

HYPER-REALITY: BLURRING DEMARCATION BETWEEN SCIENTIFIC REALITY AND FICTION IN THE MOVIE “DR. STRANGE”; A MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT:

The present research aims at investigating hyper-reality through multimodality in the movie, “Dr. Strange”, a scientific-fiction based on the Marvel Comics character of the same name. It’s a story of a surgeon who gains a new lease on life when a sorcerer trains him under her supervision to master mystic arts and manipulate time dimension and space. The research explores how hyper reality blurs the boundaries between physical reality and virtual reality. According to Baudrillard, “Hyper-reality is the reduplication of replicas of a real without origin or reality. These hyper-real effects are created through representations in the images portraying the virtual world as a real-world through different cinematic techniques” (Baudrillard, 1988). These representations are made in form of codes and signs in the words and images. The study provides a deep insight into visual narratives operating in each image/frame. It shows how the movie is particularly designed to recreate the world of illusions to have effects on the viewers. The study analyzes the visual narrative through systemic multimodal that how different metafunctions in visual narrative create hyper reality, and how it confuses the audience to the point that they fail to differentiate between the physical world and fictional world. This research has been conducted under a multi-modal approach of visual semiotics by Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen to identify the metafunctions. The research will be effective to understand and learn the application of systemic multimodal analysis of images in movies based on comics.

Key words: Hyper-reality, Semiotic analysis, Baudrillard, Metafunctions, Multimodal, Dr. Strange.

Introduction

Dr. Stephen Strange's (Benedict Cumberbatch) life changes after a car accident robs him of the use of his hands. When traditional medicine fails him, he looks for healing, and hope, in a mysterious enclave. He quickly learns that the enclave is at the front line of a battle against unseen dark forces bent on destroying reality. Before long, Strange is forced to choose between his life of fortune and status or leave it all behind to defend the world as the most powerful sorcerer in existence. (Doctor Strange (2016 film) - Wikipedia, 2022)

Semiotics lay claim differences between its prominent proponents as to what it really involves. It has undergone changes with the deteriorating mechanism of time and consistently fluctuating tendencies in the user's pattern of thought, however semiotics has tried to fill the gap in the analysis approach and what must be studied for the scientific investigation of the signs in the text. Semioticians usually discuss to films, T.V. and radio programs, advertisements, posters etc and refer them as 'texts', and to 'reading television' (Fiske and Hartley 1978).

Semiotics has a number of proponents who disagree over what it actually entails. Although semiotics has attempted to bridge the difference in the analysis techniques and what must be examined for the scientific research of the signals in the text, it has undergone variations with the degrading system of time and continually altering trends in the person's pattern of mind. Semioticians commonly refer to films, television and radio shows, ads, posters, and other forms of media as 'texts,' as well as 'reading television' (Fiske and Hartley 1978).

The film is primarily a strong show case of hyper real world. The selected images will be taken from the book and will be analyzed by using systemic functional grammar of English developed by Michael Halliday, though which Kress and Leewan attempted to use its general semiotic aspects on images rather than its specific linguistically focused features as the grounding for visual grammar. The analysis of any visual narrative, different semiotic sources like actions of participants, production of scenes, layering of events, VFX effects, striking visuals, setting, grouping, clash of opinions, geographical significance, fantasy elements, expressions, cinematography and other contributing factors are primarily focused by analysts.

According to systemic model of Halliday, there are three functions of every semiotic resource.(Halliday, 1985).

1-The Ideational metafunction

2-The Interpersonal metafunction

3-The Textual metafunction

Statement of the problem

The movie, “Dr. Strage”, a scientific-fiction based on the Marvel Comics character of the same name. Its strong visuals construct hyper- reality through different cinematic techniques. The hyper-real effects in the movie are created through representations in the images portraying the virtual world as a real-world. The images are made from codes and signs to convey various intended meanings to the audience. The images confuse the audience by giving them a realistic experience of a fictional world. The fictional world looks so real that audience fails to differentiate between physical reality and scientific fiction. So there is a need of systemic multimodal analysis of the movie ‘Dr. Strange’ to investigate how different metafunctions/ cinematic techniques are used in its images to fabricate desired concept.

Research Objectives

1. To explore hyper-reality, blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction in the movie by using systemic multimodal.
2. To investigate different cinematic techniques used to construct hyper reality in the images of the movie “Dr. strange”.

Research Questions

1. How hyper-reality blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction in the movie by using systemic multimodal?
2. How different cinematic techniques are used to construct hyper reality in the images of the movie “Dr. strange”?

Data Collection:

The images in this research have been collected only from one movie “Dr. Strange”

Research design:

The study is based on qualitative mode of research. The analysis is based on The Systemic Multimodal analysis on images theorized by Kress and Leeuwan.

Research methodology:

The research will analyze Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) theorized concept of “metafunction” from Halliday’s systemic functional grammar which they applied it on images and put forward three metafunctions in VG (Visual Grammar): ideational metafunction, interpersonal metafunction and intertextual metafunction. When applied to visual systems, the ideational metafunction organizes the way that “represented participants’ relate to each other to represent the world around us” (Van Leeuwen, 1996).

Hyper reality in Sci-Fiction movies

The key purpose of this research is to investigate hyper reality through multimodal analysis in the science fiction movie ‘Dr. Strange’. The movie is full of technologically created realities are often more authentic or desirable than the real world in film. Postmodernist film classification for works that articulate the themes and ideas of postmodernism through the medium of cinema. Hyper-reality, in semiotics and postmodernism, is an inability of consciousness to distinguish reality from a simulation of reality, especially in technologically advanced postmodern societies.

In film, hyper-reality is primarily a visual language as it works better with images in order to give a hyper-real experience to the audience. An Individual is taken to the hyper-real scenario by images which showcase his/her desires and needs. In this sense, for the study of meanings in visual modes, science fiction movies to explore hyper-reality are the successful textual data.

Images:



Image A



Image B



Image C

Multimodal Analysis:

Interpersonal Metafunction	Image Gaze	Act and Structure	Social Distance	Intimacy Level	Camera Angle
Ideational Metafunction Image A	Offer	Structure	Long Shot= Far social	Low	Type of Vector Medium + Frontal
Image B	Offer		Medium Shot= Far-Personal	Medium	Medium + Frontal
Image A		Narrative		Action+ Reactional	Bidirectional
Image B		Narrative		Action+ Reactional	Bidirectional
Image C		Conceptual		No process	Non-Transactional
Image C	Demand		Wide Shot= Public	Null	Low + Oblique

Theoretical Analysis

Textual Metafunction	Information Value	Saliency	Modality
Image A	In the center, Going towards right	Equal size, out of focus, highly illuminous. (both are equal)	low
Image B	Center and Top	Large size, no focus, background	Medium-high
Image C	Center, right and top	High focus, large size, foreground, illuminous.	Full

Ideational Metafunction (Image A)

Image ‘A’ depicts the Ancient One pushes away Dr. Strange with immense power that his soul separates from his body while he is in his full senses and could see his body leaving his soul. The image is narrative in terms of its visual representational structure as there is action going on between two characters.

There are two actors at the location. Both ‘Action’ and ‘Reaction’ process can be observed in this image. The character of Ancient One is in action process as she hits hard on the chest of Dr. Strange and Dr. Strange is in reactional process as his soul leaves his body and goes in a catastrophic multiverse. The vector is realized from actor’s gaze and movements as they are looking at each other. The eye line of the Ancient one is also pointed in the same direction towards the direction of her attack. The landscape of the location in door setting of a fort. It links the audience in the image in a locative manner as the whole audience knows about the place Kamar Taj, a home and training place to the practitioners of Mystic Arts. Another vector is formed through the body posture of the actors. The Ancient One standing on the left side is in ‘static posture’ while Dr. Strange is in the in moving posture as his soul is moving away in the air.

Interpersonal Metafunction (Image A)

In the semiotic process of the image A, there are two types of participants. The actors in the image is the RP and the image producers and the viewers of this image are the IPs. The image is ‘Offer’ for the viewers. The

vector is created by the gaze of the Dr. Strange and the Ancient One in the image directed towards each other therefore they are looking away from the camera which indicates their detachment from the IPs. Both characters offer themselves as the object for inspection to be observed by the IPs. These Ancient One represents a mystical master and Dr. Strange represents an ordinary man, hopeless and helpless to heal himself.

The image is captured with a 'Long Shot' frame size as it covers two characters involved in action and their surroundings. The RPs are shot at a 'Far Social Distance' from the IPs which suggests the low intimacy level between the RPs and the IPs. The image is shot at 'Medium Frontal angle' straight on the horizontal plane. 'What you're seeing here is daily reality, which we are associated with,' says the front aspect. 'What you're seeing here is not part of everyday life; it is their world, which we are not connected with,' says the oblique angle. (Kress & Leewan, 2006, p. 136) which suggests that RPs are detached from the IPs and are not considered as a part of their world. On the vertical plane, the image is shot at eye level which indicates that RPs and IPs have equal power relation.

Textual Metafunction (Image A)

The 'Given' in the image is the Ancient one in the left side of the image. She is presented before viewers as something already familiar to them. The 'New' in the image is Dr. Strange placed at the right side in the frame. The 'Ideal' in the image is the soul of the Dr. Strange placed at the upper side in the frame. The soul is made ideal for the viewers as it is an abstract concept. The white rays of the soul represent purity, faith and goodness. Image-producer took the audience to have a glimpse of an unknown multiverse.

Ideational Metafunction (Image B)

Image 'B' shows the scene where Dr. Strange is injured and laid down on stature in a half dead condition. At this moment, his soul appears from his body and starts instructing his fellow doctor/ girlfriend on how to operate his body. Because there is action between two characters, the picture is narrative in terms of its visual representational structure.

There are two characters in the image; Dr. Strange and his girlfriend Dr. Christine Palmer. This image depicts both the 'Action' and 'Reaction' processes. The character Dr. Christine is in action as she is operating the injured body of Dr. Strange, and Dr. Strange is in reaction as his soul is directing Dr. Christine how he should be operated. The vector here is created by observing the actors' gaze and movements while they are looking at each other. The eye line of Dr. Christine is also pointing in the direction of Dr. Strange's soul. The setting in the image is of operation theater, specifically surgical table.

Interpersonal Metafunction (Image B)

The RPs 'Offer' for the viewers in this image. The vector is formed by the gaze of Dr. Christine and Dr. Strange in the image, which is directed towards each other. As a result, they are looking away from the camera, indicating their detachment from the IPs. Both actors offer themselves as an object for inspection by the IPs. Both doctors have become fast friends, demonstrating to the audience the real meaning of a friend in need is a friend in deed. Dr. Christine is taken aback when she sees Dr. Strange's soul speaking to her, but she keeps her senses and continues to follow his instructions. The image was captured with a 'Long Shot' frame size because it depicts two characters involved in action.

Textual Metafunction (Image B)

On the left side of the image, the 'Given' is Dr. Strange. In this scene, he is clearly displayed as someone they are already familiar with. The audience is aware of the events to him, how he reached the hospital, and why his soul has emerged from his body. But the other character, Dr. Christine, is completely unaware of this. Dr. Christine is the 'New' in the image, as she is positioned on the right side of the frame. The 'Ideal' in the image is Dr. Strange's soul, which is placed at the top of the frame. Because the soul is an abstract concept, it is ideal for the viewers. Dr. Strange is positioned in the center of the room.

Ideational Metafunction (Image C)

The official poster for the film Dr. Strange is image 'C.' The poster has a lot of symbolism and is quite colorful. The poster includes all of the primary characters. The objective of a movie poster is to promote the film. Because the objective of promotional language is to convince the public to do something and make the audience easier to understand the message of the advertisement, according to Ogilvy (1988) in his book *Confession of an Advertising Man*, the vocabulary is usually informal, uses simple and short sentences, and interactive words.

The colors used in this poster include red, white, blue, green, black, brown and orange. The shades of the three posters, according to Wierzbica (1996), communicate the following messages: Brown was thought to be a dreary color. Death, gloom, mystery, hidden, frightened, unknown energies were all represented by black. Kindness,

morning, chilly, isolation, death, emptiness, supernatural power is all represented by white. The color blue represents wisdom and the depths of the human soul. Blood, passion, lust, and danger are all associated with the color red. Green is a color that represents growth, nature, and relaxation. Warmth and light were represented by the color orange.

Interpersonal Metafunction (Image C)

The RPs are "Demand" for the viewers in this image. The vector is formed by the gaze of all the characters in the image who are watching straight towards the cameras. As a result, they are looking towards the audience, indicating their full attachment from the IPs. The characters through their body posture and gaze captures full attention of the audience to take interest into them and know about their story. The image was captured with a 'Long Shot' frame size because it portrays a whole group of actors in walking posture in the image.

Textual Metafunction (Image C)

On the left side of the image, the 'Given' are the antagonist of the movie. They can be interpreted here as someone already known to the audience. The 'New' in the image is the Ancient One and her followers as they are positioned on the right side of the frame. The 'Ideal' in the image is Dr. Strange. "Salience can create a hierarchy of importance among the elements, selecting some as more important, more worthy of attention than others. The Given may be more salient than the New, for instance, or the New more salient than the Given, or both may be equally salient. And the same applies to Ideal and Real and to Centre and Margin". (Kress & Leewan, 2006, p. 201) Dr. Strange is given full salience as he is placed in the center of the image and his size is bigger as compared to other characters in the poster. He is placed in the foreground while other actors can be in the background. Most characters are ideal as they are in the upper side of the image. They can be considered away from the reality of life and title of the movie is kept on the bottom of the frame, making it "real" a story which audience will believe.

Conclusion

In the light of the multimodal application in the image above, hyper-reality is present in every image. It has put the audience in a condition in which what is real and what is fiction are seamlessly blended together so that there is no clear distinction between where one ends and the other begins. It has allowed the co-mingling of physical reality with virtual reality (VR) and human intelligence with artificial intelligence (AI). All the metafunctions affects the audience, for different reasons, more in tune or involved with the hyper-real world and less with the physical real world. The images in the movie Dr. Strange's characters and settings are either digitally enhanced. The movie 'Dr. Strange' looks completely stocked and perfect due to facing, creating an illusion of more merchandise than there actually is.

The multimodal analysis of the images above of the movie "Dr. Strange" suggests that numerous visual effects, backgrounds, lightening effects, camera angles, framing techniques, facial expressions, body postures, gestures and attitudes of the participants reveal to the world that we are always confused with what is real and what is artificial and the current conception of the universe, attempting to revitalize, reactualize fragments of simulation, fragments of this universal simulation that have become for us the so-called real world.

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