
UNIT 3 SEMIOTICS AND THE VISUAL: MEDIATIONS

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Structure

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3.1 INTRODUCTION

In simple parlance, semiotics is the study of signs and symbols. In Unit 1 of this block, you have learnt about Semiotics in the context of structuralism. Now, let us try to understand the complex relationship between Semiotics as a discipline and Visual culture by focusing our analysis on advertisements. A semiotic analysis is often used to critique the mythic structures that advertisements work to communicate. Using semiotics we will decode the social myths the advertisements draw on and analyse whether they reinforce or challenge them.

In order to do this, we will first discuss the main components of semiotics as derived by Ferdinand de Saussure and then Charles S. Peirce. We will then move on to Roland Barthes's myth construction, and then to a seminal text *Ways of seeing* (2008) by John Berger. Lastly, we will understand the ideology, mythic structures and the referent system that underplays advertisements by way of discussing Judith Williamson's book *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (2002).

3.2 OBJECTIVES

After completing this unit you should be able to:

- Explain the basic aspects of Semiotics
- Discuss the importance of Semiotics in contemporary visual culture through cinema, advertisements, television, painting and signboards; and
- Conduct a Semiotic analysis of cultural products like advertisements and relate them to questions of power and representation in our society.

3.3 PRINCIPLES OF SEMIOTICS

By now, you are already familiar with the work of the French linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure. Let us once more review his contributions before we apply these in the context of visual culture for the purposes of this unit. Saussure, in his book *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), posits that signs are made up of two parts: a *signifier* (a sound, an object, an image) and a *signified* (a concept generated by the signifier). The vehicle, which expresses the sign, is called the signifier. For example, the word 'cat', the letters separately i.e. 'c', 'a', 't', form the signifier. When we read the word, a mental picture of a cat is conjured up in our minds. This mental picture or the concept, which the signifier calls forth, is the signified.

Moreover, signs are arbitrary. The linguistic sign 'cat' has no relation to the 'cat' in reality in terms of its sound, physical appearance etc. This occurs because of social convention and an agreement among a group of users that a particular sign shall denote a particular something. According to Saussure, each linguistic sign has a place in the system of language or *langue* (French), and every speech or writing according to the rules of the *langue* is grammar or *parole* (French). In any language for utterances to be meaningful, they have to fall in line with the widely accepted rules of the language. Whereas, the actual things, which signs refer to, are called 'referents.'

Furthermore, Saussure (2011) points out that every sign in any *langue* derives its meaning by virtue of its difference to other signs. We recognize the sign 'cat', by its difference to 'dog', 'apple' etc. So language is a system of differences between one sign and all others, where the difference between one sign and the others allows distinctions of meaning to be made. The systems in which signs are organized into groups are called codes. For example, different dress codes apply for office, party or casual wear. Saussure distinguished between the evolution of linguistic signs through time, called 'diachronic' linguistics, and the study of signs existing at a given point in time, called 'synchronic' linguistics. To explain this, Jonathan Bignell (2002) uses the example of jeans. Today jeans are associated with connotations of 'casual style' or 'youthfulness'. The coded meaning of jeans depends on its relationship with and, difference from other coded signs in the clothing system today, and does not depend on the history of jeans. Therefore, synchronic analysis reveals more about the contemporary meaning of jeans than diachronic analysis. So, as Bignell (2002) says, the systems which structure our language also shape our experiences of reality.

In linguistic signs, language is always dependent upon time. While writing or speaking, one sign must follow the other, spread out over time. In photographs, paintings and other visual forms, each sign is present at the same time as others and these are distributed across space rather than

time. Whereas in cinema, both space and time are involved. In most languages, we read from left to right. **Jonathan Bignell** points out that in the sentence, 'The dog bites the man', if it is read from right to left, its meaning will be completely transformed. This horizontal movement is termed as the 'syntagmatic' aspect of the sentence. As a general principle, every sign that is present must be considered in relation to other signs present in the structure articulation, and every sign present has meaning by virtue of the other signs which have been excluded and are not present in the text (Bignell, 2002, p. 14).

Saussure called his theory of signs as **semiology**, from the Greek term for signs, *semeion*. Post Saussure, an American philosopher, **Charles S. Peirce** (1931), proposed a different theory of signs, which he called **semiotics**. In recent times, Peirce's term 'semiotics' has become widely accepted as the term to be employed for the analysis and interpretation of signs. As in linguistic signs, visual signs have codes and are characterized by arbitrariness; Peirce calls this the 'symbolic' sign. Additionally, when a signifier resembles the referent, Peirce calls this an 'iconic' sign. Iconic signs have the property to merge the signifier, signified and referent and thus in a photographic sign, it is difficult to distinguish among them (Peirce, 1931). It is precisely for this reason that **Bignell** claims that photographic media is more realistic than the linguistic media.

When a cat is hungry, it meows to gain our attention, as a way of making us realize its presence. Peirce terms this kind of sign as 'indexical'. Indexical signs have a concrete and often causal relationship with the signified. Bignell gives the example of a traffic light which has mixed symbolic and indexical components. When the traffic light signals red, it is an indexical sign as it means that the cars must wait, and simultaneously a symbolic sign as red arbitrarily signifies danger and prohibition in this context (Bignell, 2002, p. 13).

In the next section, we will examine how these theories were further developed and refined by Roland Barthes.

Check Your Progress:

*What is a sign according to Saussure? How does it apply to language?
Explain in your own words.*

3.4 ROLAND BARTHES AND MYTH

In 1957, the French philosopher and critic **Roland Barthes** published a book called *Mythologies*. The book consists of short essays, in which Barthes uses semiotics as the predominant means of analyzing aspects of everyday culture. The book concludes with an essay titled, “Myth Today” in which Barthes attempts to explain how he derived his meanings for his first section of the book. In *Mythologies* Barthes analyzes texts as disparate as soap-powders and detergents, toys, the face of the renowned movie star Greta Garbo, and practices like wine drinking and Steak and Chips. He reads or deconstructs each image or product as to how they help in strengthening societal norms and rituals. He also simultaneously shows how these images facilitate the domination of the petit-bourgeoisie in the daily life of the 1950’s in France.

In “Myth Today”, **Barthes** (1957) takes from Ferdinand de Saussure, his notion of the signifier, signified and the sign. In Barthes’ application of this notion to the objects and practices of everyday life, he takes the analysis a step further and invests a further layer of meaning in each sign - the mythological meaning or cultural subtext that underlies the primary linguistic meaning. He names the language system that myth appropriates the “language-object”, while myth itself is termed the “metalanguage”, i.e. that language which is used to structure and manipulate everyday language. On the level of everyday language, the signifier is the “meaning” but on the level of myth, it becomes the “form”. The signified remains the “concept” in both cases. That which is the “sign” on the first level, however, is equated to “signification” at the level of myth. For example, he deconstructs a photograph of a black man saluting the French flag on the cover of Paris-Match and explores the layers of meaning this image conveys, with the physical image on the paper serving as the original signifier and the signified being the literal reading of patriotism in terms of a loyal citizen saluting the flag, while the deeper or “mythological” meaning of the entire sign becomes a reinforcement of French imperialism by implying that France’s non-White “citizens” in colonial territories were content and fulfilled in their role relative to the Empire. Myth being a “second order semiological system”, the sign in the first system, which in this case is “the purposeful mixture of Frenchness and militariness” embodied in the figure of the black citizen saluting the flag, becomes a signifier in the second system that represents a bourgeois ideological glorification of Empire (Barthes, 1973, p.115).

According to **Barthes** (1957), there are three potential ways to relate to myth: as a producer, as a reader or as a decipherer of mythological speech. The task of the mythologist is to delve beneath several layers of meaning to uncover the ideological structure at the base, exposing the deceptive innocence of mythical speech as a sham. This process restores a sense of “history” and political relevance to naturalized images such as the “Negro-giving-the-salute” in the example above.

This mythological layer of meaning, then, despite its seemingly ahistorical “naturalness” and innocence, is determined by historical processes and motivated by the desire of dominant groups to maintain their ideologies and power. Myth, therefore, reflects the power structure in society at any given time. The hegemonic influence wielded by the petit-bourgeoisie, in Barthes’ view, lies in their ability to construct an image of reality that seems most natural and “real” to the rest of society, even if it represents an ideal unattainable by these other segments of the population. It is the manufactured and ideological aspect of this taken-for-granted sphere of daily life that he wishes to reveal for what it is:

“In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves” (Barthes, 1989, p. 156).

Thus, Myth according to Barthes is a type of speech that uses signs to communicate a social and political message about the world. Myth involves manipulating or forgetting of alternative messages, so that myth appears to be exclusively true, rather than other possible messages existing. The ideology conveyed tends to naturalize something which in real is actually human-constructed. By “myths”, Barthes intends that all interpretations that humans in general and the Bourgeoisie in particular impose upon events are done to bolster their own social dominance.

Check Your Progress:

i) *What is Semiotics?*

ii) *How does C. S. Peirce define a Sign?*

iii) *How does Roland Barthes advance the understanding of Signs through myth?*

3.5 SEMIOTICS OF ADVERTISEMENTS

Advertising is a kind of popular culture, and it is a major way through which we learn about, and learn how to, interpret other kinds of popular culture. As a major mode of socialization, advertisements tell us how to think and feel (defining notions of normalcy, fashion, style and sexiness) and what is important in everyday life (latest gadgets, fairness of skin, size of one's body). Barthes' (1957) notion of **Mythology** is helpful here in understanding the creation of ideology or myth by the advertiser, in order to make them heard through processes of naturalization and making them look innocent. The same can be said about advertisements; they are designed to persuade the consumers.

John Berger in his *Ways of Seeing* (2008) asserts that seeing comes before words. He points out that the way we see things is determined by what we know. Seeing and recognition comes before words and thereafter we use the requisite words from our *langue* to explain what we see in the world. He further points out that what we know, our beliefs, our experiences and our knowledge affects the way we see things. He quotes the example of how today we see fire in a different light, whereas people in the Middle Ages associated it with hell.

According to Berger, the social presence of a woman is different from that of a man. Men are measured by the degree of power they wield, where power could be of several kinds - moral, physical, social, economic or sexual. A man's presence suggests what he may or may not be able to do to or for you. A woman's presence in contrast indicates what can or cannot be done to her. Every action of a woman contributes to her presence. A woman is born into the keeping of a man, taught since childhood to constantly survey herself to be appreciated, appreciated ultimately by men. Hence, her sense of being is split into two, that of the *surveyed* and the *surveyor*. Berger simplifies this by saying that *men act*, whereas *women appear* and that a woman watches herself being looked at. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object, and most importantly, an object of vision: a sight (Berger, 2008, p. 41).

Berger illustrates that in the nudes of European oil paintings, women were the predominant subjects. The earliest representations of the nude are found in the story of Adam and Eve. For Berger they establish two striking elements. First, after consuming the apple they saw each other in a different light, therefore nakedness was in the eye of the beholder. Second, the woman is blamed and as way of punishment is made subservient to the man. During the Renaissance, the story disappeared with the emphasis more on the moment of shame being directed at the viewer. Gradually, the shame became a display. However, as paintings became more secular, in all the implication was that the woman is aware of the spectator.

To establish his point Berger discusses many examples of nudes, such as nudes looking into the mirrors and being accused of vanity, or nudes looking at the viewer looking at them. The common thread moving along is the desire of the male to see a woman naked, a sense of women being watched, their bodies always turned towards the viewer, especially the male viewer.

For Berger, 'publicity' is the same as advertising images/photographs. According to him, in our society today, the concentration of these images is so high and frequent that we take them for granted. These visual images are fleeting which refer to the future. Therefore, they seem to continually pass us, so they are seen as dynamic and us as static. Publicity is usually explained and justified as a competitive medium, which ultimately benefits

the public (the consumer) and the most efficient manufacturers and thus the national economy. The great hoardings and the publicity neons of the cities of capitalism are the immediate visible sign of 'The Free World' (Berger, 2008, p.125).

Judith Williamson takes forward the concepts introduced by Roland Barthes regarding *Mythologies* or *myths* further in her book *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (1981). She explains how the meanings of a sign are willingly transferred into a mythology in advertisements to give a meaningless product some significance. Her aim is to uncover the deceptive mythology that these advertisements propagate. By the rationale of Saussure, she argues that meaning is conveyed by a signified in its reference to a signifier. The signified is ideas, and the signifier is a thing: together, they form a 'sign' and are completely inseparable in any form of communication. According to Williamson, the function of the overt meaning in an advertisement is to create in the minds of the viewer a less obvious or a latent meaning. For this to be possible and for semiotically analyzing advertisements, three points need to be kept in mind:

- The correlation between signifier and signified is non-sequential, they are linked because of formal structures (i.e. their relative place in the frame, editing techniques, use of color, and so on).
- The viewer is the most active in the process as he/she is required to make the transfer of meanings possible.
- The element from which the product acquires meaning, must have significance in another system of meanings which exist outside of advertising (referent system).

Williamson (1981) argues that the real distinctions between people are created by their role in production. However, in advertisements, it is the products produced which create a distinction as a result of the invocation of the false categories by these ads. They obscure the real distinctions in the society by way of replacing them with the consumption patterns of the society. Hence, from this arises the false assumption that a person with two cars and a TV is not part of the working class. Through the act of buying something, one is given a false sense of upward rise or fall in the society. Williamson terms this as ideology. She says, "Ideology is the meaning made necessary by the conditions of society while helping to perpetuate those conditions. We feel a need to belong, to have a social place; it can be hard to find. Instead we may be given an imaginary one" (Williamson, 1981, p. 13).

In the context of advertisements, though we are unaware of the ideology, we inevitably participate in the creation and interpretation of meaning. The illusion is that we are free to act according to our tastes. Ideology

operates under the assumption that we do not question as they are already seen as true. Advertisements create an 'alreadyness' of 'facts'. Williamson also points out that advertisements speak in our language. Since advertisements have no clear subject that they address, a gap arises in communication. The speaker of the advertisement and us the listeners try to fill this gap as we watch, where we become simultaneously listener and speaker, subject and object of the advertisement.

The viewer unconsciously links products, signs, symbols and creates the meaning of an ad which Williamson calls the **currency of signs**. Currency is something which represents a value in its interchangeability with other things and in turn gives them their value too (Williamson, 1981, p. 20). The concept of currency is a useful metaphor for the transference of meaning. This meaning is so intimately connected with real money transactions. In real money transactions as we know money becomes interchangeable only in a referent system in which each currency like the Indian Rupee and the British Pound or the European Union Euro has a curtailed assigned value with reference to each other. The currency of signs is also such an interconnected system.

To explain further Williamson goes back to Barthes who says that advertisements denote one thing while connote something else (Williamson, 1981, p.33). Williamson points out that in denotation a signifier means or denotes something signified, whereas in connotation the signifier is itself the denoting sign, and the sign in its totality points to *something else*. It is this, *something else*, that Williamson terms as a '**Referent System**'. And for the product to symbolize something, the viewer must have knowledge of this referent system so as to complete the transfer of meaning as intended by the advertiser.

Williamson describes this with an example of an ad in which the face of Catherine Deneuve, a famous French actress, is placed beside a perfume bottle of 'Chanel No 5'. To decipher the ad, the reader must refer to the referent system of celebrities, which marks Deneuve as different from other celebrities. The reader is then able to make a connection between the signified of Deneuve as sophisticated, elegant and the signified perfume. Hence, the transference of meaning from the celebrity to the perfume bottle is complete (Williamson, 1981, p. 43).

Accordingly, Williamson points out the presence of a meta-structure that refers to the fact that an advertisement can possess two systems: the referent system that gives the ad meaning, and the product's system (the status of the product within the world of similar products). This is what makes an ad readable; receivers must take into account what items inside the ad mean in the outside referent system and in the context of the particular type of product's system (Williamson 1981, p. 42).

In the context of high-fashion advertising, Williamson mentions about the product being a signifier. She says that after the transference of the meaning, the product itself comes to 'mean'. The ad with Angelina Jolie placed below appeared in May-June 2011, with Cambodia as the backdrop. The tagline below reads, "A single journey can change the course of a life. Cambodia, May 2011." Along with the print ads, a 10 minute video was also released, with Angelina Jolie sitting amidst the riverine landscape of Cambodia and describing her relationship with Cambodia as one characterized by deep emotions. Angelina Jolie first visited Cambodia during the shooting of her movie 'Lara Croft: Tomb Raider' in 2000. She found the place breathtaking, and returned subsequently as the goodwill ambassador for UNHCR to raise awareness about the dangers of landmines. She then adopted her eldest son, Maddox, from one of the orphanages there. In 2005, King Norodom Sihamoni awarded her the Cambodian citizenship, for her humanitarian work. Post the adoption, Jolie's image transformed into that of a humanitarian and a mother. Since then she has adopted children from Ethiopia and Vietnam besides giving birth herself, thus creating a rainbow family. Overtime this has established her as a devoted mother, with picture perfect snapshots of her and her children along with her partner, spending time together as a 'family'. But more importantly, it is a family which epitomizes the ideal of equality and non-discrimination. The strong message that goes out is that of a family with strong ideals, which is committed to promoting equality and at the same time practicing it as well, a model family to be emulated by the others as affluent and well off as them. She founded the Maddox Jolie foundation which is dedicated to community development and environmental conservation in Cambodia's north-western province Battambang and also established the Jolie-Pitt Foundation humanitarian causes worldwide. When she sold the photos of her biological children to leading magazines, the proceeds went to her Jolie-Pitt foundation. Jolie has been on field missions around the world and has met with refugees and internally displaced people in more than thirty countries. She is noted for not shying away from traveling to areas that are at war: she visited the Darfur region of Sudan during the Darfur conflict in 2004; Chad during its civil war in 2007; Iraq during the Second Gulf War in 2007 and 2009; Afghanistan during the on-going war in 2008 and 2011; and Libya during the Libyan Revolution in 2011. In addition she has received awards for her efforts such as the inaugural Humanitarian Award by the Church World Service's Immigration and Refugee Program, the Citizen of the World Award by United Nations Correspondents Association etc. She is today renowned more for her humanitarian causes, performing her duty due to her virtue of being a part of humanity in addition to raising her rainbow family, than as a Hollywood actress. Keeping in view this background, the tagline of this ad, that a single journey can change the course of a life resonates with Jolie's transformation after her movie shooting in Cambodia and is more

than apt to further be the carrier of the message that LV (Louis Vuitton) via its core ad campaign is striving to send across.



A Single Journey can change the course of a life.
Cambodia, May 2011

LOUIS VUITTON

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/06/13/angelina-jolie-louis-vuitton_n_875851.html

The ad is set in the scenic riverine landscape of Siem Reap province. Jolie is seen sitting on a traditional wooden boat, barefoot with her vintage LV A l hold all, which she owns in real life too. In the ad, Jolie's jeans are rolled up and her clothes indicate rough usage; moreover, her 'naturally' wind-swept hair, translucent or with no make-up and her 'natural' surroundings are all geared to convey the 'nature' of the person. The idea is to depict Jolie's original, natural self when she is doing what she does from her heart, and that she does make an impact on everybody highlighting the cause of Cambodia and how her Cambodian experience led to change in her priorities in life, which became dedicating to fight for humanitarian causes worldwide. Furthermore her weather beaten and adventurous appearance seeks to showcase her courageous and daring aspect of her personality (visiting areas of conflict), somebody who does not merely mince words but also undertakes due course of action in order to change the order of the things. The 'natural' look of the advertisement can be further explained by Williamson's explanation of 'the natural'. According to her, being 'natural' did not have the positive connotations, until the 18th century and the Romantic era. This change in society's view of 'the natural',

no doubt stems from a change in material conditions; the importance of 'the natural' increases directly in proportion as society's distance from *nature* is increased, through technological development (Williamson, 1981, p. 124). The human being's relationship with nature is inevitably a dialectical one: it gives us our existence, and yet we must work on it and struggle with it to survive. In an advertisement, the referent (the natural product), is presented with the product and both are merged. In this instance, the referent is the 'natural' Angelina Jolie and her experiences of her emotional journey being transferred onto the LV bag, which has along the way been subject to the same emotional upheavals and achievements as Jolie.

Thus, the transference process is complete and when a consumer buys an LV bag, they get to acquire the brand's meaning and in turn become a part of the remarkable journeys undertaken by the celebrities which completely transform them into better human beings. While decoding the ultimate message of an advertisement relies solely on the viewers, in the process the viewers transform into product themselves. **Appellation**, the process of recognizing oneself as a subject, is crucial to the creation of meaning for a product. Williamson argues that appellation involves an exchange between us as an individual, and the imaginary subject addressed by the advertisement (Williamson, 1981, p.64).

Sara Mills, in her *Feminist Stylistics*, discusses how the fragmentation of the female body leads to the body becoming depersonalized, objectified and reduced into parts. These fragmented parts correspond directly to male focalization and hence the female body is objectified for the male gaze. In a patriarchal society the female body has always served as the object of thorough male scrutiny in advertising and mass media (Mills, 2002, p.6). The male gaze is that of the dominant one and in addition, the male gaze is not exclusively exercised by men alone. As explained by **John Berger** whom we discussed earlier, when a woman is born she is kept within the allotted and confined space, into the keeping of a man. A woman must continually watch herself, survey everything of herself and most crucially how she appears to men. Hence, she becomes the surveyor and the surveyed. The presence of nudity of women in European oil painting treads the same line of thought, where the paintings of women are there to present or offer themselves to the eyes or pleasure of the man. Woman offers her femininity.

Judith Williamson explains this by way of the 'Absent Man'. According to her there isn't literally an absence of a man, but someone is conspicuous by his absence signified by the clues in the advertisement. According to Williamson the man in these advertisements is nowhere and yet everywhere, a pervasive presence defining and determining everything, and in whose term the woman must define herself. She is doomed to see herself through his eyes, describe herself in his language. To contrast this Williamson uses

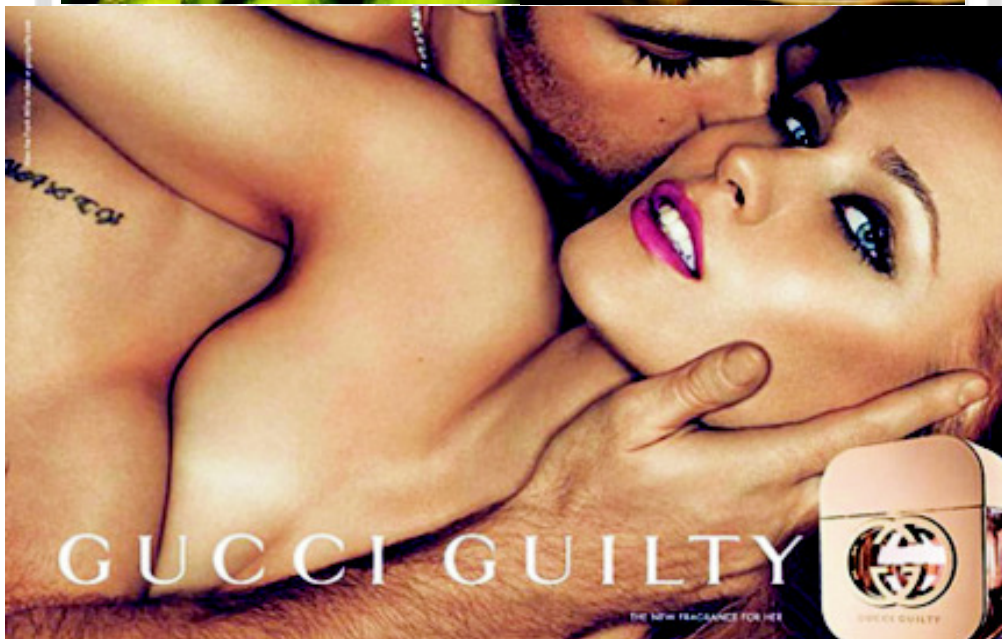
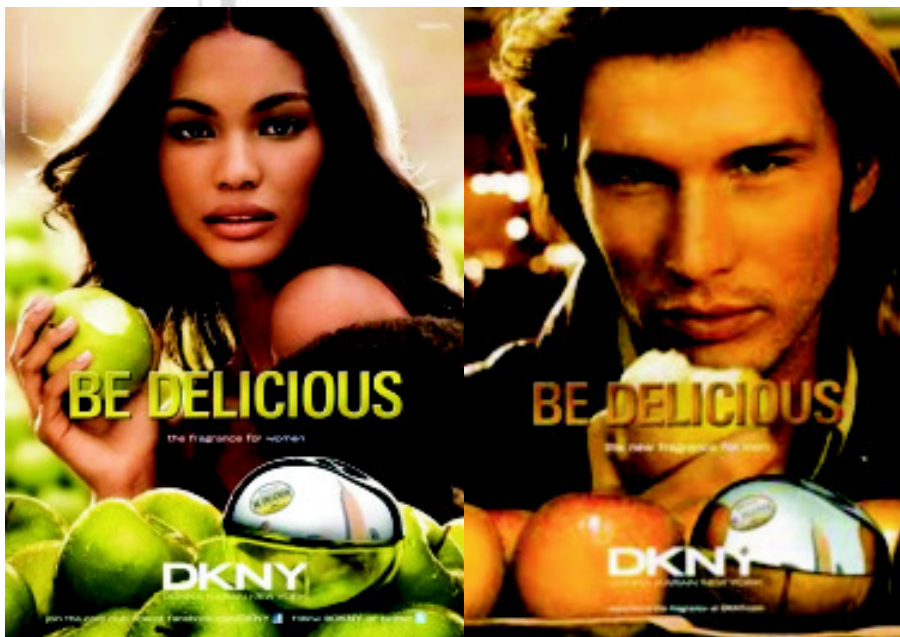
the example of the Lowenbrau beer ad. In the ad a man is casually lounging at his pool holding a cigar and a drink, with the backdrop of a huge mansion. He, unlike women models does not look at the audience. He does not need to, it is the audience which looks at him. He is independent, masculine and he has no need to please others. He does not have to seek out, to please; he will fasten his gaze on whatever interests him and at the moment it is his beer. We are sold the product by looking *with* him, not *at* him. (Williamson, 1981, p 102). Many contemporary advertisements, particularly those of fast moving consumer goods, cars, high end perfumes and other similar products, display a body language and visual iconography vis a vis men and women, that testifies to this analysis.

Check Your Progress:

i) *How are women turned into objects of sight in the history of visual arts?*

ii) *Why does Judith Williamson feel that advertisements propagate deceptive mythology?*

iii) *What is Judith Williamson's concept of Currency of Signs?*



Source: <http://thesmokingnun.wordpress.com/2011/06/02/chris-evans-launches-gucci-guilty-por-homme/> -

The advertisements depicted above follow the same line of thought as explained by Berger (2008) and Williamson (1981). In all the perfume ads featuring women, the model is offering herself for the benefit of the male viewer, as illustrated by Berger with the help of the Bronzino painting, 'Venus, Cupid and Time (Allegory of Lust)' (Berger, 2008, p 64). (<http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/bronzino-an-allegory-with-venus-and-cupid>).

Such images seek to reinforce the male gaze of women being objectified as sexual objects. The models used are beautiful, young women who pander to the male fantasy. They appear desirable, submissive to the demands of the man. The male perfume ads on the other hand are contrary to the images of women in perfume ads. They are shown as upright, looking at you, as if inviting you to comprehend what are the desires of a man, and

what they enjoy or how they would expect the woman viewer respond to him (Sarkar, 2012, p. 62). Additionally, their parted lips and bare bodies have sexual connotations. According to Williamson, sex becomes a referent system, always hinted at, and referred to, in innuendo, double entendre, or symbolism (Williamson, 1981, p. 65).

3.6 LET US SUM UP

This unit summarised the principles of semiotics and its relevance to the field of visual studies. Through the works of the pioneers Ferdinand D. Saussure and C.S. Pierce, language has been rethought in 20th century as central to how human beings articulate the world. We examined the linguistic unit of sign as explained by Saussure, a double entity comprised of signifier and signified. We then proceeded to understand Roland Barthes' application of this notion to the objects and practices of everyday life where he takes the analysis a step further and invests a further layer of meaning in each sign viz., the mythological meaning or cultural subtext that underlies the primary linguistic meaning. We then discussed the works of John Berger and Judith Williamson to subject advertisements to a productive semiotic analysis to understand how they engage us as individuals in the economy of consumption.

As you can see from the above discussion, visual advertisements play an important role in terms of the cultural representation of gender, and in determining how we as viewers, receive the encoded messages about women's and men's roles in society. Semiotics helps us to critically analyze and deconstruct the hidden messages so that we can become aware of our own participation in this process.

3.7 UNIT END QUESTIONS

- 1) Why is Myth a metalanguage in Roland Barthes? Discuss.
- 2) Explain the Meta referent system of advertisements in Judith Williamson.
- 3) Attempt a semiotic analysis of contemporary toy ads and their gendered perceptions.
- 4) Using the work of John Berger and Judith Williamson, critically analyze any perfume advertisement that you can find in an Indian magazine.
- 5) After reading this unit, do you think we can apply the same semiotic analysis to contemporary Bollywood cinema? Use any one example of a movie to discuss.

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