Introduction to Media Language

Session 1:

Semiotics & Symbols

Session One

By the end of this session you will be able to:

- Read the denotative and connotative levels of meaning within a PRINT media text
- Use and understand the **key terms** used in the analysis of media language (Denotation, Connotation, Signifier & Signified)
- Write a coherent analysis of the symbolic codes within a **movie poster**

Analysing Media Texts:
A Framework

- Divides codes of media language into three categories – **these can help you to understand the meanings of a printed text**

1. SYMBOLIC
Lighting & Colour
Positioning
Setting & Locations
Facial Expressions & Body Language
Objects
Key Signifiers/Images
Clothing, Hair & Make Up

2. WRITTEN
Slogan
Typeface/Font
Headlines
Captions
Style
Choice of words
Emphasis of words

3. TECHNICAL
Camera Angles
Framing (ELS, LS, MLS, MS, CU, ECU, POV)
Cropping
Juxtapostion (2 separate signs that together make contrasting meaning)

KEY TERM: Semiotics

Definition: The study of SIGNS

- Examines how symbolic, written and technical signs construct meaning
- Looks at how meaning is **made** and **understood**

KEY TERM RECAP:
Signifier & Signified

- THE SIGNIFIER – The sign: a word, colour or image (i.e. the colour BLUE)

- THE SIGNIFIED – The concept/ meaning/associations that the sign refers to (i.e. BLUE is often associated with sadness or the sea etc.)

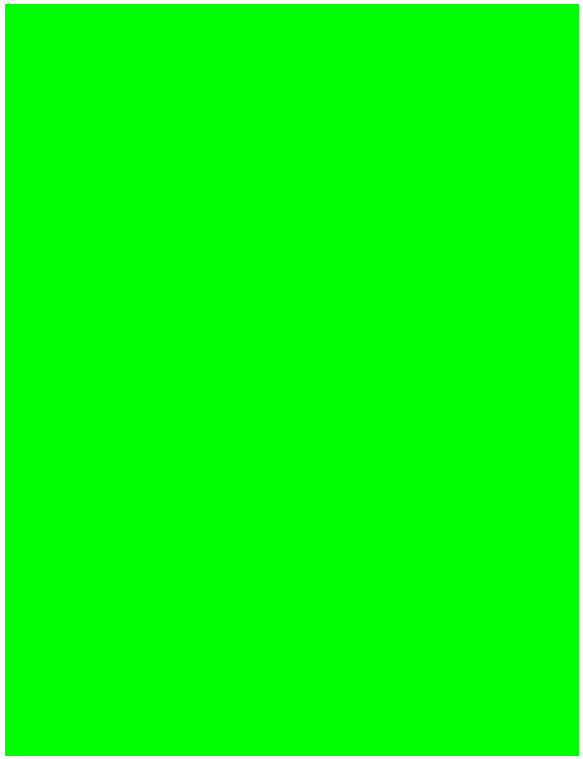
Signifier & Signified: Examples

- Signifier: Red rose with a green stem
- Signifies: a **symbol** of passion and love - this is what the rose represents

- Signifier: Brown cross
- Signifies: a **symbol** of religion, or to be more specific this is a **symbol** of Christianity

- Signifier: Heart
- Signifies: a **symbol** of love and affection

TASK: Green
What does ‘green’ signify?



TASK: What do the following signs signify? Make a list of all the meanings and associations you can think of for each signifier:

A

B

C

D

E

A: Barbie Doll

B: Hamburger

C: The Statue of Liberty

D: Bus

36
NEW CROSS GATE
Paddington
Marble Arch
Victoria
Camberwell
RM1666
KGJ 34A

E: Nike Swoosh

Signs & Cultural Differences

- How we read a sign depends on our culture:

EXAMPLE: In Britain, we associate the colour **white** with **innocence, purity, weddings**

In China, **white** is the colour of **mourning** and is worn at **funerals**

How to read the signs and signifiers within a Media Text

- All media texts have 2 layers of meaning:

- DENOTATIVE LEVEL: What we actually see

- CONNOTATIVE LEVEL: What you associate with this image

KEY TERMS 3: Denotation & Connotation

- Denotative: The **surface** meaning
- Connotative: The **deeper** or **hidden** meanings and associations

This image **denotes** the movie star Marilyn Monroe

The image **connotes** glamour, stardom, sexuality, beauty

If this was one of the last photographs of Marilyn Monroe, we may also associate it with her depression, drug-taking and ultimately death

This image **denotes** a tropical island

The image **connotes** peace, tranquility paradise, holiday, summer to some readers.

…but think about the film ‘Castaway’, the victims of the Bali bombings or the recent tsunami - in this case the image may connote isolation, fear or even death

It is important to note that images have different connotations depending on the reader of the image/text

Denotation & Connotation within a Media Text – A Movie Poster

The Mission Impossible Poster **denotes** a MATCH and a GLOBE OF THE WORLD

What are the connotations of
a) The match?
b) The globe?

TASK: Denotation & Connotation within a Media Text – A Movie Poster

1. What are the key signifiers in the movie poster and what do they signify?
2. What are the denotative levels of meaning in the poster? (What does the poster denote?)
3. What are the connotative levels of meaning in the poster? (What does the poster connote?)
4. What are they communicating to an audience? Why?

Introduction to Media Language

Session 2:

Magazines & Written Codes

Session 2: Media Language

By the end of the session you will be able to:

- Identify the written codes with a print media text
- Carry out a semiotic analysis of the symbolic and written codes within a magazine cover

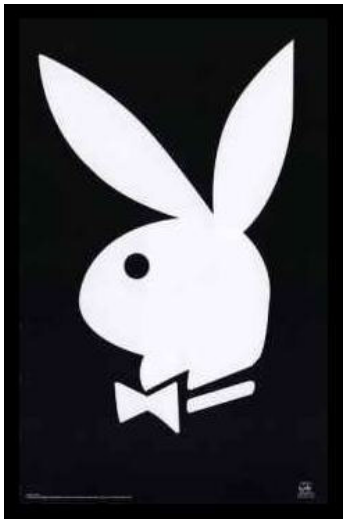
Recap

- What is the denotative level of a media text?
- What is the connotative level of a media text?

Can you name:
i) the signifiers

ii) what they signify (at least 5 meanings/associations)

A



B

C

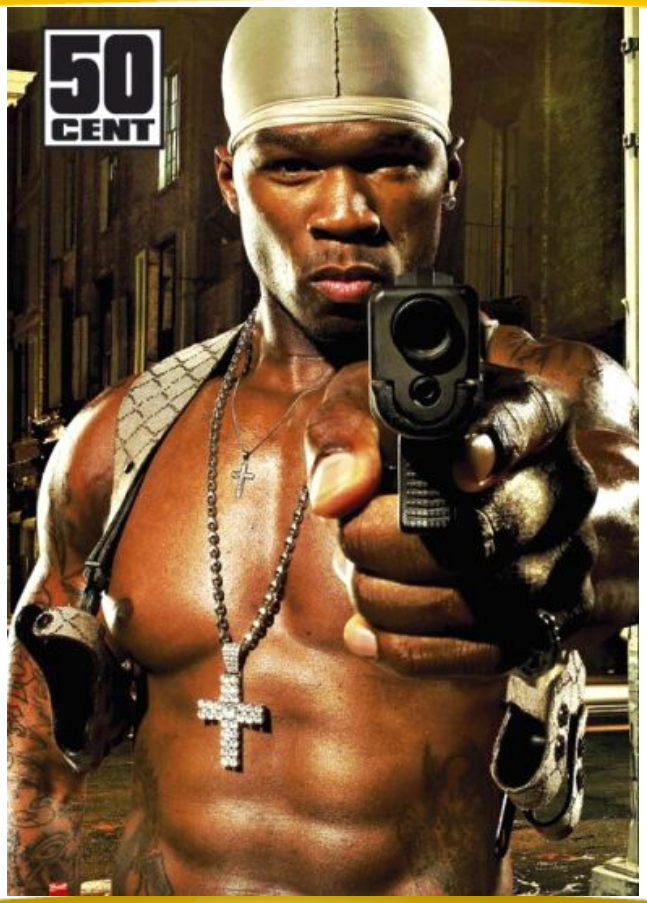
D

E

What do the following images:
i) denote
ii) connote

A

B



Written Aspects to note

The study of written codes includes:

- Slogans
- Typeface/Font
- Headlines
- Captions
- Style
- Choice of words
- Emphasis of words

Introduction to Media Language

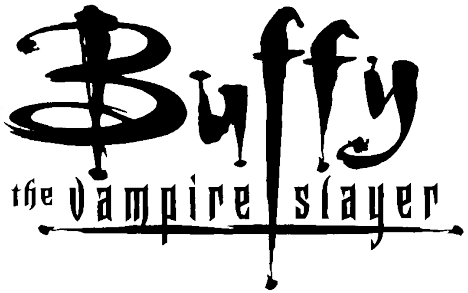
Session 3:
Advertisements

Session 3

- By the end of the session you will be able to:
- Produce an analysis of the media language codes within an advertisement
- Analyse the representation of gender within advertisements

Recap:

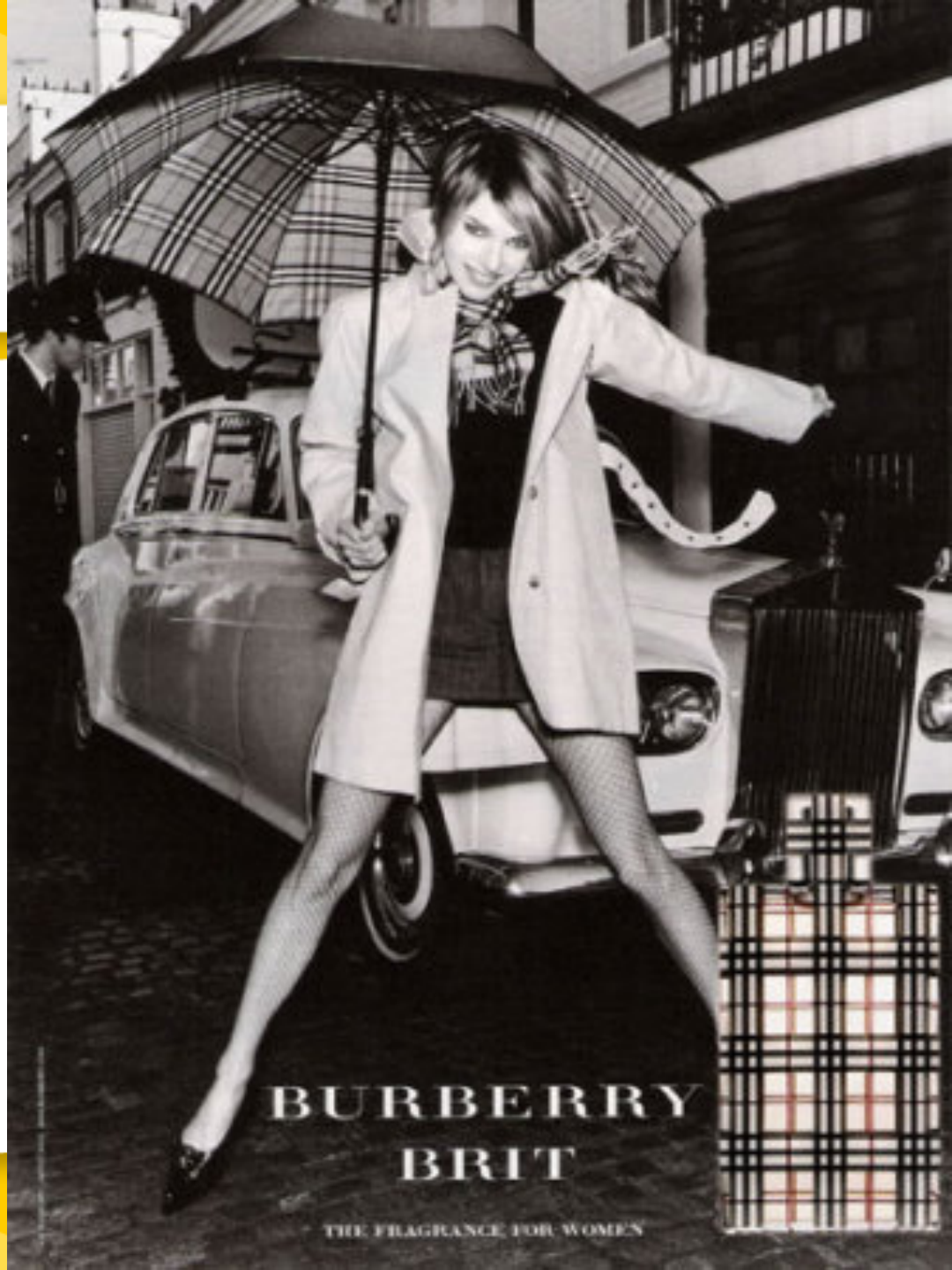
What do the following fonts connote/signify?



SIGNIFIER:
Blonde Hair
Signifies:
Ideal Woman, Innocence, Looks 'gold'
SIGNIFIER:
Jewellery
Signifies:
Extravagance, Excess, Glamour, Decedance
SIGNIFIER:
Font
Signifies:
Dior Logo, Brand Name, Designer
SIGNIFIER:
Perfume Bottle
Signifies:
Looks Jewel-like, Buried Treasure
SIGNIFIER:
Word 'Love'
Signifies:
Passion, Excitement, Lust
SIGNIFIER:
Colour Gold
Signifies:
Luxury, Riches, Expense, Success, Shimmering
Dior
LE FÉMININ ABSOLU.
Christian Dior
PARIS

TASK

- Use arrows to highlight:
- A) The key signifiers
- B) Their connotative meaning



Gender Representations in Advertising

Goffmans Theory (1972)

- In the portrayal of men and women, advertising often uses the following codes and conventions:
- **Superiority, Domination & Body Language:** Men are shown in dominant positions and appear to be reflective of thought and intelligence. Women are physically portrayed in sexual or reclining poses with blank or inviting expressions.
- **Dismemberment:** On females, parts of the body such as legs, chest, etc., are used, rather than the full body. This is often applied to sell products which are not related to the body, such as mobile phones (right)
- **The Voice-Over Authority:** In moving image advertisements, male voices are used as voice-over's in commercials rather than females.

UNFORGIVABLE
THE FRAGRANCE FOR
MEN BY
Sean John

ASSIGNMENT:

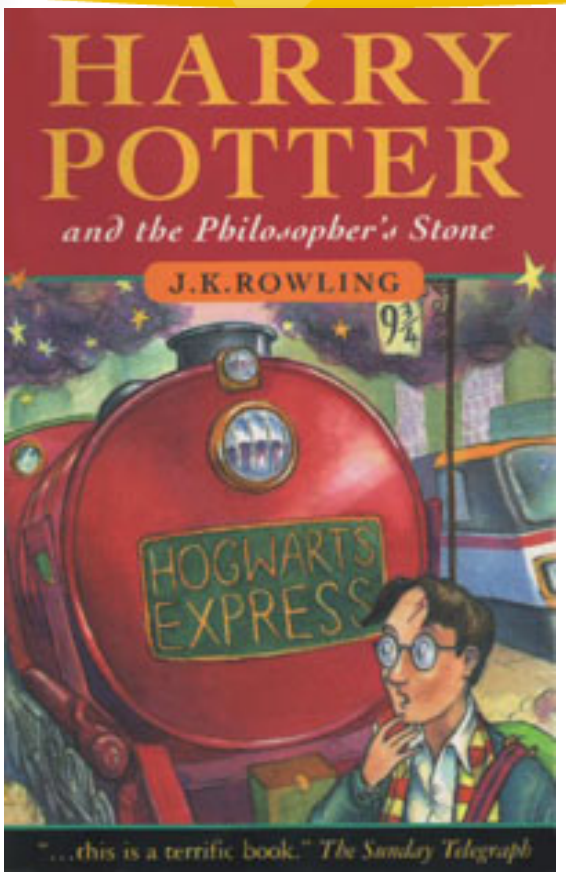
Carry out a *Semiotic Analysis* of an advertisement commenting on the relevant headings listed below:

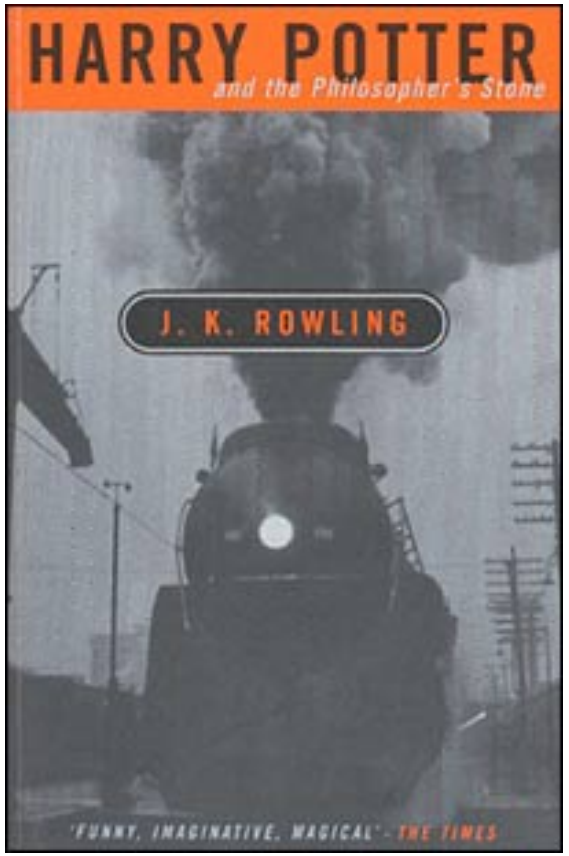
1. SYMBOLIC & WRITTEN SIGNIFIERS
Lighting & Colours
Positioning of Words & Images
Setting & Locations
Facial Expressions & Body Language (of people)
Typeface/Font Style
Key (Main) Images/Signifiers
Clothing, Hair & Make Up

2. Goffman's Theory
Does the advert adhere to Goffmans gender theory? Comment on the representation of men/women featured within the advert?

Minimum of 500 words please

Comparing Imagery





1. **In pairs, discuss and make notes on the following:**

- **What is the denotative level of meaning in each image? What does each image denote?**
- **What is the connotative level of meaning in each image? What does each image connote?**
- **Why do you think different images have been chosen?**
- **What meanings do the images convey to audiences?**