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## The Main Character in ‘Lowlife’ Music Video by Neck Deep Band: A Semiotic Approach

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### Abstract

In social life, the study of semiotic is used to uncover the meaning implied in signs. This study discusses the meaning conveyed from the main character in the music video. The main character was chosen as the object of research because it plays an important and most influential role in the conflict from the beginning to the end of the music video. The study is aimed to identify the visual elements contained in the main character of the music video from Neck Deep Band entitled “Lowlife”. The second aim is to analyze the denotative and connotative meaning conveyed from the main character in the music video clip. The data was collected through documentation method and note taking technique. The collected data was analyzed with the descriptive qualitative by using the content analysis method. There was two theories applied in this study. The first theory is the theory of visual communication proposed by Dyer (1993). The second is the theory of denotative and connotative meaning proposed by Barthes (1957). The result of the study shows that the main character Jett contains the five visual communication elements, namely: Appearance, Manner, Activities, Props and Settings, and also Image. Jett represents a form of a cynical expression to majority elite social class that living in boring life with stiff demeanor who see themselves above anything else.

**Keywords:** *Semiotic, music video, main character*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In daily life, human cannot be separated from signs. It can be said that sign is one of the crucial aspects of human’s life. Signs could be a form of text, sound and also picture. We are living in the world of sign because we could find signs everywhere such as on television, on the internet, on the road. Every sign has meanings behind it, human will always find the meanings of the signs they find around them to get information and to understand each other. In language usage there’s often misunderstood in comprehending meaning which could drive someone into problem, for example can be seen from the case of a shift in the meaning of language where this not only causes misunderstandings themselves, but if misunderstandings occur continuously, it will cause bigger problems that can change the behavior of the wider community. In order to avoid this, happen, that is why we have to know semiotics. The

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shortest definition of semiotic is the study of signs, Chandler (2002:20) Sign consists of Signifiers (the object itself as what it looks like) and the Signified (the meaning behind it). In semiotics, a sign is anything that communicates or conveys a meaning that is not the sign itself to the interpreter of the sign.

The study of semiotics can help people not to see “reality” objectively as it what it looks like. The example of semiotic phenomenon can be seen when a baby cry, instead of letting the baby cry parents will definitely find a way to stop the cry by thinking about the possibility of what makes the baby cry, it may give the parents a sign if it is thirsty or it can be anything else. Another example when somebody feel unwell, dizzy, and sneezing, it is a sign if there something wrong with the body, it might be the body tells to stop doing any activities for a while and get some rests. These examples show that from sign people are driven to do something, what act should they do, how they should respond on something precisely according to the signs they get. Through semiotic people understand how meanings are made and how reality is represented. These show that sign has very important role in the process of communication in our daily life.

Nowadays, science and technology are growing rapidly so as human’s culture. Depart to that, the use of semiotic is also increasingly widespread and more specific in almost all aspects of human’s life. In the field of business promotion and advertisement for instance. Nowadays, people use music video as a media to convey messages the creators are intended whether to wide community or certain groups of society. Because it is intended to the society, music video is also presented by taking aspects of people's lives in order to people can feel and digest the contents of the video emotionally so that the message can be conveyed or if it is aimed for promotion then, people will be able to immediately take action to do something.

Besides, through music video, semiotic also can be used to reveal behavior or culture of one individual or even certain group of society. It is because those all are created by human where they put their value or perspective of life according to their life experiences through sign in the video. In this study, the main character of the music video is used as the primary data because it aimed to represent the value which the character actually believes according to the signs represented in the music video, therefore we could know and understand the character more. By understanding them better, we could see the other side of their life that might represented reality in the ordinary life, therefore we could respect each other. Additionally, through semiotics it is not impossible to solve problems related to the social issue the characters struggling with that might also happen in the real world.

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## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

The type of research applied in this study is library research due to the data of this study were collected from previous research as the reference and guidance. This study used qualitative research. As cited from Cresswell (2002:32), qualitative research is an approach used for observing and understanding the meaning of individual of groups ascribed to a social and human problem.

The research uses primary data. The data source is in form of audio-visual material (music video) collected from Hopeless Records' Youtube Chanel. The data consists of music video by British pop punk band - Neck Deep - entitled 'Lowlife'. The length of the music video is 3 minutes and 7 seconds and was premiered on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020. According to the statement from the band, this music video tells a story about a loner named Jett, who lives in a place named Sonderland. 'Sonderland' is a fiction place made by the song writer also the lead of the band. It refers to a blend between "Wonderland" and the somewhat obscure word "sonder" which means the representation of random people living their life differently from another people.

The video was chosen as the data source because it belongs to sign that can reveal meanings. The main character was chosen as the object of the study because the main character plays an important and most influential role in the conflict from the beginning to the end of the music video clip. It also represents sign that could reveal meanings intended by the creator of the video. Another reason the data was chosen because this band is well known by teenagers and young adults because the music, they produce are easy listening. For these ages that have high mobility and learn fast, they could absorb any ideas, ideology, and believes easily both independently and through social interactions.

The data was collected through documentation method and note taking. Basically, documentation method was used to identify the content that involve written, audio and visual data. Note taking technique was applied in order to classified the visual elements and the meaning conveyed from the main character of the music video.

There are several steps to collect the data of this research namely, first, the video was downloaded from the official Youtube channel of Hopeless Record; second, the video was observed by watching the video repeatedly and carefully; next, capture the video and take a note of the data required for the research according to the visual elements and the connotative and denotative meanings of the main character; finally, group the data into visual elements and the connotative and denotative theory.

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The collected data was analyzed with descriptive qualitative by using content analysis method, and was based on the theory of visual communication proposed by Dyer (1993) and the theory of denotative and connotative meaning proposed by Barthes (1957)

There are two following steps taken in analyzing the data according the first and second problem that are formulated, they are: for the first problem, the selected data that include visual elements in the main character of the 'Lowlife' music video by Neck Deep are described and explained in detail according to each category of the theory of visual communication by Dyer (1993). For the second problem, analyzing the denotative and the connotative meaning in the selected scenes of the main character. Analyzing the denotative and connotative meaning is done by using Roland Barthes sign map. The mind map consists of two main parts, that are denotation (the first order of signification) and connotation (the second order of signification), then the data described according to the process and the meaning conveyed from the main character afterwards.

### **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Two theories are applied in analyzing this study, there are the theory of visual communication elements proposed by Dyer (1993) and the semiotic theory proposed by Barthes (1957). The study starts by identifying visual communication elements from Jett as the main character of the music video and continued with analyzing the connotative and denotative meaning of selected scenes.

There are five main components of visual communication elements that are contained in this music video which consists of appearance, manner, activity, prop and settings is explained as follows:

#### **3.1 Appearance**

##### a) Age

Age is one of the important things to be analyzed, because age could be a reference for people to identified the overall body and face. Jett's character is played by a man named Samuel Friberg. In this music video Jett's age is approximately in his early 20s to middle 20s.

##### b) Gender

Gender is related to culture. It has a significant role in identification. In this music video, Jett that is presented in the music video can be identified as a man.

##### c) Nationality and Race

Since the song writer is the band themselves, it can be assumed that Jett is from the UK because he is the representation of the Band, so his nationality is British (European). From his

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look, he has white skin, blue or greyish eye color, pointed nose, and tall body so his race can be considered as Caucasian because of his skin color, eye color and the shape of his body.

### 3.2 Manner

#### a) Expression

In this part, there are several facial expressions have been captured from Jett character in the music video. Each expression will be explained as follows:



Figure 1. Expression

The first captured expression from Jett is a blank expression. In this picture, Jett looks like he and a girl beside him just woke up from a sleep, trying to gather his awareness.

#### b) Eye-Contact

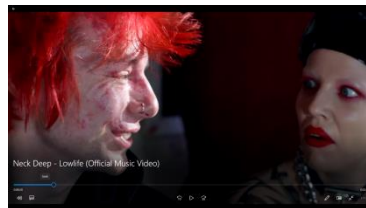


Figure 2. Eye-Contact

In this music video, Jett is mostly making an eye contact with Alice, the girl who always accompany him from the beginning until the end of the music video. However, he also makes an eye contact by staring at the tv show he watch with the girl in the music video.

#### c) Clothes

Generally, he is wearing all black from head to toe. In this music video, he is wearing black shirt with orange fire motive that match with his hair. For the outer, he is wearing black leather hoodie. He is also wearing black denim pants with chain accessories in the pocket. And lastly, his feet is wrapped with black leather boots. From the overall clothes that has been mentioned, the type of clothes he is wearing is informal and tend to be edgy, which means that those are not the typical ordinary people wear daily.

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### 3.3 Activities

#### a) Touch

Touch can be a sign or a way for one individual to communicate to another person. In this music video, there are several touching activities by the main character to another character and vice versa.

From the beginning of the music video, there is an activity of touching from the girl. In this scene, the girl is touching Jett's shoulder who is lost in his daydreams of a strange piece of pizza in his hand to get his attention. And it seems like it has successfully break Jett's dream and grab his attention. The next scene is that in the scene where Jett and the girl watching tv show together. In this scene, he is touching his mouth when his mouth was wide open. Then, when Jett and the girl in upside down position, he and the girl touching hands for a moment. Another scene is in the scene when he and the girl go down the stair, Jett touches and grips the banister.

#### b) Body Movement

The first movement that can be identified is that when Jett was sitting upside down and grabbing a slice of pizza. Then he turned half his body towards the girl because the girl was touching his shoulders. The next movement is that when he is watching tv show with the girl, he cupped one hand to his mouth then waved the hand to the side. Another movement is that when he is walking through the street. While walking, he is also rarely jumping and dancing with the girl. In another scene, he looks like he is pointing his hand somewhere. In the scene when he and other lowlifes watching on tv show, he clenched one fist and raised it in the air.

### 3.4 Props and Settings

There are many properties that are used in the *Lowlife* music video including a slice of pizza, a flat filled with furniture such as bed, chair, and television, cars, buildings, artificial flower, trampoline, dog, stroller, dining table, tea set, cakes and drinks, and sofa.

The settings of where the main character appears from this music video take place in several places including outdoor and indoor settings such as a bedroom in a flat, road, park, pier side, and back yard. The time setting is happened in daylight. These overall settings give an illustration of situation for the audience about what does Jett do in certain time.

### 3.5 Visual or Image

#### a) Focus and Depth of Vision


The main focus of this music video is mostly to the main character of Jett and his friend Alice. However, sometimes the camera focuses on other objects such as tv shows or someone who is spraying fire in the park to align the movements of the main character so that later they can produce a certain meaning. The depth vision presented in the movie bring bright, playful, yet bold impression.

#### b) Close-Ups

The close-ups is another important aspect that has a role to give information more detail about what the main character is actually doing. One of the examples of the use of close-up in this video is in the scene of Jett when he and the girl were getting closer to somebody who paint a rose in the park. Close ups mostly used to reveal the emotion of the character through facial expression.


The meanings conveyed from Jett character through map sign of Barthes popularized by Sobur (2003) in *Introducing Semiotic* is analyzed. The table consists of two main parts, that are the first order (denotation) and second order (connotation or known as myth). Further analysis is explained as bellow:

Table 1. Scene 1

<b>( Signifier )</b>		<b>( Signified )</b>	
		A white tall man named is lying with a girl.	
<b>(Sign signifier)</b>		<b>(sign signified)</b>	
Jett is lying with blank expression		Blank expression indicates that he is just woke up	
<b>(Connotative sign)</b>			
Jett had sleep			

Actually, blank expression could express several kinds of emotion like empty, daydreaming, sleepy, confusion, etc. The scene when Jett lying in blank expression with a girl beside him. Lying pose and blank expression are a strong indication that somebody just woke up, or just had some sleep.

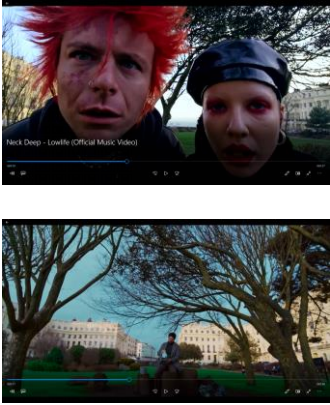
Table 2. Scene 2

<b>( Signifier)</b>	<b>( Signified)</b>
	Jett is staring at a slice of spinning pizza on his hand.
<b>(Sign signifier)</b>	<b>(sign signified)</b>
he is trying to logically digest the phenomena	Jett is amazed yet confused
<b>(Connotative sign)</b>	
The phenomena of spinning pizza is a new thing for him	

In this scene, Jett seems like with blank expression he is staring at a slice of pizza on his hand. For normal people, of course these phenomena seem strange and considered to be wasting time, instead there is something wrong with the pizza. In the picture, Jett is staring at the pizza because there is something wrong with the pizza, that the pizza is spinning itself. The facial expression shows that Jett is amazed yet confuse with these strange phenomena. And of course, this explanation supporting the previous explanation for the second scene that Jet is not in the real world.



Table 3. Scene 3

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>( Signifier )</b></p> 	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>( Signified )</b></p> <p>The camera is getting close up to the face of Jett and his girl. Jett is seeing an object of a man whose brush paint a flower in the park.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>(Sign signifier)</b></p> <p>Jett frowns and gives a blank expression</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>(sign signified)</b></p> <p>Jett is amazed yet confused</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>(Connotative sign)</b></p> <p>It is the first time for Jett seeing a man who re-colored a flower in the park</p>	

Selected scenes present Jett’s face closely to show his expression in detail. In here, from the blank expression on his face, Jett looks really confused upon an object he sees. The feeling confusion indicates that Jett never seen something like that before.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

According to the analysis data it can be concluded that the main character Jett on the *Lowlife* music video by Neck Deep contains the five visual communication elements, namely: Appearance, Manner, Activities, Props and Settings, and also Image. From the Manner of Expression there are seven expressions captured from Jett character, such as blank expression, confused expression, shock expression, amazement expression, smiley expression, irritated facial expression, and happy expression. The main character Jett represents a man who enjoys his life as a loner, apart from ordinary life become what he wants to be. The manner he acts and the clothes he wears represents a form of a cynical expression to majority elite social class that living in boring life with stiff demeanor who see themselves above anything else.

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