Twitter Thread by Homunculus ■



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@tryingattimes

You don’t have even the beginning of a facility for critical thought, do you? Can you read images in a thinking mode, i.e. through a critical semiotic lens?

Let’s begin (it won’t take long, I promise; this is quite straightforward).

@beccalamjig You identified the title and the type of person in the picture correctly, well done. This indeed looks to be a book about women, more specifically quite young women.

Now, what is unusual about the photo?

@beccalamjig Correct; the blindfold. The young woman, who indeed looks fairly stereotypical, is blindfolded.

What are the semiotics of blindfolding, Becca?

That’s right; being deprived of one’s sight by something that can be put on - and taken off.

@beccalamjig In pictures, still or moving, we might associate blindfolding with kidnapping or bedroom play. This sets up what’s called a juxtaposition; two contrasting meanings that together form additional possibilities for interpretation. Let’s settle for a simple one; sex AND kidnapping.

@beccalamjig This blindfold isn’t the type used in ordinary kidnapping though, is it?

No; it is made of deep pink satin roses.

What might deep pink satin roses symbolise? What are the associations?

@beccalamjig Let’s see, deep pink: sensuality, femininity, the inside of the female labia, even. Satin: luxurious, somewhat ostentations glamour in a feminine modality. Roses: the archetypal cultivated flower for fragrance and beauty, petals that are almost obscenely soft-fleshy to touch.

@beccalamjig I think at this point we can conclude that the blindfold is polysemic, and tells us that the young woman in the image is prevented from seeing clearly by a range of ideas around sex and femininity.

@beccalamjig Circle back to the idea of blindfolding. Remember that it can be both put on and taken off?

What does that tell us in this instance?

@beccalamjig Correct; these ideas are put on, i.e. they are not innate to the young woman in the picture, and they can be ‘taken off’ so that she might see better.

Let’s take a short break for reflection and/or discussion of that suggestion. It’s rather important, don’t you think?

@beccalamjig After a little break for reflection, let’s look at the title again, and what it means in this newly explored context.

The two words - ‘material’ and ‘girls’ are coloured differently.

@beccalamjig ‘Girls’ is pink, linking it to the idea of femininity and also the blindfold.

‘Material’ is yellow, and stands out from all other elements on the page. Think about yellow in nature and the human world. What does yellow communicate?

@beccalamjig That's right; it typically draws attention.

Yellow is the colour of "hey - right here; pay attention!"

Let's go back to the meaning of the word that is yellow, which we can now deduce as important to the interpretation of this book cover.

@beccalamjig Material, i.e. referring to the stuff-level of reality, that which will make you go 'ouch' if you bump into it or misjudge your relation to it.

@beccalamjig All matter has a degree of density, even when it isn't very much. It can be observed and assessed in such a fashion that several, even many people can agree with each other about what it is that they are looking at. Quite useful, right?

@beccalamjig Matter is fundamental to our existence; we ARE matter. Organic, i.e. living matter, but matter even so. This observation makes everything we call society and which is concerned with learning, planning, making, and functioning in a collaborative fashion, possible.

@beccalamjig The title is also obviously a pun, which it might be time to take into account - it draws intertextually on the song 'Material Girls' by Madonna, who is sufficiently well-known to ring a lot of bells for a lot of people.

@beccalamjig This pun tells us that the book is aimed not at an academic audience only, but is written for broader, or popular appeal. In fact, the whole design tells us this. We can derive some of the tenor of the book, and the publisher's plans for the book, from this.

@beccalamjig In conclusion, we have a book that:
a) is likely to be written in an engaging and approachable manner, and
b) draws our attention to the tensions between the materiality of being female (sex) and the cultural baggage attached to 'being a girl' (what we might summarise as gender).

@beccalamjig @Docstockk might disagree with this interpretation, but I suspect she won't. Either way, it will be in the public domain soon, and we can all find out.

If we bother to read it, that is.

I will.

@beccalamjig @Docstockk Oh, an important addition to the interpretation of the blindfold:

The girl in the picture can only see it, and form her own relation to what it symbolises, if she takes it off. She can't see what blinds her, until she looks at it clearly.

That's your take-home message.