Semiotic Effect in Visual Communication

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Abstract

The paper attempts to define the term semiotics of photography. Approach to the theme was started from the concept of semiotics. Since the 60s of the last century, "semiotics", which studies the characters, has begun to affect changes in the humanities and natural sciences. After Ferdinand de Saussure, the study of signs focused on humans need labeling, especially on the logic of "communication" and disclosure "codes" that form the background of diverse cultural phenomena. Semiotics provides to understand in a different way, by language and framework, the link between the image and society. It is also a method that can be used to expose photos, studying mass media, literary texts and systematically analyze a number of other features of the popular culture. In the modern, technologically developed world, man is exposed to photos more than ever (billboards, advertisements, magazines, art photography...). Visual impact, as the most convincing form of attracting attention, affects the formation of opinions and attitudes, encouraging consumption and serves in many other commercial or political purposes. Therefore, semiotics, science which studies signs and their meanings, is becoming more important scientific discipline in explaining sociosemiotic aspects of society. In the paper is analized the photo in a different context using semiotics to understand it. Assuming that the symbolism of the publicly engaged photos exposed to the public differs from those intended for the specialized or limited audience, will be attempted to prove that the former is expected to influence with emotions, more shocking attempt to attract attention, and the later let observers themselves to decode picture.

Keywords: photos, semiotics, advertising, poster, manipulation

Introduction

While preparing the photos it is necessary to follow the rules. They are not strictly defined, but more as a set of guidelines. Some of them include the proper scene framing or seating the objects by the thirds. The development of technology caused the possibility of a photomontage. Advertisers uses this possibility, to get the maximum for the purposes of their campaign. Combination of photos and text is used as well. However, photos can send a message without text, using the symbolism. Semiotics provides a way of understanding, detecting elements of photography and its symbolism and understanding overall context.

In the modern, technologically developed world, man is exposed to photographs more than ever (billboards, advertisers, magazines, art photography...). Visual impact, as the most convincing form of attracting attention, affects the formation of opinions and attitudes, encouraging consumption and serves in many other commercial or political purposes. Therefore, semiotics, that studies signs and their meanings, becomes more important scientific discipline in explaining socio-semiotic aspects of society. The aim of the present work is to summarize the application of semiotics to understand the photo in a various context. In addition, due to detailed analysis of visual symbols influence, this paper offers examples of specific types of photos that are explained and compared.

Assuming that the symbolism of the publicly engaged photos exposed to the public differs from those intended for the specialized or limited audience, the effort is made to prove that in the the former case it is expected more influence at emotions, more shocking attempt to attract attention, while in the later case is left observers themselves to decode picture.

Semiotics of Photography

Semiotics of photography can be described as one part of science that deals specifically with understanding the nature and specific features of meaning, colloquially named - "image". The scope of such specialization includes proving semiotic character of image (photo), studying particularities that differ imaging from other types of meaning (especially visual or meaning based at iconography or intrinsic motivation) and to consider ways in which more kinds of image meanings can differ without losing the essential characteristics of the image category (Sonesson, 1993).

Semiotics as theory of characters, is the sum of the meanings, allusions and presentations (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2006). Photography as a sign needs such exact elements of identifiying that it could be properly explained. According to Scott, the difference between the graphic of image, as its base, and iconography, as the base, is fundamental. It is actually essence of diversity between two directions. Graphical view of the image shifts focus from its essential existence to the very act of shooting; at the same time high number of amateur photographers is the real function of image, better than several art photographer whose work is closed in galleries. Scott further proposes that the graphic nature of photography should be made by placing the object of its authenticity compared to dropping it in the picture. The sequence (A) object / signified ↔ (B) camera ↔ (C) photographer, guarantee of authenticity is in relation (A) ↔ (B). The sequence (A) object ↔ (B) painting ↔ (C) painter, guarantee of authenticity is the relationship (B) ↔ (C) (Scott, 1999, 28). This interdependence suggests objectivity of photography as reality projection, opposing to its subjectivity generated according to the author's vision.

By the opinion of Henry P. Robinson, photographer of the 19th century, the image brings the past into the present, while the photo makes it contrary. A moment captured in photography, therefore, can represent only the past. According to Roland Barthes, "read" photos is not a problem. It need no encryption to a linguistic form, which must be known before its decoding. Perceiving photos is similar to the perception of reality because it enables moving from point to point of what is in front of the camera (van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001, 94). According to David Rodowick, the character can be a very complex structure, which mixes forms and materials of representation, and has meaning only in the context of a photo as unicode message.

Photography can be analyzed using four models: narrative, two variants of the rhetoric and the Laokont model. The narrative model is of key importance in some areas of semiotics, but its usability in semiotics of image is very limited (Sonesson, 1988, 3). According to the Catherine K. Riessman narrative analysis refers to different forms of meaningful content (Riessman, 2003) - image content among others. Dulcie M. Engel, analyzing the paper of R. Barthes "Rhetoric image", concludes that the title or text combined with photo is parasitic message. While accompanying text may give a new meaning, such as the continuation of the story shown in the photography, it usually only transmit connotation already featured on it (Dulcie, 2008, 2). Göran Sonesson proposes five categories of image objects that can be applied narrative analysis on:

time sequence - a series of moving images, as a movie or television program

time set - a set of static images of the same subject matter, such as comics or photo-novellas

multiphase image - a single static image of people from the same event

implying image - a static image that lacks multiphasing, but is made in a well-known event

static pictures - lacking any possibility of placing in an event (Sonesson, 1988, 4).

Rhetorical models for analyzing images are taxonomic and systematic. The taxonomic model, is not widely used although Barthes, in his book "The rhetoric of the image," tried to compile a list of rhetorical figures. This approach has opened more new questions than it provided answers (Sonesson, 1988, 4). Systematic analysis model is much broader and is organized

into a number of subcategories. Algirdas Julien Greimas introduced the concept of **isotopy**, which explains the connection of two or more related terms in a whole, making it meaningful (Hébert, 2011, 41). Implementation was presented by Walter Koch, analyzing, possibly vulgar comic named "Proposal", as presented in Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1. Comics 'Proposal' Strip „Prijedlog" (Koch, 1971., 38)

Figure 2. Explanation of comics using the isotopic (Sonesson, 1988, 45)

Comic itself doesn`t show explicit pornography, but scene sequence leaves room to allusions that observer can use to fill the gaps left in the undisplayed interspace. Figure 2 shows the schematic of narrative analysis, including scenes not shown in the graphic novel. A comic is made as a joke, which alludes to prostitution, but the last scene demystify the whole situation. Such a possibility of different interpretations of photographs, comics, cartoons and other static forms confirms the severity of their categorization and analysis

Laokont model owes its name to ancient Greek sculpture exhibited in the Vatican. That name was used by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing as the title of his book in 1776, in which he dealt with the boundaries between painting and poetry (Sonesson, 1988, 83). Lessing compared those two forms of expression, while in modern semiotics Laokont model still develops, leaning on Peirce and Hjelmslev theory. David Wellbery uses several settings from Hjelmslev theories and establishes a comparison between expression and content, combining the layering of materials, substances and forms (Wellbery, 1984, 110). The expression of photography is supported by the static visibility and has unlimited sources of motives, but is limited by spatial development. Substantially everything is displayed visually, consisting of bodies, objects and other physical forms, but is limited in the possibilities of expanding the image and acts only in one ontological reality.

Summing models, Sonesson concludes that semiotic analysis of photography must contain following elements:

Motive exposed to analysis, such as text in the system, should be subjected to stratification of the large number of repetitive elements, using the combination of multiple rules.

While "text" under study is object of study, the aim of describing the process is basically the "system" of elements and rules.

Connections that take place within the system determines the identity of elements.

The only connections within the system to identify the elements are the differences, which can be reduced to a binary opposites (Sonesson, 1988, 102).

Photography is transferring ideas into reality, with the lack of reality and temporal dimensions (Botz-Bornstein, 2005, 49). Joining the time dimension and photography makes completely different multimedia category (movie, fotonovelu...). Philippe Dubois identified photography as a mirror of reality (Dubois, 1983, 20). The most elementary explanation of the photos from the semiotic point of view was given by Ferdinand de Saussure, defining it as a sign. Just as the other characters it can be separated into two components - a signal (what is seen in the photo) and the symbol (meaning of visible) (Franklin et all, 2005, 244). But these basic setting inflicts problems in analyzing the photos, because the meaning can be explained in several ways. In fact, as many as the observers, so many different explanations may be. When it comes to road signs, displayed symbolism is agreed and everyone "read" such images in the same way, but it is not applicable to, for example, photojournalism or billboards. In the next chapter followes comparative analyzes of the same photo from several different perspectives, trying to show their ambiguity.

Analysis of Photos

Example 1. Advertising photomontage

Figure 3. a,b: Advertising photomontage sports equipment manufacturers 'Arena' (tpmcdermott. wordpress. com & www. themost10. com)

The example shows poster campaign because of the impact on the public. Such a campaign should send a clear message to be provocative enough, but visually creative to attract attention. Advertising campaigns must also send a specific message. Their message is based mainly on the motivational level of action of the viewer, that is, a potential buyer. Figure 3 a and b presents two pictures of the advertising campaign of the company "Arena", which produces sports equipment. Mentioned campaign was about a line of swimsuits "Water instinct". The meaning of both messages are identical. Users of these swimsuits become more skilled, faster, stronger, invulnerable in the water. In the picture a, the swimmer`s teeth are replaced with shark`s teeth, while in the figure b swimmer hunts shark. Both messages have meaning: the user of listed swimsuits turns into a predator. Namely, as the human abilities in the water are reduced compared to those on the land, and having on mind relatively common congenital fear of water, it is clear where these images points.

Another important detail that should be noted is obvious photomontage. In drafting of advertising campaigns, photomontage is acceptable. If photomontage is used on photographs in, for instance, political newspaper articles, then it is not acceptable.

Example 2. Manipulation of public opinion with the photos

Photographies may contain some hidden meaning or send a message that should shape public opinion in someone's favor. Figure 4 shows an American soldier on the street gives a water bottle to Afghan boy. The message that is sent can be explained as: Americans are in Afghanistan to help the local population. The public is particularly sensitive to a children, which emphasizes the advantage of these photos. Why is it even necessary to adorn war? The answer may lie in the fact that the war is a big industry that requires budget expenditures, for which citizens are not ready. The war in Afghanistan, thousands of miles away from the United States is not particulary acceptable to the American citizens. To justify such an operation, the government, among other things, reaches for campaigns that include such motivational photos.

From the semiotic point of view it is possible to ask one more question and get another hidden message. Does the soldier really give a bottle to Afghan boy, or the boy gives a bottle to a soldier? If a boy gives a bottle, a message can be understood as follows: local population accepts international forces as saviors and helps them in warfare. Such messages have exactly the same goal - to achieve public acceptance of the American military intervention in a foreign country.

Analysis of facial expressions and gazes from two participants in the frame, also confirms previous arguments. The soldier has a calm but firm expression, while the boy slightly raised his head which presents pride. All these signs are positive and leads in campain direction.

Figure 4. US soldier in "humanitarian action" in Afghanistan (isnblog. ethz. ch)

Example 3 Art Photography

Photography, as art, is accepted only in the 20th century. Although containing the elements of science and profession, it found its place in museums and galleries and other art facilities. The art photography, unlike other forms, does not send a clear and concrete message. Also, sent message can be ambiguous or hidden, or even non-existent. The photographer has his own perception of telling a story through a photo or, simply, go for aesthetics, colors, shapes, or any other artistic expression. Still, making of photography should follow certain rules that must be respected, but they are not essential to its semiotic understanding.

Analysis of photography "Behind the old window", taken by Albanian artist Adrian Limani, may not be entirely accurate. Likewise, it doesn`t have to be wrong. Art photography is seen in its own unique way by every observer. What is certain is usage of wall as a framework. The window can represent a view in the future or the past. Since the point of view is from the room to the outside, and that the person within the framework is turned with his back (probably on leaving), frame could be perceived as pessimistic. The curved horizon is dramatic, amplified by isolated tree without leaves. The following proposal could be given by stratification of presented elements: bare and damaged wall is a ruin, or a poor house. A person leaving symbolizes separation, and a frame narrowed within a window may represent anxiety. Horizon ends with meadow but its finality and the aforementioned drama may symbolize the end. Art photography often plays with colors, but black and white technique is very common. Its symbolism is different: can represent grief, poverty, depression, and, for example, elegance. Considering the context of the whole image and all of its elements, the impression is that it expresses the sadness

of separation. However, it is possible to reinterpret the symbols and context differently, which would lead to a different course and completion.

Figure 5: Art photo by the author Adrian Limani (www. photographyblogger. net)

Example 4: A painting

The artwork tells the story of Christ's arrestment after a night spent at the foot of the Mount of Olives, representing figures of Christ and Judas, unified in a kiss of treason, surrounded by disciples and Roman soldiers (http://artknowledgenews. com/hr/200812076540/Caravaggio. html).

Explanation of a piece as such says what the artist wanted to present. It is an extraordinary work of art. For those who are familiar with this motiv, symbolism of Judas kiss is not unknown. It revealed identity of Jesus to Roman soldiers. However, if the picture is observed by a person that never saw this work of art before, semiotics reveals its diversity. The painting could be divided into two parts. Jesus and Judas on the left side, and approaching soldiers to the right. On the right side is displayed a character who is believed to be Caravaggio`s self-potrait. The soldiers surroundes two men and want to capture them. Jesus has closed eyes and folded hands, while waiting for his pursuers in Judas embrace. It is difficult without knowledge of the work itself read out that the other character is a traitor. Caravaggio`s painting is full of symbolism. Using red (passion, readiness to react, fight of fire and blood) and blue (strength, composure, stability, wisdom, faith in paradise) indicates the categorical character. The red color also highlights the dynamics of the violence. Furthermore, interwined fingers of Jesus may indicate a prayer or willingness to get handcuffed. Judas wrinkled forehead symbolize cogitation. Self-portrait of the author stands above all, watching the situation with a lantern in his hand. His face shows curiosity. Lantern puts Caravaggio in a different context - mythical. It turns him into Diogenes who found a man among men.

Figure 6: Art painting by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio - Taking of Christ (en. wikipedia. org/wiki/The_Taking_of_Christ_(Caravaggio))

Conclusion

The symbolism of the selected photographies is adapted to the effect that photo must achieve regarding the purpose. Comparing mentioned symbolism it can be concluded about how it is used, as shown in the table below:

Table 1: Example of decoding symbolism of photography

It is clear that the pictures used as advertisements have primary role to attract public attention. This is the first step in the presentation of the offered product. After familiarizing the public with the product, followes the transfer of messages that is metaphorical, not offering a direct, clear message, but tends to provoke targeted associations. By its character, these pictures are the closest to images used in public campaigns. In such cases is noted attempt of provoking positive emotions. A common feature of all these photographies is to encourage the viewer to the desired reaction, in other words to manipulate with public opinion. Such photos are exposed to short views of thousands of people. Therefore, must be striking, use the aggressive symbolism and be observed in the tough competition.

On the other hand, art photography has no ambition to attract wider public. These photos will be exhibited in an intimate setting, for the people who were there specifically in search for art. They decided to set aside time to stand in front of the photo, take a good look and think about it. The artist doesn`t need observers to create conclusions identical to his, but to provide an opportunity to create their own. There is a noticeable difference in creative freedom in developing art photography comparing the others. It is allowed to flirt with different environments, emotions, sending clear messages and understandability. Proof of this is the fact that only in art photography overcome anxiety, sadness, and that this doesn`t diminish its value, because its value is not measured by concrete results (sales increase, changing the public perception), but subjective comments.

The artist`s goal is not to make observer in creating conclusions as he imagined, but to let them make their own. And so the work of art, as well as advertisements can be read in many different ways, which depends on a lot of preconditions

such as the knowledge of the peace or brand, the interest in it or on the subjective perception. There are many variables affecting the decoding, the only moment that links advertising and art is that they are both phenomena of the public world.

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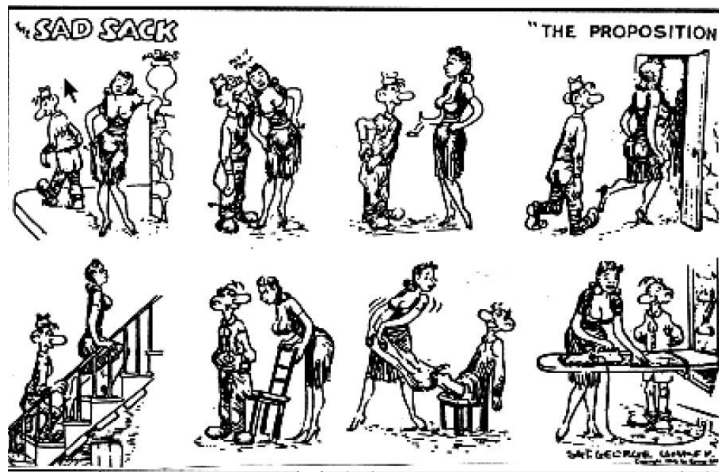
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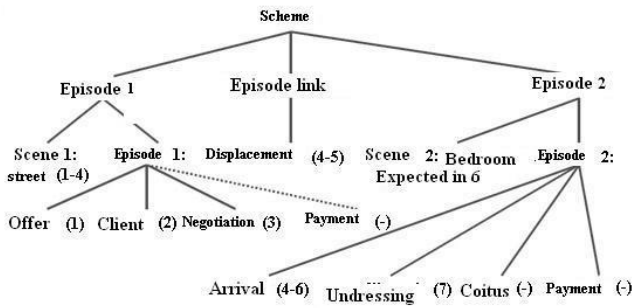
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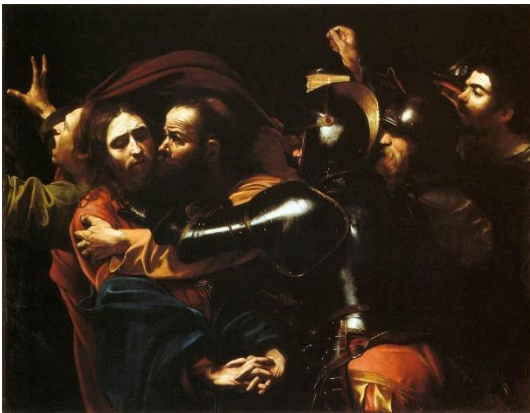

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PHOTOGRAPHY	PURPOSE	SYMBOLISM	EMOTION	EXPECTED IMPACT
1.	Increase in sales	Switching of roles Memorable parts of shark`s anatomy	Manipulating with fear Challenging consumers	Attracting attention Provoking debate
2.	Creating sympathy for the military operation	Soldier and a boy Collaboration	Humanity Empathy	Public awareness Public approval
3.	Personal satisfaction	Framing Curved horizon	Anxiety Loneliness	Encouraging observers to think

		Leaving person	Finality	
4.	Peace of art	Antithesis Manipulation with colours Self-portrait	Anxiety Fear	Telling the story

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