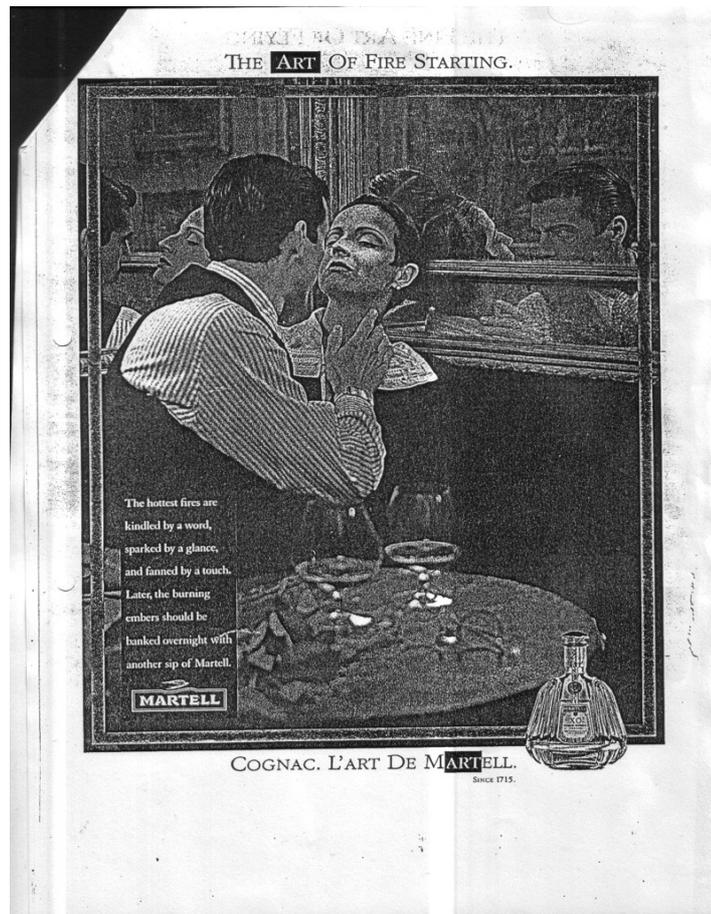


Ruhr-Universität Bochum
Englisches Seminar
Introduction to Semiotics
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Take-Home Assignment



- 1. Pick one example of each of the three types of signs in this advertisement and discuss what these signs signify and how they work in this ad.**

The bottle is an example for an icon it resembles the object that it describes. In case of this advertisement it conveys the impression of an ornated, valuable glass vessel. The photograph is used to give fair impression of the product.

The clothes and the jewellery of the persons on the advertisement are an example for an index. The index works by association, owing to this the shirt, in combination with the sleeveless pullover lets suggest that the man wearing it is a business man. In this advertisement it is used to create connection to people of the upper class society who identify with those values.

The numbers 1715 are an example for a symbol they create 'meaningfulness through common consent'. 1715 conveys the impression that Martell is known as a label for great cognac and therefore creates an effect of exclusivity, tradition and good taste. It is conventionalized and people who know it agree on its fixed meaning. If it wasn't conventionalized, people wouldn't be able to agree on a fixed meaning and it therefore would create confusion.

2. What is the difference between a paradigmatic and a syntagmatic analysis?

If one has a look at sign system he will quickly realize that signs only scarcely stand alone. The whole meaning of a sign is always contributed by paradigms and syntagms.

The paradigmatic analysis is concerned with the substitution of paradigms, which are located inside a syntagmatic sequence. The paradigmatic analysis works vertical. Paradigms are groups of signs - each one is replacable by another as long as its denotative meaning stays the same. It is also the contrast which marks a paradigm, it is selective and arouses associations.

Syntagmatic analysis on the other hand is concerned with positioning it examines the possibilities of combination and works intratextual. The syntagm is an orderly combination of different linguistic signs which are combined to constitute a certain meaning. These different signs cannot be combined in a random order, because this would demolish the meaning of the whole sentence. A random change of words in sentence for example would violate grammatical rules and thereby also obliterate its meaning. The syntagmatic analysis works horizontal and therefore analyzes the structure and the relationship between the signs. The structure itself influences memory. Creators of advertisements make use of this and therefore use spatial relationships to give a certain type of understanding to the people or so to speak manipulate the recipient e.g. by montage in photographs. There is a certain type of structure for masculine readers or female readers and also a structure which is linked to a certain type of reading in western society (left --> right) or asian society (left <-- right). Reading a set of

pictures from left to right or from right to left can change the meaning, because the right side can imply a certain meaning which is only constituted if one has read the left side of an ad. Therefore also the foregrounding or backgrounding of features can change meaning. One has to be aware of the fact that a syntagm can contain more than one type of syntagmatic structure but that in the most cases one is dominant.

3. Write a brief syntagmatic analysis of the advertisement.

Reading an advertisement from left to right or right to left is important to understand the message. Reading it from left to right is a contribution by the western society. This type of reading is also important for the given advertisement. By its clear structure and signs it develops a great appeal to men by a 'tight' structure.

Starting with the heading: 'THE ART OF FIRE STARTING' one could say that this phrase is used to emphasize its aesthetic demand and the essential need of the unknown which will follow. The aesthetic impression of the black-shaded word ART is transferred to the border which itself gives the impression of framing a real piece of art. This evokes the impression of being culturally important.

The sign which is gazed at next is one of a couple, elegantly dressed who seem oblivious of the viewers presence. They are gazing at each others eyes. The reflection in the mirror gives the possibility to be able to see the mans gaze, which so to speak almost pierces the woman. The headline is combined with the impression of the couple and therefore creates an atmosphere of sexuality.

The glasses and the table are illustrated in a blurry way. This might lead the viewer to focus on the action happening behind it. It therefore signalizes a certain dependence if you drink Martell you will be able to get engaged with any woman and will be able to 'start the real fire'.

Text and Logo ought to be aesthetic and carnal ('fanned by a touch'). The product is praised by recalling the value of the Logo, which directs to a certain audience who knows that Martell produces good Cognac.

The slogan at the bottom refers to headline. Aesthetics are once again recalled and are now connected with the bottle as an icon for wealth and exquisite taste. It includes everything

which has been delivered by the image and creates the impression of coherence.

This 'tight' structure of the syntagm might be constructed for men. It creates the impression of being able to get along with women by drinking the praised cognac. Overall the impression of virility is attributed to the Martell product.

4. Discuss the distinction between denotation and connotation, using the bottle as an example.

Denotation is what one calls the general meaning of an object. It represents the convention of a sign inside certain types of society. The society shares the meaning of the sign. Connotation on the other hand means that the sign is filled with subjective impressions. These impressions are developed by personal experiences. Understanding a sign is therefore restricted for people who are aware of the convention. Concerning this advertisement the bottle is well known as a sign for something especially exclusive to drink but one who is not familiar with this connotation can't be sure that it represents a special cognac bottle – it stands for exquisite taste and luxury. The text next to it also carries meaning; it attaches attributes of heat (in sense of love) to the bottle. One can conclude that the bottle always stands for something containing liquids but it can be misunderstood by people who are not aware of its connotative meaning. This bottle is an example how both, denotative and connotative meaning can be attached to a sign.

5. Discuss the body language displayed (posture, gestures, facial expressions, gaze, etc.) How does this kinetic information interact with the text?

Movement and multiple views, constructed by the presence of mirrors, create an impression of involvement in the whole advertisement. The man bends over the woman, gazes directly into her eyes and strokes her neck – he shows initiative, dominance and self-assurance. The woman seems to stand relatively still but at the same time her face shows seductiveness and passion – she wants to be conquered. This also is underlined by her almost closed eyes and her full lips. The man averts one's gaze but at the same time is reflected in the mirror, which creates the impression of inviolability and superiority.

Text and kinetic information are a unit. Text and kinetic information both enhance a romantic atmosphere. By using the 'The hottest fires' the creators of the advertisement appeal to the reader's emotion and combine it with the sexual grace obtained by the couple. The text on the

left bottom also gives information on how one can achieve this. The words 'Kindled', 'sparked', 'fanned' and 'burning embers' are used to describe the situation on the picture.

6. What kind of myth does this advertisement create?

If one thinks of myth in the way Barthes did, he has to treat myth as a social phenomenon, which is engaged with the ways in which one thinks about people, places, ideas or products. All of them are structured in a particular way to convey a specific message to the reader or viewer. Ahead of everyone advertisements integrate mythic significations to products by using signs which already carry meaning. This knowledge about signs is often unconscious. Myth is therefore a chain of semiotic events. The MARTELL advertisement includes several linguistic signs like hottest , fire , fanned , sparked and even connects these with other things like touch or glance . This creates an atmosphere of almost physical involvement, and therefore creates a romantic atmosphere. This is underlined by the kinetic information which the viewer is already familiar with in a positive way it's obvious that the kinetic information grants so to speak insight into the depicted peoples mind and it is decoded as physical attraction between a couple. If no one knew how to decode this message no one would understand what the purpose actually was by delivering these positive messages to the viewer the Martell advertisement attaches meaning to their product. This transfer is one of a mythic meaning in which cognac does not only denote something to drink but also something which creates opportunities in life, like success, love and physical relationship with women if one buys it. In this case the myth is used to stress one dominant feature of the advertisement, which then unconsciously opines for one special message: Martell cognac is the only cognac out of thousands which has this quality and makes the consumer a real man. It is important to recognize that this message is attached only to Martell cognac, because myth is used exactly for the purpose of manipulating the recipient, who isn't aware of the fact that he is confronted with a myth.

7. What is your opinion of this advertisement?

The advertisement combines a great amount of stylistic devices to convince the reader of the product. From my point of view commercials, which try to manipulate society like this should be abolished. Spreading conservative and class orientated body of thought in such an underlying way is on the one hand annoying but on the other hand shows the fantastic possibilities of creating a piece of art, which combines several semiotic devices to create a

demanding meaning.