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Anatomy of Visual Culture: Visual, Perception and Meaning

Görsel Kültür'ün Anatomisi: Görsel, Algı ve Anlam

Barış AYDIN¹ - Necla KILIÇ² - Zeynep KILIÇ³

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ABSTRACT

The increasing impact of visual communication in modern societies is making it increasingly important to understand the role of visual culture on individuals and social structures. Nowadays, it is known that visuals have become a central element not only as a means of communication but also in shaping social values, ideologies, and identities. Despite this situation, it is observed that the processes of meaning production of visuals and their effects on individuals have not been thoroughly examined, which necessitates the consideration of visual culture within a semiological framework. Especially, the idea that visuals, as a component of culture, carry ideological meanings and that these meanings need to be analyzed, pointing to the process of shaping historical and social accumulations both materially and spiritually, constitutes the fundamental problematics of the research. In this context, the effects of visual culture on individuals' perception and the societal dimensions of this perception are among the primary topics that need to be examined. Additionally, the primary aim of the study is to reveal how individuals perceive visuals through semiological analysis of visual culture and to what extent this perception contributes to cultural meaning production processes. In this context, the analysis of visuals is being conducted based on Roland Barthes' semiological approach, which emphasizes that the meanings contained in visuals should be addressed not only at an aesthetic level but also within ideological and cultural contexts. The aim is to analyze these visuals both individually and collectively. In this context, the research aims to provide a theoretical and methodological framework within the universe of visual culture for visuals, which are considered both carriers of specific meanings and producers of social discourse, while also contributing to individuals' critical evaluation of their visual experiences by understanding the social meaning of visuals.

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ÖZET

Modern toplumlarda görsel iletişimin artan etkisi, görsel kültürün bireyler ve toplumsal yapılar üzerindeki rolünü anlamayı giderek daha önemli bir hale getirmektedir. Günümüzde görsellerin birer iletişim aracı olmanın yanı sıra toplumsal değerlerin, ideolojilerin ve kimliklerin şekillenmesinde merkezi bir unsur haline geldiği bilinmektedir. Bu duruma rağmen, görsellerin anlam üretim süreçlerinin ve bu süreçlerin bireyler üzerindeki etkilerinin, derinlemesine incelenmediği görülmekle beraber görsel kültürün semiyolojik bir çerçevede ele alınmasını gerekli kılmaktadır. Bilhassa, tarihsel ve toplumsal birikimlerin maddi ile birlikte manevi anlamda şekillenmesi sürecine işaret eden kültürün bir bileşeni olarak görsellerin ideolojik anlam taşıdığı ve bu anlamların çözümlenmesi gerektiği düşüncesi, araştırmanın temel problematiğini oluşturmaktadır. Bu bağlamda, görsel kültürün bireylerin algı dünyasındaki etkileri ve bu algının toplumsal boyutları, incelenmesi gereken öncelikli konular arasında yer almaktadır. Ayrıca, görsel kültürün semiyolojik analiz yoluyla bireylerin görselleri nasıl algıladığını ve bu algının kültürel anlam üretim süreçlerine ne düzeyde katkı sağladığını ortaya koymak, çalışmanın

¹ Sorumlu Yazar, Doç. Dr., Dicle Üniversitesi Sanat ve Tasarım Fakültesi

² Yüksek lisans öğrencisi, Dicle Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi

³ Yüksek lisans öğrencisi, Dicle Üniversitesi Eğitim Fakültesi

(encryption) and decoding (decryption). This process is shaped by the perception, understanding, and interpretation of the message sent by the source by the receiver. The process in question (Figure 1) is defined by the elements of sender (source), message (message), receiver (target), channel (medium), encoding, decoding, and feedback. In this context, the phenomenon of communication is considered as the process of understanding, interpreting, and expressing based on visual perception that occurs between the source and the channel. In this process, the sense of sight plays an important role. Humans perceive objects and events around them by seeing, mentally analyzing, defining, and interpreting them



Image 1: Lascaux Cave Stylizations (Wikipedia 2024)

The process in which humans began to create visual elements in structures like caves, where they were forced to live within the limitations offered by nature, is considered a period when the foundations of communication were laid. Especially in the visuals found in the Lascaux Cave in France (Image1), which constitute the first examples of plastic arts, the effort of humans to visualize their surroundings through imitation has enabled the transmission of this knowledge to the present day through shapes. It is observed that these simplified and detail-free visual forms significantly contribute to the communication process. In this context, the increasing impact of visual communication in contemporary societies makes it increasingly necessary to understand the influence of visual culture on individuals and social structures. It is stated that visuals, which have become an inseparable part of life today, create new layers of meaning as carriers of social values and ideologies. Within the social dynamics of the modern era, visual culture, which plays a decisive role in shaping personal and collective identities (Mirzoeff, 1999, p. 3), highlights the need for individuals to interpret their visual experiences in a more profound way.

The processes of meaning production in visuals can be examined more deeply through the fundamental concepts of semiotic theory, namely "denotation" and "connotation." Barthes (1977) defines denotation as the basic and objective meaning of an image, while he suggests that connotation shapes this meaning within cultural and ideological contexts. In this context, semiotic analyses that reveal the multilayered meaning structures of visual elements allow for a better understanding of the relationships individuals and communities establish with these meanings. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006), visuals not only shape individual perceptions but also play a decisive role in the formation of social structures.

Visual culture is defined as a multi-layered phenomenon that evaluates both its effects on individuals and its contributions to social structures (Rose, 2016, p. 12). Research focusing on the processes through which visuals carry traces of historical and social accumulations in both aesthetic and ideological dimensions reveals

the dynamic fields where social values are reproduced. In this context, Barthes's semiotic approach provides a strong theoretical foundation for analyzing the ideological meanings embedded in visual elements. Mirzoeff (2013) states that visuals are incorporated into social narratives within a historical continuity and attempts to explain how visual culture is effective in this context.

This study aims to examine the effects of visual culture on individuals' perception worlds, revealing the multilayered relationships between personal perceptions and societal discourses. In this context, as Berger (1972, p. 7) stated, visuals not only provide an aesthetic experience but are also laden with ideological meanings. Evaluating the effects of visuals on both individual and societal levels from a critical perspective allows for a deeper understanding of visual culture. Additionally, the societal impacts of visual culture can also be analyzed through the reflections of visuals in media, art, and popular culture on individuals (Sontag, 2003, p. 50). For example, it is known that visuals carrying ideological content, such as a poster produced for propaganda purposes, have been used as a means to transform societies throughout history. In this context, as Hall (1997, p. 22) stated, it can be said that visuals have the power to reshape cultural codes. In conclusion, visual culture studies make significant contributions to the in-depth analysis of the universe of social meanings. In this context, the aim of the study is to evaluate the role of visuals in the formation of individual and societal meanings within a theoretical and methodological framework. The consideration of visuals as both carriers of meaning and tools for social transformation constitutes one of the fundamental assumptions of this study.

Visual Culture

In John Berger's (1986) work *Ways of Seeing*, the statement "Seeing came before talking" emphasizes that the act of seeing is a fundamental and primary experience in the history of humanity. Seeing is one of the earliest developing sensory processes in an individual's perception of the surrounding world, offering a dimension of meaning beyond language in the relationship between humans and objects and their environment. In this context, "seeing" means the observation of an object and the perception of that observation through the sense of sight, and it expresses the individual's interaction with both the physical world and mental images. Seeing is not only a perceptual process but also encompasses a practice of meaning-making that shapes individuals' subjective experiences and perceptions within a social context. In relation to the phenomenon of seeing, the concepts of "image" and "visual" represent different dimensions of this perception. An image refers to the physical or mental representation of an object, event, or situation, encompassing both elements that can be physically observed (for example, a reflection in a mirror or a photograph on a screen) and images imagined or remembered in the mind. In this respect, the image is considered both a more general and concrete as well as an abstract concept. For example, recalling a vacation spot creates a mental image, while looking at oneself in a mirror represents a physical image. On the other hand, a visual refers to objects or materials that appeal to the sense of sight and typically possess a designed or arranged structure. Visuals, while combining a concrete structure with an aesthetic or communicative purpose, stand out more as a concept used in the context of art, media, and communication. For example, the designs, illustrations, and infographics on billboards serve as examples of the visual concept. Visuals are structured to convey a specific message or create an aesthetic value, and in this respect, as Barthes expressed, they assume a functional role within a social context as carriers of a specific ideological or cultural discourse. With these characteristics, visuals are considered an important tool in the transmission of cultural dynamics and social values. Additionally, images and visuals have different functions in the processes of meaning production.

The visual gains meaning in a broader context as a carrier of ideological or cultural discourses. This situation necessitates the consideration of images and visual concepts within a semiological framework and their accurate differentiation. In the historical process, the act of seeing has taken on a central role in terms of meaning production and communication. In this context, humanity needs visual communication tools. Among these tools, phenomena such as stylizations, pictographs, and hieroglyphs play an important role in conveying information, shaping the intellectual and cultural structures of communities, and simultaneously contributing to the evolution of communication through visual representations. The invention of writing, the development of the printing press, and the technological advancements that transformed this process have expanded the cultural and societal impacts of seeing and visual elements. As Berger emphasized, the act of seeing lies at the core of communication and becomes a structure open to cultural influences through visual elements. In this context, the visual is considered one of the most profound and fundamental experiences in human history, shaping the ways individuals perceive and interpret the world.

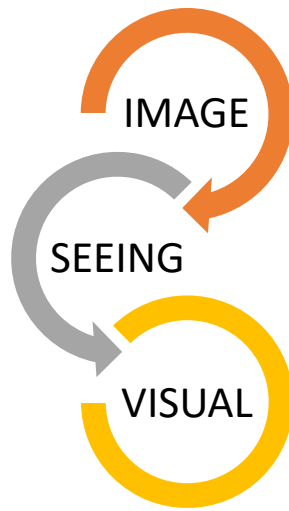


Figure 2: Image, Seeing and Visual Formation Cyclical process

Culture is defined as the entirety of beliefs, knowledge, and practices produced by humans and passed down from generation to generation, and it is studied in this context. The word "culture" is derived from the French word "cultura" and is related to the Latin term "colere." This term is used in the sense of farming or cultivating (crop). At the same time, cultura is also associated with the term "ekin" in Turkish (TDK, 2024). The concept of culture was first addressed by Voltaire in the context of the formation, development, and exaltation of human intelligence. This word is known to have passed into German over time and to have appeared as "Kultur (Culture)" in a German Language Dictionary published in the late years of the third quarter of the 20th century (Güvenç, 1994, p. 96). Culture, while carrying various meanings in different languages, essentially encompasses every element that defines a human being. In other words, culture is expressed as a totality that reflects the intrinsic values of human abilities and activities. At the same time, it represents the process of harmonizing what nature provides to humans with the contributions humans make to nature. Therefore, culture is seen as a reflection of the traces left by people on the world, and in this context, the existence of various cultural structures formed by different human communities constitutes a known reality. With this diversity, the phenomenon of Culture, which integrates individuals into society and contains elements that make them special and different, exists ontologically as a concept that shows numerous differences in terms of its origin, purpose, importance, and prevalence.

Güvenç (1994) states that the concept of culture is used in four different contexts: "scientific culture" as civilization, "human culture" as an output of the educational process, "aesthetic culture" as plastic arts, and "material (technological) and biological culture" as production, agriculture, crop cultivation, and reproduction processes. Among these distinctions, the culture in the aesthetic domain reflects the multifaceted structures of the complex relationships individuals establish with art, beauty, and creative expression. Societies shape their identities through the aesthetic values they possess and question the existing social norms. Within this

framework, aesthetic culture continues to play an important role in every era and society by deepening the understanding of art and beauty. Ensuring the sustainability of aesthetic culture and understanding societies' perceptions and experiences at a global level requires the development of a special awareness in this field. Therefore, culture emerges as a discipline that examines how visual images, symbols, and aesthetic experiences are distributed in social, cultural, and individual contexts.

Culture, as a phenomenon that shapes social structure and organizes people's lives, includes both material and spiritual elements. Material culture is defined as elements that enable people to express themselves through tangible products. These elements range from technological tools to artistic works and architectural pieces. According to Alakuş (2004, pp. 63-64), "Material culture is the tangible traces that emerge from a person's interaction with their environment." Additionally, the material elements of culture consist of objects that directly affect the economic and social structure of society. These material elements, which reflect people's cultural identities, undergo changes over the historical process. The preservation of cultural heritage and its transmission from generation to generation also ensure the continuity of these elements. Thus, the material elements of culture not only carry the traces of the past but also shape the future. In addition, these elements that influence people's lifestyles shape social norms and values, promoting cultural diversity. Alakuş (2004, pp. 63-64) states that these elements "form the cornerstones of the social structure." The material elements of culture also encompass important factors that determine people's aesthetic understanding. Spiritual culture, on the other hand, consists of abstract elements such as a society's values, beliefs, traditions, and language. These elements constitute the totality of the fundamental components that strengthen social bonds and enable individuals to make sense of the world. Alakuş (2004, pp. 63-64) states that spiritual culture is "a structure that shapes people's intellectual and spiritual worlds." Spiritual culture constitutes the most important elements that form the identity and integrity of a society. It states that spiritual culture has a function that reinforces social order. The shared values and norms present in society determine how people live together, and this ensures the continuity of culture. It is also observed that spiritual elements deeply affect individuals' daily lives and strengthen social solidarity. It is also emphasized that spiritual culture plays a role in reinforcing understanding and tolerance in human relationships. The material and spiritual elements of culture, as a complementary whole, shape the identities of societies and ensure their evolution over time. As a result, culture, which is one of the fundamental components of visual culture, encompasses a wide range from elite culture to folk culture, and from multidimensional culture to one-dimensional culture (Bernard, 2002).

Duncum, Evans, and Hall (1999) state that the term visual culture was first used by Svetlana Alpers [Professor of Art History at the University of California] in a study conducted in 1983, although it is noted that Elkins indicated this concept was used by Michael Baxandall [Professor of Art History at the University of California] in a study conducted in 1972 (Stankiewicz, 2004, pp. 5-6). According to Bernard, the narrow interpretation of visual culture terminology is defined as everything produced, interpreted, or aimed at technological, functional, communicative, and/or aesthetic purposes by humans. Visual culture defines a comprehensive field that examines how individuals and communities create meaning, communicate, and experience the world through visual images and symbols. This concept is not limited to works of art; it also encompasses many forms of visual communication such as advertisements, films, photographs, graphic content, and social media content published in society. In addition to helping understand possible identities, social roles, and cultural values, visual culture also reflects social dynamics and changes, which constitutes an important aspect of the phenomenon. Tavin (2003, p. 69) describes visual culture in three different ways: as "the practice of recognizing, visualizing, and demonstrating new technologies to understand the human experience permanently affected by images," or "the entirety of images, objects, and arrangements," along with "a study that investigates, interprets, and critiques different visual manifestos and cultural experiences." In other words, this phenomenon is transformed into visuals or images in the plastic arts; while the cultural aspect corresponds, in the broadest sense, to the daily lives, characteristics, practices of a group of people, or any type of perception that holds meaning for multiple individuals.

One of the important components of visibility, the image, constitutes a representation or representations that have been detached and preserved from the place and time of their first appearance—whether it belongs to a few minutes ago or a few centuries ago (Berger, 1986, pp. 9-10). Berger's definition provides a fundamental framework that explains the process of constructing meaning through images in visual culture. An image refers to objects or events that can be perceived by the senses but appear in consciousness without external stimuli. These images emerge independently of the external world within the individual's inner world,

shaping a mental process (Berger, 1986). For example, a dream, fantasy, or mental image can be cited as examples of images that appear in consciousness independently of external stimuli. These images are formed in connection with the individual's subconscious, thoughts, and emotions, and they exist in a perception realm different from the real world. At the same time, images are seen as the mental representation of an object, concept, or emotion formed in the mind (Turkish Language Association [TDK], 2024). From the perspective of visual culture, images are not only the result of individual mental processes; they are also shaped by social contexts and cultural meanings. In this context, the interpretation of images encompasses multiple levels of meaning and always presents a structure that varies according to the context. As one of the fundamental elements of visual culture, the image is seen as a factor that significantly influences how individuals perceive the world. This situation reveals that images play a central role in communication and interaction processes. According to Berger (1986), the meaning of an image is expressed as being reconstructed in a different plane of meaning, detached from the context in which it first appeared. This situation demonstrates how the meanings produced through images in visual culture are processed with social and cultural contexts. As a result, visual culture emerges as a field where images interact with social, cultural, and individual contexts. These images, while shaping individuals' ways of producing meaning and perceiving the world, also gain importance as carriers of collective memory and cultural values.

In the book *Ways of Seeing*, which is a fundamental reference source for understanding visual culture, Berger (1986) defines representation as the process of presenting an object, concept, or event to the viewer or reader through artistic or linguistic means, along with the image. It is observed that this process appears in various fields, from artworks to media content and social practices. Within the scope of visual culture, it can be emphasized that representations are interpreted by the viewer/art viewer/target audience or consumer by attributing specific meanings to symbols. However, these interpretations can vary according to individuals' cultural, social, and personal experiences, as well as their areas of expertise. Moreover, representation encompasses not only the reproduction of something but also the process of attributing a specific meaning to it. At this point, Aristotle's understanding of mimesis becomes significant. Aristotle defines Mimesis as the artistic reproduction of events and objects in nature; however, he states that this reproduction means a deep understanding of reality and its reinterpretation through art, rather than a superficial imitation (Aristotle, as cited by Berger, 1986). This idea can be expressed as the artist in visual culture embodying it by combining their observations of nature or reality with their inner world to imbue their works with meaning. This understanding can be concretely observed in the works of artists like Picasso and Kandinsky. For example, Picasso directs the viewer towards a different mode of perception by abstracting objects, while Kandinsky is said to create a visual language by combining color and shapes with the quest for meaning. These artists provide striking examples of the contribution of the concepts of representation and mimesis to visual culture. In this context, mimesis not only reflects the external world as a technique but also appears to incorporate the artist's own perspective and interpretation into this reflection (Berger, 1986). From the perspective of visual culture, representation is considered a multidimensional process that determines how individuals make sense of the world. The meaning and impact of representation are shaped by the visual elements produced in media and art, while the consumption of these elements allows for different interpretations within individual and societal contexts.

Visual culture can be defined as an interdisciplinary field that examines the impact of visual representations on individuals and communities in modern societies. This field encompasses a wide range, from art history to media studies, sociology to psychology. The fundamental questions that visual culture focuses on can be addressed within this framework: How are visual images produced? How are these images consumed? and most importantly, how do these images shape the structures of meaning in society? As Berger has shown, the meaning of a visual is not only dependent on the artist's intention but also on the viewer's interpretation of that visual. Therefore, mimesis and representation, as fundamental concepts of visual culture, are at the center of visual production and consumption. Visual culture offers a critical perspective aimed at understanding the aesthetic dimension of social life, while also revealing the effects of this aesthetic dimension on individual identity and collective memory.

Semiotics

Derived from the Greek word "semeion," meaning "sign, mark," the term semiotics (Barthes, 1964) is associated with the discussions on language and meaning by Ancient Greek philosophers, particularly Plato

and Aristotle. It is possible to say that the foundations of semiotics were laid with Plato's discussions in the "Cratylus" dialogue about whether words are natural or arbitrary. In the 19th century, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure is known to have used the term "semiologie" in his work "Cours de Linguistique Générale" (General Course in Linguistics), associating this field with linguistics (Saussure, 1916/1983). At the same time, the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce is seen to have developed the concept of "semiotics," conducting a logical analysis of signs (Peirce, 1931).

According to Saussure (1916/1983), linguistic signs are arbitrary, and therefore the meaning of the sign is determined through social consensus. In contrast, Peirce (1931) categorizes signs into icons, indexes, and symbols, stating that meaning is formed through the relationships between the object and the interpreter. In the post-structuralist approach, thinkers like Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes argue that the sign does not have a fixed meaning; rather, meaning is subject to continuous "deferral" (Derrida, 1967; Barthes, 1977). In this context, from an epistemological perspective, semiotics argues that meaning is not a fixed but a dynamic process. In other words, as a discipline that examines the production of meaning through symbols and language, Semiotics fundamentally focuses on how ideas, discourse, and other symbolic systems are used by human communities in the construction of meaning. Additionally, by analyzing the relationship between symbols and meaning, it helps in understanding social structures and cultural norms. Essentially, semiotic analysis encompasses not only language but also the processes of meaning-making in visual culture, art, and other symbolic systems (Chandler, 2007, p. 15). In this context, the concept of semiotics is seen to have been first used in its current sense by the English philosopher John Locke in his work "An Essay Concerning Human Understanding," published in 1690. Locke prefers the term "semeiotike" for semiotics and argues that there is a relationship between a perceived object and the representation it forms in the mind. According to him, this relationship is one of the fundamental elements that constitute knowledge. Knowledge consists not of the objects themselves, but of the "perceived representations" that these objects create in the mind, which Locke refers to as "ideas." Locke's process of knowing is based on three fundamental facts: the mind, the object, and the perceived (idea).

Many scientists influenced by John Locke's views are known to have examined signs in various disciplines such as linguistics, music, and choreography, in addition to mathematics, and to have proposed theories related to these fields. One of these important scientists, Ferdinand de Saussure (1916, pp. 37-42), who is claimed to have laid the foundation of semiotic thought, states that language is a system of signs/pictograms. Saussure, stating that each linguistic unit is based on the relationship between a "sign" and the "signified," reveals the capacity of language to produce meaning. The signifier expresses a concrete element of spoken language, while the signified conveys an abstract meaning. Saussure emphasizes that language possesses a dynamic anatomy beyond a system carrying fixed meanings, and that language is constructed within a social context, with meaning being a product of construction. Moreover, he argues that meaning is not fixed, but rather shaped by cultural and social contexts. Saussure bases the meaning of language in his theory solely on the relationship between the sign and the signified. This interaction, in addition to being connected to social structures, indicates that the function of language in producing meaning goes beyond just linguistic elements, as symbols also play a role in the production of meaning. As a result, this theory also addresses the deep layers of meaning in symbolism beyond linguistic meaning. Dividing signs into three main categories: icons, indexes, and symbols, Charles Sanders Peirce (1931–1958, pp. 78-85), another important figure in semiotics, states that symbols in semiotics gain meaning when placed in a specific cultural or social context. According to Peirce, "Icons" carry meaning through similarity. For example, a map serves as an icon of reality. Indexes are based on cause-and-effect relationships. Smoke shows fire as an index. Symbols, on the other hand, are signs that are socially accepted, and their meanings are based on societal acceptance. These three categories play a critical role in explaining the function of signs in producing meaning. Peirce's theory offers a broader understanding in terms of semantics. According to him, the meaning of a symbol is based solely on context, and therefore symbols can have different meanings in different cultures. Peirce's approach demonstrates the impact of cultural variation on the functioning of symbolism. Symbols, by reflecting social norms and ideologies, contribute to the reproduction of cultural systems.

Applying the semiotic analysis method to cultural and media texts, Roland Barthes (1977, pp. 23-41) particularly addresses advertisements and media content on a symbolic level. According to him, advertisements play an important role in disseminating social ideologies. The images used in advertisements convey specific cultural meanings and social values. Barthes, by analyzing these images, demonstrates how

social structures are reinforced through the media. Especially by analyzing the visual language of advertisements, he reveals how cultural norms are reproduced in the media. Barthes also discusses the relationship between symbolism and culture. He examines how the media shapes the processes of meaning production and how it uses symbol systems. The colors, figures, and compositions used in the media are consciously designed to convey a specific ideological message to the audience. Barthes' approach helps to understand how social structures are reproduced through visual symbols in media content. The media's use of symbols contributes to the establishment of social norms and the reinforcement of power relations. Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis method defines denotation, one of the two fundamental levels at which meaning is produced, as the direct and explicit meaning of a symbol or image. For example, the denotative meaning of an image of a "tree" represents only the physical characteristics of the tree; this forms the surface expression of the visible elements. In contrast, connotation encompasses the deeper layers of meaning of the symbol or image. Connotative meaning is nourished by cultural and social context, and the same "tree" image can express emotional ties associated with nature or broader social values such as environmentalism in some societies. Thus, Barthes' approach reveals that symbols gain meaning not only through their physical characteristics but also through their cultural and ideological contexts. Roland Barthes considers media content and advertisements as part of semiotic analysis. According to him, the images and symbols used in media texts reflect certain ideologies and social structures. Barthes argues that the images used in advertisements or other forms of media convey a system of meaning and values to the audience. The colors, figures, symbols, and compositions used in the media consciously serve to convey social ideologies. These symbols are used not only to reinforce cultural norms but also as a tool to shape individuals' perceptions of social structures and power relations. In his work *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes analyzes various symbols encountered in daily life, such as advertisements, popular culture images, and news headlines, revealing the underlying cultural myths and social ideologies. According to him, these symbols are not limited to their surface meanings; they also carry deeper, "mythological" meanings within the collective unconscious of society. In this context, Barthes' semiotic analysis method consists of three main stages. First, it analyzes the semantic structure of texts by examining the relationships between symbols such as images, words, and colors. Secondly, it analyzes how these symbols are connected to social norms, power relations, and cultural values, and finally reveals how social structures and power relations are reproduced through symbolism. This approach offers an important method for understanding the ideological effects of media and texts.

Semiotics acknowledges that symbols play a critical role in the process of producing social meaning. Symbols do not merely function as tools of communication; they also shape social structures. Each symbol carries a meaning, and these meanings are shaped by social values. Saussure and Peirce's theories make this aspect of semiotics clearer. Symbols generate meaning based on the cultural values and ideologies of society, and this process carries a characteristic unique to the cultural structure of each society (Chandler, 2007, p. 57). In this context, it is observed that visual culture also encompasses an important area for semiotic analysis. Cinema, television, and other visual media platforms convey meaning through symbols and create a space for the reproduction of social ideologies.

Saussure (1983), the sign consists of a functional relationship between a "signifier" and a "signified" and does not carry a material reality, stating that language, symbols, and signs produce meaning by reflecting social relations and cultural values. Additionally, Peirce (1931)'s pragmatic semiotics understanding acknowledges that signs have an objective counterpart. Semiotic theories provide a strong framework for analyzing these processes. The contributions of Saussure, Peirce, and Barthes help in understanding the different aspects of semiotics. These theories analyze the effects of symbols and language on social structures, allowing us to understand how meaning is produced. Semiotics, while addressing the relationship between symbolism and meaning production, also takes into account the social context. Language and symbols shape cultural values and social structures, while these structures also influence the functioning of symbolism. Semiotic analysis serves as an important tool in understanding how symbol systems relate to social norms and ideologies. In this context, meaning can be produced not only in language but in all symbolic systems, and semiotics plays a critical role in understanding these production processes (Eco, 1976, pp. 120-125).

Jean Baudrillard (1981), who argues that signs can create simulations with the concept of hyperreality and, at a certain point, signs create their own independent reality, can also be related to the concept of myth. Derived from the Greek word "mythos" (word, story, narrative), myth refers to the symbolic narratives that have shaped the collective memory and belief systems of societies throughout history. This phenomenon is

regarded not merely as a type of story, but as a category of knowledge aimed at explaining social values, norms, and the relationship between humans and the universe. In this context, Claude Lévi-Strauss's structuralist approach argues that myths reflect the fundamental workings of the human mind, while Roland Barthes sees myths as a critical tool in presenting social ideologies as natural realities (Barthes, 1972, p. 109; Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 430). The phenomenon of myth, both at the historical and cultural level, serves as a structure that builds the identities, worldviews, and collective memories of individuals and societies, while also existing as powerful symbolic narratives that facilitate the presentation of social structures and values as natural realities. In this context, Barthes (1972, p. 140) argues that myths created through visual images and linguistic signs play a critical role in legitimizing the social order. For example, he states that a white dove has become a common symbol representing peace, while a red rose symbolizes love. These symbols are perceived as simple images at the first level, but they carry deeper and ideological meanings at the second level. According to Barthes, such symbols influence individuals' perception of the world, leading to the acceptance of social norms as a natural reality.

The representations of myths in visual culture shape individuals' perceptions of social structures, while also necessitating the development of a critical perspective. Semiotics offers an effective method for uncovering the ideological structures behind this process. Saussure's theoretical framework on linguistic signs, Peirce's views on the contextual relationships of signs, and Barthes' works explaining the ideological functions of myths form the foundation of this analytical process. In this context, the critical examination of symbols and myths in visual culture allows individuals to develop awareness in the face of these symbols and meanings. Throughout its historical development, it is observed that semiotics and the phenomenon of signs, which have undergone various transformations in epistemological and ontological contexts alongside etymology, have different theoretical narratives regarding the process of signification and its theoretical dimensions. Starting from the roots of traditional linguistics, this phenomenon now offers a detailed and multi-dimensional analytical framework. Especially modern and postmodern approaches evaluate the reflection of semiotics on reality along with meaning from different perspectives. In the first quarter of the twenty-first century, semiotics is preferred in the fields of digital media, communication, visual arts, and artificial intelligence, adopting an interdisciplinary approach. With the transformation of new media technologies, the interaction between visual and written signs has become complex, and it is observed that semiotics is one of the main approaches analyzing these processes. It can be said that the preference for semiotic analyses in the fields of artificial intelligence and machine learning has increased, and the research conducted on perception processes along with meaning/content production has diversified. This situation shows that semiotics is not just a theoretical field but also a directly connected and applied science with contemporary technological transformations. In this context, the role of signs in the processes of producing both individual and societal meanings comes to the forefront. In the context of interpersonal communication, cultural transmission, and media analysis, semiotics holds significant importance in the current era. Cultural and technological changes/transitions constantly affect the processes of meaning construction of signs and necessitate the updating of semiotic analyses. As a result, it is accepted that semiotics has transformed into a dynamic field with different dimensions beyond being a linguistic and philosophical discipline. This approach continues to interact with different scientific fields and maintains its reality as one of the fundamental mechanisms shaping the universe of meaning alongside human perception.

Semiotic Analysis of ‘The Great Wave off Kanagawa’



Image 2. Katsushika Hokusai.(ca. 1831).The Great Wave off Kanagawa [Woodblock print]. From the series Thirty-Six Views of Mount Fuji (Fugaku Sanjūrokkei).

One of the iconic examples of Japanese art, Katsushika Hokusai's *The Great Wave off Kanagawa*, stands out not only for its aesthetic value but also for the deep mythical meanings it carries regarding the relationship between nature and humanity. Produced in 1831 in line with the aesthetic understanding of the Edo period, this work is seen to symbolize the philosophical relationship established with nature in Japanese culture. The giant wave, Mount Fuji, boats, and figures depicted in the image serve as indicators symbolizing various aspects of nature. Through these symbols, a cultural and mythical narrative is being constructed.

The positioning of the elements in the composition on the horizontal plane and their relationships shape the production of meaning in the context of the compositional axis. The massive wave in the foreground symbolizes the temporary, destructive, and uncontrollable power of nature, often represented by natural events like tsunamis in Japanese culture (Guth, 2015). The wave's curved form and foamy structure create a threatening atmosphere that draws the viewer in. This form, beyond physical movement, also reflects the fury and chaotic nature of the environment.

Mount Fuji, which is in the back ground, is not only a geographical feature in Japanese mythology and art but also a symbol of sanctity, continuity, and immutability (Okakura, 2003). The contrast between the wave and the mountain reflects the mythical duality between nature's transient and destructive aspect and its permanent and sacred dimension. This duality also aligns with the concept of "harmony of opposites," which holds significant importance in Japanese aesthetic thought.

Table 1. *Semiological Analysis of 'The Great Wave off Kanagawa'*

	Indexical (Segtanmatik) Axis		Discourse (Paradigmatic) Axis	
Indicator	Showing	The shown	Connotation	With Meaning
Wave	The massive, curved, and foamy wave	The sudden, destructive, and uncontrollable power of nature	Threat, chaos, transience	In Japanese culture, the tsunami; the necessity of harmony with nature
Mount Fuji	The small Fuji Mountain in the back ground	Iconic triangular mountain silhouette	The relationship between nature and humans and the superiority of nature are emphasized.	In Shinto, it is associated with the sacred goddess Konohanasakuya-hime. It represents the power of nature, immortality, and uniqueness, and seeing Fuji or dreaming about the mountain is considered a good omen. Genius loci (spirit of the place); sacred nature, eternity
Small Boats and Figures	Small wooden boats under the waves	The helplessness of human-made objects against nature, the fragility of the human figure against nature	Boats represent humanity's struggle with nature. Human beings are depicted as weak entities in the face of nature's uncontrollable power.	"The Hero's Journey": an existential test
Color palette (Prussian blue vs pastel)	The blue tones of the wave and the light pastel colors in the back ground	While blue tones create a cold, threatening feeling, light colors symbolize balance. Contrast: destruction vs peace	Colors emphasize both the threatening and balanced aspects of nature. In Japanese aesthetics, the tradition of balance and the coexistence of contrasts is reflected.	Duality in nature: destruction and tranquility together
The curve of the wave and the movement of the foam	The wave curling upwards and the dynamic flow of the foam	A lively, dynamic natural force, continuity, danger, staging	The movement of the wave shows the viewer the constantly changing and transient aspect of nature. The cyclical and dynamic power of nature is being conveyed. Dramatic narrative, sense of threat	The tragedy of humanity on the stage of nature

Another notable element that stands out in the artwork "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" is the small boats positioned among the waves. These boats and the figures inside them symbolize the human being who

remains powerless and defenseless against nature (Uslu, 2020). Despite all the dangers, the fact that these figures continue to struggle makes visible humanity's resistance and existential struggle against nature. When evaluated within the framework of Joseph Campbell's (2008) concept of the "hero's journey," the figures on the boats are interpreted as heroes resisting nature. However, this heroism is defined not by an absolute victory, but by an ongoing struggle. The figure of a diminished human in the face of nature's power signifies the importance of living in harmony with nature rather than in conflict with it in the Japanese cultural memory.

The colors used in the artwork stand out as an important visual element that reinforces the layers of meaning. The Prussian blue that Hokusai particularly favored emphasizes the cold and threatening nature of the wave. In contrast, the light pastel tones in the sky create a balancing effect. This use of color not only creates a visual balance but also builds a sense of philosophical harmony. The contrast between the colors overlaps with the contrast between the wave and Mount Fuji, representing the mythical balance between nature's destructiveness and tranquility.

In addition, the element of movement in the work is also distinctly structured. The curves of the wave, the direction of the foam, and the position of the boats create a dynamic composition by directing the viewer's gaze. This dynamism draws the viewer into the narrative and transforms the scene into a dramatic composition. Thus, the work transcends being merely a landscape; it becomes the stage for a visual narrative.

When the work is evaluated from the perspective of the serial axis, the potential shifts in meaning that could arise from replacing elements in the piece with other symbols reveal a noteworthy phenomenon. For example, if a typhoon or volcanic eruption had been depicted instead of a wave, the destructiveness of nature could have been represented in a similar manner. However, in the Japanese cultural memory, the wave, especially the tsunami, serves as a powerful visual representation symbolizing sudden and uncontrollable destruction (Buruma, 2003). Therefore, the preference for the wave reflects a culturally significant choice.

Similarly, if a different mountain figure were placed instead of Mount Fuji, the work's ability to reflect Japanese identity and the understanding of sacredness could have significantly diminished. Mount Fuji is considered the "Genius Loci" in Japanese culture and symbolizes the concept of continuity (Tanizaki, 2001). Similarly, when the size or orientation of the boats changes, the message about humanity in the work also transforms. A large ship can create an image of a strong human against nature, while small boats more effectively emphasize human helplessness and fragility against nature.

These elements deepen the mythological layers of meaning in the work through the artist's conscious visual choices. As a result, *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* not only depicts a natural landscape but also makes visible the relationship between Japanese culture and nature, as well as the mythological representations of this relationship. The visual elements, layout, color palette, and movement components used by Hokusai generate meaning along both the compositional and narrative axes, transforming the destructive and sacred aspects of nature and humanity's existential struggle into a mythological narrative. In this context, the work is considered a strong representation of the Japanese aesthetic understanding, the quest for balance in the human-nature relationship, and the mythological structures conveyed through visual symbolism.

Semiotic Analysis of the Poster Design of the Series “Fight Against Four Pests”



Image 3. Ding, H. (1958, January). Poster design of the series “Fight Against Four Pests”

In the mid-twentieth century, the "Great Leap Forward" policies initiated by the People's Republic of China aimed not only at economic development but also at organizing the people within a framework of collective ideology. In this context, it is observed that poster designs are at the forefront as the main works of visual designs that carried out many actions within the framework of the state's objectives. In this context, the "Fight Against the Four Enemies" posters, which were one of the propaganda tools of the period, stand out as important communication products that visualize the political climate and ideological orientations of the time. The aforementioned poster designs not only contain a warning or informational text aimed at public health but also convey texts that reproduce a specific ideological order, behavioral patterns, and power relations. In this context, the examination of the poster themed "Fight Against the Four Harmful" within the framework of semiotic approaches by Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco allows for the uncovering of not only surface meanings but also deeply embedded myths. Barthes (1967) suggests analyzing signs within cultural and ideological meaning networks, both in the linguistic or visual plane. According to him, each sign can be processed on three levels: the denotative meaning (literal meaning), the connotative meaning (associative or

secondary meaning), and the myth (naturalized ideological meaning). In this context, the analyzed poster presents a discourse structured to show a worldview, a system of values, and power relations as natural and legitimate, beyond merely providing information or guidance to the viewer.

Table 2. *Semiotic analysis of the poster design of the series "Fight Against Four Pests"*

	Indexical (Segtanmatik) Axis		Discourse (Paradigmatic) Axis	
Indicator	Showing	The shown	Connotation	With Meaning
Sword	A large sword descending from above.	The sword is a tool of power, purification, and destruction in both physical and symbolic senses.	Cleanliness, discipline, and destructive power. Symbol of strong leadership and authority.	a symbol of honor, duty, and personal pride, a physical representation of the samurai's spirit, and an object that also represents social hierarchy and power in society. It seems there is no text provided for translation. Please share the text you'd like me to translate, and I'll be happy to assist you!
Mosquito, housefly	Mosquito, housefly	Threats that harm human health and agricultural products.	Health and economic threats. The idea of healthy living through the eradication of pests.	In Japanese mythology, it represents distress and discomfort, while in Buddhist narratives, it symbolizes desires and worldly disturbances.
sparrow	sparrow	Threats that harm human health and agricultural products.	Health and economic threats. The idea of healthy living through the eradication of pests.	Moral values and social norms
Tarifa	Tarifa	Threats that harm human health and agricultural products.	Health and economic threats. The idea of healthy living through the eradication of pests.	In Japanese folklore, there are both positive and negative meanings; positive, as the helpers of the god Daikokuten, symbolizing wealth and abundance, and negative, as they cause damage to crops.
Text (Chinese Characters)	"Fight Against Four Pests!" message.	The call for the eradication of pests.	Public health and agricultural productivity increase.	The message that collective effort is the key to national development.

In the poster design chosen from the "Fight Against the Four Harmful" series, the first striking visual element can be considered as a large sword figure descending from above. This object can be said to directly represent physical strength, purity, and destructive power. However, this symbol can also be interpreted as a representation of the state's power to intervene and its will to maintain order, beyond being merely a tool of struggle at the connotative level due to its reference to discipline and authority. The four living figures the sword is directed at – the mosquito, the housefly, the sparrow, and the rat – can be said to serve as visual representations of biological and economic threats in the poster design. Each of them is known to have concrete

effects on public health and agricultural production under the conditions of the time. In this context, the mosquito, which is a common name for blood-sucking and harmful insects from the Diptera family, is included in the visual due to its role as a carrier of infectious diseases. Additionally, the housefly, classified as an insect from the Muscidae family and a source of hygiene problems, along with the sparrow, a conical billed bird from the Passeridae family that lives in close proximity to humans, is illustrated in the poster design due to the damage it causes to agricultural products. Apart from these three images, the rat, classified as a genus of the rodent family, is depicted in the visual as a threatening element due to its role as a disease carrier and the damage it causes to food supplies. In this parallel, these visualized images, when considered individually, indicate a biological hazard. When considered collectively, they transform into an expression of numerous threats to the public's welfare and productivity. Thus, the poster design not only succeeds in creating a direct perception of threat in the viewer but also reinforces the legitimacy of the call to action.

As another image in the poster design, the typographic phrase "Fight Against the Four Evils!" can be seen as a call to action that verbally confirms the visual message carried by the poster, going beyond being just a slogan. This expression not only calls for direct action but also emphasizes the state's role in organizing society and the understanding of collective responsibility. On a connotative level, this discourse carries the message that public health can be ensured through individual cleanliness and societal mobilization. On the mythical level, this call can be described as presenting the idea that national development, hygiene, and order can only be achieved through mass campaigns led by the state as a "natural" reality. In this context, the relationships established between the signs on the poster correspond to the structure that Barthes defines as the "syntagmatic axis." In other words, each visual image gains meaning within the context it establishes with other elements. The orientation between the sword and the pests represents the direct relationship between threat and intervention; the alignment between the textual discourse and this visual structure ensures coherence at the level of discourse. However, the meaning of this structure can vary if the signs are replaced with alternative versions. This is seen as the area where the paradigmatic structure, which Barthes referred to as the "syntagmatic axis," comes into play. For example, if a rifle had been chosen instead of a sword image in the poster design, the dosage and nature of the violence could shift to a more militaristic framework. Similarly, a more passive object like a broom can soften the struggle in the context of cleanliness and hygiene, while a symbol like a hammer can evoke the working-class ideology or revolutionary transformation. In the use of virus, bacteria, or abstract threat symbols instead of harmful figures, the poster's message can shift directly from a health threat to an ideological or economic threat. For example, visualizing a human figure considered ideologically threatening instead of a sparrow can directly transform the poster into a propaganda tool against opposing individuals. Such changes demonstrate how transformations in the sign system can lead to radical ruptures in meaning production. Beyond the indicators used in poster design and their arrangement, the true function of the poster emerges at the level of myth as defined by Barthes. In this dimension, the poster, beyond addressing a "natural" need for health and cleanliness, transforms into an ideological structure that legitimizes a sense of collective mobilization, the direction of individual behaviors, and social control. It can be said that the state's regulatory and supervisory role over the public is being normalized, internalized, and rendered unquestionable through the visual and verbal arrangements of the poster. Thus, poster design functions not only as a public health announcement but also as one of the tools through which power shapes and directs society. As a result, the "Fight Against the Four Harmful Substances" poster can be described as a propaganda tool that carries very different meanings on the semiotic level, normalizes ideological messages through visual arrangements, and glorifies mass mobilization. Each sign in this preferred poster serves a system of norms that shapes behaviors at both the individual and societal levels. This analysis conducted using Barthes's semiotic approach reveals how visual culture products not only convey messages but also carry and naturalize a system of values, thereby serving an ideological function. Thus, it is once again understood that visual communication requires a political and social reading beyond its aesthetic phenomenon.

Semiotic Analysis of 'Le Déjeuner Sur L'herbe (Lunch On The Grass)'



Image 4. Manet, É. (1863). *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (Lunch On The Grass) [oil painting]. 208×264.5 cm (81.9×104.1 in), Musée d'Orsay, Paris, Fransa.

Édouard Manet's 1863 work *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (Luncheon on the Grass) can be described as a direct challenge to the aesthetic norms of the period as well as the established social codes. In the third quarter of the 19th century, with the process of modernization in France, a new narrative space emerged where art, individual experiences, daily life, and social tensions became visible. In this context, Manet's work in question not only represents a clear break from classical art understanding but also carries a multilayered semiotic structure as a visual text. When the signs present in the work are analyzed along with their physical forms and the cultural and ideological connotations they carry, it becomes possible to understand how modern art constructs a new myth. In this context, the image of a nude woman sitting on the grass and two clothed male figures in Manet's work can be perceived as a direct gaze directed at the viewer, which subverts the role traditionally assigned to women as the "object of the gaze" in classical painting. This stance, when evaluated in the context of Laura Mulvey's concept of the "male gaze," demonstrates that the woman is not merely a passive object of observation but rather exhibits a subjectifying posture (Mulvey, 1975). The woman's nakedness is not placed in a mythological or allegorical context and is not idealized. In this respect, it opposes the tendency of classical art to sanctify nudity by presenting the body in an everyday, ordinary, and worldly context (Berger, 1990). The existence of women is represented as individuals emerging from everyday life,

beyond being goddesses or abstract ideas. This ordinariness, in fact, signifies not only the birth of a modern myth but also the transfer of the sacred to the ordinary and the replacement of the mythical ideal with ordinary individuality (Zweig, 2004).

Table 3. *Semiological Analysis of 'Le Déjeuner Sur L'herbe (Lunch On The Grass)'*

	Indexical (Segtanmatik) Axis		Discourse (Paradigmatic) Axis	
Indicator	Showing	The shown	Connotation	With Meaning
Female Figure (Nude)	A naked woman is looking at the audience.	Modernity, ordinariness, individuality	Challenging the male gaze, the woman's escape from sacred mythology and her trivialization	Venus (Goddess of Love and Beauty) Venus (Goddess of Love and Beauty)
Male Figures	The two clothed men next to the woman	The tension between civilization and nature	Social gender roles, the superiority of reason and culture over nature	--
The Woman Figure in the Background	The half-naked woman standing in the distance	A pastoral idealization	Romantic ideal figure, a reference to the purity of nature	"Arcadia" (utopia or pastoral paradise)
Picnic Basket and Fruits	Natural products, fruits	Symbol of abundance and fertility	Worldly pleasures, the myth of Nature's abundance	--
Nature and Trees	Yoğun yeşillik ve su	The reality and ordinariness of nature	The reduction of the pastoral scene to the real world, Nature's conflict with modernity	--

The visualization of the two male figures next to the woman in the artwork, through their clothing, allows for an interpretation of gender roles based on the stark contrast between nudity and clothing. The female body represents nature and fertility, while the male figures symbolize intellect, culture, and the dominance of modernity. Women represent nature, while men are depicted as images of culture in the work. The construction of their relationship through the representation of the female body is further strengthened by the men's lack of dialogue directed towards women. It is observed that, despite the male figures conversing with each other, there is no direct attention directed towards the woman. This can be expressed as the woman experiencing objectification at the level of representation. However, the woman's gaze directed at the viewer breaks this objectification and reverses the direction of the gaze (Pollock, 1988).

In the back ground of the artwork, there is another semi-nude woman by the edge of the shallow water. However, this figure is spatially distanced and rendered smaller in size compared to the woman in the foreground. This proportional change violates traditional perspective rules and can be considered a formal rebellion against classical painting techniques (Nochlin, 1988). Manet's choice carries an ideological meaning

beyond an artistic technique. The woman in the back ground appears to be in a state of pastoral tranquility, resembling an idealized representation; whereas the nude woman in the foreground is not only more dominant figuratively but is also seen as closer to the representation of reality. The contrast established between these two figures transfers the opposition of the ideal and the real, the mythological and the ordinary, onto the canvas plane. Thus, it can be said that Manet is making an effort to replace the representations of mythological women with the individual of the modern age who confronts the body and possesses self-awareness.

The images chosen by the artist for visualization, such as the fruit basket, food, and drinks, refer to the still life genre frequently encountered in the Western painting tradition. However, this reference goes beyond being merely an aesthetic quotation; it also carries symbolic connotations related to fertility, abundance, mundanity, and pleasure. Fruits and food symbolize bodily pleasures and the continuity of life. In addition, it can be stated that the classical tranquility of the pastoral has been replaced by the everyday existence of the modern individual (Eldem, 2014). Nature, with this work, ceases to be an idealized space and transforms into an ordinary setting of modern life. This also necessitates rethinking the position of the individual and the body in modern life.

It appears that Manet aimed to make a profound intervention in art history not only at the content level but also in terms of form with this work. With the violation of perspective rules, the disproportion of the figures and the ambiguity of spatial depth eliminate the sense of temporal coherence in the narrative. This conscious choice breaks the classical narrative structure, inviting the viewer to a confrontation space instead of a narrative flow. Especially the placement of the figures very close to the visual plane and in a distinct manner creates a direct interaction with the viewer. This is defined as an ideological dematerialization beyond an aesthetic distance. The viewer is removed from their traditionally positioned safe observer role and is forced to confront the subject of the painting (Clark, 1990). When evaluated in this context, *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (Luncheon on the Grass) is interpreted not only as a painting but also as an ideological statement heralding the birth of modern art. Historical representations of the female body are being questioned, the tension between nature and culture is being made visible, and a new modern myth is being constructed instead of classical mythological narratives. With this work, Manet takes a radical step towards transforming not only aesthetic rules but also social values, highlighting that art is an intellectual production field beyond its visual aspect. Therefore, this work can be interpreted as the starting point for a new perspective, a new construction of meaning, and a new form of representation in a mythical context.

Result

Visual culture, today, goes beyond being an aesthetic experience and emerges as a multi-layered form of communication that shapes individuals' ways of perceiving, understanding, and interpreting the world. The operation of the human mind based on visual perception plays an important role in meaning production through the selection, interpretation, and transformation of environmental stimuli into cultural codes. In this context, seeing represents not only a biological function but also a cultural and ideological experience. The main argument presented within the scope of the study can be said to be the reproduction of visual experience through the individual's mental representations and interactions with social codes. In this context, the distinction between the layers of meaning of the concepts "Seeing," "Image," and "Visual" is evaluated as a semiotic structure in the process of understanding the individual's relationship with their environment. The process of seeing refers to a physical perception mechanism, while an image conveys a mental or material reflection. The visual, on the other hand, refers to a communication tool that is consciously designed to convey meaning. This conceptual distinction allows for a clearer evaluation of the visual's communicative function. The interpretation of visuals requires not only reading the representation on the surface but also necessitates the analysis of the underlying cultural, historical, and ideological codes.

The semiological analysis methods of R. Barthes used in the study address the production of meaning in visuals at two levels: denotative (literal meaning), which presents a structure describing what is seen on the surface, and connotative (implied meaning), which reveals the underlying cultural, ideological, and mythical meanings. Barthes' approach reveals that visuals, beyond being an aesthetic expression tool, serve as carriers of ideological and societal discourses. In this context, the analyzed visuals exemplify the multi-layered nature

of visual culture. Katsushika Hokusai's work titled "The Great Wave off Kanagawa" presents a mythical narrative that expresses the power of nature and the fragility of humans in the face of that power. Additionally, the dynamic form of the Waves represents the transient yet destructive power of nature, while Mount Fuji symbolizes permanence and sanctity. The correspondences of this visual in Japanese mythology and Shinto belief concretize the ontological relationship between the individual and nature within the cultural realm. The blue tones used in the visual and the movement of the wave create a mythical message about the constant variability of nature. Similarly, the design of China's Fight Against the Four Pests poster not only serves as a propaganda image for a hygiene and public health campaign but also symbolically reproduces concepts such as discipline, authority, and collective effort. The sword image in the poster is designed not only as a symbol of physical strength but also as a representation of justice and discipline in a mythological sense. This visual reinforces the individual's responsibility for health and agricultural production with an ideological discourse, thereby reproducing the health myths of modern society. Another important example evaluated within the scope of the study is Édouard Manet's work *Le Déjeuner sur l'Herbe* (Luncheon on the Grass), which strikingly reveals the ideological and aesthetic dimensions of visual culture. The direct eye contact established by the naked female figure in the artwork with the viewer, while questioning traditional representation norms, offers a critical narrative about the individual's position in modern society. When read through Barthes' semiotic approach, the work transforms into a visual text where cultural codes related to gender, morality, and the gaze are decoded, beyond being merely an aesthetic object. In this respect, Manet's work once again demonstrates that visual culture is not only a transmitter of meaning but also a producer of meaning.

In line with the analysis of the selected works in the study, this research reveals that visuals serve as carriers of cultural identity, ideological discourse, and mythical narratives on the visual plane, beyond being mere individual aesthetic objects. Visual culture contributes to the development of individuals' critical thinking capacities, fostering a questioning attitude towards societal norms. Semiotic analysis, in this context, serves as an academic method while also becoming an intellectual tool that allows individuals to evaluate the visual messages they encounter in daily life more consciously. However, the limitations of the study should also be taken into account. Especially the differences in meaning that arise in intercultural visual readings, along with the impact of individual experiences on interpretation and how visuals gain new meanings in different socio-cultural contexts, need to be supported by more comprehensive empirical research. In this context, future studies should examine the reflections of visual culture in digital media, the visual codes produced through new media tools, and their relationship with collective memory. In conclusion, this research reveals the effects of visual culture on both individual and societal levels through semiotic analysis, while also demonstrating that visuals are not only aesthetic but also tools woven with cultural and ideological narratives. At the theoretical level, this analysis based on Barthes' semiotic approach provides significant contributions to visual communication studies by offering a flexible and applicable model that can be used in different disciplines at the methodological level.

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