



Metz's Semiotic Analysis of Social Collectivism in The Animated Film Jumbo

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to analyze the representation of social collectivity in the animated film Jumbo using Christian Metz's semiotic approach. The method employed is descriptive-interpretive, with data collection techniques including visual observation and screen captures of animated film scenes. The results indicate that social collectivity is constructed through cinematic signs such as interactions in public spaces, shared activities, and cooperation among characters. The narrative structure illustrates a progression from isolation toward social integration through conflict and reconciliation. Collectivity is not merely present as an explicit message but also as a construction of meaning formed through the relationships between scenes, characters, and social spaces, thereby reinforcing the values of togetherness, solidarity, and mutual aid.

1. Introduction

The animated film Jumbo set a record as the highest-grossing Indonesian film of all time after reaching a total of 10,076,973 domestic viewers. It is also recorded as the Southeast Asian animated film with the largest audience (Tempo, June 2025).

The Ministry of Creative Economy of Indonesia provided full support for Jumbo's global release, opening opportunities for more countries to recognize the works of Indonesian creators. Following its domestic success with over 10 million viewers, Jumbo was also screened in several countries, including Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, and Kazakhstan (Komdigi, June 2025).

Jumbo attracted significant audience attention, particularly in Indonesia and Southeast Asia, due to its combination of storytelling, characters, and visual approach that feel closely connected to everyday life. The film presents stories that are relatable and universal, yet framed from the perspective of Indonesian children. This makes the animation not only appealing to children but also evokes nostalgia for adults. Audiences in Indonesia and Southeast Asia can easily relate to it because the social culture portrayed mirrors their daily lives, the characters feel familiar, and the visuals reflect their surrounding environments.

This research examines social collectivism in Jumbo. The study is important because the film functions not only as an entertainment product but also as a medium representing social values embedded in Indonesian and Southeast Asian societies. Amid the currents of globalization and the dominance of individualistic culture in popular media, Jumbo presents a narrative that emphasizes togetherness, solidarity, and social connectedness as part of cultural identity.

Previous research on representation in *Jumbo* has explored power relations in bullying behavior depicted in the film. The focus of that study was how dominance, subordination, and social inequality are represented through visual scenes. It examined how power relations among characters are constructed through symbols and visual signs (Asmoro & Yulia, 2025). Another study discussed the representation of moral values in *Jumbo* as an educational medium for children (Eloi & Muntazah, 2025).

The fundamental difference between this study and previous research lies in both its focus and theoretical approach. Earlier studies emphasized Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis to uncover power relations in bullying behavior and the representation of moral values. In other words, those studies focused on denotative, connotative, and mythological meanings related to individual issues such as violence and moral education.

This research employs Christian Metz's semiotic approach, which is rooted in film theory. It analyzes not only signs but also cinematic structures such as narrative, visual codes, and film language more comprehensively (Metz, 1964, in Tröhler & Kirsten, 2025, pp. 28–54, 245–263). It also highlights social collectivism as its primary focus, a concept not specifically examined in previous studies. This focus is important because collectivism is a relevant social value in cultural contexts, particularly in shaping solidarity, cooperation, and group identity among children.

Film semiotics is an approach that views film as a system of signs that constructs meaning through visual, narrative, and cinematic structures. One of the key figures in film semiotics is Christian Metz, who developed the concept of film as a language with its own system of signs. Metz argues that film does not have a standardized grammar like verbal language, but it still possesses a structure that can be analyzed through sequences of images, scenes, and narrative (Metz in Tröhler & Kirsten, 2025).

Through semiotic analysis from Christian Metz's perspective, this study provides a deeper understanding of how *Jumbo* constructs meanings of collectivism through cinematic elements. Thus, it contributes not only to film semiotics studies but also to the development of educational media based on social values.

Examining social collectivism in this film allows for a deeper understanding of how these values are constructed, negotiated, and conveyed to audiences. Furthermore, this research is relevant in analyzing the role of local animation as an agent in shaping social meaning, as well as in strengthening collective cultural discourse amid increasingly dynamic social change.

Mary Ann Doane's work, "The Cinematic Signifier and the Imaginary," draws on Christian Metz's theory of the cinematic signifier, discussing how film creates illusions through images and leads audiences to psychologically identify with the filmic world (Tröhler & Kirsten, 2025).

In the development of contemporary film studies, Metz's theory remains relevant for analyzing film meaning through narrative and visual structures. Recent research indicates that Metz's semiotic approach helps explain how films construct meaning through the combination of shots, scenes, and sequences that form a syntagmatic structure (Schmidt, 2024).

In his work "Problems of Denotation in the Fiction Film," Christian Metz employs a semiological method to divide and classify films. He argues that meaning in film does not arise solely from the events being recorded, but from the way the film is structured through images and scenes (Metz, 2017). Metz categorizes film structure into several syntagmatic types, enabling researchers to understand how meaning is constructed through visual and narrative sequences (Tröhler & Kirsten, 2025).

The use of Christian Metz's semiotic theory in this research is relevant because his approach specifically positions film as a complex system of signs, where meaning is conveyed not only through dialogue but also through sequences of images, visual composition, and narrative structure. Metz views cinema as a language without a fixed grammar, yet one that possesses codes that can be analyzed to uncover meanings embedded within visual representation.

Mary Ann Doane's perspective aligns with Christian Metz in viewing film as a complex system of signs, where meaning emerges not only through dialogue but also through visual elements and narrative structure. Doane further develops this idea by emphasizing how the cinematic signifier operates within the imaginary realm of the audience (Tröhler & Kirsten, 2025).

Metz's semiotic approach, in the context of *Jumbo*, enables researchers to examine how social collectivism is constructed through cinematic signs, including character interactions, the use of space, and visual symbols throughout the film. His theory also provides a strong analytical framework for understanding how the meaning of collectivism is not only explicitly represented but also constructed through the film's narrative and syntagmatic structures.

Through concepts such as the *grande syntagmatique*, Metz explains how sequences of scenes form a narrative logic capable of producing particular social meanings. In *Jumbo*, social collectivism does not stand as a single message but emerges as a construct shaped by relationships between scenes, conflicts, and character resolutions. Therefore, this theory allows for a deeper interpretation of how social values characteristic of Indonesia and Southeast Asia are implicitly represented through cinematic language, strengthening the rationale for using Metz's semiotics as the analytical framework in this study.

2. Method

This study employs a qualitative film semiotic analysis approach. The framework used is Christian Metz's semiotics to examine the cinematic structure and visual signs that construct the meaning of social collectivity in the animated film *Jumbo*. This research is descriptive-interpretative in nature, aiming to understand how social collectivity is represented through the narrative, visuals, and relationships between scenes in the film.

The object of the study is the animated film *Jumbo*, which has been released on the Netflix platform, allowing the researcher to capture screenshots for data collection and analysis. The research data consist of selected scene excerpts obtained through screen capture techniques conducted directly by the researcher. The research materials include scenes that indicate values of social collectivity. Data collection techniques involve visual observation of the animated film *Jumbo*, documentation in the form of captured scene screenshots, and note-taking of dialogues or events relevant to the research focus. The collected data are then analyzed using Christian Metz's semiotic approach by identifying syntagmatic structures, visual codes, and the relationships between scenes that construct the meaning of social collectivity. The analysis process is carried out through stages of scene selection, data classification, interpretation of cinematic signs, and drawing conclusions to obtain an understanding of the representation of social collectivity in the animated film *Jumbo*.

3. Results and Discussion

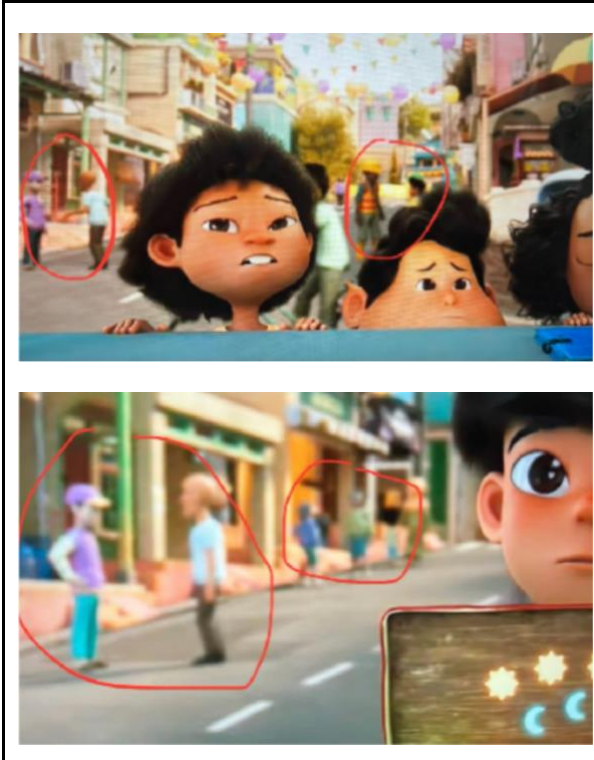







Denotation: A group of people are standing facing each other on the side of the road, appearing to be engaged in conversation.



Literal meaning: A simple social interaction between individuals in a street setting.


Connotation:

Reflects a culture of open communication within the

	<p>community (rather than individualistic relationships).</p> <p>The street functions not only as a passageway but also as a social space where relationships are formed.</p> <p>Indicates a communal way of life in which people coexist and interact closely.</p>
	<p>Denotation: A group of children playing in a shared space (a field/neighborhood area).</p> <p>Literal meaning: A collective play activity.</p> <p>Connotation:</p> <p>Public space as a center of collectivity The field or neighborhood area functions not only as a place for play, but also as a shared social space that brings individuals together within a community.</p> <p>Diversity of roles within the group Children playing kasti (a traditional Indonesian ball game) and those who are simply sitting indicate that within collectivity, each individual has different roles and levels of participation, yet all remain part of the group.</p> <p>Social inclusivity Children who are not actively playing (only sitting) still remain within the social circle. This suggests that collectivism does not demand uniformity of activity, but rather values presence and social engagement.</p>

	
 	<p>Denotation: Several characters sit in a circle while eating and drinking tea together. Children are conversing with older individuals (a grandmother and an older sibling) while sitting, drinking tea, and some are eating together. Literal meaning: The activity of eating and drinking tea together.</p> <p>Connotation: The dining space as a space for social communication Eating and drinking tea are not only meant to fulfill physical needs, but also serve as a medium for dialogue and the exchange of experiences among family members.</p> <p>Intergenerational bonding Conversations between children and older individuals indicate a transfer of values, experiences, and social knowledge. This strengthens collectivism through relationships across generations.</p> <p>Collectivism as a space for sharing problems The children's concerns being discussed together suggest that individual problems are positioned as shared matters, not merely personal burdens.</p> <p>Emotional warmth in togetherness Casual activities such as sitting and drinking tea create an atmosphere of closeness and emotional support, which form the core of social solidarity.</p> <p>Normalization of informal deliberation Casual conversations reflect the practice of deliberation in an informal form, where solutions and understanding are built through everyday collective interactions.</p>
	<p>Denotation: Several characters help a main character complete a task (for example, working on a competition performance project, helping a friend, or cooperating when facing a conflict).</p> <p>Literal meaning: collaborative activities (cooperation) and helping one another.</p>

	<p>Connotation:</p> <p>Problems as a collective responsibility</p> <p>A problem experienced by one character is not positioned as a personal matter, but becomes a shared concern.</p> <p>Rejection of individualism</p> <p>The main character is not depicted as solving problems alone, but rather through the help of others.</p> <p>Mutual cooperation (gotong royong) as a core value</p> <p>Acts of helping one another represent the value of gotong royong, which is a hallmark of collectivism.</p> <p>Social interdependence</p> <p>Problem-solving illustrates positive interdependence among characters, where each role complements the others.</p> <p>Emotional and practical solidarity</p> <p>The help provided is not only physical (actions), but also emotional (support, empathy).</p> <p>Distribution of roles within the group</p> <p>Each character usually has a different role in solving the problem (some contribute ideas, others provide physical help, or offer support).</p>
	<p>Denotation:</p> <p>Rows of shop-houses (ruko) standing tightly side by side with no gaps, featuring a variety of functions such as a butcher shop, grocery store, photocopy service, and a Chinese herbal shop.</p> <p>Literal meaning:</p> <p>A spatial arrangement of living and commercial spaces that are interconnected.</p> <p>Connotations:</p> <p>Density as a symbol of social closeness</p> <p>The absence of distance between buildings reflects closeness among individuals, both physically and socially.</p>

	<p>Economic diversity within a single community</p> <p>The variety of businesses indicates a plurality of economic activities coexisting, signaling an inclusive sense of collectivity.</p> <p>Cultural coexistence</p> <p>The presence of a Chinese herbal shop among other businesses reflects acceptance of cultural diversity within a collective community.</p>
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4. Conclusions

Syntagmatic Structure

The analysis of the syntagmatic structure in the Jumbo animated film shows that the sequence of scenes is arranged linearly to construct layered social meanings, particularly related to the value of collectivism. The narrative introduces the main character, Jumbo (Don), as an individual who is different both physically and socially. The social environment surrounding him—family, peers, and the community—begins to form the initial framework of social interaction. At this stage, the initial conflict, in the form of insecurity and social alienation, becomes an important foundation for the story’s development.

Entering the complication stage, social conflicts develop in a more complex manner through experiences of rejection, ridicule, and marginalization faced by Don. Interactions with other characters reveal diverse social dynamics, ranging from support to rejection. Internal conflict is also experienced by Don. His selfishness and his act of breaking a promise to Meri become key elements that deepen the narrative conflict. This not only worsens his relationship with Meri but also triggers disappointment from his friends.

Key events such as competitions, performances, or crises function as catalysts that drive changes in relationships between characters. In this phase, Don begins to realize his mistakes, including the impact of his selfishness and betrayal. This shift in attitude opens space for reconciliation with Meri and his friends.

In the resolution stage, Don is not only accepted back into the group but also succeeds in repairing strained relationships, including those with Meri, his friends, and Atta, with whom he previously had conflicts. This reconciliation process demonstrates the restoration of trust and the reestablishment of stronger social bonds.

Relationships among characters become more harmonious, grounded in understanding, empathy, and cooperation. This resolution emphasizes that collective success depends not only on accepting differences but also on an individual’s ability to acknowledge mistakes, repair relationships, and rebuild solidarity. Thus, the overall syntagmatic structure not only organizes the storyline chronologically but also constructs an ideological meaning about the importance of individual responsibility in building a cohesive and sustainable collectivism.

Narrative Progression

The narrative progression in this study illustrates a storyline that gradually moves from isolation toward social integration, through stages of isolation, interaction, collaboration, and integration. In the initial stage, Don is portrayed in a condition of social isolation, marked by insecurity, alienation, and limited acceptance in group play. This isolation is not only caused by external treatment but also stems from internal conditions that limit his potential.

The development then moves into the interaction stage, where Don begins to engage in relationships with other characters. His three close friends initially intend to help him perform on stage, but conflict arises due to Don's selfishness and his betrayal of a promise to Meri. This interaction becomes an important space for social learning, as through these experiences Don begins to understand the consequences of his actions as well as the importance of empathy within a group.

Don gradually becomes involved in better cooperation with his friends, and relationships that were previously dominated by conflict due to his selfishness begin to improve. This process also includes efforts to restore broken trust and an understanding that each member's contribution plays an important role in achieving shared goals. At the end of the story, the stage performance by Don and his friends is not merely an artistic display but also a form of resistance against the labels that have burdened him.

Representation of Collectivism through Characters

The representation of collectivism through characters in this study is clearly seen in the construction of Don as a subject who is "different yet valuable." At the beginning of the narrative, Don is positioned in a marginal role that subconsciously evokes empathy from the audience. His experiences of alienation, insecurity, and rejection build a strong emotional connection. When Don later undergoes a process of integration into the group, the narrative provides psychological satisfaction for the audience, as if the need for social acceptance is also fulfilled. Thus, Don functions as a representational medium that connects individual experience with the collective desire for recognition and meaningfulness.

Other supporting characters also play important roles in representing the dynamics of collectivism through changes in their attitudes. Characters who initially appear antagonistic or rejecting gradually transform into supportive and accepting figures. This change emphasizes that collectivism is the result of a dynamic process of social negotiation. Relationships among characters—including conflict, disappointment, and reconciliation—show that acceptance within a group is not static but continuously shaped through interaction and shared experiences.

In the context of the imaginary signifier, collectivism is represented as a sign that is not only understood rationally but also felt emotionally by the audience. Collectivism appears as a symbolic construction that feels real, fulfilling subconscious needs for belonging, acceptance, and being part of a peer group and social environment. Thus, this representation affirms that the power of the narrative lies not only in the events depicted but also in the characters' ability to mediate the audience's emotional experience of togetherness.

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