

### **Assignment 3**

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“In our society the real distinction between people is created by their role in the process of production, as workers, it is the products of their own work that are used in the false categories invoked by advertising, to obscure the real structure of society by replacing class with the distinctions made by the consumption of particular goods. Thus instead of being identified by what people produce, people are made to identify themselves with what they consume.”

Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements*

For this assignment, choose a current advertisement or advertising campaign and drawing on the work of Barthes and others, analyse it to show how it derives and conveys meaning to its intended audience.

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# TRULY MADLY THINLY



**NEW & IMPROVED RECIPE**



**FROM OUR FAMILY TO YOURS**

Serving suggestion

**Figure 1. Advertisement for Warburtons Thins taken from Waitrose Food Magazine in July 2016**



Figure 2. Advertisement for Warburtons Thins taken from creativematch.com dated 2011

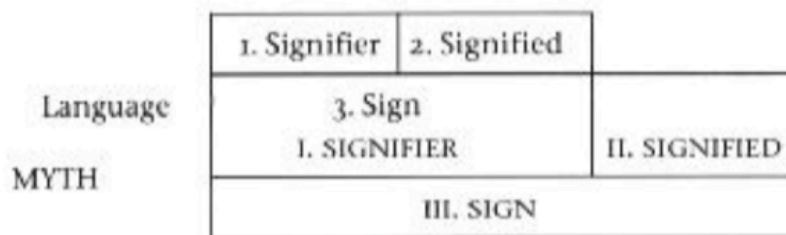


Figure 3. Barthes' diagram illustrates how myth operates

1. Sandwich 2. Something to consume 3. 'Healthy' food that is good for you I. Desirable snack II. Potential wish fulfilment III. An emblem of a 'better' lifestyle (that isn't really obtainable since based on falsehoods and doesn't exist as represented)



I have chosen an advert for **Warburtons Thins** (image 1), low calorie sandwich buns. It appeals directly to 'hunger', and certainly to a sense of want. I argue the advert is riddled with class distinctions and serves to maintain typical British class structure. The advert is different to the previous incarnation, which was less aspirational. (Image 2) Aspiration is coded into the aesthetic styling in the newer advert, as I describe later.

## **1. From Our Family To Yours - A Key Brand Truth**

The words "From our Family to Yours" are labelled as a **key brand TRUTH** on the agency website (see appendix). No other company is referred to in this way on the site. "From our family to yours" is a manipulative and emotive phrase that plays specifically into English working class social relations. *Our* family - not *theirs* - to *Yours*. The cynical class-based ideology promoted by the advertisers operates at its highest level (perhaps most perniciously) within the advert in this phrase. Connoted, the phrase is friendly and suggests a pleasant sharing of something between two family groups, harking back to kinship-gift transactions, i.e. a way of establishing positive links between groups and reaffirming and maintaining a constructive, non-warfaring relationship. Although it is true the company is still owned and managed by family members, and has done since it was originally started in 1876, it is nevertheless the second largest brand in Britain after Coke (Neilson January 2015). The connoted message is about one family giving to another, whereas the denoted message is about including certain types of people who identify with the brand image and excluding those who don't. By doing this, the advert further entrenches separation between groups and reinforces the dividing lines that determine who is connected to 'our family' and who isn't. The people who aren't connected are the ones who have access to specific cultural and/or economic capital, which enables them to make their own bread, or buy organic, perhaps have the time and energy to avoid e-numbers, or even avoid eating bread altogether, believing wheat is detrimental to them, who employ chefs to make their food for them, the pink salt brigade, the orthorexics who are literally terrified of veering away from absolute perfection in terms of healthy eating, separate from those who wouldn't be seen dead eating Thins, from the people who can afford in a variety of ways to eat really, really well. The denoted meaning is "our sort to your sort"; i.e. hard working people, who do the right thing, follow the rules, listen to advice. And of course, **From our Family to Yours** uses words to blatantly pretend this is not a transaction between a powerful business and a distant shopper, connected only via economics and who is prepared to pay £1.30\* for some flat bread that will last longer than normal bread.

## **2. TRULY Madly Thinly**

The largest font on the page, 'Truly' is telling customers they will find it hard to believe just how thin these Thins are. What's more, its actually crazy and bizarre the Thins are so thin but customers better believe it; the Thins are *insanely* thin. As well a telling us about the size of the Thins, by emphasizing *Truly* in the way they have done, the company is reaffirming the fact they are an honest company and wouldn't lie to you. They are truly selling something to do with thinness to their customers. Honest.

Additionally, the phrase associates the product with the film, *Truly, Madly, Deeply*, starring Juliet Stevenson and the late Alan Rickman, who died in January this year. He was generally a well-liked celebrity/actor. I have not been able to find out when this advert was made as it has no online presence, (suggesting it might be relatively new) but clearly it capitalises on any notions we associate with Rickman, intentionally or not, since his death brought him to our minds. Judith Williamson suggests products must be connected to something or someone in order to give it meaning. Catherine Deneuve's glamour is transferred by association to the product, Chanel No. 5 in one of her examples. Williamson says, "The advert presents us with this transference as a *fait accompli* (Williamson 1978; 25) I suggest the transference works on several levels in the Warburton advert. The evident tastiness of the filling ingredients is transferred onto the product (which needed a new and improved recipe - the fact it needed one implies it was inferior before). But crucially, it is also associated with a film about idealised love, with actors who are middle class and therefore fulfill aspirational values. As this is a photograph of something you might eat, the transference is also working directly on you, the consumer, in a two-way reflection. If you eat this, you become this THIN; and you too can probably have a truly-madly-deeply love affair. Or at any rate be like the people in a film you might only know about pre-consciously.

### **3. New & Improved Recipe**

As discussed earlier the meaning of this phrase is evoked by comparison in its literal meaning – the product now has a better flavour than it had before. However, the connoted meaning suggests the consumer can be new and improved too if they buy the product. This happens as the overall advert is presented as a mirror portrait. You are the sandwich when you look at the advert. i.e. You are what you eat. (A well-known phrase used in rhetoric about healthy eating). Eat this and you are new and improved.

### **4. The Image**

The bun is filled with a great deal of food. The advert doesn't tell us the buns contain only 100 calories, which suggests it is deliberately avoiding sounding like a dietetic food. However, the implication in the name of the food is very clear. The product is called Thins. However, the filling contains so many calories it instantly becomes less of a diet food in the serving suggestion. To be conservative (even though by the look of things, the chef was anything but) I shall halve the calorie count making it 50gs for each ingredient, which amounts to an estimated 334.5Kcal for the filling. Add the 100 calories of the bun in, and you're looking at a snack (described as such the Warburtons site) of nearly 450 calories. (NHS calorie counter) In other words the advert is less than honest about its dieting credentials. This makes it a strange sort of mirror which tells the reader what he or she wants to hear.

The food is placed on a wooden board. There is a trope in pubs, which caters for a certain section of society to serve food on breadboards and slate tiles, in fact anything other than a plate. This photograph echoes the trope.

The image is like a portrait. In fact it is styled and coded in much the same a way a populist portrait might be, with shallow depth of field, central placing, direct visual connection. If you eat this tasty object you too might also be as tasty and tasteful as the product.

## 5. Signifier, Signification, Chain of Signifiers

The advert works because of the way in which all the relevant signified work together, including historical notions of food; who in society eats what, as well as government advice regarding food. What looks like a picture of sandwich has become an emblem pertaining to class structure. As Barthes says, "Let us now look at the signified: this history which drains out of the form will be wholly absorbed by the concept." Here the concept is linked to aspiration, presented in a way which appeals to people who hope to see themselves a step higher than they might feel or want to feel. (Barthes, 1968) Williamson says, like all adverts it contributes to creating "structures of meaning" replacing religion's role in a more secular society (Williamson, 1978; 12) by setting up "connections between certain types of people and certain types of products." (Williamson 1978; 12) She goes on to describes Barthes' much referred to Signified diagram (3) more accessibly than he does, stating that after connections have been established in the media, we skip reading the initial signified and instead read the feeling it has been connected to. Adverts do this, Williamson says, to create false distinctions and therefore structures (in this instance very clearly pertaining to class). "From this we are made to feel we can rise and fall in society through what we are able to buy (and eat/consume)...and this obscures the underlying class basis which still underlies social position". (Williamson, 1978; 13)

To summarise:

- Thinness is a not only a desirable adjective evoked by the noun, the product's name, it is key to happiness, and acceptability and even idealised structural concepts of love – all of which are associated are Thins
- By eating Thins you will be thin and may even move up any perceived social class system you may feel bound by (leading to some element of antagonistic definition between one class and another inherent in the advert which maintains and holds British social distinctions firmly in place)
- Everything you read in the advert can be trusted to be true, the absolute truth, like the brand image, down to earth and reliable – patently a falsehood
- The company is a family just like yours and is therefore trustworthy (unlike other recognisable faceless corporate brands) (in reality, it isn't)
- The recipe for the product is new and better (by definition compared to a previous recipe which was ergo inferior)
- The advert works as a mirror giving the reader a portrait of how they would like to see themselves but does so in a less than truthful way

\*Sainsburys 10 August (on sale for £1.00)

## Appendix

1. WCRS description of brand: “Warburtons has been a family owned and run business for 140 years, and our brand positioning 'From our Family to Yours' is a **key brand truth** that reflects this. This idea is a consistent thread throughout all our communications; it is flexible enough to build warmth for the brand as well as to communicate specific product benefits.” (From Warburtons’ creative agency, WCRS, website)
2. **The word taste:** Rousseau, we are told by Derrida in *Of Grammatology*, condemns greed as the worst of all vices, saying, “Gluttony is the main vice of those who have no sense of taste.” (Rousseau, 1992; 947) Perhaps there are those who would find it easy to condemn potential consumers of Thins for having no taste – after all, the bun is presented in such a way as to tell us it is virtually tasteless. It required a new and improved recipe, ergo the previous recipe was inferior. The fact it needs to be associated with so much other tasty food in order to appeal to anyone is another clue of its potential tastelessness. Crucially though, when considering the word “taste”, it is useful to keep in mind ways in which the phrase “taste” is used, i.e. often in relation to class and education relating to style. To have no or poor taste is considered gauche. This advert manages to reflect and maintain a very British class structure, separating out those with and without the ‘right’ sense of ‘taste’, and appealing to people’s desire to ‘improve’ their taste or access to ‘good’ taste.
3. **Calorie count:** These rough calculations reveal how dishonest the advert in fact is; Avocado 100gs 160Kcal, Bacon 100gs, 287 Kcal, Roast chicken with skin still on, 165 Kcal, mayonnaise 1 tablespoon 57 calories. I shan’t include the tomato and lettuce count since that is negligible.



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## Images

1. Warburtons Thins (July 2016) (Advertisement in Waitrose Magazine)
2. Warburtons Thins (2011) Advertisement online) At:  
<http://www.creativematch.com/news/liquid-gets-warburtons-sandwich-revolution/100053/> (Accessed 11 August 2016)
3. Barthes, R, 1968 Barthes, R, 1968  
<http://faculty.georgetown.edu/irvinem/theory/Barthes-Mythologies-MythToday.pdf> (Accessed 10 August 2016)

## Assessment Criteria – Self-Assessment Notes

- **Demonstration of subject based knowledge and understanding**

I have very much enjoyed learning about semiotics and Deconstruction, and developing a language to think and discuss the subjects. I am deeply interested in Anthropology anyway (I wanted to study it a few years ago) and this section of the course is a natural progression from that. I do get frustrated by my inability to command language as I would like which makes explaining my thoughts clearly challenging. Sometimes the way in which people wrote about the subject seems archaic and opaque which is frustrating too. And of course there are aspects to it all, which do really test my brain's ability to comprehend quite what is being said, i.e. it can be confusing. However, I'm never sure whether it's the language or the concept that is opaque. There are so many subtle semantic variations in the literature and moving beyond a general understanding to a more nuanced one is the challenge, I would think.
- **Demonstration of research skills**

My life is not quiet or as ordered and calm as it might be so ensuring I get a chance to read as much as I would is tricky, but I have branched out and read around the subject as much as I was able to. I've not quite finished Chandler's book, which is excellent. I was also glad to be recommended the Williamson book by another student as it's more accessible than Barthes, whose use of language makes it hard to grab hold of concrete meaning across the whole. Instead I tend to recognise snippets and then have to try and piece things together with him. As I read through the supporting texts I am constantly triggered to think about other books I have read or own but haven't got round to. I think I could spend a lot more time researching and expanding my knowledge if I had it available, as well as the energy, resources and a very quiet room without children barging in every few minutes. Saying that, my interest in related subjects probably means I have access to ideas and facts that are very helpful anyway – it would be great to have the chance to expand on it all.
- **Demonstration of critical and evaluation skills**

I'm not afraid to question some of the ideas posited by 'names'. If I don't understand something and think it might be explained in another way I will say so. Ideas (out there and my own) are constantly changing and I am happy to present my knowledge and thoughts about related subjects alongside some of the ideas we're looking at here, and use those ideas to question the assertions being made. I think if my brain were a bit less fuzzy I could make a better job of it. It's frustrating to feel hindered by tiredness, a slow-moving thought process, and a haphazard command of written English but there you go... I couldn't string a sentence together at school at all, so it's work in progress.

- **Communications**

I've always been able to communicate more effectively verbally rather than in my written work. When I was at school I was constantly asked by teachers, why can't you write as well as you speak? (Surely, discovering the answer should have been one of their aims but it felt more like a 'blaming' question at the time.) I worked hard after I finished school to try and learn how to write because I enjoyed it as a very young child and still do. I hope I have managed to take on board some of the suggestions I was given in my last feedback, using headings and structuring the argument so it can be followed. I would have liked to include more references to back up some of my statements but wanted to stay within the word count. I cut lots of 'bloggy' writing although I'm sure it's still evident in many places. I'd hate to delete my entire personality – although the typos, I could really live without.