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## Semiotics Analysis of Music Video “High Low” by The Unlikely Candidates Using Ferdinand de Saussure’s Semiotic Theory

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### Abstract

This research has found the semiotic meaning of the video music “High Low” by The Unlikely Candidates within the music itself. This study used the theory by Ferdinand De Saussure as the base for the analysis. According to Saussure, a sign contains two major components: signifier and signified. Using the theory by Ferdinand De Saussure, we have analyzed the meaning of the video music “High Low”. The purpose of this study is to found out how music video and semiotic are interconnected. In the end of this paper, the researchers find out that “High Low” music video contain many semiotics aspects, from lighting and color, to the personalization of feelings.

Keywords: Semiotic; Music Video; Ferdinand de Saussure.

### 1. Introduction

“The study of semiotics is focused on the representation of signs, like the language, image, and object. In visual semiotics, the visual signs have more direct meaning than in language. The representation not only shows the world but also the interaction in it. This interaction can be accompanied by the text or not and then it will constitute a recognizable kind of text (paintings, posters, magazines, etc)” [1]. According to the general definition of semiotics, it is the study that focuses on finding meaning in a sign, such as a language, images, or objects. Therefore, semiotics will help in the analysis of this paper and for this analysis, we will use Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotic theory.

Saussure [2] stated Semiology, therefore, aimed to take in any system of signs, whatever their substance and limits; images, gestures, musical sounds, objects, and the complex associations of all these, which form the content of ritual, convention or public entertainment: these constitute, if not languages, at least systems of signification.

#### 1.1. Music Videos

“Musicians, in order to deliver messages as well as to reach higher appreciation in the music industry, create music videos which contain a set of scenes in order to visualize the songs they have composed. According to Webster’s New World College Dictionary, the music video is a musical performance that is recorded as a videotape based on the musical recording along with a dramatic interpretation of the song lyrics and surreal images.” [3]. A music video is made not only for making a visual version of the song itself but also to function as an additional meaning of the music itself. A music video contains more stories of the music and emphasizes what the music actually wants to tell audiences.

Music videos often have been characterized as the ultimate medium of the postmodern world. Fast. Empty. Lascivious. At least that is how the majority of the academic and educated world perceives them. Using Frederic Jameson's terms, music videos have been defined as a schizophrenic string of isolated, discontinuous signifiers, failing to link up into a coherent sequence, as a string without a center. Andrew Goodwin talked about "semiotic pornography", "electronic wallpaper" and "neo-fascist propaganda" and Michael Shore defined the medium by its so-called "decadence", its "surface without substance", by its "clichéd imagery”.

The fact that music videos in this sense are primarily poetic does not mean that clips never contain narrativity, as I have already stated before. Most music videos do develop a storyline, embedded within its poetic structure and some clips even contain introductory story sequences or non-musical narrative sequences inserted within the video number but "outside" its musical score. These sequences are rather infrequent though, but nevertheless stress the capability of the utopian act to infiltrate into the 'real' world of narrativity. Narratives in clips thus becomes a devise to structure the poetic clip world and make it more accessible and recognizable to the viewer.

### 1.2. Linguistics

Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) is a summary of his lectures at the University of Geneva from 1906 to 1911. Saussure examines the relationship between speech and the evolution of language, and investigates language as a structured system of signs. The text includes an introduction to the history and subject-matter of linguistics; an appendix entitled "Principles of Phonology;" and five main sections, entitled: "Part One: General Principles," "Part Two: Synchronic Linguistics," "Part Three: Diachronic Linguistics," "Part Four: Geographical Linguistics," and "Part Five: Concerning Retrospective Linguistics."

Saussure defines linguistics as the study of language, and as the study of the manifestations of human speech. He says that linguistics is also concerned with the history of languages, and with the social or cultural influences that shape the development of language. Linguistics includes such fields of study as: *phonology* (the study of the sound patterns of language), *phonetics* (the study of the production and perception of the sounds of speech), *morphology* (the study of word formation and structure), *syntax* (the study of grammar and sentence structure), *semantics* (the study of meaning), *pragmatics* (the study of the purposes and effects of uses of language), and *language acquisition*.


Saussure says that linguistic signs are by nature linear, because they represent a span in a single dimension. Auditory signifiers are linear, because they succeed each other or form a chain. Visual signifiers, in contrast, may be grouped simultaneously in several dimensions. Relations between linguistic signs can be either: *syntagmatic* (linear, sequential, or successive), or *associative* (substitutive, or having indeterminate order). Saussure defines semiology as the study of signs, and says that linguistics is a part of semiology. He maintains that written language exists for the purpose of representing spoken language. A written word is an image of a vocal sign.



Saussure defines sign from the point of view of linguistics and states that a sign is composed of two elements: a signified (concept) and a signifier (sound-image). His model of the sign is in the dyadic tradition with signifier as the form the sign takes and signified as the concept to which it refers, and both signifier and signified were psychological [4].





### 1.3. Signifier and Signified



In semiotics, signified and signifier (French: signifié and signifiant) stand for the two main components of a sign, where signified pertains to the "plane of content", while signifier is the "plane of expression". The idea was first proposed in the work of Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, one of the two founders of semiotics. (Wikipedia) Based on the semiotics theory by Saussure, we know that there are two elements of semiotics, which are signifier, the plane of expression or the object who contain the meaning, and signified, the plane of content or the meaning of what the signifier tries to convey. Here we gonna do an analysis of the signifier and signified components of the music video High Low.




## 2. Analysis



No.	Duration	Visual	Verbal	Analysis
Data 1	0:00-0:06	 <p>Figure 1. Duration 0:00 – 0:06</p>	<p>Sometimes I get so high so low Where did all my good friends go?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signifier: This scene shows a man sitting in his bed inside a white room that is pretty much empty, beside of bed, tv, mirror, table, and some little decoration where the stuff has the color white and the decoration has an orange color and . while holding a frame of a picture.</li> </ul>

No.	Duration	Visual	Verbal	Analysis
				<p>and the word “HIGH LOW” is shown on his side.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signified: The feeling of emptiness and loneliness is shown through the room that’s completely empty and the color white which emphasizes the emptiness.</li> </ul>
Data 2	0:07 – 0:13	 <p data-bbox="555 1003 738 1032">Figure 2. 0:07 – 0:13</p>	<p>Sometimes I get so high so low Where did all my good friends go?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signifier: In the next scene we see the man now lying down on his bed and using an orange pillow for his bed. on his left side we see a frame that he was holding before has a picture of him and his fellow friends.</li> <li>Signified: This scene means longing and lethargy. We can see in the picture that the man had friends but he is now alone. Instead of trying to connect with friends once more, he rather just lie down which signifies lethargy.</li> </ul>
Data 3	0:14-0:17	 <p data-bbox="555 1787 738 1816">Figure 3. 0:14 – 0:17</p>	<p>Drinking champagne from the fire escape</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signifier: After lying down, in the next scene he now sits again on the left side of his bed and now tries to drink a bottle of champagne.</li> <li>Signified: The act of drinking champagne, a drink you’re supposed to drink in a party with friends, alone, signifies addiction within the man that he can’t seem to get away from.</li> </ul>

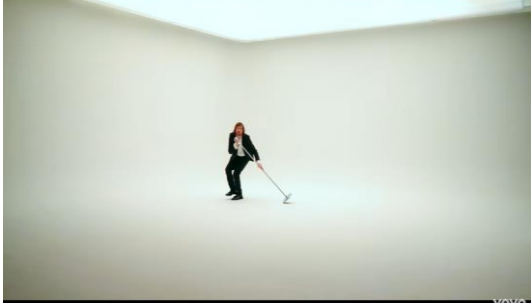
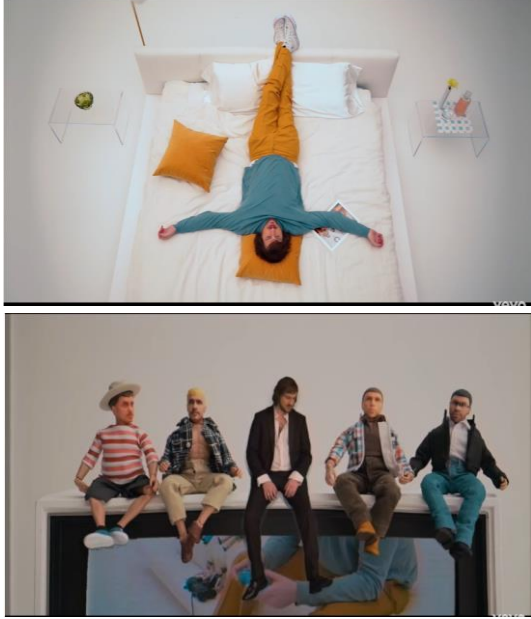

No.	Duration	Visual	Verbal	Analysis
Data 4	0:18-0:19	 <p>Figure 4. 0:18-0:19</p>	Watching all my troubles rain down	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signifier: Now we are given a point of view from the inside of a bottle of champagne, where we can see a frame of a photo of the man and his friend and the man with a confused face looking into a bottle of champagne indicate that the bottle was empty.</li> <li>• Signified: We can see that the man is using alcohol to cope with his loneliness. We can see that loneliness from the photo of his friends beside him.</li> </ul>
Data 5	0:21-0:31	  <p>Figure 5. 0:21 – 0:31</p>	<p>Everyone I know got somewhere to go I'm here with my head in the clouds</p> <p>Billions of people but there's no one like me</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signifier: In the next scene we see the man sitting in the bed with a wondering face, and then clouds suddenly shown up in his head going around him. then the cloud slowly fades away while the camera moves away.</li> <li>• Signified: The cloud in his mind signifies the clouded mind of the mind due to the effects of the alcohol kicking in.</li> </ul>
Data 6	0:32-0:37		I'm left I'm right I'm out of my mind don't even know myself sometimes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signifier: On this scene, we start with the camera within a lens and go forward to the man who looking at the frame with a disquiet face. then the camera move to the frame of the picture from the upside and then</li> </ul>


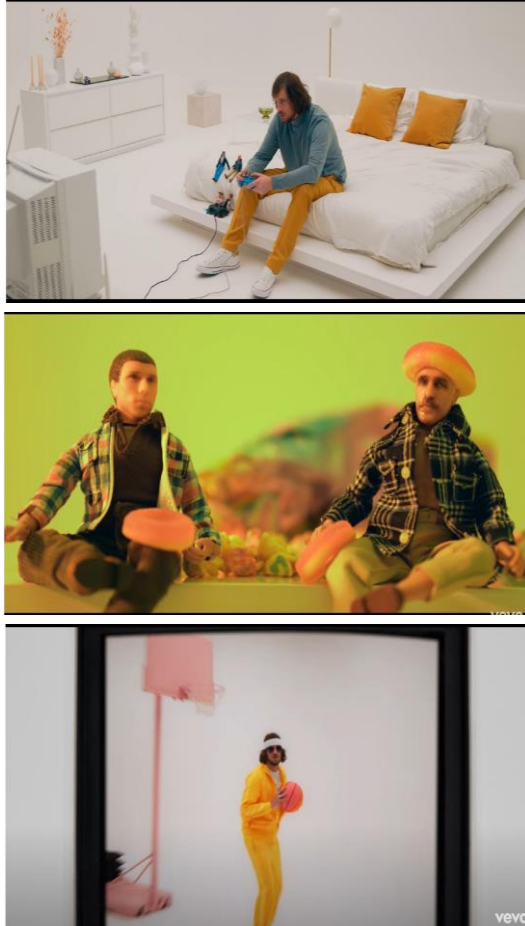
No.	Duration	Visual	Verbal	Analysis
		 <p data-bbox="555 1240 740 1263">Figure 6. 0:32 – 0:37</p>		<p data-bbox="1257 309 1477 456">the picture suddenly changes into four dolls with different appearance for each doll.</p> <ul data-bbox="1206 472 1477 591" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1206 472 1477 591">• Signified: The dolls in this scene represent the friends that the man had.</li> </ul>
Data 7	0:38-0:46		<p data-bbox="938 1279 1190 1442">I get so high so low Where did all my good friends go? Sometimes I get so high...</p>	<ul data-bbox="1206 1279 1477 2011" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1206 1279 1477 2011">• Signifier: Now this scene shows the map struggling on a blanket with a red pattern, then the scene goes to the man sitting on a box that is covered with the same blanket where he's struggling. and for some moment the video show scene with a camera inside a lens showing the same man singing inside a yellowish room, then the video flickering and back to the man sitting on the box while the camera goes away to bellow.</li> </ul>

No.	Duration	Visual	Verbal	Analysis
		 <p data-bbox="555 927 740 954">Figure 7. 0:38 – 0:46</p>		<ul data-bbox="1209 315 1481 674" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signified: The yellow room signifies alcohol that has filled his entire life, so much alcohol that it fills an entire room. The red blanket signifies that the man is slowly hurting himself by drinking alcohol</li> </ul>
Data 8	0:46-0:51	 <p data-bbox="555 1274 740 1301">Figure 8. 0:46 – 0:51</p>	<p data-bbox="938 969 1038 996">...so low</p> <p data-bbox="938 1003 1187 1066">Where did all my good friends go?</p>	<ul data-bbox="1209 969 1481 1525" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signifier: In this scene show the man offering a sweet to the doll, however, since it's just an inanimate object it can't accept his offering and the man decide to eat the sweet instead.</li> <li>• Signified: The longing feeling of the man is shown here, as he tried to share food with an inanimate object that represents his friends.</li> </ul>
Data 9	0:51-1:03		<p data-bbox="938 1541 1150 1568">High low, high low</p> <p data-bbox="938 1574 1187 1637">Where did all my good friends go?</p> <p data-bbox="938 1644 1187 1706">High low, high low, high low, high low</p>	<ul data-bbox="1209 1541 1481 1995" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signifier: In this scene show the man keeps shouting the word "high low" repeatedly until it almost sounds like "hello". the man shouted in many places that had already been shown before, like on his bed, in the yellowish room, and box covered with a red blanket.</li> </ul>

No.	Duration	Visual	Verbal	Analysis
		 <p data-bbox="555 1552 738 1581">Figure 9. 0:51 – 1:03</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signified: High low means the high emotional feeling that the alcohol gave him, while low signifies the aftermath of drinking resulted in him.</li> </ul>
Data 10	1:03-1:09		<p>Hear my neighbors talk through these thin walls Kinda got me feeling left out</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signifier: Now this scene shows the man stick his face into a glass layer of a picture frame and then the scene move to the man singing inside a white room.</li> <li>• Signified: This scene showsx the man wanting to be in the picture frame, just like his friends are in the picture.</li> </ul>




No.	Duration	Visual	Verbal	Analysis
		 <p data-bbox="549 618 743 645">Figure 10. 1:03 – 1:09</p>		<p data-bbox="1257 309 1477 456">Followed by the scene showing him in the white room representing loneliness.</p>
Data 11	1:10-1:15	 <p data-bbox="549 1276 743 1303">Figure 11. 1:10 – 1:15</p>	<p data-bbox="938 656 1192 745">Sleepin' on the floor of my castle Wonder if I'll ever come down</p>	<ul data-bbox="1209 656 1477 1429" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signifier: On the next scene show the man laying down on the bed with the position upside down and putting the picture frame of him&amp;his friends under his hand. and the scene moves to the man sitting together with the dolls on the tv while the tv shows a video of the man and dolls playing games together.</li> <li>• Signified: The tv showing the man playing games with the dolls likely means the past, back when the man still had friends to play with him.</li> </ul>
Data 12	1:53-2:04		<p data-bbox="938 1440 1192 1529">If I'm feeling right, I'll go out tonight Meet some strangers like me</p>	<ul data-bbox="1209 1440 1477 2024" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signifier: This time the scene shows the man standing in front of the mirror while touching a flower in a vase, then scene goes to the man standing near a TV and flickering to show one of the dolls holding a sweet.</li> <li>• Signified: The position of the sweet that the doll is holding is inside the man. This means that the alcohol sweetness is getting</li> </ul>

No.	Duration	Visual	Verbal	Analysis
				<p>a grip on his organs or insides.</p>
<p>Data 13</p>	<p>2:04-2:14</p>	 <p style="text-align: center;">Figure 13. 2:04-2:14</p>	<p>I'll be stumbling home, searching high and low For somebody like me, for somebody like me</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signifier: Then in this scene shows the man playing a game with the dolls and then shows another two dolls among the sweets. after that, the scene moves to the TV screen showing what the game that the man and the dolls playing are is, and turns out the character of the game is the man himself.</li> <li>• Signified: The man is thinking of what could have been, instead of trying to make it happen himself. This is shown through the man playing the game with the doll instead.</li> </ul>

No.	Duration	Visual	Verbal	Analysis
Data 14	2:26-2:39		<p>I keep on looking for somebody like me</p> <p>I got this feeling, got you to know what I mean</p> <p>High low,...</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signifier: This scene shows the interaction between the man and the dolls while playing the game. we can see how sometimes the man is upset and flicked the doll's hat and other times the man is happy and high five one of the dolls. and also we can see inside the TV gameplay where the man wins against the dolls in a basketball game. and the TV screen also shows the word "sport" and some clouds at the upper and bottom of the TV.</li> <li>• Signified: The first scene indicates the man misses the old time when he played together and experience things together. The cloud in this scene represents dreams, which means that the man is merely dreaming of happy times with his friends.</li> </ul>

Figure 14. 2:26 – 2:39

No.	Duration	Visual	Verbal	Analysis
Data 15	2:51 – 3:03	 <p>Figure 15. 2:51 – 3:03</p>	<p>Where did my, where did my Where did all my good friends go? Where did my, where did my Where did all my good friends go?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signifier: In the last scene, it shows the man singing with a face that looks like sad, concerning, and wondering. and the next scene shows a man sitting on his bed while the camera slowly goes back away.</li> <li>• Signified: In this scene, he seems like he had woken up from his dream. He is shown looking sad and looking up as if hoping that the dream was a reality. It seems to be a symbol of depression.</li> </ul>
				•

### 3. Conclusion

So, by using Ferdinand De Saussure's theory about signified and signifiers, we can conclude that the music video of the song "High And Low" by Unlikely Candidates are using the play of lights, property, and facial gestures as signifiers to give us the message.

From the signifier analysis, we can get the context meaning inside the signified of the music video of the song "High And Low" by Unlikely Candidates. The signified itself still seems pretty close to the signifier, where the meaning signified inside the music video is about the man who cut off his relationship with his friend because of a problem and had to live a life alone without friends, tasted the bittersweetness of life without anyone to share with. It made the man miss his friends.

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