Paper #1: Semiotic Analysis of a Hartman Center Visual Artifact
VMS 202D – "Introduction to Visual Culture"   *8% of course grade*

Due: In discussion sections on **Friday, September 20, 2019**
[No late papers accepted!]

Length: 4 full pages (minimum) -- *All papers must be formatted in 12-point, "Times" or "Times New Roman" font with line spacing set at 1.5. All margins must be 1 inch (1"). No font shenanigans!* ☺

<u>*Semiotics*</u> offers a language for analyzing the way in which meaning is constructed through signs. The choice of signifiers and how they are situated in relation to each other shapes the denotative and connotative meanings of a photograph, advertisement, film, internet meme, etc.

Today (September 6), you are visiting the Hartman Center for Sales, Advertising, & Marketing History, where you will be introduced to their archives and view a sampling of their artifacts. ***Choose an artifact from among the materials on display and take a photograph of it for closer study and analysis.***

For this first paper, your task is to conduct a **semiotic analysis** of your chosen artifact using key concepts and terms from our course lectures and readings. Invoking semiotics to talk about images is one approach that visual studies uses to understand how meaning is **constructed** through representations. Begin your analysis with a thick description (**ekphrasis**) of the image, describing the key **signifiers** that shape its meaning and the **denotative** and **connotative** **signifieds** they conjure in your mind as an **interpretant** of its **signs**.

Some questions to consider in your analysis:

- What are the individual **signs** in the artifact and how are they used to **represent** concrete and abstract **referents** outside the artifact? How does the choice of **signifiers** shape the **signifieds** that the artifact evokes?
- What are the **denotative** and **connotative** meanings of the artifact? What meaning do you ascribe to the things that you see? How does your particular **subject position** (identity, experience, point of view) as **interpretant** shape your close reading of this artifact? How might the artifact be read differently depending on its viewer?
- How **motivated** are the signs in the artifact? Identify the use of **symbol, icon** and/or **index** as appropriate. How does the degree to which the signs in your artifact are motivated by their objects affect the meaning(s) of the artifact?

- Can you infer the creator's/artist's **intended meaning** from the way in which the artifact's visual language is constructed? Who is the target of the advertisement's **mode of address**?

In your conclusion, summarize your observations about the artifact and consider how issues of **power** and/or **myth (naturalization)** are at play in the artifact. Finally, discuss the merits and limits of using semiotics to help us understand advertisements: what does this approach to the study of images allow us to see? What does it fail to see about the artifact that you feel is important?

You must support your arguments with concrete and specific evidence from what you observe in the artifact itself!

Use richly ekphratic descriptions! Return to the archive to view the artifact again if it will help you understand the specificities of its signifiers.

When introducing key terms, use definitions from the lecture and textbook and readings and be sure to appropriately cite your sources when quoting or closely paraphrasing.