

# Nike's "Find Your Greatness Campaign" a Discourse Analysis

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Maržić, Dea

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**UNIVERSITY OF RIJEKA  
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH**

Dea Maržić

**NIKE'S "FIND YOUR GREATNESS" CAMPAIGN:  
A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the B.A. in English Language and  
Literature and German Language and Literature at the University of Rijeka

**Supervisor:  
Irena Meštrović Štajduhar**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this B.A. thesis is the discourse analysis of Nike's "Find Your Greatness" advertising campaign, released at the time of the 2012 Olympics in London. The analysis is preceded by a brief overview of important theories, findings and terminology in the fields of discourse analysis, visual analysis, and advertising. Of a total of twenty individual adverts, the first and last released advertisements were chosen as representative of the main approaches and methods used throughout the campaign. In order to examine the underlying principles of the campaign, as well as connect it to the overall sociocultural and political context, three categories were analysed – the audio-visual aspect, the text, and the participants – with attention to how these elements interact and mutually affect one another, thus jointly creating the overall message of the campaign.

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## **1. Introduction**

In contemporary Western society, advertising is everywhere. Walking or driving about town, one's vision is constantly interrupted by billboards. Magazine pages are filled with advertisements, frequently masked as actual magazine pages, i.e. articles. Broadcasting networks air commercial blocks running almost the length of a short film; some may very well be considered short films, falling more squarely into the genre of artistic production than anything else. Browsing the Internet, advertising is there; opening one's mail at home, advertising is there again. In the broadest sense, even the ways one chooses to dress, wear their hair, or talk, move, and gesture may be considered a form of advertising, a way of creating a personal brand, signalling to the outside world who one is – or rather, who one wants to be perceived as.

Such lore and variety is analogous to genres like literature, poetry, visual arts, and music. Analysis of advertising is thus not only justified, but also vitally important, due to its nature as a discourse based on an active attempt at persuading someone into spending their money on a product or adhering to a particular ideology. Since its early beginnings, culminating in the formulation of the industry as we know it today during the 1950s (Brierley, 2002, p. 133) advertising has shaped modern society in ways one is often completely unaware of. One historical example is that of weddings – previously ordinary civic affairs, they included a sparse list of guests and no white dress. The modern “big white wedding” can be seen as a direct product of heavy marketing aimed at the middle class, which played on their insecurities and the desire to have a taste of the luxurious, creating in the process an entirely new industry that thrives to this day (Connover, 2016). If any genre inevitably stems from and shapes society, none does the latter as drastically as advertising, being fundamentally based on the idea of persuasion.

However, the multimodality of advertising as a genre poses a great problem for an attempt at a comprehensive linguistic analysis. Language itself is a complex, often tricky matter to dissect, but contemporary advertisements bring into this even more issues, such as analysing moving images, and with even more difficulty, music (Cook, 2001, p. 42). Another problem in analysis is its nature of constant change (Cook, 2001, p. 221). In an effort to avoid being stale and dull to the ever more demanding viewers, advertising regularly flips itself on its head, it seems, as soon as certain rules may be ascertained. Like any genre, contemporary advertisements carry in each individual instantiation a tradition, intertextuality, dependence on and divergence from previous models. This is unspoken, but assumed to be known by the general public, a shared “cultural knowledge” (Goddard, 2001, p. 79), comparable to the tradition of oral epics.

Thus, advertising forms an inseparable part of contemporary Western culture. It is its product; arising out of the particularities of a capitalist structure, reflecting the social circumstances of such a world, and adapting to its fears, needs and desires in order to achieve the highest possible degree of persuasion. On the other hand, it participates in the production of contemporary culture, frequently entering the collective mind as a piece of global or national lore, and forming a subtle, but pervasive part of one’s daily life.

## **2. Literature Review**

Previously on the margins of scientific interest (Cook, 2001, p. 221) – often seen as trivial, with no artistic value, and criticised for its inherently manipulative nature – in contemporary times, advertising has been recognised as a well of interesting questions for potential research in a number of different fields, including linguistics, visual arts and design, psychology, and economics. Such fertile ground is provided by virtue of it being what Cook (2001) calls a “parasite discourse” (p. 219), i.e. a discourse appropriating different genres, like literature, science, or performance arts, but ultimately without an individual “voice” extant on its own. Therefore, to approach any advertisement as completely and comprehensively as possible – be it a brief classified in the local newspaper, or a global campaign produced by a multinational company – one finds oneself in need of a variety of tools from different fields of inquiry.

### **2.1. Advertising as discourse**

In its essence, advertising is a communicative enterprise, a most fundamentally linguistic act whereby a sender (in this case, a product manufacturer via an advertising company) sends a particular message to a receiver, hoping this message will be successfully decoded, thus yielding desired results: the purchase of advertised product(s) or adherence to a particular ideological view. The field of linguistics offers, therefore, a very useful tool for a detailed examination of advertising – discourse analysis.

Discussion on discourse analysis often constitutes the first chapter on any book dealing with a specific type of discourse, including those written on advertising. As Cook (2001) says, “Language is always in context” (p. 5), and that is a key notion in his approach to advertising. To him, context consists of the following: substance, music and pictures, paralanguage, situation, co-text, intertext, participants, and function (p. 4). The tripartite division of his book is quite instructive in dealing with the individual elements of any

advertisement. Firstly, he discusses the materials carrying the advertising message, paying special attention to its visual and auditory aspects. Secondly, he deals with the text, the advertising message itself, its presentation and the meaning behind it, describing the effects of some analogous literary devices such as linguistic parallelism, prosody, metaphors, etc. Finally, he discusses the people, i.e. the participants creating and receiving the message, and the various tools used to create relationships between them. Furthermore, Cook's (2001) work is especially useful in providing valuable terminology for talking about advertising, such as the difference between hard sell and soft sell or reason and tickle ads (p. 15).

A comprehensive and approachable account of the theory and practice behind discourse analysis is provided by Gee (1999). He takes a stance, shared by most prominent contemporary linguists, which underscores the importance of “language-in-use” (p. 5). In other words, he asserts that text alone is not sufficient for adequate analysis. Language never happens in isolation; it is accompanied by certain gestures, facial expressions, tone of voice – what Cook (2001) calls paralinguage (p. 4); it happens in certain situations, at certain places and between certain people, during certain times. All this informs the way language is used, and in combination with the text, ultimately creates Discourse (Gee, 1991, p. 7). More important than its communicative is the constructive purpose of language. It is an “active building process” (Gee, 1991, p. 11), building, shaping and enforcing society, while in turn being built, shaped and enforced by it. The context is therefore integral to the understanding of language, just as language is crucial to better understanding of the context.

A very industry-based view comes from Brierley's *The Advertising Handbook* (2002). As its title suggests, this work is aimed primarily at advertisers, detailing the logistics of the industry, but a part of the book also concerns the persuasive methods and their language. Approaches have changed through time; in the 1920s the main distinction was between reason-why and atmosphere advertising, the first appealing to the rational, and the second to



the emotional side of the viewer (p. 132). Further developments like the unique selling proposition (p. 133), and creating a brand image, i.e. emotional selling proposition (p. 134), came about as the industry developed. All of these were focused on differentiating the product and/or associating it with certain desirable qualities that would evoke emotional responses and positive implications in the viewer's mind.

## **2.2. Elements of advertising discourse**

### *2.2.1. Language*

An important element of analysis is the language of persuasion. Hosman (2002) gives a general overview of current findings on the matter. On a syntactic level, these findings indicate that simple structures, positively worded statements and active voice all help in comprehension, and by extent, persuasion (p. 373). This is consistent with the information processing model of persuasion, which dictates that the smaller amount of information needed to be processed, the greater degree of persuasion occurs (Meyers-Levy & Malavya, 1999, p. 47.) However, the larger quantity of information to be processed also ensures stronger and more lasting effects of persuasion.

On a lexical level, Hosman (2002) deals with lexical diversity, language imagery, intensity and equivocalness, while the level of language use concerns pragmatic implication and power of speech style, as well as the effectiveness of standard versus nonstandard language. While it is possible to draw some general conclusions, the author feels that the subtleties and variations within these categories have not yet been studied thoroughly enough. In particular, he calls for future research to place greater emphasis on how all these affect attitude change rather than just message comprehension and recall (p. 383). While his text provides little in the way of concrete results to build upon, the discussion of various terms and notions is useful in analysing the ways language operates in advertising.

More specific insights come from authors like Cook (2001), Goddard (2001) and Tanana (1994). All conclude that the language used in advertising often draws on “the genre of conversation” (Cook, 2001, p. 173), that is, spoken language. This serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it attempts to appeal to a mass audience, not all of which shares the same level of education. Secondly, it attempts to establish a more personal relationship that might alleviate the distrust the viewer naturally feels towards the advertiser (Tanana, 1994, p. 59), in turn making them more susceptible to persuasion.

One of the most obvious ways this is done is through the use of pronouns, with the frequent use of “we” or “you” to simulate the notion of having a conversation (Cook, 2001, p. 161). Puns and metaphors are used to the same effect, with the added advantage of stimulating the viewer’s interest (Tanana 1994, p. 64 ).

### 2.2.2. *Visual imagery*

The visual comprises another important element of any advertisement. This is the focus of Kress’ and van Leeuwen’s *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (2006), a work in which they attempt to establish “a visual grammar” – a framework delineating regularities in how depicted elements combine into “visual statements” (p. 1). In many ways, they approach this task as linguists. Their method relies heavily on Halliday’s (1978) social semiotic approach to language and metafunction theory, and is ultimately built on a very linguistic attitude which holds that images can carry meanings and are therefore susceptible to analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 20). However, while many comparisons between the visual and the verbal are made throughout the book, the authors refrain from drawing direct analogies between images and text (p. 19). Instead, they find that “the semiotic modes of writing and visual communication each have their own particular means of realizing what may be quite similar semantic relations”, some of which “can only be realized visually and

others only linguistically, or some more easily visually and others more easily linguistically”.

(p. 46)

### *2.2.3. Realisation of relationship between participants*

Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) linguistically-informed approach to the visual is therefore quite suited to explicating some of the elements one may find in a multimodal creation such as an advertisement. A key differentiation the authors make is between the participants in the process of sending and receiving a visual message. Represented participants (p. 48) are the characters of the advertisement, the subjects shown in a particular action, while interactive participants (p. 48) refer to the actual people in the communication process behind coding and decoding a particular visual message. In the case of advertising, these include the company commissioning an advertisement, the producers making it and, most importantly, the viewers ultimately watching it.

In determining the relationships between these participants, the size of frame and social distance are of great significance. The camera shots range from close, over medium, to long, delineating personal, social and public distance respectively (p. 124), and thus determining the degree of connection the viewer is expected to experience in relation to the represented participants and the action unfolding. This connection may be strengthened or weakened by the distinction between a “demand” image (p. 117) – in which the represented participant gazes towards the camera, and therefore the viewer, directly addressing them, or an “offer” image (p. 118), where no such direct address happens, the viewer instead being placed in the position of an objective observer. The angle of the shot determines the power distribution between the participants – a represented participant filmed from a higher angle effectively places the power in the viewer's hands, while the same participant filmed from a lower angle seems imposing and authoritative, thereby holding power over the viewer. All these elements may be combined and recombined to evoke different meanings and multiple

combinations thereof, making the visual equally as dynamic and meaning-constructive as the textual.

Represented participants can further be analysed in terms of what Gee (1999) calls cultural models (p. 43). These “socioculturally defined groups of people” (p. 43) serve as prototypes - Goddard (2001, p. 62) would call them stereotypes – of different social identities which the human mind has categorised according to certain patterns it encountered in a particular society. This economises communication, enabling its participants to automatically assume certain positions, expecting a certain type of “Discourse” and “Conversation” (Gee, 1999, p. 12), and modifying their own to fit the situation. Cultural models are therefore crucial in discourse analysis, since they are inseparable from what is said, often answering the question of *why* it was said in that particular way.

#### *2.2.4. Auditory aspect*

A rather difficult point of analysis is the sound. At the textual level, sound comprises such aspects of the paralanguage as intonation, stress, tone of voice, as well as the rhythm underlying the text. It is an exceptionally important element in understanding genres like spoken poetry, since the prosody created by certain sounds yields particular effects, thus expanding on or adding to the linguistic meaning. Onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance and associated devices have long been an integral part of analysing any literary text, and such use of sound is equally as important in analysing advertisements, it inevitably adding to, transforming or sometimes negating the surface level meaning.

Hosman (2002) describes a study in which a table was drawn, giving more “weight” to certain phonetic features over others (p. 372). According to this model, politicians’ names were analysed and it was found that it was possible to predict by a large margin the winners of various elections based on the presence or absence of certain sounds in their names.

Cook (2001) also speaks of the importance, as well as the problems, of analysing sound, and in particular, music in advertisements. Melodies have the ability to carry certain connotations (p. 50) – some may bring melancholy, others may evoke enthusiasm. A crescendo at a particular time, a use of certain instruments, the “swelling” of music – or the total absence of all these – creates an added layer of meaning, inseparable from the overall message of any linguistic instance that includes sound.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Aims of the study**

The aim of this paper is to conduct a case study of Nike's "Find Your Greatness" campaign of 2012, delineating the persuasive methods and devices used, as well as relating those to the discourse of advertising and the cultural context in which such discourse proliferated. For this purpose, individual elements – namely the audio-visual, linguistic and representational aspect – were submitted to analysis, focusing also on the effects created by their mutual interrelationships.

#### **3.2. Corpus**

The "Find Your Greatness" campaign was launched by Nike, a multinational corporation that specialises in designing and manufacturing sportswear. It was released in 2012, around the time of the Olympics held in London. It is comprised of 20 individual advertisements, shown on TV sporadically preceding the Olympics. The final film, assembled from the previous short TV spots, was released through social media on July 25, its TV premiere set for July 27, coinciding with the opening ceremony in London. (Nike Launches "Find Your Greatness" Campaign, 2012)

Due to the limited scope of this thesis, the focus is on two of these adverts: the first and the last one released. The first advertisement, called "The Jogger" sets an archetype to be followed by the successive nineteen videos, with slight variations and deviations. The final advertisement puts together bits and pieces from the preceding films, functioning as a summary and conclusion of the entire campaign. These two advertisements present the two ends of the spectrum, illuminating important similarities and differences in approach to persuasion, but ultimately contributing to the same overall idea behind the campaign.

The campaign as a whole is a product advertisement (Cook, 2001, p. 15), attempting to persuade more viewers into buying various Nike merchandise. It does so primarily by creating

what Cook (2001) calls a fusion (p. 108) – an assemblage of positive associations attributed to the brand, therefore increasing the viewer’s susceptibility to persuasion, both in terms of agreeing with the overall message and, in doing so, making it more likely for them to buy Nike products.

Instead of directly stating facts about the products, the campaign employs a soft sell technique (Cook, 2001, p. 15), relying more on evoking a general mood which might persuade the viewer into believing that this product will make their life better. This is a long-term goal, associated with the brand image (Brierley, 2002, p. 134), hopefully creating a permanent link in the viewer’s minds between Nike and the positive associations shown in the campaign. Almost inseparably, this technique means the campaign falls into the category of a tickle advertisement (Cook, 2001, p. 15), meaning it appeals not to the viewer’s reason, but their emotion. Throughout the campaign, garnering sympathy, creating comedic effects or establishing a personal, friendly or devotional atmosphere are used in order to strengthen the emotional response.

Due to its release during the Olympics, this campaign simultaneously falls into the “sudden burst” and “slow drip” categories as proposed by Cook (2001, p. 16). The former is a result of the campaign’s timeframe being specifically set around the Olympics, cashing in on the hype surrounding them, and building on already existing emotions and associations with such a manifestation. This context is important both for understanding the contrasting cultural models at work throughout the campaign, as well as the success and attention it received. On a microlevel, an element of the “slow drip” is noticeable in that the individual advertisements were not aired at once, but released sporadically.

### **3.3. Procedures**

In the overall approach to each advertisement, a division analogous to Cook’s (2001) distinction of materials, text and people was employed, underlying three main segments to

each advert: the visuals, the text, and the participants. Each of these three categories was further analysed according to the theories and sources described in the preceding chapter. Firstly, the visuals were analysed in terms of van Leeuwen and Kress' (2006) visual grammar and terminology. Secondly, the text underwent a detailed analysis based on elements from Gee (1999), Hosman (2002), Cook (2001) and Goddard (2001). Finally, the participants were described using, again, van Leeuwen and Kress' (2006) terminology, as well as Gee's (1999) theory of cultural models.

This integrated framework ensured a multidisciplinary approach suited to the multimodal nature of advertising in general, and this campaign specifically. The following analysis is therefore structured according to this framework, but keeping in mind the intertwined nature of these elements who constantly mutually affect one another.



## 4. Analysis and discussion

### 4.1. The Jogger

The first in the series of twenty individual adverts is a minute-long video called “The Jogger”, which sets the general principles to be followed throughout the whole campaign until the final film.

#### 4.1.1. *The Visuals*

The screen is clearly horizontally divided into two levels. Below, an empty grey road, flanked with greenery; above, the pale blues and pinks of the sky at dawn. At the very centre of the composition the viewer sees, at first, a small amorphous figure, moving towards the camera, while the camera simultaneously moves backwards. During the first seconds of the advertisement, there is no sound but the chirp of crickets, completing the atmosphere of a quiet early morning. The figure slowly, but steadily, approaches the camera, and the viewer can soon identify it as a person running. The camera continues its backward movement as this person comes into view more clearly; the sound of their footsteps also coming into focus. At this point, the narration begins:

“Greatness. It’s just something we made up. Somehow we’ve come to believe that greatness is a gift, reserved for the chosen few. For prodigies. For superstars. And the rest of us can only stand by watching.  
You can forget that. Greatness is not some rare DNA strand, it’s not some precious thing. Greatness is no more unique to us than breathing.  
We’re all capable of it. All of us.”

During the narration, the figure closes the distance between the camera, now identifiable as an overweight teenager in workout clothes, breathing heavily, jogging continuously towards the viewer. As the monologue ends, the boy continues running, with a look of stress, fatigue, and out-of-breath determination on his face. Across his chest, now forming the focal point of the composition, the campaign’s tagline “FIND YOUR GREATNESS” and, below it, Nike’s logo appear.

The general principle behind the video, and the campaign in its entirety, is that of playing on assumptions and preconceptions. A particular image is offered to the viewer, only to be subverted or transformed, thus creating a new, multilayered message. Visually, this is done via camera positioning. The video begins with a very long shot, the figure shown at public distance, not even recognisable at first. During the course of the advert, this evolves into a medium close shot, the figure reaching close personal distance.

What starts, to the viewer, as an objective, detached observation of an unknown subject, is therefore soon transformed into a rather personal ordeal. The angle also plays a role in establishing a particular relationship between the interactive and the represented participant – filmed frontally, at eye level, it puts both in equal positions of power. This creates equity between the participants, subsequently increasing the viewer's tendency to relate to the protagonist – a key element of the campaign, one that helps in carrying out its essential message. In line with this established connection, any viewer is free – indeed, encouraged – to project their own flaws and insecurities onto this overweight boy, so different from the culturally shared definition of a successful athlete, thus relating their own struggles with this individual's quest for personal greatness.

Furthermore, the transformation from a long shot to a close-up is both subject-initiated and camera-initiated (van Leuween & Kress, 2006, p. 262). In addition to increasing the dynamic quality of the advert, this also plays a role in strengthening the overall message. The boy is shown as pushing his limits, but ultimately succeeding in catching up with the continually mobile camera, and on a symbolic level, the new definition of Greatness Nike is in the process of creating.

#### *4.1.2. The Text*

As the scene unfolds, the viewer is addressed in the soft-spoken voice of the famous British actor, Tom Hardy. His monologue is punctuated by the visual imagery discussed

above, both the linguistic and the visual thus inseparably working to deliver the final message. The intimacy and quietness of his voice correlate with the visual serenity, combining into an atmosphere of a meditative tranquillity, an almost sacred moment.

The key word of the monologue is, quite clearly, the word “greatness”. It is the first spoken word of the advertisement, and the last written one. Throughout the text, it is repeated four times. This frequent repetition in a relatively short text works in two ways – it calls up this particular concept in the viewer’s head, simultaneously undermining it by overusing the word. This is helped by the use of indefinite pronouns. Greatness is described as “*something* we made up”, “not *some* rare DNA strand”, “not *some* precious thing” – its very definition, seen through the prism of negation, thus being deconstructed. The result is a relativisation of the term, which brings it down to a certain level and makes it more approachable – both linguistically and conceptually – to any average individual. Now that it had been stripped off its previous connotations and implications – of its “situated meaning” (Gee, 1999, p. 40) in Western culture – the narrator can begin to attach new meanings to it. In this case, greatness may very well be as simple as the effort of a young boy to achieve it.

The use of pronouns, especially personal ones, has further significance in the monologue. The narrator’s pronoun of choice is the first person plural “we”. While this is a pronoun frequently used in advertising to denote the producer or manufacturer, establishing a sense of authority (Goddard, 2001, p. 30), in this case it operates quite differently. The “we” here encompasses both the message sender and receiver, the narrator and “narratee” (Goddard, 2001, p. 31), all the participants, represented and interactive. This sense of unity scaffolds the two important elements already discussed: it establishes a more personal connection with the viewer, while also placing emphasis on “greatness” as something within everyone’s reach. The only instance of the more authoritative “you” is the narrator urging the

viewer to “forget that”, to forget this old and outdated definition of greatness as a rare talent and privilege.

What Cook (2001) calls linguistic parallelism (p. 136) often plays a crucial role in any advertisement, as it does in this one. It serves not only to make the text more interesting and attractive to the viewer, but also to advance the message. For example, the juxtaposition of phrases “reserved for *the chosen few*” and “we’re *all* capable of it; *all of us*” is not merely poetic contrast; it also hammers home the elemental point about greatness being not an innate talent of a small percentage of the population, but an innate ability within each individual. This is further emphasised through a comparison of greatness to breathing – something generally perceived as ordinarily unattainable, to something so common and ordinary one does not have to put any amount of conscious effort into doing it.

#### *4.1.3. The Participants*

The strongest element carrying Nike’s message about greatness is the represented participant, the protagonist of the advertisement. Following Gee’s (1999) theory of cultural models, the boy is shown as representative of several stereotypes people tend to unconsciously attach to the image of an obese American teenager. Various presumptions usually include the following: such a person is not very good looking, not particularly athletic and not talented. Therefore, they are probably not very popular, which must mean they are also not very happy. They might even be a little unintelligent. Even if all these unfortunate implications remained absent, most people would still consider the boy’s weight to be the result of his own blind hedonism, lack of self-control and laziness.

All these characterise a person diametrically opposite to the contrasting cultural model. This model is not explicitly shown on screen, but is clear from the very start, particularly in the context of a sports brand’s commercial released during the 2012 Olympics. Indeed, the Olympic athlete is the epitome of this unspoken cultural model. Such a person

would be considered hard-working, determined, exhibiting incredible command of their mind and body. Almost in a chain reaction, these desirable qualities are followed by others, less logically linked to the idea of athleticism – such a person is then probably conventionally attractive, popular, sociable and happy; undoubtedly talented and amazing, truly a *great* human being, and most importantly, their greatness is derived from something within, unique and inaccessible to most “ordinary” people.

However, as demonstrated in the previous sections, this is an advertisement that takes an idea only to subvert it; contrast is its *modus operandi*. Thus, these two clashing cultural models are married into an unconventional, almost laughable one, embellishing this overweight child with all the attributes of a medal-winning Olympic athlete. The old notion of greatness is deconstructed, its revised postulate scrawled upon the new face that represents it – greatness is something to be found. It is everyone’s striving towards it. This boy is not fat or lazy; he is an active agent in his own life. He is not weak, or average, or miserable – he is *great*, simply by virtue of trying to be.

This also plays on the underdog effect, generating sympathy in the viewer. The boy is no longer the subject of ridicule; instead, he is someone to root for. All this adds to the sense of “sameness” between the viewer and the protagonist. By showing a marginal case, one deviating from the usual depiction of a concept such as greatness, Nike invites the viewer to relate to the protagonist, projecting their own circumstances on him. The viewer’s particular obstacle, mentally or physically, may not be a weight problem – but it is certainly closer to that than the abstract hindrances one can only imagine Olympic athletes may encounter in their extraordinary lives. A sense of a personal relationship is thus further amplified by the viewer’s self-insertion into the world of the advertisement. In this way, both the represented and the interactive participant are shaped and manipulated by the two cultural models described above.

## **4.2. The Final Film**

Visually and linguistically the most complex element of the entire campaign, this final advertisement is an assemblage of sorts – uniting into a coherent whole many of the previously released advertisements, serving thus as a conclusion to the campaign as a whole.

### *4.2.1. The Visuals*

Differences between the first and the last advertisement may be noticed from the very start. For one, there is no absence or reduction of sound; the film is filled with music from the start. Secondly, it is much more fast-paced, dispensing with the individually-oriented tone of the previous advertisements, which all used focusing devices as a way of bringing to attention one particular individual or group. In the case of the final film, the viewer's attention is grabbed with dynamic, visually attractive, quickly changing shots, paralleled linguistically by the vivid, motivational speech of the narrator.

The film begins with a series of shots showing places all over the world, connected by virtue of their name being or having something to do with London, clearly connoting the Olympics. This visual listing is musically followed by repetition of the same notes, an auditory effect evoking the checking of a list. Soon, these landscape shots begin to be interpolated with images of various people of diverse genders, races and appearances. These represented participants are mostly protagonists from the previous eighteen individual advertisements, like a man working out at the London gym, cyclists in Nigeria, boys playing rugby in South Africa. After several shots, all associated with a common denominator, but clearly distinct – combining the ideas of individualism and unity into one – the narration begins: “There are no grand celebrations here. No speeches, no bright lights.”

The music picks up, a new underlying melody now added to it, working much in the way paragraphs would: after a brief introduction, the main body of the message is now set out, followed by a greater amount of musical complexity. The next shot shows young African

children playing rugby, the same protagonists from the first few establishing seconds. One of the boys is zoomed in on as he takes the ball, his face now in profile, running towards another boy with determination. This shot is followed by a new line of monologue: “But there are great athletes.”

That same boy is now shown in a wider shot, pushing his teammate or opponent – it does not really matter – with a smile on his face, laughing audibly. The shot changes, now to a close-up of an adult Black man in profile, concentrating on the following action, revealed as the shot widens. The man and his fellow surfers run towards the ocean. This is shown first from a bird’s view, and then from a medium angle, right in the action, as if the cameraman and consequently the viewer were one of the surfers running at that very beach. The shot then changes to a Black female boxer, training.

The narrator continues: “Somehow we’ve come to believe that greatness is reserved for a chosen few. For superstars.” As the narrator ends this line, a shot of a young baseball player is shown at very close personal distance. He is shaking his head, as if to punctuate the narrator’s sentence and simultaneously negate it. The music now reaches a full crescendo – again, a musical parallel to the main conflict, or culmination, as found in literary texts. The narrator continues his speech across a shot that formed an integral part of one of the individual advertisements, revealing that same boy to be disabled, missing the lower part of his left hand. The boy throws the ball, and the shot quickly changes to marathon runners in London, Canada.

“The truth is, greatness is for all of us.” A woman is running as the narrator says this, standing in close-up upon finishing the race, a satisfied, yet exhausted smile on her face. “This is not about lowering expectations”, the narration continues over an image of a paraplegic cyclist. The shot rapidly changes to a young wrestlers’ training. “It’s about raising them for every last one of us”. This sentence, and in particular the pronoun “us” is clearly

punctuated by a group of Muslim female footballers, huddled in a circle, putting their hands together and raising them with a loud cheer.

The music swells. Swimmers are shown in a long shot, from a high angle; this rapidly changes to volleyball players filmed frontally. “Because greatness is not in one special place”, the narrator says, over another sequence of fast-paced location shots. “And it is not in one special person”, he continues, this line followed by even more rapid succession of images of different protagonists. “Greatness”, he says, the shots almost frantically shifting between different individuals, until finally stopping on the image of a young boy atop a bright yellow board, “is wherever somebody is trying to find it.”

The boy is seen from behind, looking down, scratching the back of his head in preparation for what appears to be him a quiet scary prospect of jumping into the pool. The campaign’s tagline “FIND YOUR GREATNESS” is written over his back, now the compositional centre. The words fade out. Finally, as a visual conclusion to the film, and indeed the message the whole campaign has been building up to, the boy jumps, now filmed in a longer shot. The music stops, and Nike’s logo appears over the centre of the screen – a visual answer to the quest for greatness, as it were. With the end of music, the final moment of the film is by contrast a quiet, almost ordinary one, punctuated by the boy’s splash as he finally reaches the water.

#### *4.2.2. The Text*

“There are no grand celebrations here. No speeches, no bright lights. But there are great athletes. Somehow we’ve come to believe that greatness is reserved for the chosen few. For the superstars. The truth is, greatness is for all of us. This is not about lowering expectations. It’s about raising them for every last one of us. Because greatness is not in one special place, and it is not in one special person. Greatness is wherever somebody is trying to find it.”

The key element in the monologue is, yet again, the word “greatness”. Repeated four times – quite frequently in a relatively short linguistic stretch – it thematically links to the first



monologue of the campaign, in part borrowing and paraphrasing from it: “Somehow we’ve come to believe that greatness is reserved for the chosen few. For the superstars.” This intertextual feature of referring back to a text within the same campaign lends the entire project a sense of coherence, cohesion and continuity. The two monologues are firmly linked, framing everything that came in the eighteen advertisements between them, into a unified whole. It reveals an almost essayist structure, wherein the two advertisements discussed function as the introduction and the conclusion of a particular thesis.

In the narrower sense, coherence and cohesion are also realised through the use of indefinite and demonstrative pronouns, conjunctions, and ellipsis. Despite the eloquence and vividness of the narrator’s powerful speech style, these same elements also add to the conversational tone of the language, thus strengthening the sense of familiarity and personal connection between the participants. For example, in the narrator’s first line, “There are no grand celebrations *here*”, the “here” is visually explicated through the superimposition of various shots, but the use of this adverb of place also adds to the sense that the narrator and narratee share this same location, or at least the view of it. They are both privy to the same knowledge, and share the same level of engagement. This helps in establishing a closer personal connection between the viewer and the world of the advertisement.

Further familiarity is created by other less formal elements of the narrator’s speech, such as his tendency to start clauses with conjunctions (“*But* there are great athletes.”) or prepositions (“*For* the superstars.”). In the latter example, he goes so far as to leave the clause linguistically incomplete according to the rules of formal grammar, due to its lack of a clear subject and object. This combination of the conversational and the poetic makes for both a more personal and a more prosodically attractive language. In this way, two big tasks of advertising are completed: the viewer is directly accosted with a faux sense of friendliness, while still maintaining a high degree of the artistic and aesthetic value.

An interesting point of analysis is the particular way in which the visually dynamic sequence of images is interpolated with the linguistic structure, either in support of existing layers of meaning or addition of new ones. As said, the sequential images of various places associated with the name London establishes multiple settings. Visually coinciding with the word “here”, this suggests both a multiplicity of *heres*, further emphasised by the diversity of protagonists, and a unity and connection between these different locations. This notion of unity in diversity correlates quite closely to the Olympic spirit, as well as the new definition of greatness, being simultaneously something everyone has, but manifested in different ways, not all of which adhere to the standard connotations of the word.

Another visually supported linguistic statement is the falsehood of the idea that “greatness is reserved for a chosen few”. As mentioned in the previous section, this is followed by a shot of a boy solemnly shaking his head. In extreme close-up, this protagonist strengthens the already established connection – built not only in this specific advertisement, but throughout the campaign as a whole – between the interactive and represented participants. The assertion that “this is not about lowering expectations”, on the other hand, is uttered over a shot of a disabled person followed by a shot of children; thus visually explicating the point about particular groups of people not being less privy to the notion of greatness. It is also an almost political statement in that it calls for the viewer to view such people as complete individuals on their own, not defined just by their age or disability, held to lower standards due to these factors.

The phrase of “lowering expectations” is met with its linguistic contrast – “It is about raising them.” In addition to dynamising the text and its vividness, contrasts like these also serve the fundamental principle of the campaign, that of subversion. On the narrower, textual-only level, this is another example of the narrator’s frequent negation of something said or established earlier. It is a model followed throughout the whole campaign, in particular the

shorter advertisements filmed in between the two analysed more closely in this paper. On a macrolevel, this provides linguistic support for the ideological message of the campaign, the idea of the negation of a previously established notion of greatness, and creation of a revised concept, accessible to everyone.

Interestingly enough, while some findings would indicate that negation affects the persuasion process negatively (Hosman, 2002, p. 373), here it is used extensively. This is partly because it presumably resonates with the viewer, negating a statement that will ultimately result in the viewer feeling better about themselves. Furthermore, it enables the deconstruction of preconceptions of greatness, and later reconstruction of a new definition. We find negation in the very first lines of the monologue: “no grand celebrations”, “no speeches”, “no bright lights”. These linguistic structures are presented negatively with the familiar goal of establishing an expectation, and then subverting or transforming it: “*But* there are great athletes”. Another example of negation, as well as linguistic parallelism, are the phrases “not in one special place” and “not in one special person”. This negation refers to the overall context of the advertisement, as well as the campaign, which showed a great number of diverse settings and protagonists. The transformation of expectations follows in the very last line, summing up the entirety of the campaign and the message behind it: “Greatness is wherever somebody is trying to find it.”

#### *4.2.3. The Participants*

The final film assembles many represented participants from the previously released advertisements. Each of them evokes a different cultural model, representative of a particular social group, with all the consequent associations and connotations that help in creating the complex identities of these protagonists, and through a modification of that perceived identity, the underlying message of the entire campaign. Generally speaking, these participants are by and large representatives of minorities and marginalised social groups. They are women,

children, disabled people, people of colour. Admitting the criticism of Hollywood and their default depiction of a human being that of an adult, white, able-bodied and conventionally attractive man, it is obvious that most of the protagonists appearing in Nike's campaign deviate from that norm.

Most of the world probably will not relate to these categories – more than half of the world's population is already alienated by the depicted gender, and that number keeps growing as each category is statistically observed. In that case, that same large population will better relate to a representative of any minority than the Hollywood Standard. A represented participant, therefore, does not have to match one's specific identity in order to count for successful representation – the struggles that come with being part of any marginalised social group are already relatable enough and sufficient for creating a more personal connection between the participants. In addition to that, Nike further increases the chances of still hitting that specific target for various groups of people by representing a plethora of different protagonists throughout twenty individual advertisements. Furthermore, all these protagonists are described as “everyday athletes”, pandering to the average person by virtue of being average people themselves, rather than famous sportsmen who already hold an almost deified, unreachable social status in modern society.

The narrative itself, as has been underscored, works on the principle of subverting expectations. A cultural model is introduced, banking on the human mind as a pattern-recognising, inherently stereotyping device (Gee, 1999, p. 52) to establish some assumptions. Further connotations are already created in the viewer's mind by the knowledge of the context of the campaign – being created by a sports company during the Olympics – thus introducing a contrasting cultural model, that of an Olympic athlete. The depicted action reinforces the combination of the two cultural models, both visually and linguistically, arriving thus at a new, revised cultural model, and a new, revised definition of “greatness”. The protagonists,

therefore, serve a twofold purpose. They tell a story, and they allow the viewer to insert themselves into that story. An inspiring and surprising story happens on screen, and by virtue of personally relatable protagonists, who are either framed as friendly counterparts or underdogs which further strengthens the personal connection, the viewer is encouraged to think of an analogous story for themselves. In other words, they are asked to find their own greatness.

## 5. Conclusion

It is easy to forget that the campaign in question was indeed a product advertisement, with the specific goal of persuading the viewers into buying Nike products. Its multidimensionality, layering and motivational aspect make it more akin to a work of art, a sequence of short films, than what one usually considers a straightforward advertisement. This is in line with the multidimensional nature of advertising, working primarily on creating a fusion that appeals emotionally to the viewer, persuading them into buying a product and staying loyal to that product's manufacturer.

As such, the campaign is a prime example of the advertising genre as it exists today. It is a mixture of many, often conflicting, discourses, methods, ideas, and goals, wherein the only constant regularity seems to be that of inconstancy, of constant change and subversion. It also demonstrates the inherent inseparability of advertising – or any discourse, really – from the society in which it developed; and a specific advertisement from the specific sociocultural context in which it was created. In the case of “Find Your Greatness” campaign, this is perhaps most obvious in the discussion of its protagonists and the cultural models they played on, instilling an inescapably political aspect to the campaign as a whole.

By and large, it is a campaign playing on people's hidden or more obvious insecurities, fears, desires and needs. In the socio-political context of today's society, it provides an array of protagonists appealing to an ethnically and economically diverse audience. On a more complex, emotional level it panders to a number of people who might feel they underachieved in life, not just in the physical, but in nearly every other sense as well. By taking the meaning of “greatness” from a privilege reserved for “the chosen few”, and expanding it to a broader scope, each individual is reassured that they are not a failure, and that their very quest for greatness – if they continuously and diligently choose to undertake it – might in itself mean that they have found it.

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