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Off *the* Grid

The Rhetoric of the Image by Roland Barthes analyzes a seemingly average french advertisement for Italian products. This advertisement, although very simple, can tell a message to the viewer and ultimately sell a product to you. That is the goal of any advertisement, whether you see one on the train, on your phone, in a magazine, or on a billboard their main purpose is to get you to buy something. Often people scroll past or turn a blind eye when looking at advertisements but never take a second to actually look at what they're consuming.

Advertisements are all around us constantly whether we realize it or not and even the most simple and average ads have a message for the viewer. Roland Barthes' analysis of the average French ad can be applied to any advertisement we see today. Harper's Bazaar magazine, a women's fashion magazine, has countless fashion ads for the viewer to look at and consume. One in particular is advertising affordable, comfortable clothing from a French fashion brand.

In this ad inside Bazaar Magazine you see a woman wearing a headscarf and a rectangle shaped striped dress with frills on the side. You can see her holding onto an umbrella, which also has stripes on it and she is on the beach. The sand looks more like dunes or hills because you can just barely see the ocean in the background. The sky is filled with clouds and is a vibrant blue, there is text on both the top and bottom of the advertisement. At the top it states, "News" in a

modern typeface where the tracking is extreme, meaning there is a lot of space in between the letters. Underneath the “news” there is a sans-serif typeface in all uppercase that states, “Edited by Alison S. Cohn” and at the bottom of the image there is the text that says, “Off the grid”. The text is once again in a modern typeface and “off” and “grid” are in all uppercase letters where the word “the” is italic and all lowercase. Underneath that text it states, “text by Chantal Fernandez/Photography by Andrea Spotorno”, which is also in all uppercase but in a sans-serif typeface. The woman looks happy and carefree, she is in the center of the image and the vertical striped dress she is wearing really captures your eye along with the striped umbrella. The advertisement is very balanced in terms of composition, there are the sand hills in the background that are at a diagonal, which leads you straight to the model. Both diagonal lines created from the sand hills lead you directly to the model and the almost towel-like dress she is wearing. The scenery makes you feel calm and serene, like you’re at the beach on a beautiful sunny day. There is also the very dark shadow created by the umbrella and the model that perfectly contrasts the light sand hills. This contrast of the shadow and the sand, once again leads your eye directly to the model and to her outfit.

In the Rhetoric of the Image Barthe goes over the linguistic message of the advertisement he is analyzing as well as the non-coded iconic messages, the coded iconic messages and all the elements that make up each of those messages, and explains the signs he sees. Firstly, in this advertisement there are three signs, the colors, the composition, and the pose of the model. The colors seen in this ad are blue, grey, beige, light greens, and a teal color. These colors all create a sense of calmness, serenity, and joy. The environment in which the model is in is somewhere you want to be. The composition is another sign, where the model is the clear focus. As stated before the diagonal lines created by the sand hills lead you straight to the model and to her clothing. The

model itself is another sign, giving off a carefree and happy aura to the viewer, this is signified by her smile and her pose. Almost like she is letting the wind take her away and letting herself relax on the beach. The linguistic message of the ads are not directly related to the photography itself. There are no denotational elements from the text, the text in this ad does not describe exactly what you're seeing and does not give any context to the image at all. It doesn't even state the brand name or designer. However, there is a connotational message that this ad has the words at the bottom, "Off the Grid" might imply that the viewer can get away from their stressful life and embark on an adventure to the beach and go "off grid". It can imply that the model went "off grid" and you should too because look how calm and happy you could be. Those are the linguistic elements of the advertisement, they don't tell you exactly what you're looking at but instead imply additional meaning through the words, "Off the Grid".

The advertisement does not have an anchor, if anything the text in the image makes things more unclear and makes you wonder about the model and what's going on. Once again, it does not tell you what you are looking at and if you are lost while looking at this ad you are not likely to rely on the text to help ground you in its message. This advertisement does make you relay a message, it takes our minds out of where we are and makes us wonder. It takes away from the literal linguistic message and makes you wonder about bigger and better things. The non-coded iconic message, the literal message of the advertisement, is that there is a woman on the beach, hanging onto an umbrella on a sunny day. When analyzing the non-coded iconic message there is no personal bias and your beliefs don't get in the way while viewing this ad. You are simply describing what you see exactly as you see it. Some elements of the non-coded iconic message include objectivity, innocence, denotational elements, perceptual elements, quasi-tautological elements, and syntagmatics. To summarize each element they each help the

viewer understand the literal message of the advertisement, no wondering or subjectivity is involved when it comes to the non-coded iconic message. We assess what we see as we see it. The coded iconic message is the opposite of the non-coded message, it involves subjectivity, cultural elements, it's connotational, symbolic, and ideological. The coded iconic message of this advertisement makes you want to be somewhere else, to imagine your ideal vacation and involves your perception and euphoria. It allows you to bring your own beliefs and values into the advertisement. One thing to point out is the symbolic message from the garment she is wearing, it almost looks like a beach towel. The shape, colors and designs further emphasizes the beach idea and happiness surrounding her.

This advertisement relies heavily on the coded iconic message and the linguistic message aids the wonder and happiness of the advertisement. This ad is simply trying to sell you clothing from a French fashion brand. However, it does this by making you feel serene, happy, and calm through the colors, the composition leads you straight to the model and as you look at her smile you might think, "I want to be like her to" or "I want to be where she is". The Rhetoric of the Image by Roland Barthe allows you to look at advertisements that you might pass by in a new way and really think about each element that makes up an advertisement and what each message means to you.

N E W S

EDITED BY ALISON S. COHN



OFF *the* GRID

TEXT BY CHANTAL FERNANDEZ / PHOTOGRAPHS BY ANDREA SPOTORNO

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