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Title: Question 4. From the series of IMAGINED WORLDS research strand lectures, choose a theme, movement, or selection of artists or designers that relate to your practice or interests, and construct a 2,500-word essay. Critically assess primary themes, key writers, and relevant practitioners.

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Advertisement and beauty, what is the connection?

Within my essay I intend to critically explore the relation between Jean Paul Gaultier's fragrance advertisement called "*Le Beau*" and "*La Belle*" to beauty, through semiotic analysis. I chose eight of the main poster advertisements, each image containing the same male and female throughout, by keeping the same two models I intend to show you how they can be seen as a narrative. I will attempt to read the signs of these images and discuss the overall context of this campaign and provide a subjective reading of the two images. Identifying why a fragrance advertisement needs human interaction, especially in sexual or provocative way? Outlining any hidden messages within Jean Paul's cultural expression of these products? Defining what Jean Paul Gaultier is trying to portray?



Image One

The first image we will look at (above) is for *Le Beau*, fragrance for men. At my first glance of the image there is a semi naked muscular man standing in a jungle area under an arch. The

assumption I made from the first glance of this image is, this is a product for men, recognisable because of the fragrance name "*Le Beau*" and the male shaped bottle that is blue in colour, all very stereotypical grouping from the outset. Stereotypes are important, all advertising needs some form of stereotype "Such representations or impressions of groups are called stereotypes. These are psychological representations of the characteristics of people that belong to particular groups" (McCarthy, Yzerbyt and Spears, 2002, p.2).

On deeper reflection of this image, the man who is the main area of focus stands in front of red and green material drapes. The green drape practically camouflaged, it blends with the foliage surrounding him. The red drape however, with just a fraction on show gives a contrasting perception of this image. From adding such a rich colour, the motive of this image shifts slightly, it becomes, in my opinion, sensual. The stance of the man gives the impression he is laying down, but he is actually standing. He looks tense, his muscular torso seems unnaturally toned, especially in the position he is stood. His body language implies seduction. His head slightly tilted, and his eyes fixated on you, their gaze almost talking to you, luring you in like a siren would have done to sailors at sea. As written by John Berger "Images were first made to conjure up the appearances of something that was absent" (Berger, 2008, p.8). When I look at this image, I think there is something missing, for me what is missing is meaning. On viewing this image first before the following seven images you are open to different perceptions of what this image is expressing. We use "learnt assumptions" (Berger, 2008. p.11) to decipher the truth about the image. Initial assumptions of this image revolve around beauty/body image. This analysis leads to many questions, do all the elements of this image connect? Is he in a jungle? Or a bedroom? My interpretation of this image is that the man is in some sort of French feel boudoir preparing for his companion. As for the name of the fragrance, '*Le Beau*' this translates to '*The*

Handsome Man'. It would seem a very literal name for the imagery that has been used, such as the same for the next image.



Image Two

Here we have Image two (above). "*La Belle*" translated means '*The Beautiful Woman*'. The word woman, a denotation although used in a different language is stated and central to the image stands a woman. I would say this image is almost a replica to Image one.

Instead of the jungle/foilage we have blooming flowers, this presenting a connotation. The flowers signify femininity and the way they have been displayed instantly signifies an advertisement for a female. There are flowers coving her breast, indicating that they are a use of clothing to cover up her body parts that should not be seen. This reminds me of the story of Adam and Eve. Eve was created innocent just like Adam, naked as if just born, natural and how god indented. Judging from her facial expression, she seems vacant, not looking at anyone, neither happy nor sad, possibly in a state of daydream. An interesting

quote that Freud once wrote “we may lay it down that a happy person never phantasies, only an unsatisfied one” (Freud, 1908, p.146), is she unsatisfied? At this point I would suggest she was unsatisfied and agreed with Freud's statement. She looks uncomfortable, her arm in an awkward position, she no longer looks natural, almost a forced pose. The female does not appear seductive. By deconstructing this image, it leaves me questioning, is this woman (image two) what the male (image one) desires? Is that the impression Jean Paul Gaultier is painting? Quite possibly, I feel that these two images are starting to form a narrative, as we move to the next image, we see that an underlying theme of the imagery starts to become quite apparent.



Image Three

Above, image three, is stripped back, more natural and less forced. The background more visible. We see a full green velvet drape, is the green illustrating something? If we take into account, my previous mention of Adam and Eve then the colour green becomes rather

powerful “Most Biblical scholars agree that one of the primary meanings behind green in the bible is immorality” Nelson (2020), Immorality is defined as sinful or wrong behaviour, this may lead us to believe that Jean Paul is structuring a more sinister path. Is Jean Paul linking this advertisement to an attack on the church? If I had more time I may have explored if this could be read as Catholicism?

With many symbolic signs, there are deep red wine-colours on the cushions beneath their feet on top of a captivating Persian rug with rich, harmonious colours. Dr Reza Cheshmehdoost (2008) describes the Persian rug as being “renowned for their richness of colour, variety of spectacular artistic patterns and quality of design. In palaces, famous buildings, mansions and museums the world over, a Persian carpet is amongst the most treasured of possessions”. The placement of this rug resembles wealth and power, it’s displaying that together they make a powerful couple and now we finally see them in their entirety. Straight away there is an indexical sign, from the female wearing only flowers and the male wears a fig leaf covering his genitals, these signify clothing. Now this image becomes a metonymy, the selective use of a fig leaves and flowers as clothing immediately integrating the bible and the story of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, confirming my earlier thought. The use of the apple in the female’s hand, yet another symbolic sign. This apple a connotation resembles temptation, the forbidden fruit, this a metaphor from Genesis 2:4-3:24 (2011) “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die”. The male stares at the apple, you can see his temptation. The woman aware of his desire, holding the apple in his eyeline, she seduces him without doing very much at all. The focus of this image is all about preparing the narrative. As we move to the next

image (Image Four) you will notice how bare the image feels compared to image three (above).



Image Four

What a significant difference image four is to image three. This image is completely stripped no scenery, no gimmicks. Just a man and a woman, not even in their natural environment, just plain. The underlying theme of Adam and Eve, the garden of Eden is still evident. The product now the sign. The object of desire becomes the bottles of the fragrance they hold, like the apple, they are held in such a position to entice you. However, this image portrays a different side to Adam and Eve. The female is no longer trying to tempt the male by the forbidden fruit. They both work in unity, looking to the viewer and using their sexuality to accentuate what they hold, the 'forbidden fragrance' if you please. Both fragrances, are held in provocative positions. The male, his arm relaxed to his side, holds the bottle almost parallel to his fig leaf. The female's arm is raised level to her flower covered breasts. The arrangement of both bottles is not accidental. They have been sexualised, trying to appeal

to what human's desire, the areas of the human body that we are naturally drawn to. Both stand confident with their bodies on full show. Their stance laid back; they seem completely relaxed. On reflection of this image it would seem that it holds more power than first thought, unlike images one, two and three there is less chaos.

"We are inclined to think of reflection as something quiet and personal. My argument here is that reflection is action-oriented, social and political. Its 'product' is praxis (informed, committed action), the most eloquent and socially significant form of human action."

(Kemmis, 1985, p.141). As Kemmis suggests we have to look at reflection differently and reflection of this image shows there are more connotations in this image than the previous image, which is slightly ironic considering the obvious detail, time and effort put into the placement and positioning of the imagery signs in image three. Now that we have looked at the four main advertisement for Jean Paul Gaultier's new fragrance range, I would like to take at a closer look at the choice of bottle and Gaultier himself.



Image Five

Although image five is part of the ad campaign for *Le Beau* and *La Belle*, it differs because the entire focus of the image is on the bottles of fragrance, they become iconic signs. The background setting reverts back to the lavish indoor area, with an added addition of peacock feathers and a gold podium. The introduction of the gold podium to display the bottles highlights the gold that is used on the bottles. The gold on the bottle now stands out. *La Belle* contains a garland of golden roses round the bottle neck whilst *Le Beau* keeps in theme of Adam and Eve with a large golden fig leaf covering his manhood. We have not seen roses in any of the images previously. Are they there to symbolise something new or just because roses signify passion? It would seem Jean Paul Gaultier is bursting with passion for these iconic bottle shapes? His bottle shapes have become an association with the brand itself, as said Dave Trott "The product creates the experience. The experience creates the reputation. The reputation creates the brand." (Trott, 2016, p.180). It would seem that Jean Paul is trying to create a new aspect of his brand as these two bottles take on a slightly different twist to the iconic shaped bottles. Ordinarily his bottles contain a theme such as

burlesque or sailor, but these have become more angular, almost robotic, more in keeping with the 21st Century perhaps. So why a male and female torso? On delving into Jean Paul Gaultier past it became quite apparent that his love for the corset inspired his style of designing. In fact, his love for the corset came from growing up in close contact with his grandmother, he was fascinated by her corsets. This in itself seems almost unusual, for a young boy to have such an interest. That saying, was Jean Pauls fascination with corsets the link to this narrative of this fragrance? Were his own temptations as a child what inspired him to design this product? These bottles are described in many blogs as “exotic” and “erotic” and I think that rings true, they do not leave much to the imagination and some may interpret them as controversial and graphic. However, Jean Paul himself is fully aware of all his actions when executing such designs, has gained the nicknamed *Enfant Terrible* from his behaviour, “I don't think I was ever concerned with shocking people. Was I conscious of the fact that it could be shocking? Yes. But I just wanted to show what I found fair or normal or beautiful. If anything, I was the one who was shocked, by certain kinds of intolerance.” (Gaultier, Jean-Paul Gaultier Biography, 2014). Seemingly Jean Paul is not afraid to take a risk, which leads me to discuss the next two images.



Image Six



Image Seven

In both image six and seven shown above, we see much the same as image three. The colours the same, with the introduction of the red roses. Bottles of fragrance removed, there is no glaringly obvious indicators for what these two images are actually advertng. The images take your mind on a journey through your senses. You can almost smell the flowers and feel the sexual tension they are emitting; the male and female are the seducers of this advertisement. With carefully placed lighting that accentuates the body features and the smoothness of their skin, they almost look too perfect, as written by (Hogan, 2016, p.22) “at a certain point, enhancing facial luminance or related differences will cease to heighten aesthetic feeling and begin to have the opposite effect”. I could not have put it better myself, at what point do we think of this as too much? To some these images would be aesthetically pleasing, to others offensive and overly erotic. I cannot help wondering what the point to these images are. They contain no product information. That being said, when

integrating the other images, the purpose of these seems to be for displaying the human body, its shape and beauty, such as the bottles that are used. Also, they keep the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden current, this moves us on to the final image (Image 8), the end of *La Belle* and *Le Beau* story.



Image Eight

Above, image eight, the final image to the ad campaign. This image integrating a sample all of that has been shown so far. The male and female are together, the female somewhat bizarrely positioned to look as if she is sat on the males back. Each hold the apple again the signs that refer back to my previous comment, they are trying to entice you, not each other. Both stare at you, almost longing for you to join them. The male gone from longing for temptation himself, now fixated on the target audience. All in all, I feel this image seems rushed, thrown together to get all the information in one place. That information itself being a little confused or is it? With my last question in mind, it leads to my final findings.

In conclusion I examined the relation of this advertisement to natural beauty through a semiotic reading and found there are many denotations and connotations that run throughout Jean Pauls campaign. On my first look at the imagery I saw nothing more than a typical Jean Paul Gaultier advertisement, a male, a female, barely dressed holding his iconic bottle design, at the beginning of this essay I had learned assumptions. I did not see any deeper meaning but on reflecting my findings, Jean Paul Gaultier uses the story of Adam and Eve, mixed with a French boudoir setting to encapsulate one distinguishing fact, the smell of the scent. He is visually representing what these fragrances will smell like for the wearer through his imagery. This confirming my first thoughts predicting there may have been a hidden message within the campaign. Jean Paul Gaultier somewhat glorifies a multitude of sins along the way such as temptation, greed, gluttony to name a few. The reading I take from this ad campaign is it amplifies the use of human body, beauty, nudity and sexuality to try and sell a product. Is all this really necessary, arguing the fact, yes it is on this occasion as the connotations for the story would not have worked as intended if his use of imagery changed and the narrative of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden would not have been relevant without the use of natural beauty. This essay has been an exploration of my own personal reading and approach to understanding readings.

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Figure List

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