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Nude Men in Advertising

Advertising information generally fails to reach the—as a rule indifferent—customer from out of the jungle of distractions. More than 90% of superabundant advertising stimuli end up in the “trash.” (Kroeber-Riel/Weinberg/Gröppel-Klein 2009)

How are the barriers of inattention to be overcome? Sex sells! Advertising strategists at least share the view that when confronted with scantily clad or naked women or men in erotic poses displayed on advertising posters, in the print media, TV spots, webpages, or brief videos, consumers will be unable to repress their basic orienting responses. Uncovered models attract our attention, even when it should be focused on tables and chairs (Fig. 1). When Burt Reynolds posed nude on a bearskin rug, taking up nearly the entire surface of the page,¹ he excited the attention of potential customers, and it was to be hoped that their gaze remain captured long enough to be shifted to the product on offer. The perfume advertisement may seem banal, but not where Tom Ford has chosen to place the bottle!² And the same is true of the dramatically positioned vodka bottle in the advertising image at <http://jyothsnay.wordpress.com/2007/03/20/absolut-break/>.

In fact, naked models in advertising do attract the attention of generally uninvolved media users and the target groups who leaf quickly through magazines, successfully heightening their interest. By registering the direction of gazes, it can be determined where viewers look, and whether their focus eventually wanders from image to brand-name and texts.³ Via psychophysiological methods of measurement, we can also determine the strength of activation. Sexual stimuli are also designed to trigger emotional responses. Subjects with erotic charisma promise success in the competition for our attention that is fought out by advertisers.

It remains questionable whether displays of nakedness actually lead to purchases. Nevertheless, cognitive processes can be reduced to the point at which the feelings evoked are associated unreflectively with the product or brand name on display. Those who surround themselves with the symbols of consumerism that are being sold, finally, mean to call attention to themselves and to radiate that which the advertisement has aroused.

Do the targeted customers enjoy seeing naked women and men, and do such images actually induce them to make purchases? Women who are presented as erotic and who assume the corresponding sexual poses primarily attract the attention of men, and are generally valued positively by them; according to LaTour, women respond rather by being bored, and negatively.⁴ In April 2012,⁵ 73% of men in Austria found naked women in advertising to be a good thing. Among the

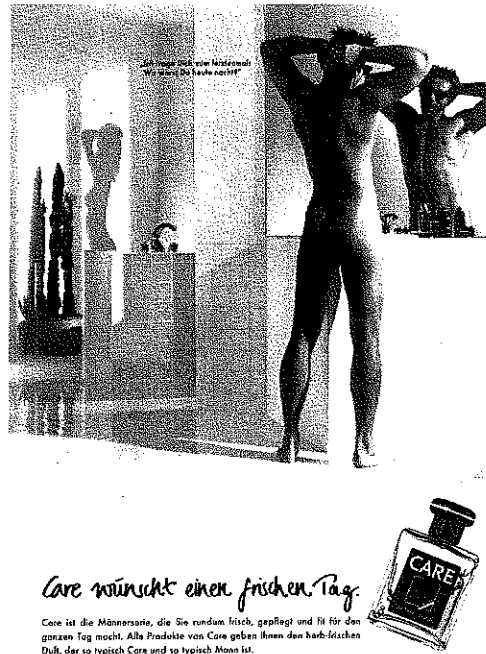


Fig. 5
Marc Jacobs, in: Elle magazine, USA 7/2008

Fig. 6
Advertisement for Care perfume, 1974

women interviewed, only 27% expressed a positive attitude. But what is the response when it is men who are disrobing? Among Austrian women, 41% found naked men good. The men, however, did not; only 22% expressed positive views. The advertisements of the Interbest Outdoor Company would seem to suggest almost the opposite of acceptance and appreciation. Displayed on one poster is a man who would hardly be chosen as an idol of beauty toward whom many would be attracted or feel envy. The caption reads: "The sooner you advertise here, the better." Somewhat later, another poster shows the same man wearing less clothing, and threatening by a gesture to remove—even more. Finally, he stands there, wearing only his undershorts, and just as he is apparently about to remove these as well, a valiant advertiser for a radio station is found to rent the surface, thereby preventing the worst from occurring.⁶

Is an unclothed man really so egregious? In any event, naked men seem to cause irritation. They are seen on advertising posters less frequently than naked women, and at times find their way into images inadvertently. In an advertising image used by the French online clothing shop La Redoute, four little boys on the beach look laughingly toward the camera. Bathing in the background is a naked man. Did this figure somehow escape the attention of the retouching artist? The customers certainly noticed. Their horrified cries circulated through the international media, and understandably, the company would not agree to have this "snapshot" reproduced in the present context.

Does the use of nude models violate social taboos, transgress the boundaries of good taste, shake the very foundations of established values? According to Simpson, Horton, and Brown,⁷ women respond to nude—or more accurately: erotically presented—men more positively than do men. Substantial quantities of naked skin can be oppressive, but entirely naked male models tend to irritate. Masculine viewers were reserved, and found clothed men better than nude ones.

Advertisements featuring nude models are not always well received. Above all the "exploitation" of nudity is criticized, especially when the visual theme and product type seem wholly unrelated. If ads are to be effective, then the imagery, the emotions evoked, and the story narrated must be well adapted to the product being presented. The attraction of the models on display should not take the upper hand, distracting attention from the product instead of guiding toward it. The much-feared "vampire effect" may emerge especially with advertising imagery which arouses strong feelings and is emotionally effective: the undesirable circumstance that it distracts attention away from the product. Instead of paying attention to the shoe "DSquared2," viewers of the ads on the website http://www.lesmads.de/blogs/chuhchuh/2010/06/bild_des_tages_-_dsquared2-werbung.php may linger with delight over the models. The metrosexual nude in a public transportation setting⁸ and the nude man with the perky behind who gazes into the mirror (Fig. 4)⁹ attract attention; but does the gaze continue onward toward the advertised product? The Finnish advertisement for ice cream¹⁰ is undoubtedly creative, but the viewer must seek out the product within



Fig. 7
Campaign for the Netherlands radio station "Radio 2"
Y&R Amsterdam/Interbest

the scenario. Instead of being encouraged to remember the television channel Canal +, the viewer of this short film might simply be amused by the story of the naked man who stares out from the wardrobe at the astonished husband.¹⁴

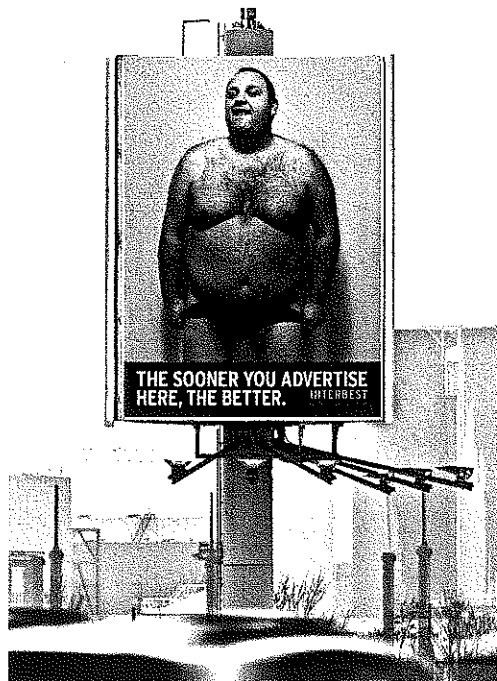
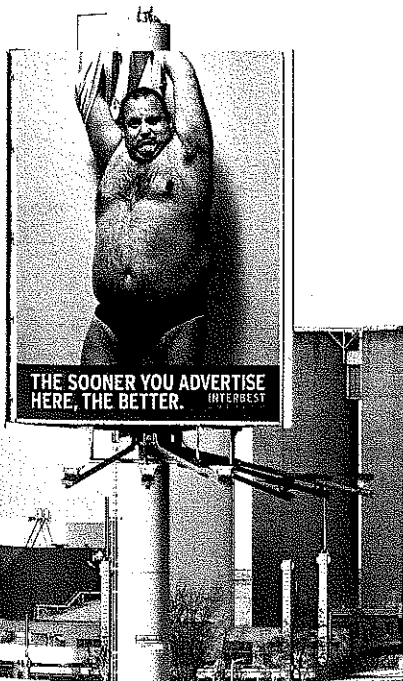
Reichert and Lambiase¹⁵ report that approximately 40% of the women appearing in advertisements in American magazines are scantily clad. By no means all scenarios, however, are sexual in character. In the issues of *Cosmopolitan* and *Glamour* surveyed, which is to say, magazines directed toward female audiences, as well as in those of *Details* and *Esquire*, both addressed toward men, approximately 8% of the advertisements contained explicitly sexual content. Women appeared in the overwhelming majority of ads, often using a specific product for the benefit of the reader in order to stimulate their need for it; or else they demonstrated how wonderful it felt to wear a certain article of clothing, and how their self-esteem was enhanced by it. Men, however, appeared in less than one-fifth of the cases. Depicted frequently in men's magazines was a man together with a woman in ways suggestive of intimacy and sex. Men's bodies alone appeared rarely, and often served as scenery in an advertisement.¹⁶

Naked men are used in advertising less frequently than naked women. But men were "undressed for advertising purposes" far earlier than is often assumed. Even in antiquity, naked male athletes carved from stone were used in cities and plazas in order to solicit attention, to get talked about, and to cultivate an image. Modern advertising—which dates from the moment when freedom of trade was granted in England during

the first half of the 18th century, and toward the end of the 19th century in Prussia¹⁴—contributed to the development as well. With the increasing diversity of the commodities on offer and escalating competition, it became necessary to call attention to one's product. Kreutzer states: "Women in particular were discovered as marketable objects of desire. Hitherto well-packaged ladies suddenly appeared as nudies [...] or stood in the limelight as naked nymphs for jewelry, breast enlargement powder, tires, paint, paper, or light bulbs. [...] For some artistic revolutionaries, this didn't go far enough. They brought men into play as well."¹⁵

In 1874, one Berlin textile dealer is said to have solicited customers by means of the double entendre: "My pants store ["Hosenladen," which also means "pants fly" in German] is open on Sundays as well"—succeeding not only in attracting the attention of readers, but that of the Imperial office of censorship too.¹⁶ It was simply scandalous to allude so shamelessly to the male sexual anatomy!

In Germany, a rack for postcards was marketed with the boldly ambiguous words: "Since Edgar, more and more innkeepers have been getting a stand [in German, "Ständer," is slang for "hard on"]." In Canada, "Floral Design" caused a stir with: "There he stood. His South American machismo drew me like a moth to a flame. Lean and powerful, the juices of sensuality coursed through his veins. His sweet mahogany scent caught me, taunted me—spun me out of control." Häagen Dazs marketed its ice cream with the sentence: "For instant pleasure rub gently and remove top"; and the magazine *Amica*



solicited subscribers with a new, diabolically depicted muscleman and the sparing words: "Im Abo [...] 12 x kommen lassen" [which means more or less: "As a subscription = coming 12 x"].¹⁷

Even where no nude men are depicted, the associations between nudity and sex are nonetheless clear in many advertisements. In Singapore, a pair of white man's underpants was shown against a yellow background, joined by the appeal, "Scratch and sniff!" The ad was for washing powder. Perrier speaks of a "sparkling encounter" and shows its product, carbonated mineral water, spurting like champagne from the neck of a phallic bottle.¹⁸

When censorship authorities find that nudity or even eroticism might injure the sensibilities of viewers or defame groups of people, they mount the barricades. Advertisements showing nude women are often criticized for exploiting women as objects of desire or consumption, for promoting bodily ideals which endanger the health of young people in particular, since such imagery is regarded as heightening their dissatisfaction with their own appearances, thereby damaging self-esteem. The striking trend of presenting a trio of models representing both genders in relatively explicit poses instead of the traditional couple has also been attacked as indecent by the guardians of morality. Calvin Klein tried it out, and earned a media ban;¹⁹ Peta was somewhat more restrained.²⁰

Some ad campaigns cause public furor, culminating in wild protest, because the performers are very young, and adopt explicitly straight, bisexual, or gay poses.²¹ Here, the

censors intervene. In 1995, Calvin Klein used teenagers to sell his jeans. The ads triggered intensive public discussion, and even legal bans. Meanwhile, the models have become somewhat older, but the ads of this fashion house remain faithful to blazing eroticism and ambiguity.²²

Many advertising images display performers in erotic poses, many approach pornography closely—and some go even further (the ads of AussieBum, for example).²³ Some scenes are disturbing. Women are not only used as objects of desire, but are humiliated and their sphere of intimacy is violated; they are exhibited as sex objects in various poses and used to satisfy macho fantasies. In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* on 5 March 2007, Eike Schrimm was incensed about the provocative nature of an ad campaign by Dolce & Gabbana: the brilliantly polished scenery with its perfect bodies seems artificial and harmless enough. Some viewers, however, might be reminded of "a report according to which students at a party raped a girl together," and that was enough for the censors: "This motif transgresses certain boundaries, and is therefore unsuitable for publication in magazines or as a publicly-displayed poster."²⁴

The association of violence with women finds a counterpart in the association of violence to or with men in photographs by Tantrum. The woman in the photo²⁵ is wearing stockings, not pants, while the nude men, their behinds red from being spanked, pose around her like animals, almost terrified by the camera, and gawking at the voyeuristic viewer. While the misuse of women as (sex) objects is criticize loudly, objections to comparable depictions of men are remarkably muted.

Fig. 2
Advertisement for
Hirter Bier, 2010



As soon as criticism of excessively revealing presentations of women becomes too vigorous, the seemingly remorseful advertisers simply exchange them for images of men in the same style. With the slogan “Hart, Härter, Hirter” (Hard, harder, Hirter), accompanied by a trio of less than scantily clad women, the brewery succeeded in catapulting itself into a crossfire of criticism. Complaints about the phallic positioning of the beer glasses, which the naked women raise “to your health” with such relish, were simply balanced in a “compensatory campaign” involving nude men. Like the black, red-haired, and blonde women with the black, red, and golden beer, a trio of black, red-haired, and blonde men now enjoyed black, red, and golden beer (Fig. 2).²⁶

Discussions about nude models and advertising, and levels of acceptance and judgments have changed through time, and are culture-specific. Ten years after LaTour’s study of 1990, Mittal and Lassar²⁷ were unable to reproduce a number of earlier findings. Levels of acceptance, then, shift depending upon society’s degree of sexual openness and of the conscious perception of manipulation by the advertising content. Varying as well are responses to nakedness and sexuality in different cultures. Nelson and Peak evaluated the advertisements contained in editions of *Cosmopolitan* sold in Brazil, China, France, India, South Korea, Thailand, and the USA.²⁸ They found that the quantity of naked skin displayed and the degree of acceptance or disapproval (even minimal displays of nudity were sometimes condemned) depended upon the sociopolitical ideology and values in place value system in force: appearing in the editions of *Cosmopolitan* published in

France and Thailand, were numerous ads featuring nude models. Far fewer appeared in the USA, Brazil, India, and South Korea, and markedly fewer in China. But even in China, according to Tai, an increasing number of ads exploited sex appeal.²⁹ Numerous erotic advertising images were displayed in countries which enjoyed sexual freedom and upheld feminine values; in centrally-governed countries where masculinity was valued more highly, on the other hand, there were fewer.

But as in the past, advertisers will not be constrained by censorship. Kreutzer illustrates advertising posters from America, Asia, Australia, and Europe beginning with the Art Nouveau period.³⁰ As a concession to critics and censors, fig leaves were used to hide genitalia—and in most instances stimulated fantasy more effectively than they concealed the body (Fig. 3). For the most part, the outcry of the authorities and its echo in the press provide more publicity for products and brand names than the advertisements themselves. Today, it is difficult to trigger a scandal that provokes an invaluable press reaction.

Some advertisements featuring unclothed male models have been treated as scandalous provocations, while defenders have countered with the question: But isn’t it art? The Dolce & Gabbana ads from 2005-06 must be art, or parodies of art!³¹

In 1971, Yves Saint Laurent promoted his Eau De Toilette by having himself photographed by Jeanloup Sieff seated on black leather cushions, wearing his birthday suit and his



charismatic eyeglasses. The indignation was unbridled; the Eau de Toilette was a sensational success, and when the auction house Christie's offered the photograph with the "the naked icon," its value was estimated at approximately £300,000 (Fig. 4)³²—a genuine Waterloo for straight-laced critics!

Most of the naked figures appearing in advertisements adopt erotic poses; some are depicted humorously, while some naked men display a sensibility for partnership and family. Scott A. Lukas, professor of anthropology and sociology at Lake Tahoe Community College in the US, has collected numerous gender-related advertisements, which he has classified and interpreted. Found at the webpage <http://www.genderads.com/> is a substantial and impressive selection. Often (to summarize), advertisements are directed toward potential customers, and needless to say, they exploit the "toolkit" of erotically depicted models in order to let target groups know what men—and meanwhile women as well—find genuinely attractive. Men are depicted as authorities, dominant and powerful, as intelligent experts and the bearers of culture. In many cases, they are used to present phallically-connoted objects which resemble erect penises and are suggestive of potency. Male models are used to stimulate fantasy, an

example being the preppy young man wearing glasses by Tom Ford,³³ the sporty types who pose for AussieBum, Dolce & Gabbana's athletic wrestlers,³⁴ and the contented male couple in an ad for Tylenol.³⁵

Models in advertising convey the way in which a man "normally and ideally" looks. The kind of messages that used to be directed exclusively at women are aimed today at metrosexual men who are career, leisure, body, and health-conscious. Not just women, but men as well are now misused as objects in advertisements, gazing vacuously at us from posters, terrifying us as monsters, and being shown in grotesque poses.³⁶

For the most part, the men seen in advertisements are independent and strong, in conformity with social stereotypes. Men are heroes! They brim over with strength and the desire for adventure when smoking Marlboro; they are irresistibly erotic when they take a break from construction work, exhausted and sweaty, to enjoy a Coke. They rescue and protect fragile women and helpless children, risk their lives for family and homeland. As women already have been for centuries, men are displayed undressed as objects of display and desire in order to capture the attention of customers. (Fig. 8)³⁷

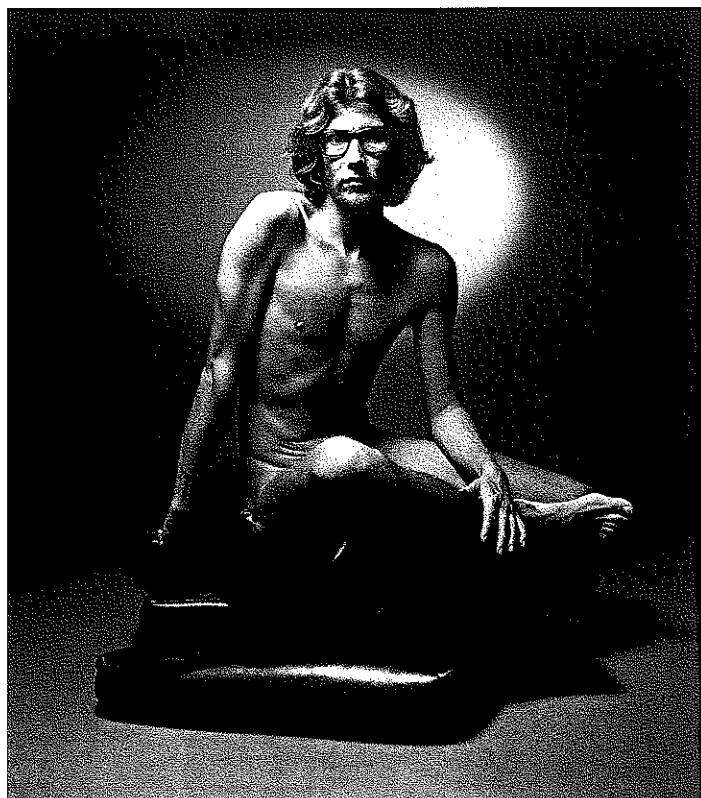


Fig. 4
Jeanloup Sief
Yves Saint Laurent, 1971

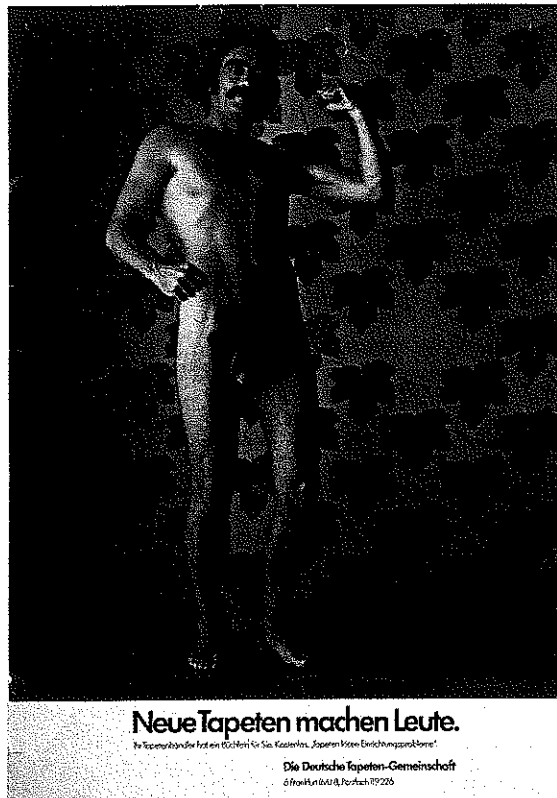


Fig. 3
Advertisement for the Deutsche Tapetengemeinschaft
in Stern, 1973

- 1 See <http://adweek.blogs.com/photos/uncategorized/burt.jpg>. All of the webpages cited here were visited between April and July of 2012.
- 2 See <http://www.flickr.com/photos/36551571@N08/3403075157/>.
- 3 See <http://willskullypower.files.wordpress.com/2011/03/eye-tracking.jpg>.
- 4 LaTour 1990.
- 5 In the survey, involving 490 people conducted in Austria in April of 2012, the WISSMA market research agency in Vienna was kind enough to pose the following question for this article: how do you feel about nude women (nude men) in advertising? (Possible responses: very good-good; fair; bad-very bad).
- 6 Agency: Y&R Not Just Film—Amsterdam, Netherlands. "The sooner you advertise here, the better." From: <http://allthatinspires.me/interbest-outdoor-company-male-stripper>.
- 7 Simpson/Horton/Brown 1996.
- 8 See <http://thegrandnarrative.com/2009/01/05/the-scent-of-a-man-what-deodorant-commercials-tell-us-about-korean-metrosexuality/>.
- 9 See <http://www.adsandbrands.com/en/sujet/care/care/33678/coffset-4/o/start-1690/end-2012/brand-care/sortierung1-title/sortierung2-datum/order1-ASC/order2-ASC/showbrand-marke>.
- 10 See http://files.coloribus.com/files/adsarchive/part_92/926905/file/classic-ice-cream-harem-small-15394.jpg.
- 11 See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LniHoZApCiI>.
- 12 Reichert/Lambiasi 2003.
- 13 Gould 2003.
- 14 Juen/Lerch 1999.
- 15 Kreutzer 1999, p. 10.
- 16 Kreutzer 1999, p. 27.
- 17 Kreutzer 1999, p. 136.
- 18 See <http://www.google.at/imgres?q=perrier+advertisement&um=1&hl=de&sa=N&biw=1183&bih=723&tbm=isch&tbnid=Lxlzu3aoL9cE3M:&imgrefurl=http://trendland.com/la-main-perrier-the-world-sexiest-hand/&docid=NEgeFIIyOhq8M&imgurl=http://trendland.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/01/la-main-perrier-ad-5.jpg&w=547&h=735&ei=hbz1T8vwj4rP4Qsr3bnwBg&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=120&vpy=308&dur=7287&hovh=260&hovw=194&tx=159&ty=218&sig=114516155471328510652&page=2&tbnh=159&tbnw=118&start=15&ndsp=22&ved=1t:429,r:5,s:15,i:137>.
- 19 See <http://www.20min.ch/life/story/18300086>
- 20 See <http://www.we-are.at/?p=2812>.
- 21 See <http://samisoni.blogspot.co.at/2011/01/dsquared2-ss11-by-mert-marcus-full.html>.
- 22 See for example <http://www.myself.de/galerien/eva-mendes-fuer-calvin-klein-herbst-2009-1-jpg/5423/345893>.
- 23 See http://www.google.de/search?q=aussie+bum+advertisement+sex&rlz=1I7ADRA_de&um=1&ie=UTF-8&hl=de&tbm=isch&source=og&sa=N&tab=wi&ei=FYgGUiwvGlv74QS53NypCQ&biw=1280&bih=558&sei=G4gGUODuGKni4QTxnNCdCQ.
- 24 See <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/leben/werbung-von-dolce-amp-gabbana-mehr-als-nur-modemacher-1.226751>.
- 25 See <http://www.wmagazine.com/fashion/2011/11/steven-meisel-advertisements-ss#slide=1>.
- 26 See <http://diepresse.com/home/kultur/medien/601685/Hirter-BierWerbung-Jetzt-mit-nackten-Maennern>.
- 27 LaTour 1990; Mittal/Lassar 2000.
- 28 Nelson/Peak 2005.
- 29 Tai 1999.
- 30 Kreutzer 1999.
- 31 See <http://kunst-kinder.blogspot.com/2009/11/napolienische-kunst.html>.
- 32 See <http://www.hype-magazine.com/blog/archives/5187>.
- 33 See for example <http://www.google.at/search?q=tom+ford+advertisement&hl=de&prmd=imvns0&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=VvD2T5vRMYSn4gSinNHJBg&ved=0CFAQsAQ&biw=1183&bih=723>
- 34 For example http://www.google.at/search?q=dolce+gabbana&um=1&ie=UTF-8&hl=de&tbm=isch&source=og&sa=N&tab=wi&ei=kPD2T6DRD8iKhQeFvKDTBg&biw=1183&bih=723&sei=kvD2T_10Aaq14gTHu-COBw.
- 35 See http://www.google.de/imgres?q=typenol+advertisement+gay&um=1&hl=de&sa=N&rlz=1I7ADRA_de&biw=1280&bih=558&tbm=isch&tbnid=UUqxYLxRhKDZ2M:&imgrefurl=http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/snarl/2005/07/20/karl-gets-all-political-on-your-ass/&docid=q_nrOxjRBq5kM&imgurl=http://media-cyber.law.harvard.edu/blogs/static/snarl/tylenolpm.jpg&w=500&h=691&ei=B4wGUJXXFISH4gShl6ibCQ&zoom=1.
- 36 See <http://www.flickr.com/photos/23139290@N04/2216584748/> und „http://www.google.at/imgres?q=athena+advertisement&um=1&hl=de&biw=1183&bih=723&tbm=isch&tbnid=nvTCJLjebjOLPM:&imgrefurl=http://magic-m.posterous.com/underwear-werbung-einmal-originell&docid=NSaxL-1RjedNvM&imgurl=http://adsoftheworld.com/files/images/athena_outdoor_jump_preview.jpg&w=590&h=417&ei=M8n1T_fCI6SQ4gTc7dTjBg&zoom=1&iact=hc&vpx=331&vpy=333&dur=512&hovh=189&hovw=267&tx=109&ty=100&sig=1132326428828770529336&page=1&tbnh=139&tbnw=197&start=0&ndsp=16&ved=1t:429,r:6,s:0,i:87“.
- 37 See <http://fashionindie.com/elle-features-naked-men/>.

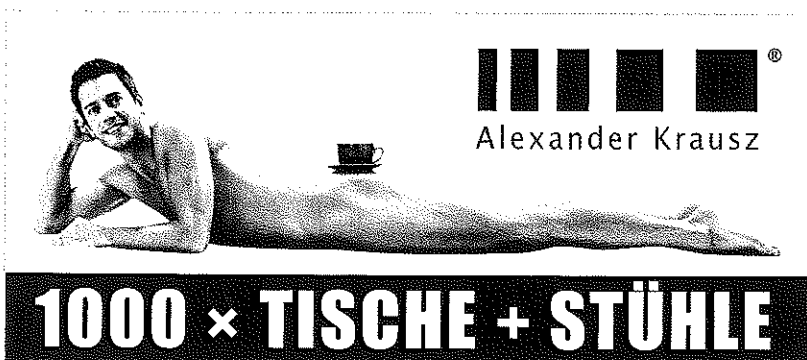


Fig. 1
Cover of the jubilee catalogue "40 Jahre 1000 x Tische + Stühle"
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