

# Applying roland barthes communication theory



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In the following text I will introduce and summarize Roland Barthes's communicational theory and describe its focus, purpose and application. Furthermore I will apply it to the Apple case: „ 3: Apple slogans, advertisements, and merchandize“, from the given material. I will attempt to give my own explanation of the function and its relevance to the example provided. Barthes in his theoretical essay “ Myth Today” states that myth is neither an object, concept or idea but an act of speech – an utterance, which gives a myth no limit appliance. “ Everything , then, can be a myth?

Yes, I believe this, for the universe is in infinitely fertile in suggestions. ”

(Barthes 2009: 131) Furthermore in his study Barthes elaborates on a work of a swiss linguist Saussure, who defined 3 main terms in semiology, the science of verbal and non verbal signs and symbols. Signifier (the visual image or acoustic), Signified (the mental image triggered by signifier).

Barthes was interested in second order semiology, which triggers a second meaning of the signified, called the Sign.

“ That which is a sign (namely the associative total of concept and an image) in the first system, becomes mere signified in a second. (Barthes 2009: 137)

By Griffin, Barthes later revised his work on semiology and specified two distinctive meanings in myth. Denotation (first order meaning) and Connotation (second order meaning). Denotation is the stable definitive description of a visual, whereas connotation depends on a context, such as ideological beliefs, situations, times or history – that is Myth. The result is shown on a digram on a side: -denotation (first order meaning), is stated as a Language as it is linguistic order. The first box language, representing a first order meaning concerning words and objects.

In the second box is Myth itself (metalanguage), the second order meaning. For Barthes, Signifier in the second order is the meaning when the last term, but form when acting when a beginning. The absolute sign is also signification, the myth. To apply this concept to a case i selected a very ambiguous picture from the Apple case - a poster " Building American Dream". (Appendix 1) The image features an American flag in the background (consistent of red and white stripes, blue corner with white stars), a bright red apple with one green leaf, a sentence " Building American Dream" and a small rainbow Apple logo in the bottom corner.

To start the analysis we firstly look find the denotative meaning of the image, that is the presenting evidence and literal descriptive meaning. The signifier in this picture is the American flag, big bright red apple, small rainbow bitten apple logo, and the support of caption, which is marginal " building and american dream". The signified would be the visual of a strong American nation combined with the perfect fruit denoting Macintosh company and leading us to an image of strong prosperous American computer company.

Connotative meaning relies on cultural or historical contexts, contexts of both the image and the viewer, personal feelings, experiences and knowledge. Connotation concerns with what the image evokes, though not seen in the first place. The signified in this system therefore can be interpreted in many ways. To start with we look at the biggest symbol in the image - a bright red apple in its natural way. To most people assimilate this image with a perfect affordable fruit. From a religious perspective, Christians

would view this images as a pure plant of Eden's gardens, healthiness and positivism.

The apple sign used in Mackintosh logo has a bitten piece which could represent the taste of Eden's gardens, the knowledge. For an ordinary person it represents " the bite" that everybody can afford and experience, with a cross-cultural appliance as everyone is familiar with an apple taste, this would signified a product/company that everybody would be easy to associate with. The apple fruit in the visual, represents the original and directly associates with the company logo of a bitten rainbow color fruit. Gay people would recognize its colors as the gay - lifestyle flag and with others as a symbol of freedom.

In a parallel this refers to Americans and people dedicated to computers as the famous supposed father of computer science Alan Turing, was a homosexual. The American flag represents a patriotism and with the motto of Building An American Dream, it signifies the strong american values, traditions, hard work and lastly the whole idea of American dream. Americans would endorse this and associate Macintosh as a reliable strong and safe company. By buying an Apple product a person would be supporting a company whose ideals are very patriotic and positivistic.

This is a form of company branding from Apple. From a cultural perspective the third world countries could view this as a capitalistic symbol of rich and powerful. With the current world issues the muslims could view this poster as a threat and the positive feelings would be replaced with a negative welcome, anger and mockery. Lastly we must not forget the issue of time, as

this posters dates back to the 80s, when world issues were different as well as peoples interests. To conclude what myth is, it is what we believe and what we value in an image.

Apple case proved us that myth is heavily influenced by culture, as what seems true in one culture or by an individual, might be very different in another. As well as what might people perceive from an image at one point in a history as one thing, might be perceived different in another time, although the image hasn't changed. Myth is a second order semiological system and deals with forms and meanings. Barthes concepts helped to understand and perceive the image of an Apple poster in a different ways and led us to interesting conclusions. I realized one can analyze and view a picture from different perspectives and capture valuable meanings.