

THE SEMIOTICS OF IMAGES

PHOTOGRAPHIC CONVENTIONS

IN ADVERTISING

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1. INTRODUCTION

This presentation explores semiotic power of photography in advertising. The photographic image has become the most preferable visual tool of the mass culture on the account of its correlation with reality and, consequently, its ability to visually transfer cultural and social conventions.

In the world of advertising where there is tendency to minimize the noise between the meaning that sender is transmitting and the meaning that the receiver might understand, the sender predicts the visual and verbal resources that a typical receiver holds and uses them to compose the message. This composition is made possible with conventions, established principles and norms by which meaning is formed. In our investigation we use photography as a carrier of these visual resources with an overview of social dimension within advertising discourse.

2. PHOTOGRAPHIC CONVENTIONS

SOCIALLY
ESTABLISHED
NORMS {
1. derived from art history &
cultural heritage
2. product of social life &
human interaction

Timberlan campaign ‘Graph’, 2001



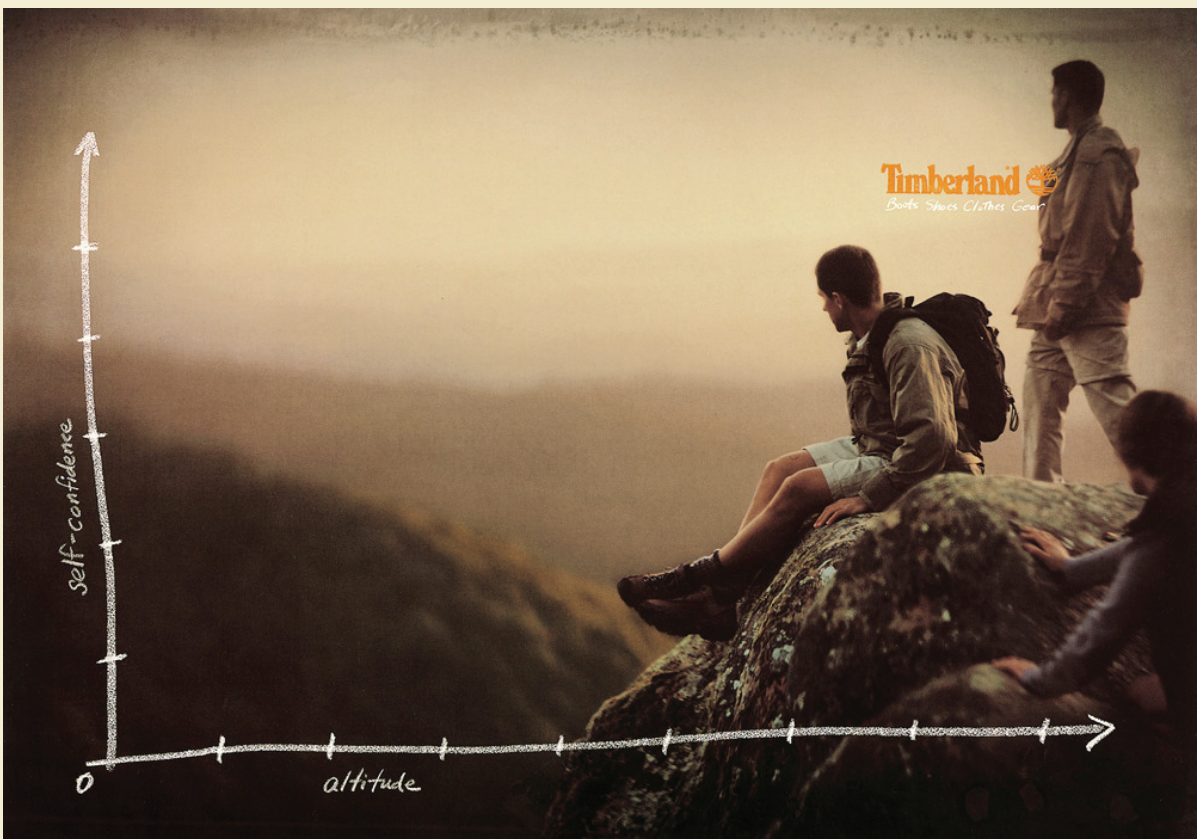
• exploration •



• time away from television •



• distance from shore •



• altitude •

3. PHOTOGRAPHY IN ADVERTISING

- > popular for distributing propaganda messages
- > has ability to attract and hold attention
- > commercial photographers use well known and popular forms

codes&forms { ENABLE EASIER
RECEPTION BY
THE VIEWER

4. PRODUCTION OF MEANING THROUGH PHOTOGRAPHIC GENRE

- > connection of photographic content with specific conventions of the genre
- > selection of genre triggers connotations that the viewer holds
- > photography in advertising employs various genres to direct the message

FOR EXAMPLE > if advertiser wants to call upon the truth
and sincerity, he borrows the characteristics of the
documentary photography genre.

5. METHOD

5.1 ANALYSIS OF ADVERTISED TEXT

The concern of the advertising text analysis is in visual representation of the ad message observed through two distinct modes: verbal and visual (photographic).

In this paper we use Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) conventions of the social semiotics.

5.1.1 ANALYSIS OF PHOTOGRAPHIC MODE

This part of the analysis draws on Lister and Wells (2001) work on photographic and social conventions combined with Jewitt and Oyama (2001) social semiotic analysis through representational, interactive and compositional meaning.

REPRESENTATIONAL MEANING
(people, places, objects represented in the photograph)

INTERACTIVE MEANING
(contact, distance, point of view)

COMPOSITIONAL MEANING
(information value, framing, salience)

5.1.2 CONTEXT OF PHOTOGRAPHIC GENRE

- > basic characteristics of the lomography genre are spontaneity and immediacy
- > genre connotative meaning is natural scene that is sincere

6. CONCLUSION

Social semiotics is valuable analytical tool for semiology but for advertising research as well. It allows us to answer the question of sign variability in different cultural and historical surroundings. Within social semiotics analysing advertised text presents us with the information of how a specific photographic genre is applied in the attempt to reach specific target group. Visual literacy is not crucial for communication but it certainly refines it and makes it more efficient. For a graphic designer this means continual enrichment of the visual vocabulary with resources and conventions, as well as familiarising with formation and change of the meaning within specific discourse.

7. LITERATURE CITED

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