



# HigherMedia



The Key Concepts:

# Language

# Language: A Brief Note

- ■ Language is a detailed and confusing concept at first
- ■ Essentially, **Language** looks at the techniques used in a **medium** (*print, television, film, radio, internet,...*) to create **meaning**
- ■ However, we need to look at the background theory first...

# Language: An overview

- ■ **sign**: the smallest unit of communication which conveys meaning — *eg word, image, sound*
- ■ **denotation**: the description of a **sign** — *eg dictionary definition of a word*
- ■ **connotation**: the **meanings** associated with a **sign**  
— *eg. visions of white beaches, blue seas, surf, hot sunshine evoked by the word 'palm'*

# Language: An overview

- ■ codes: systems of signs which can be analysed. These may be technically and/or culturally produced. For example, a *high angle camera shot* of a human figure suggests the vulnerability of that person; in some cultures, a *red rose* symbolises love
- ■ motivation: the reason for the use of a specific **code**, so as to, for example, aid understanding or tell a story



# Language: An overview

- polysemy: the idea that a text may have several meanings at one time. For example, the meaning of a photograph in a newspaper may be ambiguous (*unclear or hazy*)
- anchorage: the narrowing down of the *polysemy* of a text by combining its **signs** with others to create a **preferred reading**
  - *for example, the caption under a newspaper photograph fixes the meaning and clears possible ambiguity*

# Language: An overview

- conventions: established ways of treating *genre, codes, narrative* or *representations*, etc
- ideology: a set of beliefs and values shared by a cultural group which produces a partial and selective view of the world out there; for example, capitalism (*free-market system motivated by profit*) and communism (*ownership and control of wealth and property lies with the state*)

# Language: An overview

- ■ myth: a story which a culture tells about itself which appears to be ‘commonsense’; for example, the **values** of the nuclear family (i.e. the traditional family model)
- ■ discourses: the articulation in a media text of *ideology/myth*



The Treachery Of Images - René Magritte (1928-29)

# SEMIOTICS



# Roland Barthes & Ferdinand de Saussure

*They were French and Swiss... in case you hadn't guessed*



# The Sign...

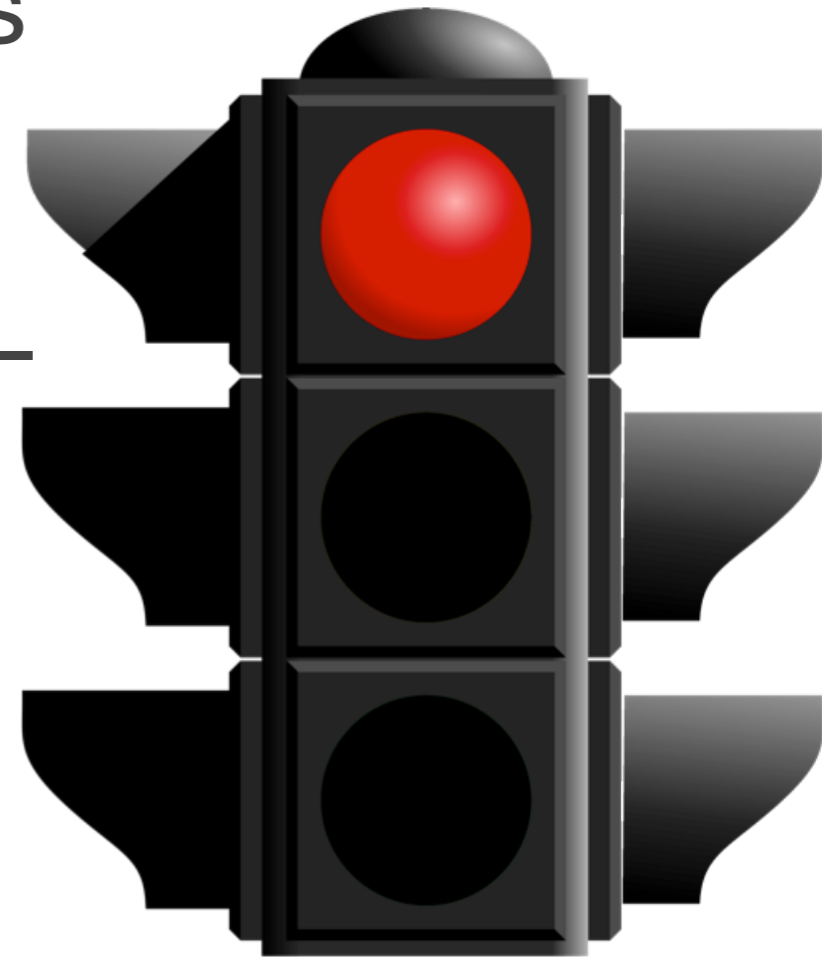
- ■ Semiotics – the study of signs
- ■ Key theorists:  
*Roland Barthes / Ferdinand De Saussure*
- ■ A sign is something that can stand for something else.
- ■ In Media, a **sign** can be an *image*, a *piece of text* or a *sound*

# The Sign...

- ■ According to ***Saussure***, a sign is made up of:
  - ■ The **signifier** – the literal thing that we see, hear, the actual image, sound etc.
  - ■ The **signified** – the idea(s) to which the sign refers
- ■ Sometimes, we are expected to have prior knowledge to understand what the sign is signifying. This prior knowledge is called a **referential code**.

# Understanding the sign - examples

- The image of a red traffic light is a “sign”
- It is made up of the “signifier” – the red light
- And the “signified” – what the red light represents (stop, wait, pause for go)





# Understanding the sign - examples

- ■ The image of a red rose is a “sign”
- ■ It is made up of the “signifier” – the red rose
- ■ And the “signified” – what a red rose represents (*love, emotion, romance, etc*)



# Try your own...

■ ■ In small groups, do the same for the following signs:

■ ■ *Thunder/lightning*

■ ■ *The silent, calm sea*

■ ■ *A blurry camera shot in a film*













# Denotation Connotation

- ■ Saussure's description of the **signifier** and **signified** is what we call *denotation* and *connotation*
- ■ Denotation – the literal description of a sign (e.g. a rose)
- ■ Connotation – what we associate with the sign (e.g. for a rose, it could be love, romance, etc)

# Denotation Connotation

- Working out the ***denotation*** and then ***connotation*** of a sign is what we call **deconstructing** or **decoding** the meaning of a sign
- *This is what you may have already encountered in your study of media texts in English*

# Denotation Connotation

■ ■ **denotation** — the obvious meaning.

*For example:*

■ ■ a rose is a pretty-looking flower with a strong scent...

■ ■ jeans are a pair of denim trousers



# Denotation Connotation

■ ■ **connotation** — the associations created in the minds of those interacting with the sign.

*For example:*

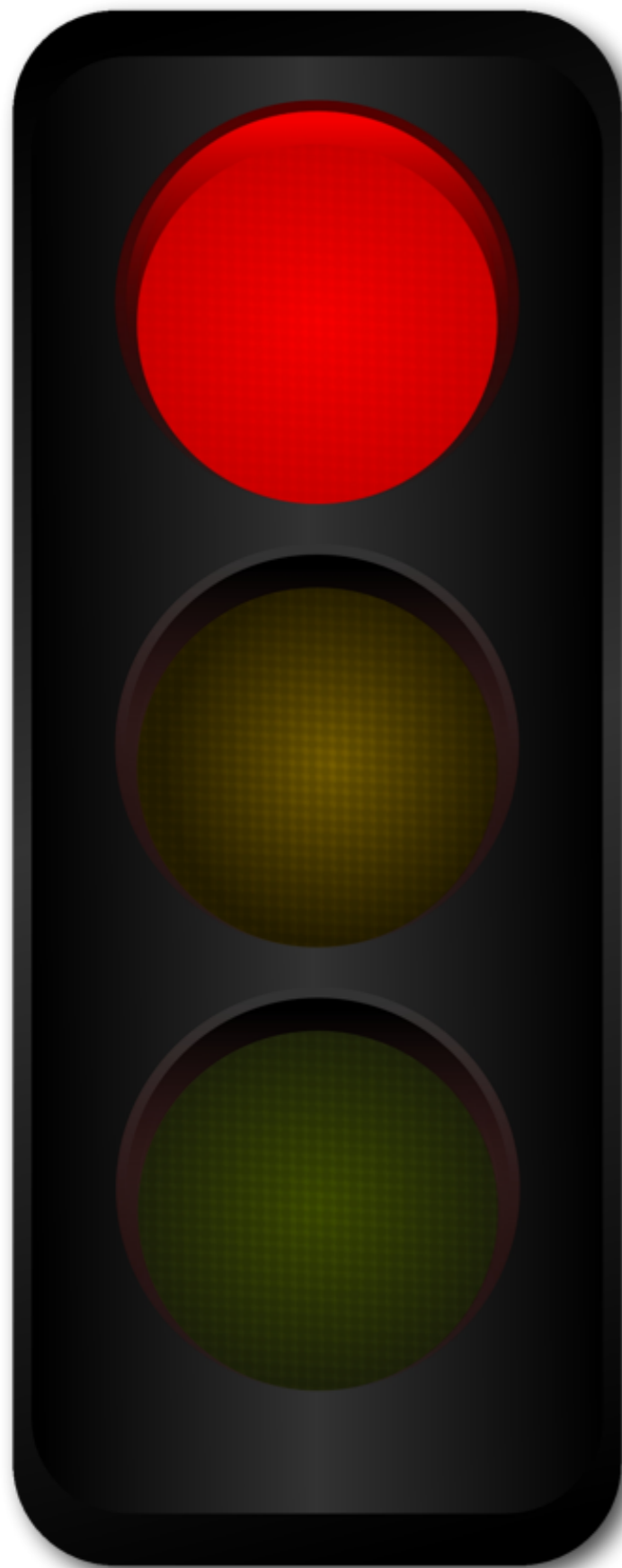
■ ■ a red rose **connotes** romance and the presentation of a red rose to someone **connotes** romantic affection

■ ■ jeans **connote** comfort and informality

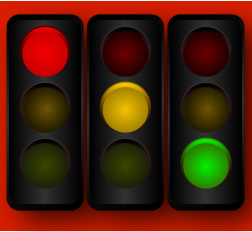
# Denotation Connotation

- The **context** can alter the meaning, though:
  - a red rose may also now **connote** a **political party**, or **sporting team...**



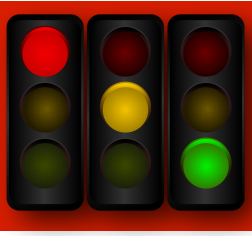


# Denotation Connotation



- ■ **Connotations** can often be specific to a culture. Some have become almost universal — largely as a result of the global nature of today's media.
- ■ Traffic lights can be used to explain **semiotics** and to demonstrate that human interaction makes *fixed meaning* impossible to define.

# Denotation Connotation



■ ■ A Red sign means stop

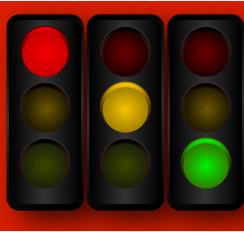
■ ■ An Amber sign means get ready to stop/go

■ ■ A Green sign means go

■ ■ However, it is **not** as simple as this. Consider the following again:

■ ■ Amber is a sign that is interpreted by many to mean *'speed up before the lights change to red'*. These people understand the 'official' intention of the sign but choose to '**read**' it in a different way.

# Denotation Connotation



- If you have visited Paris you will know that a green light on a pedestrian crossing does not mean go; it means you **may** be able to cross ...but only if the cars will stop for you!

These two examples demonstrate that interpreting signs is never straight-forward and can depend on human interaction and interpretation, this is also known as

**polysemy.**

# PracticeAnalysis



WIDE SCREEN PRESENTATION

**“SHEER COMIC  
DELIGHT”**

SCOTLAND ON SUNDAY

HE'S BACK - AND HE'S GOT SOME SERIOUS EXPLAINING TO DO

A BILL FORSYTH FILM

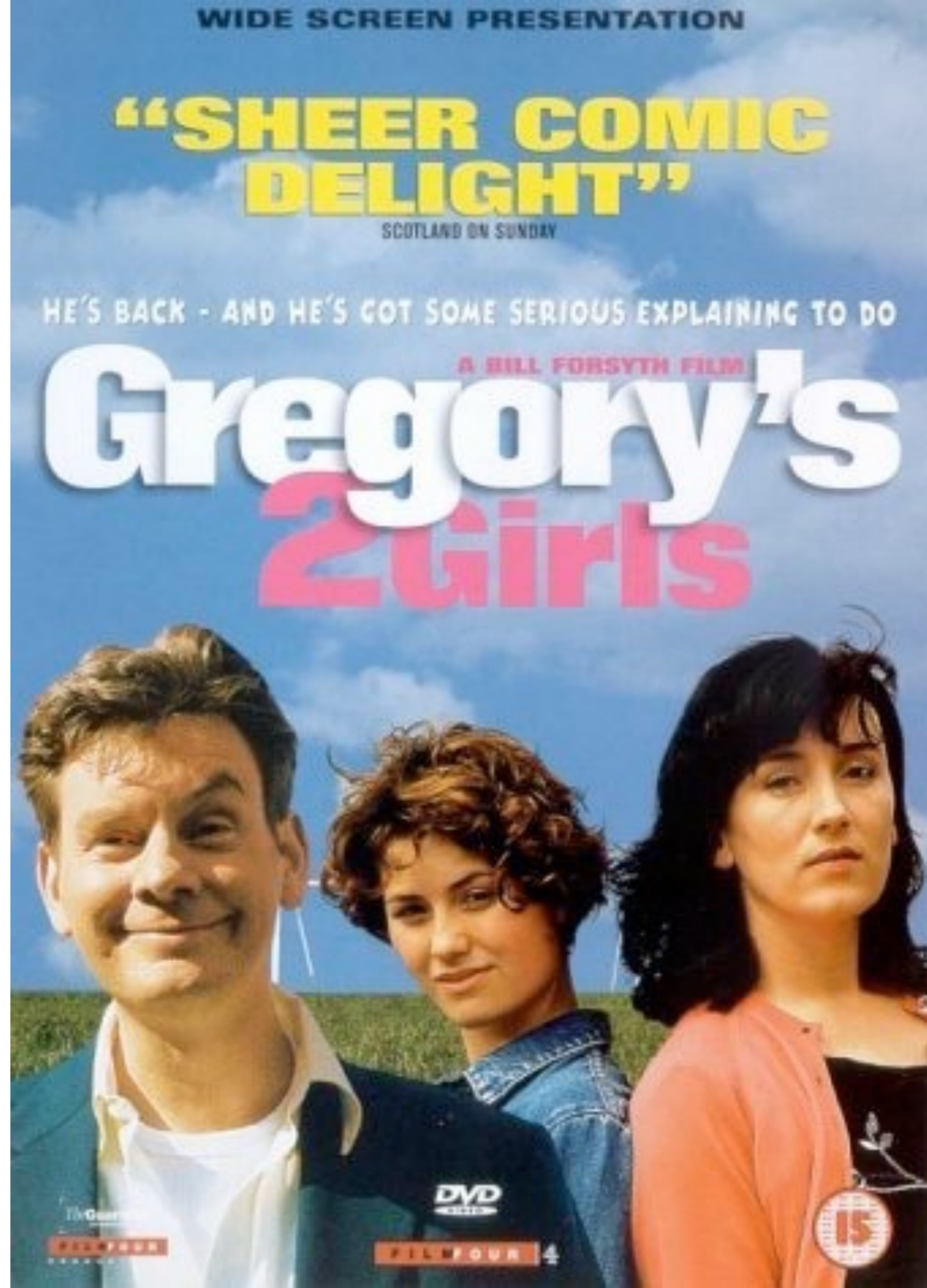
# Gregory's 2 Girls





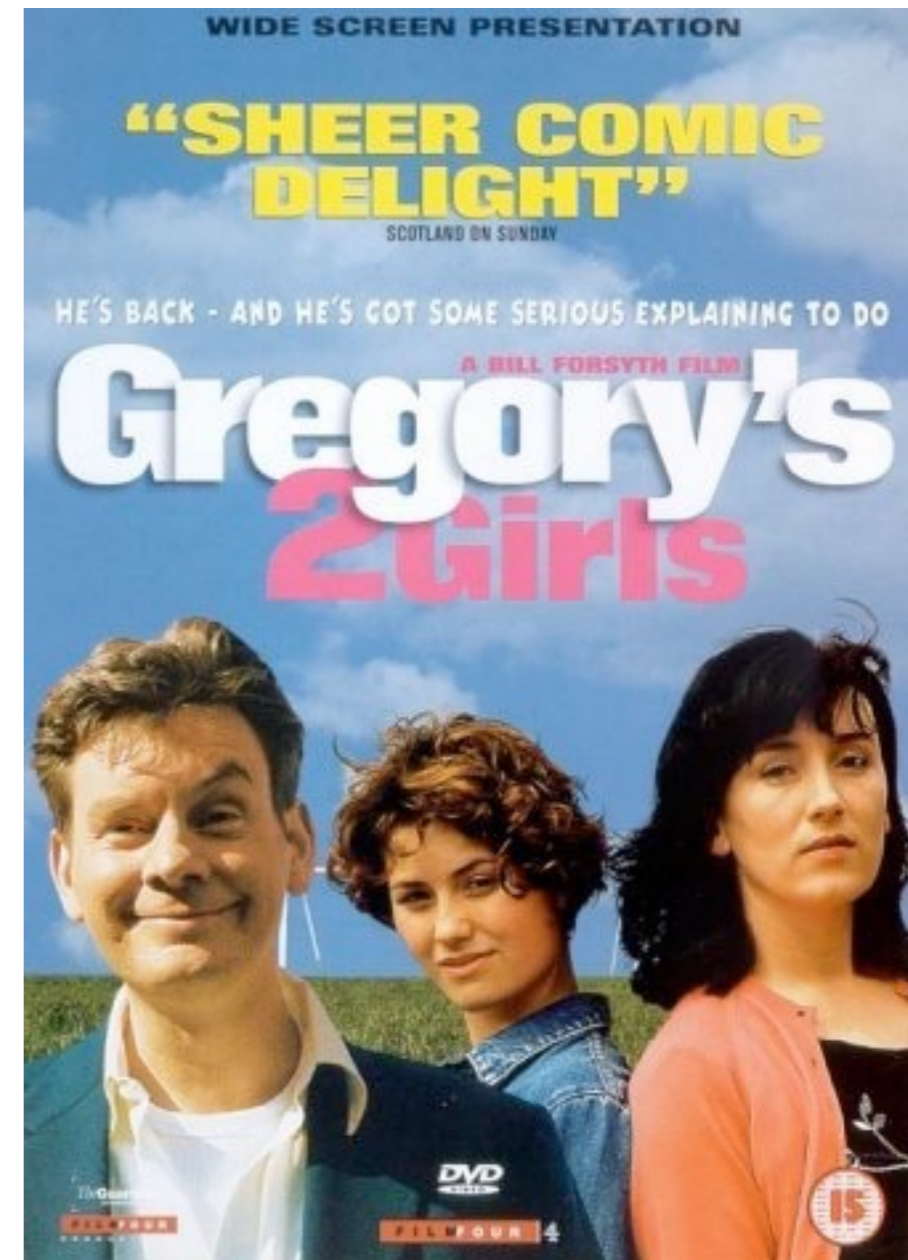
# Signifiers

- What does the title signify?
- What does the pink lettering signify and the blue sky (*think about stereotypes*)
- What does the setting signify?
- What does the expression upon Gregory's face signify?
- What do the costumes signify?



# Signifiers Gregory's 2 Girls

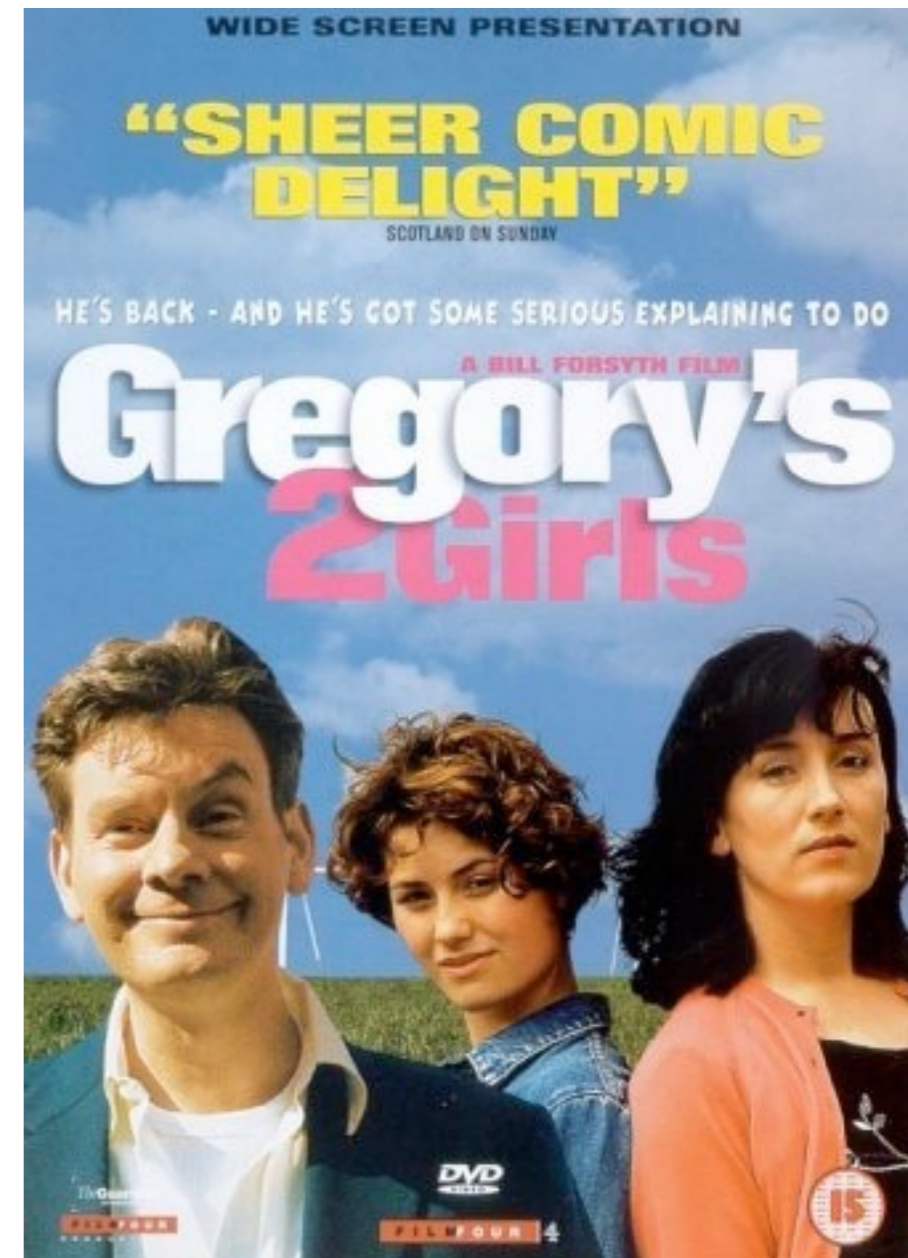
- The title is bold, bright and overlapping itself. This signifies a lighthearted comedy film. The pink lettering for '2 Girls' signifies females (perhaps stereotypically), especially when contrasted with the blue of the sky (for boys).





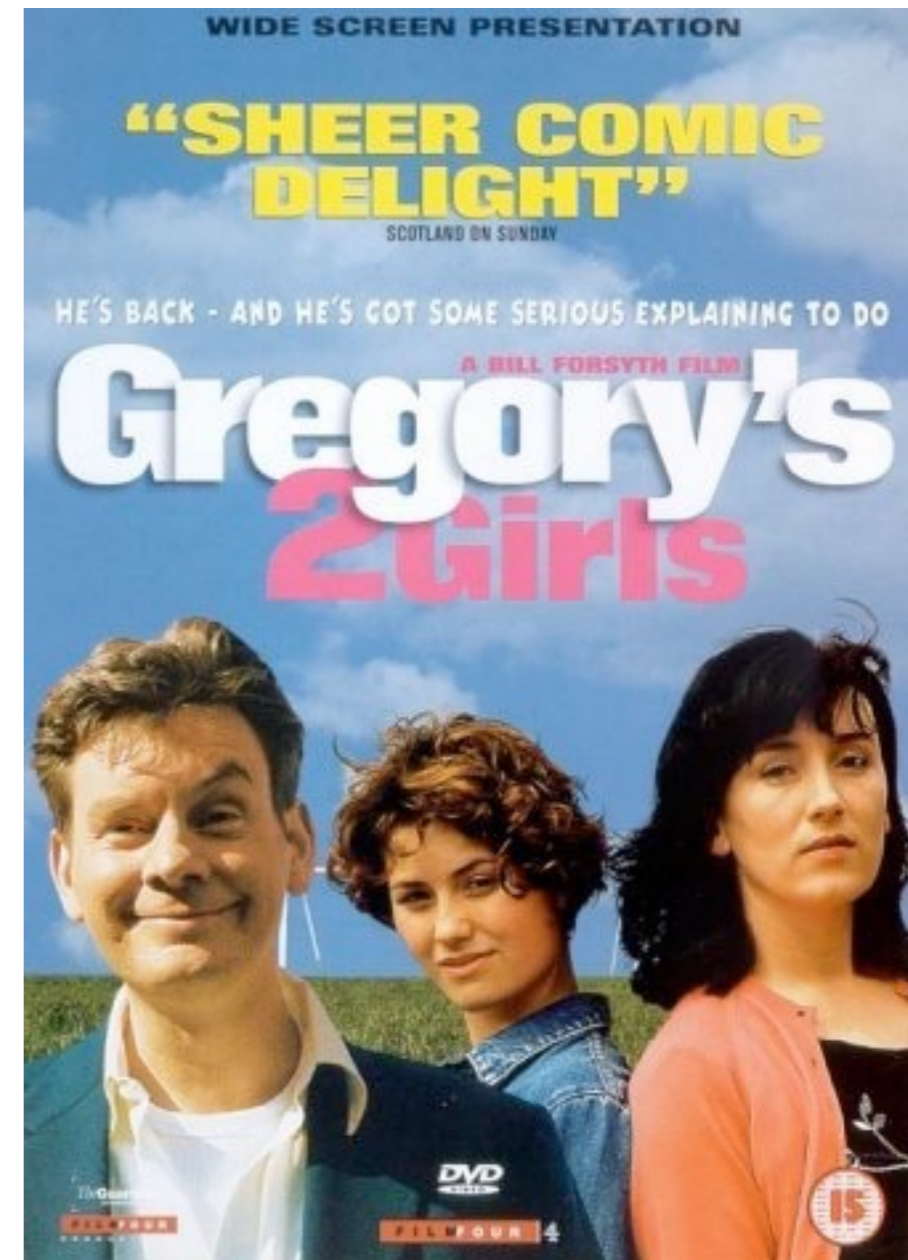
# Signifiers Gregory's 2 Girls

- The sky itself, being bright blue with just a few thin clouds, signifies a summer setting in which people may feel more carefree, again signifying the lighthearted nature of the film. The bright varied colours also add to this by signifying liveliness and fun.



# Signifiers Gregory's 2 Girls

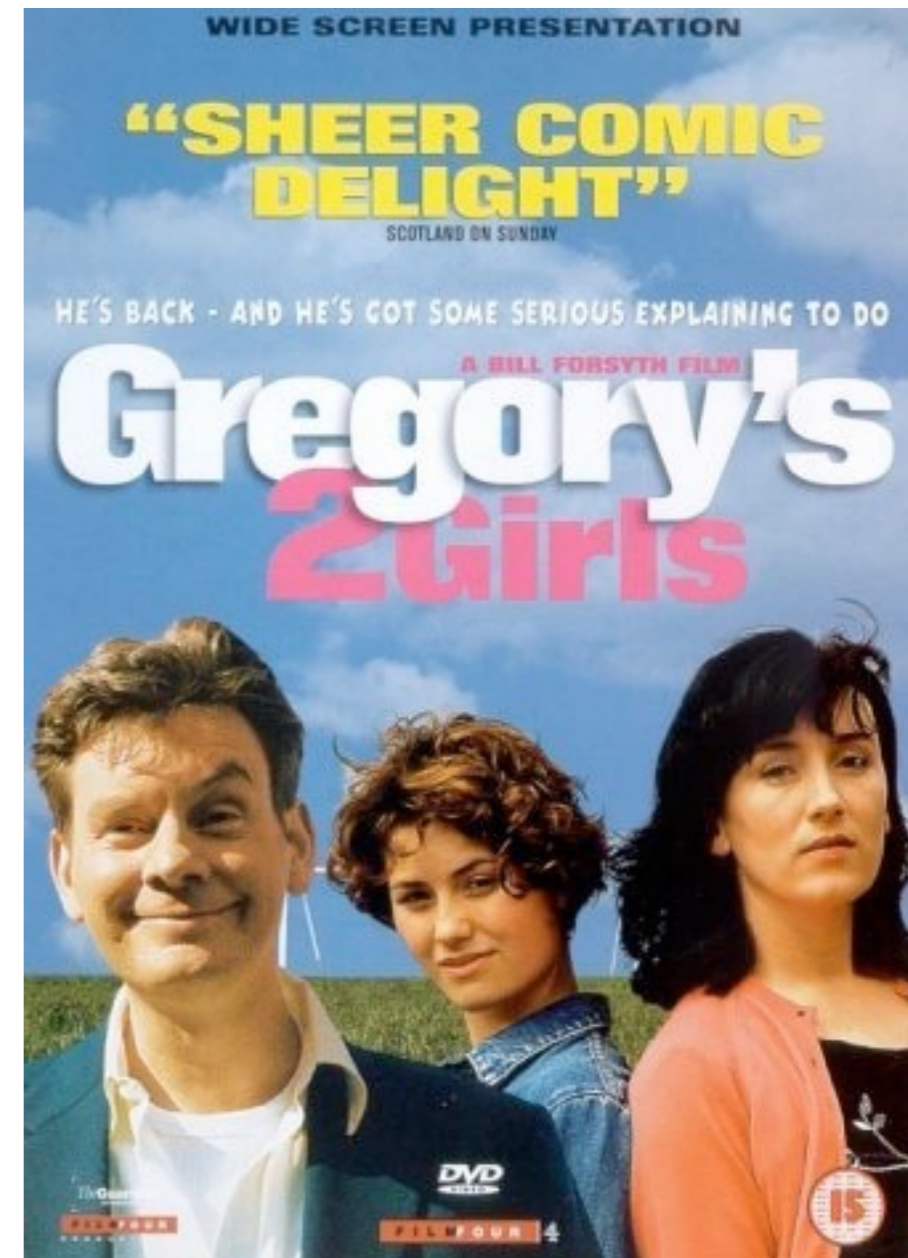
- The expression on Gregory's face signifies a man who is pleased with himself. With two women in the background perhaps he is 'getting away with it'? The raised eyebrow reinforces the impression that this is a lighthearted film. His casual clothing strengthens this impression.





# Signifiers Gregory's 2 Girls

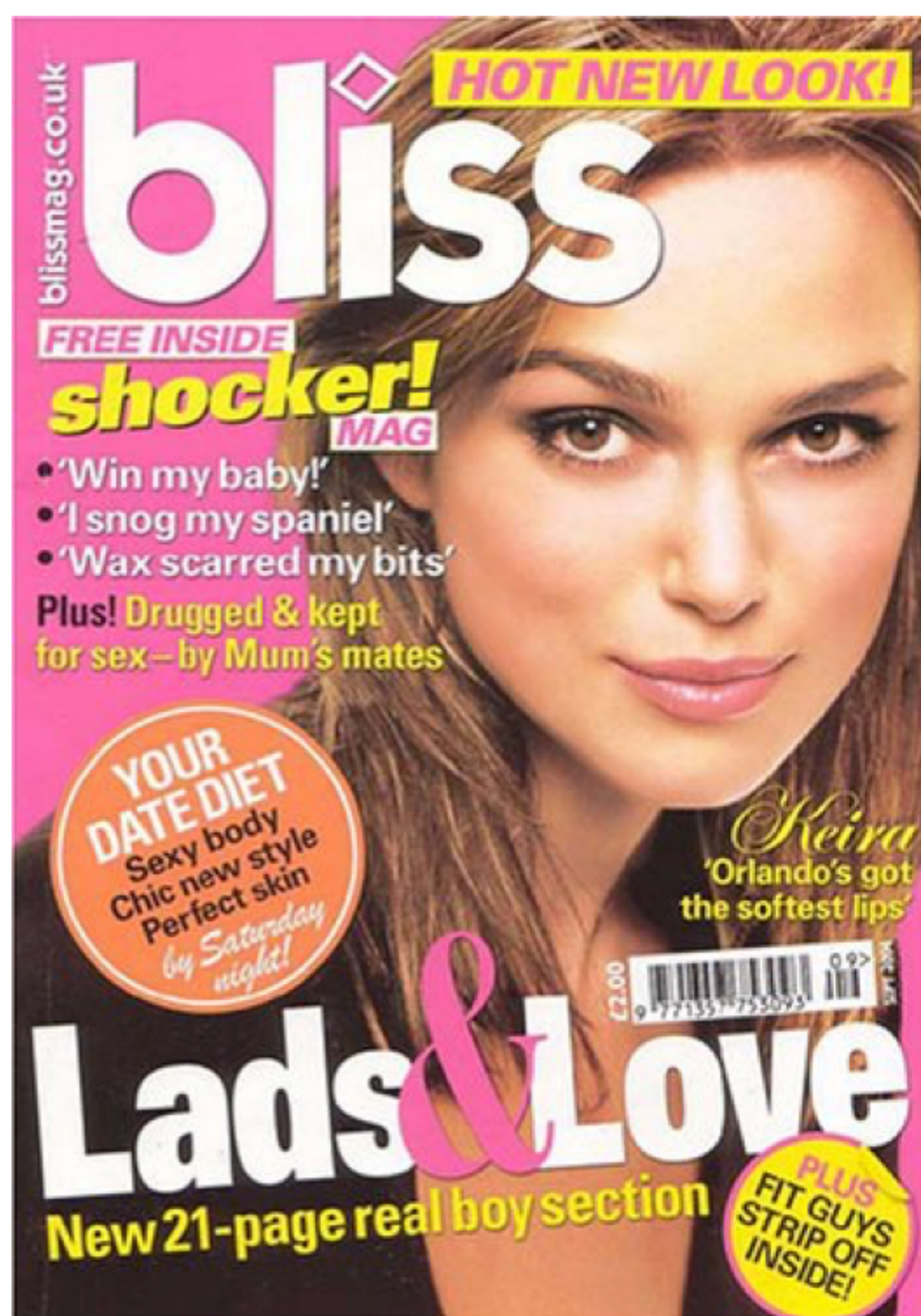
- The clothes of the women are interesting. The one on the right has styled, dark hair, a pink cardigan and a flowery print dress. These signifiers suggest a certain amount of 'poshness' and superiority. She is also likely to take herself seriously. In contrast, the woman in the background has more unkempt hair, is wearing a denim jacket and seems less formal. From these signifiers we could conclude that she will be down-to-earth, fun loving and funny.





# TaskPINK

What does the colour 'pink' signify when used on this magazine cover? List — and analyze — five other signifiers.





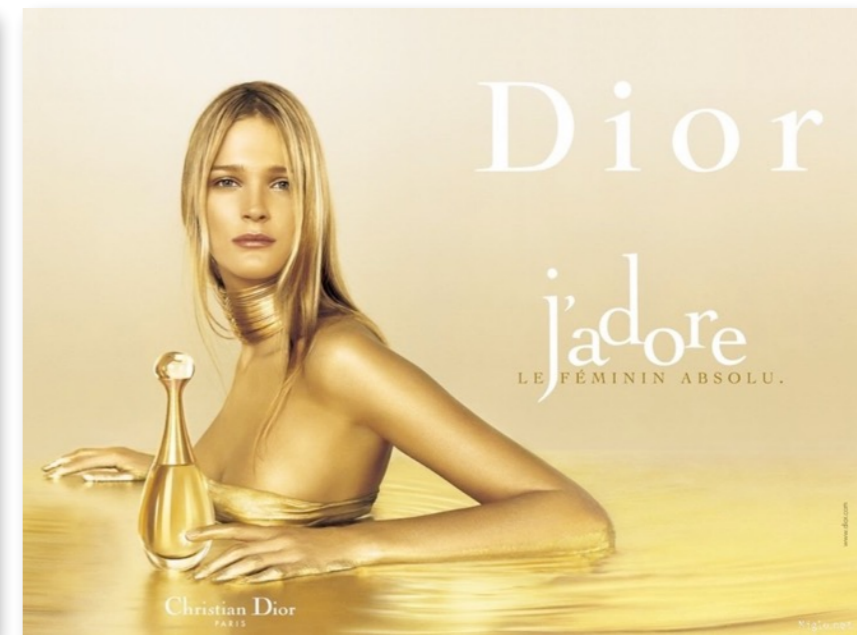
# Advertising Analysis



# Advertising Analysis

Look at the press adverts for Davidoff Blue Water and Dior's j'adore.


For each, identify at least **four signifiers** and indicate what you think they *signify*.









A photograph of a man's muscular torso in blue water, with a blue perfume bottle in the foreground. The bottle has a black cap and the brand name 'Davidoff' and 'Cool Water' written in a cursive font. The bottle is covered in water droplets. The background shows the man's torso and head in the water, with his eyes closed and a serene expression.

*SIGNIFIER:*  
**Water/Ocean Wave**  
*SIGNIFIES:*  
Wild, Stormy, Natural,  
Earthy

*SIGNIFIER:*  
**Facial Expression/  
Body Language**  
*SIGNIFIES:*  
Ecstatic, pleasure lost  
in ecstasy, laid back,  
inviting

*SIGNIFIER:*  
**Mans Naked Torso**  
*SIGNIFIES:*  
Natural, angelic, pure,  
toned, ideal,  
masculine, adonis

*SIGNIFIER:*  
**Words 'Cool Water'**  
*SIGNIFIES:*  
Refreshing, different,  
pure, clean

*SIGNIFIER:*  
**Droplets on Bottle**  
*SIGNIFIES:*  
Cool, chilled  
appearance, almost  
drinkable

*SIGNIFIER:*  
**Calligraphy Style Font**  
*SIGNIFIES:*  
Classic, timeless,  
expensive tastes





Dior

j'adore  
LE FÉMININ ABSOLU.

Christian Dior  
PARIS



*SIGNIFIER:*  
**Blonde Hair**  
*SIGNIFIES:*  
Ideal Woman,  
Innocence,  
Looks 'gold'

*SIGNIFIER:*  
**Jewellery**  
*SIGNIFIES:*  
Extravagance,  
Excess, Glamour,  
Decadence

*SIGNIFIER:*  
**Perfume Bottle**  
*SIGNIFIES:*  
Looks Jewel-like,  
Buried Treasure

*SIGNIFIER:*  
**Font (Serifs)**  
*SIGNIFIES:*  
Dior Logo, Brand  
Name, Designer

*SIGNIFIER:*  
**Colour Gold**  
*SIGNIFIES:*  
Luxury, Riches,  
Expense, Success,  
Shimmering

*SIGNIFIER:*  
**Word**  
**'Love' (French)**  
*SIGNIFIES:*  
Passion,  
Excitement, Lust

Christian Dior  
PARIS

Dior

j'adore  
LE FÉMININ ABSOLU.



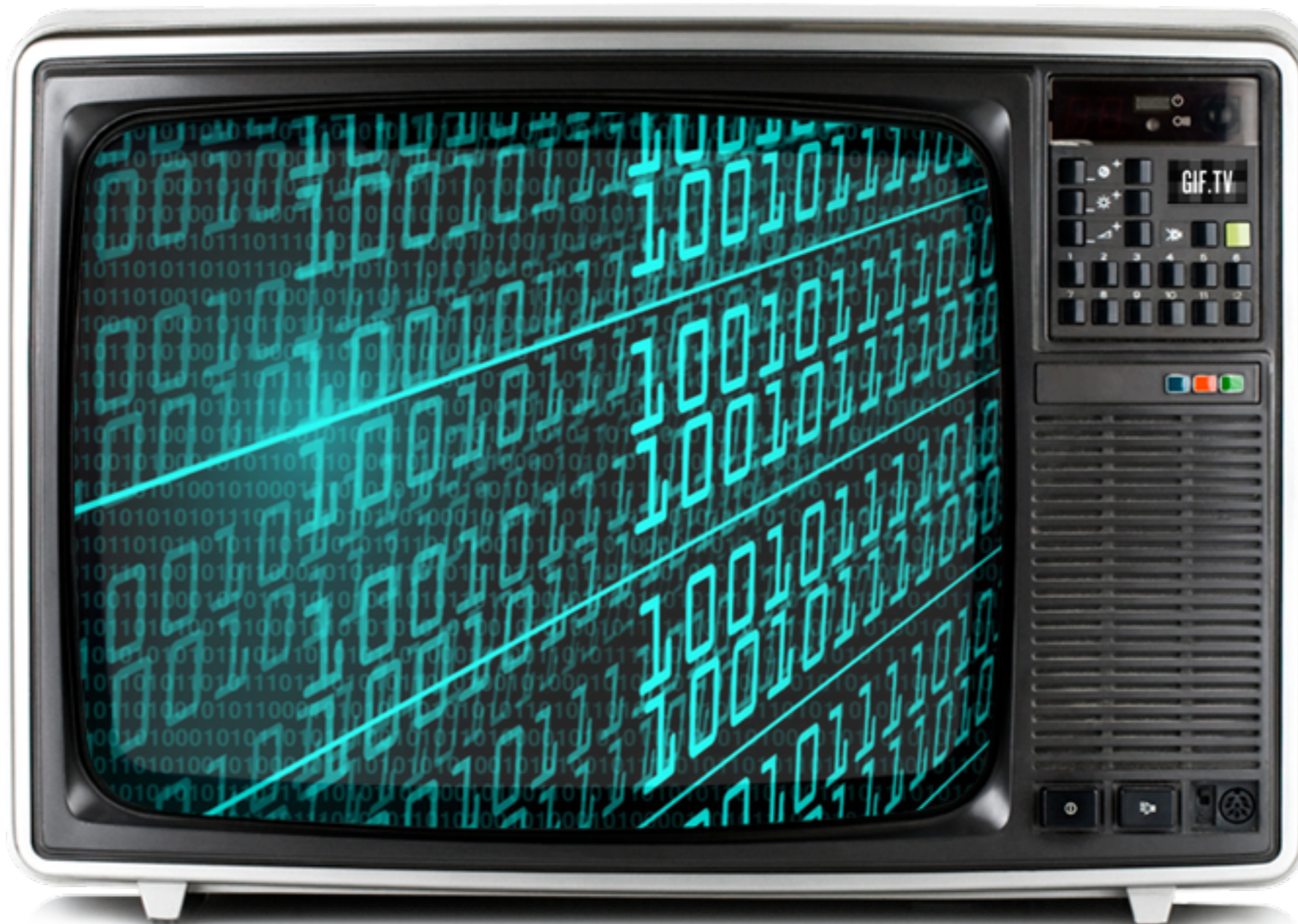
# SignHomework

Select a print (or TV) advert and identify at least **five** signs used in it.

For each, you must identify:

- the **signifier**
- what it **signifies**

# Codes...



# Codes...

- In Media Studies, signs are grouped together into groupings called codes.
- Cultural codes - system of signs whose meaning is shared by members of a culture (*e.g. dress/costume, gesture, mise-en-scene, intertextual reference*) Often this is associated with cultural ideology
- Technical codes - specific to media (*sound, lighting, camera techniques, angles, framing and shots e.g. a fade-in is an **editing code** and may connote the beginning in print sans serif is a **typographic code** and may connote modernity*)
- The motivation is the reason for using particular codes (e.g. to connote a certain emotion or feeling)

# Examples...

- **Codes** (techniques) of specific media will be looked at when we study texts in full, but may include:
  - **For film:** *Camera length, camera angle, sounds, editing, costumes, expressions, lighting and colour*
  - **For print:** *Font, colour, size, spacing and arrangement.*



# Analysing Written Codes



1. What is the title of the magazine and what does this connote?
2. What slogans/captions have been used?
3. What colours are used and what do they connote?
4. What font has been used and what does this connote?
5. What words have been chosen? Why do you think they have been chosen?
6. What words are emphasised and why do you think they have been emphasised?

# Polyssemy & Anchorage

# Polyssemy & Anchorage

- **Polyssemy** is the idea that signs and codes can have more than one meaning
- *The meaning a person takes from a sign or code is dependent on their prior knowledge, experience and social status*
- **Anchorage** is when something else is included in a media text to make sure consumers take the meaning the producer intends (the *preferred reading*). For example, a caption under a photograph could explain what the photo shows





# Anchorage





Without a caption for this photo,  
how do you read it?





***Family watch bonfire  
on 5th November***



# Polyssemy & Anchorage

# Polysamy & Anchorage

- Without the text below the image explaining what it is, this picture could be anything.
- The picture could be a group of students watching their home burn down... or a group of pagans giving their fallen comrade a religious send off
- This means the image is **Polysemic** (this means the *signifier* could be interpreted in a number of possible ways)
- To make sure the viewer/audience/reader knows what the image is *meant* to show we use **Anchorage** to *anchor* the image to its *meaning*
- This leads the viewer directly towards what the image is supposed to be *signifying*







Police remove a body from the scene of the Boston Marathon explosion.





Police forcibly remove a protester from the Occupy Wall Street demonstration





Who knows? The point is that, we **trust** the caption to anchor a particular meaning...

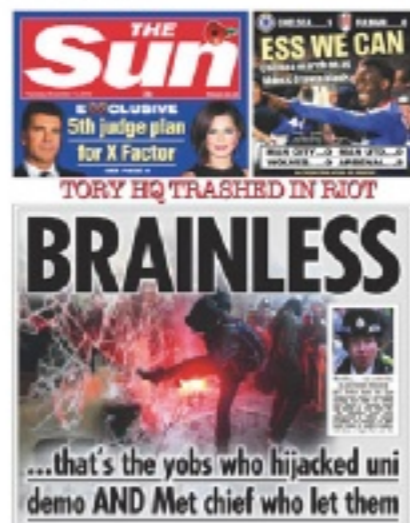


# Polysemic Anchorage

The usual accusation made against the media in these scenarios is that they treat the violent minority as representative.

In this case it is literally true, in the sense that this photo of **one** over-excited protestor is used **to portray the whole event**. But in fact the narratives are more nuanced.

*-Charlie Beckett*





# Taking Stock

Signifier: what we see (*denotation*)

Signified: what the sign means (*connotation*)

Anchorage: something added to prompt a preferred reading

Preferred reading: the interpretation intended by the producer of the media text

Polysemic: the sign is open to different interpretations

# InPractice

## Advertising Standards Authority

**Institutional Constraints**  
*(We'll be talking about these later in the course)*



Legal, decent, honest and truthful



# InPractice

What is being  
advertised?



Legal, decent, honest and truthful







Legal, decent, honest and truthful





- Should advertisers be able to use whatever images they want?
- Should they be able to attach any image they want to any product or service?
- As long as it attracts attention, is it OK?
- Is this ad OK?



Legal, decent, honest and truthful







# Nice Headlamps.

What do you  
look for in a car?

***UlsterTrader.com*** 

Northern Ireland's Fastest Growing Car Website

50  
YEARS

Legal, decent, honest and truthful

ASA 



Banned

...tips.  
...what do you  
look for in a car?

**UlsterTrader.com**   
Northern Ireland's Fastest Growing Car Website



Legal, decent, honest and truthful



The **ASA** said:

“This was a poster ad. 44 complainants challenged whether the poster was offensive, because it objectified women, degraded them and was sexist. Some complainants also considered that the poster implied that women, like cars, were commodities to be bought and sold.

“We agreed with the complainants that the image of the woman’s cleavage coupled with the strapline ‘Nice Headlamps. What do you look for in a car?’ was likely to be seen to objectify and degrade women by linking attributes of a woman, her cleavage, to attributes of a car, the headlamps, in a way that would be seen to imply a woman, like a car, was to be ‘selected’ for those attributes.

“We concluded that the poster had caused serious offence to some readers and was likely to cause widespread offence.”



Legal, decent, honest and truthful



# InPractice

- Would you ban the following advert, and if so, on what grounds?





DOLOCE & GABBANNA



# D&GReaction

news.com.au National | World | Lifestyle | Travel | Entertainment | Technology | Finance | Sport

## 'Gang rape' Dolce and Gabbana advert banned

This story was published: 8 YEARS AGO | MARCH 07, 2007 12:00AM

**A CONTROVERSIAL ad by fashion designers Dolce and Gabbana suggesting gang rape has been banned from Italian publications.**

"The advertisement showing a woman pinned to the ground by the wrists by a bare-chested man, with other men in the background looking on", has been banned since yesterday, the Advertising Self-Discipline Institute (IAP) said.

The body said the ad "offended the dignity of the woman, in the sense that the feminine figure is shown in a degrading manner. The woman has an alienated expression, with an absent look".

### 5. Dolce & Gabbana

The controversial predecessor to Calvin Klein's sexual assault advert; one of Dolce & Gabbana's 2007 ad was pulled in Spain as it was thought to 'glorify rape'.

Designer Stefano Gabbana defended the image, saying its intent was to show "an erotic dream, a sexual game".

## 'Gang Rape' Dolce & Gabbana Advert Brings Yet More Controversy For Brand After 'Synthetic' IVF Comments

The Huffington Post UK | By Rachel Moss



Posted: 18/03/2015 13:42 GMT | Updated: 30/03/2015 17:59 BST

# Powerful Signs

Signs have immense power. They appeal to our senses on a visceral level and as such, can be used to manipulate us subconsciously.



# Conventions

Important term:  
This is a **MUST** learn

**Conventions** are the normal ways in which *signs* and *codes* are used in certain types of media.

- The *conventions* of horror films include:
  - Dark lighting
  - Tense music
- The *conventions* of British soap operas include:
  - Continuous storylines focusing on domestic issues
  - Working-class characters





We hold these truths to be self-evident,  
that all men are created equal, that they  
are endowed by their Creator with certain  
unalienable Rights, that among these are  
Life, Liberty and the pursuit of  
Happiness...



# Ideology, Myth & Discourses...

- ☑ An ideology is a belief or shared value
- ☑ For example, ***The American Dream*** is an ideology that everyone, no matter where they come from, can succeed and make it big in America.
- ☑ *PS: You can find this ideology in many mainstream American/Hollywood films*





# Ideology, Myth & Discourses...

- ☑ A myth is a (usually untrue) story told by a culture about themselves
- ☑ For example, the myth that Scotland is a romantic land full of kilted warriors

OUTLANDER  
Some Like It Scot...



# Ideology, Myth & Discourses...

- ☑ **Media discourses** are the ways these *ideologies* and *myths* are represented in the media.

