A STUDY ON THE PHOTOGRAPHIC STORYTELLING

BASED ON VISUAL SEMIOTICS

Young-Do Kim / 3dphoto@netian.com, Seung-Gkyu Jeon / skjeon@kookmin.ac.kr

Kookmin University, Graduate School of Techo Design, 861-1, Chongnung-dong, Songbuk-gu, Seoul, 136-702, Korea

Abstract: Modern visual media or the genre do not show a strong explosive power as a cultural industry completely due to the lack of the story, which do not conform to the advancing speed of the technique. Therefore, it is urgently wanted the fundamental and deep study about the storytelling structure conforming to each media. Accordingly, it is handled here in this thesis, the complementarity of the photographic process and storytelling, as a basic study for the encounter of the visual media and storytelling at first. Basing on the former, we suggest MPP System (Matrix of Pan-Photographic System for making photographic meaning) as a model of photographic storytelling in this thesis.

Keyword: Photographic Storytelling, Visual Semiotics, MPP System, Photograph

1. Introduction

Images of Photography play an essential role in the visual communication environment of modern society. Especially in the fields oriented around the use of photography such as Advertising design, Film design, Movie posters, etc., it is vital that we study and analyze the meaning of photograph. Accordingly, the following thesis will use the basic semiotics derived from Reading-photos and Making photos to develop and propose the frame or the general guide line to "Story telling by Photograph."

2. Photograph as Sign

Saussure differentiates the visual signs into two categories: Visual Expression as being "signifier" and Visual Content as being "signified." Also, if we sum the research relating to visual signs, the common criteria required to become a visual sign is the concept of "Stand for."
The fact that ideas and thoughts are expressed through the realistic images of photograph, we can term photograph as being the visual sign of reality.
To analyze the subject of semiotics, the first requirement is to identify the distinctive features of the subject and separate the differences. Accordingly, there is a distinctive need to finely separate and investigate the mechanical process of making photograph. Unfortunately, the research into photograph up to now has been mainly focused on examining the symbolic images on photographic paper only. Alternatively, this thesis endeavors to examine beyond the images on photo papers and expand it to also include the whole mechanical process of photograph as being the subject of semiotics.

3. Theory of Visual Semiotics

As the applicable areas of semiotics increase, so too have been significant increases in the analysis of Visual Semiotics of photograph which is now, more than ever, being analyzed at much more finely detailed level. This is especially so due to the large increase in popular culture’s interest towards photograph leading to increasing number of large groups of media proposing number of theories focused on visual semiotics.

F. de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce have contributed much to this study of semiotics. Especially Peirce's theories on Icon, Index, and Symbol proposed one of the most fundamental concepts in Visual Semiotics. In Christian Met's statement, he claimed that "to investigate, study, and inquire an image is not about making an image but more importantly to generate discussion on the image." In relation of photographs to Advertising, Roland Barthes proposed the interpretation of relationship between the structures of wordings to images. J.M. Floch proposed that "the meaning of any language, such as talking, writing, gesture, picture, etc is created from the result of combining the two planes 'expression plane' and 'content plane.'

4. Basic Essentials of Photographic Storytelling

To read the meanings in detail, we need to divide and differentiate the continuous phenomena of the world and its people into levels of individual elements. Similarly, we also need to uniformly divide the continuous mass of continuous photo images. In order to uniformly know the meaning from photographic paper, we need to firstly understand the process of photograph's ENCODING and DECODING. In photograph, the ENCODING usually occurs during the process of making the photograph whilst the DECODING process is required during the appreciative stage of the photograph. Accordingly, the process of investigating the rules of these codes is the process of photographic storytelling.

5. MPP System (Matrix of Pan-Photographic System)
In F. de Saussure's view, the meaning of language is created by the relationship between Syntagmatic axis of language and the Paradigmatic axis of language. Accordingly in MPP system, we must uniformly divide and place the orderly steps of photo making process on the horizontal "X" axis (Syntax axis) and place the each row of paradigm into the vertical "Y" axis (Paradigm axis). And then place the "Z" axis at a lower rank of the paradigm. In other words, Photograph occurs as a result of a union between an individually each step selected from the Syntagmatic axis and an individual level of each step selected from the Paradigm axis. Accordingly, this system instinctively shows that when the latitude and the longitude of each individual stages of photography are weaved, it can produce one form of photographic story telling for that particularly weaved paradigm. Also, we are able to directly identify, to large degree, how big or small the effects of technical levels of photograph has on the creation of meaning to the photograph.

Ultimately, we are able to achieve significant unity in the meaning of the photograph by uniting all the repertories involved at the macro level of the photograph into systematic arrangement. Thus the meaning and the narrative of a photograph can be expressed through the complex inter-association of X, Y, and Z axis of the MPP Matrix. According to the matrix, the process of making a photograph follows an order of different stages of photograph with each stages of photograph as being the bases for a factor in the matrix. But, to the eyes of the appreciator, who only sees the photograph on paper, they are unable to see all the factors of the axis because the photo is expressed only in the form of flat space. In other words, even though the actual photograph is entrenched with the factors of time, the characteristics of time on flat photographic paper is compressed to a one flat space. Accordingly, the final images on photographic paper cannot show the linearity of time, thus, ultimately becoming an incomplete language. This makes it difficult to understand the true theme and the value photography story telling

6. Conclusion

Photograph is a visual genre produced through media filter and as such we it is prone to distortions and incomplete analysis. Thus, it is crucial that we analyze the distortions and fulfill the incomplete analysis of this genre. However, analysis conducted by critics who have little experience can lead to dangerously superficial or even wrong conclusions. This is because photograph, being expressed through the filters of Media, is susceptible to distortion that media brings. This is the very element that is ultimately lead photograph into incomplete analysis.

Up till now, majority of the leading research on photograph semiotics has only been concerned with the view of printed images but considerably lacked the research into the actual process of making photograph and the technical mechanisms of photograph. Accordingly, this thesis attempts to highlight the importance of but up to now ignored, the actual technical process of making and developing photographs as one of the key elements in determining the meaning of visual semiotics in photography. This is done through a systematic model called the MPP (Matrix of Pan-Photographic) System, The thesis endeavors to propose that the determination of theme of photographic storytelling can be achieved through the application of the MPP System where the MPP System will interlink the relationship between the content (image on print) and the actual physical process of making a photo-making to form a more complete visual semiotics.

7. References