

La confidential essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

LA Confidential (1997) is a film set in the 1950s, in the suburb of Hollywood and is focused around a particular police station. All these aspects of the film have attached connotations and signifiers.

Charles Peirce (as cited in Branston 2003: 17) identified three different types of signifiers; indexical, iconic and symbolic, all of which can be found in the film. Curtis Hanson uses the indexical signifier of a flash as a reference to cameras; an example of which can be found in the opening montage sequence. This draws on the 'code' (Hall cited in Branson 2003: 18) of the camera within Hollywood films and connotes celebrity, the paparazzi and glamour. An example of an iconic signifier would be the movie posters that can be found throughout the film. They act as a constant reminder of where it is set and what the preoccupation of the suburb is.

Symbolic signifiers are the most frequent and are cleverly used to illustrate and reinforce information about the plot and the characters. A pair of glasses can connote intelligence, a responsible individual and is also a symbol of weakness and an object of mockery. As Ed Exley wears spectacles the audience expects him to embody these traits. Dudley Smith discourages him from wearing them as he does not consider them to be symbolic of a policeman. The colour red connotes sex, seduction and romance as well as being symbolic of 1950s fashion when used in lipstick.

Therefore, Lynn Bracken's choice in cosmetics can reveal much more to the audience than just what she looks like. Being a prostitute the connotation of sex is appropriate. However, she is also considered to be high class and

glamorous and this is still inferred by the lipstick. Both her hairstyle and cosmetics are signifiers to the period and insights into her personality.

One standout cultural reference is to that of the film *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952) in which much meaning could be interpreted. It is referenced throughout *LA Confidential* and this particular film will not have been chosen by accident. It fits in with the recurrent references to 1950s Hollywood and show business. The film itself is about the ruthlessness of the industry and features not only the actress Lana Turner who makes an appearance as a character in the film but also the character Jonathan Shields who shares many character traits with Jack Vincennes.

The use of *The Bad and the Beautiful* reinforces the audience's thoughts on what Hollywood was like in that period. Branston and Stafford (2003: 12) describe how all human organization is determined by large social or psychological structures. Such structures are highly perceptible in *LA Confidential*. The hierarchy within the police force is one such structure along with the social and economic hierarchy found in the movie business.

It is possible here to mention Marxist theory given his position as a structuralist. The film depicts ethnic minorities as lower class citizens. Although both cops and blacks and corrupt only the cops gain from it in the long term and the blacks are portrayed as weak and impressionable. Marx would interpret their crimes as their way of rebelling against an unfair system.