

THE CONJURING

Semiotic Analysis

The Signifier: "The Conjuring," a horror film by director James Wan.

The Signified: To "Conjure" means to "To call upon (a spirit or ghost) to appear, by means of a magic ritual."

The name and trailer signify that ghosts or spirits will appear and cause problems.

Diachronic Analysis: Though not a totally visual sign, the trailer opens up with the song "Time of the Season" by The Zombies to establish a time-setting.

The viewer connects the release and popularity of the song (1969-70) with the visual cues on screen, such as the 70s era fashion and color scheme (subdued reds, strong blues, lots of yellow) to learn that the movie is taking place in the 70s.

Intertextuality: The visual representation of the poltergeist phenomena is one that is familiar to many horror film viewers. The idea that a ghost, demon, or other supernatural being is controlling the physical movement of objects has been around for centuries.

It's been featured in countless films, such as *Poltergeist* (1982), *Paranormal Activity* (2007), *Insidious* (2010), and many more.

"Real-life" poltergeist videos are also found all over the internet.

Denotation: The film denotatively represents a horror movie that is based on a true story taking place in the 1970s. A ghost/spirit causes problems for a family in their new home.

Connotation: The film connotatively represents a cinematic adaptation of a "true" haunting story from the 1970s, taking well-known real-world figures Ed and Lorraine Warren and fictionalizing one of their cases. The trailer features visual and auditory apparitions of spirits, as well as examples of poltergeist (a ghost or other supernatural being supposedly responsible for physical disturbances such as objects thrown around), which is a well-known phenomena that inspired a horror film in 1982 by the same name.

Codes: The visual representation of the poltergeist phenomena is one that is familiar to many horror film viewers. The idea that a ghost, demon, or other supernatural being is controlling the physical movement of objects has been around for centuries. It's been featured in countless films, such as *Poltergeist* (1982), *Paranormal Activity* (2007), *Insidious* (2010), and many more. "Real-life" poltergeist videos are also found all over the internet.

Images: All good horror movies thrive off of visual image. This trailer contains many images that signify a meaning or a representation for story and emotion. Here are some examples:



This shot from the trailer is set up in a way that James Wan is known for. Horror movies, especially ones done by Wan, thrive off of the audience knowing more than the characters. Even from the trailer, you can tell that something bad is going to happen because the focal character is blindfolded in a room with a very clearly placed wardrobe. The composition of the shot forces viewers to look at either the character or the wardrobe, but then shifts the focus to the wardrobe completely when its doors begin to open up.



This image is meant to work as both a demonstration of the conflict of the film and as a “creep-out” because it shows cherished family photos being smashed by an unknown force. It is a foreshadowing tool to represent what the haunting of this home will do to the family, as well as an iteration of poltergeist activity.



Horror films thrive off of limited light and long pauses to effectively execute jumpscares, and this image from the trailer shows those techniques in action. The focal character is in pitch black, and has to light a match to see. The match’s light only illuminates the character’s face, with pitch black still remaining on the sides, until a pair of grayish hands enter the firelight and clap. The serves as both a visual and auditory jump scare to give a feel for the audience of what this film will contain.

Interpellation: Horror films (and this trailer specifically) seem to direct their trailers at the average person. The idea behind horror films being scary is that they should seem like they could happen to anyone. This trailer, due to its 1970s setting in an old, large house, limits that target audience slightly. Though the film is surely directed at all horror-loving audiences (through its jumpscares, shot composition), it also adds an extra target of people who live in old houses.

Structuralism: This is, obviously, a horror film. Though the genre is certainly more encompassing than it once was, almost all horror films require certain components to exist in the genre, such as jumpscares, eerie music, and “look out behind you” shots. This trailer contains all of those, as every James Wan film does. Another aspect of well-made horror movies is their ability to build suspense through the pacing of shots, volume of music, and movement of the camera. This trailer showcases some of that technique as well.

