

Transforming Pictorial Reference in the Age of Computer-Generated Imagery. A Multimodal View from Current Advertising

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The keynote takes its point of departure from the observation that in a corpus of 564 global ads (Lürzer's Archive 1–6/2019), 41% of the images were doctored images (Stöckl 2021: 197). This is a class of imagery that has also been called computer-generated (print-CGI), or digital imaging/art (Lürzer's Archive 2013/2014: 12–14). Going far beyond re-touching, this image-type “involve[s] a large variety of more or less conspicuous manipulations of image elements and graphic form that have strong repercussions on pictorial content and function” (Stöckl 2021: 196). Such images are fast becoming the technological standard in advertising; they raise sensitive semiotic issues of pictorial meaning and reference, which the keynote will address.

The main claim is that, in contrast to traditional ad imagery, such doctored images no longer serve an indexical, documentary function, showing product qualities, situations of product use or life styles. Instead, they primarily deliver visual image elements that come to be utilized as concepts in multimodal argumentation (Bateman 2018; Roque 2017; Kjeldsen 2012). They invite viewers to apply their reasoning and inferencing powers to determine the relevance of the images for a persuasive argument.

The keynote presents a corpus-based qualitative study of the digitally doctored advertising image, aiming to shed light on the relation between rhetorical manipulations of pictorial form (cf. Phillips/McQuarrie 2004) and their semantic potential for construing a brand/product argumentation. Besides proposing an empirical typology of visual design operations, the keynote will also enquire into the kinds of commercial arguments constructed (Lehn 2011) and the relational propositions set up between pictorial and linguistic content (Mann/Thompson 1986).

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