

Cover Image

Havana/Diesel

The year was 2000. Global fashion giant Diesel was propagating its “Successful Living” campaign, predicated on the concept of conscious hedonism. This ad appeared painted on the side of a building in the Habana Vieja (Old Havana) district of Havana – now a UNESCO World Heritage Center. While the area’s impoverished residents, who earned incomes of approximately seven U.S. dollars per month (after housing, food and health allowances), could not afford Diesel branded clothes, the ads that appeared in their neighborhood weren’t directed at them. The year 2000 also saw a major increase in tourism, with wealthy European and Canadian tourists arriving by airplanes and cruise ships – to a land that people leave in rafts and inner tubes. While many of these tourists wandered the streets of Habana Viejo, the ad, I believe, wasn’t aimed at them either. It was, however, aimed at their cameras, or more precisely, was bait for tourists who would aim their cameras at the irresistible and offense contrast the ad offered. In doing so, these tourists became unwitting vectors for a viral ad campaign, bringing this curious image home and spreading it, along with Diesel’s Successful Living campaign, among their networks of friends and associates. You are now holding a contagion in your hands.

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