<u>Semiotics and Advertising</u>

Structuralism emerged in France in the 1950s as a counter to existentialism and can best be described as the process of symbols and their created meanings. Studying the structure of a system requires breaking a system down into smaller units. The study of these smaller units, signs and symbols, and their relationships within society is known as semiotics. Roland Barthes deconstructed the connotations of cultural symbols in a series of essays from 1954 to 1956, these essays which would later be assembled to construct his 1957 book, appropriately titled, *Mythologies,* set out to expose myths showing how the denotations in the signs of popular culture betray connotations which are themselves "myths" generated by the larger sign system that makes up society.

In 1970, Barthes published one of his most famous essays, *S/Z*, in which he (in a moment moving from structuralism to poststructuralism) unveils narratology's system of overarching thematic and semiotic codes illustrating the ability of these codes to reflect structures that are interwoven, but not in a definite way that closes the meaning of the text. Examining Balzac's *Sarrasine*, Barthes performs a textual analysis of the work's narrative arguing that any narrative is woven of five codes: hermeneutic, proairetic, semic, symbolic, and referential. These codes create a network of space for the text to run through while blending to create the textual economy of a particular work. Through the employment of these codes, Barthes suggests that the reader is actively producing interpretations of the text.

Similarly, Christian Metz employs semiotics (and later psychoanalysis) to clarify the language system of the cinema. Unearthing the minimal units of cinema, however, proved impossible since there are an infinite number of minimal units within cinema's

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langue. Yet, Metz continued with his semiotic analysis because the symbolic chains of

the language of cinema is consistent enough to produce a systematic mode for semiotics.

For example, the cinematic construction of a flashback typically involves a focused

image becoming increasingly fuzzy, perhaps as harp music beginning to play. This is not

a realistic depiction of memory and, yet, audiences automatically recognize the fuzzying

image as a flashback. The employment of the fuzzy image and harp music is arbitrarily

assigned to flashback, but because it is repeated over and over again, this cinematic

device becomes a clearly identifiable tool within cinematic language.

Metz discovered that cinema functions as a language which can only be

interpreted by proxy. Similarly, print advertisements prohibit interaction with their

audiences while constructing connotative symbols to be processed by spectators. Using

Metz's and Barthes' theories, I will deconstruct Apple's iPad ad exploring how particular

ideological codes move through the text. I hope to illustrate that this text is a dynamic

system and not a static object.

Apple released iPad last week to an audience eager to buy. Over 300,000 iPads

were sold in its debut weekend. Perhaps this can be attributed to Apple's aggressive

marketing campaign including the widely criticized *Modern Family* episode which aired

the Wednesday before iPad's Saturday release depicting mobs of enthusiasts lining up

outside stores to get first hands on Apple's latest product.

The back cover of this week's *Entertainment Weekly* depicts an ethnically

ambiguous woman looking at pictures stored on her iPad while casually laying on her

couch. At first, the ad seems very plain, almost mundane, but upon further inspection, the

ideological codes interlaced within the ad begin to unfold relaying a complexity of

interwoven messages to its audience. Perhaps the most striking element of this ad is its

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positioning of point of view. The camera is angled to assume the viewer of the ad is the woman in the picture. Using the camera to suture the spectator into the ad is a genius marketing ploy. The object's hands are placed on the page exactly where the viewer's hands would be creating an uncanny interaction with the page. As I examine this ad, I recognize that my hands naturally fall on the page where the object's hands are positioned, and I am, in fact, the one holding the iPad.

The intentional feminization of the computer has been an overarching theme in Apple's advertising strategy. In *Electric Dreams,* Ted Friedman's close reading of Apple's celebrated "1984" Superbowl commercial illustrates the ideological reasoning behind gendering Apple's personal computer as feminine. In addition to tapping a market for women to buy computers, feminizing the personal computer enticed customers by suggesting that their product was friendlier, easier to use, and more like an assistant or secretary than the cold, emotionless IBM machines. Similarly, the iPad ad feminizies the technology of its latest product as the object of the ad is leisurely sifting through digital photo albums instead of reviewing spreadsheets or word documents. Over twenty years later, Apple is still pursuing the same logic that made it a household name, however, this ad pictures the iPad as both a secretary and a companion. The woman pictured is passing time with a friend, her iPad, which also keeps her life in order.

The time depicted on the screen reads 9:41 AM. While it is not clear whether the ad takes place during the week or weekend, the child depicted in several of the album covers suggests the object is a mother. Traditionally, the home as been constructed as a feminine realm. Any trace of office environment is absent from this ad because the office is an ideologically male domain. The setting inferred from this ad is a normal weekday, mother on couch waiting for child to return from school and father/partner to return from

work. This ad speaks to both stay at home mothers as wells as working ones in its day of

the week omission. The purpose of this ad is to integrate the spectator into believing this

leisurely life, whether waiting for child and husband/partner to return from work or

enjoying a relaxing weekend morning, it accomplishes through the point of view

positioning of the camera. Suturing the spectator into the ad, Apple has engendered an

elegant and elevated "everywoman" for the masses. Anyone can be - and everyone wants

to be this woman.

Engendering an elegant everywoman requires the use of ambiguous ethnicity. I

confess that I initially thought the woman pictured in the ad was white, probably because

I am white, or because my hands fell naturally (though this naturalness was anticipated

by the ad's authors, and, therefore, constructed) over the objects hands encouraging me to

picture myself as the object in the ad. However, upon second notice, I perceived the

woman in the ad as having an ambiguous ethnicity. In fact, the woman in the ad could

pass for any ethnicity further enhancing her everywoman-ness. By encouraging viewers

to interpolate their personal ethnicity onto the object, Apple is further complicating the

interaction between audience and ad. The child pictured in several of the pictures also

exudes an ambiguous ethnicity, further supporting the idea of an "every-race-

everywoman."

While this ad primarily is targeted at women, it has a very precise purpose that

heterosexual men may find beneficial. By encouraging women to view themselves as

technologically savvy consumers, Apple is supporting its heterosexual partnered clientele

by encouraging women to embrace gadgetry, especially sexy and expensive gadgetry.

The iPad is an expensive luxury appliance priced from $499 to $829. Male partners in

heterosexual couples may benefit from Apple's advertisement as they convince their

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female partners that iPad is a worthwhile expense. Men are still the dominant sex when it comes to consuming technology. Encouraging (heterosexual) women to embrace computer gadgetry aids Apple's dominant customer base while cultivating new customer swells.

The scenes depicted in the album covers illustrates an ideal, upper middle class life and function well as pardigmatic icons communicating an idealized lifestyle. Vacations to Hawaii, New York City, and the Pumpkin Patch intermingle with memories made at Grandma's house, soccer practice, and that day in the park. The woman reviewing these pictures relaxes on her comfortable sofa wearing khakis, a lavender sweater, and white penny loafers. Her hands are well manicured and airbrushed to perfection. At 9:41 in the morning, she has nothing better to do than spend time with her iPad reliving some moments from her carefree life as she waits for child and husband/partner to return home. She confidently scrolls through her digital scrapbook controlling the technology that rests at her fingertips. Through the point of view positioning of the camera the spectator is the woman in the ad. The ad is intended for heterosexual women, but still works for lesbian audiences. Heterosexual men may appreciate this ad in its ability to encourage their partners to spend a lot of money on a luxury appliance. Homosexual men, however, represent the binary opposition and are excluded completely from this ad.

The focalization used in this ad constructs the gaze of the spectator. The mechanical construction of the gaze is an ideological construction commonly used in film. However, inserting the spectator into the body of a female is atypical of this classical camera positioning. By asserting the spectator as female, Apple is gendering its latest product as a feminine appliance. In essence, the iPad is a touch screen laptop

computer, but there is no trace of technophilic tropes in the ad. Also, though a woman,

child, and dog are clearly pictured in the ad, Apple has not included a man in the image.

A fragmented portion of a possibly male face is visible in the picture of the dog, but it is

unclear whether the fragmented face is in fact male. The exclusion of maleness is

consistent with the absence of traditional technophilic themes typically concurrent in

advertisements for computers. The exclusion of gay maleness is concurrent with the

positioning of the iPad as a family friendly device meant to make familial American life

easier to organize and conceptualize.

B. Suture

In vague, broad strokes, psychoanalytic theory, when applied to cinema, is a study

of the ways in which film organizes the desires of the spectator. There are several

variations of how psychoanalytic theory accomplishes this, suture theory is one approach

within psychoanalytic theory. Generally, it operates within the classical system as a way

to organize the gaze. Suture theory focuses specifically on the way in which the spectator

is given a place within the text by the film itself. The film apparatus engages in specific

and particular cinematic devices to manipulate the spectator's involvement within the

text.

Perhaps the best way to illustrate suture theory is using a shot-reverse-shot (SRS)

as an example. An establishing shot usually begins a conversation sequence between two

characters as both are framed within the shot to signify their spatial proximity. The

establishing shot is typically followed by over the shoulder shots oscillating between the

two characters. The filmic language suggested here is that the spectator is seeing the one

character through the eyes of the other character. Of course, this is a false assumption

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because an over the shoulder shot is completely different from a point of view shot (it is important to note here that suture theory extends far beyond point of view shots and shot reverse shots, as Hitchcock clearly demonstrates, but for the purpose of this "brief" summary, this example is best). The SRS tricks the spectator into thinking s/he is seeing what the characters see, however, in truth, the spectator's gaze is aligned with the camera and not the actors.

Through this "misplaced" angle, the camera has created a virtual space. The spectator mistakenly believes they are occupying the character's space, but are in fact occupying this virtual space created by the camera. This created space is a phatomatic and constructed space which does not actually exist in the narrative, but through the SRS editing device, the film sutures the spectator into the text. The goal of suturing is to close the gap between the unseen thereby linking the gaze of the spectator to the gaze of the character. Suture encapsulates the techniques of film used to soothe the distress found in feeling the camera is keeping secrets or hiding things from the spectator.

Recognizing the laconic influence of this misrepresented space is a fundamental aspect of suture theory. As we will see in Mulvey's argument, the mirror phase is imperative to the development of the ego. This primary process represents a joyous time in a child's life as they gaze into the mirror and imagine the reflected image to be more complete than their actual body. However, recognition of the reflection as self and the misrecognition of the reflected self as a superior being creates a super ego by projecting an idealized concept of body outside the actual body. Suture theory, similarly, evokes the same concept as the viewer stands in for the characters onscreen misrecognizing themselves by identifying with the projected characters.

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Silverman's argument that suture theory depends on sexual difference is inspired by Laura Mulvey's, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" essay in which Mulvey deconstructs the gaze of Classical Hollywood Cinema (CHC). Based heavily on Lacon's mirror stage, Mulvey identifies two modes of spectatorship: scopophilia and narcissistic identification. Scopophilia is simply pleasure derived from looking often in an erotic manner. The apparatus of film is set up for three modes of voyeurism: (1) The camera's gaze; (2) the heterosexual male audience's gaze; (3) The male characters' diegetic gaze. This three tiered system is designed for voyeuristic pleasure and asserts man as the active bearer of the look and woman as the "to-be-looked-at-ness." Similarly to Silverman's suture theory, narcissistic identification evokes the mirror stage as an exaggerated focalization which occurs as the male spectator identifies with the male protagonist in the film. As the male viewer watches his "ego-ideal" onscreen he is vicariously living out his fantasies through the over-identification he feels towards the hero of the film.

Mulvey argues that CHC constructs gendered spectatorship in a binary way that equates the male to voyeuristic, active, and in possession of the phallus while female equates to passive, exhibitionistic, and without power and/or phallus. The realization that women do not possess the phallus leads the male spectator to experience castration anxiety. Castration anxiety occurs on an unconscious level and illustrates fear males feel upon realizing women are without penises. The fear that males, too, may lose their penises creates this specialized anxiety. Mulvey's argument forces the female, as an object, into the male gaze similarly to the act of forcing (suturing) a spectator into the text. In these instances both the female object and the spectator are passive allowing cinematic devices to weave them into the ideological apparatus of cinema itself.

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Mulvey suggests two ways males can cope with castration anxiety, sadistic voyeurism and fetishistic scopophila. Sadistic voyeurism copes with castration anxiety through the demystifying and/or punishing the female object. The demystification process typically forces the female to relay all of her secrets by (sometimes violent) force or interrogation while punishment usually signifies a marriage or death (it is important to note here that the narrative is the agent doing the damage, not just the male spectator). Fetishistic scopophilia pertains to fragmented shots of the female body and/or the build up of beauty. Fragmenting shots of a female segments the body, usually focusing on the parts of the body ideologically most desirable to the male gaze like legs and breasts. Usually, these shots are headless and allow the spectator to fetishize particular parts of the female anatomy further objectifying the female. Building upon female beauty produces smokescreen effect in which the female figure is hidden under layers of feminine dress like feathers, gauze, and scarves. Hiding the female body distracts the male viewer from her lack of penis. Similarly to suturing, the fetishization of objectified images engrosses the spectator, sewing them into the text.

Also, castration anxiety anticipates suture theory in its misrepresentation of the ideal ego. Upon experiencing the mirror stage, children begin to view others with the hope of identifying with them. Suture theory expressly mimics this act as spectators identify with onscreen characters. Mulvey argues that the female body misrepresents the ideal ego of the (male) spectator causing anxiety similarly to suture theory's spectator who identifies with the onscreen character and who experiences anxiety when the camera prohibits them from seeing what the onscreen character sees.

Mulvey's male gaze is problematic because it assumes all male audience members are heterosexual and it completely refuses to acknowledge female protagonists within

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CHC. In addition to these gross oversights, Mulvey's argument is buried in

psychoanalytic jargon which limits its accessibility to lay film goers. Also, Mulvey's

argument prohibits a spectator from reading against the grain of the film and implies that

women have been duped into objectification by the film apparatus for decades. However,

focusing on the primary processes of the mirror stage, Mulvey ignited feminist film

studies calling for the experimentation within film to buck patriarchy.

Her emphasis on primary processes like the mirror stage seems to imply an

inevitability of the apparatus of the cinema because it is so aligned with the stages of

psychoanalysis. As with any totalizing theories, Mulvey's theories have been picked apart

for its overarching generalizations and simplistic explanations of women in film, and in

her 1981 follow-up essay, Mulvey addresses some key omissions from her initial

arguments--chiefly, the female spectator and the female protagonist.