

## **Beyond Depicting. Language-Image-Links in the Service of Advertising<sup>1</sup>**

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The present contribution examines how the current trend in advertising towards more pictures and less text affects the linking of language and image. Investigations on a larger corpus (1.100 worldwide ads) are to substantiate the hypotheses that in this situation pictorial functions and linkage types diversify and language – even though quantitatively reduced – reclaims a pivotal part in making and managing meaning. After a brief consideration of multimodality and the semiotic and cognitive mode differences between language and image the article outlines a model which sets out to explain how recipients understand the kind of minimalist ads now in fashion. It rests on three interconnected tiers: recipients need to resolve indirectness (implicatures), trace secondary meanings of signs (connotations) and follow the networking of concepts (metaphor/metonymy). The contribution then reviews approaches to the analysis and typology of language-image-links since Barthes' first attempt (1977) and suggests that a complex methodology would need to take into account spatial syntax, inter-modal coherence, rhetorical-logical semantics and pragmatic functions between language and image. Using corpus evidence the article explains and illustrates five currently common textual patterns of linking image and language, which are based on pictorial functions and logical semantic ties. Pictures may engage the recipient in the very process of vision, they promote the management of concepts and reduce complexity, set up all kinds of semantic games that delay decoding and provoke the recipient by transgressing norms. Writing may also emulate pictures through typography and layout.

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1 The present article is the long version of a paper presented at the AILA world congress 2008 in Essen during a symposium entitled "Multimodal Communication in a Multilingual World".

## 1. Trends in Advertising

The increasing dominance of images over words and their omnipresence in today's communicative culture have often been deplored. Some fear that our penchant for pictures<sup>2</sup> might mutilate our ability to read. While I do not generally share those fears, advertising, though, clearly displays the trend targeted by cultural pessimists and preservationists of the logo-centric tradition. The genre relies ever more heavily on pictures of all kinds. At the same time texts are being cut down, sometimes leaving us just with brand name, headline or caption, and slogan<sup>3</sup>. However, current ads are hardly purely visual – they are semiotically minimalist combinations of word and image with a calculated division of communicative labour between the two. The trend towards a greater reliance on images is complemented by another interesting development. It seems the product advertised and its features no longer take centre stage. Instead, all sorts of 'alien', seemingly irrelevant content is pushed to the fore in order to make a more indirect, hidden, but recoverable connection to the product. Let me try to explain these two trends.

### 1.1 Why more pictures?

Thanks to their semiotic and perceptual properties pictures are conducive to almost all persuasive functions adverts aim to fulfil. Most importantly, they are rich in information, strong in their impact on perception and memory and effective in conveying emotional appeals and imbuing messages with affective auras that help build brand identities (cf. Kroeber-Riel 1993: 53–96). In co-operation with language, pictures can flexibly perform the essential speech act functions required in advertising, i.e. presenting, describing, evaluating. So it would seem natural for advertisers to make ample use of imagery. Given that media technology facilitates higher picture quality and easier distribution, the trend is likely to persist.

### 1.2 Why do pictorial messages seemingly stray from the product?

Both products and adverts operate in a highly competitive market. Owing to an exploding amount of communication exposure attention is scarce. As the use values of rivalling products often strongly converge, distinctions need to

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2 Cf. Halawa (2008: 20f.) “[...] dass Bilder omnipräsent sind, dass Menschen sich von ihnen angezogen fühlen und das Sehen offenbar immer mehr zu lieben scheinen als z.B. das Wort”.

3 Gieszinger (2000, 2001) has shown that since 1788 texts have indeed become shorter and more heavily structured typographically whereas the amount of pictures has increased.

be made in the act of communication through the quality and nature of the ads. So rather than explain exchangeable product features, in a context of consumers' resistance to advertising it seems wise to turn the communicative act itself into an aesthetic event. The aim here is to offer symbolic worlds for social identification and brands which project group values and common sense. (cf. Stöckl 2003)

## 2. Hypothesis and Claims

In what follows I should like to substantiate and explain a simple hypothesis about recent developments in the ways advertisers utilize the image. For convenience, my claim may be broken down into a few statements.

### 2.1 Language-Image-Links

As in most genres the image alone cannot successfully communicate advertising messages. It is the alliance with language (and other modes, e.g. music, noise, typography), which provides pragmatic flexibility. So rather than study the picture in isolation it is vital to focus the language-image-link, i.e. the specific inter-play of linguistic and pictorial signs. Advertisers' foremost strategic job is to conceive of ideas that can be expressed and work well in language-image-texts, even though the number of words needed to contextualize and semantically pin down the picture has, in fact, decreased.

### 2.2 Default and Diversification

The 'neutral', default case of a language-image-link in advertising would seem to be what could be called 'depiction'. (cf. fig. 1 and 2) The picture



**Fig. 1:** ADIDAS Football, TBWA/Chiat/Day 180 Amsterdam, USA 2004 (Wiedemann 2006: 472)

shows real-world objects (e.g. user, situation of product use, etc.) more or less closely related to the product advertised. Language is used to explain, evaluate and recommend the commodity. Historically, too, this seems to have been the first use of the image. Now, the accelerated development of image-making technology and our exposure to and experience with visual communication has fostered novel and diverse



**Fig. 2:** TIDE, Procter & Gamble, Saatchi & Saatchi, USA 2004 (Wiedemann 2006: 244)

ways of using pictures in advertising. Advertisers in their innate desire to break with established norms<sup>4</sup> and in their creative playfulness are generating new types of language-image-links, which go way beyond depicting.

### 2.3 Pragmatic Enablement

This kind of diversification in linking language and image has a number of repercussions. First, it enables pictures to perform a variety of novel pragmatic functions. Second, it shifts the status and role of language in multi-modal advertising texts. Most importantly, diversifying the language-image-link

makes advertising more attractive, culturally significant and an interesting benchmark in communicative strategies at large.

What drives this trend is open to speculation. One may suspect technology is one of the essential factors. Communicative needs generated by a branch which hungers after the spectacular will be another. Certainly, our post-modern condition of an 'anything-goes-philosophy' with its recycling and cross-over of styles and trends as well as a greater cultural and cognitive autonomy of the recipient will have contributed to the trend, too. I will not speculate any further here. Instead let me continue with a look at how language and image differ from each other.

### 3. Multi-Modality and Transcriptivity

Multi-modality, although perhaps not the most fortunate coinage, has become the standard term to describe texts and communicative events, which involve more than one signing system or semiotic resource. I should like to briefly highlight some crucial implications of this phenomenon:

1. If modes like language, image and sound combine, what seems most essential is that they are integrated and interrelated on a number of levels, i.e. in terms of syntax, semantics and pragmatics. Individual signing resources must co-operate to build a connected text, which makes modes interlock smoothly and leads to a functional advantage in the given situation.

4 Gaede (2002) classifies such norms and describes more or less systematic ways of breaking with them.

2. In a cognitive light, multi-modality may be understood as a mental faculty or a type of intelligence which specializes in relating to one another information coded in different semiotics. Ludwig Jäger, who calls this phenomenon *transcriptivity* (2002: 34–39), has claimed that meaning can only ever be produced in a culture and made legible by way of ‘transcriptions’ from one mode/medium/text to another. This means that as sign users we permanently engage in commenting, paraphrasing and explicating one mode with the help of another. In this sense, multimodality would be a cultural technique, an essential competence enabling communication and mutual intelligibility.
3. Most importantly, linking various modes and rewriting (‘transcribing’) content from one mode/text/medium to another must follow techniques and conventions. So multimodality can also be seen as a patterned semiotic activity in the production and reception of texts. Especially within a genre like advertising it would seem inevitable that certain logical, semantic or rhetorical patterns of linking language and image would emerge in order to facilitate orientation and processing.

Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2001) have sensitized us to the fact that every mode has a semiotic character all its own and that the various modes do not easily compare. On the other hand, it cannot be denied that language has often been used as a yardstick for comparison, either implicitly or explicitly<sup>5</sup>. This may be because, after all, language is still widely seen to be the most flexible and semantically potent mode<sup>6</sup>. I should like to follow Holly (2007: 392), who claims that every semiotic mode commands its own ‘autochthonic’ semantics, which is shaped both by potentials and assets as well as by weaknesses and shortcomings.

The linking of modes, e.g. the language-image-link, will crucially depend on those ‘autochthonic’ semantics. So what can and cannot be done with language and image in a calculated combination essentially hinges upon their semiotic properties. I believe that too little attention has been devoted to this recently mainly because these issues were seen to be too ‘structuralist’ in nature and because the generalist and undifferentiated perspective of mode flexibility and individuality did not favour them. I suggest mode differences may be studied on four levels: (1.) semiotic, (2.) perceptual/cognitive, (3.) semantic and (4.) pragmatic. For reasons of space, I will highlight just the most significant distinctions between image and language in the table below.

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5 Some (Doelker 1997) have tried to develop an overtly analogous parallel between linguistic categories and the description of pictorial grammar.

6 Jäger (2002: 34) has called language an *Archimedium*, i.e. an ‘archetypal medium’.

	PICTURE	LANGUAGE
❶ SEMIOTICS (sign system)	continuous 'flow' of signs	discrete, distinct signs
	integrative grammar (weak)	combinatorial grammar (strong)
	spatial configurations	linear units (syntagmatic)
	iconic (close to perception)	arbitrary (removed from perception)
❷ PERCEPTION/ COGNITION (understanding)	simultaneous – holistic perception	step-by-step
	Quick	slow (comparatively)
	strong in impact and memory	weaker in impact and memory
	directly tied to emotions	no direct tie to emotions
❸ SEMANTICS (meaning potential)	surplus of 'free-floating' meaning (semantically dense)	'anchored' meaning (semantically scarce)
	vague and under-determined	precise and determined (tendency)
	limited semantic range, e.g.: negation, modality, abstract reference, illocutions, linking of utterances	unlimited semantic range
❹ PRAGMATICS (communicative functions)	presentation of objects rich in perceptible properties	narrating actions/events in time
	indicating relational position of objects in space	explaining logical relationships between entities
	emotional appeals	all illocutions and speech events
	Instruction	

**Table 1:** A Comparison of Semiotic Modes – Picture vs. Language

1. Pictures are close to our perceptual experience (cf. Sachs-Hombach 2003: 73ff) and need no re- or transcoding, as does language. A weak grammar (distinctive signs? combinatorial rules?) allows for vague meaning potential but not for definite, fixed meanings. Context, therefore, is paramount.
2. Access to pictorial signs is quick and seemingly effortless (holistic). In terms of the image's impact on understanding and memory, it outperforms language (cf. Kroeber-Riel 1993: 53–96), which is cumbersome in its linearity and step-by-step logics.
3. Pictures confront a number of semantic limitations: negating statements, expressing modality, definite illocutions and logically linking utterances all pose one or the other problem. Where language tends to be precise<sup>7</sup> and

<sup>7</sup> However, communicating sensory impressions (i.e. taste, smell, sound, etc.) comes up against some serious linguistic shortcomings, too.

sufficiently determined, pictures mostly exhibit a surplus of meaning, which cannot easily be tied down (cf. Gombrich 1996: 41–44).

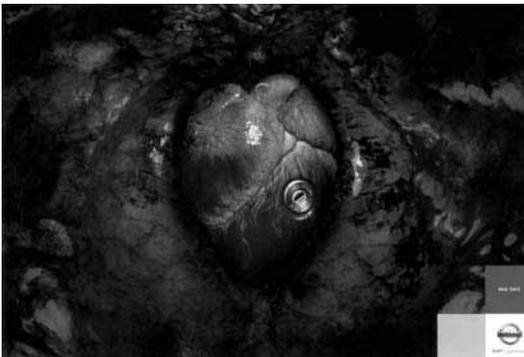
4. As a consequence of all these properties, pictures fulfil different communicative functions than language. Pictures present objects, locations and situations in all their perceptive wealth and they are good at evoking feelings and aura. However, pictures cannot tell a story, unless in a sequence; something language is quite good at.

#### 4. Understanding Ads

I have already said that current advertisers use few words and seemingly irrelevant pictorial contents to construct what may be called minimalist advertising. One of the questions that emerge is how recipients make meaning from these kinds of ads. Fix (2006: 265f.) has argued that understanding a text means to establish “den Bezug zwischen dem Erwarteten und dem realen Text”<sup>8</sup>. Even if we assume ads are easily recognized as such through their positioning in the media, their materiality (layout, picture dominance, logo, etc.) and their communicative situation, what remains obscure, however, is how recipients use their knowledge of the text type to generate sense from ads, which offer few explicit signs and messages. Advertisers obviously trust the decoding abilities of their potential audiences assuming they know how to read product and brand related meaning into whatever small semiotic offer there is.

I propose that what must happen in the process of understanding the kind of semantically under-determined small or no copy ad in question here

(cf. fig. 3) is mainly three things (cf. Stöckl 2008a: 173–180).



**Fig. 3:** NISSAN 350Z, TBWA Paris, Frankreich 2004 (Wiedemann 2006: 603)

8 'a connection between the expected (i.e. the text type knowledge - H.S.) and the real text exemplar'

1. First, recipients notice a discrepancy between what they perceive and what they would normally have expected. A full-frontal open heart semantically clashes with car advertising. Since Grice's co-operative principle (1975) this phenomenon has often been called *implicature*. Such obvious rifts between the signs presented and the meaning/message intended<sup>9</sup> call for acts of inferring sense from context and background knowledge. Advertisers must trust that the implicatures they construct can be computed by the recipient, otherwise they would not design them<sup>10</sup>. However, because implicatures are equivocal they leave some space and leeway for individual interpretation.
2. Second, in order to come up with a relevant interpretation of the signs presented recipients must read them on various non-literal levels. The heart will – on a secondary level – be read as signifying emotion, love, passion, but also, more immediately and still non-literally, it will signify vital functions and beating/pumping. Both Morris (1971) and Peirce (1966) have argued that making and conveying sense, which they called *semiosis*, is potentially unlimited, as every meaning of a sign can be read as another sign on a higher level. Barthes (1996) referred to this phenomenon as *connotation* or *myth*. Advertising clearly limits the potential of semiosis, as – according to their genre knowledge – recipients will read the signs in connection with the product, the brand and an obligatory positive evaluation.
3. Third, signs connect to concepts, which are organized in domains of knowledge and experience. Cognitive semantics has shown that these domains are systematically networked in the human mind so that one concept can easily call up another through metonymy or metaphor (cf. Kövecses 2002). Advertisers can rely on this and present one seemingly irrelevant sign knowing it will lead to another expectable concept in the given context. Using the heart the advertisers make sure that such connotations as centrality, vitality, passion and emotion (as elements of a source domain) can be projected onto the sports car (target domain) in question. Without explicitly stating it the ad highlights good engine properties and passionate driving/engineering as brand values. What facilitates this reading is, of course, the ignition key lock that has been inserted into the heart. It acts as a metonymic pictorial symbol to convey the concept of 'engine', which in turn allows for the implied analogy between heart and engine.

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9 i.e. between what is said and what is meant

10 Implicatures, on the other hand, may be suspended, cancelled or reinforced so the advertiser remains free to use whatever sense is created by them in further arguments.

## 5. The Language-Image-Link: Typological Approaches

Since Barthes' seminal essay (1977)<sup>11</sup> numerous attempts have been made to describe the kinds of relationships that language and image are capable of establishing (cf. Burger 2005: 389–424). Although prolific and uncontested in its usefulness, this branch of linguistics and communication studies has not had the impact and burgeoning development other disciplines took. Very likely this is due to some inherent difficulties, which do not allow for simple models and transparent terminologies. I should like to try and give a short account of major strands and perspectives within the field of studying the language-image-link.

1. At the beginning researchers like Durand (1987), Bonsiepe (1968) and later Gaede (1981), Rentel (2005) and Doelker (2007) emphasized that rhetorical figures (e.g. analogy, antithesis, climax, hyperbole, metaphor, etc.) and the logical operations underlying them can be used to describe what happens semantically between the pictorial and verbal parts of a text. While the feasibility of this approach has been amply demonstrated, it should also be clear that one of its weaknesses is terminological confusion and an obsession with too fine-grained a distinction between various types of language-image-links, which in fact often blur in analytical practice.
2. Another approach focuses on quite a generalized account of how content or information conveyed in picture and text might relate to one another. The work of Spillner (1982) and, more recently, Nöth (2000) are good examples. The terminology introduced makes distinctions such as (reciprocal) extension vs. determination (Spillner) or complementarity vs. contradiction and dominance vs. redundancy. A balanced, integrated and compact view is presented in Fill (2007: 135–149), who treats content linking as different types of 'tension' between picture and language. While some of the categories above are so basic that they have been taken up in later accounts, using them as the only criteria to build a descriptive typology of the language-image-link seems too broad and vague.
3. More precision was gained from approaches which modelled the link on various levels. Thus, Geiger and Henn-Memmesheimer (1998) mirror Morris' old division of sign systems into semantics, syntax and pragmatics by claiming that to any language-image-link there is a content, a structural and a functional dimension. Later systems, e.g. by van

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11 "The Rhetoric of the Image", originally published in *Communications* in 1964.

Leeuwen (2005) and Martinec and Salway (2005), also combine various levels and order them hierarchically. It is mainly generalized content, i.e. 'information linking' (van Leeuwen 2005: 219ff) (e.g. elaboration vs. extension, equal vs. unequal status) and logical relations (e.g. time, space, cause), they have in mind.

4. More recently two important points have been made. Language-image-links come as conventionalized patterns of reciprocal mode interaction and interlocking. Various levels of text are helpful in their description (e.g. spatial-syntactic, content-thematic, rhetorical-logical; Stöckl forthcoming). The patterns are clearly text-type-sensitive, so too generalized a perspective does not make sense. What seems most important is to ask which pragmatic functions pictures can fulfil in relation to language. Holly (2007: 411ff.) in a detailed analysis of a commercial highlights four major functions: authorize, socially address, ground meaning, and gloss over meaning.

In order to illustrate my own system of analysing language-image-links I am now going to discuss a sample advert. I hope this will demonstrate the usefulness of applying levels and criteria. Despite these attempts at structural clarity, language-image-links also remain elusive to a certain degree as they may display a richness of meaning potential, which is hard to capture and account for by any theory. The sample text advertises a foliage trimmer by the German brand 'stihl' (cf. fig. 4). The only language in the ad is the slogan "cut your brush". The image shows a man in a torn suit on the doorstep of a house, whose garden plants are growing into the house through the door. There are three levels to my analysis.



**Fig. 4:** STIHL Foliage Trimmer 'Cut your Brush'  
DDB Paris, France 2004 (Wiedemann 2006: 515)

### 5.1 *Form: Connectivity and Spatial Syntax*

In the ad the picture precedes the words of slogan and brand name. The recipients' attention will, therefore, first be focused on the image, the content of which they will be trying to work out. Relating and integrating the verbal message into the overall text will only happen later. Cohesion between language and picture is created through the strict top-bottom layout – the small schematic depiction of the product advertised creates a kind of mediating formal and semantic link between pictorial and verbal information.

### 5.2 *Content: Thematic Structure and Inter-modal Coherence*

Seen in relation to the verbal message, which is an imperative instruction, the picture provides a highly stereotyped situation. It provides the context for understanding the slogan. Coherence is established by mapping lexical elements – i.e. 'cut' and 'brush' – onto pictorial signs: 'cut' may metonymically be related to the torn suit and the injuries in the face; 'brush' is shown growing into the house through the door. The picture, though stereotyped, also reveals what may be called knowledge frame or script incongruence in exactly those details (i.e. injured salesman, plants growing wildly). Most importantly, content from picture and text elaborate one another, that is, they mutually explain, illustrate or complement one another. Recipients will understand the pictorial content as a hyperbolic, but plausible situation of product application or as a problem to which the advertised tool offers a solution.

### 5.3 *Function: Rhetorical-Logical Semantics and Pragmatic Function*

Although pictures can be used to perform all sorts of speech functions (e.g. instruct, warn, etc.), their most basic and often also their only function is to represent an object or a situation. In our case it is a fictitious but imaginable situation, which – as we have said – contextualizes and complements the text. Image and language have been coordinated logically to the effect that the picture illustrates and instantiates the slogan, which in turn adds the speech of an indefinite voice which, however, could be attributed to the man depicted.

We have seen that the analysis has tackled a number of issues: sequencing or spatial relation of picture and text, cohesion, relation of informational content in image and text, coherence, speech act functions and logical-rhetorical relations between the two modes. What seems most central is the functional role of the image and its logical-semantic ties with the text.

### 6. Language-Image-Links in Advertising: Pictorial Functions

We may well assume that the wealth of design options for linking language and image in advertising is stupendous. At the same time I believe that underneath the diversity on the surface there are more or less conventionalized patterns of language-image-links. They will have emerged from the common practice in a pragmatically clear-cut discourse domain. Both in production and reception such patterns in the mechanics of picture-word-interrelations would seem to be helpful as they may channel creative ideas and enable easy orientation. Most importantly, however, the patterned nature of verbal-visual communication results from the original potentials and deficiencies of language and image, which in turn are sensitive to the functional demands of the text type advertising. In what follows I will attempt to show the diversity of linking language and image creating some order as I go along. Of course, typologies are always fraught with difficulties and completeness cannot be my aim here. However, I believe the types I suggest reflect current practice in advertising worldwide<sup>12</sup> and go some way towards outlining the pragmatic flexibility of pictures in combination with minimal text. For ease of orientation I have put the 13 types into five groups (cf. fig. 5). At the end, I will be able to further abstract from this and judge the functionality of pictures for advertising in general. Here is my typology.

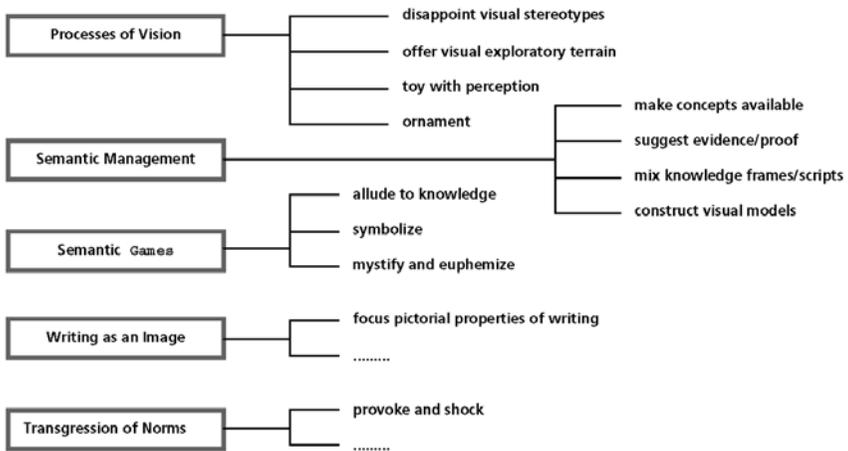


Fig. 5: Typology of Pictorial Functions in Language-Image-Links for Advertising

12 My research is based on the investigation of a rich corpus of ads from sources worldwide (with their texts mainly in English, though) in Wiedemann (2006), which comprises roughly 1.100 ads from diverse print media.

Ideally, I would now need to apply all my three analytical categories (i.e. form, content, function) to the linkage-types in question. However, all the details would take up too much space. The labels I used in the typology already indicate that what I am going to do instead is to mainly look at the function of the image in relation to the text and gauge the nature of the logical-semantic ties between the two modes.

### 6.1 Disappoint visual stereotypes (Vision)

Pictures are all about seeing, while (written) texts are about reading. It is not surprising then that a number of language-image-links try to use the picture in order to engage the recipient in what could be called a prolonged visual experience. Instead of quickly glancing at a stereotyped and prototypical image the viewer is supposed to relish the second look or the intense inquisitive inspection of a designed optical surface. One way to do this is to use a picture which deliberately disappoints or runs counter to the regular look of things. In the ad for a South African importer of luxury sports cars (cf. fig. 6), for instance, an extremely low garage door will capture our attention and may lead to the following inferences: If you had a garage like this you would



be a very special person. The only car that fits into it would be a sports car. The lower a sports car, the faster and/or the more exquisite it is likely to be. The slogan “specialists in luxury sports cars” along with the logos of Ferrari and Maserati may focus our visual attention and help to detect the element that upsets our stereotypical perception.

**Fig. 6:** viglietti motors, J. Walter Thompson, South Africa 2004 (Wiedemann 2006: 029)

### 6.2 Offer Visual Exploratory Terrain (Vision)

Another way to engage the recipients in the very process of seeing is to offer them an exploratory visual terrain to inspect. Usually such pictures consist of a panoramic tableau of an accumulated multitude of objects. Thus in the

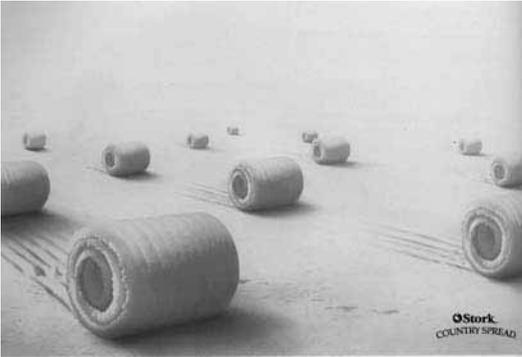


**Fig. 7:** SUZUKI JEEP, General Motors South Africa, Net#work BBDO, South Africa 2005 (Wiedemann 2006: 609)

ad for a four wheel drive jeep (cf. fig. 7) we are confronted with a vast collection of stamps showing various views of different African countries. Naturally, we first have to inspect the picture a while to get at the logical-semantic idea: the image elements shown and the names provided are supposed to illustrate potential destinations or situations of use for the advertised car. The slogan sums this up by claiming “Go anywhere. Do anything.” What seems obligatory for this kind of language-image-link, besides the accumulation of diverse objects, is the small size of the individual pictorial elements, so it really does take a while to work out an interpretation.

### 6.3 Toy with Perception (Vision)

Visual perception is seemingly quick and effortless, yet it depends on context and can easily be deceived. The fact that any two objects may look alike or that you may see two things in one shape may also be exploited in the design of language-image-links. The ad for a ‘country spread’ (cf. fig. 8) shows this. Here rolls of margarine have been made to resemble rolls of hay – this optical analogy is supported by the linguistic polysemy of ‘roll’. What activates one or the other interpretation is verbal context cues, viz. either ‘spread’ or ‘country’.



**Fig. 8:** STORK MARGARINE, Unifoods, Herdbruys McCann Erickson, South Africa 2005 (Wiedemann 2006: 148)

Another deception trick is more in the way of a calculated optical illusion than a semantic game. An advert for rechargeable batteries (Wiedemann 2006: 327), which claims “non-stop power”, shows wheels that look as if they were really turning. Of course, we know they cannot really do so, but our visual experience conjures up the illusion. The logical-semantic function of the image here would be to

deliver some kind of evidence of the verbal claim. More than in any other language-image-links where intensifying and prolonging visual experience is the issue this case shows that the images in all these links are paramount, yet cannot communicate without a minimum of verbal context.

#### 6.4 Ornament (Vision)

In addition to representation, images also offer aesthetic pleasure through shapes, composition, colour and style. If this aspect dominates and there is little in terms of pictorial content, we might use the term *ornament*. Semioticians might argue that ornaments are not really pictures in the true sense, as they do not depict. While I do not subscribe to this point of view, it is interesting to see that ornaments also feature in advertising as ways to focus and deepen visual experience. In the Nike ad (cf. fig. 9), the shoe only emerges from a welter of shapes and colours, which as an overall impression convey the taste, feel and style of the 1970s. The text here merely contextualizes the image and adds information which could not have been communicated visually.



**Fig. 9:** NIKE BASKETBALL SHOES, DDB Paris, France 2005 (Wiedemann 2006: 461)

## 6.5 Make Concepts Available (Semantic Management)

I have said earlier that picture and text can only be integrated if the signs offered in both establish some kind of semantic connection. In a way, what recipients will be doing in order to understand language-image-links and build coherence is to continually map elements from the text onto the picture and vice versa. The easiest way for advertisers to make the logical semantic ties transparent is to reduce pictorial content to a few signs that easily connect to selected words in the text. The ad for a shower gel containing honey essence (cf. fig. 10) features the drain of a shower or bath, some drops of water and – inside the drain – the pattern of a honeycomb. The de-contextualized pictorial minimalism achieved here will activate recipients' thought processes: the metonymic connections (drain for shower and honeycomb for honey) are easily understood and form the very foundation of advertisers' visual communication techniques. It is the small number of signs and their de-contextualized style that make the necessary concepts available effortlessly. Networking associations from pictorial elements is *the* central and most elementary task of a language-image-link in advertising<sup>13</sup>.



**Fig. 10:** DURO SHOWER GEL, EVYAP, Medina Turgul DDB, Turkey 2005 (Wiedemann 2006: 162)

<sup>13</sup> This phenomenon, which is both a cognitive activity as well as a structural property of texts, could also be called *inter-modal coherence*.



Fig. 11: YONG QUICK DRY CEMENT, Y&R Thailand, Thailand 2005 (Wiedemann 2006: 345)

### 6.6 Suggest Evidence/Proof (Semantic Management)

Pictures are often taken for real; they are regarded as simulating reality. This is because pictures, especially photographs, are indexical and iconic in their semiotic nature. Even in an age of digital manipulation this cognitive tendency to treat pictures as factual traces of the real persists. So advertisers often use pictures in the service of creating evidence and proof of verbal claims. The ad for quick dry cement (cf. fig. 11) does exactly this: it shows a bucket in mid-air stuck to the ground through a stream of cement, suggesting that the cement dried up in the very process of pouring. Here is a good example to show that still images can be suggestive of action and that visual thinking goes way beyond what is visible in the frame. The logical pattern established in this very common type of language-image-link is that some more or less banal product quality will be substantiated or illustrated by a picture. Often those visual proofs are dramatized and exaggerated – advertisers would not get away with spelling out those pictorial contents in language.

### 6.7 Mix Knowledge Frames/Scripts (Semantic Management)

Pictures tap into our knowledge of the worlds and cultures around us – this is how they can make meaning at all. Knowledge is systematically



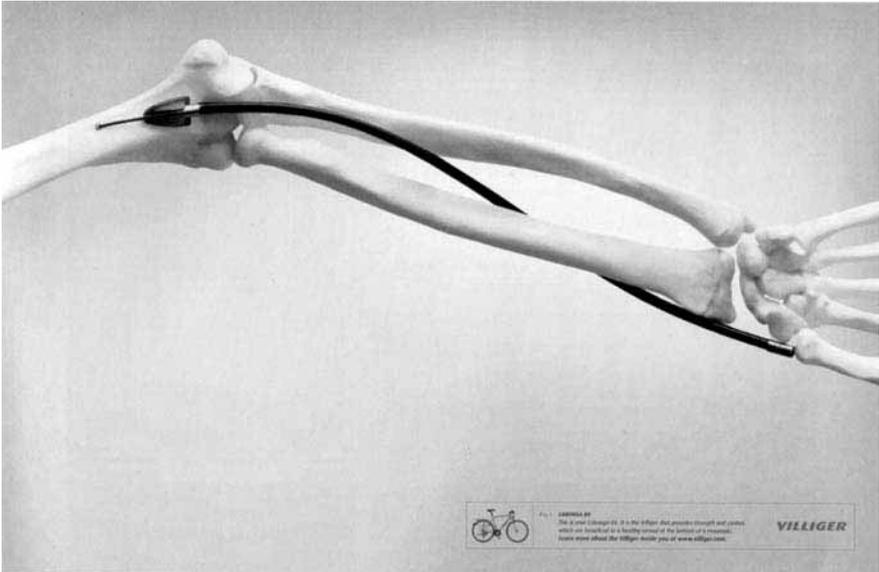
**Fig. 12:** FERNER JACOBSEN, McCann Italy, Italy 2004 (Wiedemann 2006: 076)

which is mediated through verbal comments, must count as one of the basic techniques within the advertisers' repertoire of language-image-links.

## 6.8 Construct Visual Models (Semantic Management)

Pictures also command the great powers of the fictitious – they can develop and concoct worlds that diverge from what we are ordinarily capable of seeing. Here is the realm of the visual model or those pictures which use image-making technology (supersonic scans, x-ray, magnet resonance tomography, etc.). Their general aim is “dass sie Gegenständen, die andernfalls im Unbestimmten bleiben müssten oder die nicht ohne weiteres verfügbar sind, eine handhabbare und anschauliche Form geben” (Reichle/

represented in our minds through semantic frames and scripts. We hold mental models of what we know. Pictures usually open certain knowledge frames and thus make meaning. Advertising messages can effectively be conveyed if frames or scripts are strategically combined. The ad for a fashion store (cf. fig. 12) uses a picture which shows belts in various colours in an ice bowl along with wafers. The frames of ‘clothing/fashion accessories’ and ‘eating’ are mixed here so as to create an aesthetic visual arrangement. The semantic effect that emerges is that eating and shopping for clothes are somehow likened to one another. In addition the text “have a nice summer” highlights another shared feature, namely seasonal compatibility. Again, this calculated mix of semantic domains in the picture,



**Fig. 13:** VILLIGER BIKES, Leo Burnett, USA 2005 (Wiedemann 2006: 525)

Siegel/Spelten 2008: 12)<sup>14</sup>. Also, such visual models “[gewinnen] entscheidenden Wert, da sie unüberschaubare Zusammenhänge in eine endliche Menge von Elementen gliedern und so Komplexität reduzieren helfen” (ibid.)<sup>15</sup>. For their argumentative and explanatory purposes, advertisers also construct visual models and use what is often called ‘technical’ images. In the ad for Villiger mountain bikes (cf. fig. 13), a skeleton model is complemented with a bowden cable connecting elbow and finger. The aim of the model here is to build an analogy between technology and human anatomy, which is facilitated by the slogan: “Learn more about the Villiger inside you”. Rhetorically, what is behind the language-image-link here is an attempt to present something inanimate as something animate. Visual models can take many shapes; their underlying principle is to show visual elements in spatial relations, from which all sort of logical connections may be derived.

## 6.9 Allude to Knowledge (Semantic Games)

As opposed to neutral management, semantic games come as more refined attempts to toy with expectations as regards the networking of associations

14 ‘to give manageable and graphic shape to objects which would otherwise remain in the dark or not be immediately tangible’.

15 ‘become highly valuable as they subdivide multitudinous relationships into a limited number of elements and thus help reduce complexity’.



**Fig. 14:** POLO FOX, Volkswagen, DDB, Belgium 2005 (Wiedemann 2006: 625)



**Fig. 15:** KELLOGG'S ALL-BRAN, Leo Burnett, Spain 2005 (Wiedemann 2006: 108)

through picture and text. Often those games, which delay the processes of generating sense, may be based on the simpler semantic management techniques. Their main aim is to be pragmatically indirect and to provoke the recipient to recover the communicative relevance of the pictures through more detailed reflection. In the ad for the Volkswagen Polo Fox (cf. fig. 14), an image of a chicken raising its wings and staring at the viewer with open eyes and beak first begs the question as to its significance in a car ad. However, when relating the chicken to the fox in the product name the allusion to the stereotypical animosity between the two animals may become clear. In the context of car advertising, of course, this game between text and picture will probably be read as a message to the business rival, who in face of the new car will take heed and 'chicken out'. The kinds of knowledge alluded to in language-image-links can be diverse and range from the conventionalized and everyday to the more specialist and culture-dependent.

### 6.10 Symbolize (Semantic Games)

Pictorial symbols emerge when visual signs allow for connotations on a secondary level or when shapes and colours through use elsewhere have become conventionalized and can now be adopted in novel contexts. The ad for a breakfast cereal (cf. fig. 15) thus shows nothing but the superman-logo



**Fig. 16:** LAXITTE, Generis, DDB, Belgium 2005 (Wiedemann 2006: 190)

in a slightly modified version, which resembles a schematic drawing of the gastrointestinal tract. Knowing that all-bran cereal is good for healthy digestion, the resulting message ought to be clear. It is, interestingly, one that again advertisers would not dare to spell out in text, because it is too banal. However, the adoption and creative use of a visual, pop-cultural symbol lets them get away with it quite well.

### 6.11 Mystify and Euphemize (Semantic Games)

Pictorial content may also be out to hide, tone down or ameliorate messages, which had better not be communicated directly and explicitly. This mystifying and euphemizing function (cf. Stöckl 2008a) is important for advertisers mainly for two reasons. First, banalities about the product must be glossed over. Second, potentially risky messages, which result from the kind of product, e.g. home car and hygiene, must be avoided. The sample ad (cf. fig. 16) demonstrates an extreme case, where the scope of what can be depicted to advertise a laxative is rather narrow. The advertisers decided to demonstrate the effectiveness of the product by using a special kind of pack shot: the bottle has ripped the packet. Language features here as writing on the package and comes as an integral part of the picture. All it takes for the mechanics of words and picture to work in the interest of

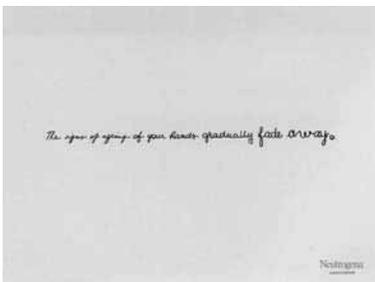
creating proof is the name of the product category. Everything else is self-explanatory and, therefore, relieves the text producer from spelling it out.

### 6.12 Focus Pictorial Properties of Writing (Writing as Image)

Occasionally, advertisers use writing alone. They will then make sure the text acquires a pictorial dimension. This may sound paradoxical, but thanks to a number of typographic properties, scripts can be designed and set on the page so as to communicate meaning over and above what the text is saying.<sup>16</sup> This phenomenon of the symbolic system of language transmuting to the iconic semiotics of images may be called *typopictoriality* (Weidemann 1997). A clever example is the advert for a hand cream (cf. fig. 17). Here, the text “the signs of ageing of your hands gradually fade away” is set in handwriting and makes a strong claim as to the product’s effects. This anti-ageing promise is supported by immediate visual evidence of a metaphoric kind. The style of writing changes from an adult’s at the beginning to a child’s at the end.

### 6.13 Provoke and Shock (Transgression of Norms)

Seeing is a highly habitualized cognitive activity. So what we see in certain situations and how we see it generally comes as stereotyped, schematic pictorial content and, therefore, contains no surprise. At the same time our eyes continually hunger for new visual experience. Advertisers, therefore, are likely to gain attention when they show states of affairs and objects which stray from the conventionally expected and present perspectives that can hardly be adopted in everyday life. Gaede (2002) claims that advertisers



**Fig. 17:** NEUTROGENA ANTI-AGEING HANDCREAM, Johnson & Johnson, DDB Paris, France 2004 (Wiedemann 2006: 163)



**Fig. 18:** ANTI-YOUTH SMOKING CAMPAIGN, American Legacy Foundation, Arnold Worldwide, USA 2005 (Wiedemann 2006: 423)

16 For a concise treatment of the typography in ads cf. Stöckl 2008b: 13–36.

are always out to break with what has become normative in order to be effective. He lists a number of norms that can systematically be manipulated, e.g. social, ethical, religious, moral, etc. In the ad for an anti-smoking campaign (cf. fig. 18), we see an ear stitched onto the head so the person cannot hear. A knife bearing the inscription “seek truth” points at it as if it was about to open the stitches. Clearly, recipients may find this kind of imagery disturbing. They will, however, also try and work out its relevance in the context: Smokers have to be forced to listen and take seriously appeals to their health. This may hurt and come as a real, physical change to their lives. Pictures supposed to provoke and shock do so mainly by exposing recipients to a visual experience which is in some way socially tabooed or can hardly be made in ordinary life and then seek argumentative relevance from it by relating it to a verbal message in context.

## **7. Conclusions**

The exemplary ads discussed were supposed to demonstrate the functional diversity of the image as well as the rhetorical and logical-semantic richness of potential language-image-links. What should have become obvious is that, whatever the design behind image and linking might be, advertisers are keen to use them as strategic tools to effectively develop their arguments. Because the ads are semiotically minimalist, recipients need to invest some decoding efforts in order to generate communicative relevance and sense. If we were to abstract from the details and judge the usefulness of pictures and language-image-links in the service of advertising, we would have to consider the following arguments:

1. Pictures offer and network associations which can be utilized in verbal statements. Often, semantic games are played in the semiotic space between language and image, which promotes indirectness and delay decoding.
2. Pictures are used to highlight certain contents and hide others, usually those that are risky, banal or undesirable for whatever reason.
3. Pictures can reduce complexity by modelling and structuring reality. Technical images show objects not normally visible from perspectives otherwise unattainable.
4. Pictorial content and design may provoke and shock the audience, if they stray from expected norms. Generally, pictures address and position the viewer socially and aesthetically. In this sense, pictures are indexical of social tastes and life styles.

5. Most importantly, pictures command suggestive powers and can easily create illusions. The spectrum of rhetorical functions ranges from idealizing and imagination to dramatizing and manipulation.<sup>17</sup>

Without a doubt we need more “praktische und theoretische Bildkompetenz” (Hoffmann/Rippl 2006: 7)<sup>18</sup> to fully understand how language and picture cooperate. Just as language can be used in diverse ways, so pictures, too, exist in many types and varieties (Reichle/Siegel/Spelten 2007: 8)<sup>19</sup>. It is this fact which needs to sink in deeper and must sensitize us to the richness of pictorial species and styles and their differentiated use in various text genres.

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17 Cf. Liebert/Metten (2007: 12) “[...] vier Kategorien, die mit dem Begriff der Täuschung verbunden sind: Idealisierungen, Phantasien, Dramatisierungen, Manipulationen.”

18 ‘practical and theoretical picture competence’; cf. Hoffmann/Rippl (2006: 7) “Dieser Bilder Macht steht ein Mangel an praktischer und theoretischer Bildkompetenz gegenüber.”

19 Cf. Reichle/Siegel/Spelten (2007: 8) “Bilder sind so vielfältig, wie es unsere Sprache ist. Sie sind vielfältig nicht nur darin, dass jedes einzelne Bild ganz verschiedene Facetten in seinen Funktionen und Kontexten, in seiner Verwendung und Wirkung aufweist, sondern auch darin, dass ganz unterschiedliche Arten von Bildern existieren.”

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