock Holmes Online Games

<http://www.sherlockian-sherlock.com/free-full-online-games.php>

Doyle, "The Adventure of the Dancing Men"

Questions to Consider

How do we understand and explain screen versions of Sherlock Holmes? (As Adaptation or Essay?)

How does film theory translate into screen theory to help us examine other versions of Sherlock Holmes?

What is the relation among repetition, difference, and ambiguity?

What is the relation among readership, viewership, and playership?

Outline

1. Review—A semiotic comparative approach
2. (Screen) Language—Signs: Repetition, Difference, and the Special Case of Ambiguity
3. Animating Holmes: *Sherlock Holmes in the 22nd Century*—"The Adventure of the Dancing Men"
4. Gaming Holmes
5. From screening Holmes to translating Holmes

Discussion

1. How do we compare and contrast print and screen versions of Sherlock Holmes? How do we think about different versions as adaptations? How do we think about them as interpretations, critiques, or essays?
2. How do we compare elements that are repeated and elements that differ across texts? What can print do that screens cannot? What do screens do that print cannot? How do we consider the special case of ambiguity across print and screens? How does ambiguity become commentary?
 - a. "The Adventure of the Speckled Band"
 - b. "You are screening your stepfather."
 - c. Count: Mr. Holmes do you ever hunt? / Holmes: In a manner of speaking, Count.
 - d. Holmes: I suppose we'll have to think of the case of the speckled band as only partially successful.



3. How does screening an animated version of Sherlock Holmes addressed to a young adult audience alter our expectations of Holmes and of the story and discourse? What changes as targeted viewership deviates from the print text's targeted readership? How can we find these changes in the screen text? How can these changes prompt us to revisit the print text and our own learned expectations?
 - a. The reader's surrogate → The viewer's surrogate
 - b. Holmes' methodology → Holmes' pedagogy
 - c. Detection → Edification
 - d. Making sense of things → Making sense of things
4. How do we consider Sherlock Holmes games as interpretations of the print versions? How do we change our methods as we move from readership to viewership to playership? How do the online games recall other screen versions as well as other print versions? What makes a Sherlock Holmes text a "Sherlock Holmes Text"? (How are the games the one place where *we become Sherlock*?)
 - a. The player's surrogate (Holmes)
 - b. The player's methodology
 - c. Play
 - d. Making sense of things
5. How can we think screening Holmes as essay rather than adaptation? How might we compare and contrast these techniques of screening Holmes to techniques of understanding and explaining translating Holmes?

