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## Person-Indexing Registers, Stardom, Auteurism

*Registres d'indexation des personnes, célébrité et auteurisme*

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## Preface

- 1 The theme of the seminar for which this article was originally written was “Deixis and Enunciation Theory between Linguistic Anthropology and Semiotics.”<sup>1</sup> With this theme in mind, we might begin by observing that enunciation, as theorized by Émile Benveniste (1971), implicates *deixis*, insofar as deictics are those form classes of the virtuality that is *langue* which anticipate realized instances of discourse and, in the particular case of PERSON-indexing deictics, inhabited participant-roles in speech events (Jakobson 1957). From this perspective, what is important about deictics are their *indexical ground*—that is, that their meaning turns on a “real connection” or “existential relation” between a token-instance of the deictic class and its semiotic object (Peirce 2.287, 2.243; Nakassis 2018). Yet most indexicality as concerns discourse—to say nothing of the rest of semiosis—is unlike *deixis* (Silverstein 1976a); it is not grammaticalized, not referential, not overt, segmentable, or localizable in lexemic classes (Silverstein 1981), and thereby not easily reducible to decontextualized writable utterances (the bread and butter of the linguist). By contrast, most indexicality in discourse is distributed, global, emergent, and only by-degrees conventionalized—such “greasy parts,” as Erving Goffman (1964) called them, evaporate under conditions of decontextualization (Agha 2005). To find them you have to actually look at empirical events of semiosis in their contexts of happening.
- 2 Mutatis mutandis, we can extend the same point to enunciation and its subjectivity effects: most traces of enunciation are not reducible to personal pronouns (a point made by numerous continental semioticians; Metz 1987; Fontanille 1998; Paolucci 2022) nor to other semanticized, segmentable, localizable, referential categories; and, thus,

we should not look primarily for subjectivity/subjectification in such decontextualized traces but elsewhere.

- 3 But where? My suggestion is that we need to start from *indexical processes* in their full range, as intersecting functional dimensions of semiosis; in particular, as involving processes of shifting, rigidification, and typification.<sup>2</sup>
- 4 And if we follow this path, where do we end up? In this paper, I investigate one such destination, what I am calling *person-indexing registers*.

## I. Persona- and Person-Indexing Registers

- 5 Before getting into the details, let me quickly sketch out the distinction that I will pursue between *persona-indexing* and *person-indexing registers*. In the sociolinguistics literature, a speech register is a “way of speaking” (Halliday 1964), a repertoire of forms taken by users as appropriate to some social situation or activity—that is, that stereotypically index some aspect of their context of use, as with the language of the law, thieves’ cants, baby talk, sports-announcers talk, bureaucratic military speech, and the like (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Table 3.4. *Some features of ‘Sports announcer talk’*

(a) Omission of sentence-initial deictics (e.g., anaphors, determiners) and present-tense copula: e.g., [ <i>It’s a</i> ] <i>pitch to uh Winfield. [<i>It’s a</i>] strike. [<i>It’s</i>] one and one</i>
(b) Preposed location and motion predicates: e.g., <i>Over at third is Murphy. Coming left again is Diamond</i>
(c) Preponderance of result expressions e.g., <i>He throws for the out.</i>
(d) Epithets and heavy modifiers: e.g., <i>left-handed throwing Steve Howe . . . ; Larry Milburn, 3 for 4 yesterday, did not face . . .</i>
(e) Use of the simple present to describe contemporaneous activities e.g., <i>Burt ready, comes to Winfield and it’s lined to left but Baker’s there and backhands a sinker then throws it to Lopez</i>

Source: (Ferguson 1983)

Table 3.5. *American military register*

<i>Pentagon lexicon (‘Militarese’)</i>	<i>Standard English</i>
aerodynamic personnel decelerator	parachute
frame-supported tension structure	tent
personal preservation flotation device	life jacket
interlocking slide fastener	zipper
wood interdental stimulator	toothpick
vertically deployed anti-personnel device	bomb
portable handheld communications inscriber	pencil
pre-dawn vertical insertion	a night-time parachute drop
manually powered fastener-driving impact device	hammer

Source: (Lutz 1990)

Some examples of (persona-indexing) speech registers.

From Agha 2007, pp. 164, 166.

- 6 Linguistic anthropologists have critically expanded on this, pointing out that preeminent of the stereotypic values of such registers are the *social types of personhood* that organize such repertoires (Agha 2007) and which can be indexically enacted by speakers in and by using them. Speech registers, thus, involve conventionalized social

voices (Bakhtin 1982) that speakers can cast as those of speech-event participants (prototypically, their own): legalese is a way of speaking as a lawyer, sports-announcer talk as a sports announcer, military speech as a defense expert, baby talk as an affectionate adult (to a baby), and so on and so forth.<sup>3</sup> Speaking “in” register, thus, indexically invokes such social types and, more specifically, character-izes their contexts of enunciation with the stereotypes associated with such personae. Since a social persona is indexed, we can these registers *persona-indexing registers*.<sup>4</sup>

- 7 We can contrast this with *person-indexing registers*, where the repertoire of speech forms in use do not invoke a social type of personhood, but rather where the figure in question is an individuated entity (a social token, as it were), prototypically a biographical person.<sup>5</sup> In such cases, by indexing an individuated existent as *an individual* such repertoires of signs and their associated indexical values are construed as proper to them, and perhaps even—under the right circumstances—“their” property.<sup>6</sup>
- 8 Perhaps this sounds like what in linguistics is called the *idiolect*, the lower-bound of systematicity in Bloomfieldian structuralism: the linguistic “system” of an individual speaker (Bloch 1948; Johnstone 2000; cf. Paul 1880; see Nakassis n.d.a). A person-indexing register and an idiolect are not the same thing, however.<sup>7</sup> Our question is *not* what is the unique linguistic signature of the individual. Rather, it is what are the features of semiosis that are enregistered, or conventionally recognized for some social domain, as indexically proper to some so-individuated and personified entity (whatever that happens to be in some culture or other, be it a biographic individual, a famous kula shell, an heirloom, a musical instrument, a brand corporation, a spirit, or an AI chatbot).<sup>8</sup>
- 9 This distinction is important because what counts as an individual or a person cannot be taken for granted and, perhaps, cannot be known or exist outside of such processes of enregisterment. Further, even assuming the individual as a stable entity to which we can correlate linguistic behaviors, not all of the demonstrable variation at the level of individual speakers is taken as socially meaningful by hearers as unique to or characteristic of that individual. Moreover, much of what is taken as indexically proper to some individual is not unique to them, in fact, in principle *will never* be unique to them insofar as one can always cite, imitate, and appropriate such person-indexing forms.<sup>9</sup> The question, thus, isn’t what forms are objectively unique to the individual so much as what forms are taken as indexically proper to them for some social domain of sign users, that is, are construed as differential indexes of them as individuals (however conceptualized). How does this happen and what are the implications therein?

## Semiotics of Persona-Indexing Registers

- 10 As is apparent, registers are ideological constructs. They are cultural models that orient how semiotic variation is discerned as pragmatically meaningful by some social collectivity or other (Silverstein 2003, 2022; Agha 2005, 2007; Gal 2018; Gal and Irvine 2019). One can’t study registers, thus, without appealing to local cultural conceptions of semiosis (for speech registers, of language) and personhood. Moreover, speech registers are based on a referentialist (functional) conceit, namely, that they are “different ways of saying the same thing,” where the “same thing” is propositional, referential meaning and “different ways” denotes pragmatic, social meaning that does not contribute to the denotationality of the acts within which such enregistered

speech-forms are being used.<sup>10</sup> For a certain social domain of language users, for example, “method” (as in, “this *method* is loud”) and “cannabis sativa” (as in “this *cannabis sativa* is odiferous”) differ not in what they referentially contribute to an utterance but in their non-referential indexicality, in this case, differentiating speaker as contrastively aligned with social identities and worlds of meaning, say, between being a pot-head from New York or a botanist; similarly, using “yinz” rather than “you all” or [da:n't<sup>h</sup>a:n] rather than ['daʊn,təʊn] differ not in their denotational meaning but in their capacity, through phono-lexical variation, to index a regional and class identity of a particular sort, here, being a working-class Pittsburgher (Johnstone *et al.* 2006; Figure 2).

Figure 2

Some features of “Pittsburghese” (and surrounding region of Pittsburgh in Western Pennsylvania, USA)		Some Metapragmatic Stereotypes of Personhood (of the Pittsburgher/ Yinzer)	
Phonological	- diphthong /aw /realized as (a:) - laxing of tense vowels /i/ and /u/ before /r/ and /l/	age:	unmarked (oldest generation speakers)
Prosodic	- final falling rather than rising intonation on some Y/N questions	class:	working-class; later: by-degrees unmarked
Lexical	- <i>slippy</i> for ‘slippery’ - <i>jab</i> for ‘tease’ - <i>nebbby</i> for ‘nosy’ - <i>redd up</i> for ‘clean up’	neighborhood:	“Southside”, “Lawrenceville” later: “Pittsburgh” per se
	- <i>gumband</i> for ‘rubberband’ - <i>jumbo</i> for ‘bologna sauce’ - <i>chipped ham</i> for ‘thinly sliced ham’ - <i>n’at</i> for ‘and stuff like that’	qualities of speech/speaker:	1950s-1960s media: “odd”, “amusing but undesirable”, “the nasal way of talking”, “ignorant”; interviews: uneducated, non-standard; later: “authentic”, “local”
Morpho-syntactic	- <i>yinz</i> (2nd pers. plural) - <i>needs/want</i> + past participle for ‘needs/wants + infinitive’ (e.g., “this shirt needs ironed,” “the customer wants served”)	regional identity:	since 1970s(?): “authentic” Pittsburgher (older generations)
		ironic stance:	since 1990s(?): “Yinzer” (ironic, urban hipness) (youngest generations)

Some repertoire forms and enactable stereotypes of “Pittsburghese”.

Adapted from Johnstone *et al.* 2006, pp. 77–104.

- 11 In short, speech registers (and semiotic registers more generally) are virtual schemas that mediate the indexical meaningfulness of variation in speech (or semiosis more generally). They are thus *metapragmatic* phenomena—they reflexively take as their semiotic object the pragmatic meaning of other signs. But to say that they are virtual schemas is to say that they have scope over actual events without being reducible to any single event, which is to say that they are *interdiscursive* metapragmatic phenomena.<sup>11</sup> This doesn’t mean, however, that they are independent of specific events. Indeed, registers only live in and by the events of discourse that put them into play; they emerge out of instances of discourse even as they necessarily circulate beyond them (Wortham 2006). Such historical, interdiscursive processes by which register phenomena emerge, are transformed, and disappear are what linguistic anthropologists have called *enregisterment* (Silverstein 2003; Agha 2007).
- 12 But if registers are metapragmatic models of enactable indexical value that zone off repertoires of sign forms as sharing non-referential indexical meanings (namely, metapragmatic stereotypes of persona types), registers should not be thought as “bins” or “lists” of discrete signs—as the tabular, dictionary-like representations of Figures 1–2 would suggest—for register phenomena, to repeat, only ever live *in/through* real-time events in which their repertoire-forms are enunciated; that is, enregistered repertoire-

forms always unfold in arrays of mutually co-textualizing signs (Agha 2005). From this point of view, registers are metapragmatic models that mediate processes of *entextualization* (Silverstein 2022). In saying this, we are concerned with the *texture* of semiosis—the emergent property of co-occurrence relations that produce signifying wholes (Fontanille 1998), or *texts*, which in their semi-symbolic—or iconic indexical—form figure some “content” in relationship to some equally so-constituted “context.”

- 13 The concepts of *entextualization* and *text* (Bauman and Briggs 1990; Silverstein and Urban 1996) extend and generalize Roman Jakobson’s (1958) notion of the “poetic function,” whereby the qualia of indexically contiguous signs afford emergent, iconic resonances that draw attention to the message form in its palpable materiality, thereby forming what Jakobson, after Hopkins, called “figures in sound.” The poetic function, thus, is an emergent metapragmatic function of (i.e., condition on) textual coherence (Silverstein 1993), where signs cohere and thus figure something at the level of their sensible qualities. Let’s call this dimension of textual coherence, *aesthetic textuality* and the text that emerges out of such a process an *image-text* (iconic coherence, that which is depicted or formed; see Nakassis 2019, 2023a).<sup>12</sup> We might ask about other kinds of textual coherence that are based on the emergent orderedness/discreteness—the *entextualization*—of other semiotic grounds: for example, the information or narrative structure of a discourse is what we can call a *denotational text* (symbolic coherence, “what is said”). Similarly, we can ask after coherence at the level of pragmatic (indexical) signs, what is figured as done in and by what is said or depicted (that is, in and by denotational or image-texts). We call this an *interactional text*: diagrams of action that emerge from the coherence relations, from the poetics, of indexical semiosis. Think of adjacency pairs like question/answer or request/grant (Schegloff and Sacks 1973), interaction rituals like greetings (Irvine 1974), or discursive genres like lectures (Goffman 1981) as examples of conventionalized interactional texts (see Silverstein 2022 for more discussion).
- 14 The point is that registers are one kind of model of interactional textuality, where signs are entextualized by gelling with each other, iconically resonating with each other, not based on their denotational meanings per se nor based on their iconic qualia alone, but because their non-referential indexicalities—the metapragmatic stereotypes they invoke—are construed as “fitting together” or being in appropriate co-occurrence relations. Registers, in short, exist under conditions of *entextualization* and *co(n)textualization*, through textual juxtapositions of signs with each other along some semiotic (indexical) ground as construed by some cultural (metapragmatic) ideology.
- 15 As it turns out, however, we never encounter registers in isolation nor is communicative activity ever only in *one* register; rather, what we find are register-tokens in polyphonic relations to other semiotic elements that exceed or lay beyond the register in question, both at the level of the text and in relation to its *co(n)texts*.<sup>13</sup> It is for this reason that every instantiation of a register is a moment of its possible transformation, of the *co(n)textualization* of its forms relative to other signs that create nonce configurations—what Agha (2005) calls *tropes*—that may, in turn, produce novel, contextualized pragmatic meanings. Such innovations may themselves be incorporated into the registers on which they trope (as part of their normative or conventional meanings), just as older forms and meanings may come to be transformed or lost. This dialectic is the ongoing process of *enregisterment* at work in and across every event of *entextualization/contextualization*.

- 16 The final point to notice is that persona-indexing registers coordinate two indexical relations, each of which have distinct indexical targets. At one level, a register involves a non-referential indexical relation between a set of repertoire forms (entextualized in some event of semiosis) and some figure of personhood; such a metapragmatic stereotype is a kind of cultural ideology about semiosis (“people like this speak or act or dress or ... like that”) and is thus, we might say, nomicallly calibrated to the event of enunciation. By *nomic calibration*, we mean that the indexical target (the stereotype of personhood) stands in no particular timespace to the enunciation that indexically invokes it (Silverstein 1993, 2021; Nakassis 2020).<sup>14</sup> When actualized in a contextualized event, however, such a virtual figure of personhood is instantiated in some particular way: through a shifter-like indexicality, where the first indexicality is leveraged to ‘point to’ some contextual variable of the speech event itself, canonically the inhabitant of the participant-role of speaker. When I speak in academic English, I point to myself as inhabiting the figure of the academic, and when you use it, the origo shifts to you, and so on and so forth. I may also index other things as well, of course: for example, the particular situation we are in as a type of situation (for example, a lecture), just as a register may point to the addressee or some co-present bystander, as with registers of honorification, and so and so forth. In such moments, the register’s indexicality is *reflexively* calibrated to the event/origo of its enunciation (since the metapragmatic sign is coincident with the pragmatic event it regiments), though other configurations are also possible, as with all shifty indexicals: for example, where the use of a speech register is used to point to some other timespace or element of it—consider the earlier example of “method” and “cannabis,” where the indexical stereotype was in a mention mode and thus shifted away from the *hic et nunc* of enunciation; further consider that my usage just now harkened back to a previous moment in my own discourse, citing my mere mention (Nakassis 2013a), and thus standing in what we call a *reportive calibration*; in such cases, the deployment of the register is put in quotational marks and its indexicalities are “shifted out” (Fontanille 1998) to another event that is not the event of enunciation (hence, it is non-reflexive) but is in some kind of timespace relationship of continuity with it (hence, it is non-nomic).

## Semiotics of Person-Indexing Registers

- 17 With the above in mind, let us turn to person-indexing registers. Person-indexing registers share similar features to persona-indexing registers, with a critical difference being that the figure indexically invoked is not a nomicallly calibrated social type but an individuated entity in a *reportive calibration* to the event of entextualization—since, presumably (i.e., by stipulation), the person/entity indexed exists in some historical contiguity with the event of using the register. This is a slight difference, but a consequential one, as we’ll see.
- 18 Notice that the enregisterment of a person-indexing register presupposes the (prior) individuation of what is indexed; moreover, this often involves (or at least is imagined to involve) the conferring of what Saul Kripke (1980) called a *rigid designator*—in many societies, the bestowal of a proper name, a performative act where some existent is ritually individuated (via token-referring shifters: pointing gestures, demonstratives, etc.) and constituted as an individual worthy of recognition by the name.<sup>15</sup> Rigid



designation is the semiotic infrastructure of person-indexing registers precisely because of its peculiar indexicality.

- 19 A name like “Aristotle,” Kripke argues, once fixed to its referent, refers to that referent across its various contexts of use, and further, in any “possible world” for those party to the original performative act of nomination, be it directly, or through the “speech chains” that emanate from that baptismal event. What Kripke means by “possible worlds” is that, once a referent is fixed by a name, in any counterfactual situation where some semantic or stereotypic intension of the referent is hypothetically otherwise (say, Aristotle turns out not to be the student of Plato or not to be the teacher of Alexander), that from the perspective of the speech chain of naming, that is, as tethered to the name’s presupposed performative event of baptism (as the name’s indexical origo), then the reference still holds. Even if everything that was truly predicable of Aristotle turned out to be false (including that he even existed), we could still refer to the entity so-fixed by that act by virtue of the name; hence, in the sentence “Aristotle never existed,” “Aristotle” still refers! On this account, the name, thus, presumes upon an identity beyond all intensional properties (Žižek 1989); or rather, we might say, it *stipulates some such identity* independently of any of the characteristics, qualities, or stereotypes about its referent, simply by having fixed its referent at some moment, and thus across future moments. In this sense, rigid designators are *reportively calibrated* to their putative events of baptismal origin, which serve as the ever-after origo of the name in its referential indexicality.<sup>16</sup> (The latter thus evinces, as well, a kind of nomic calibration, as Luke Fleming [2024] has argued.<sup>17</sup>) It is this fixing that makes such signs generally unshiftable across contexts of quotation, translation, and the like. To shift the referent of the rigid designator, rather, requires resetting the origo by performing a novel baptism and thus inaugurating a new “speech chain” (Butler 1997).
- 20 The point for us is that proper names, however else they signify (and they signify in lots of ways!), *refer* based on their capacity to rigidly designate. And it is this property that makes them important for person-indexing registers and the diverse phenomena they organize (reputation, fame, celebrity, branding, stigma, and the like). For it is *because* rigid designators (names, but also other such signs like faces) refer independently of their semantics or stereotypes or contexts of use that they can, in turn, *communicate* those meanings—and in particular, those social indexical values that they pick up through their interdiscursive travels—back to the entities to which they refer.<sup>18</sup>
- 21 Rigid designators like proper names are semiotic batteries for social pragmatic power; they absorb and release the social meanings that are generated (i.e., entextualized) in their contexts back to their referents. As such, the rigid designator is an intertextual principle linking all such events in which something is predicated of or done to or around a name (Munn 1986). Which is to say, the name is an intertextual metapragmatics that anchors signs that co-occur with it *to it*, indeed, that allows such signs to be incorporated into the personage of the name, that is, to become indexes of the person. To return to our earlier point: registers live through events of entextualization and contextualization—and thus innovative social meanings that are generated in context, and the signs that participate in them, can always be recouped back into, and reanalyzed as, elements of the register; in the case of person-indexing



registers, can be turned into signs proper to the person, reanalyzed as “theirs” in some way.

- 22 In short, with person-indexing registers, the name qua rigid designator anchors a wider set of repertoire forms which, in relation to (i.e., by being relayed through) the name, thus function as *rigid indexes*, signs that have as an indexical target (and, in some sense, origo) the individual denoted by the name.<sup>19</sup> While one of the indexical targets of a persona-indexing register is the nomically calibrated figure of personhood that is the register’s metapragmatic stereotype, by contrast, whenever repertoire forms of a person-indexing register are used, the indexical target is a reportively calibrated individuated entity (Figure 3), whoever happens to be animating the forms (including the entity itself).<sup>20</sup> If one speaks ‘like a politician’ (a class of persons, a social type) by using certain enregistered forms, one may also speak *like Barack Obama* (a specific person, a social token) by using forms enregistered as rigid indexes of *him* (Lempert 2011). (This includes Obama himself, of course.) If in the former case I enact a figure of personhood, in the latter I cite a person or some aspect of them. In doing so, I adorn myself with their personage (Munn 1986), even as I in turn become a vector of their reputation, for better or worse (one can, after all, *defame* someone by doing violence to signs proper to them, just as one may pay them homage). And in so adorning myself, I may even become an enregistered part of their repertoire, where my social existence itself becomes an index of the person in relation to which I am defined (as anyone with a badly behaved child in public knows).
- 23 To further consider these various points, I want to turn two types of person-indexing registers in the cinema: that of the star actor and of auteur director.<sup>21</sup>

Figure 3

	Persona-indexing register	Person-indexing register
<i>Indexical targets</i>	1. Social (stereo)type (of personhood) 2. Enunciating subject (speaker) * *other contextual variables possible, as with, e.g., honorific registers, avoidance registers (Fleming 2011)	1. Token-entity/individual 2. Enunciating subject* *other contextual singularities possible (e.g., historic events)
<i>Calibration types (indexical originēs)</i>	1. Nomic calibration of stereotype/persona to cultural world of belief 2. Reflexive calibration of (1) to event of enunciation (e.g., to speaker)	1. Reportive/(nomic) calibration to (presupposed) baptismal event (via “speech chain”) and to referent 2. Reflexive calibration of (1) to event of enunciation (e.g., to enunciating subject)
<i>Indexical type</i>	1. Symbolic index (to social type), 2. Shifter (non-referential, to speaker)	1. Rigid index (to token-individual), 2. Shifter (non-referential, to enunciating subject)
<i>Interactional schema</i>	Enacting/voicing(Speaker, figure) (i.e., inhabiting a social type of personhood)	Being/citing(Enunciating subject, entity) (i.e., inhabiting a social individuality)
<i>Repertoire</i>	Various: phono-lexico-syntactic, gestural, dress style, et cetera	Various: phono-lexico-syntactic, gestural, face, name, et cetera
<i>Default interactional text</i>	Speaker (indirectly) signals (voices) social identity through register coherent texts	Enunciating subject signals their individual identity through repertoire forms (and, if that enunciating subject is other than the target-individual, something of their own identity as well)

Some contrasts between persona- and person-indexing registers.

## II. Cinematic Person-Indexing Registers

- 24 In the cinema, any part of what Goffman (1974, 1981) called the *production format* can be the site for person-indexing enregisterment. In such cases, elements of filmic form—but really, a much wider set of cinematic repertoires of signs—come to be recognized as

indexes of the social actors who fill such enunciative roles: beyond their aesthetic qualia and their contribution to the image onscreen, beyond their involvement in building a narrative, traces of enunciation are enregistered to the personage of some individual, pointing beyond the text to the person who inhabits the role of editor, stylist, sound designer, cinematographer, et cetera, by presencing them within that text.<sup>22</sup> The two sites where such person-indexing enregisterment are most culturally elaborated, economically important, and politically contentious, of course, are the star actor and the auteur filmmaker, each of which I discuss in turn.

## Stardom as Person-Indexing Register

- 25 Stardom is organized semiotically as a person-indexing register, where a repertoire of forms is united in their non-referential/non-narrative indexicality,<sup>23</sup> and whose target is the individual star. With filmic stardom, we can say that the individual star not only is a criterial frame for entextualizing filmic coherence; their stardom is also therein an intertextual principle linking together the actor's multiple texts (Dyer 1979) and, further, is a virtual model of the pragmatics of the actor's cinematic (extratextual) influence (cf. Munn 1986): box-office pull, adoration, commodity investiture, and, in the South Indian context, electoral political influence. Indeed, star actors who play the hero in South Indian cinemas (and in particular, so-called mass heroes) are expected by fans to form political parties to represent them, and they often get involved in electoral politics during and after their film careers (Srinivas 2009; Prasad 2014; Nakassis 2017, 2019, 2023b).
- 26 Consider the Tamil film star, Rajinikanth. Rajinikanth is the stage name given to the biographical individual Sivaji Rao Gaekwad (b. 1950) by the director who broke him into the industry, K. Balachander. Rajinikanth began as a character actor, in particular, a villain in auteur-helmed realist "nativity" films in the mid-1970s, in the wake of the retirement of the previous generation of star heroes. After a series of popular films in which he stood out as an audience favorite, in the 1980s Rajini increasingly began to act in hero roles; and into the 1990s, in films that molded him in the image of the "*Puraṭci Talaivar*" (Revolutionary Leader), the *Makkaḷ Tilakam* (Pride of the People), M.G. Ramachandran (or MGR), the legendary "mass hero" of the previous generation who retired from cinema into the Chief Minister position of the state of Tamil Nadu until his death in 1987. Which is to say, Rajini's films in this period increasingly framed him through a form of populist heroism that had been, until then, the preserve of MGR's own person-indexing register (viz. "the MGR film"). Rajinikanth's films in this period more and more orbited around constructing his particular star image, framing him as a self-made man of the people (a former bus conductor who came from humble beginnings), but also as an invincible hero and object of desire like but distinct from MGR in key ways (e.g., as an anti-hero with vices; as dark-skinned; less romantically aloof; and with his own signature performance styles; see Rajanayagam 2015).
- 27 It is in this period that Rajinikanth became known as the "Superstar." While Rajinikanth began to be referred to as the Superstar as early as 1978 (in posters and other cinematic metadiscourse), it wasn't until the early 1990s that this star-designating epithet mandatorily appeared onscreen before his films began, starting with the hugely popular 1992 film *Annamalai* (dir. Suresh Krissna). The title sequence from *Annamalai* became a rigid index of Rajini's personage (Figure 4), iterated in and

adorning nearly every film of his afterwards (though with updated graphics and music since the mid-2000s).<sup>24</sup> This title sequence frames every Rajinikanth film as unfolding *in his names*, announcing that what follows—the film text proper, with its diegetic ups and downs, dialogues, songs, outfits, gestures, and characters—is ‘his,’ as being part of *his* personage and thus as enactable/citable indexes of him.

Figure 4



Rajini's iconic title-sequence and James-Bond-esque theme music: the letters of his stage name fly towards the audience against the backdrop of his epithet in marquee lights, and then—composed as his name—fly back *from* the audience onto the screen, announcing the film text as unfolding in his names.

- 28 Having achieved this level of stardom, every film of Rajini's is, from this perspective, an investment in his celebrity, a depositing of signs in the virtual bank of his stardom that thus become continually available to be redeployed within later films. Indeed, as he came into his own as the “Superstar,” Rajini's films increasingly saw more and more auto-citational references to his other films. Consider another example from *Annamalai* (1992), where Rajini's character, Annamalai looks into an old-time bioscope only to watch a montage of Rajini's previous films, replete with his most memorable scenes, iconic outfits, and signature gestures! But not just to his previous films, such auto-citatoriality in Rajinikanth's films also extends to his offscreen biography; for example, films of this period and since feature copious references to his offscreen personage: his stage name (Rajinikanth), birth name (Sivaji), birthday, background as a lowly bus conductor, his spirituality, dark skin, political ambitions, and the like.
- 29 The predicate used in Tamil to describe this star figure is the English-borrowed word *style*. As Rajinikanth fans put it, Rajinikanth means “style” and “style” means Rajinikanth because everything Rajini does is *stylish* (Nakassis 2016a). More specifically, *style* denotes those ostentatious and idiosyncratic acts Rajini consistently performs in

his films: his tricks of throwing cigarettes (or gum) into his mouth; his brisk gait and *stylish* dress; how he flips his shawl over his shoulder or crosses his legs; the way he spins around his sunglasses before putting them on or flips his bangs back when he turns his head; and perhaps above all, his twirling fingers and so-called “punch dialogues” (aphoristic one-liners; Nakassis 2017, 2019). Like the copious use of his names and references to his off-screen biography, all these elements are *de rigueur* parts of Rajini’s films from the 1990s onwards, serving as a constant reminder in his films that we are not simply watching characters in a diegesis but *Rajinikanth, the Superstar* himself, an entity whose auratic and powerful presence thereby suffuses the texts and contexts in which he appears.<sup>25</sup> Such citational elements, in their insistent iteration in and across such films, weave a poetic (inter)texture, a particular rhythm of cinematic experience, where what we encounter is felt to be manifestations (non-referential indexes downshifted as icons) of him, rigid indexes of his all-encompassing enunciation.

- 30 These rigid indexes—culled from Rajini’s “film history” (as it is called in the Tamil film industry)—constitute a repertoire of forms construed by his fan publics as proper to him (Figure 5). In indexing him, such signs *multiply* his person, each element in its movement across time and space an expansion of his person (Munn 1986). Rajini circulates through the rigid indexes of his natural figure (as a biographical individual), his staged figures (as characters), and most of all, his star figure, that intertextual metapragmatics that unifies all of his films, all of his repertoire forms together as instances of the “same,” of the “Superstar” (on the notion of “figure,” see Goffman 1974, pp. 524ff.). It is precisely through this stardom, this rigid enregisterment, that the film texts in which he is incarnated are shaped, mediated in their poetic form and pragmatic functions; at a limit, his stardom influences every stage of the text’s becoming and every element of its reception.<sup>26</sup>
- 31 Of course, Rajinikanth’s films do not *only* feature elements enregistered to his personage; most of the semiotic elements in his films are not peculiar to him: some are shared with other stars of his stature (as befit a star hero)—such as special-effects fight sequences, copious close-ups, slow-motion shots; others are common to the “language” of narrative film more generally—such as editing patterns, camera movements, and the like; still others may be linked to other formations (e.g., other actors; to particular directors, editors, music directors; genres) just as some are innovative forms that have never appeared before in any of his films (nor ever again). This recalls our earlier point that there is a heterogeneity within and an open-edge to every register-instantiating text, where signs that are not part of the register in question co-textualize and are juxtaposed with elements of the register, and where innovative pragmatic effects may be generated therein. Yet this open edge is not a hard boundary beyond the register so much as a kind of interface, a semiotic zone across which a sort of primitivized accumulation may take place. That is, such heterogeneity and creativity, in being mediated by and encompassed within the textuality of the star (that is, by being entextualized as part of a text whose coherence is constituted by register-tokens of the star’s person-indexing register), is always liable to be swept up into and reanalyzed as part of his person-indexing register. The star, thus, functions as a kind of gravity well, drawing those signs that co-occur with signs of him *into* him. Here, signs that are ‘no one’s’ in particular come to be incorporated as signs proper-to the star, where a contingent flick of the wrist in one film, a phrase (“*itu eppadi irukku?*” from 16

*Vayathinile Vayathinile* [1977]), or the presence of a snake onscreen (in *Bairavi* [1978]), become recognizable, and thus iterable, signs of Rajini in later semiosis.<sup>27</sup>

Figure 5.

	Repertoire forms		Metapragmatic stereotype	Indexical target (& often origo)
	Type	Notable Examples		
Linguistic	Personal name (of natural figure) Titles (of star figure) Character names (of staged figures)	Sivajirao Gaekwad, Rajini(kanth) Superstar, <i>Style Mannan</i> (King of Style) Talaivar (leader) <i>Baasha</i> , <i>Padayappa</i> , etc.	"Style", "Heroism"	Superstar Rajinikanth (as star/natural figure; i.e., a metapragmatic stereotype of a person [qua personage])
	"Punch dialogues"	E.g., "Itu eppadi irukku" ( <i>Pathinaru Vayathinile</i> [1976]); "Oru tadave sonna, nūru tadave sonna mātri" ( <i>Baasha</i> [1995]); <i>En valai tani valai</i> ( <i>Padayappa</i> [1999]), etc.		
Bodily/ Performance	Finger gestures (w/swoosh effect)	E.g., <i>Baasha</i> , <i>Padayappa</i> , <i>Baba</i> (2002; 'Katham Katham'), etc. (Nakassis 2017)		
	Tricks with sunglasses, cigarette, gum, shawls, etc.	E.g., <i>Ninaithale Inikkum</i> (1979), <i>Geraafar</i> (1985), <i>Padayappa</i> , <i>Sivaji</i> (2007)		
	Gait (spood of)	Various		
	Face (smile and eyes in particular)	Various		
Filmic	Stylish dress, hair style	Various		
	"Superstar" title sequence	<i>Annamalai</i> (1992) and films since		
	Introductory song	E.g., "Vanthenda Paalkaran" ( <i>Annamalai</i> ), "Nān autokkāran, autokkāran" ( <i>Baasha</i> ), "Oruvan oruvan mutalāli" ( <i>Muthu</i> [1995]), typically sung by SP Balasubramaniam; since genericized to other heroes		
	Frontal aesthetics, slow-motion/freeze-frame shots of eyes, face	E.g., <i>Baasha</i> , <i>Arunachalam</i> (1997), since genericized to other heroes		
	Intertextual references to other Rajini characters and films	Various (e.g., <i>Annamalai</i> , <i>Sivaji</i> )		
	References to off-screen biography	E.g., as bus-driver ( <i>Baasha</i> ), as non-Tamil ( <i>Padayappa</i> ), his birthday ( <i>Lingaa</i> [2014]), political ambitions, rivalry with Jayalalitha ( <i>Padayappa</i> , <i>Baba</i> )		
	Religious references (to Rajini's spirituality)	Rudrah necklace; his films/heroes named after Hindu deities ( <i>Annamalai</i> , <i>Arunachalam</i> , <i>Padayappa</i> ), religious plots lines (e.g., <i>Baba</i> )		
	Other	Snake as good-luck charm (after <i>Bairavi</i> [1978]), used in, e.g., <i>Tambikku Enna Ooru</i> [1984], <i>Annamalai</i> , <i>Padayappa</i> )		

Some elements of Rajini's person-indexing register.

NB: an enlarged version of this figure is at the end of the article

- 32 It is important to see that the repertoire of such stardom, and the open-edge of its force field, is not simply limited to the screen or to the body/personage of the star-actor; it is also propagated through citations of him by other subjects, in particular, through the voices and bodies of his fans. In South India, stars like Rajinikanth have thousands and thousands of organized fan clubs. Such clubs, which are almost exclusively made up of men, engage in various activities: in addition to talking about the star, such clubs organize festivities for first day shows, put up billboards for new releases and other events (Figure 6), celebrate other special days (like the star's birthday), as well as engage in social service (donating supplies to school children, blood drives, and the like) and, when stars go into politics, in political activity. All such activities take place 'in the name' of the star and are encouraged by such actors to produce goodwill on their behalf (and to dissuade fans from engaging in negative activity that would defame their star value).<sup>28</sup>



Figure 6.



Some billboards created by Rajinikanth fans.

Top-left: <https://kelisdigitalprinting.blogspot.com/2015/12/super-star-rajini-birthday.html>; top-right: <https://graphiczonetiruvavur.blogspot.com/2011/06/>; bottom: <https://www.thenewsminute.com/tamil-nadu/he-cant-change-banner-culture-activists-fume-illegal-rajini-hoardings-fill-chennai-roads>.

- 33 Notice how in the billboards in Figure 6, the name and face of the fan are intercalated in indexical intimacy with the name and face of the star (who himself is intercalated with other stars; in the bottom-right poster, e.g., MGR; cf. Bate 2009).<sup>29</sup> In such moments, the fan appears *in and through* the fame of the star, the actor's stardom citationally borrowed by the fan and put to use in their own local projects of person-indexing enregisterment (Nakassis 2016a). And yet, it is precisely and perhaps only through such citational activities, where the fame of the star is distributed among his followers, who thus become indexes of him, that stardom is itself constructed and proven as real, confirmed only as signs of him are disseminated through others' citations and yet gathered back and returned to him as proper-to his person. And, again, the semiotic infrastructure/medium of this citational assemblage is the rigid indexicality of the person-indexical enregisterment that orients itself to and anchors itself in the rigid designators of the star (his name and face). All such enregistered signs are the vehicles of his presence, fame, and influence, just as they are the threads that weave the poetics of his filmic entextualization and of his dissemination into, encompassment of, and claims on the spatiotemporally expansive cinematic contexts in which his texts, that is, in which *he* travels.
- 34 In this is a more general lesson, one made by the late Nancy Munn (1986) some time ago: to be a person, to be a subject in a meaningful cultural way—as a star or as a mundane individual—is to always be more than one's own existence as a body in a time and space; it is to have a reality detached from one's own body, virtually expanded by being circulated through signs of the self; it is to act, to enunciate at a distance through

one's indexical proxies. To be a person, is to have such an extended social being; and for this, one must be *enregistered* through the semiotic processes we have been outlining.

## Auteurism as Person-Indexing Register

- 35 Fame and the presencing of biographic individuals—or other person-like entities—in/by film-texts through rigid indexes of them are not only the preserve of star actors. As already noted, any nameable entity who leaves a trace on the filmic text's enunciation has a foot in the door to such enregisterment processes. Here, I focus on a role in the cinematic production format that has received much attention in film criticism and film studies: the director; and, in particular, the director as *auteur*. *Auteur* in English doesn't simply mean the director as author; rather this term (with its French provenance and enregistered stereotypy, note!<sup>30</sup>) connotes something more: the director as *artiste*, a creative visionary who stands above the film and in whose name it circulates (precisely because it expresses "his" [*sic*] vision), and relative to which informed viewers—*connoisseurs*—interpret their filmic experience.<sup>31</sup> The *auteur*, in other words, is like the star (and may, in fact, also be one; Corrigan 1991): a metapragmatic function that regiments filmic entextualization—as a basis for textual coherence—for those in the *auteur*-register's social domain (those who know what—that is, who—to look for in "appreciating" film "art"). Moreover, the *auteur* is an intertextual metapragmatic function (an "author function"; Foucault 1969) around which coheres an *oeuvre*. Under such conditions, as with the star, textual coherence is mediated by intertextual coherence (Nakassis 2023a).
- 36 What are the signs of an *auteur*? Of a director with vision? With *panache*? The answer to this question constitutes a whole branch of film criticism and film theory: *la politique des auteurs* in mid-century France and, inspired by it, so-called "auteur theory" in the English-speaking world (Sarris 1962; Wollen 1972; Bordwell 1979), a "theory" devoted to how to forensically read films for rigid indexes of a director's unique "touch." *Auteur* theory, in other words, is an institutionalized semiotic ideology and hermeneutic practice that functions as a metapragmatics for the entextualization of film, indeed, that construes the textuality of film for its person-indexing repertoire forms, just as the fan "reads" a Rajinikanth film for performance signs of the star's personage.
- 37 As an example, consider the *auteur par excellence*, Alfred Hitchcock. Hitchcock is a director often mentioned for his "signature style" and "unique flair" (Žižek 2004:257). As François Truffaut, who spearheaded the *politiques des auteurs* in 1950s France, says, in an introduction to his interviews with Hitchcock:
- Because he exercises such complete control over all the elements of his films and imprints his personal concepts at each step of the way, Hitchcock has a distinctive style of his own. He is undoubtedly one of the few filmmakers on the horizon today whose screen signature can be identified as soon as the picture begins.<sup>32</sup> (Truffaut 1967, p. 18, my underlining)
- 38 Perusing how film critics, cinephiles,<sup>33</sup> and academics (e.g., Deleuze 1986, pp. 197–215; Allen and Ishii-Gonzales 2004) discuss Hitchcock's "screen signature"—those for whom the proper name "Hitchcock" anchors a person-indexing register—what can we say about the repertoire of Hitchcock's register, of those elements that are entextualized by his viewers as rigid indexes of the *auteur* himself, of his enunciative presence in "his" texts?



- 39 Figure 7 presents elements that function as indexes which cinephiles, in online and in-print metadiscourses,<sup>34</sup> have noted as particular to Hitchcock's films; these are signs which participate in giving his texts the feel, the texture, of a Hitchcock (note the use of the indefinite article to denote a token of the Hitchcock series-type).

Figure 7

Plot thematics/structuring elements	
- "Themes":	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o mistaken-identity, wrong-man accused (e.g., <i>North by Northwest</i> (Wollen 2013[1972], pp. 181, 184–85);</li> <li>o chaos and irrationality underneath the ordinary (e.g., <i>Birds</i>) (Wollen 2013[1972], p. 182; Žižek 2004, p. 262);</li> <li>o obsession, fascination (e.g., <i>Rear Window</i>) (Wollen 2013[1972], pp. 183).</li> </ul>
- Plot/suspense structure:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o (1) secret of a character kept from other characters, but to which the audience has access;</li> <li>o (2) close calls that tease secret's revelation with the character fearful, "near miss effect" with audience helpless to do anything;</li> <li>o (3) surprise twist in revelation of the secret to relieve the tension.</li> </ul>
- Linking of suspense with "gallows humor" (Narenmore 2004)	
- Use of a "MacGuffin"—a word popularized by, and associated with, Hitchcock in particular (e.g., in <i>North by Northwest</i> , the art statue with a secret around it). (NB: A MacGuffin is some detail or object that is a major issue—object of desire or worry—for the characters but which, in itself, is totally unimportant (for the viewers to know).)	
- Recurrent motifs:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o stairways for suspense (e.g., <i>Vertigo</i>);</li> <li>o birds as omens of bad luck (e.g., <i>Birds</i>);</li> <li>o falling from high places/acrophobia (e.g., <i>North by Northwest</i>, <i>Vertigo</i>);</li> <li>o doubles (Rosenblatt 2004);</li> <li>o spirals (Žižek 2004, p. 261).</li> </ul>
- Extraordinary climaxes at public monuments: e.g., Mt. Rushmore ( <i>North by Northwest</i> ) or Golden Gate Bridge ( <i>Vertigo</i> )	
- Familiar places rendered strange through tension and drama and fear (Wollen 2013[1972], p. 183).	
Character types	
- Domineering mothers (e.g., <i>Psycho</i> ) (Wollen 2013[1972], pp. 184–85);	
- Charming, upper-class, attractive villains.	
Casting	
- Casting the same actors and personnel; in particular, icy blond heroines: e.g., Grace Kelly and her later "surrogates": Ingrid Bergman, Doris Day, Kim Novak, Tippi Hedren (whom Hitchcock presumably styled in the image of Kelly).	
- Hitchcock himself appears in all of his films in hidden, cameos.	
Cinematic elements	
- Minimal dialogue for narration, visual storytelling (Rosenblatt 2004);	
- Understated acting, shots of actors' blank expressions (McElhaney 2004);	
- "Watch the listening" shots of characters' uptake of others' speech/action; in particular, in shot / point-of-view shot / reaction shot sequences;	
- Use of color with symbolic meanings:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Technicolor, surrealism: imagery (e.g., dream-sequence in <i>Vertigo</i>);</li> <li>o Marked lighting contrasts (darkness for impending doom).</li> </ul>
- Camerawork:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Use of marked (impossible) high angles (e.g., <i>Topaz</i>, <i>Psycho</i>) (Narenmore 2004, p. 30);</li> <li>o Roaming cameras that "lurch inward" into intimate spaces (e.g., <i>Rear Window</i>).</li> </ul>
- Voyeuristic point-of-view shots:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o shots of people looking through cameras (e.g., <i>Rear Window</i>);</li> <li>o peep holes (e.g., <i>Psycho</i>) and spying on others;</li> <li>o screens within screens (e.g., <i>Strangers on a Train</i>).</li> </ul>
- Proximity to face correlating with actor emotion:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o wide shots for emotional distance between characters;</li> <li>o close ups for intense emotion;</li> <li>o profiles for guilt;</li> <li>o behind for denial.</li> </ul>

Some elements of Hitchcock's person-indexing register, as collated from cinephile metadiscourse.

NB: an enlarged version of this figure is at the end of the article

- 40 Again, these are not an exhaustive list of all of the elements of Hitchcock's films that are unique to him. On the one hand, we might find many more. (Film studies scholars are counting on it!) On the other hand, many of these elements are not, in fact, even unique to Hitchcock, before, during, or (especially) after his time. Others used the above listed elements and techniques before him, and even more since (see, e.g., Rosenblatt 2004).
- 41 Rather, what this list represents is a *cultural model* (a metapragmatic, or meta-filmic model) of self-styled discerning viewers as to how to entextualize Hitchcock's films, an ideological model for how to construe a certain auterial coherence, one that travels under the name "Hitchcock." Recall our earlier point that a register is *not* a list of indexicals that share a target (even if this is how users' own ethnometapragmatic consciousness tends to rationalize them) but a model of textual coherence, a machine for entextualizing texts whose *text-level* indexicality (Agha 2007) invokes some person(a).
- 42 There are two implications of this, both of which turn on a certain gap between such a model—as an ethnometapragmatic, ideological phenomenon—and the process that it models, construes and skews, and thus constitutes. First: it is relative to this model that, for those socialized to the register, certain filmic texts effectively become

composite indexes that point beyond the text to other texts and thereby to the personage of the director, Alfred Hitchcock, *even if most of these signs are not sufficient to presence Hitchcock unto themselves*. That is, most of the elements that constitute a person-indexing register, and the texts it regiments, are not shibboleths<sup>35</sup>: that is, are not signs whose mere occurrence necessarily invokes the metapragmatic identity standing behind the register (Hitchcock); some might seemingly be (such as the name or face of the auteur; though even these can be defeated), but most are not. Rather, as we've already noted, it is in co-occurrence relations that such elements pile on so as to produce our sense that, indeed, the director (or star) is present in the image; note that many of the elements that cinephiles identify (Figure 7) overlap with and co-occur with each other in Hitchcock's films; it is such textual densities that make us feel some text to be a (or at least *like* a) Hitchcock film, not the elements on their own. This is because, on the one hand, most repertoire forms are low-intensity in their indexicality (i.e., are not shibboleths) and because, relatedly, processes of entextualization are both emergent and gradient in nature, involving thresholds and cumulative concentrations of indexical intensity that are convoked in particular moments to entail discrete pragmatic text-in-context effects (e.g., indexing the person).<sup>36</sup> For those that reflect on and rationalize such processes (such as cinephilic viewers, film critics, auteur theorists), that cumulative indexicality of the whole is often fetishistically reanalyzed and metonymically reduced to (certain of) its parts, wherein the part is felt to carry (and thus, in certain measure does carry) the intensity of the whole in which it participated. Hence, lists like Figure 7, which present diacritics of person, most of which are, upon further inspection, anything but.

43 In short, the emergent and cumulative nature of entextualization (as the process through which registers live) goes hand-in-hand with the fact that register repertoires comprise signs of relative indexical intensities, with many (most?) repertoire forms pointing relatively weakly to their targets; which is to say, most of a register's repertoire must be co-textualized with other signs to produce some determinate indexical effect (i.e., their indexicality is easily defeasible, vague, non-detachable). Further, this makes it such that most repertoire forms of a register belong to more than one register (e.g., as with techniques that are shared by different auteurs, and yet carry a potential indexicality of them that may be activated in different textual configurations) and, relatedly, be easily co-textualized with repertoire-forms from other registers (i.e., are easily intercalated with other registers in non-incoherent ways); which is to say, registers are porous to and shade into other registers—this is the open-edge beyond and heterogeneity within mentioned above.<sup>37</sup>

44 The second outcome of this gap is a kind of ideological inversion; while the ideological models that constitute person-indexing registers rationalize their repertoire-forms as a natural efflorescence of their indexical targets or as what is proper to them (elements  $x...n$  are indexes of person A because “that is how they talk/direct/act”; or, elements  $x...n$  are indexes of person A because they are “theirs”), this itself obscures (and thus produces) a normative force that is central to such registers: namely, that in mediating processes of entextualization (a Hitchcock film will be like this ... , with such and such elements ...) registers are intertextual structures of expectation which thus set the conditions for deviations from what is anticipated; or put otherwise: while enabling the rigid indexing of a person, such registers—in coming to do so—are always detaching themselves from their targets, floating off into *stereotypes* of those persons.<sup>38</sup> This is why an auteur—say, Hitchcock—or a star—say, Rajinikanth—can make a film that is not

a Hitchcock (e.g., “un-Hitchcock” films like *Rebecca* [1940] or *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* [1941]) or not a Rajinikanth film (e.g., in recent times, *Kabali* [2016] and *Kaala* [2018]), why they can self-differ from their enregistered personage and not live up to their own name (to their fans’ disappointment, usually; Vest 2004).<sup>39</sup> As this further suggests, every person-indexing register, by giving rise to a stereotype of the person in-and-by indexing their individuality, shades into a *persona*-indexing register.<sup>40</sup>

### III. Porousness of Person- and Persona-Indexing Registers as Dimensions of Enregisterment

- 45 This last observation leads us to a critical point: while we have analytically *distinguished* persona- and person-indexing registers, they are not distinct in empirical fact; they blur into each other, are superimposed onto and built out of each other. One becomes the other, and one and the same process may involve both. Our distinction, thus, is not a typology of *kinds* of registers but rather the discerning of *dimensions* of enregisterment that dialectically interweave with each other.<sup>41</sup>
- 46 One key way that this dialectic traffic unfolds, as we’ve seen, is through *acts of citation*. It is through their citation that person-indexing registers circulate, continually recontextualized in new situations, in new configurations of signs and sign users. It is through such recontextualizations that they are not only reproduced but also transformed, in particular, into persona-indexing registers, where they lose their rigidly indexed *originēs* along the way (Derrida 1988) and become calibrated to new metapragmatic targets, from individual tokens to social types, and back again (Wortham 2006).
- 47 Indeed, consider that fact that the innovations of an auteur like Hitchcock have lived on far beyond his oeuvre into the films of *other directors*, indeed, as resources in other processes of enregisterment.<sup>42</sup> Hence the Wikipedia page for “Hitchcockian”<sup>43</sup>—note the adjective formed from the proper name to characterize a class of things that are *like* but not fully proper to Hitchcock—which suggests the way in which the uptake of repertoire elements from Hitchcock’s person-indexing register shade into other intertextual metapragmatic structures, be this genres (such as suspense/thriller, where many of Hitchcock’s register-forms have become generic, i.e., unmarked from his personage) or as part of the auteur-indexing identities of other filmmakers. For example, the auteur identity of a Brian De Palma—if we continue to follow this *wiki-cinephilia*<sup>44</sup>—is *carved out* through his citational relationship to Hitchcock; De Palma is an auteur only by being an extension of another auteur, Hitchcock (and vice versa as well, of course: to be an auteur is to exert influence on other directors).
- 48 We also saw see this process in the case of Tamil film stars, where specific gestures and textual forms that were once enregistered to the star figure of particular actors become generalized into a general way of being a hero. Hence, as we noted, while for a time only MGR acted in films that adulated his political personage, that mobilized heavy intertextual references to his offscreen persona and other films, and that featured particular idiosyncratic performance styles, after MGR passed out of the industry, the next generation of film stars began to adorn themselves with his filmic forms (that is, they were seen by audiences as following in his footsteps). This by-degrees genericization was a function of junior stars, like Vijayakanth and Rajinikanth, citing

senior stars like MGR, appropriating their auratic stardom by indexically paying them homage through using identifiable shibboleths of them—such as MGR’s signature hand gestures (Figure 8; see Nakassis 2016a, pp. 205ff.)—but also innovating on them (as with Rajini’s elaborate gestural styles).

Figure 8



MGR in *Nadoodi Mannan* (1958), Rajinikanth in *Annamalai* (1992) and Sivaji: *The Boss* (2007).

- 49 Over time, some such features have lost their person-indexing rigidity and gone fully generic. Fully typified, they are now simply what a hero looks and sounds like in Tamil films (to the point of parody even; Nakassis 2023b, pp. 113–145), just as they are the basis out of which new person-indexing registers are created, as when new stars trope on and appropriate the forms of existing persona- (and person-) indexing registers and create their own individual star images, shifting and rigidifying them in new ways. Others retain a glimmer of their sources even after their eclipse (at least for those in the know).
- 50 Person- and persona-indexing registers, thus, are in a constantly dialectical movement, an enunciative praxis (Bertrand 1993; Fontanille 1998) constituted by continual citational relations that oscillate between the re- and dis-enregisterment—the shifting, rigidifying, and typifying—of the signs in which they consist.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, it is through being so entextualized and enregistered that they can then become—by being citationally used, but also abused and indexically unmoored (Nakassis 2013a)—part of the texts of others or genericized as part of the cinematic commons.
- 51 This is a more general dialectic, of course, that has nothing to do with the cinema per se. All person-indexing registers may start out as persona-indexing registers, and vice versa. Social meaning, subjectivity, and historical change are precipitated in the process<sup>46</sup>; and each are implied by the indexicality of semiosis, conceived in its broadest terms.

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## NOTES

1. An oral version of this paper was originally given for the seminar, “Journée d’études: La deixis et l’énonciation entre anthropologie linguistique et sémiotique,” organized by Juan Alonso Aldama, Cécile Canut, and Maria Giulia Dondero at the Université Paris Cité, Paris, France, 12 January 2024. Sections were subsequently presented at the Celebrity Studies conference in Amsterdam, Netherlands (2 July 2024) and the American Anthropological Association meetings in Tampa, Florida (20 November 2024). Thanks to Urmila Nair and Angela Reyes, who provided discussant remarks in Paris and Tampa, respectively, and to Luke Fleming, Stanton Wortham, and Jack Sidnell for discussion of a draft of this paper. Two anonymous reviewers offered engaged comments; their questions and suggestions were deep and incisive, and I have tried to

address as many of them as I can and to the best of my ability. Finally, many thanks to Maria Giulia Dondero, whose generosity of spirit and mind produced the occasion to write the original talk and, later, to publish it.

2. These are three semiotic dimensions that are most lexically manifest in three noun classes—deictics (shifters), proper names (rigid designators), and common nouns—in their prototypic metapragmatic calibration types—reflexive, reportive, and nomic, respectively (Silverstein 1993, 2021; Nakassis 2020). But as reflection shows, these dimensions can't be reduced to lexemic form classes, since they are achievements of semiotic processes that may imbue instances of these form classes with the properties/functions that are associated with (and sedimented as) the others: pronouns can be used to rigidly designate or typify/denote, proper names to shiftily index or typify/denote, and common nouns to shiftily index or rigidly designate. Consider the interaction I overheard between my children, at the time age 5 (E--) and 7 (C--), engaging in make-believe using the world of *Power Rangers*, a fantasy children's television show:

C--:	<b>He</b> <sub>x</sub> 's	a <i>kodiak</i> .
	<u>He</u> <sub>x</sub> 's	a <i>szord</i> .
E--: No,	<u>he</u> <sub>x</sub> 's	a <i>she</i> .
C--: No, I want	<u>him</u> <sub>x</sub> to be	a <i>he</i> .

In the transcript above, **bold** indicates a functional achievement of exophoric deixis (shifty indexicality; reflexively calibrated/reportively calibrating; cf. Davidson 1966 on “referential uses”); underline indicates the achievement of endophoric deixis (by-degrees rigid designating; reportively calibrated/reportively calibrating, quasi-citational), and *italics* the achievement of common nomination/typification (semantic/intensional denotational; nomically calibrated/reportively calibrating [use of a semantic class to refer to a token-existent]). Here, the important point is that shiftiness, rigidity, and typifiability are emergent accomplishments (manifesting, I would further suggest, immanent potentials and ever-present tendencies) of semiosis that are achieved in various degrees and in various ways in contextualized events.

3. Notice that the terms for such social types are nomically calibrated common nouns—status terms more particularly—that semantically denote some socially recognized identity or class linked to the (imagined) pragmatics of the register's use.

4. More precisely, this class involves registers one of whose indexical targets is a metapragmatic stereotype; the range of such stereotypes should not be reduced to enactable personae (qua social identities), even if these are the ones linguistic anthropologists and sociolinguists have given the most attention in recent years. As I further argue in the conclusions, we should not think of these as a distinct class but as characterized by the prominence of a particular dimension of enregisterment (that of typification).

5. We might make the distinction that a persona-indexing register has as its intensional/stereotypical target a characterological figure (*sensu* Goffman 1974), extensionalizable as some sociological group of persons, while a person-indexing register has as its target a natural figure, extensionalizable/collapsed into a biographical (human) individual, though, as noted, the “natural figure” of a person-indexing register may be something other than a biographical individual. As indicated in notes 4 and 40, while such registers may prototypically take as one of their targets an individual person, the range of *individuables* so enregistered is much wider; as such, we should not confuse the prototype for the full range of possible targets.

6. It is not uncommon for signs enregistered as person-indexing to be property-like and liable processes of propertization, as with intellectual property regimes and their excrescences, such as brands (Nakassis 2012, 2013b, 2016a, 2016b, n.d.b). On this view, brands are capitalist person-

indexing registers organized around state-backed intellectual properties (which is to say, rigid indexes and designators of the brand); they are a Goffmanian figure animated by the corporation that owns it and stands as its principal. What is interesting, however, is that *it is often—and tendentially, always—to the register itself* that such signs are proper (not to the indexed target who happens to inhabit this figure of individuality), and more particularly, to the proper name that functions as the metapragmatic name of the person-indexing register. This is why you can always steal someone's identity by appropriating their person-indexing register; or why such registers—such as brands or clan-based ancestor names and their associated narratives among Northwest Coast Native American groups (Roth 2008)—can be bought and sold or lost and won, be this in potlatches of the Tsimshian or of late capitalism. In the Tsimshian case, it is the *names* that are eternal, while profane individuals only hold on to them for a time. Other forms of institutionalization are possible as well, as well as their combinations (e.g., the branding of a star or auteur; Corrigan 1991). Such register formations are also the basis of institutions of surveillance and state power, where such indexes are regimented/rationalized as unique identifiers of individuals: name and birth registries (also social security numbers, national ID numbers, etc.); the so-called grain of the voice (the grist for voice recognition software), the physiognomy of the face (the grist for facial surveillance technologies like ID cards and facial recognition), the print of the finger (as used in criminology databases but also various security devices), idiosyncratic ways of speaking or writing (handwriting analysis), shopping patterns (for targeted marketing), and so on.

7. We should say, rather, that an idiolect is a person-indexing register for the *social domain of the linguist* who studies it. Agha's (2007) critique of Halliday's positivistic repertoire-view of registers can be, *mutatis mutandis*, extended to the notion of idiolect insofar as both assume that the task of the linguist is to describe etic variation and correlate it to some pregiven, primordial unit (the individual, the demographic group, the context-type) without asking how such phenomena are themselves ideologically—that is socio-historically contingently and perspectively—constituted through processes of enregisterment. Repertoire-based views thus fail to reckon registers as always duplex, operating as metasemiotic models and object repertoires. Further, they presume that individuals exist outside of processes of enregisterment and then try to correlate observable speech forms to such individuals, whether or not anyone finds such variation meaningful, or even observes it. I won't pursue this critique here (see Nakassis n.d.a), though retheorizing the idiolect through enregisterment might provide an avenue to better understand the kinds of historical change that have concerned linguistics since neogrammarianism (here, I am thinking of Hermann Paul's [1880] nominalistic individualism recapitulated, in its way, with the crest of Penny Eckert's [2000] third wave in the form of "linguistic icons").

8. Here, thus, we are interested in the cultural model of individuality (a metapragmatic mode of singularity/individualization, as one reviewer helpfully put it) that is 'heard' in speech, through which sign users encounter variation and construe it based on ethnometapragmatic conceptualizations of the universe (viz. as involving singular entities)—what we call in our folk cosmology, "individuals." As cross-cultural comparison reveals, however, there is much variation in what counts as an individual and a person. (After all, not all humans are considered persons, nor all persons human; nor are all persons individuals, or individuates personified.) As such, the notion of person-indexing registers is agnostic on the nature of the individual or the person, only being concerned with individuates (which vary across historical and cultural contexts).

9. One might temper this claim by looking for sociohistorical cases where such citationality is limited through forms of policing and the like. These would be exceptions to prove the rule.

10. Of course, from the linguist's point of view of Saussurean *valeur*, register forms—say, "interlocking slide fastener" in American military register or "zipper" in standard English—are not really synonyms (they have distinct semantic senses), though they are calibratable—even interchangeable—in acts of definite reference.

11. More technically, we should say that a register is an *intertextual* metapragmatic function, since the textual coherence of any particular interactional text as entextualized by the mediation of a register is a function not simply of the poetic resonance of the enregistered indexicalities ‘within’ the event (qua text) but also of the coherence of the so-entextualized text with a series of other such texts across the history of the register’s enregisterment. Conforming to register, thus, produces textual coherence only by also participating in inter-textual coherence (i.e., coherence within a series of other texts); examples of cinematic registers discussed later clarify this point.

12. An image-text is an iconic indexical *diagram* made up out of Peircean “images” (Peirce 2.277).

13. So, we can say that, from the perspective of sign activity, signs that have been historically grouped as part of some repertoire indexically invoke the stereotypy of the register and that, in doing so, create conditions of *comparability* of those signs with others (Agha 2007), which may resonate or ‘gel’ with them or not, and thus may ‘cohere’ as being birds of a feather (or not). Such a process is emergent, cumulative, and by-degrees. The point is that, in such moments, the interactional textual coherence of the speech event is a function of the registers that are put into play by sign-users. From this point of view, registers are invoked by signs as models of the coherence of *the very discourse of which they are part* as a function of their own coherence *with other* such events of discourse (i.e., their textual coherence is a function of their inter-textual coherence). This is why we say that registers—like styles and genres—are intertextual metapragmatics (Nakassis 2023a).

14. Of course, the historical process of enregisterment turns, as Agha (2007) points out, on what he calls, following Kripke (1980), “speech chains”—that is, there is an interdiscursive component, a citational reference to *previous entextualized events* of register usage. Hence, there is also a reportive calibration, at least implicitly, which is abstracted from in the ideological imaginary of the register as a *general, abstract* schema. As I have argued elsewhere (Nakassis 2020, 2023a), metapragmatic calibration types are *dimensions* not discrete *kinds*; indeed, they imply and are implicated in each other.

15. Here, we stress *presupposes*; the claim here is not that all rigid designators involve some such discrete, singular baptismal moments, nor that person-indexing registers are empirically preceded by the existence of rigid designators. Indeed, rigidity (in designation or in person-indexing enregisterment) is often (usually?) accomplished through a retrodictive movement that comes after the fact and may evolve gradually rather than through any discrete moment (even if the use of such signs presupposes some such origins). In this sense, not only is “rigidity” the effect/achievement of some *process* (of rigidification), but it itself is a model, or ideology, of indexicality that mediates those achievable effects. (Kripke’s causal theory is one such ideology, with its own origin myth of reference to boot.) Also see note 18 for discussion. I thank an anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to clarify this point. I would further emphasize that here I am less concerned with the causal theory of reference per se than with a particular semiotic relation that Kripke’s discussion helps us to conceptualize. Whatever problems there may be with the causal theory of reference, I don’t think they undermine the points and argument that I pursue here.

16. Contrast this with reflexively calibrated personal pronouns that while also being inherently token-referential indexes shift across enunciations.

17. Here, my account differs from Fleming’s (2024), though is, I think, reconcilable with it. For Fleming, the three calibration types map on to deictics of speech-act participants (default reflexive), anaphors (default reportive), and proper nouns (default nomic). The first two are shifters (in that their referent is defeasible and resettable across instances of use), and all three are inherently referential (to some token-targeted extension); in this, they contrast with common nouns (and all other nouns further down Silverstein’s [1976b] noun-phrase hierarchy), which are neither shifters nor inherently referential, but are denotational (have semantic intensions that are type-targeted). In this way, proper nouns are liminal between shifters and

common nouns. From my point of view, however, I would characterize anaphors and proper names as themselves liminal: anaphors as liminal between reflexive and reportive calibrations (reportive since they index another event-space, like proper nouns, but reflexive, like personal pronouns, as shifters dependent on their event of enunciation for their values to be fixed) and proper names qua rigid designators as liminal between anaphors and common nouns, always reportively anchored to some presupposed indexical origo of baptism (via a speech chain) and, via that speech chain/baptismal origo, to their indexical target (a token-targeted referent), but also akin to common nouns in that they are relatively unshiftable. Fleming's partition of metapragmatic calibration types and noun-phrase form classes might be represented thusly:

<i>Reflexive</i>	<i>Reportive</i>	<i>Nomic</i>
personal pronouns, other deictics	anaphors (and decentered shifters)	proper nouns, common nouns, ... (everything else in noun- phrase hierarchy)
shifters		non-shifters
indexical		non-indexical/symbolic

By contrast, we might cut the pie thusly:

<i>Reflexive</i>	<i>Reportive</i>	<i>Nomic</i>
Personal pronouns, other deictics ...	anaphors (...)	proper names / proper nouns common nouns, ...
shifters		non-shifters
inherently referential (token-targeting, extensionalized)		non-inherently referential, predicating (type-targeting, intensionalized)

That said, and as I suggest in the conclusions, the issue for me is less stable form classes (with stable, default calibration types) than achieved semiotic functions (of shiftability, rigidification, typification); further, as I've argued elsewhere (Nakassis 2020), we should view metapragmatic signs less as 'having' one calibration type or another and instead ask after the semiotic "syntax" of calibration types: how they combine with each other, implicate each other, and so on.

**18.** One might imagine person-indexing registers without rigid designators, that is, as a congeries of rigid indexes linked to some unnamed target; yet even in such cases (e.g., the recognizability of a voice one hears on the radio without knowing its speaker's name, the face and gait of the stranger I walk by every morning to the train, the style of killing of an as yet unidentified serial murderer), any one rigid index of that target *can* always (if only in potentia) function also as a rigid designator of the entity stipulated to hold together such a repertoire of forms. (In such cases, the voice, the face, the mode of murder may all be reanalyzed as like a "signature" or "trademark"—a notable, and telling, extension of this legal term of art for rigid designators—referring back to the entity.) Names—as bits of explicit metapragmatic discourse—are perhaps the most obvious and transparent of rigid indexes/designators, though non-linguistic signs may also work to the same effect, as already noted.

**19.** I call them *rigid indexes* rather than rigid designators because the indexicality of the repertoire forms are non-referential. When one uses a name, one *refers* to the token-existent. But when one uses the repertoire forms of the person-indexing register—say, an idiosyncratic pronunciation or gesture—one does not refer to the individual so much as indexically invoke them, talk or gesture 'like' them, call them to mind.

**20.** In such cases, given the superposition of animator and target/figure, the rigid index is not only reportively but reflexively calibrated to its referent.

**21.** I want to keep in mind, however, the wide-range of phenomena that the concept of person-indexing registers brings together, from authorship (Foucault 1969; MacCabe 1989) to reputation and fame (Munn 1986) to so-called "idiolects" to brands. As the last again reminds, such registers need not only include organismal human individuals as their targets. Indeed, person-like entities like brands or clans or other corporate groups are often what is so-enregistered (in the case of

cinema, we can speak of film studios or production houses serving in such roles). What is critical is that what is indexically invoked are *individualized, singularized entities* that are *culture-internally* treated as person-like. (Here, we might wonder: can one enregister a repertoire not only to a social type or a social token but a social *tone*?)

22. Or at least we should say, who can authoritatively claim to inhabit such a role. Indeed, every such role within a production format may be inhabited by multiple individuals/actants (e.g., in the Tamil cinema, every director has multiple assistant and associate directors; every cinematographer multiple assistants, etc.), only one of which may be seen as—as far as concern such enregisterment processes—inhabiting that role. There is always a politics, thus, to the production format (see Nakassis 2023b), as to who can be the principal of the production-format role (see also Andrew 1993, p. 80; Gunning 2000, p. 5 on directorial authorship). It is *that* recognized person who thus inserts themselves as the target of person-indexing enregisterment processes.

23. Here, non-referential in the sense that they function as second-order indexes (Silverstein 2003) relative to first-order denotational function vis-à-vis building a film narrative.

24. As Krissna describes in a collection of remembrances about the films he made with Rajinikanth in the 1990s and early 2000s, “Surely Rajinikanth, who was becoming a phenomenon, warranted a unique logo to go with his name, I thought” (Krissna and Rangarajan 2012, p. 89). Likening it to the classic James Bond title sequence, Krissna narrates how he pitched the idea to Rajini: “Till now you’ve been described as the Superstar by a few. But the time has come for the status [i.e., Superstar] to precede your name in the titles. So I’ll create a logo and a signature tune for it, which will announce the arrival of Brand Rajni. The impact will be magical” (*ibid.*, p. 90).

25. Such *stylish* acts occur throughout Rajini’s films, but particularly occur at ritualized moments that are featured in all his films (and thus also serve as part of the repertoire of his enregistered identity). They appear most clearly and forcefully in “introductory” scenes where the hero first appears onscreen, at critical junctures in the plot (such as clashes with the villain and his seductions of the heroine), in fantastical song sequences, and in his films’ climaxes (see Nakassis 2016a, 2017, 2019). These are narrative sites for the performative perforation of the fourth wall, for the star to presence himself with particular force (Nakassis 2023b). These sites/moments are woven out of these enregistered indexes of him, indexes that presence him in the film text as its pre-eminent subject of enunciation. Central to stardom in this idiom, as discussed more in the main text, is the dense intertextuality of these images. Rajinikanth’s presence in any particular event of viewing is always mediated through multiple not-nows and not-heres, of which each such event is figured as an iteration. Rajini’s presence as a star *in* a film world that exceeds it is mediated by the fact that his personage is multiplied within and across films through the multiplication of signs that rigidly point back at *him*, that are signs ‘of’ him, that are ‘his’ signs. Here, every token, every character, every *stylish* gesture—every enregistered repertoire form invokes the star, a personage that has been constructed over more than 150 films. As such, for fans in the social domain of his register, every *stylish* gesture is experienced as being done, and every punch dialogue is heard as being said, by Rajinikanth himself; and through the intertextuality of his stardom, by every other character. As Rajini’s punch dialogue in the 1995 super-hit film, *Baashaa* says: ‘if I say it once, it’s like I said it a hundred times.’

26. And note the metapragmatic calibration types involved here. On the one hand, there is a deeply reportively calibrated intertextual relationship between *every single Rajinikanth film and every other film*; every film involves multitudes of citations to other films, both at a token level (this film cites that film) but at a type level (this film is like every other film, but also a little different!). There is also a nomic calibration of *the star image itself*, which infuses and regiments every film. It is a sacral image, an image from another realm, that has lifted off beyond the intertextual series that the star governs to hover over every one of his films as a kind of essence. If his films are like planets, the star is the Sun; they orbit him, yoked to him, following his path in

a cosmic dance. But this stardom is not just a nomic sacrality composed of intertextual filaments; his gravity field is not just a discrete set of forces linking each orbit to the others. It is also a *reflexive calibration* since through these relations *the star becomes present to the audience in events of exhibition and viewing*; his aura reaches out beyond the screen. In those moments, in particular, when there is a tight poetic coherence regimented by the metapragmatics of his stardom (when signs of his person proliferate), the star steps out from the diegesis and enters the theater (Nakassis 2017, 2023b).

27. Under such conditions, semiotic propriety may become intellectual property. This was attempted by Rajinikanth and his associates at the turn of twenty-first century: the coproducer of *Padayappa* (1999), for example, registered a design from the film as a trademark for goods like beedis, cigarettes, and tobacco (which feature heavily as accoutrement of Rajini's character in the film). In 2002, for the release of his 150th film, *Baba*, Rajinikanth issued notice in the Tamil and English press prohibiting the imitation of his screen persona or using the signature styles from the film for commercial gain, with an exemption issued to autorickshaw drivers (who popularly used Rajini's image on their vehicles)! None of these were successful in policing citation; but they were successful in reiterating the point that every such sign, as enregistered to the person of Rajinikanth, counted as rigid indexes of *him*, however they were recontextualized or used (or legally protected). They were always anchored back to him, even if profits did not return the way the indexes pointed.

28. The precarity of reputation is a source of concern for stars, as it is for all market actors who work through brand-like person-indexing registers (Nakassis 2016a), precisely because every such rigid index is always entextualized among other signs in novel configurations that generate novel pragmatic effects, positive and negative. When all is well, such positively valorized effects accrue to the star as *his* fame. Here, the contextualized surfeit, the text-in-context pragmatic effect, travels back to the star through the rigid semiosis of his name and other repertoire forms. But as noted in the main text, fans are so encouraged precisely because much fan activity does *not* generate positive value for the star within his wider publics: fans get drunk and fight with fans of other stars, they embody a form of subalternity that is itself a liability to the “decency” of the star (Srinivas 2009). Fans may also conduct unauthorized, local political activity in the name and through the vestments of the star, engaging in political issues that the star may not support (or want to be seen supporting). It is not only fame but defamation that also travels along the circuits of person-enregistered semiosis (cf. Fleming 2011).

29. Some fans even take on the star's names (e.g., his most famous film characters' names) as their own, such as Pazhani Basha, the head of a fan club I knew in Madurai during the time of my dissertation fieldwork.

30. The English borrowing of the French word—from a school of mid-century French criticism (the *politique des auteurs* linked to the *Cahiers du Cinéma*) that partially staked its claim on rereading commercial American cinema for its auteurs (Bazin 1954, 1955; Hillier 1985; MacCabe 1989; Andrew 1993)—tells us much about what is at stake, given the enregisterment of French (for American aesthetes) as cosmopolitan, sophisticated, and artsy-fartsy. It also shows us how persona-indexing registers (of taste, connoisseurship, national identity, etc.) are implicated in abilities to recognize certain person-indexing registers (of auteurs).

31. Andrew (1993, p. 79) characterizes this—in reference to Wollen—as “isolating the auteur's signal within the noise of the text.”

32. Or, as Hitchcock himself said, of himself: “self-plagiarism is style.” This auto-citatoriality, as we saw with Rajinikanth (about whom Hitchcock could have been speaking), is a key process in the enregisterment of many person-indexing registers.

33. See, e.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UPbpA00f1cY>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OtOawE5DteQ>.



34. Such metadiscourses are often part scholarly analysis, part cinephilia, and in both cases function as normative meta-models for how to discern the auteur, Hitchcock, in “his” films (whether and how anyone so does this being another, not unrelated, question).

35. Sociolinguistically, shibboleths are signs that unambiguously—which is to say, seemingly simply by their occurrence—index group membership or identity. Recalling the Biblical story (Judges 12:6)—where palatalization (/ʃ/), or its absence (/s/), of the initial fricative in the word *s(h)ibboleth* served as a (life and death) index (hence, a shibboleth!) of who was Gileadite and Ephraimite—a shibboleth thus seems to function in a decontextualized and absolute (even semanticized) way; this is in contrast to most other social indexicals, which are much more defeasible and co(n)text dependent. This notion of shibboleth is close to Labov’s (1972) notion of a “sociolinguistic marker.”

36. From this perspective, rigid indexicality is not a feature of the repertoire forms of a person-indexing register per se (though it may be of its shibboleths, or at least in ethnometapragmatic consciousness as it reflects on such forms out of context) but of the *texts* that a register successfully mediates. We should also note that lower-intensity indexical forms textually ride on of the anchoring effects of higher-intensity indexes (such as shibboleths). Here, we might think the notion of intensity in relationship to Fontanille’s (1998) discussion of “modes of existence” as the relative *presencing* of semiotic forms, though I do not pursue this avenue here.

37. This is similarly the case with speech registers, which overlap with each other, both at the level of texts-in-context and their repertoires; for example, consider how much of academic English overlaps with legal language with standard English.

38. See Gunning’s (2000, p. 3) discussion of Fritz Lang’s authorship on this point. What this means is that not only is the auteur a metasemiotic principle that mediates semiotic processes, but also a semiotic phenomenon itself, indeed, a resource against which a particular text is “read.” The implication of this is that the identity of an auteur can itself be incoherent with the texts he produces, or even render those texts incoherent, e.g., as a kind of strategy (as when a director or star attempts to transform their identity; or tries to confound audiences; etc.) (see Corrigan 1991, p. 107); see main text for more discussion.

39. On claims about un-Hitchcockian Hitchcock films, see, e.g., <https://www.empireonline.com/movies/reviews/rebecca-review/>; <https://www.jasonbovberg.com/hitchcock-conversations-mr-mrs-smith-1941/>;

<https://moviecrashcourse.com/2020/11/22/the-wrong-man-1956/>; cf. Lowenstein 2004.

On *Kabali* not being (enough of) a Rajinikanth film, see: <https://english.tupaki.com/entertainment/article/kabali-movie-review/42401>;

<https://filmferret.wordpress.com/2016/07/23/kabali-ranjith-not-rajini/>;

see discussion in Nakassis 2023b:197–203.

See Vest on the famous frustration of the *Cahiers* group (Bazin, Truffaut) in first meeting Hitchcock and finding that “the human being did not correspond to their image of him” (2004:110), viz. the title of Bazin’s 1954 essay, “Hitchcock contre Hitchcock” (Bazin 1972) where the two tokens of “Hitchcock” differentially refer: in the first, to the biographic person and, in the second, to his enregistered personage (i.e., Truffaut’s idea of Hitchcock, the director as a “Hitchcockian creature”; Vest 2004:115).

40. Earlier, I said that it is relative to a particular cultural model of filmic texture that certain filmic signs can become cinematic indexes that point to the personage of the director. And here, *personage* is the right term (rather than individual or person), for the indexical target here is that assemblage that his name represents; even among cinephiles there is the recognition that “Hitchcock” (the enregistered personage) doesn’t only comprise Hitchcock the biographical man but also his “team”: his music director, his cinematographer, screenwriters (Lowenstein 2004:185), and so on and so forth. Again, person-indexing registers don’t require that their indexical targets be single individuals understood as organisms whose selfhood ends at the

boundaries of their skin (which is, of course, a dominant ideology of individuality and personhood in our culture); rather, as I've noted, person-indexing registers involve *cultural ideologies as to what counts as an individual existent and person*, which is various, even in modern Western culture: it could be a brand, a corporation or other corporate group, a studio, a franchise or cinematic universe (viz. Marvel's franchise of films), or even a directorial assemblage. Further, as we've noted, through person-indexing enregisterment, avatars of the indexed person (e.g., fans, but also others, like technicians; for Hitchcock, e.g., composer Bernard Hermann) can themselves become elements of the register's repertoire.

41. We have already seen a couple of examples that bear this out. We saw how the concept of the auteur—as an ideological expression of a type of register—has second-order enregistered indexicalities (of persona-indexing types): they may be indexical of nation-based politics (France versus the US; Wollen 1972, p. 61) or class-based politics (art films versus commercial films; Bordwell 1979) which further serve as resources for the enacting of certain social types: the *cinophile*, whose stance to auteurism is itself an index of his or her sophistication, taste, or whatever the metapragmatic stereotype happens to be. (Or for star actors, the *fan*, that subject who looks for signs of the star within the text, and may be marked by this fact in various ways: by class, caste, gender, age, education, and so on.) Notice that at the birth of auteur theory in 1950s France, among the skeptical (like André Bazin), proponents of auteur theory (vectors of the person-indexing enregisterment of figures like Hitchcock) were themselves (persona-indexing) enregistered as “(fanatic) Hitchcockians” (Bazin 1972, pp. 60, 67) or “hitchcocko-hawksiens” (Bazin 1955; see Hillier 1985, p. 3), embodying a social type of film critic/theorist, enregistered by their propensity for reading films as belonging to the *oeuvre* of an “auteur.” Here, we see how one type of register formation can be intercalated with, and mobilized within, other types of register formations.

42. When such repertoire forms are used as a resource in filmic entextualization, they are recontextualized into the texts of such directors in ways that produce multiple orders of indexicality (Silverstein 2003). At a first order, any such repertoire form will have a particular function within the image- and denotational-text of the film in question: for example, to create suspense, to contribute to the plot, whatever. But at a second-order, or as a residual indexicality, that element will—if read against the auteur text of Hitchcock—be interpretable as indexing Hitchcock himself, as invoking his personage as standing over and above the film we are watching, and because of this, at a third-order, as signs indexing another director (a De Palma, e.g.) or perhaps as a response by the auteur himself against his own person-indexing register (thereby figured as persona-indexing register) (Lowenstein 2004).

43. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hitchcockian>.

44. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian\\_De\\_Palma](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brian_De_Palma).

45. Person-indexing registers often take as their repertoire forms signs regimented by other intertextual metapragmatic formations (i.e., styles, other registers, genres; see Nakassis 2023a). Hence, for example, an auteur-register often emerges through the enregisterment of stylistic or generic elements (a type of camera movement; a type of plot structure) as indexes of their directing (Bordwell 1979, p. 653): hence, we ‘recognize’ Hitchcock in experiencing the aesthetic and denotational texture of his films. Further note that *recognition* of such elements is always itself a *social act*, it is an interactional text that happens in a cinematic context; and, given that, it can serve as an index—stacked on top of the others (Silverstein 2003)—that points not only to Hitchcock but to the viewer him or herself as discerning, as we have already noted.

46. See Gunning (2000, pp. 5, 11) on this dialectic as concerns the historical influence of Fritz Lang's person-indexing enregisterment on the history of filmic style and genre (qua impersonal “film language”).

## ABSTRACTS

This article explores the semiotics of *person-indexing registers*—registers where one of the indexical targets of the register’s metasemiotic model of semiosis is an individuated, singular entity (vs. a social type). Differentiating such cases from *persona-indexing registers* (e.g., speech registers like legalese, regional dialects, etc.) and so-called *idiolects*, the article then turns to cases of *person-indexing enregisterment* in the cinema, where various filmic and non-filmic signs come to be (non-referential) indexes of particular individuals within the production format of film. I focus in particular on the star actor and the auteur director, two intertextual principles that function as metapragmatic models of filmic textuality, presenced in films through the enregistered signs that indexically invoke them. I am particularly interested in how signs enregistered as proper-to the entity they index (in such cases, a particular star or director) become construed as “theirs,” and how this relation, through processes of cinematic entextualization, incorporates and enlarges the repertoire of so-enregistered signs. I conclude my discussion by gesturing to the non-discreteness of *persona-* and *person-indexing registers*, the way they dialectically transform into each other through citational processes, and how an understanding of this relationship affords insight into more general dynamics of indexicality and enunciative praxis.

Cet article explore la sémiotique des *registres d’indexation de personne* — des registres où l’une des cibles indexicales du modèle métasémiotique de la signification est une entité individualisée et singulière (par opposition à un type social). En distinguant ces cas des registres d’indexation de *persona* (par exemple, des registres de discours tels que le langage juridique, les dialectes régionaux, etc.) et des soi-disant *idiolectes*, l’article se penche ensuite sur des cas de mise en registre d’indexation de personne dans le cinéma, où divers signes filmiques et non filmiques deviennent des index (non référentiels) de personnes particulières dans le format de production cinématographique. Je m’intéresse en particulier à l’acteur-star et au réalisateur-auteur, deux principes intertextuels qui fonctionnent comme des modèles métapragmatiques de textualité filmique, rendus présents dans les films à travers des signes mis en registre qui les invoquent de manière indexicale. Mon intérêt porte particulièrement sur la manière dont les signes mis en registre comme propres à l’entité qu’ils indexent (dans ces cas, une star ou un réalisateur particulier) sont perçus comme les « leurs », et comment cette relation, à travers des processus d’entextualisation cinématographique, incorpore et élargit le répertoire des signes ainsi mis en registre. Je conclus ma discussion en évoquant la porosité des registres d’indexation de *persona* et de *personne*, la manière dont ils se transforment dialectiquement l’un en l’autre à travers des processus citationnels, et en montrant comment la compréhension de cette relation permet d’éclairer des dynamiques plus générales de l’indexicalité et des praxis énonciatives.

## INDEX

**Mots-clés:** indexicalité, registres, mise en registre, cinéma, star, célébrité, politiques des auteurs, Tamil Nadu

**Keywords:** indexicality, registers, enregisterment, cinema, stardom, celebrity, auteur theory, Tamil Nadu

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	Repertoire forms		Metapragmatic stereotype	Indexical target (& often origō)
	Type	Notable Examples		
Linguistic	Personal name (of natural figure) Titles (of star figure) Character names (of staged figures)	Sivajirao Gaekwad, Rajini(kanth) Superstar, <i>Style Mannan</i> (King of Style) <i>Talaivar</i> (leader) <i>Baasha</i> , <i>Padayappa</i> , etc.	"Style", "Heroism"	Superstar Rajinikanth (as star/natural figure; i.e., a metapragmatic stereotype of a person [qua personage])
	"Punch dialogues"	E.g., " <i>Itu eppadi irukku</i> " ( <i>Pathinaru Vayathinile</i> [1976]); " <i>Oru tadave sonnā, nūru tadave sonna mātiri</i> " ( <i>Baasha</i> [1995]); <i>En vaḷi tani vaḷi</i> ( <i>Padayappa</i> [1999]), etc.		
Bodily/ Performance	Finger gestures (w/swoosh effect)	E.g., <i>Baasha</i> , <i>Padayappa</i> , <i>Baba</i> (2002; 'Katham Katham'), etc. (Nakassis 2017)		
	Tricks with sunglasses, cigarette, gum, shawls, etc.	E.g., <i>Ninaithale Inikkum</i> (1979), <i>Geraaftar</i> (1985), <i>Padayappa</i> , <i>Sivaji</i> (2007)		
	Gait (speed of)	Various		
	Face (smile and eyes in particular)	Various		
	Stylish dress, hair style	Various		
Filmic	"Superstar" title sequence	<i>Annamalai</i> (1992) and films since		
	Introductory song	E.g., " <i>Vanthenda Paalkaran</i> " ( <i>Annamalai</i> ), " <i>Nān autokkāran, autokkāran</i> " ( <i>Baasha</i> ), " <i>Oruvan oruvan mutalāli</i> " ( <i>Muthu</i> [1995]), typically sung by SP Balasubramaniam; since genericized to other heroes		
	Frontal aesthetics, slow-motion/ freeze-frame shots of eyes, face	E.g., <i>Baasha</i> , <i>Arunachalam</i> (1997), since genericized to other heroes		
	Intertextual references to other Rajini characters and films	Various (e.g., <i>Annamalai</i> , <i>Sivaji</i> )		
	References to off-screen biography	E.g., as bus-driver ( <i>Baasha</i> ), as non-Tamil ( <i>Padayappa</i> ), his birthday ( <i>Lingaa</i> [2014]), political ambitions, rivalry with Jayalalitha ( <i>Padayappa</i> , <i>Baba</i> )		
	Religious references (to Rajini's spirituality)	Rudrah necklace; his films/heroes named after Hindu deities ( <i>Annamalai</i> , <i>Arunachalam</i> , <i>Padayappa</i> ), religious plots lines (e.g., <i>Baba</i> )		
	Other	Snake as good-luck charm (after <i>Bairavi</i> [1978], used in, e.g., <i>Tambikku Enna Ooru</i> [1984], <i>Annamalai</i> , <i>Padayappa</i> )		

Figure 5. Some elements of Rajini's person-indexing register.

### Plot thematics/structuring elements

- "Themes":
  - o mistaken-identity, wrong-man accused (e.g., *North by Northwest*) (Wollen 2013[1972], pp. 181, 184–85);
  - o chaos and irrationality underneath the ordinary (e.g., *Birds*) (Wollen 2013[1972], p. 182; Žižek 2004, p. 260);
  - o obsession, fascination (e.g., *Rear Window*) (Wollen 2013[1972], pp. 183).
- Plot/suspense structure:
  - o (1) secret of a character kept from other characters, but to which the audience has access;
  - o (2) close calls that tease secret's revelation with the character fearful, "near miss effect" with audience helpless to do anything;
  - o (3) surprise twist in revelation of the secret to relieve the tension.
- Linking of suspense with "gallows humor" (Narenmore 2004)
- Use of a "MacGuffin"—a word popularized by, and associated with, Hitchcock in particular (e.g., in *North by Northwest*, the art statue with a secret around it). [NB: A MacGuffin is some detail or object that is a major issue—object of desire or worry—for the characters but which, in itself, is totally unimportant (for the viewers to know).]
- Recurrent motifs:
  - o stairways for suspense (e.g., *Vertigo*);
  - o birds as omens of bad luck (e.g., *Birds*);
  - o falling from high places/acrophobia (e.g., *North by Northwest*, *Vertigo*);
  - o doubles (Rosenblatt 2004);
  - o spirals (Žižek 2004, p. 261).
- Extraordinary climaxes at public monuments: e.g., Mt. Rushmore (*North by Northwest*) or Golden Gate Bridge (*Vertigo*)
- Familiar places rendered strange through tension and drama and fear (Wollen 2013[1972], p. 183).

### Character types

- Domineering mothers (e.g., *Psycho*) (Wollen 2013[1972], pp. 184–85);
- Charming, upper-class, attractive villains.

### Casting

- Casting the same actors and personnel; in particular, icy blond heroines: e.g., Grace Kelly and her later "surrogates": Ingrid Bergman, Doris Day, Kim Novak, Tippi Hedrin (whom Hitchcock presumably styled in the image of Kelly);
- Hitchcock himself appears in all of his films in hidden, but not that hidden, cameos.

### Cinematic elements

- Minimal dialogue for narration, visual storytelling (Rosenblatt 2004);
- Understated acting, shots of actors' blank expressions (McElhaney 2004);
- "Watch the listening" shots of characters' uptake of others' speech/action; in particular, in shot / point-of-view shot / reaction shot sequences;
- Use of color with symbolic meanings:
  - o Technicolor, surrealist imagery (e.g., dream-sequence in *Vertigo*);
  - o Marked lighting contrasts (darkness for impending doom).
- Camerawork:
  - o Use of marked (impossible) high angles (e.g., *Topaz*, *Psycho*) (Narenmore 2004, p. 30);
  - o Roaming cameras that "lurch inward" into intimate spaces (e.g., *Rear Window*).
- Voyeuristic point-of-view shots:
  - o shots of people looking through cameras (e.g., *Rear Window*);
  - o peep holes (e.g., *Psycho*) and spying on others;
  - o screens within screens (e.g., *Strangers on a Train*).
- Proximity to face correlating with actor emotion:
  - o wide shots for emotional distance between characters;
  - o close ups for intense emotion;
  - o profiles for guilt;
  - o behind for denial.

Figure 7. Some elements of Hitchcock's person-indexing register, as collated from cinephile metadiscourse.