Episode 3: Codes and Conventions

Welcome to Popular Culture and Theory, joining you from the unceded lands of the Palawa people in which we now call Hobart. I want to extend my respect to indigenous elders past, present, and emerging, and extend that respect to all indigenous Australians joining us today. I'm your host, Ashley Reminga, a PhD candidate at the University of Tasmania. Today we'll be introducing some media theory. But as you'll see, media theory builds upon semiotics and what we've already discussed so far.

As such, it's important you are familiar with the key concepts we've already discussed. So if you haven't already, please go back and listen to the past podcast. We discuss signs, signifiers, signified, as well as connotations and denotations in the past episodes. So forwarding our discussion of signs, we'll discuss what codes and conventions are. To put simply, codes and conventions are networks in which communication occurs.

You see these two terms are often used together and are associated with media theory. So let's begin by defining these terms. Codes are a system of signs organized according to a set of rules or conventions. The term can also be used to refer to these organizing rules or principles. So let's use Star Wars as an example.

A code might be the black design we see in Darth Vader for being bad. We've become accustomed to this association of the colour black being used for villains and the colour white being used for heroes. To reflect back to last week's discussion, the colour black as seen with Darth Vader has connotations associated with evil. So moving on to the second term, conventions are accepted narrative or in some rare occasions technical practices that is

associated with a particular genre. So, returning to our example of Star Wars, a convention we can observe is the narrative of good versus evil or perhaps a hero's journey and growth from nothing to being a legend.

These are examples of conventions. As you see in these instances, a convention is narrative driven established norms. So now let's put these two elements together. We can observe Star Wars presenting the convention of good versus evil. It presents this convention fire codes such as using colours, such as black for Darth Vader and white for Luke.

We may also observe that throughout the original trilogy, Luke shifts from wearing white to black at times as he navigates his own identity and a sense of his own understanding of ethics. This visual code is also reflective of the convention of a character having an identity crisis. Now just one last thing to leave you on, I mentioned that in some instances, a convention may contain technical elements. So an example of this would be with anime in which the method being the artistic style of the genre is both a technical element and also a convention. But this is a bit more complex, so we'll come back to it another time and just put it aside for now.

And, yeah, that's where we're going to leave it for this week. If you like this podcast, please share it around, give it a like, and subscribe. I hope you've all learned something, and I'll see you again next week.