**STRUCTURAL FEATURES OF POLITICAL ADS**

Many ads depend on structural features to convey their meaning. Some of these features overlap with propaganda techniques, while others involve technical aspects of film-making.

1. **Candidate mythologies:** Use of mythical images to portray the candidate as, for example, war hero, man of the people, father, savior, or friend. The image of "friend" is often shown by a handshake.

2. **Background locations:** Use of the place where the candidate (or opponent) is shown to convey an important idea about the person. JFK was sometimes shown walking alone on a beach.

3. **Props:** Use of objects in a scene to convey an idea about the candidate (or opponent). The most common prop is the American flag. Use of a bare tree might be used to show what might happen to the environment if the opponent is elected.

4. **Emotion-communicating faces:** Use of human faces; for example, the candidate seen at his best; the opponent seen in an unflattering photo; members of a crowd reacting with smiles to the candidate.

5. **Appeals:** Use of appeals to some quality or emotion in the viewer, such as patriotism, greed, fear. Many appeals are called "hot button" issues.

6. **Music and background sounds:** Use of music to portray the candidate as inspirational (orchestra music) or the opponent as fearsome (horror movie sound track). Background noises, such as sirens or drum beats are also used to set a mood for the ad.

7. **Film editing and camera use:** Use of film techniques to emphasize, for example, the candidate's truthfulness (close-up straight-on shot) or as a strong leader (camera looking up to him or from behind, looking down on a crowd). Black and white scenes set a serious mood. The scene or camera angle often will change every few seconds to keep the viewer entertained as well.

8. **Clothing:** Use of the candidate's apparel to convey a feeling of power (dark suit, light shirt, red tie), hard work (sleeves rolled up, tie loosened), or plain folks (jacket slung over the shoulder).

9. **Depicted actions:** Use of actions to convey positive or negative ideas about candidates. Positive actions might include signing papers (hard worker) or interacting with family (caring). Negative actions might show the opponent doing something silly (flipping pancakes) or in the company of "undesirables."

10. **“Supers” and code words:** Use of “supers” (words on the screen) to draw attention to something. Code words can carry unconscious meanings, such as "values" (I have them, my opponent doesn't.) or "yesterday" (old, in the past, not relevant).

Adapted from "Ad Watcher's Toolkit: 10 Structural Features to Look for in Campaign Ads" by Esther Thorson. Available on the PBS website at: www.pbs.org/pov/ad/ads/toolkit\_list.html

**WHAT'S IN AN AD?**

1. Who or what group made the ad?

2. Ad type: compare and contrast\_\_\_ attack/negative\_\_\_ humorous\_\_\_

promotion/biographical\_\_\_ issue\_\_\_

3. Background/Settings (candidate) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Background/Settings (opponent) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What image is conveyed by these settings?

4. Music Type: Pop/Rock\_\_\_ Classical\_\_\_ “Elevator”\_\_\_ Other\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How was the music used? Did it change during the ad?

5. Voice(s): Male\_\_\_ Female\_\_\_ Candidate\_\_\_ Opponent\_\_\_

Why do you think these voices were selected for the ad?

6. What do the words in the ad convey about the candidate and the opponent? What "supers" (words on the screen) are used in the ad?

7. Clothing (candidate):\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Clothing (opponent):\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What did the clothing worn convey about the person?

8. Activities of the candidate:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Activities of the opponent:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What did the activities depicted in the ad convey about the candidate and others?

9. What did the props used in the ad convey about the candidate and others?

(Ex: flag = patriotism; books = learned)

10. Describe the images or photos of people in the ad and tell how they contributed to the tone of the ad.

11. How are camera angles and film editing techniques used in the ad to portray the candidate & others?