

The Pragmatics and Semiotics Analysis of Vinyl Record Cover Art *They Fell From The Sky's* Album *DECADE*

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ABSTRACT

In this study, the researchers focus on the meaning of the DECADE album cover from They Fell From The Sky music band. This was chosen because the artwork used is quite attractive and has This study uses qualitative research with a descriptive method. The analysis was carried out using the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes and the pragmatics theory of John Searle. This study aimed to determine the meaning contained in the cover design of the DECADE album. This research shows that between context signs and visible signs, there is a relationship where the two synergize in the title. The band, namely "They Fell From The Sky," by using a skull image that uses an astronaut costume in an iconic, denotative, and connotative symbolizing "death," a form of death because "falling from the sky" so the message to be conveyed is to publish the Decade album which for ten years or "a decade" like struggling until astronauts in outer space experience death as if falling from the sky. The Astronaut's skull artwork entitled in Indonesian "Binasa" ("Perish" in English) which is the basis of the DECADE album cover design, also strengthens this interpretation.

Keywords: *Album cover, Semiotics, Pragmatics.*

INTRODUCTION

The cover of a music group album product is sometimes loaded with implied meanings, even though the function of the album cover is actually as a tool to promote the sales of the album product, whose content is aligned within the genre of the music. The term "Album cover design" is imagined as where visual art meets the music."At that time, it was also realized that an album cover does not only function to protect the cassette or L.P.s in it; another function is to convey or communicate the vision and identity desired by the recording artist and record label and also to show the artistic side of an album and represent the atmosphere of the Album. Colors, images, and compositions can communicate the design personality through many design elements and principles, including logos on brands, packaging colors, fonts, images, shapes, lines, textures, and other graphic design elements (Oladumiye & Ebenezer, 2018, p. 02). Whatever the genre of music, the Album is designed by a designer in the corridor of form following the sense of enjoyment. When the album cover is made, it will become the hallmark of the Album. So that it will present the emotions and moods that the artist wants his listeners to feel and is an essential component in music branding (Dorochowicz & Kostek, 2019, p. 02).

The designer interprets what the band wants, starting from the parameter that the album design must also be accepted by the market and compete when displayed with other album cover designs whether the Album is able "to sound" the feeling of the artists. The study of the history of album covers is a theme that is quite widely analyzed. Some elements, such as iconography, liner notes, and artwork, on the album design represent the identity of the cover design. (Vad, 2021, p. 12). This is where a in depth-study of the album cover is conducted and examines the shifting myths and messages in the sociocultural context that shape the ones found in the album cover design. The object of the study is the cover design on the vinyl record album of a U.K. band called *They Fell From The Sky* (TFFTS). The band was formed in 2008 and only released their first Album in 2021 (Cockrell, 2021) for the physical form of the Album; they only released vinyl records. The physical condition of a vinyl record album cover determines the size, dimensions, and materials; the cover design on a Vinyl record is a medium for expression measuring 33 X 33 cm with a 12-inch L.P. size. (Herdyanto, 2019) The cover design on vinyl record media is quite significant, considering the Album is printed in physical form. The artwork on the Album's front cover will be analyzed using pragmatic and semiotic studies, which are correlated in concluding the verbal and visual meaning.



Figure 1. *DECADE* album cover image on a vinyl record

Source: *Invicta Magazine*

Pragmatics is the study of the intent behind the speech of a speaker and interlocutor bound by context, which is to translate and identify the meaning of the text. At the same time, a designer or artist is the bearer of the sign; the design process itself creates friction between the designer's ideology and, in brief given so that communication occurs in the form of 'Individualistic Subjectivism', Volosinov considers that the individual human mind is the most critical place for language in taking language itself into a type of aesthetic activity, with the natural consequence that all speech acts are individual, creative and non-reproducible. (Crowley), 2018, p. 39).

The terminology of 'Abstract objectivism' means that when it includes elements that are among the possibilities of pragmatics utterances. Linguistic utterances can be interpreted directly according to the meaning of the locutionary or indirectly impact the recipient due to the power of the illocutionary forces. In this context, intentionality, the speaker can manipulate with a sense of speech showing the transparency of the speaker's intention. The meaning of an open or hidden expression is when the recipient understands it immediately or interprets it only through paraphrasing (Wąsik, 2017, p. 476). Pragmatics is the study of meaning concerning speech situations. Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that studies language structure externally; that is, the linguistic unit is used in communication (Wijana in Damayanti, 2019, p. 47). Visuals on the Album will be interpreted with semiotic studies; Semiotics is a system to form/find meaning about social phenomena (Crossman & Sarbari, 2021, p. 54). Visual signs guide the interpretation of what happens according to possible scripts and contribute to framing characters, fairy tale worlds, and sequences of events (Merminod & Burger, 2018, p. 10).

RESEARCH METHOD

The method used in this study is qualitative, which describes the subject matters to be then narrated in depth about the object of study based on the data obtained supported by the theory of pragmatic semiotics study of speech acts or speech acts from the theory of John Austin and Searle

illocutionary acts. The hidden meaning of an utterance is figurative meaning with its connotation in the corridor of sociocultural context, while the semiotic analysis used to examine the object is the visual semiotic theory of Roland Barthes based on the development of Saussure's theory where theoretically placing linguistics in semiotics it is difficult to avoid adopting a linguistic model in exploring sign systems, 'signification can be understood as a process; it is an act that binds the signifier and the signified, an action whose product is the sign' whose two compositions are the signifier and the signified (Barthes in Chandler, 2017, p. 14). Verbal information strengthens the interpretation of the changing object of the sign (Pfutzenreuter & Chiachiri, 2017, p. 309).

Qualitative content analysis is a method for studying the meaning contained in the message body. This is done by systematically classifying and organizing the content of the communication into categories that describe the message's topic, theme, and context. (Williamson et al., 2018, p. 461) the success of qualitative research depends on how the observer can describe the structure of the studied object. The album cover of this research is contained in the visual form of the work, which includes visible or visual signs, visual elements, and the intrinsic value of the vinyl record album *They Fell From The Sky*. The analysis helps to reveal how the various semiotic modes are systematically arranged in creating meaning and how they facilitate the communication of the knowledge structure and the underlying ideology (Wong, 2019, p. 110) so that the course of this study can find the myth in question.

RESULT & DISCUSSION

The physical form of the cover on the vinyl record product *They Fell From The Sky* was designed by a designer who uses the initials Cranenoir; the image base can be found on the online portfolio platform with the title "Binasa" (Indonesian) or "Perish (English) (2013). The artwork is a visual of a skull head wearing clothes and emphasizes the attributes of an astronaut's helmet with a black background. The Astronaut's dominant color is green and measuring 4073 x 4073 pixels. The artwork is used as the basic design of the vinyl record cover after transforming from green to greyscale and given abstract ornaments in the form of boxes and rectangles with glitches and transparent accents. On the right is the band name *They Fell From The Sky*, and on the left is the text of the Album's title that reads "DECADE." The pragmatic study will examine the two writings: the band's name and the Album's title.



Figure 2. Artwork titled "Binasa" (Indonesian) or "Perish" (English) (left) and "DECADE vinyl record album cover" (right)
Source: *Deviantart.com* and *Punktastic.com*

Pragmatics Meaning

The first meaning is as a medium to express the message. The message expression found is a study of the relationship between language and the context that underlies the explanation of the meaning or understanding of language. This view shows three critical aspects in the album cover image: language, context, and knowledge of the rock band "*They Fell From The Sky*" and the title of the Album they released after ten years, namely "DECADE." Historically, the rock band name of *They Fell From The Sky* had its genesis way back in 2008 when it was formed from an eclectic mix of artists; they worked to do one thing: rocking hard. A song "Crush This World" demo was recorded, but circumstances turned against them, and they disbanded, leaving only the demo as a legacy.

The unique name of *They Fell From The Sky* music band has no clear literal sense since it can not be easily and clearly understood as the reference to the personal pronoun of the word "They." Still, in the figurative or pragmatic sense, the words *They Fell From The Sky* described the meaning of some of the terms used on the album cover as distortions of the acronym of their band name, namely "TFFTSTFFTS." During an interview session with Soundphere magazine (Smith, 2021), Jason, the drummer, said that the word "TFFTSTFFTS" if spelled like the sound of an airplane cockpit computer device which semiotics contains a metaphor between human relations with life or their time. Sociocultural life, especially in the super busy City of London, England, where the band originated, was eroded by fast-paced and tiring activities. The sentence "*The Fell From The Sky*" is the mirror or reflection of complicated, busy modern people's life that needs relief and a way of escaping bittering reality. From the perspective of Searle in Levinson (1983: 240), this can be categorized as the type of representatives speech acts.

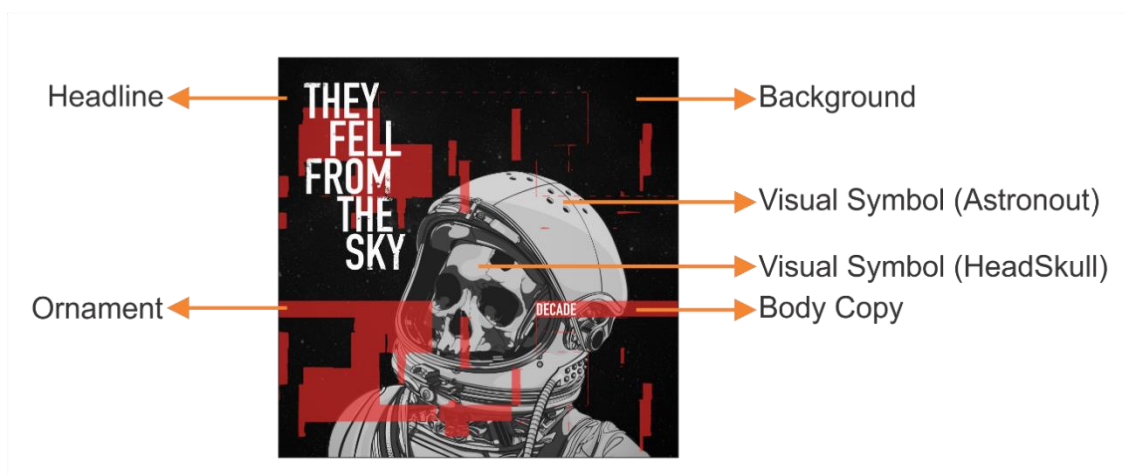
Representatives are speech acts that the utterances commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition. The utterances are produced based on the speaker's observation of certain things then, followed by stating the fact or opinion based on the observation. When someone says,

"She's beautiful," the speaker can state the sentence based on the fact or give their own opinion about a person's physical condition.

It also states what the speaker believes to be the case or not. Statements of fact, assertions, conclusions, and descriptions are all examples of the speaker representing the world because they think it is. For example, when someone says, "The earth is flat," it means the speaker's assertions about the earth. The speaker has an opinion that the earth is flat. Some speech can note representatives speech act verbs, such as: remind, tell, assert, deny, correct, state, guess, predict, report, describe, inform, insist, assure, agree, claim, beliefs, and conclude.

Then the word "DECADE" refers to the temporal deixis when more than ten years later or "a Decade," however, The *They Fell From The Sky* music band has been resurrected, rising from the dead with an entire album. This may have never heard people listen to the demo every once in a while, and wonder what could have been. Either way, music lovers won't be expecting this record, and according to musicians, it is more than a welcome surprise – it's a masterclass in post-hardcore (Kenworthy, 2021).

Semiotics Interpretation



Verbal Signs	Visual Signs
Headline: <i>They Fell From The Sky</i>	Astronaut
The Body Text: DECADE	Skull

Table 1. Verbal Signs versus Visual Signs

Formal Analysis

The visualization of the Decade vinyl record cover is dominated by dark colors even though it contrasts with the red color used. The design is catchy, like a movie poster. The placement of album cover area is placed horizontally by applying an element of symmetrical balance so that it can seem solid even though the composition looks less balanced; this can be seen from the placement of the headline on the top left and the ornament. Emphasis on

what stands out is the visual element of the Astronaut's skull head in the middle with a larger size than the other elements. In addition, using a black sky texture as a background can strengthen the emphasis of the point of view element and make the public immediately focus on the Astronaut's skull head element. The relevance of the visual and verbal elements displayed is a combination that fits the punk rock music genre performed by the *They Fell From The Sky* music band.

Interpretations

Verbal Signs	
Signifier	They Fell From The Sky
Signified	Punk-Rock music Band
Signifier	Decade
Signified	The displayed theme of the Album
Visual Signs	
Signifier	The Skull of the Astronaut
Signified	The dead Astronaut

Table 2. Signifier & Signified versus Verbal and Visual Signs

Hermeneutic Code

Hermeneutic code is seen in verbal signs, namely typography. Continued through the title of the album *DECADE*, which is an affirmation of the first verbal sign that can be interpreted as connoting that the band *They Fell From The Sky* conveys a message about the struggle to publish their first Album since the band was formed in 2008, utilizing the design that comes from a stale image entitled "Binasa" or "Perish" in English. Then, it is interpreted the icon on the visual sign on the album cover. Then several questions arose, such as the real meaning and interpretation of the image of the skull of the Astronaut.

Semantic Code

The semantics on the Decade album cover can be seen in the stage aspect of a band's journey to survive in the European music industry. This can be seen from the connotation meaning of the skull astronaut image. These elements are associated with visual signs regarding the connotations of the band's struggles.

Symbolic Code

"*They Fell From The Sky*" by using a skull image wearing an iconic astronaut costume, symbolizing the struggle to publish the first Album for more than a decade, finally collecting several singles with a total of 10 tracks, namely 1. Dry, 2. Crush This World 3. The Line 4. Can't Think of Anything 5. Take Or Leave It 6. Mantrap 7. The Joy of Hindsight 8. One More Obstacle 9. Staring At The Sun 10. Birth Of Stars. The ten tracks have gone through various selections to be featured on the Decade vinyl cover album.

Cultural Code

The cultural aspects of rock music, where rock music is often present with messages of resistance to the established system in society, including criticism of political democracy in government which is considered full of falsehood and transactional relationships. Like what *They Fell From The Sky* did in voicing criticism of the environment around them through the songs they created.

Narrative Code

The narrative code contains a story about the connotation meaning of rock music lovers; in this case, *They Fell From The Sky* urges new listeners to consider listening to their music first. The visual discussion of the vinyl record album cover of the band *They Fell From The Sky* is analyzed by looking at the denotative and connotative meanings:

Denotation

Visually, the album cover is dominated by black. The illustration of an astronaut's skull seems dark with the texture of the sky's darkness behind it. The visual tone depicts sadness as well as success, even though success is obtained by death. There are design elements.

a) *Color*. The dominant colors are black, gray, and red; black is a color that gives strength, metal, as well as anger, according to the genre of music being carried.

b) *Shape*. This album cover takes the form of several objects such as astronauts, skulls, and space conditions that depict silence, infinity space, and the horrors of the universe beyond earth life.

c) *Space*. The space on the album cover has a space composition with a center balance type where the right and left positions are equal.

d) *Contrast*. The album cover has a balanced contrast so that even though it is dominated by black, it doesn't overpower the other color elements; even in saturation, there is no over-highlight.

e) *Texture*. This album cover has a reasonably light texture so that it is enough to give an overview of outer space

f) The typography or the shape of the letters in the words "*They Fell From The Sky*" and "Decade" uses the same font type, namely a sanserif type called Helvetica, one of the most popular fonts in

the world and widely used by global brands. Sanserif-type fonts give the impression of being bold, solid, and not wordy.

Connotation

Furthermore, connotation analysis is the heart of interpretation. (Blom in Hilander, 2021, p. 397)

The cover of the vinyl record album *They Fell From The Sky* has various interpretations, including:

a) the Astronaut's skull artwork with no facial expressions depicts only one state of adversity, death, and the power of survival.

b) Abstract ornament of rectangular boxes and red dotted lines depicts sophistication and minimalism in music technology which is also an additional instrument in mixing music.

c) The essential thing in this album cover is to inform the importance of protecting the environment so that the earth remains beautiful and comfortable. The album cover contains the band's name, "*They Fell From The Sky*" which has a symbolic representation of the band's name. "Their" diction is the five band members, namely Colin Duran (vocalist), Dave Draper (guitarist), Lee Erinmez (bassist), Oly Edkin (guitarist), and finally Jason Bowld (drummer). The psychological atmosphere they carried out is the value of Beauty, Fun, Survive, Caring, and a symbol of struggle. These words slightly describe the meaning of some of the symbols contained in the album cover are distortions of the acronym of their band name, namely TFFTSTFFTS. In an interview with Soundphere magazine (Smith, 2021), Jason the drummer said that the word "TFFTSTFFTS if spelled would sound like from the cockpit computer tool, semiotically there is a metaphor between human relations with life. Sociocultural life, especially in the metropolitan city of London where the band originated, was filled with hectic, busy, and vice versa, mostly filled with stressful activities. This means that every business will still take time to work on, depending on how humans take care of it.

Icons	Denotation	Connotations
Astronaut	Space Travel	Greatness
Skull	The Dead	Struggle
Rectangle Box	Technology	Modern Era
Dotted line	Technology	Sophisticated
Black Color	Rage, Real Badass	Death, Struggle
Red Color	Rage, Real Badass	Struggle
Gray Color	Rage, Real Badass	Solid, Modern

Table 3. The relation between denotation and connotation

CONCLUSION

The cover has a meaning related to the contents of the Album, the visual form of an album will be interesting because of the combination of text and illustrations used even though it is not mandatory. However, the composition is very influential in designing an album cover. The aesthetic aspects of the design are made following the intent of the theme, concept, and even the title of the Album. It indicates that the album cover also functions as a product of visual communication design.

Finding meaning in the text and images contained on the vinyl album cover entitled DECADE from the band name *They Fell From The Sky* was studied using two methods, namely pragmatics and semiotics.

The meaning of the title/writing on the Album is analyzed using pragmatic analysis and conceptualizing the first two aspects of the speech and the second on the situation. At the same time, the album image uses Roland Barthes' semiotic axis, namely grouping markers and signifiers, denotative signs, and connotative signs. Therefore, it can be found the myth contained in the album cover; based on the analysis of contextual signs and visual signs contained on the cover of the band's DECADE album from *They Fell From The Sky*; it can be concluded that between context signs and visual signs, there is a relationship where they synergize in the band's title, namely "*They Fell From The Sky*."

By using an image of a skull that uses an astronaut costume in an iconic, denotative, and connotative symbolizing "death", a form of death due to "falling from the sky," the message to be conveyed is to publish the DECADE album, which for a decade or ten years period, is like struggling until astronauts in outer space experience death as if people fell from the sky. The Astronaut's skull artwork entitled "Binasa" (Indonesian) or "Perish" in English, which is the basis of the DECADE album cover design, also strengthens this interpretation. Apart from being an attraction for consumers to buy, the Album also serves as a messenger about the band's struggles in releasing their works. Based on the context of the genre of music they offer is not for everyone's ears. Background, myth, or culture is very influential if it is related to the meaning contained in each design work. The album design presented is a visual symbol or form representation of the reality of the work that is designed according to the speaker's brief and the designer's creations according to the context.

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