

Play, Power, and Resistance: A Cultural Studies Reading of Satyajit Ray's *Two* (1964)

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ABSTRACT

Satyajit Ray's *Two* (1964) is a silent short film that, while brief in form, carries a deep critique of social hierarchies and human relations. This paper analyzes the film through the theoretical lens of Cultural Studies and Semiotics, drawing on Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model and Roland Barthes' ideas of signification to decode its visual and narrative strategies. By situating the film within the broader socio-political context of postcolonial India and the global Cold War moment, the study examines how Ray encodes the contrast between the affluent child and the street child as a symbolic struggle between privilege and deprivation, domination and resistance. The analysis focuses on mise-en-scène, sound design, and visual juxtapositions, revealing how toys, musical instruments, and even silence function as semiotic markers of class, consumerism, and cultural assertion. Beyond its aesthetic brilliance, the film demonstrates interdisciplinary relevance, intersecting with sociology, political science, childhood studies, and media theory. The study argues that *Two* transcends its historical moment by offering a timeless reflection on inequality, cultural imperialism, and resilience of the marginalized. Through a cultural studies framework, the paper shows how Ray transforms a seemingly simple children's rivalry into a powerful allegory, underscoring the enduring capacity of cinema to critique society and stimulate theoretical inquiry.

Keywords: Film Studies, Satyajit Ray, Cultural Studies, Semiotics, Film Criticism

INTRODUCTION

Satyajit Ray's short film *Two* (1964) occupies a unique position in the canon of Indian and world cinema. Unlike his celebrated feature films such as the Apu Trilogy (1955-59), *Charulata* (1964), or *Jana Aranya* (1976), this work is not a full-length narrative but a brief, wordless film of approximately thirteen minutes. Commissioned for the public television service in the United States and made at a time when Ray had already established himself as a leading figure in world cinema, *Two* offers a striking departure in form while retaining the director's thematic concerns with class, humanism, and power relations (Shihab, 2025). Shot in black and white and devoid of dialogue, the film stages a seemingly simple rivalry between two children- one affluent, playing inside a modern urban home, and the other impoverished, playing on the streets outside. Yet, beneath this surface simplicity lies a profound social commentary. The film emerges not merely as a children's story but as a metaphor for inequality, domination, and resilience, making it a powerful cinematic text to examine through the lenses of theory and cultural critique.

Ray made *Two* at a crucial historical moment. India, in the early 1960s, was a newly independent nation navigating the tensions of postcolonial development, modernization, and persistent poverty. Internationally, the Cold War had polarized the world into two power blocs, and questions of dominance, resistance, and cultural imperialism were becoming increasingly visible in artistic and political discourse. Within this global and national context, *Two* can be seen as a subtle allegory that resonates far beyond its immediate narrative. The boy in the affluent home, armed with an array of consumerist toys- guns, masks, balloons- embodies the excesses of privilege, while the street child with handmade toys and a flute represents resilience, creativity, and cultural rootedness. The silent battle between them mirrors larger struggles between wealth and poverty, between domination and resistance, and even between Western modernity and indigenous cultural expression.



The absence of dialogue in *Two* is not merely a stylistic choice but an intentional strategy that underscores the universality of its message. Without spoken words, the film becomes accessible across languages, geographies, and cultural boundaries, allowing audiences anywhere to decode its visual grammar. This silence is paradoxically eloquent: it draws attention to images, gestures, and sounds, foregrounding the role of cinema as a visual medium. Moreover, silence itself becomes a political statement. In a film that stages the contest between two unequal adversaries, the absence of verbal discourse suggests that resistance does not always manifest in spoken defiance but can also emerge through non-verbal, symbolic actions. The flute's melody, repeatedly played by the street child, becomes a counterpoint to the gunshots, balloons, and toy instruments of the privileged boy- an assertion of identity and dignity without words.

The research problem that drives this paper emerges from this layered simplicity: how does *Two* communicate ideas of class, power, and resistance through purely visual means? In conventional narrative cinema, dialogue, plot development, and character psychology are central to conveying meaning. *Two*, however, rejects these tools and instead relies on visual juxtapositions, sound cues, and mise-en-scène to articulate its ideas. The problem, therefore, is not only to interpret the story of a rich boy versus a poor boy but to critically analyze how Ray encodes messages of inequality and resilience in cinematic language through framing, lighting, objects, and performance. Addressing this question requires moving beyond surface-level description into a theoretically informed reading that situates the film in broader cultural and political debates.

The relevance of studying *Two* today is manifold. In an era of increasing economic disparity and widening social gaps, the symbolic conflict between the privileged child and the street child continues to resonate. The film anticipates global conversations about inequality, consumerism, and cultural homogenization that have only intensified in the twenty-first century. Moreover, the battle of toys: factory-made versus handmade: echoes ongoing debates about globalization, cultural imperialism, and the resilience of indigenous traditions. In media studies, *Two* provides a model for how cinema can communicate complex ideas without words, reminding us of the visual medium's potential to transcend language. For disciplines such as sociology, political science, childhood studies, and anthropology, the film serves as an interdisciplinary text that captures the dynamics of class, power, and identity in ways that remain strikingly relevant. The film's compact form, accessibility, and thematic richness make it an ideal subject for a critical research paper that combines close analysis with theoretical interpretation.

To unpack these meanings, this paper employs a dual theoretical framework: Cultural Studies and Semiotics. From Cultural Studies, Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model provides a lens to understand how Ray encodes class dynamics into the visual text and how audiences, across contexts, may decode them, sometimes reading the narrative as a playful children's rivalry, and at other times as an allegory of power and resistance. Hall's insights into representation, hegemony, and identity are vital to analyzing how *Two* constructs social difference through cinematic codes. Complementing this, Roland Barthes' semiotic theory, particularly his concepts of denotation, connotation, and myth, allows a close reading of objects and gestures within the film. The toy gun, for example, denotes a plaything but connotes violence, domination, and the might of modern industrial consumer culture. The flute, on the other hand, denotes a simple musical instrument but connotes tradition, creativity, and cultural rootedness. Together, these frameworks illuminate the symbolic depth of the film and demonstrate how Ray's cinematic signs function both at the level of narrative and myth.



This approach positions the paper within a broader scholarly tradition that treats films not merely as entertainment but as cultural texts. By applying Cultural Studies and Semiotics, the analysis demonstrates how *Two* operates simultaneously as a work of art and as a site of socio-political critique. Rather than relying on spoken discourse, Ray encodes meaning into visual and sonic forms, inviting viewers to decode multiple layers of significance. The use of children as protagonists underscores the innocence of play while highlighting the embeddedness of inequality even in childhood, thus universalizing the conflict. Through this framework, the film's relevance extends beyond Indian cinema to global debates about inequality, power, and cultural survival.

This paper argues that Satyajit Ray's *Two* is far more than a short silent film for television; it is a layered allegory of class conflict and cultural resistance. By analyzing its content, visual appeal, and social relevance through the combined theoretical lenses of Cultural Studies and Semiotics, the study reveals how Ray's film communicates timeless ideas about domination, resilience, and human dignity through purely visual means. *Two* remains significant today precisely because of its ability to transcend its historical moment, continuing to speak powerfully to contemporary concerns about inequality and justice.

Theoretical Framework

To analyze Satyajit Ray's *Two* (1964) in depth, it is essential to employ a theoretical framework that can account for both the socio-political context of the film and the cinematic strategies through which it communicates meaning. This paper adopts a dual framework: Cultural Studies, particularly Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model, and Semiotics, drawing on Roland Barthes' theories of denotation, connotation, and myth. Together, these approaches allow for an understanding of *Two* not merely as a narrative about two children but as a layered cultural text that encodes class struggle, power, and resistance through visual and symbolic language.

Cultural Studies and Stuart Hall

Cultural Studies emerged in Britain in the 1960s, contemporaneous with the making of *Two*, as an interdisciplinary field concerned with power, ideology, and representation in everyday cultural practices. Central to Stuart Hall's contribution is the idea that media texts are not neutral conveyors of information but are actively encoded with meanings shaped by dominant ideologies. Audiences, in turn, decode these texts in different ways-accepting, negotiating, or resisting the intended meanings.

Applying this to *Two*, Ray can be seen as encoding a critique of class inequality into the silent conflict between the two children. The affluent boy, inside a modern home, is surrounded by consumerist symbols of power-guns, masks, balloons- while the street child relies on handmade toys and music. On the surface, the film might be decoded as a playful children's rivalry. Yet, through Hall's lens, the "dominant-hegemonic reading" would interpret it as a metaphor for socio-economic hierarchies and the arrogance of privilege. A "negotiated reading" might emphasize the universality of childhood play while still acknowledging inequality. A "resistant reading" could valorize the street child as a symbol of subaltern resilience, challenging consumerist domination.

Hall's model is particularly useful here because *Two* is a silent film. With no dialogue to guide viewers, meanings are carried entirely through visual signs, gestures, and juxtapositions. This amplifies the importance of encoding/decoding: Ray encodes meaning into mise-en-scène and imagery, while audiences bring their cultural contexts to decode the allegory. The film thus demonstrates Hall's claim that meaning is never fixed but is negotiated in the space between production and reception.

Semiotics and Roland Barthes

While Cultural Studies situates the film within ideological structures, Semiotics enables a closer reading of the film's symbolic language. Roland Barthes, building on Saussure, distinguished between denotation (the literal, descriptive level of meaning) and connotation (the cultural or ideological associations layered onto signs). He further developed the idea of myth, where signs are naturalized into seemingly universal truths that mask their cultural constructedness.

In *Two*, this semiotic approach illuminates how objects and actions function as signs. The toy gun denotes a child's plaything but connotes violence, dominance, and the intrusion of industrial consumer culture into leisure. The affluent boy's mask denotes an accessory but connotes impersonality and intimidation. The balloon denotes fragility and spectacle yet connotes the ephemeral pleasures of consumerist play. By contrast, the street child's flute denotes a simple instrument but connotes cultural rootedness, creativity, and a form of resistance. The handmade bow and arrow, while modest, connotes resourcefulness and the assertion of agency despite poverty.

These connotations accumulate into what Barthes would call "myth." The myth embedded in the affluent boy's arsenal is that privilege and consumerism equate to superiority, while the myth of the street child's toys is that resistance and creativity can counter domination. Through these semiotic contrasts, Ray destabilizes the myth of consumerist triumph by showing that the flute's melody ultimately outlasts the toy gun's noise.

Integrating Cultural Studies and Semiotics

Individually, Cultural Studies and Semiotics provide valuable but partial insights. Cultural Studies highlights how Ray's film encodes ideological critiques and how audiences may decode them in multiple ways. Semiotics reveals the micro-level functioning of signs, gestures, and objects that carry these meanings. Together, they provide a comprehensive framework: Semiotics explains the mechanics of meaning-making within the film, while Cultural Studies situates those meanings within broader structures of class, power, and ideology.

This integration is crucial for a film like *Two*, which communicates without words. Its silence forces attention to visual codes, making semiotic analysis indispensable. Yet its resonance with global struggles of inequality, consumerism, and resistance makes Cultural Studies equally necessary. By combining these approaches, the analysis in this paper aims to uncover how Ray's seemingly simple children's rivalry encodes profound socio-political critique and why this critique continues to resonate across cultural and disciplinary boundaries.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarship on Satyajit Ray has predominantly focused on his feature films, particularly the Apu Trilogy and later works such as *Charulata* and *The Chess Players*. Critics such as Chidananda Das Gupta (1992) and Andrew Robinson (1989) emphasize Ray's humanism, his ability to weave everyday realities into compelling cinematic experiences, and his balance between local cultural contexts and universal themes. However, relatively less scholarly attention has been devoted to his short films, including *Two* (1964), which stands as a distinctive experiment in visual storytelling devoid of dialogue. This lacuna highlights the need for closer engagement with *Two*, especially given its thematic richness and minimalist form.

Within Ray studies, scholars have examined his engagement with modernity, class, and tradition. Ashis Nandy (1998) argues that Ray's films consistently critique domination by presenting marginalized perspectives with dignity and empathy. In this light, *Two* represents a concentrated example of Ray's political and cultural commentary, presenting inequality not through overt ideological discourse but through symbols embedded in children's play. Recent scholarship on world cinema, such as Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's work on

postcolonial film theory, encourages reading such films as interventions in global discourses of power and representation.

Theoretically, two major frameworks guide this study: Cultural Studies and Semiotics. Cultural Studies, shaped by Stuart Hall and Raymond Williams, emphasizes how cultural texts reproduce or resist social hierarchies. Hall's theory of representation (1997) suggests that meaning is not fixed but constructed through cultural codes—a useful lens for analyzing how *Two* positions toys as metaphors for class privilege and resistance. Semiotics, rooted in Ferdinand de Saussure and later developed by Roland Barthes, provides tools for unpacking how signs—such as the flute or the toy robot—carry layered meanings. Barthes's concept of mythologies (1957) is particularly relevant, as Ray's film demonstrates how seemingly “innocent” objects participate in larger ideological struggles.

Research on silent and short films provides further context. Scholars like Noël Carroll and David Bordwell have discussed how narrative meaning can be generated through visual and formal strategies rather than dialogue. *Two* exemplifies this cinematic principle, relying entirely on visual cues, framing, and sound design to construct its ideological conflict. Moreover, the short film format itself is often overlooked in mainstream scholarship, yet as theorists like Richard Raskin argue, brevity can heighten intensity and force audiences to confront themes in distilled, impactful ways.

Finally, interdisciplinary approaches to cinema underscore the relevance of *Two* today. Media theorists connect its allegory to Cold War geopolitics, with the “big boy” symbolizing technological dominance and the “small boy” representing local resilience. Sociologists interpret the conflict as a representation of structural inequality, while cultural theorists see it as a parable of globalization, where indigenous traditions resist cultural homogenization. Such readings demonstrate the film's adaptability across disciplines and its ongoing significance in contemporary debates on power, inequality, and resistance.

In sum, existing scholarship on Ray has established his reputation as a global auteur concerned with humanism and social realities. Yet, *Two* remains relatively underexplored despite its immense potential for cultural and semiotic analysis. By situating the film within Cultural Studies and Semiotics, this research contributes to filling that gap, highlighting how Ray's visual storytelling continues to resonate in the present, offering insights into the enduring struggles of class, culture, and creativity.

Contextual Background

Satyajit Ray's *Two* (1964) must be situated within the larger historical, cultural, and cinematic contexts in which it was conceived. The film is not an isolated creative endeavour but a cultural text that reflects the tensions of its time: postcolonial India's struggles with poverty and modernity, Ray's own humanist concerns as an auteur, and the global climate of the Cold War. Together, these contexts frame *Two* as more than a children's tale; they elevate it into an allegorical work that transcends its short format.

Postcolonial India: Poverty, Modernization, and Inequality

India in the 1960s was less than two decades removed from independence. While political sovereignty had been achieved, the legacies of colonialism continued to shape social and economic realities. The Nehruvian state was pursuing ambitious modernization projects, building industries and promoting technological advancement, yet stark inequalities remained visible in urban and rural spaces. Urban India was marked by contrasts: rising middle-class affluence on the one hand and persistent poverty on the other.

In this milieu, *Two* stages a direct confrontation between privilege and deprivation. The affluent child, playing inside a modern urban home with factory-made toys, embodies the consumerist aspirations of India's growing middle and upper classes. The street child outside, with his handmade toys and flute, symbolizes the resourcefulness of those left out of the narrative of modernization. Their interaction is not simply personal rivalry but an allegorical representation of India's postcolonial dualities: wealth and poverty, Western modernity and indigenous traditions, dominance and survival.

Seen through this lens, *Two* reflects the contradictions of Nehru's India, where technological progress and industrialization coexisted with deep social inequalities. Ray's decision to set the battle between children, rather than adults, universalizes the conflict while highlighting how inequality permeates even the innocent world of childhood.

Ray's Cinematic Philosophy and Humanism

Satyajit Ray's oeuvre has consistently reflected a deep concern for human dignity, social realities, and the moral dimensions of everyday life. Influenced by Italian Neorealism, particularly Vittorio De Sica's *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), and by Bengali literary traditions, Ray's films often foreground the struggles of ordinary individuals within broader socio-cultural structures.

In *Two*, Ray distills these concerns into a minimalist form. The absence of dialogue emphasizes visual storytelling and forces viewers to focus on gestures, objects, and juxtapositions. This aligns with Ray's belief in cinema as a visual medium capable of transcending language. His humanist outlook is evident in the dignity accorded to the street child, whose resilience and creativity subtly undermine the apparent superiority of the affluent child. By portraying the street child not as a passive victim but as an active participant in play and resistance, Ray reinforces his commitment to portraying marginalized lives with depth and agency.

Moreover, Ray's choice of children as protagonists resonates with his broader interest in innocence, morality, and the shaping of human character. In films such as *Pather Panchali* (1955) and *Aparajito* (1956), childhood becomes a lens through which broader social realities are explored. *Two* continues this exploration, but in a more allegorical mode: childhood play becomes a metaphor for societal conflict.

Cold War Context and Global Resonances

Beyond its national context, *Two* must also be read against the backdrop of the Cold War. The film was commissioned for U.S. public television, aimed at an international audience. This explains, in part, the absence of dialogue: the film needed to be intelligible across linguistic boundaries. But the Cold War setting also shaped its thematic concerns.

The affluent boy, armed with consumerist toys, can be read as an emblem of Western modernity and capitalist dominance. His arsenal—guns, masks, balloons—evokes both military might and cultural spectacle. The street child, by contrast, represents the resourcefulness of the marginalized, an allegory of the Global South resisting domination with indigenous creativity. Their silent contest mirrors the larger geopolitical tensions of the era, where military and economic power sought to overwhelm, but resistance emerged from local cultures and alternative values.

The Cold War also marked a period of intense cultural diplomacy, where films, literature, and art were mobilized as soft power. Ray's *Two*, though subtle, participates in this cultural discourse. While it can be appreciated as a universal story of childhood, its deeper allegory of inequality and resilience resonates with global audiences living through polarization, domination, and decolonization. By encoding this critique in a form accessible to both Indian and international viewers, Ray elevated *Two* into a cinematic text that transcended its immediate historical setting.

The Significance of Silence and Universality

One of the most striking aspects of *Two* is its silence. Unlike many of Ray's other films, which rely on dialogue and rich soundscapes, *Two* communicates solely through images, gestures, and limited diegetic sound. This silence is not a limitation but a deliberate strategy to make the film universally accessible. It strips the conflict of cultural particularities and presents it as a timeless allegory of inequality.

At the same time, silence resonates politically. In a world saturated by Cold War rhetoric and ideological speeches, *Two* communicates through absence, suggesting that the most profound truths about power and resistance need no words. The silence also elevates the role of sound effects—the flute's melody versus the

gunshots and noise of manufactured toys. This sonic contrast reinforces the ideological contrast: indigenous creativity and simplicity against industrial noise and aggression.

Positioning *Two* within Ray's Legacy

Within Ray's body of work, *Two* is often overshadowed by his feature films. Yet it remains a remarkable experiment in form and theme. It distills Ray's concerns with class, dignity, and resilience into a compact allegory, demonstrating his mastery of visual storytelling. It also reveals his ability to adapt to international contexts while retaining a rootedness in Indian realities.

In retrospect, *Two* can be seen as a bridge between Ray's humanist realism and his later, more allegorical works such as *Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne* (1969), where play, music, and fantasy similarly critique power and privilege. The short film's simplicity belies its depth, making it a rich site for theoretical exploration.

Analysis of the Film

Satyajit Ray's *Two* (1964) may appear deceptively simple: a silent confrontation between two children, one wealthy and one poor. Yet beneath this brevity lies a wealth of symbolic meaning. Using the frameworks of Cultural Studies and Semiotics, this section unpacks the film across five dimensions: (1) content and narrative structure, (2) mise-en-scène and visual composition, (3) semiotics of objects and sound, (4) representation of power and resistance, and (5) interdisciplinary relevance. Together, these analyses demonstrate how Ray encodes a critique of class inequality and cultural imperialism into a seemingly playful encounter.

Content and Narrative Structure

The narrative of *Two* is linear but highly suggestive. The film opens with the affluent boy, comfortably situated in a modern home, surrounded by toys that signify both wealth and consumerism. His world is safe, enclosed, and materially abundant. The entry of the street child into the narrative, visible through the window as he plays outside, initiates the central conflict. What begins as parallel play soon escalates into a contest of superiority, as each child attempts to outdo the other in sound, spectacle, and persistence.

From a Cultural Studies perspective, this narrative can be seen as an encoding of class struggle. The home becomes a space of privilege, insulating the wealthy child from hardship, while the street symbolizes deprivation and exclusion. The conflict between the children is not simply a childish rivalry but a metaphor for structural inequality. The affluent child uses mass-produced toys as tools of dominance, while the street child resists with handmade instruments. The asymmetry in resources mirrors broader social realities: one has access to industrial power, the other must rely on creativity and resilience.

Structurally, the narrative builds to a climax when the affluent boy unleashes his loudest, most aggressive toy- a toy gun that drowns out the street child's flute. Yet the final image of the film resists closure. After the gunshot, the flute's melody returns, soft but persistent, suggesting that resilience cannot be permanently silenced. This ending encodes a hopeful reading: despite structural inequalities, marginalized voices endure.

Mise-en-scène and Visual Composition

Ray's mastery lies in his use of mise-en-scène- the arrangement of visual elements within the frame- to encode meaning. Every detail in *Two* carries symbolic weight.

Spatial Contrast: The affluent child is framed inside a modern, well-furnished home, marked by cleanliness, order, and consumer abundance. By contrast, the street child occupies an open, undefined, and dusty space outside. The juxtaposition of inside and outside is central: the interior signifies privilege and security, the exterior deprivation and exposure. It must also be noted that the affluent child is shown to be positioned in an upper storey house "looking down" upon the street child, who is always shown to be standing on the ground. This clearly marks the hierarchies created in terms of the economic class structure.



Upper storey house of affluent boy



Street boy on the ground

Costume and Appearance: The wealthy boy is neatly dressed, embodying middle-class aspirations and order. The street child's simple clothing indicates poverty, but also mobility and freedom. This contrast visualizes class difference without words.



Framing and Angles: Ray often frames the affluent child from slightly low angles, enhancing his sense of superiority and dominance within the home. The street child, however, is framed in wider, longer shots, emphasizing vulnerability but also resilience in open space. The use of windows as a framing device further highlights separation- an invisible barrier between privilege and deprivation.



Gestures and Expressions: The affluent child's gestures are assertive and sometimes aggressive, while the street child's are understated but persistent. These physical cues encode the power dynamics of domination and resistance.



In semiotic terms, the mise-en-scène functions as a system of signs: the home, toys, costumes, and gestures all connote broader social realities. Barthes' distinction between denotation and connotation is useful here: denotatively, the film depicts two boys playing; connotatively, it encodes class hierarchies, consumerism, and the asymmetry of power.

Semiotics of Objects and Sound

The central “weapons” in the children’s contest are their toys and instruments. These objects, while seemingly mundane, operate as semiotic markers that encode social and cultural meanings.

1. **Toy Gun:** Denotatively, a plaything; connotatively, it signifies violence, domination, and the militaristic undercurrents of consumer culture. Within the Cold War context, it also evokes the global arms race.
2. **Mask:** A symbol of impersonality and intimidation. By wearing the mask, the affluent child hides individuality and asserts dominance, transforming play into spectacle.
3. **Balloon:** Denotes fragility and entertainment, but connotes the emptiness of consumerist pleasure- bright and attractive but ultimately fragile.
4. **Handmade Bow and Arrow:** Denotes a simple weapon; connotes resourcefulness and cultural tradition. It signifies the ingenuity of the marginalized, making do with available materials.
5. **Flute:** Perhaps the most potent sign in the film. Denotatively a musical instrument, connotatively it symbolizes culture, tradition, and human spirit. Its melody, gentle yet persistent, functions as a counter-discourse to the gun’s aggression.
6. **Toy tower:** Signifying the material concrete of hopes and ambitions, used as a symbol to crush the working class, which is then made to fall in the last shot by the affluent boy’s robotic toy itself, suggesting a larger scheme of societal foundation and the idea of humanity.

The film’s sound design amplifies these semiotic contrasts. Without dialogue, sound becomes central: the loudness of manufactured toys versus the subtle melody of the flute encodes the opposition between industrial consumer culture and indigenous creativity. The final return of the flute after the gunshot signifies resilience: a semiotic statement that music and creativity can outlast violence and domination.

Representation of Power and Resistance

Through these narrative and semiotic strategies, *Two* constructs a powerful allegory of power and resistance. The affluent boy’s dominance represents structural power- economic privilege, consumerist culture, and, by extension, global capitalist hegemony. His control over space (the home) and resources (factory-made toys) encodes structural inequality.

The street child embodies resistance. Deprived of material abundance, he responds with creativity and persistence. His toys are handmade, his music deeply cultural. His resistance is not direct confrontation but symbolic endurance. The flute, returning after the gunshot, encodes the idea that marginalized voices cannot be permanently silenced.

Stuart Hall’s encoding/decoding model is especially relevant here. Ray encodes the narrative as an allegory of class struggle, but different audiences may decode it differently. A dominant-hegemonic reading interprets it as a critique of inequality. A negotiated reading might see it as merely a rivalry between children with a hint of social commentary. A resistant reading may valorize the street child as the true hero, a subaltern figure asserting dignity against domination.

Barthes’ idea of myth further illuminates the ideological stakes. The myth of consumer culture- that factory-made toys are superior- is destabilized by the flute’s enduring melody. The myth of the powerful silencing the weak is challenged by the persistence of resistance. By exposing these myths, *Two* transforms play into a site of ideological struggle.

Interdisciplinary Relevance

The richness of *Two* lies in its ability to speak across disciplines.

1. **Sociology:** The film illustrates class stratification and the reproduction of inequality, showing how even childhood play is marked by socio-economic divisions.
2. **Political Science:** It encodes power relations and resistance, mirroring larger geopolitical dynamics of the Cold War and postcolonial struggles.
3. **Childhood Studies:** It highlights how play is not merely innocent but socially constructed, reflecting broader inequalities.
4. **Cultural Studies:** It demonstrates how cultural texts encode ideological meanings and how audiences decode them.
5. **Media Studies:** It showcases cinema's ability to communicate complex ideas visually, without words.

By operating at the intersection of these disciplines, *Two* exemplifies the interdisciplinary value of cinema as a cultural text. Its brevity does not diminish its richness; rather, it intensifies its ability to encode multiple layers of meaning in a compact form.

DISCUSSION

The silent duel between the affluent boy and the street child in *Two* is deceptively simple, yet it encapsulates layered discourses of power, class, and resistance. When examined through the lenses of Cultural Studies and Semiotics, the film reveals how Satyajit Ray mobilizes images, objects, and soundscapes as signifiers of broader social tensions.

The wealthy boy's imported toys- robots, guns, trumpets- function as signs of industrial modernity, consumer culture, and dominance. From a semiotic standpoint, these toys carry denotative meanings of play but acquire connotative meanings of aggression, superiority, and technological power. In contrast, the street child's handmade flute and drum emerge as counter-signs of tradition, creativity, and survival. While his resources are limited, his ability to create music from the simplest materials embodies resilience. Stuart Hall's encoding/decoding model helps explain this opposition: Ray encodes the power imbalance into the objects, while viewers decode them through their own cultural positions- some may empathize with the street child's defiance, while others may see inevitability in the wealthy boy's dominance.

The mise-en-scène furthers this opposition. The rich boy operates within the confines of his upper-class home, surrounded by possessions, while the poor boy inhabits the open street, defined not by ownership but by improvisation. Their spaces, though geographically close, are socially worlds apart. Cinematically, Ray crosscuts between the two children, creating a dialectical rhythm that mirrors the larger Cold War climate of two opposing blocs. Yet the struggle is also distinctly local: the boy's imported toys suggest the infiltration of Western consumer culture into India, while the flute signifies indigenous identity and cultural continuity.

What makes *Two* relevant even today is its portrayal of resistance. The rich boy's mechanical toys grow louder, harsher, and more violent, but they cannot silence the flute's melody. The film ends not with a resolution but with the endurance of the street child's music. Semiotic analysis positions this as a mythic statement: modernity and privilege may dominate materially, but cultural identity and human creativity persist. In the language of Cultural Studies, this is an act of oppositional reading- an assertion that the marginalized can resist hegemonic forces not by matching their power, but by asserting alternative values.

In contemporary contexts of global inequality, *Two* speaks with renewed urgency. The film's silence ensures universality: it needs no translation to expose asymmetries of wealth and culture. Moreover, in a media-saturated world where images increasingly substitute for speech, Ray's visual storytelling anticipates today's reliance on symbolic communication. The film, therefore, is not merely a historical artifact but a living text- relevant for disciplines ranging from sociology and political science to film and media studies.

By grounding *Two* in Cultural Studies and Semiotics, this discussion demonstrates that Ray's short film is less

about two children and more about the persistent negotiation between domination and resistance. Its continuing resonance lies in its ability to condense a global narrative into the intimate space of play, reminding us that even in silence, cinema can articulate the loudest truths.

CONCLUSION

Satyajit Ray's *Two* (1964) demonstrates how cinema, even in its most minimal and silent form, can articulate complex narratives of class, power, and resistance. By presenting a conflict between two children, Ray condenses broader social, cultural, and political struggles into a microcosm that transcends time and geography. An analysis through Cultural Studies foregrounds how privilege and marginality operate not only in material possessions but also in symbolic practices, while Semiotics reveals how ordinary objects—flute, drum, robot, gun—become signifiers of ideological positions.

The film's enduring relevance lies in its capacity to speak to multiple disciplines simultaneously. For sociologists, it reflects structural inequality; for political scientists, it resonates with the Cold War anxieties of domination and defiance; for cultural theorists, it demonstrates how local creativity resists global consumerism. Most importantly, for film and media scholars, it is a reminder that the grammar of cinema is not confined to dialogue but thrives on visual storytelling, rhythm, and silence.

In today's world marked by widening economic disparities and the cultural homogenization of globalization, *Two* retains its critical edge. The persistence of the flute's melody, despite the overpowering noise of mechanical toys, is both a metaphor for survival and a call for resilience. Thus, the film endures not as a relic of Ray's oeuvre, but as a timeless text—one that insists on the power of the marginalized voice and the transformative potential of cinema as a medium of resistance.

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