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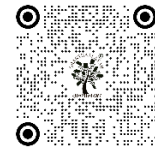
## CONSUMING MODERNITY: A SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF FOOD, CLASS AND DESIRE IN KAAKA MUTTAI (2014)

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### ABSTRACT

In this paper, the semiotic analysis of a Tamil film, Kaaka Muttai (2014), directed by M. Manikandan, is created to fill a crucial gap in the knowledge of Tamil cinema. Although the literature has been mostly analyzing the film through the analysis of subaltern representation, childhood deprivation, and neoliberal city critique, no systematic investigation of the formal structure of food as an order of signification has been made.

Based on classical semiotics and cultural theory Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes, Claude Levi-Strauss, Pierre Bourdieu, and Guy Debord, this paper contends that Kaaka Muttai food functions as a formal semiotic system as opposed to a thematic component. The movie develops a dualism between the branded pizza and the egg of crow, making food not a material object of sustenance but a symbolic object of marking of the class aspiration and consumer modernity.

The research shows how the biological hunger is being re-formulated into aspirational desire through an examination of mise-en-scene, spatial organization, mediated visibility, and narrative progression. The article comes to the conclusion that pizza is not a culinary object, but a mythic signifier, a part of a spectacle-driven economy of images, which uncovers the processes of how the neoliberal desire works in our day-to-day lives.

**Keywords:** Semiotics, Food Representation, Consumer Modernity, Class Aspiration, Symbolic Capital, Tamil Cinema

### INTRODUCTION

Tamil cinema has traditionally been produced in a spectacle, melodramatic, narrative abundance in which meaning is produced as a result of a multiplicity; the presence of multiple characters, space mobility, song sequences and overproduction of visual effects. In this paradigm, the emphasis placed by scholars on ideological critique, star studies, and socio-political representation is comparatively greater, whereas the formal structure of cinematic meaning has remained relatively underrepresented.

A major shift out of this tradition is Kaaka Muttai. Although, on the surface, it can be regarded as complying with the realist cinema in terms of urban poor areas and marginalized childhood, the layers of meaning beneath the surface of the film are structured around food in a complex way. Instead of being the mere index of deprivation, food turns out to be the main mechanism by which the class, desire and modernity are both expressed.

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This essay is using the semiotic approach to the study of the creation of meaning not through the mere content of the narrative but through the relational structure of the factors in the cinema. Based on the theory of differentiable meaning by Saussure, the mode of myth by Barthes, binary structures by LeviStrauss, and the idea of taste as differentiation of classes suggested by Bourdieu, the research reinstates food as structured sign-system in the movie.

Conducted through a reversal of the thematic interpretation to signifying architecture, the paper suggests that Kaaka Muttai produces a shift of biological hunger to symbolic consumption, which thus uncovers the logic of consumer modernity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Semiotic analysis originates in film studies in structuralist traditions with the focus on meaning as relational. Ferdinand de Saussure introduced the idea that meaning is created as a result of differences in a system of signs, and not inherent characteristics. Roland Barthes applied this model to a cultural interpretation to show how the ordinary objects obtain a mythical meaning, making the ideological forms natural.

The anthropological methods of food especially Claude Levi-Strauss, see culinary systems as binary systems that organize the cultural meaning. Pierre Bourdieu further extends this observation by connecting the issue of taste with the issue of class distinction, demonstrating that the consumption practices reproduce social stratifications.

In the context of cinema, Christian Metz and David Bordwell point to the fact that meaning is created when the cinematic codes are organized, i.e. framing, space arrangement and narrative structure. Nevertheless, Tamil cinema studies have placed a lot more emphasis on ideological as opposed to formal analysis.

The available research on Kaaka Muttai dwells on the representation of subalterns, neoliberal urbanism, and childhood innocence. Although these methods are valuable to the socio-political aspects of the movie, they are more inclined to view food as a theme, and not as an organized system of semiotic.

There is a gap in the lack of a systematic semiotic reading of food. The paper fills that gap by combining structural linguistics, the myth theory, cultural sociology and spectacle theory into one analytical approach.

## LITERATURE GAP

The preceding review shows that Kaaka Muttai has received much analysis using subalternity frames, neoliberal capitalism frames, childhood marginality frames, realism and consumer aspiration frames. The involvement of the film with the hierarchy of classes and globalization has been effectively determined by scholars relying on [M. S. S. Pandian \(1992\)](#), [Ganti \(2012\)](#), [Vasudevan \(2011\)](#), [Spivak \(1988\)](#), [Marx \(1976\)](#), [Bourdieu \(1979\)](#), [Appadurai \(1981\)](#) and [Debord \(1967\)](#). Nevertheless, there is still a serious gap. To begin with, the current research has been largely sociological or ideological as opposed to a structural semiotic analysis. Although pizza is being constantly talked about as a sign of globalization, it was not theorized using the model of myth developed by Barthes (1957) as secondorder signification. How pizza is naturalized as aspirational modernity is a process whose exploration is yet to be achieved on the level of sign mechanics. Second, binary opposition of egg and pizza has not been mapped structurally using Saussurean difference (1916) and binary logic of Levi-Strauss (1966). The oppositions in the film, such as local/global, survival / spectacle, subsistence/branding, have been clearly created, however, they are only descriptively accepted as opposed, not methodically deconstructed. Third, it is still underdeveloped as to the difference between biological hunger and symbolic hunger. According to Bourdieu (1979) theory of taste and Debord (1967) spectacle, there is mediation of desire in late capitalism based on image and distinction. Nevertheless, the available readings fail to examine the ways in which the movie turns food spectacle using visual coding, repetition and narrative flow. Fourth, there is lack of sufficient film semiotics. Metz (1974) and Bordwell (1985) offer the means of examining the codes used in the cinematic and narrative structure, but these have never been strictly used in the analysis of the food in the film. Thus, the exact gap in the research will be the following: despite the thorough research of Kaaka Muttai as a socio-political criticism of poverty and globalization, no exhaustive semiotic analysis would be based on food as the primary signifying apparatus of the movie. The egg-pizza opposition has not been deciphered as a systematic netsystem of signs inherent in cinematic form. This paper fills in that gap by applying a systematic semiotic analysis of food representation, which combines structural linguistics, myth theory, cultural sociology, spectacle theory, and film narratology. By so doing, it changes the analytical emphasis of thematic commentary to signifying architecture, and in the process, it introduces a new methodological and theoretical intervention to the scholarship about Kaaka Muttai and modern Tamil cinema.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS (RQ)

**RQ1** What are the visual and narrative codes of food that Kaaka Muttai uses to build a food semiotic system?

**RQ2:** How does the egg-pizza binary generate class, exclusion and modernity meanings?

**RQ3:** In what ways does the movie change the material need of hunger into the symbolic desire of a spectacle-based consumer culture?

## METHODOLOGY

The research design of this study is a qualitative one based on semiotic textual analysis where meaning is generated as a result of the systematic interplay of the cinematic elements and not solely as a result of external socio-cultural validation. Located in an interpretivist epistemological context, the analysis presupposes that the meaning does not reside in object, but it is created through the relational signs systems of visual and narrative codes. It is a deductive, theory-based approach which uses structural linguistic, semiotics, cultural sociological and spectacle theory frameworks to inform interpretation. The main object of analysis is the group of scenes where food i.e. the crow egg and pizza is visually or narratively present since these are the critical points of meaning construction. By repeatedly watching and dividing the film, recurrence, variation, and contrast patterns are discerned on the mise-en-scene, space organization, framing, repetition, and mediated visibility dimensions. The analytical sequence is conducted in a systematic way: First, isolating and listing repetitive visual and narrative patterns relating to food, Second, mapping the relational antithesis between egg and pizza in a Levi-Strauss binary framework, and third, interpreting this antithesis in the theory of myth by Barthes, iconic capital by Bourdieu and spectacle by Debord to determine how food is turned into symbolic desire. The importance of cinematic form, in particular, spatial segregation, visual composition, and circulation of images, in generating hierarchical differences, and mediating access is given particular focus. It is also based on observable formal elements instead of speculative or explicitly ideological statements, which guarantees the consistency of analysis and theoretical rigor. This methodological approach facilitates a systematic de-codification of food as a semiotic apparatus that would make the study step out of thematic description into the analysis of the structural processes through which meaning, desire, and class are produced in the movie.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework is a combination of structural linguistics, semiotics, cultural sociology, and spectacle theory. The model of the sign that was developed by [Ferdinand de Saussure \(1966\)](#) determines the meaning as the result of the contrast between signifier and signified. This principle forms the basis of the examination in the study of how egg and pizza get their meaning in a relational way and not in an intrinsic way. [Claude Lévi-Strauss \(1966\)](#) adds binary oppositions as the building block in cultures. The egg-pizza opposition is thus discussed as an ordered binary encoding differences like local/global, subsistence/branding. The theory of myth proposed by [Roland Barthes \(1957\)](#) carries the analysis further by differentiating between denotation and connotation and, therefore, regarding pizza as a mythic signifier of consumer modernity. The concept of distinction by [Pierre Bourdieu \(1984\)](#) also gives a sociological explanation of taste as a symbolic capital whereas the theory of spectacle by [Guy Debord \(1994\)](#) gives a Mediation of modern desire through the image and the visibility. These frameworks, as a whole, place food in the context of larger structures of class hierarchy and consumer culture. [Christian Metz \(1974\)](#) and [David Bordwell \(1985\)](#) both make sure that the analysis does not lose focus on cinematic codes and narrative structure and fall into an ideological commentary.

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The analytical process occurs in three steps that are interrelated. To begin with, the crucial episodes with food are selected and divided into separate readings, which is the approach to textual analysis developed by Barthes (1977). Visual characteristics, spatial location and repetition schemes are recorded to define recurrent signifiers. Second, the egg-pizza conflict is mapped structurally in binary logic Levi-Straussians. This step analyses the way these contradictions like rooftop /storefront and informal/corporate are processed in mise-en-scene and in the plot development. Third, the theory incorporates the idea of myth implemented by Barthes and the differentiating concept of Bourdieu to the spectacle of Debord to analyze the transformation of pizza into symbolic aspirations instead of material nourishment. Specific emphasis is put on scenes of exclusion, media presence, and brand visibility to prove the fact that hunger is turned into biological need, which is then converted to an aspirational desire. This systematic approach to semiotic methodology provides the study with a guarantee of interpretation being theoretically underpinned, textually accurate and analytically consistent. The framework offers a stringent point of reference in analyzing the food as the main signifying device in Kaaka Muttai.

## ANALYSIS

Kaaka Muttai is a Tamil-language movie which was directed by M. Manikandan and produced by Dhanush and Vetrimaaran. The film is a city life slum based film in Chennai and according to the plot given, the film centers on two young brothers who are called Periya Kaaka Muttai (the elder), and Chinna Kaaka Muttai (the younger) in the course of the movie. The boys remain with their mother and the grandma and have their father imprisoned. They are living on informal occupation and minimum wages, the everyday life is created within the economic structure of the urban poor.

The initial scene is introduced of the brothers picking the eggs of crows on the roof and consuming them as a basic though important delicacy. This practice gave them their slogan, Kaaka Muttai (crow egg). This is the daily life until another pizza shop is

being set up near their slum colony. On encountering a TV commercial and other children eating pizza, the boys have the idea of trying the pizza. Pizza to them is a fancy, western and exotic experience that they add to their lives.

The brothers begin to save up on money full of the resolve to try this new food. They seek various menial things and schemes in order to earn adequate money to purchase a pizza. They are not accepted as soon as they finally enter the restaurant on the grounds of their appearance and status. The security personnel and the staff look down upon them thus cementing the apparent difference between the classes of the slum children and the kind of customers the establishment targets to serve.

Further efforts of the boys to acquire pizza got media publicity. The slight fight in the restaurant turns to be a media event as the television journalists frame the incidence as a scenario of class discrimination. It becomes a politics issue and the local governments intervene. As a PR gimmick to overcome the PR, the management of the restaurant presents free pizzas to the children.

At the final point of the movie, the boys finally get to taste pizza. What they thought about the experience is however not the case. The so long-desired food cannot live to its dream. It is ironical after all the struggle, all the melodrama, the boys return to their regular life and the symbolic halo which surrounds pizza is gone and fades into a more convoluted meaning of desire, aspiration and social reality.

### THE SIGNIFYING ENVIRONMENT: SPACE, BODY, AND REPETITION

**Time Code:** 00:01:41

**Analytical Purpose:** To demonstrate how framing produces spatial compression

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1 The Home**

It is the space created by the introductory sequences of Kaaka Muttai that causes the meaning to develop in response to the space organization, the positioning of bodies and the repetition of habitual practices. Rather than introducing the narrative antagonism or a theme focus, this movie begins with the establishment of a framework in which life is constituted by constraint. The camera does not isolate any events with the perspective of creating drama but it does indicate continuity. This permanence is necessary in the sense in which he places the conditions of existence fixed to render deprivation in the form of not disruption but of form. The inside of the house is represented in the form of one open space without the partitioning between functional areas. Sleeping, rest, movement occurs in the same line of sight and absence of segmentation will lead to logic of space in which boundaries are not determined by a building but rather through bargaining. The frame normally absorbs a series of bodies of tiny depth of depth and squashes the distance reducing the possibilities of isolation. This compression is not a spatial kind of compression but a perceptual kind of compression; the viewer is simply made to experience proximity as a state and not as an ad hoc arrangement.

In this respect, the placement of cameras facilitates this scenario. This is because the expansion of space is possible considering the mid-range framing and the use of static observation, which does not permit to expand the space beyond what exists. It lacks establishing shots that make the surroundings open up to a bigger space. Instead the frame is sustained in the restraints of the domestic interior constituting a visual density, which is the reflection of the material constraint of the space. The motion in the frame is not full and is typically bounded by the presence of other bodies, and this emphasizes the fact that all things are bargained against the restriction. The bodily practices are of more importance herein this narrow space. As is the case with the scene where Chinna Kaaka Muttai urinates back in his sleep, it is not exaggerated and lacks a narrative focus, but it is placed in the same space, which alters its meaning. No longer a secret, the act immediately it is a disturbance of space. Child reaction; inconsequential alterations, attempts to sustain it, silence shows that the child has a conception of how to live in the community, which is not initiated by learning. It is a biological and social institution at this point. It moves automatically when it attempts to regulate its visibility.

The result is something like discipline, but not one imposed by an external power, but rather by the pressures of the environment. A clear lack of an area where the body functions would force the individual to internalize control. The thing that the child is hesitant to move, pays attention to the situation and does not give the rules to be caught is the fact, that behavior is dependent on the proximity and consequence. The body is not taught to change, it is taught to do this, but it has no option with the surrounding environment. This argument is extended into the following scene of washing. It is random and self made, and constrained by the available materials and the need to revert the situation to the ordinary without drawing attention. Nobody seems to have found a solution but it seems that the disruption is re-introduced into the routine of the space. The importance of this absorption is that it demonstrates how irregularities are normalized. The environment does not eliminate disorder, but it internalizes it. The stabilizing of such meanings is performed by repetition. These accommodation, compromising tendencies are recurrent in the beginning sequences, till gradually a kind of order of life, an organization necessitated by necessity, is to be created. These are not distinguished as special moments during the film, but rather they are left to accumulate. The build up assists the viewer to understand that this is not an anomaly but normal in a system. It is not then stated that poverty is an event but an unexpressed condition, which organizes time, space, and action.

What comes out is a kind of discipline created not by the powers of the outside but by the limitation of the environment. Lack of exclusive room to carry out bodily functions compels the person to internalize control. Proximity and consequence are possible determinants of behavior because the child is reluctant to move, he is careful in handling the situation, and he does not want to be detected. It is not taught to adapt to the environment; it simply adapts because the environment has no other choice. This logic is further expanded by the following cleaning act. It is improvised and partial, limited in its means and necessities by the need to bring back order without attracting attention. It does not have a total resolution but rather the disturbance is taken back into the routine of the space. This internalization carries a lot of weight since it shows how abnormalities are legitimized. The environment is not a place where disorder gets rid of itself. The crucial role in stabilizing these meanings is played by repetition. The same process of adaptation and compromise is repeated throughout the initial sequences, which eventually create a pattern of life rhythm that is arranged in such a way that it is necessitated. These moments are not singled out in the film; they are left to build up. With the accrual, the viewer starts to realize that these activities are not isolated cases but rather in a system. Poverty therefore does not identify itself as an event but as a state that orders time, space, and action.

**Table 1**

| <b>Table 1 Spatial and Bodily Structuring</b> |                                      |                                   |
|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Visual Pattern</b>                         | <b>Cinematic Construction</b>        | <b>Interpretive Function</b>      |
| Compressed framing                            | Multiple bodies within limited space | Restriction and lack of autonomy  |
| Absence of spatial division                   | Continuous interior field            | Collapse of functional boundaries |
| Minimal camera movement                       | Static observation                   | Reinforcement of confinement      |
| Repeated bodily adjustments                   | Small-scale movements                | Internalization of constraint     |

**FOOD AS IMMEDIATE PRACTICE: LABOR, RISK, AND VALUE**

**Time Code:** 00:06:28

**Analytical Purpose:** To show the integration of body, space, and food acquisition.

**Figure 2**



**Table 2 The Tree**

Food does not come out in this environment as an object but as a component of an already established system of surviving. The egg of the crow is presented in a chain of activities that incorporates the searching, climbing, and extraction and the meaning of the egg cannot be isolated of this procedure. In contrast to the food that is acquired by exchange, the egg is reached by the direct contact with the environment, and this interaction is what determines its worth. Climbing brings a vertical component that is in opposition to the horizontal compression of the domestic area. The body raises itself, walking on an uncertain ground and bargaining balance. This movement does not mean escape, but it moves in the direction of purchase. The body extension is intentional and momentary, and this is the same fact that ultimately goes back to the limitation of the ground as soon as the object is fixed. The vertical axis, therefore, is a place of struggle and not emancipation. This movement has risk within it. The value of the egg is contributed by the instability of climb, the exposure to height and unpredictability of the environment. The object is not an extremely passive object; it is acquired in a carefully managed risky manner. This brings in a correlation of risk and reward in such a way that value cannot exist without the terms of purchase.

This immediacy is further stressed upon by the way the egg is handled. It is possessed without an intermediary and it is eaten without modification. There is no preparation which separates the object and its source. The process of consumption succeeds the process of acquisition, blurring the line between the production and the consumption of food. Such immediacy places food in an enclosed system of effort and payoff. The regulating principle of this loop is brought in by the practice of leaving one egg behind. This rejection of the idea of extracting all the available resources may indicate a perception of continuity that goes beyond the direct necessity. This constraint exists in the form of restraining without being enforced, which implies that the consumption is regulated based on an innerized concept of balance. The environment is not regarded as a boundless resource but a system that has to be maintained.

**Table 3**

| <b>Table 3 Processual Structure of the Egg</b> |                                     |                             |
|--|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Stage</b>                                   | <b>Cinematic Emphasis</b>           | <b>Interpretive Meaning</b> |
| Climbing                                       | Vertical movement, unstable footing | Effort and risk             |
| Extraction                                     | Careful handling                    | Value through acquisition   |
| Consumption                                    | Immediate eating                    | Absence of mediation        |
| Restraint                                      | Leaving one egg                     | Continuity and balance      |
| Repetition                                     | Daily recurrence                    | Stabilization of practice   |

**SPATIAL HIERARCHY AND THE EMERGENCE OF COMPARATIVE DESIRE**

Time Code: 00:12:41

Analytical Purpose: To demonstrate visual access combined with physical restriction

**Figure 3**



**Figure 2 The Fence**

The subsistence to aspiration transformation in Kaaka Muttai does not happen by bringing about a new object but rather a gradual restructuring of perception. The film establishes an arena where one can compare before any actual face-to-face experience with pizza. The process of this shift is catalyzed by spatial adjacency in which two separate ways of living are put into the visual field but they are not merged. The slum and the apartment are not distinct narrative spaces; they are placed side by side, which means

that one can make a continuous visual reference. Space is made comparative by this adjacency. With the introduction of the apartment, there is a new order of enclosure, regulation and controlled access. The apartment is framed, partitioned and also internally structured unlike the open and porous structure of the slum. The wall which divided the two spaces is not only physical but perceptual as well. It creates a demarcation within which the movement is limited but the vision is allowed. This situation creates an essential imbalance: the boys can look into the apartment room but they can not enter it. The visibility of a place without access is the basis, on which comparison is built. The act of looking takes a different role in this set up. In the previous sequences, vision is put to the short-term tasks- search, navigation and adjusting. Here, vision starts going beyond necessity.

The boys are looking at things that do not belong to their routine: children playing without working, objects that are used without any noticeable effort, and places that are arranged to be comfortable and not restrictive. These observations are not instantly turned into desire, but they cause a sense of difference first. Objects are more important in balancing this difference. The toy watch which the boys are wearing is contrasted against the functional watch which is worn by the child in the apartment. This opposition is not expressed dialogically, but framed. The object is isolated by the camera so that the difference is registered. The toy watch is a symbol of meaningless imitation and the actual watch is the symbol of usefulness and possession. The difference between the two objects is not only material, it contains an alternative on the basis of time, value and usage. The toy watch is not about measuring time; it mimics the concept of measuring time. The actual watch in its turn is a part of a regulation mechanism. The same form is flung out in the opposition of animals. The stray dog which lives in the world of the boys has no owner, it runs freely and exists thanks to adaptation. The confined breed dog in the apartment is taken care of and controlled. The contrast between the two animals is not the contrast of types but the one of condition. The homeless dog represents existence in uncertainty, whereas the breed dog represents existence in order in the organized world. With this opposition, the movie continues its spatial reasoning to the realm of the living whereby hierarchy is at work not just with objects but with forms of life. Play goes on to reinforce this comparative structure further. The play with such objects like discarded materials or improvised toys by the boys is opposed to the use of the structured play objects by the apartment child. This is especially important in the looks of the helicopter toy. The helicopter brings in a vertical motion which is unattached to labor. This is unlike the climbing done by the boys that exposes them to labor and danger, but the helicopter flies easily through mechanical control. Desire to own this object does not immediately result out of fascination with it, rather, it results in a state of suspended attention. The boys watch, pursue and trace its movement which suggests the transition of action to observation.

**Table 4**

| Table 4 Object-Based Differentiation |                            |                         |                              |
|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Object Pair                          | Mode of Use                | Structural Difference   | Emerging Meaning             |
| Toy watch / Real watch               | Simulation vs function     | Imitation vs utility    | Awareness of difference      |
| Stray dog / Breed dog                | Unregulated vs controlled  | Survival vs care        | Hierarchy of life conditions |
| Improvised play / Structured play    | Resource-based vs designed | Adaptation vs provision | Unequal access to leisure    |

**MEDIATED VISIBILITY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF DESIRE**

**Time Code:** 00:29:29

**Purpose of Analysis:** To show visual enhancement and controlled framing.

**Figure 4**



**Figure 3 The Advertisement**

The switch of comparative observation to the structured desire in Kaaka Muttai does not happen in direct contact with objects but through their mediation. With the invention of television, this encountering of objects is changed decisively, reorganizing perception through the severing of objects and their immediate surroundings and by re-inscribing objects in a controlled viewing field. With mediation comes distance in comparison to the previous mode of seeing which was based on physical proximity and spatial constraint, but at the same time facilitates increased presence. The objects are no longer met by labor or by means of access; they are met by pictures. The television itself does not bring the story to another dimension as a neutral apparatus but restructures the visual field. It shrinks several spaces into one frame, and makes objects and environments that are distant, seem to be within reach. But this proximity is a figment. The things on the screen are physically not reachable yet very visual giving rise to the state of disconnectedness between what is seen and what is held. This loosening of the connectivity of vision changes its role. Seeing has ceased to be oriented toward action, and it becomes oriented toward anticipation.

The interaction of the boys with television is at first in the form of imitation. They repeat speech, imitate actions and internalize rhythm of acting. This imitation represents that the screen does not merely show the images but produces the behavioral patterns. The body starts to adjust itself to the visual codes on the screen. This orientation is not directed to consumption but to engagement in a mediated setting. Before the boys become able to desire the objects of the logic of the screen, they learn to occupy its logic. In this mediated field, the introduction of pizza will be the first time that an object is shown purely by representation. In contrast to the egg, which was part of a chain of actions, pizza is complete, unrelated to any apparent process of production. It is not depicted in preparatory, source or acquisition form, it is depicted as a finished object, already established in a display system. This lack of process is essential since it places the object outside of the field of work and inside the field of image. The advert forms pizza based on a sequence of regulated visual techniques. The object is placed in the middle of the frame frequently without any background noise and is lightened so that it highlights texture and color. The texture of the pizza is represented as polished, smooth and visually attractive and produces an image that is beyond its material actuality. Duplication of these images normalizes the visual identity of the object. Pizza, over time turns to no longer being viewed as a particular object but rather a type of want. This construction is increased by the presence of the celebrity. The endorsement is not an addition of information about the object, it is an addition of value in terms of association. The object gains legitimacy through the body of the celebrity which acts as a conduit through which this object gains its legitimacy. Consumption is performed in a dramatic way allowing the enjoyment to be embellished and shown. This performance is not supposed to be emulated literally; it is supposed to be followed and internalised. The boys are not tasting the pizza, they are spectators to eating it.

Table 5

| Table 5 Transformation of Food through Mediation |                      |                         |
|--|----------------------|-------------------------|
| Dimension  | Egg (Earlier System) | Pizza (Mediated System) |
| Visibility                                       | Direct, physical     | Screen-based, visual    |
| Acquisition                                      | Labor and effort     | Invisible / absent      |
| Consumption                                      | Immediate, tactile   | Represented, staged     |
| Value  | Functional           | Symbolic                |
| Relation to body                                 | Active engagement    | Passive observation     |

**ATTEMPTED ACCESS AND POLITICS OF ENTRY.**

**Time Code:** 00:29:34

**Analytical Purpose:** To demonstrate a transition of action-oriented body to gaze-oriented body.

Figure 4



Figure 4 The Glass Façade

The transition of the expression of the desire being mediated to the attempted access is one of the key changes in the narrative structure of *Kaaka Muttai*. What used to be absorbed in the sphere of perception now starts to arrange action. The interests of the boys in pizza are shifted no longer to observation and repetition; it is directed to acquisition. This internalization-action movement brings a new set of conditions under which desire will have to deal with material constraints. This battle scene is made to center on the pizza store. Compared to the domestic area or the flat, which were integrated into the daily life of the boys, the shop can be characterized by the enclosedness, regulation, and a limited entrance. It is not merely a different space, on the contrary, it is a regulated space with both visible and unspoken rules. The shop also gives a false impression of openness by its transparent front, but this is false. The glass is a visual access and it is at the same time reinforced separation.

The initial visit to the shop by the boys is characterized by reservations. Their movement has been slowed down because they are moving out of the comfort of the surrounding they have known to be the gateway into a space that is physically different. This apprehension is not clearly explained but can be seen through the way their bodies would be facing the entrance. This implies that entry is not simply a continuation of movement but a negotiated process which is observed, pauses and modified. The divide between the shop acts as a point of transition. At this borderline the distinction between seeing and entering is made entirely evident. The boys who have already internalized the image of pizza by exposing it a number of times now strive to transform the image into experience. The threshold however comes with a number of conditions that were not present in the previous stages. The entry is not based on desire anymore, but the visibility, appearance, and perceived legitimacy. This regulation is formalized by the availability of the security guard. The guard does not simply manage movement, he reads bodies. The boys are not refused entry due to an explicit rule mentioned in the story; they are refused entry due to their looks, which do not match with the occupants the space is supposed to hold. Dressing, physical layout, and physical representation is made a standard in which one is granted or denied access. The body, which has been hitherto a survival instrument, is assessed as a sign.

**Table 6**

| Table 6 Stages of Desire Formation |                     |                    |             |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Stage                              | Mode of Engagement  | Dominant Process   | Result      |
| Observation                        | Watching TV         | Visual exposure    | Recognition |
| Repetition                         | Mimicking scenes    | Internalization    | Familiarity |
| Fixation                           | Sustained attention | Image retention    | Attraction  |
| Anticipation                       | Deferred action     | Temporal extension | Desire      |

**SPECTACLE, MEDIA AMPLIFICATION, AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF VALUE**

**Time Code: 00:29:01**

**Analytical Purpose:** To illustrate visibility combined with exclusion

**Figure 5**



**Figure 5 The Television**

The importance of the moment is that it is irrevocable. After the experience of encountering the object as image, it cannot go back to being just functional. The perception of the boys has been changed and the comparison is what will mediate the future direct experiences with food. The image of pizza will now be in the relation with the egg, the environment and their own actions. The system has changed into one where meaning is created by necessity to the one where meaning is created by representation. This turn sets

the stage of the next one, when desire will cease to be merely an internal fixation, but an external action, and where the object will start to organize behavior, but no longer simply focus attention.

**Table 7**

| Table 7 Threshold and Access Structure |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Element                                | Observed Function        | Interpretive Meaning     |
| Glass façade                           | Visibility without entry | Controlled openness      |
| Entrance threshold                     | Point of transition      | Site of evaluation       |
| Security guard                         | Regulation of entry      | Enforcement of hierarchy |
| Body appearance                        | Basis of judgment        | Sign of class identity   |

**VISIBILITY WITHOUT RECOGNITION: SPATIAL EXCLUSION AND THE POLITICS OF DESIRE**

**Time Code:** 00:44:07

**Analytical Intention:** To hold the physical enforcement of the boundary of classes.

**Figure 6**



**Figure 6 The Rejection**

The numerous efforts to get into the shop create a sequence of participation which intensified the meaning of the object. Every rejection makes the gap between the boys and the wanted object even stronger making desire persistence. The object has transcended a commodity; it has served as an indicator of admission into a system that they do not partake in. At this stage, the role of visibility gets complicated. The boys are visible to the people in the shop, however, their visibility is not relevant to recognition. They are perceived as but not accepted as legitimate participants. The condition leads to partial presence whereby the body is present in the visual field, but it is not given functional status in the space. The visibility which once created a desire is now a process of exclusion. The area arrangement of the store supports this situation. The inside is well lit, well arranged, and well organized, which is a contrast to the disorder of the environment of the boys. The shop has its objects laid out in a systematic manner and motion controlled. The feeling of control that is created by this organization does not only extend between physical arrangements of objects to the control of bodies. The failure of the boys to fit into this order is what causes their marginalization.

The climax of this process is the moment of physical rejection, especially, being pushed or hit. The body is not assessed anymore, it is ripped off. This passive exclusion to active enforcement indicates the subtext of the space. The shop is not merely discriminating; it is defensive. It has its boundaries which are maintained by both visible and invisible processes. This moment has an effect which goes further than the immediate experience of pain or humiliation. It restructures the awareness of the object by the boys they desire. Pizza is no longer merely an image or a goal, it gets to be tied with a system that actively rejects their involvement. The object gains a different meaning, in which the desire cannot be separated with exclusion.

**Table 8**

| Table 8 Transformation of Meaning through Exclusion |                   |                  |
|---|-------------------|------------------|
| Stage   | Relation to Pizza | Dominant Meaning |
| Advertisement                                       | Visual attraction | Aspiration       |

|                        |                     |             |
|------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Observation            | Sustained attention | Fascination |
| Attempted entry        | Physical approach   | Expectation |
| Rejection              | Denied access       | Exclusion   |
| Repetition of attempts | Continued effort    | Persistence |

**SPECTACLE, MEDIA PROLIFERATION AND THE METAMORPHOSIS OF VALUE.**

**Time Code:** 01:03:46

**Analytical Purpose:** To show the change of event to image.

**Figure 7**



**Figure 7 The Mobile phone**

The moment of exclusion is not just the moment that is isolated as the instant of interaction between the boys and the pizza shop. Rather, it is a transformation that causes it to become mediated phenomenon as opposed to a localized phenomenon. This shift is an essential widening of the semiotic organization of the film, as the object of desire is no longer incarcerated in an individualized pathways but moves out into a social sphere of exposure. Mobile recording is the beginning of this transition, which transforms an incident into an image that can proliferate. The very process of recording makes the event change its essence. What used to be perceived as an embodied experience, organized into the body and the space of presence, has now taken a new form of the visual information. The phone does not merely record the incident, but it restructures it. The moment of rejection ceases to be restricted to the presence of the site, but is rather transferable, repeatable and distributable. The marginalization of boys is turned into a visual artifact, which can be looked at without the context of the initial situation.

This metamorphosis is an addition of a new time aspect. The observed incidence can be re-enacted, broken and reprocessed. It has lost its meaning at the time of occurrence but instead it is subject to reinterpretation by repetition. The circulation separates the event, and it is inserted into a larger network of spectators. The boys that were not visible before, through the structured space of the pizza shop, are hyper-visible through the mediated field. There is, however, a major reconfiguration of visibility at this point. The visibility in the previous sections was related to the exclusion, the boys could see the object but were unable to reach them. In this case, visibility is used as a kind of power. The recording also allows the boys to be viewed by people outside the immediate space and this increased visibility changes their status in the social field. They cease to be the mere spectators, but members of the spectacle.

**Table 9**

| <b>Table 9 Transformation of Visibility</b> |                            |                    |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------|
| <b>Stage</b>                                | <b>Mode of Visibility</b>  | <b>Function</b>    |
| Pre-media                                   | Direct observation         | Limited, localized |
| Advertisement                               | Mediated object visibility | Desire formation   |
| Shop encounter                              | Partial visibility         | Exclusion          |
| Recording                                   | Reproducible visibility    | Circulation        |
| Media coverage                              | Amplified visibility       | Public recognition |

**MEDIATED VISIBILITY AND THE RECONSTITUTION OF VALUE.**

**Time Code:** 01:29:12

**Analytical Purpose:** To show transformation of private event into public spectacle

**Figure 8**



**Figure 8 The Media**

The fact that the event has been turned into spectacle changes the status of the pizza itself as well. What was already used as a site of aspiration and exclusion, the object is now put in a web of representations. It is no longer in the desire of the boys but is rephrased by means of the discourse of the population.

The pizza has ceased being merely a commodity, it is a representative of a larger story about inequality. This mediated visibility and the reaction of the pizza shop to it indicates how value is currently controlled by image. The free pizza offer is not put as a sign of generosity but rather as a reaction to reputational pressure. The rationale behind the choice made by the shop is that it is a move to rebrand its reputation in the social context. The object that the individual had been denied before is made available but again the availability will be determined by the visibility. The access is provided not due to the fact that the boys comply with the requirements of the space, but because the space has been revealed.

This change brings out a paradigm shift in the logic of access. In the past, the access was controlled by appearance and perceived legitimacy. In this case, visibility and public scrutiny mediate access. The very space which brought about exclusion now brings about inclusion but the inclusion is theatrical. It is not only directed to the boys but also to the audience that is watching the act. This process of offering pizza therefore attains a dual role. It meets the immediate need to resolve and at the same time is a performance of accountability. This object is returned back into the story not as a commodity but as a gesture. Its worth is no longer based on what it is made of and what it symbolizes as an object of aspiration; it is based on its place in the spectacle.

**Table 10**

| <b>Table 10 Reconfiguration of Pizza as Object</b> |                      |                         |
|--|----------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Stage</b>                                       | <b>Role of Pizza</b> | <b>Dominant Meaning</b> |
| Advertisement                                      | Visual object        | Aspiration              |
| Observation  | Desired object       | Fascination             |
| Shop encounter                                     | Restricted object    | Exclusion               |
| Media stage  | Public symbol        | Social issue            |
| Resolution   | Gifted object        | Image management        |

**FINAL CONSUMPTION AND THE COLLAPSE OF SYMBOLIC VALUE****Time Code:** 01:41:19**Analytical Purpose:** To capture the moment of direct encounter and reaction.**Figure 9****Figure 9 The Pizza**

The final point of the story in *Kaaka muttai* is best characterized by the scene when the boys finally get a taste of pizza. This scene, resulting out of a series of observations, mediations, exclusions, and spectacles, seems initially to finish the main line of the desire. Nonetheless, consumption does not stabilize meaning, but destabilizes it. This thing which has gained a symbolic weight throughout the story receives a transformation when it directly comes into contact. It is important to note that the terms under which they get the pizza are very critical. The object is not acquired through work, buying or negotiating in the original system of access. It is awarded due to brokered visibility and pressure of the crowd. This change of the mode of acquisition changes the relations between the boys and the object prior to consumption. The pizza is no longer put as something that needs to be attained; it is offered as something that is given. Such a shift between the seeking and the being sought brings about a slight yet considerable displacement of meaning.

The experience of receiving the pizza takes place in a regulated setting that is different as compared to the domestic setting and the previous experience of exclusion. The media, presence of observers and institutional figures make the occasion an event as opposed to a normal eating. The boys are not merely eating food, they are doing consumption in a visible situation. Their body language, facial expressions, and responses are noted, documented and assessed implicitly. Eating therefore has been incorporated into a realm of representation. Upon the boys finally having a taste of the pizza, the expected visual and actual matching is not achieved. The sensual experience lacks the intensity of the mediate image. The texture, taste and material presence of the object does not match the expectations that one forms due to constant visual exposure. This distortion is a sign of underlying disconnect between representation and experience. Once experienced face-to-face, the object loses the surplus of meaning that it had been subjected to during mediation. This is when the symbolic value of the object reaches its demise. The pizza that has served as an object of desire, marginalization and spectacle is diminished to its material qualities. The stratification of meaning that gains momentum throughout the story, the connection of the story to modernity, the way it is placed in a hierarchy, its place in the discourse of the multitude, etc. are no longer maintained in the consumption process. The object is again incorporated into the realm of use.

The response of the boys to the taste of pizza is characterized by the ambiguity and hesitation instead of satisfaction. Their words fail to express satisfaction of desire; on the contrary, they indicate an evaluation process. The object is no longer desirable as such in a blind way, but upon judgment. That this transition of anticipation to evaluation suggests that the object has returned to a space where the meaning is constructed by immediate experience not mediated by a representation. This transformation is further strengthened by the act of disposing or shunning the pizza. The rejection of the continued consumption is an indication that the object has lost its value maintenance. The earlier persistence of the boys which had been caused by the symbolic meaning of the object does not work anymore. After the object is met with in a material sense, it becomes less able to create desire. Aspiration intensity is not able to be sustained without mediation.

**Table 11**

| Table 11 Transformation of Pizza Across Stages |                     |                        |
|--|---------------------|------------------------|
| Stage  | Mode of Engagement  | Dominant Meaning       |
| Advertisement                                  | Visual encounter    | Aspiration             |
| Observation                                    | Sustained attention | Attraction             |
| Exclusion                                      | Denied access       | Desire intensification |
| Media spectacle                                | Public visibility   | Symbolic expansion     |
| Final consumption                              | Direct experience   | Symbolic collapse      |

**DIFFERENTIATION OVER SUBSTITUTION: REFRAMING EGG AND PIZZA**

**Time Code:** 01:42:42

**Analytical Purpose:** To show re-entry into subsistence system

**Figure 10**



**Figure 10 The Happy life**

Destruction of symbolic value does not lead to the restoration of the previous system in its usual state. The boys do not merely abate their former consumption without any changes. The feeling of lust, isolation, and satisfaction is not without a trace. The object is, however, no longer in the place it was. It can no longer organize action or support aspiration. The fact that people revert to their normal lives in the last few days of the movie should then be seen not as a restoration but as a recontextualization. The previous system of subsistence is not eliminated and it is now being enlightened by the experience of mediation. The egg that had served as an object of stability in a closed system is not completely unresponsive to comparison anymore. However, without its symbolic value, which is maintained over time, it once again continues to play a functional role. The opposition of the two food objects is not therefore solved by substitution but differentiation. The egg still functions in a system of necessity and the pizza is found to function in a system of representation which cannot be maintained by direct experience. The difference between the two is not lost; it is made clear.

**Table 12**

| Table 12 Final Differentiation of Food Systems |                    |                                     |
|--|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Dimension                                      | Egg                | Pizza                               |
| Mode of acquisition                            | Labor-based        | Mediated / gifted                   |
| Relation to body                               | Direct, functional | Initially symbolic, then diminished |
| Stability of meaning                           | Consistent         | Fluctuating                         |
| Role in narrative                              | Sustenance         | Spectacle → collapse                |

**DISCUSSION**

According to the analysis, food in Kaaka Muttai is not a thematic part of the story, it is rather an ordered structure wherein the meaning is created, organised, and changed throughout the story. The gap between the pizza and the egg can not be reduced to the dichotomy of poverty and aspiration but testifies to two discordantly different levels of signification. The egg is put in a closed system

of subsistence where work, riskiness and promptness have the value. The meaning of it is permanent because it cannot be separated with the reality of the day of its being taken and used. It has been in a vicious cycle where the environment, body and action are directly related. Comparatively, pizza comes in as a lost already manufactured product that is already a component of a representation system. It is perceived originally in the form of image and its sense is created as revealed in visibility, repetition and association as opposed to use. This change reorganizes the perception sense, which provides food with a chance to transcend its material functions and act as a value carrier symbolically. The co-existing of both systems allows viewing that the concept of food in the film does not exist in the form of a neutral category but, on the contrary, is a place where different modes of meaning overlap, clash, and alter one another.

Material deprivation fails to bring about the transformation to subsistence but the reorganization of vision and value. The mediation of images alters the manner in which the boys will experience the surrounding environment, which produces a shift in the action-based perception to the observation-based attention. Things that had been functional in definition begin to be measured relative to other things and it is this relative order that creates a hierarchy. The proximity of spaces and the exposure of difference and the repetition of the mediated images are what come together to generate a condition where desire is an ordered response to the comparison. The boys themselves are not, in any case, interested in the food, which, being taken into consideration, is pizza, they are interested in what the picture of the pizza is supposed to represent the access to the system of visibility and legitimacy, recognition. The restriction of desire and the refusal to enter the realm makes the object a continuity place and heightens this desire. The limitation of the access controlled by the monetary exchange but also reflected by the signs of the classes is demonstrated by the pizza store with its narrow frames and assessment mechanisms. The object of the self also comes out as indicating inclusion or exclusion and in the attempt to convert desire into action the parameters of this system is seen.

Objectification of the narrative by the media makes the status even more intense as it displaces the object to a greater scope of visibility. The mentioned case of exclusion that was recorded turns a local experience into a viral picture which makes the boys relocate to a shared area where their status is recognized and perceived. But the very visibility, which was utilized as an exclusionary mechanism, may be applied as leverage and hence access may be inverted. Such a twist, however, is not rooted in structural change but on the need of representation. The object is granted not because of its involvement in the initial system but as a response to being exposed. It involves adding additional layers of meaning to pizza, it is a commodity, a symbol, a gesture. Such appendages of significances ultimately destabilize the object and this displacement is realized in the final stage of the consumption. It is anticipated that image and experience must be related to one another, yet this eruption is not forthcoming, a disjunction takes place between image and material reality. In the face to face, the object loses the symbolic surplus that supported desire, the value is reduced to the immediate qualities of the object. The reality of such a failure does not nullify the background system of subsistence but gives it a new context, displaying that there is nothing inherent to objects to make them have a meaning but the meaning is made through the context in which they are perceived, desired and taken. Food then becomes a dynamic of a signifying apparatus, food in the film becomes readable within the larger processes of class, visibility and consumer modernity.

## CONCLUSION

The article aimed at reviewing the ways in which food is a system of signification in *Kaaka Muttai*, and not just a thematic marker of poverty or aspiration. The dissertation has, through a close textual analysis, shown that the film structures meaning by having a structured opposition between two different regimes of food, the egg, which is located within a closed system of subsistence, and the pizza, which functions within a system of representation that is mediated. Such resistance is not merely economic but is semiotic, spatial and perceptual. Immediacy, labor and continuity define the egg whereas visibility, repetition and symbolic excess define the construction of the pizza. Through the tracing of the placement of these two objects in the story, the research has demonstrated that food is the most dominant apparatus that the movie employs to define the distinction, access and aspiration of classes.

The discussion also shows that a lack is not the only cause of change in biological hunger to symbolic desire but the restructuring of the perception by mediated images. With the emergence of television and advertising the objects are no longer linked with their material conditions but are re-presented in a visual economy where value is created through showing. This change allows the desire to become organized in response to the presence and comparison instead of a straightforward elaboration of need. The next effort at reaching the pizza reveals the boundaries of this desire showing that entry into the system of consumption is controlled by bodily indicators of class and spatiality. The scene of exclusion brings the distance between representation and access to light, showing the contradiction between the promise of universality which was the focus of the image and the arrangement of space itself.

This divide is expanded further by the shift into media spectacle whereby, a previously exclusive experience of exclusion is now turned into a public event, thus redefining the conditions of access. Nevertheless, the realization of desire after mediation intervention does not stabilize the meaning of the object. Rather, the consumption process results in the failure of symbolic value whereby the material experience cannot be sustained by the expectations that were formed by the process of representation. Such a fall does not merely disenfranchise the aspiration, but reveals how it relies upon mediation. The movie therefore illustrates that the price of the object is in its non-material features but the context in which it is viewed, circulates and is wanted. That way, it redefines food as dynamic that signifies form and exposes the functioning of the modern consumer culture as image-access-perception.

The location of food at the heart of its analytical system makes this study offer a new angle to the concept of Kaaka Muttai by providing a more socio-political description with emphasis on the semiotic structure. It is implied in the findings that cinematic objects cannot be unambiguously comprehended in terms of thematic interpretations, but rather based on the systems of meaning that systematize their appearance and circulation. This method not only enhances the analysis of the film but it also allows wider possibilities of understanding of the food and material culture in the context of cinema as the two places of construction and contestation of ideology, class and desire.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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