

REPRESENTATION OF SOCIAL CLASS IN FILM (Semiotic Analysis of Roland Barthes Film Parasite)

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Abstract. Social class differences have been formed long ago which can identify people's identities which are usually measured based on economic status. This class difference is depicted in Bong Joon-ho's Parasite film, telling of two families of different classes. The Kim family as a lower class and vice versa Mr. Park as the upper class. The core theme of the film Parasite is that of realistic drama about class domination which can also be seen around us. The paradigm used is critical interpretative, so researchers not only criticize but also make interpretations related to this Parasite film. In the analysis phase, this study uses Roland Barthes's semiotic analysis, which are signs in the form of words, images, sounds, movements and objects that are analyzed based on three things, namely parsing data based on the connotation, denotation and myths contained in the Parasite film scene. Furthermore, representations produced through objects or images can produce meaning or processes that we understand or relate them to a meaning. Based on the first analysis of the film industry, Parasite Films are not included in the logic of most cultural industries but still succeed in penetrating the international market. Then, at the stage of representing social class markings in the film Parasite, it is found that there are at least five main points, namely: ease of life, fashion, boundaries, body odor, and color. Thus, the description of social class representation in the film Parasite is perfect both in its scenes, properties, and cinematography.

Key words: Film, Parasite, Representation, Semiotics, Social class.

Abstrak. Perbedaan kelas sosial sudah terbentuk sejak dahulu yang dapat mengidentifikasi identitas orang yang biasanya diukur berdasarkan status ekonomi. Perbedaan kelas ini digambarkan dalam film Parasite karya Bong Joon-ho menceritakan dua keluarga yang berbeda kelas. Keluarga Kim sebagai kelas bawah dan sebaliknya keluarga Mr. Park sebagai kelas atas. Tema inti dari cerita film Parasite yaitu mengenai realistis drama perihal dominasi kelas yang sebenarnya juga dapat terlihat di sekitar kita. Paradigma yang digunakan yaitu kritis interpretatif, sehingga peneliti bukan hanya mengkritisi tetapi juga melakukan interpretasi terkait film Parasite ini. Dalam tahap analisis, penelitian ini menggunakan analisis semiotika Roland Barthes yaitu tanda-tanda yang berbentuk kata-kata, gambar, suara, gerakan dan objek yang di analisis berdasarkan tiga hal yaitu mengurai data berdasarkan makna konotasi, denotasi dan mitos yang terdapat dalam adegan film Parasite. Selanjutnya, representasi yang dihasilkan melalui objek atau gambar dapat menghasilkan makna atau proses yang kita pahami atau mengaitkannya dengan suatu makna. Berdasarkan analisa pertama mengenai industri film, Film Parasite tidak termasuk dalam logika industri kebudayaan kebanyakan tetapi tetap berhasil menembus pasar internasional. Kemudian, pada tahap merepresentasikan tanda kelas sosial yang ada dalam film Parasite, ditemukan setidaknya terdapat lima poin utama, yaitu: kemudahan hidup, fashion, batasan, aroma tubuh, dan warna. Dengan demikian, penggambaran representasi kelas sosial dalam film Parasite sangat sempurna baik dalam adegan, properti, dan sinematografinya.

Kata kunci: Film, Kelas sosial, Parasite, Representasi, Semiotika



INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years Kalva (2002: 125) says image and video compression research has explored new methodologies for high compression using high-level techniques. The next generation of coding techniques has made it possible to encode and represent audio-visual scenes with objects that are more semantically meaningful. Like other new technologies, object-based representation of audio-visual scenes (Kalva, 2002: 125), one of which is film. Movies have a very different and much inferior origin from TV. They started out as cheap side shows, with no audience at all what they could take from vaudeville houses and gallery shootings. Created by gadgeteers and exploited by small businesses, cinema is never considered anything but a medium of entertainment (Houseman, 1956: 228). In addition, Danesi (2004: 144) considers films as works of fiction that can stimulate reflection and lead to a better understanding of some aspects of human reality. By creating characters, placing them in certain situations, and establishing a point of view, fiction writers make judgments about moral, philosophical, psychological, or social issues (Danesi, 2004: 144). Currently there are more and more films that raise social issues in the story, one of which is the film that will be raised in this research, namely Film Parasite.

The film Parasite is a film directed by Bong Joon-ho about a drama that is quite realistic and is often called a crime drama, comedy, sad human drama, or terrible thriller. 8 In 2020 Film Parasite has taken

home the most awards at the 2020 Oscars, winning four Academy Awards at the Oscars tonight including Best Picture, Directing, International Feature Film and Writing (Original Screenplay).

Not only that, this film is also the first non-English language film in Oscar history and the first film from South Korea to be nominated for an International Feature Film. The film Parasite tells the story of two families of different classes. A lower-class family living in a squalid semi-basement flat hoping for a normal life but hard to get to. Instead Mr. family. Park as an upscale person who works as the CEO of an IT company. They are a competent, wealthy new family and can be said to be the ideal family among the modern urban elite.¹

Long & Wall (2013: 658) explains that social class is a group of things, so social classification is the process of identifying different people as belonging to different groups with a number of different social forces, usually measured based on economic status. At present, class politics in modern Western (even world) society appears to be not only about workers and owners but more about levels of ownership and appearance, and about cultural differences (Long & Wall, 2013: 660).

In connection with the Parasite film, there are signs of representation regarding the message of social class in the Parasite film, as stated by Isfandiyary (2017: 1) that an image can represent something and its appearance has its own meaning for the audience. Film is one of those products that requires an image to advertise itself to viewers. By looking at pictures; the viewer can infer not only what the image is but also what the film is. Therefore, based on these

¹ <https://oscar.go.com/news/winners/parasite-wins-4-oscars-and-makes-oscar-history>

accessed on 27 May 2020

concepts, I will analyze how to criticize the representation of social class based on the signs depicted and formed regarding class domination and the struggle of the lower class in wanting a sense of belonging to the upper class in the Parasite film. Parasite film is a film with a family background in South Korea which may also be reinterpreted in various countries like South Korea.

With the formulation of the problem, how is the sign system used in the Film Parasite to represent the social class of the people in South Korea? And the research objective, namely the purpose of this study was to determine how the sign system used in the film Parasite to represent the social class of the people in South Korea through the film Parasite.

Social Class

Marx and Engels argue that society as a whole is increasingly divided into two large opposing camps, into two great classes which are directly opposite each other. The two classes are called the bourgeois (capitalist) class and the proletarian (working) class (Fuchs, 2020: 106). Rampton (2006: 216) reviews class 'breakdowns' during the twentieth century, noting that the 'analytic utility and cultural salience of social class appears to be diminishing', at least as they relate to processes of macro-social change and explicit patterns of self-identification. This breakdown, driven by economic reorganization and political and cultural changes, has made it all but impossible to overcome the 'working class' as a coherent population (Eley dan Nield, 2000 dalam Callier, 2014: 583).

Coupland (2009, 2010) in Callier (2014: 583) brings Rampton's ideas to special thinking about the relationship between changing social class meaning and mediated communication. He points out that discourse analysis must be able to target not only those moments of interaction

where domination occurs, but also where resistance to domination is sought, making moments of social transformation in discourse visible. Coupland's observations align with social class work in media studies, which emphasizes transformation and contestation.

One form of how social class is represented through film is in the film Titanic. Shakespeare in this film, Jack on the Titanic, is blessed with an artistic ability that makes him indifferent to money and social status. Jack only cared about his reputation as an artist, and this made him irresistible to the soulful aristocratic woman. (It must be made clear that nearly all literary historians will dispute this depiction of Shakespeare as a poor bohemian indifferent to social status; historians generally see him, more precisely, as a social climber. We know very little about him), but one thing we do know. is that he worked very hard to get the emblem for his family and social class and privileges for his family) (Gandal, 2007: 31).

Representation

Representation comes from the word "represent" which means to represent or "means" or something that symbolizes something. Representational codes are used to produce text, that is, messages with independent existence. Representations can be based on a text consisting of iconic or symbolic signs and even language or verbal photography (Fiske, 2002: 66-67). Regarding semiotics, according to Curtin (2009: 51) it relates to meaning; how representations, in a broad sense (language, images, objects) produce meanings or processes that we understand or associate meanings. For visual images, or visual and material culture more generally, semiotics is a broader investigation than the study of symbolism and the use of semiotic analysis challenges concepts such as naturalism and realism (the idea that an image or object can

describe something objectively) and intentionality (the idea of that the meaning of the image or object is produced by the person who made it) (Curtin, 2009: 51).

Basically, in acknowledging the relationship of each variable, perhaps we should represent it because the image or object is understood to be dynamic; that is, the importance of images or objects is not understood as a one-way process from images or objects to individuals but the result of complex interrelationships between individuals, images or objects and other factors such as culture and society (Curtin, 2009: 51). Thus the existence of representational forms of media, such as books, paintings, photographs, writings, architecture, interior decoration, and others. Where it can also be found in the film scene as a medium of communication (Fiske, 2002: 18).

Semiotics

One of the broadest definitions of semiotics is the definition of Umberto Eco, which states that 'semiotics deals with everything that can be considered as a sign' (Eco, 1976). Semiotics involves the study not only of what we call 'signs' in everyday speech, but of whatever 'represents' something else. In the semiotic sense, signs are in the form of words, images, sounds, movements and objects (Chandler, 1999: 8). Semiotics began to become the main approach to cultural studies in the late 1960s, partly as a result of the work of Roland Barthes.

In addition, Saussure in (Danesi, 2004: 3) also explains that semiotics is the study of the life of signs in imaginable society. Saussure calls it a semiology (from the Greek "sign") which will show what is a sign, what laws govern it. There is an ability to reason why, over time, the human species has come to be governed not by the forces of natural selection, but by "historical forces," that is, by the accumulation of meanings that previous generations have

captured, preserved, and passed in the form of signs (Danesi, 2004: 3).

Roland Barthes was the first to apply semiotic ideas, which evolved from linguistics, to visual images, for example, food advertising, photography and motion pictures. Barthes' work offers a useful summary of the important aspects of semiotics discussed above. Basically, it seeks to analyze how the meaning we associate with images is not a "natural" result of what we see; that is, they are not clear and universal in the way we understand what we see (Curtin, 2009: 54).

METHODOLOGY

According to (Neuman, 2014: 94), paradigm is a general organizational framework for theory and research that includes basic assumptions, main problems, quality research models, and methods for finding answers. In this study, researchers will use a mixed paradigm, namely the interpretive critical paradigm.

The paradigm or critical approach itself is a methodology that analyzes the great power structures that guide daily life. The reciprocal relationship between communication and culture is that power must exist in every communication situation, and plays a big factor, although sometimes its role is hidden in an intercultural interaction (Martin & Nakayama, 2018: 51). In addition, Neuman (2014: 110), Social critical science defines social science as a process of critical inquiry that goes beyond surface illusions to reveal real structures in the material world to help people change conditions and build a better world for themselves.

Then, the interpretive paradigm according to Neuman (2014: 84) is a type of theoretical explanation of an event that occurs and how something works and is expressed in terms of socially constructed

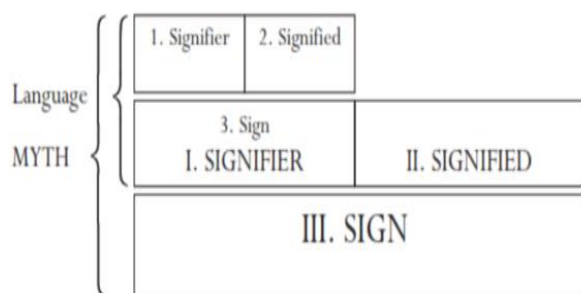
meanings and a subjective world view. Interpretive researchers see that social situations contain great ambiguity in which behavior or statements have meaning and can be interpreted in various ways (Neuman, 2014: 108).

Furthermore, the approach used in this research is a qualitative approach with Roland Barthes' semiotic research method. With the object of analysis in this study, namely the content in the film Parasite which has been downloaded by the researcher.

Qualitative research consists of globally dispersed groups of people seeking to apply a critical interpretive approach that will help them (and others) understand the dire conditions that define everyday life in the second decade of the new century. One of the main focuses in qualitative is analyzing political representation and textual analysis in literary and cultural forms including production, distribution, and consumption (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018: 17-19).

Particularly in Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method, namely adapting the semiological theory regarding the relationship between significant and significant from Saussure with an important difference according to Barthes, namely the presence of mythical signs (Allen, 2003: 41), see Figure Presence of Mythical Signs

Figure 1. Presence of Mythical Signs



Source: (Allen, 2003: 43).

Barthes semiotics works in two stages, namely in the first stage, speaking directly about the object (denotative stage), namely the signifier, signified and sign. The second stage, taking the whole sign system of the first stage (connotative stage). It is at this second stage that the meaning of the message is uncovered (metahababasa stage), namely by the addition of a myth. Metlanguages are the operations which form the majority of scientific languages as signatures, apart from the unity of the original signs, can be said to be outside a descriptive realm. Myths act on existing signs, whether they are written statements or text, photographs, films, music, buildings or clothing. As Barthes said that myth is a strange system, because this myth is built from a semiological chain that existed before (Allen, 2003: 42-43). Thus, based on Barthes' stages, the researcher will parse the data by analyzing the meaning of connotations, denotations and myths to find out the elements of social class representation contained in the Parasite film.

Thus, the data collection technique used in this study is to observe the Parasite film to obtain the required data. Footage of films observed and parts captured using official platforms such as Google, Youtube and Netflix. Then, researchers conducted a literature study by collecting data from various sources such as books, scientific journals and the internet.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Film

According to (Sørensen, 2016: 3), the absorption of cellular technology has made the practice of watching audiovisual content on various screens and devices increase, directly or indirectly. Kalva (2002: 125) says, the next generation of coding techniques has made it possible to

encode and represent audio-visual scenes with objects that are more semantically meaningful. Like other new technologies, object-based representation of audio-visual scenes will raise many technological challenges while providing a feature-rich framework and is increasingly being used today, one of which is in a film (Kalva, 2002: 125).

Film as one of the cultural industries is seen by Adorno as a cultural industry in capitalism, the same as other industries that have to produce products with the main orientation for profit. The culture industry is managed by responding to market conditions, production costs, profits, marketing, competition. The character of the products produced by the cultural industry tends to contain standardization (the same pattern) because the cultural industry is profit-oriented, the reproduction process is a necessity which also requires identical needs in many places (standardization, homogenization) "it has made the technology of culture industry no more than the achievement of standardization and mass production, sacrificing whatever involved a distinction between the logic of work and that of the social system" (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1993: 1).

As we know, South Korea has become a popular culture globally which has become known as the Korean Wave or Hallyu (Chang, 2014: 17). Hallyu is a global phenomenon that makes South Korean popular culture more widespread and becomes the consumption of many people, both from music and drama (Jeong et al., 2017: 2288-2289). However, the film *Parasite* is not entirely what Adorno and Horkhamier had in mind. *Parasite* is indeed profitable because it has won many awards. However, the director, Joon-Ho, did not make a work that contained standards or had the same pattern. Even the film *Parasite* is out of standard Korean Pop in general,

which has a lot to do with many romance dramas.

Joon-Ho's courage in taking the theme of differences in aesthetic standards called taste culture where there is an upper-middle culture that becomes the audience for high art works, namely those that are not standardized, critical, substantive, unique, expressive. This proves that there are many viewers who want to consume works that provide intellectual nourishment and many of them also appreciate reflective films.

Moreover, the film industry is a challenging domain for scientific research in Indonesia in general and for modelers in particular. This industry is characterized by a product (content) with several distribution outlets, each of which has a relatively short window of opportunity (unlike soap operas). In each window involved in film production, many different parties and decision makers are involved and some emphasize the creative and artistic aspects of the product, others focus on business issues (Eliashberg et al., 2008: 437). Meskipun sudah menjadi industri kreatif, pada prinsipnya, kita harus menganggap film sebagai jenis makna tertentu, perilaku kognitif. Seperti bagaimana sebuah film meneliti makna seperti itu, dan melakukannya ke dalam kekhususan sinematisnya (Ehrat, 2005: 3).

Social Class Representation

Figure 2. Different views in each house





Source : Parasite Film



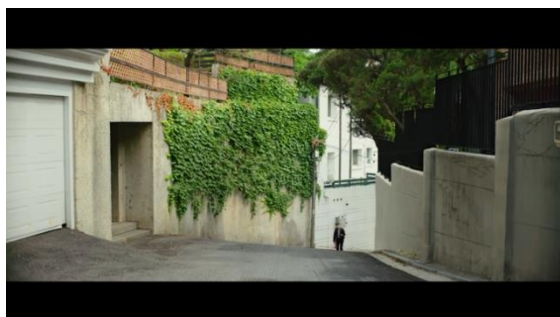
Source : Parasite Film

Connotation: In the two pieces of the scene in Figure 3.1, there are different views in each house where on the left is the view of the house of the poor and on the right is the view of the house of the rich.

Denotation: This different scene shows how the conditions in which the poor and rich live live. The poor live like an underground house with views of adjacent houses and public roads. Besides that, the rich have a comfortable residence with views of the green and spacious yard.

Myth: This social class gap shows how the poor (lower class) and the rich (upper class) enjoy life. The poor who are accustomed to slum scenery will certainly enjoy living in a place with a more beautiful view, but not the other way around.

Figure 3. Ki-Woo was heading for the Rich's house



Connotation: The above scene in scene 3.2 shows when Ki-Woo was heading for the Rich's house and it was seen that to get to the house he had to walk on an uphill road. Besides this, the next scene shows Ki-Jung and Ki-Woo returning to their homes in the lowlands.

Denotation: Good in some countries it seems that they want a good home area and are not prone to disasters, especially floods. Thus, some of them the bourgeoisie chose a place in the elite, high, and usually in areas safe from floods. Unlike the poor who live in densely populated, slum settlements and usually get flooded because most of their area is in the lowlands.

Myth: The rich (upper class) are at the top and the poor (lower class) are at the bottom.

Based on the overall figure 1 and 2, it can be seen that there are differences in the environmental conditions that exist in each social class. The existence of a stratification of society between class groups can affect the emergence of ease of life and a separate lifestyle in a society (Heriyanto C., 2016: 17). For example, the rich (upper layer) will find it easier in life, such as living in a house in the highlands so that they are not prone to flood disasters and the opposite is compared to the poor (lower layer) who in this film live in the area. lowlands and prone to flooding. In addition, rich people will have certain different lifestyles, for example living in luxurious and large houses in non-densely populated settlements which are different from poor

people who are described as living in narrow houses in slum and densely populated settlements.

Figure 4. Condition of the lower class people



Source : Parasite Film

Connotation: The first cut of the scene in Figure 3.3 shows the condition of the lower class people who are gathering. On the other hand, the second cut of the scene shows a party held by those of the upper class.

Denotation: The appearance of each class is very visible, especially in terms of dress. The first crowd appeared to be in an unhappy state in modest clothes. In contrast to the second picture where every party guest looks happy in a nice outfit.

Myth: The people around and how to dress can show a person's social class status.

According Barnard (2014: 93), fashion or clothing is not just a style but can also be used to represent someone. The existence of a structured meaning system in it that allows an individual to interpret a social identity, sexuality, gender and class

based on what is used which includes in the realm of communication.

Figure 5. In the first scene is a housemaid



Source : Parasite Film

Connotation: In Figure 3.4, where the scene in the first scene is a housemaid who is waking her employer who is asleep in the garden of the house because someone has come. Then in the next cut of the scene, Kim Ki-Taek - Ki Woo's father wants to do a job interview as a driver to the head of the household of the Rich.

Denotation: These two scenes show a line on a mirror that seems to define a boundary between the two main players, which also implies that there is an irreconcilable difference between the upper and lower classes.

Myth: There is always a dividing line or boundary between the rich (upper class) and the poor (lower class) that we don't realize.

The notion of "boundaries" has come in recent years to play a key role in important new pathways in the social sciences, one of which is group rights. Social boundaries are objective forms of social difference manifested in unequal

access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and non-material) and social opportunities. For one thing, Marx often described the proletariat as the negation of the capitalist class. Symbolic and social boundaries must be seen as equally real, that is, starting at the intersubjective level, ending in showing themselves as groupings of individuals (Lamont & Molnár, 2002: 167-169).

In this film, the boundary between rich and poor appears not only from the appearance of clothes or place of residence, but from the cinematographic side of the picture which many people unwittingly have become a dividing mark. So, if you pay attention to where in the shooting, there is a vertical line that is used to convey the class division between the two families.

Furthermore, in the film *Parasite*, social inequality is explored not based on money, behavior or even the words "poor and rich" that never exist in a conversation dialogue. One indication of social class is actually expressed through the smell of the body odors of the two class groups in the film which is shown in one of the scenes. The scene shows when the boy, Da-song, says that he smells the same smell between the driver, the housemaid, and their two new private tutors.

Figure 6. Scene Da-song



Source : *Parasite* Film

Connotation: Figure 3.5 describes the scene where a boy, Da-song, smells the scent of his father's driver and continues to smell the scent of their household assistant. He was surprised and said that both of them had the same scent as well as the two private tutors in the family.

Denotation: It's no wonder that the body odors of a family living in the same house have the same body odor. In fact, many of us are not aware of our personal scent that other people notice. This is what happened to the scene.

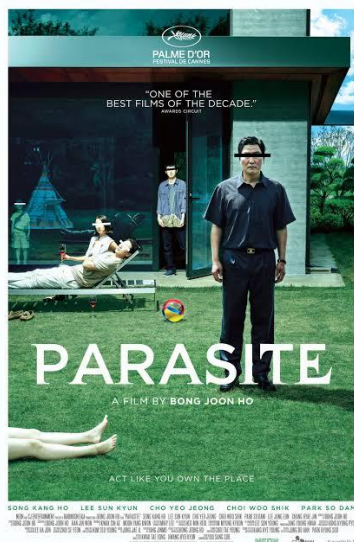
Myth: The lower class usually smells less pleasant than the upper class who usually smells more fragrant. This usually relates to identity to the food eaten and the environment in which each class lives.

As said by Fox (2007: 25) that smell is not only a biological and psychological experience, smell is also a social and cultural phenomenon. Personal identity is also determined by a complex smell. The complexity of personal odors is the subject of sophisticated classification systems in many other cultures. For example, a

person's unique odor is a combination of natural personal odors that can be obtained through the food he eats or smells caused by emotions or periodic odors (Fox, 2007: 32).

Joon-ho as Suradara also explained the relationship between body scent and social class in his interview with the Korea Times, "In normal life, the rich and the poor don't share the same living space. On the same plane, there are sections for rich riders and poor riders and they are separate. The only time those of different classes can smell each other is when the poor work for the rich families as tutors, housekeepers and drivers,"² Then in addition, in the Parasite film poster also found representations of social class, which can be seen in Figure.

Figure 7. shown on the sensor



Source : Parasite Film

Connotation: The face of each of them is shown on the sensor in the eye area in black and white.

Denotation: In connection with the face that is censored, it is because in South Korea there is a policy that both the perpetrator, the victim and the source have the right not to be identified. Then there is a

difference in the color of the sensor as if to explain who is behind the "black" and who is behind the "white".

Myth: Black and White can be interpreted as dark and light, which are the basic colors of life. The poster seems to interpret that there are things that are very contrasting related to evil and good in which players who are given a black sensor (lower class) are bad actors and players who are given white censorship (upper class) are good actors.

A lot of history and culture that explains the implications of black and white are so easily accepted as opposition. The best known example of this is represented in the Tao-Yin-Yang symbol, the embodiment of opposing forces (good and evil) that are interrelated and interdependent in the natural world. Black is evil; white is good. Black traps space, while white opens up space. Black evokes sophistication; white communicates innocence. So the point is very clear that black and white contradict each other.

In addition, in the book Marxism by Artz et al. (2006: 19) explain that the color black is also a social product of people who have negative racial prejudices in most contexts such as black sheep, blackball, and black marks on the memories of many people who are unwanted. On the other hand, white lies, white sheep, snow white is the preferred or positive context.

CONCLUSION

Parasite film can be said to be a work of the cultural industry that dares to appear outside of market standardization, especially the South Korean market. Even so, the work was successful even at the international level. This proves that something that does not mean in the popular

²https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/art/2019/06/689_269700.html accessed on June 10, 2020

formula can also be well received by people around the world.

Then, with regard to the representation of social class contained in the film, based on Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis, the researcher found at least five points related to the signs found in the scenes and posters of the film, namely:

1. Ease of life and a different lifestyle.
2. Differences in fashion or clothes worn by each class.
3. There are unconscious social class boundaries.
4. The smell of the body can become a class identity.
5. Class contradiction with black and white symbols.

Based on these five points, this Parasite film shows that class differences are in fact not just the words "rich" and "poor" that can be displayed in the dialogue, but can be shown through signs that can be socially interpreted by the audience themselves which are basically we can find in everyday social life. In addition, the presence of upper class domination that looks positive is very much shown in this film. Therefore, the representation of social class in the film Parasite is very perfectly depicted, both from the way each scene is selected, the very supportive properties, to the extraordinary cinematography and design.

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