The Visual Code
Pennarola, chapter II
The title of Roland Barthes’s essay, *Rhetoric of the Image*, lays down the groundwork for the main argument of his essay, as the word “rhetoric” refers to language that is used to persuade or influence people; and the word “image” refers to a reproduction or imitation of the form of a person or thing. As such, the “rhetoric of the image” simply refers to images used to persuade or influence people.
SEMIOTICS

• Semiotics is the science which studies the relationship between meaning and signs.

• In so far that language is a system of signs, it is studied by semiotics.
Semiotics – Barthes

- Paradigmatic
  - The big dog is lazy
  - Large, immense, enormous, huge, massive...

- Syntagmatic
  - Preserves meaning by being in a certain order. This sentence could read "the lazy dog is big."
These two dimensions are often presented as 'axes', where the horizontal axis is the syntagmatic and the vertical axis is the paradigmatic. The plane of the syntagm is that of the combination of 'this-and-this-and-this' (as in the sentence, 'the man cried') whilst the plane of the paradigm is that of the selection of 'this-or-this-or-this' (e.g. the replacement of the last word in the same sentence with 'died' or 'sang'). Whilst syntagmatic relations are possibilities of combination, paradigmatic relations are functional contrasts - they involve differentiation.
An example of the syntagmatic relations and paradigmatic contrasts involved in Western menus:

In the food system... one defines on the syntagmatic axis the combinations of courses which can make up meals of various sorts; and each course or slot can be filled by one of a number of dishes which are in paradigmatic contrast with one another (one wouldn't combine roast beef and lamb chops in a single meal; they would be alternatives on any menu). These dishes which are alternative to one another often bear different meanings in that they connote varying degrees of luxury, elegance, etc. (Culler 1985, 104).
Roland Barthes (1967) outlined the paradigmatic and syntagmatic elements of the 'garment system' in similar terms. The paradigmatic elements are the items which cannot be worn at the same time on the same part of the body (such as hats, trousers, shoes). The syntagmatic dimension is the juxtaposition of different elements at the same time in a complete ensemble from hat to shoes.
Semiotics – Barthes (2)

• **Sign** = **Signifier** + **Signified**

• **SIGNIFIER** = physical representation of a thing or of a concept. It is the EXPRESSION.

• **SIGNIFIED** = meaning. It is the CONTENT.

• **CONTENT may be:**
  – *denotative* (the ‘brain’ definition)
  – *connotative* (the ‘deeper’ meaning - see, for ex., the word ‘dog’).
The arbitrary nature of the sign is used deliberately in Dow, where the word green is presented against a red background, which creates an advertisement that is quite confusing to the reader. Upon investigation, we learn that the "green" is the green which is culturally associated with envy—your friends will envy you your Dow carpet product.
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Semiotics – Barthes (3)

• Objects have meanings.

• Such meanings may be:
  
  – **symbolic** (= connotative meaning)
    • they have a metaphorical meaning
  
  – **taxonomic** (= denotative meaning)
    • they are included in a system where things are named and organized.
    • They are **classified**.
Barthes and the Rhetoric of Images
Semiotics – Barthes (4)

• Objects, regarded as symbols, have connotative meanings

• Connotative meaning of objects can be:
  – **Existential**
    • Related to life but with non-human elements – market
  – **Aesthetic**
    • Related to design – for instance, still nature
  – **Technological**
    • Related to technology – i.e., when the object is useful for something else
There are three categories of denoting expressions or objects:

• **(1) ICON** = visual representation of the signifier.

• **(2) SYMBOL** = arbitrary relationship between the signified and the signifier.

• **(3) INDEX** = existential relation between two signifieds
  – for example, if I say ‘smoke’ I **indicate** the existence of ‘fire’ and create a relationship between the two signifieds.
  – Metonymic relationship
NO. I'VE DECIDED TO OPT FOR A SMALL AND RATHER UNEVENTFUL LIFE.
Symbols

- Symbols are conventional expressions for the culture that has created them
Alcohol advertisements tend to depict wealthy living and sex appeal by characterizing the alcohol consumers as such.
Symbols and Indexes

- In terms of cultural significance, a company is well-served if its symbol becomes an index.
  
  - A signifier goes beyond what it directly signifies to some larger association.
The McDonald's "Golden Arches" is of course originally indexical from the name.
The symbol of McDonalds has come to be indexical over time.

This represents a very strong cultural establishment of the symbol.

Of course, it is a very powerful marketing tool.
Symbol or Index?
The Media Iceberg

Symbol
(Text/visual)

common (unsaid) knowledge

background assumptions:
- stereotypes;
- thought/ideas against social norms;
- discrimination;
- sexist and racial statements
• In advertisements, a great component is the text.

• What is the main purpose of the text?

• Advertising language has to be adapted to the needs of the consumers
Language of advertising

• Informative language
  – factual, realistic, objective
  – Symbolic relation between the brand, the product and its qualities

• Consumer language
  – Catchy, creative, glamorous
  – Metaphors, analogies, imagery, idiomatic, colloquial and informal expressions
• What is language?

• Social behaviour to satisfy needs
  – Once: food/safe shelter
  – Now: security/money/comfort => necessity to belong/to be identified to a social group
Jakobson’s linguistic factors

addresser \rightarrow context \rightarrow message \rightarrow addressee \rightarrow code \rightarrow contact
Addresser & addressee in ad

- What in Jakobson’s theory is defined as the ADDRESSER in ad language is the WRITER, SENDER, PRODUCER

- What in Jakobson’s theory is defined as the ADDRESSEE in ad language is the READER, RECEIVER, CONSUMER

- THEREFORE we do not have a simple addresser-addressee relationship because ad language has complicated purposes
• **Ad language** obeys to the marketing laws

• **It** **MUST** persuade the consumer to buy.
  – => linguistic rhetorical devices

• ≠ styles and ≠ narrative viewpoints

• **We therefore have the relation:**

  NARRATOR   NARRATEE
Narratee =YOU

• YOU in ad language exploits the psycholinguistic potentiality:
• it awakes our sleeping ego, as YOU is our ego seen by others
• It also suggests the idea that some of US is able to say YOU though feeling to be similar to the US
• In English, the pronoun YOU has an ambiguity which is unknown in other languages, as YOU is both singular and plural.
Jakobson’s linguistic factors

addresser

context

message

code

contact

addressee
Jakobson’s linguistic functions

- emotive
- referential
- poetic
- metalingual
- phatic
- conative
Emotive

(these are my emotions)
Every cigarette we smoke makes fatty deposits stick in our arteries.
Metalingual
(can you explain it any better?)
Poetical (we play with language)
Conative

(claim about the receiver)
Phatic

(checking the channel to go on with conversation)
AD as a persuasive discourse

A successful ad responds to the ARMS characteristics:

- **Attention seeking devices**
  - (images, paralanguage, linguistic violations)
- **Readability**
  - (Buonaseeeeeeeera)
- **Memorability**
  - (How are you)
- **Selling Power**
  - (onelikenoone)

To achieve success, advert language must therefore be **PERSUASIVE**
Attention Seeking Devices

Startling images
Paralanguage

- It supports our verbal language.
- In face-to-face interaction:
  - Linguistic Stress and intonation
  - Body position
  - Gestures
  - Physical proximity
  - Clothing
  - Eye contact
  - Touch
Paralanguage

• In written communication:
  – Layout
  – Typographical features
  – Space
Graphological features

HANDWRITING
Sometimes happiness just isn't enough

A child’s birthday party, the World Series, a perfect dish of ice cream. Let’s face it - sometimes happiness just doesn’t cut it. Sometimes you need something a little stronger, something that rises to the occasion. It’s not that happiness is bad... it’s just that enthusiasm is so much better.
Typographica\l\nal setting as a form of paralanguage (1)

Different fonts (Haettenschweiler)
Different fonts (Times New Roman)
Different fonts (Courier New)

Different fonts (Curlz)

Different effects (Shadows)

Different effects (Outline)
Typographical setting as a form of paralanguage (2)

• Different sizes (32 point)
• Different sizes (48 point)
• Different sizes (60 pt)
Typograhical setting as a form of paralanguage (3)

- Different styles (emboldened)
  - *Different styles (Italics)*
  - Different styles (underlined)
- *Different styles* (emboldened underlined italics)

- Normal vs. *Different styles* (Apex)
- Normal vs. *Different styles* (Pedix)
Typograhical setting as a form of paralanguage (4)

- CAPITAL LETTERS (UPPERCASE)
  - small letters (lowercase)

- and... features of punctuation?
- and – features of punctuation!
- and: ‘features’ of punctuation;
- and features of ‘punctuation’.
London return at very silly prices.

£35
£39
£49

Just book your APEX ticket seven days in advance and you can travel from Glasgow to London return for £35, from Edinburgh for £39 or from Inverness for £49.

From Glasgow or Edinburgh, APEX returns to Manchester are just £15 away or Birmingham £25. (Subject to availability). And, all these fares include free seat reservations. Have we gone completely loco? Pick up a leaflet for details from your station or Travel Agent.

INTERCITY
Have you noticed how some people never like to say the word?

It’s true it is a terrible disease, but it’s not nearly as hopeless as it sounds.

In the past ten years enormous progress has been made in the treatment of .

It is still, after road accidents, the major cause of death in children. But consider this.

Successful treatment of childhood has risen from less than 10% in the 1950's to more than 50% today.

Many doctors are now convinced will be the first cancer we will find a cure for.

With your help it will be.

Please give as much as you are able. Then by the year 2000, hopefully, people will no longer be scared to say the word .

Because will have disappeared forever.
“Emina Uzicanin was just 5 years old. Her family was living on the outskirts of Sarajevo. On a sunny afternoon in May, Emina was playing in a field behind her Uncle’s house. There, she spotted two little rabbits. As soon as she started toward them, the rabbits took off. So she began running. Five feet. Ten feet. That’s when it happened. An ear-shattering explosion ripped through Emina’s body, severing her left leg and leaving the rest of her badly scarred. Every 22 minutes another innocent civilian is killed or maimed by a land mine. Right now there are over 60 million unexploded land mines waiting just beneath the earth in nearly 70 countries. We need your help to rid the planet of land mines and to help its victims like Emina.”

http://www.ncddr.org/products/researchexchange/v07n03/9_mines.html
You can now buy the emergency contraceptive pill from the pharmacy. It’s called Levonelle and works best within 24 hours but can be used up to 72 hours after unprotected sex.
COLOURS

• Yellow: Mental activity, intellect.
• Red: Joy, aggression, animal passion, fun.
• Blue: Spirituality, religion, art, culture, philosophy, attitude to life itself.
• Green: harmony, nature, feeling of fullness.
• Orange: Drive, ambition.
• Purple: power, leadership, respect
• Pink: Love
• Grey Meaning: Uncommitted, uncertain - ‘grey area’. Mental denial of emotion, depression.
• Brown: Earthy, practical
• White: Hope, faith, purity, perfection, confidence, enlightenment
• Black: Negativity, i.e. fear, anxiety, hatred, resentment, guilt, depression (no hope / faith).