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Set Design

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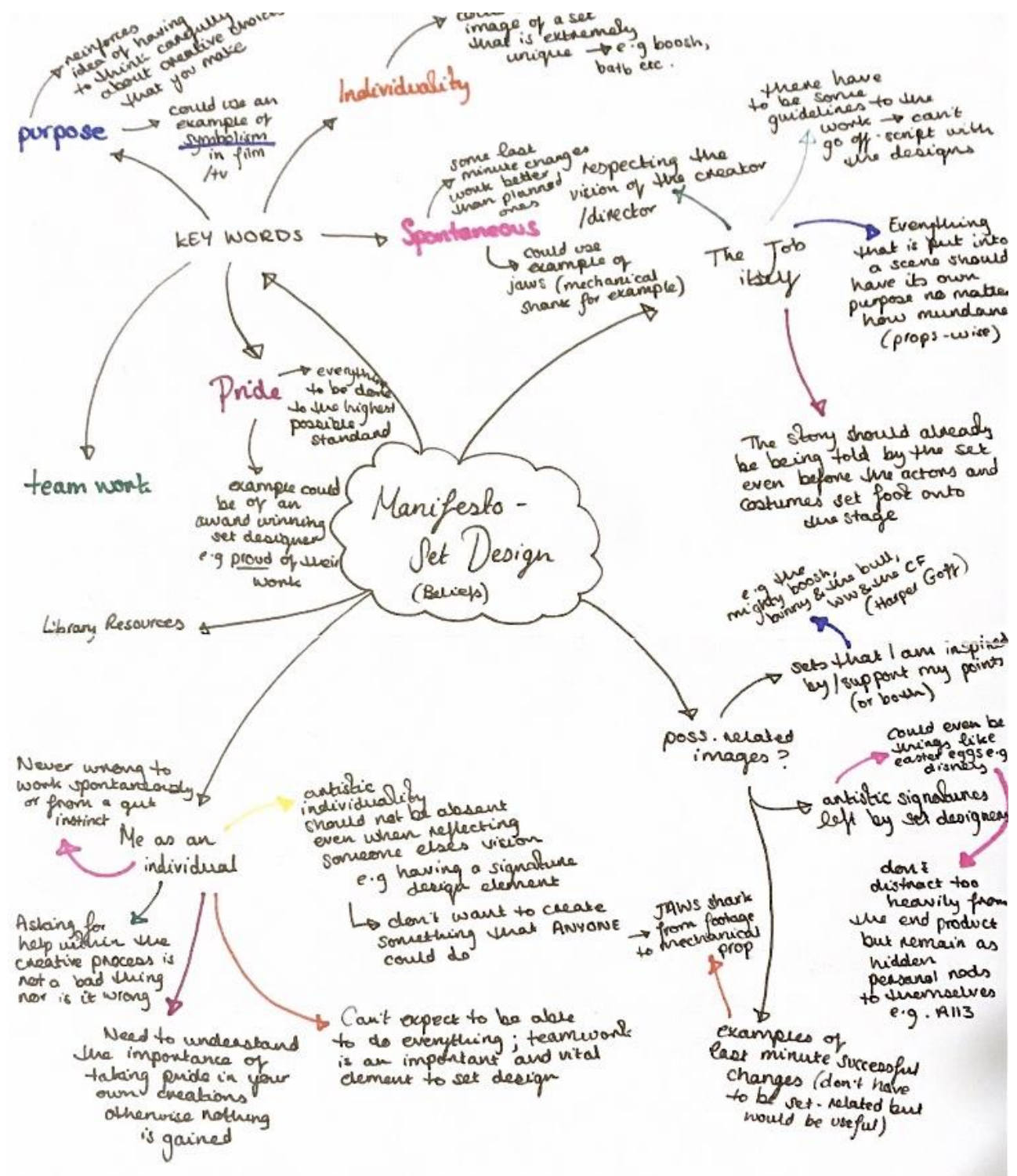
Tasks in the order I received them:

Task One: Manifesto (Julia Task) = 507 words

Task Two: (Jon Task) = 498 words

Task Three: Semiotic Analysis (Ryan Task) = 540 words

Task One: Manifesto (Julia's Task)



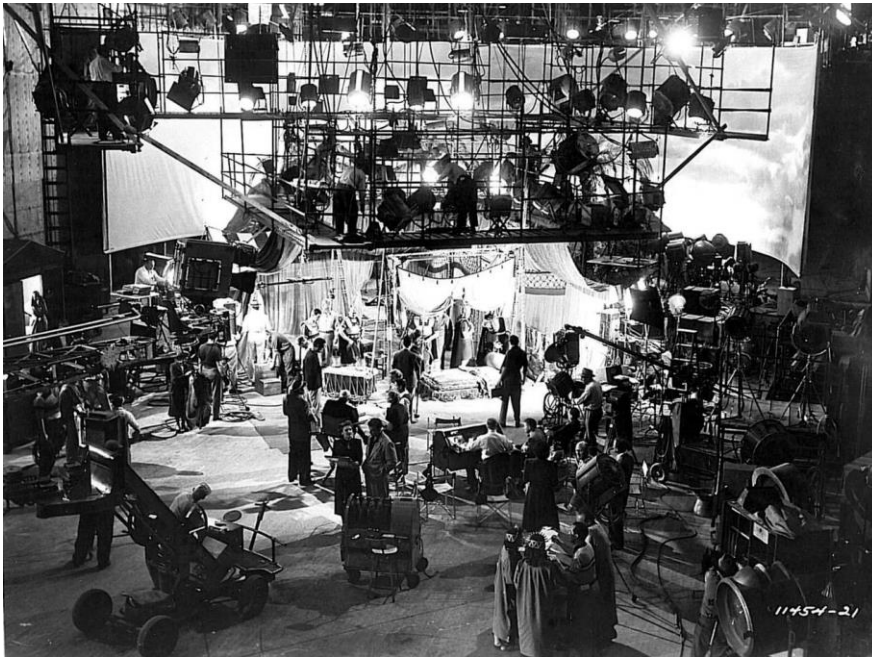
Beliefs as a Set Designer

1. It should be my job to evoke some sort of response from the audience
whether positive or negative; passivity achieves nothing
2. My own artistic individuality should not be absent within the director/creator's
vision
3. Designing a set is reliant on teamwork; without teamwork the end product's
success is limited
4. Spontaneity is a key element of set design as a problem solver regarding last-
minute changes that are crucial to getting things done on time
5. It is particularly important to enjoy and take pride in your creations, otherwise
nothing is gained from the experience
6. It is never wrong to ask for help or inspiration from somebody else in order to
generate creativity or get something done
7. Each item within a scene or set should have its own purpose and meaning;
communicating the story through objects and colour can influence the whole
scene
8. The set should be able to tell a story through your work before the scenes and
characters even come to life

Keywords & Images

Teamwork:

3. Designing a set is reliant on teamwork; without teamwork the end product's success is limited



Behind the scenes of Sunset Boulevard, 1950 [1]

It would be arrogant as a designer to assume that you alone can create a masterpiece of a set without any guidance or advice; asking for help is not a sign of creative weakness but a way to create the best possible outcome. Fundamentally you are already being helped at the beginning of the designing stage when you are first given a script or brief to work from. As a production begins, immediately “emphasis is on the director, the company of actors, and stage management” (Thorne,1999, p15). This means that everyone else’s role is just as important as yours when contributing to the final product; Actually speaking to the actors, director and even watching the rehearsals gives you vital insight for your design process. By

immersing yourself in the production and receiving feedback from others involved, the design is instantly more effective and successful than it would be if you shut yourself away and designed based on assumptions from the script.

Spontaneity

1. Spontaneity is a key element of set design as a problem solver regarding last-minute changes that are crucial to getting things done on time



Steven Spielberg with the mechanical Jaws shark, 1974 [2]

As a designer, even the most carefully planned projects can have unexpected problems that must be solved quickly. This might include props breaking unexpectedly before they need to be used or, as highlighted by Wilson (2003),

noticing whether a prop or item has any flaws during the performance or filming. It is especially prudent in these cases of limited time to think on your feet, meaning utilising your improvisational skills to find a quick solution whether it be temporary or finding a new material that's more effective than before. Spontaneity is then key to ensure smooth running of the project and for future reference should this problem arise again in the future. Importantly, despite possible risk regarding spontaneity, being open minded can unlock potential and is “much more palatable to a business culture” (Goddard, 2015).

Purpose

7. Each item within a scene or set should have its own purpose and meaning; communicating the story through objects and colour can influence the whole scene



The Emotions from Pixar's Inside Out, 2015 [3]

The most important job is being able to communicate a story with the set and the objects within it. Much like how a character's costume tells you about them, for example a depressed character may wear more ragged, baggy clothes with dark and faded colours as to not draw attention to themselves and to represent a lack of self-

care (Malloy, 2015, p225), you are essentially dressing a room in its own costume. Colour in a scene is a perfect indicator of mood or genre, and even shapes and form can change a scene e.g. something with jagged edges will automatically make it seem more aggressive. These details may not be blaringly obvious and so serve more as a subconscious symbol to the audience, but they are a crucial element of the storytelling and serve to strengthen the authenticity of the performance.

Bibliography

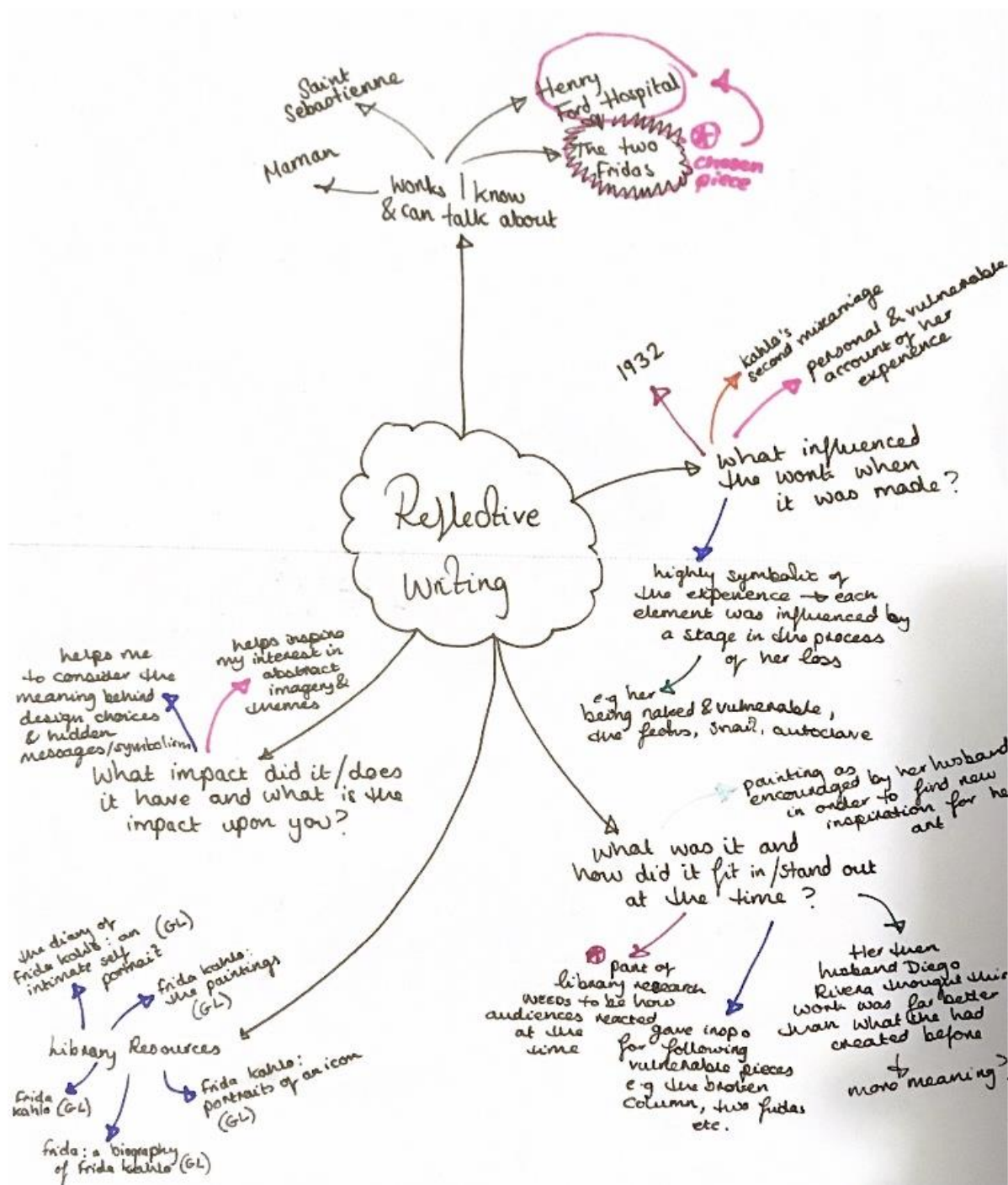
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Task Two: (Jon's Task):





Henry Ford Hospital, Frida Kahlo [4]

The work I have chosen to reflect upon is the 1932 painting *Henry Ford Hospital* by Frida Kahlo as I am familiar with and constantly intrigued by it. It is one of many extremely personal and revealing self-portraits created by the artist following injuries she suffered following an accident in which a bus she was riding collided with a tram; the long recovery period was where she found that self-portraits were her preferred genre (Hooks, 2003, p.12). *Henry Ford Hospital* depicts Kahlo's second miscarriage and is a personal account of the event. She uses abstract imagery to represent her experience; For example the fetus represents the child she and her husband Diego had longed for, the snail which implies the slow pace of her operation, both of which along with the others are connected to her almost like umbilical cords (Herrera, 1992, p.72-73). She also paints herself as naked and vulnerable; the top half of her body is facing towards the viewer contrasting with the bottom half facing away which shows the conflict she has with sharing this personal experience with the observer.

It was her then husband Diego Rivera's belief that following her miscarriage, Frida had a positive change in her approach to her paintings, claiming them to be "a series of masterpieces" and unlike anything female artists had done before (Herrera, 1989, p.144). The personal aspect and raw emotion helped to influence and create such visually interesting and layered personal pieces of work. Following paintings by Kahlo such as roots, the broken column and the two Frida's drew inspiration from experiences and emotions from her own life which translated into stunning and extremely thought provoking art that not only had their own motivations and messages but were also abstract enough to be open for interpretation for other observers of the work.

This painting, and other works by Kahlo, continue to influence me as I am constantly fascinated by abstract imagery, concepts and items. The idea that changing the perspective of a mundane thing can flip its whole meaning, use or aesthetic is fascinating as being able to seek further information or to acknowledge the lack of is more effective than having a passive reaction to something. As a set designer, this sort of imagery and intention is perfect; it inspires more fascinating and visually interesting ways of telling a story as the more bizarre something is, in my eyes, the more enjoyable it is. Also, as Frida has done, I can take note of ensuring that I can tell a story with objects, in my case on a set, before a character or person even steps into the frame. For example, a bed would no longer be just a bed but a physical embodiment of the character's mood in that scene due to colour choice or the way the pillows sit or lie. A key element of a good set design is how well it complements the story, just as Frida's painting complements her own experience.

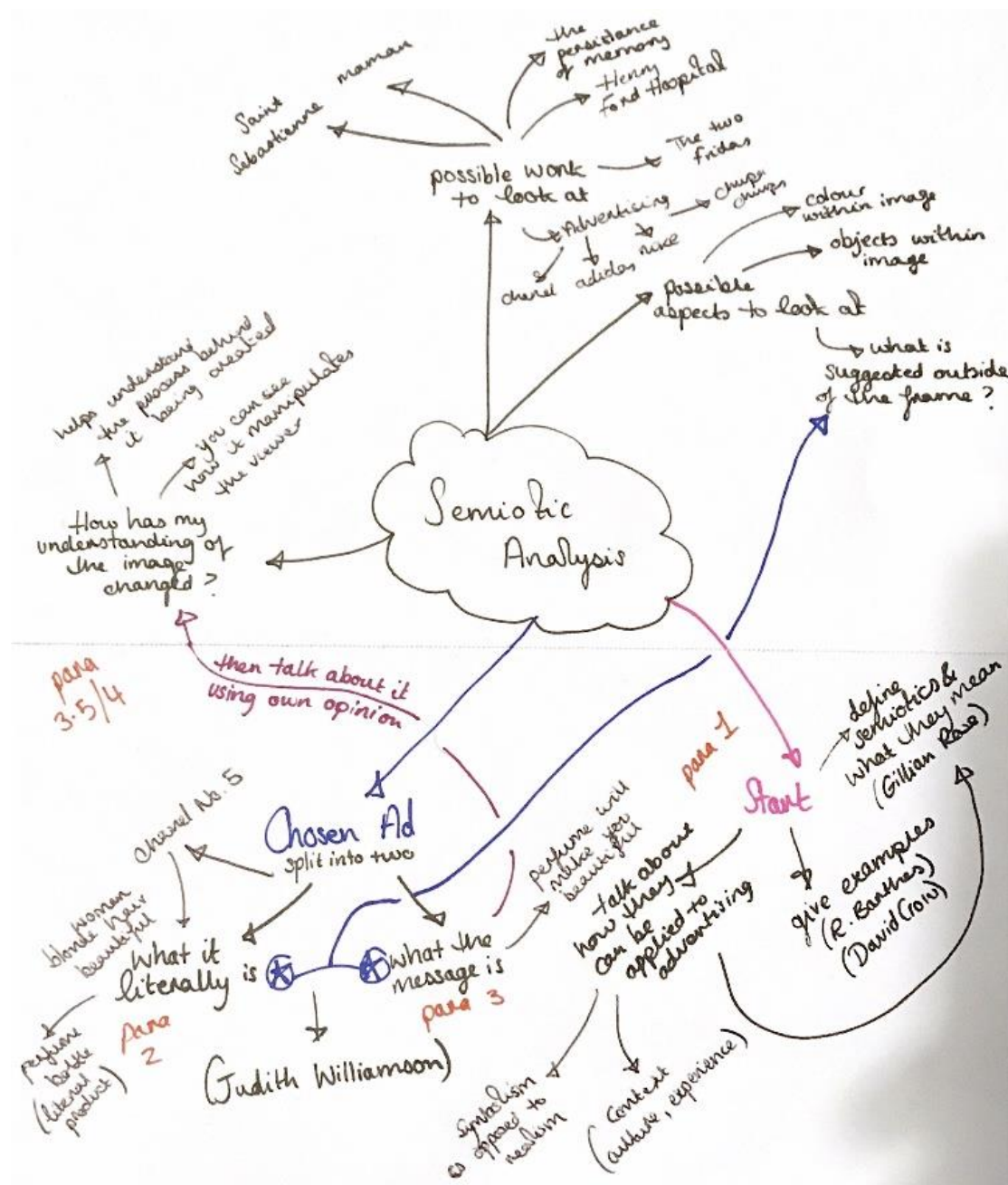
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Task Three: Semiotic Analysis (Ryan Task)



Semiotics is explained by Gillian Rose (2001, p.74) as a sign with two parts, those being the signifier and the signified. She uses the example of a baby; the name is the signifier as we all recognise and understand what is meant by the word, and therefore the signified is our understanding of that word, described by her as “a very young human unable to walk or talk”. So, in the simplest terms, the sign is a thing,

the signifier is what we identify it as, and the signified is our understanding based on the signifier. It is also important to consider that a sign can be interpreted in different ways depending on culture and our own experiences (Crow, 2003). For example, the word beauty as a sign; Most people would understand the signified in the same way, but the signifier may vary within different cultures because of the stereotypical view you may have of beauty or a beautiful person from how or where you were raised e.g. differences in Western vs Eastern cultures.

I am going to be looking at advertising as it is something that surrounds is hugely influential over us as consumers in the sense that they are mythologies around us, such as those described by Barthes (1993, p.159) as things that, if identified at their “full weight” we then “respect it, but we restore it to a state in which is still mystified”. Essentially meaning semiotics are used so well, in this case in advertising, that despite sometimes clearly being a façade to sell something to us, we are still constantly drawn in by the promises that are signified.



Chanel No. 5 advertisement, 1975 [5]

Semiotics is all about deconstructing images which is exactly what I am going to do with this advertisement. This is from 1975 for Chanel No. 5 featuring Catherine Deneuve. Here, we are told very little about the product but must subconsciously pick up the underlying message. Her face has no correlation to the bottle of perfume, but here they have linked the colour of her hair to the glass of the bottle and the blue-grey colours that she is wearing links to the silver of the cap. There is also this intensity of the profile of each, how they are both facing forward and framed so that they are the only focus of the advertisement. It is as though she is the personified version of this bottle of perfume.

The personification is what draws you in; essentially what this advert is selling is glamour, as highlighted by Judith Williamson (1978, p.25) who notes that it brings new meaning and beauty to the product which would otherwise be just a bottle of perfume. What is signified by this poster is that in purchasing Chanel No. 5, you too can become just as glamorous. The reason this works so well is all to do with cultural context and how we in a Western culture view this beauty as admirable (Barthes, 1993, p.56) therefore having it presented to us makes us want it as well.

By using semiotics, we have a better understanding of how to deconstruct images, allowing us to analyse and unravel subliminal messaging and hidden influence, giving us more conscious awareness of the messages all around us.

Bibliography

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Figures

- [1] <https://flashbak.com/twenty-one-behind-the-scenes-shots-of-classic-hollywood-movies-363525/>
- [2] <https://consequenceofsound.net/2015/06/jaws-turns-40/>
- [3] https://disney.fandom.com/wiki/The_Emotions
- [4] <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/henry-ford-hospital-frida-kahlo/kgHTa-02kVhHJA>
- [5] <https://petsonalities.smugmug.com/Other/1975/i-Fc8mTSp/0/L/039-L.jpg>