

Using Visual Stereotypes: Where do You Want to Go?

If one is to understand the difference between Dr. Strangelove and Fight Club, he is best to begin with the difference between apples and pears.

Pears are green and sometimes red, just like apples. The difference lies in their forms, only. In this case, the colour has nothing to do with the sense of the 'thing'. This is not so in the case of a ceramic glass cook top. Even a child is well advised not to touch it when it is red instead of brown or grey. As follows, in some situations the colour red can be a discriminative signal, in others not.

This depends entirely on the particular context the colour is placed in. To make it easy, we can call that a frame. Imagine you see, for instance, someone getting robbed in a park. In the next second you see some busy people and somebody who is signalling you that you better not make any noise now. You suddenly become aware of having landed in a film scene.

Two frames are at work here. The first shows you that you have been getting into a bad situation, but the second negates the first. The 'film-frame' covers the first and puts it out of function. Frames consist of actors, their actions, and situations. These three factors are coded via colours, forms, smells, verbal statements, movements, and so on.

Film picks out a few of these discriminators and, using these, (re-) creates frames like shopping, sightseeing, or going to work. Thereby, films span a meta-frame or second level frame, over these first level frames. However, like films are part of the world they represent, they can either appear in another film or be compared to other films, which takes place in a third level frame.

Comparing films means to compare how these films present a reality, and this becomes distinguishable by the codifiers used. To begin, Dr Strangelove is black and white while Fight Club has colours. Cutting techniques as well should be supposed to have advanced since the early Kubrick. Both films are connected with different backgrounds of culture and expectation.

In the same way as a Sunday morning is perceivably different from a Monday morning, one literally sees and hears the differences between soap operas, Wild West, news, or horror. In order to create a film or its script, you have to stick to already existing patterns, so that people know what you are 'talking about'.

But you have to follow these patterns and be different at the same time to be successful.