

The Rhetoric of the Image

Roland Barthes, 1964



PATES - SAUCE - PARMESAN
A L'ITALIENNE DE LUXE

Images as copies

Digital vs Analog

- Discrete, vs continuous

Double articulation

- Small units combined to make larger ones
- In language, sounds are combined in words
- Sounds have no inherent meaning, only words do
- This is a feature of complex systems of communication, as opposed to animal sounds or iconic road signs, for example

Semiotics of image vs. semiotics of language

- the image is “weak” or “poor” (compared to language)
- Either images are “rudimentary” means of communication, or...
- ... images are “beyond” signification

Why advertising?

“Because in advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly **intentional**; the signifieds of the advertising message are formed *a priori* by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible.”

Message analysis

- Which codes are present?
- To begin with “language” and “French”
- These are the most superficial codes

Codes

- Codes are rules
- They may govern denotation - such as “2” standing for the quantity “two”
- Or they may be cultural codes - like behaviour, dress, manners, etc, which are primarily connotational

Denotation vs Connotation

- Denotation: to mean **explicitly**
- Connotation: to mean **implicitly**

Semiotics of the image

- discontinuous signs - the image is made of signs
- but these signs - unlike words - do not have obvious boundaries

The structure

- The ad
 - The scene
 - freshness
 - domestic preparation

What codes are being accessed?

- A culture of shopping
- Italianicity

Italianicity?



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Three messages

- a linguistic message
- a coded iconic message
- and a non-coded iconic message.

Coded messages

- Perceptual message vs cultural message

Anchorage and relay

Anchorage

- A floating chain of signifieds
- The linguistic message guides interpretation
- Anchorage is **control**

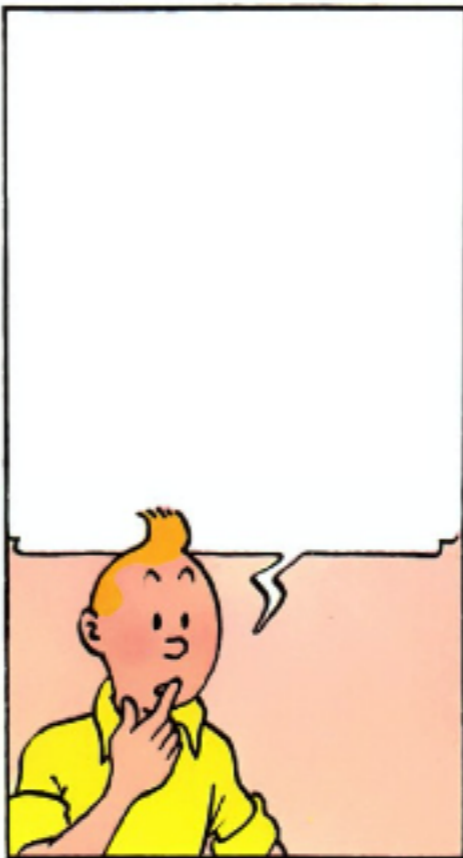
1 TOP TEXT

2

BOTTOM TEXT

Relay

- words set out what is not in the image, as in film





Captain, as soon as we return we'll see Mr. Sakharine. I'm sure he took the two scrolls ...

Yes, we've got one ...

only

One! Great snakes! we haven't even got that! The Bird brothers took it! But we can get it back!

Give me back the parchment you stole from my room!

Give it back?... That's impossible... Max has it in his pocket!

Ring up the police-station at once; give them a description of Max Bird, and his car number - LX188. Then we'll go straight back to town...

Right!

Next morning...

Now for Mr. Sakharine...



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The denoted image

- “we never encounter...a literal image in a pure state”

Photographs: Messages
without codes?

Photographs vs drawings

- rule governed transformations
- division between the significant and the insignificant
- the drawing demands an apprenticeship

Photography

- not "transformation" but "recording"
- its reality that of "having been there"



Compleats

Cafe Creations

Chicken Chipotle Pasta

Linguini pasta with grilled white meat chicken in a spicy, creamy chipotle sauce.



The connoted message

- A normal system whose signs are drawn from a cultural code

Lexicon

- a portion of the symbolic plane that corresponds to a body of practices and techniques.
- vocabulary

- Signifiers of connotation will be called connotators, and the set of connotators a rhetoric
- A **rhetoric** is the signifying aspect of **ideology**

Rhetoric

- Here, Barthes means a *systematic method* for creating connotative messages

Rhetorical terms

- metonym: a word or concept that acts as a substitute for a related word or concept
- asyndeton: removing conjunctions — “I came, I saw, I conquered”
- metonymy: substitution of one thing for another
- parataxis: moving of elements around

Key points

- Here, Barthes sets out how to use a linguistic tool to approach visual communication
- Rhetoric of the Image is a fundamental text on how visual images can be analyzed and created
- **It fills a gap in semiotics: how do deal with non-verbal signs**