



Open College of the Arts

Tutor report

Student name	Keith Greenough	Student number	416177
Course/Module	Visual Studies 1	Assignment number	3

Dear Keith

Many thanks for your third assignment, and thanks for letting me know about formal assessment. Yes, I had a nice few days' holiday – just a shortish trip to Devon and Cornwall – seems years ago now, as term has started at my university, and so am up to my ears in new students! The expression 'herding cats' seems to apply – but I guess they will get the hang of it eventually.

Feedback on assignment

You have chosen I think my favourite advertising campaign of all time. It is so interesting as to why this is so memorable. You do focus on many of the key aspects, noting the authoritative nature of Alexander. I think, too, that his Eastern European accent linked to his autocratic behaviour does play out subliminally in our minds as in some way representative of the ruling elite from that part of the world. If you think of films, especially those made in the period of the 1960s through to 1980s, the sinister character was frequently Russian (reflecting Cold War rhetoric) and was often also a figure of fun (for example in the Peter Sellers film *Dr. No*). Frequently mistakes with spoken English formed part of such characters' dialogue.

So there are some fairly gentle stereotypes at play in this character, and also in the setting of his grand house. He is seen as vain and concerned with his aristocratic pedigree, but it is done in such a way (helped by the fact that he is a cute animal) that we find this endearing rather than annoying. The adverts also work effectively in the way in which they employ narrative – the earlier adverts in particular told quite complex stories, thus encouraging us to feel that we 'know' this creature well.

As you note, the linguistic content is clear in terms of the words, and their physical location on the screen. We do clearly have to note 2 similar phrases, but also recognise their subtle differences. The 'schoolmaster' type figure reminds us of our own schooldays and being instructed at the blackboard. I think you're correct in drawing attention to Barthes' notion of a literal and

symbolic message occurring simultaneously, and that the literal meaning will have at least one meaning aligned to what we see.

The use of animation these days is also interesting. It is so widespread that it is no longer a novelty, so clearly its use in advertising is not solely based on that factor. Certainly we do understand the 'code', we accept that in this context an animated animal can indeed speak to us. Animation, rather than drawn cartoons, allows for us to understand the fakeness, yet 'buy into' the apparent reality of what we are seeing. Alexander is both clearly not real, yet real enough to have the enormous following to which you refer (and to have encouraged me in the past to have a picture of him as a screen saver!).

Certainly this advertising campaign does firmly lodge the words 'Meerkat' alongside 'Market' in the viewer's mind, and is thus likely to be successful. The fact that the campaign has run for so long would appear to be proof of this working. I think that also the campaign allows us (if we like it) to go even further into pretending that these characters are real: hence the profile on Facebook, and the enormous success of the Harrods meerkat toys a few Christmases back, even though they looked like teddy bears rather than meerkats.

I think the notion of Judith Williamson's argument over juxtaposition – which is so often used in advertising – has become very complicated in the Meerkat adverts. Certainly the latter does align with an increasing trend in advertising generally to be light-hearted, more 'knowing' about the whole process of trying to sell us goods. Many adverts now openly acknowledge this – in other words, they make it clear that we all know what is going on when goods are marketed, but nonetheless brand competitiveness continues, and always will do.

You also note that the whole infrastructure behind the Meerkat advertisements – the goods for sale, the films, the recorded messages, etc. – allow us to play, and being playful is enjoyable for adults. You also show how such a complex and compelling campaign vividly makes tangible an intangible business – a comparison website.

Good analysis.
All best
Pauline

I've noted what you've said about not going for formal assessment – no problem. I've also suggested a generous timespan before submission of the next assignment – you have until October 2013 to complete the course, so we're not under any time pressures.

Tutor name:	Dr Pauline Rose
Date	29 September 2012
Next assignment due	1 December 2012

