

Simulating an Ad agency

Janice Rahn

Curriculum applications: News Media/Art/Language/Advertising/Social Studies

SUMMARY

Concepts

Students will learn to identify and articulate persistent stereotypes by comparing art history and advertising. They will learn that ads exist within a broader popular culture context of film, art history, and television. Students will learn to “read” a visual communication codes such as gesture, stance, relationship of figure to product, placement of text, relationship of text to image etc. Students will learn to represent an idea collaboratively through dramatic tableau. They will work individually to further construct the image on the computer.

Technical Skills

Students will learn digital camera and photo manipulation skills. They will learn the necessary skills to actualize and push their ideas to create a professional print advertisement.

RATIONALE

This assignment is part of a series on photo manipulation and critical awareness of the digitally constructed image. Advertisements are ubiquitous in everyday life. This provides a relevant accessible source of visual material to work with. Young people will become aware of marketing strategies used to target their interests.

Youth are increasingly targeted by advertisements that dictate how they dress and act. Students this age are forming consumer opinions about what types of products and ideas they want to support. Using ideas presented to them through advertisements, young

people make choices about what products and things will be most effective and worthwhile to buy. Advertisers take advantage of youth, knowing that they are less informed as adults with making decisions about what they purchase. Providing students with an opportunity to learn about the tactics and strategies of advertisers will empower young people to make more informed choices about what they consume.

Adolescents are developing their identities and forming ideologies that will direct their future. Allowing students to place themselves into an advertisement will help them think more critically about who they are and how they want to be represented. Students will be motivated to create an advertisement because they are very interested in consumer culture through the magazines they read and TV they watch.

Summary

This assignment is meant to teach how the photograph, especially in advertising, is constructed. Students work in groups to analyze examples of ads that are organized into different categories such as gender stereotypes, or the exotic in representing ethnicity. I also include images from art history that reveal the persistence of these themes throughout history. The readings for this assignment critique advertising within an art historical context (Berger, J. 1972, Frith, K. 1998, and Sturken, M. 2001). In groups you will view and analyze examples of ads and art history according to gestures, the relationship between figures and between the figure and product, the gaze, computer manipulation, use of text, scale, composition, color, etc. You will individually continue this analysis of your own ads created from theatrical tableaux.

Create a theatrical tableau as a group that advertises a product. Act this out in front of the class while someone takes a digital photo. When I say “unfreeze,” bring the tableau to life with movement and dialogue. This personalizes a critique of the issues as you take on a character. Immediately project the images from the computer to show the translation of the 3-D tableau into a 2-D photo that was framed by the photographer. Technically, this shows the speed of digital representation. Next, you will further construct the image by using Photoshop software, to cut, past and manipulate with filters. This assignment is structured on the motivation to experience, and critique the social

construction of an advertisement, while learning to communicate visually through formal design principles and technical skills.

By creating the tableau you become actively engaged in discussing and acting out the roles of characters portrayed in the ads. In groups you will generate ideas and stage the image. Individually you will manipulate the image, insert a product and text. The layers in photoshop allow them to juxtapose slogans, fonts, and other changes to the image, while allowing you to view the variations. After you create the tableaus, you will write an analysis about the original ads and the final tableau image. You will each present the final image to the group who will respond first with their interpretation to show that meaning is created by the audience. Finally, the creator of the image will explain the intended meaning and the group will critique the image further with questions and suggestions.

Analysis

Consider the process you went through: in your group discussions, creation of the tableau, manipulation of the image, and final group critique. Write at least one page that analyzes the process and what you learned in relation to the readings. Make at least two references to the readings to show an understanding of how to put theory into practice.

Material, hardware and software needed

Glossy magazines with good advertisements – ask students to bring in their own to study their own social context

Computers, Photoshop or other photo manipulation software

Digital cameras, projector

Resources

Propaganda posters to compare advertising with propaganda and to study the design of effective propaganda. For eg. Life Magazines from 1940s, Russian Constructivist posters

Video clip from the lion king (where Scar addresses the troops)

Marketplace video

Berger, John, (1972) *Ways of Seeing*, Penguin Books

Sturken Marita, (2001) Practices of Looking, An introduction to visual culture, Oxford U Press

Technical Skills Required

None

PEDAGOGICAL OBJECTIVES

Concepts

- Students will study the social context of advertising and become critically aware of persistent stereotypes
- Students will learn collaboration and communication in a real life context of working in an ad agency.
- Students will actively participate in problem solving and critical thinking through the process used in advertising.
- They will learn the relationship between audience, communication, and intent to manipulate using text and image.

Technical skills

Students will learn digital camera and photo manipulation skills.

PROCEDURE

1. Collect a sizeable amount of ads from various magazines. Divide these ads into genres: cigarette, alcohol, youth identity, automobiles, youth culture, clothing
2. Present the website “visual literacy” comparing art history to advertising (available on accompanying CD). Ask questions posted with the images to provoke a class discussion.
3. Divide the students into groups. Give them a package of ads from a particular genre and tell them that they are an ad agency for this particular market.
4. Students critique and analyze strategies used by their agency to target their Particular audience. They develop their own strategies.

You are the new wave of advertising. You are aware of how media savvy your audience has become and you will go to all lengths to attract and hold their attention. You have to become experts in the language of persuasion to compete with the millions of competing messages out there! You been approached by a client to design an ad campaign for their product. Your job is to design an ad campaign for your client.

Planning Steps:

Consider the following details and questions:

- a) Product _____
 - b) Brand name _____
 - c) Design a logo for your brand name.
 - d) What words or phrases do you want the public to think when they see your product?
 - e) How is text/language/print used? What is the relationship between the image and written text? How does the image add information to/beyond the text? What does it say?
 - f) What is the market of your product? How will your ad campaign appeal specifically to this market? What audience are you addressing? What are their desires, their secret fantasies? What are their insecurities? Are their any appropriations of social issues?
 - g) What colors are you choosing for your ad campaign? What do these colors have to do with your product and with your audience?
 - h) What strategies are you using to target your audience (relationships between people/figures, people/figures and product, people/figures and viewers)?
 - i) What rhetorical devices of media are you using to engage with your audience (persuasion, irony, satire, humor, hyperbole, etc.)?
 - j) What stereotypes (language, facial expressions, gestures, clothing) are you using?
5. Students create a dramatic tableau to take an original photograph for their ad. Consider stance, gesture, and relationship of figures to each other and to a product, background, keeping in mind that they can insert different backgrounds, people, products, and text on the computer.

6. Groups can present their tableau to the whole class. Someone says, “freeze” and he or she freeze into the tableau. Say “unfreeze” and they begin talking. At this point it becomes a live commercial and stereotypes are often more pronounced.
7. The digital photos are entered into the computer.
8. Students work individually manipulating their image to create their own ad. Text is added.
9. Students print their ad in 8x10” and hand in at least two paragraphs which analyses the process they went through in making their choices.
10. Students critique each other’s ads. The creator of the ad listens to hear how it communicates to the audience before stating the intended meaning and process.

Extended activities and concepts

1. Students can study layout, design, and language of brochures to create their own, with an ironic twist. For example, a grade ten student made a **brochure** about the wonders of the pickle. Again it is recommended that students create original photographs at this point. It takes more problem solving skills to conceive of an idea, and recreate it in a photograph.
2. Students can make television commercials.
3. Students can make **propaganda posters** looking at old magazines from the 40’s. Life Magazines are an excellent resource for their ads during the war. They all have a hidden message that is moralistic about the war, while making people feel good about buying the product. This is a perfect way to begin a unit on war, esp. WWII which was driven by the new media propaganda devices.
4. Students can study **logos and branding**. Silkscreen a t-shirt with their own logo. This can be used as a cooperative group exercise in branding their group. Create a group brand that is expressed in a poster and t-shirt design. Everyone in the group has the same t-shirt. They can study how this creates group cohesion. They can discuss ideals of community and the negative side of tribalism in adolescence where peer influence dominates autonomy and independent thinking.

