

# House a politician or a plant cultural studies essay



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Introduction: Images can sell everything such as perfume, car, a shoe, a house, a politician or a plant. Ads present us with images and then make them seem true (Quoted in Dyer, 1982: 82). Images are the central medium of information and visuals are dominant images today. Advertising is what René König has termed 'a restless image' (Quoted in Myers 1983: 221). Advertisements holds an independent existence and a powerful effect, especially with the aid of visual narrative. Human being is bombarded with symbols, images and signs and has always tried to signify them and to use them for communication. The meaning comes out of an interaction between the message and its reader). The components, but also the relation between those components, the impressions it has created and the techniques used for creating such impressions must be considered. The images urge us to react and we become aware of its effect upon us. This is the result of connotations embedded in the images. Visual semiotics lead to deconstruction of the communicative visuals to try to find the meaning and ideology. Print advertising creates a medium for understanding how advertisers try to persuade potential receivers to go into action. According to van Leeuwen (2005, p. 8), "A good starting point for studying aspects of visual communication is to consider that there is two verbal and visual modes of communication in print advertising with complex interaction between them". The importance about signs is that their meaning can only be assessed in relation to their structure and in their structural relationships with other signs. A sign not only means in and for itself, but also through its place in other signifying systems, for example the individual ad in advertising. The signified does not exist except as a function of a particular signifying system. The main aim of this research is to show the ideological

concepts hidden in ads and the role gender plays in it. Analysis of Magazine Advertisements with Semiotics Approach

Picture 1 Sample Sign: Absolut Vodka magazine advertisement

absolutperfect

The figures and elements shown in the ad is a modern female opening a box with different bodily parts of a modern working man in an urban designed room . The mood is showing a distorted scene where the woman tries to construct a perfect man from the body parts she has ordered. The mood is positive by neglecting the expression on the frustrated women face while she is trying to put the man's body parts together. The roses, the formal clothes of the lower portion, the guitar and the tattoo on the man's arm, the girl reading the instructions on the package , the mars symbol for male on the package, the urban setting and modern furniture and decor , the specs, and the dog act as signifiers in this advertisement. The body parts of the male figure are of different colour; the face seems white, the arms are white, but the torso is of darker color which could be that of a black man. Unlike previous perception, when " racial minorities were either ignored or stereotyped" they are now projected as part of an ideal world (Croteau & Hoynes 2003, 201). Looking at the different body parts, the ad cleverly puts across the Absolut definition of a perfect man . A perfect man is supposed to buy roses for his woman, he is supposed to work as a professional and may have other interests such as playing on the guitar, and his body has six pack abs. The perfection of the man is superficial and does not seem to touch upon his emotional and intellectual characteristics as being an expectation of the woman's dream man. The symbol of mars male on the carton strengthen the heterosexuality of today's major society. The dog in the ad seems to be watching the woman. It seems a bit frightened seeing the body parts which shows the confusion that the

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animal is in. In today's 'do it yourself world', we can select and arrange anything we wish to own and possess. In the real world, a perfect man probably does not exist so one has to assemble one yourself. The semiotic of the campaign is about the world and the people in it. This is a global language that focuses on the world and its people, their identity and the one homogeneous desire of the vast diversity existing today. This campaign definitely addresses very universal issues in a sense of what Absolut vodka would be like in an Absolut world today. The advertisement resembles the changes that are going on in the world. Women are portrayed as strong confident and powerful rather than only sexual objects which are beautiful and attractive. Moreover, homosexuality is indirectly reflected in ads and is no longer taboo. The perception of coloured or racial different groups is perceived in a positive way. In the Vodka ad, a black body was perceived as part of ideal man. (2012). Gender and Media Representation. (Key Concept of Media Studies). Retrieved from [http://www.someaddress.com/full/url/http://www.mediaknowall.com/as\\_alevel/alevkeyconcepts/alevelkeycon.php?pageID=gender](http://www.someaddress.com/full/url/http://www.mediaknowall.com/as_alevel/alevkeyconcepts/alevelkeycon.php?pageID=gender). Picture 2SampleSign: Southern Comfort magazine advertisement [http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics\\_and\\_ads/ball\\_and\\_chain.jpg](http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/ball_and_chain.jpg) <http://www.slideshare.net/Veiland/semiotianalysis-on-4-alcoh> <http://www.slideshare.net/Veiland/semiotianalysis-on-4-alcoh> "The old " is a phrase that Most people know the phrase "ball-and-chain" which is associated with oppression, jail, convicts, hard labour and unfairness. We often hear it from the lips of a distressed, fatigued, overworked man who is in the company of his nagging wife. It is this image that the advertisers for Southern Comfort are trying to convey. They want the person looking at the ad to sympathise

[http://www.mediaknowall.com/as\\_alevel/alevkeyconcepts/alevelkeycon.php?pageID=gender](http://www.mediaknowall.com/as_alevel/alevkeyconcepts/alevelkeycon.php?pageID=gender)

[http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics\\_and\\_ads/ball\\_and\\_chain.jpg](http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/ball_and_chain.jpg)

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with the man in the image. The man is dragging his imaginary "ball-and-chain". There are many signifiers in this ad. There is a man, three women, bags, sides of buildings, a chair, writing on a window, a sidewalk-like walkway, a bottle of Southern Comfort, some white lines, and two lines of copy. The first line of copy reads, "Your free time may have changed. Your drink doesn't have to." The second line reads, "Hang on to your spirit." The ad is divided in two. The top two-thirds of the ad is the photo image and the bottom one third features a black background. The advertisers take our mind from the image on the page to the thoughts that progress in our head through the images, or signs, that have been presented to us. The man in the ad is dressed casually, wearing khakis and a blue, collared shirt. A box is tucked under his left arm and his hands are full of shopping bags. On his right foot is the image of a ball-and-chain suggested by dashed white lines. In the direction in which he is looking is a woman wearing a short black dress with black heeled-shoes. The woman is holding onto the right arm of the man and holding a purse with her right hand. She is looking towards him and she is smiling. Much of our reaction to this ad comes from looking at these two individuals, especially from the image of the man. The colour of the man's shirt and the bags he is carrying stands in contrast to the black of the woman's dress and therefore attracts our eyes toward him. By carrying so many bags, while the other individuals in the ad have at most one bag, also makes him the centre of our attention. We see the bags that the man is carrying meaning that there has been a day of shopping. The relation between the man and woman, enforced by our own codes of what the duties of the male and female are in a relationship, leads us to the assumption that he is carrying the bags for the woman walking next to him, holding onto his

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arm. The image of the ball and-chain as well as the woman grasping the man's arm, makes us believe that the man may not be there voluntarily. He is " captured" (ball-and-chain) by the woman and is then forced to do things that he normally would not do such as spend the day shopping. The ad supports the idea of lifestyle change that a man is forced to undergo when he enters into a relationship with a woman. It blatantly reads, " Your free time may have changed", referring back to the paradigm of masculinity, that a man would not, under normal circumstances, choose to be shopping (this paradigm that shopping is a female hobby is also strengthened in the ad by the fact that there is only one male figure as opposed to three women, and the man is there because he is fulfilling some requirement of a male in a relationship). " Your drink doesn't have to leads one to assume that the Southern Comfort is the drink that the man used to use before his life was controlled by the woman, or is at least a common drink of choice for bachelors. It links the drink to the freedom that the man had before he became " captured", the freedom that men like to hold on to. " Hang on to your spirit", stands out because it looks like individually cut-out words which stand out on the contrasting black background. Our mind associates these cut-outs with the print found in newspapers or magazines. By using the cut-and-pasted words the advertisers imply the " ransom" myth as seen in movies where the villain of the film used cut-out letters to prevent being traced. The advertiser is warning the consumer not to let what happened to the man in the ad happen to them. The man must not let the bachelor spirit be captured by a demanding woman. They are urging the consumer to hold on to their freedom in their old way of life, which has been linked to the Southern Comfort. The advertiser is trying to get us to assume that the ball-

and-chain could be replaced with the bottle of Southern Comfort signifying freedom. The advertisers are appealing to the codes and paradigms that we have established in our culture which dictate to us what bachelorhood is like, what happens when a man enters into a committed relationship with a woman, and what behaviours are normal for men and women. The woman for whom the man is carrying the bags, is dressed in black. This could represent two things: it could be used to signify the fact that the woman is "upper class" or, it could be seen as signifying that she is the death of the man's freedom. Here, two contradicting social codes could be invoked for interpretation. Do we use the code that signifies black to mean high class and high society, or the one that interprets black as the colour of death? Semiotics is a complex system of interpretation and can be used in different ways by different people. I believe that the main objective of the advertisers here is clearly to associate Southern Comfort with the freedom that a man feels as a bachelor and, to appeal to an age group of men who might be in committed relationships and who are attracted by the lure of reliving their "glory days", escaping the ball-and-chain (control) that they are currently experiencing. The advertisers try to connect, in the reader's mind, Southern Comfort with myth of male bachelorhood, and therefore encouraging the public to buy Southern Comfort so that they can experience those things which society has come to associate with the myth of bachelorhood, namely freedom, and good times spent with friends. [http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics\\_and\\_ads/jrousseau\\_analysis.html](http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/jrousseau_analysis.html)

Conclusion Advertisements in today's world attempt to erase the line between ideals and reality. They try to bring us closer to what we want, what

we rarely need, and most importantly who we want to be. [http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics\\_and\\_ads/jrousseau\\_analysis.html](http://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/jrousseau_analysis.html)