

Digital-Spectacular Advertisements: Form, Style and Aesthetics.

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Many TV advertisements employ the kinds of devices and techniques that are producing revived spectacle in the cinema for their own ends. Thus new levels of surface accuracy and image brilliance, novel or augmented forms of image combination, distortion and alteration, all are utilised within these brief, playful and pictorially compressed texts. The aim is to take possession of the eyes, to surprise and hook the viewer to a brief yet intense image display.

(Darley 2000, p.53)

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with generically and formally defining the new and emerging television advertising form of the ‘digital-spectacular’ advertisement. It argues that the digital-spectacular advertisement is aesthetically and functionally a fundamentally different form compared to previous ‘classical’ television advertising forms. In particular, the thesis argues that the digital spectacular advertisement is informed and characterised by a logic and aesthetic of spectacle and display rather than the logic and aesthetic of information and narrative that informs and characterises traditional television advertising forms.

The thesis provides an overview and analysis of classical television advertising forms which is then followed by and contrasted to an in-depth analysis of the digital spectacular advertisement form. It looks in particular at each of these forms’ generic elements, aesthetics, modes of audience address and functions. In doing so, the thesis identifies the key elements and features that distinguish that digital spectacular advertisement from classical advertisement forms and allows us to clearly see that the digital spectacular advertisement is a new advertising form.

Introduction

Beginning around the mid-1990s, a certain form of television advertisement emerged that exhibited a shift in style that set it markedly apart from previous forms of television advertising. Whereas the logic and aesthetics of traditional or 'classical' genre forms of advertising are orientated towards the provision of information or narrative-based content to the audience, the logic and aesthetics of this more recent form of television advertisement are directed primarily towards the provision of scopic pleasure and visual thrill. It is a form driven by digital production methods and technologies which present to the audience a spectacular visual aesthetic that emphasises virtual space, complex and exhilarating transitions and a high degree of image innovation. It is characterised less by specific product information or narratives which function to tell a story and 'sell' the product than it is by the pure foregrounding and display of striking imagery and sensational visual techniques. This form is the 'digital-spectacular advertisement.'

These digital-spectacular advertisements are seen widely by a large audience while exhibiting imaging techniques that are not used anywhere else in such a stylised fashion. Darley writes that 'these advertisements represent the very core of our lives' (2000, p.100), yet we do not see in-depth discussion regarding television advertisement aesthetics, particularly when the image moves towards a far more spectacular form as opposed to a language or narrative-oriented form. Little has been written on this form of digital-spectacular advertisement. While touched on in the writings of Caldwell, Darley and Spielmann (Caldwell 1995; Darley 2000; Spielmann 1999, 2001), their work tends to focus primarily on the broader aspects of digital-imaging aesthetics. Discussing generally the impact of digital imaging aesthetics on the audience of these forms as well as the processes behind the image creation. Their work also tends to function on a filmic level, as with Darley and Spielmann and on a televisual level as with Caldwell. Generally speaking, the digital-spectacular advertisement itself as a specific

and particular form in its own right is rarely the focus of any detailed or extended discussion. Rather, the advertisement in these cases is used as a support for broader arguments about other digital media forms. For example, Spielmann (1999) cites a 1997 Coca-Cola advertisement (fig. 8) to illustrate the concept of morphing between images before applying the same concepts to a discussion about film. When the spotlight does shine on the topic of digital-spectacular advertisements, as in the writings of Twitchell (1992, 1995, 2000, 2004), the focus is on the marketing aspects rather than dwelling at any length – if at all – on the role of the aesthetics of the advertisement.

Darley also points significantly to the lack of scholarly attention given to ‘forms of pure spectacle – image for image’s sake’ in broader visual culture (2000, p.5) and notes that the advertisement is one of the driving factors in digital imaging and the production of new and striking spectacular forms of visual imagery (Ibid, p.82). While many media forms are often understood as narrative forms, the digital-spectacular advertisement is, first and foremost, an image-based form and needs to be studied as such in terms of its visual or spectacle-based nature. The subject of spectacle and digital effects has been addressed and discussed within the context of film studies (Buckland 1998, 1999; Cubitt 1998, 2004; Darley 2000; Geuens 2005; King 2003; Ndalians 2000; Pierson 1999; Spielmann 1999, 2001; Whissel 2006). However, much of this discussion assumes the primacy of narrative to describe and explain how spectacular and digital effects work and function rather than focussing on them on their own aesthetic terms. Importantly, too, we need to recognise that digital imaging and spectacular aesthetics function in a substantially different manner in the context of film than they do in the context of television advertising.

Up until now, advertising has generally been considered to be an information or narrative based form. This is, in effect, the ‘classical’ model of advertising, one understood to be organised around an information or narrative informed aesthetic. Yet to apply the model of the classical advertisement to the digital-spectacular advertisement fails to provide us with an

adequate understanding of the form and its particular features and functions, focussing as it does primarily on information or narrative concerns. As a result, we need to draw on a spectacular aesthetic framework or theoretical model as suggested and discussed by Darley (2000), Spielmann (1999, 2001) and Gunning (1989, 1990, 2004a, 2004b), among others, which allows us to theoretically and formally take account of spectacle and thus understand the digital-spectacular form of advertising. In general, the form of the classical advertisement is driven ultimately by a narrative logic that impacts on the aesthetic. Conversely, the digital-spectacular advertisement relies on a spectacular aesthetic that emerges from early cinema or the ‘cinema of attractions’ and its orientation towards display and spectacle. This study, then, draws broadly on the film models of ‘classical Hollywood cinema’ and the ‘cinema of attractions’. These models provide us with a clear understanding of the differences in form, function and modes of audience address that are possible across a particular form or forms such as cinema and can usefully be applied to an analysis of the advertising form generally and the digital-spectacular advertisement particularly.

The term ‘spectacular’ needs clarification within the context of this thesis. In the tradition of the Hollywood blockbuster, the term spectacular implies an aesthetic of scale and vista (Buckland 1998; King 2003). This form of spectacle will be referred to as *cinematic* spectacle as it is a spectacle of absorption which draws the viewer into the world of the film.

Richard Rushton discusses the topic of absorption and theatricality in his paper ‘Early, classical and modern cinema: absorption and theatricality’ (2004). In it, Rushton writes;

So perhaps at its simplest, the distinction between absorption and theatricality centres on the way the viewer looks at the artwork: with absorption it is as if the viewer goes into the painting, while with theatricality it is as if the painting comes out to the viewer so as to surround the viewer in ‘situation’.

(Rushton 2004, p.229)

The *digital*-spectacular advertisement differentiates itself from the *cinematic*-spectacular advertisement not only in aesthetic approach but also in how the advertisement addresses the audience. This new genre of digital-spectacular advertisement is a different form of spectacle than that of the cinematic-spectacle, or the Hollywood blockbuster. The digital-spectacular is a spectacle of *theatricality*. The digital-spectacular in question is not based on our traditional understanding of spectacular *per se*: illusion, vistas, horror, etc. Generally speaking, the digital-spectacular is not ‘photo-realist’ in that it does not try to pass itself off as a realistic illusion within the context of a story-world. The digital-spectacle foregrounds the imaging techniques used, emphasising the spatiality, depth, image processing, virtual cinematography, animation techniques and image generation technologies. This digital-spectacle is, in effect, foregrounding the artifice, the surface, of the image itself. In this sense, it is a theatrical form, with echoes of the ‘cinema of attractions’ (Gunning 1989, 1990, 2004a 2004b) and its impulse towards display and theatricality. This is in contrast to absorptive - or ‘cinematic’-spectacle that on a technical level uses many of the same fundamental techniques as the ‘digital-spectacular’. However, the spectacle in absorptive spectacle is not fore-grounded in a theatrical sense as it is located within a narrative and as such is bound to a narrative aesthetic logic that keeps the viewer absorbed in the spectacle.

The ‘spectacular’ in the digital-spectacular context is the very novelty of a technique or an image, and the effect of digital production has allowed a rapid expansion of this novelty factor in regards to ‘new’ images. It functions as an aesthetic experience for the viewer – it is an *attraction* that comes *out* to the viewer and addresses them directly, theatrically, as an image. This is opposed to the viewer going “into” and becoming absorbed by a film’s sequence or illusionistic story-world. It is not about telling stories; it is about visual novelty and display.

Writing about film in his article ‘The Grand Style’, Jean-Pierre Geuens writes;

The medium is no longer about the stories themselves, it's about telling them in a visually seductive manner. It's about the pure pleasure of superbly elegant images. Through it all the emphasis is on formal manipulation, on tweaking the image, on styling it, on flushing it with colourful aphrodisiacs and powerful steroids, all in the hope of wooing the viewers.

(Geuens 2005, p.32)

The same can equally be said for advertising – it is no longer about the advertising itself, it is about advertising in a visually seductive manner more so than ever before. The digital-spectacular marks a shift towards an even more image-centred form of advertising. It is within this broad context and understanding of the spectacular that we might begin to theorise, analyse and understand the digital-spectacular advertisements' form, style and aesthetics.

Ultimately the reason I am approaching this topic of the emergence of the digital-spectacular advertisement is to improve our understanding of this under-studied and arguably under-appreciated form. Coming from a background in film, design and multimedia, this study is focusing primarily on the *form* of these advertisements. This study will not look at how successful they are as a device used to increase sales, which is debatable. A similar argument is made by Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver, writing about 'postmodern' advertisements (2004), noting that some critics state that the actual effectiveness of these adverts is minimal as they do not present basic information needed to convince the consumer to buy the product. While certainly an important factor that needs to be taken into consideration if considering the effectiveness and economics of advertisements, this aspect falls beyond the scope of this study. The primary aim here is to begin to provide an account of the digital-spectacular advertisements form, style and aesthetics, while also briefly considering the outcome this general shift in form might have on the broader function of the advertisement.

Drawing on a range of theories and concepts from film theory, film history, art history, visual culture and media studies, this study hopes to define the general form of the digital-spectacular advertisement in relative detail. It does this through contrasting the digital-

spectacular form with the 'classical' and 'cinematic-spectacular' forms, making a comparative analysis between the different forms. A comparative analysis can at times be problematic within advertising due in part to the hybrid nature of advertisements which borrow ideas and techniques from other advertisements and re-package them and create something 'new'. Yet in comparing the different forms we can track the changes and developments from one form to another and identify some of the fundamental features and elements which distinguish one advertising genre form from the other. In this way, we can see how a new form of advertising has emerged in recent times.

What I have tried to do in choosing the advertisements in this study is to select examples that exhibit techniques that are either new digital imaging techniques or novel applications of old techniques. Many of the advertisements have been sourced through an assortment of 'aggregate' websites that have examples of digital imaging in various forms. The advertisements themselves have generally been accessed via production company websites. In the case of older advertisements, these have been sourced these from archive websites, most notably archive.org and ad-rag.com. In using the Internet rather than local television to source the advertisements, I believe this will give us a broader understanding of the form as the examples are from multiple countries across the globe. To use local television would severely limit the available advertisements, especially considering the at times 'regional' nature of television in Adelaide.

The thesis is divided into two parts. Part one – chapters two and three – is concerned with the classical forms of advertising, prefaced with an overview of the 'Classical Hollywood' style to contextualize the form. Chapter two focuses on the 'classical' advertisement genres of both information-driven and narrative-driven forms of classical advertisements, analysing their respective forms and elements, their modes of address and their general function. Chapter three begins to extend the classical form in the direction of the cinematic-spectacular

advertisement, looking at its relation to the 'New Hollywood' style of film-making, again looking at the forms and elements, modes of address and general function of the genre.

Part two of the thesis is prefaced with an overview of the spectacular image and the cinema of attractions, thereby shifting the framework for the digital-spectacular's analysis away from a narrative framework to a spectacular framework. Chapters four through seven lead us to the discussion of the digital-spectacular advertisement proper with chapters four through six detailing the digital-spectacular advertisement's form and elements, modes of address and function as an advertisement in detail. The final chapter will discuss the findings and the implications of those findings, suggesting future research on the topic.

Included with this thesis is a visual appendix with all figured advertisements presented on a DVD. This will allow the reader to view the discussed advertisements in their entirety rather than relying on selected still images.

Part 1: Classical Forms

This preface for part one of this study provides a brief discussion and context for understanding the classical advertising form. Stylistically the classical advertisement has a common ancestry within the classical Hollywood cinematic form. Both forms are driven by a basic aesthetic logic that arises from their informational or narrative forms.

Classical Hollywood cinema is a form of filmmaking that developed throughout the early years of the 20th century. By the 1930s, it had firmly established itself and the predominant film form in Hollywood (Bordwell & Thompson 2004, pp.69-102). “Classical because of its lengthy, stable and influential history, Hollywood because the mode assumed its most elaborate shape in American film studios” (Ibid, p.89). The classical Hollywood period lasted until the 1960s, yet arguably still forms the basis of today’s cinema in some capacity (Bordwell 2002). This is despite an influx of terms and arguments that state that the classical Hollywood cinema form has been ‘superseded’ by other forms, such as ‘New Hollywood’ (Smith 1998, p.3). While the form has certainly changed it still fundamentally can be referred to as the classical Hollywood cinematic form in that its basic premise and structures remain relatively unchanged.

‘Stability and regulation’ are the words that Smith cites as the common ‘watchwords’ for classical Hollywood cinema (Ibid.). Structurally, the classical Hollywood style is primarily a character driven form, the narrative being based around a cause-and-effect chain of events (Hayward 2006, p.83-84). These are often goal-oriented narratives that introduce some sort of obstacle for the character to overcome to get to the goal.

Stylistically, the classical Hollywood mode of production is one based on providing the audience with a clear understanding of the spatial and temporal construction of the film while not drawing attention to the techniques used to construct those spatial and temporal aspects. This applies to camera location and framing, mise-en-scene and editing aspects. They all exist to immerse the viewer into the diegetic world of the film. We can refer to this as 'suture' or the 'stitching in' of the viewer into the film (Hayward 2006, pp.404-410). Gunning supports this, writing: "The continuity of classical cinema is based on the coherence of story, and the spectator's identification with the camera is mediated through an engagement with the unfolding of the story" (Gunning 1989, p.9)

Primarily a voyeuristic form, the classical Hollywood style uses a shot selection consisting of matching eye-lines, shot-reverse-shot, establishing shots and close-ups to provide the audience with the sensation that they are 'within' the film space, standing or sitting alongside the characters.

Using these techniques, the audience does not see the final film as a contrived story world made up of isolated shots, but rather becomes immersed in the film's construct. "The emphasis" writes Smith, "is very clearly and explicitly placed on technical and aesthetic norms" (1998, p.4). Hence Smith's use of the terms 'stability' and 'regulation' – nothing happens technically or aesthetically that destabilises the overall effect of the audience engagement with the story. The classical form's production is one that is hidden from the viewer and should emphasise the plot and the characters, the *content* of the film rather than the technical aspects of its construction.

To apply this style to advertising however, we need to adjust or expand our understanding of the classical Hollywood form within the context of the television screen. Whereas the narrative-oriented advertising form fits into the classical Hollywood form being firmly based on those techniques, the information-oriented advertising form, as we shall see shortly, relies

much more on a direct mode of audience address rather than the indirect mode of the Classical Hollywood form. “The first television ads were simply radio ads on TV: A ‘sponsor’ holding up a box of detergent while delivering a radio ad” writes Varan (Varan 2003, p.563). This provides us with a problem. This clearly contradicts the classical Hollywood form in that it acknowledges that there is a camera that mediates between presenter and audience. However, ultimately the advertisement exists to transfer information – a message – to the audience in some fashion. Having said this, direct modes of audience address retain the notion of suture as the information-oriented classical advertisement still does not draw attention to its construction *per se*, but rather maintains the notion of being involved *within* the advertisement as the presenter is talking directly *to* the audience. Rather than voyeurism, the audience become involved with the content (presenter) directly rather than indirectly from within the diegetic film space. Smith’s ‘stability and regulation’ are maintained as the audience is not disrupted by the mode of audience address because of the regulation of the form.

To summarise, the major points that we need to consider when discussing the classical advertising form are the use of character in narrative forms and presenter in informational forms. Both exhibit an engagement with the audience; narrative forms place the viewer ‘alongside’ the characters within the narrative through motivated shot selection, effectively placing the viewer in the diegetic space of the advertisement. Informational forms engage with the audience directly through the use of a presenter either on or off screen. Rather than being engaged with the narrative, the audience is engaged with the informational content. The overall coherence of the forms maintain the audience’s engagement with the narrative or content.

In the next chapter we look at the classical advertising form, beginning with informational-oriented advertisements followed by narrative-oriented advertisements, looking at their forms, elements, modes of address and function in the context of the classical Hollywood form.

Chapter 1: The Classical Advertisement

The classical advertisement is the broad term that I have given to advertisements that are traditionally associated with television advertising. Primarily developed when “television was entering the bloodstream” in the 1950s (Twitchell 2000, p.2), the classical advertisement features either the salesman-like pitch of the *information-oriented* advertisement (as previously mentioned, essentially a television adaptation of the radio advertisement) or the voyeuristic, character-based elements of the *narrative-oriented* advertisement.

Information-Oriented Advertisements

Form & Elements

The information-oriented advertisement is primarily designed to deliver ‘facts’ and ‘testimonials’ about a product. They can be an intense – even aggressive – form of advertising. It is essentially ‘the hard sell’ of the television-advertising world, as opposed to the ‘soft sell’ of ‘image advertisements’ (Bulmer & Buchanan-Oliver 2004, p.1). Stylistically, they are also aggressive in their use of graphics and images. An example is the ‘infomercial’ (a protracted version of this genre), which use strong typographic elements to display numbers, phrases and prices. While perhaps these elements sound clichéd and over-the-top, the basic idea – the transfer of information in a salesman-like fashion – is what lies at the heart of this form.

Images that ‘inform’ the viewer are often used to help represent abstract ideas. First made (in)famous by the Anacin advertisements in the 1950s, these informative images can be graphics, or similes (fig. 1b, below). In a much later Anacin advertisement, the ‘other brand’ is represented by a ‘regular’ gymnast, Anacin by the ‘better’ gymnast. In this example, comparisons are drawn between the gymnasts and the pain-killers. The audience sees that one athlete is better than the other, and we are told that Bayer is to ‘regular’ as Anacin is to ‘better’.



Figure 1: Anacin

(a) The presenter gives us facts that appear in bold lettering on screen. (b) An animation – the visualisation of pain. (c) Cut to testimonial, and back to the presenter (d)

The most important element within an information-oriented advertisement is that of the presenter – the salesman (fig. 1a). This figure is the main focus of the advertisement as they are the authority figure – everything happens around them. They are the narrator, the omnipotent ‘voice of god’. The purpose of the presenter is to tie everything together, acting as

the mediator between product and viewer. Without the presenter/narrator/salesman, the advertisement would be a dislocated series of graphics and imagery.

Another common element that appears predominantly in early information-oriented advertisements, but still sometimes seen in more contemporary forms, is that of the consumer testimonial (fig. 1c). Again, looking out at the audience, much like the presenter, they are framed to appear as if they are talking to the viewer: “I feel great! Headache’s gone and my stomach doesn’t feel upset.” “And no wonder,” continues the presenter. “Anacin is like a doctor’s prescription...” he says as he indicates to a writing pad and listing off more facts (fig. 1d). Again we see the basic information being presented through simile and the listing of truths – it is *like* a doctor’s prescription because it contains *these* drugs.

Twitchell (2000, pp.146-153) looks at the rise (and subsequent fall) of the Anacin brand and advertising campaigns. Today, the basic premise of the pain killer advertisement remains the same. Even the aesthetic elements have not changed in any substantial fashion. Instead of the jagged lines of lightning bolts and compressing springs, we see pulsating red points or small fires lighting up inside representations of people. Taking the pill causes the fires to go out and the red pulses to fade. The basic premise of the information advertisement has not changed in fifty years; list the facts that set one product apart from another, have a ‘demonstration’ of the product and have a narrator mediate the entire sequence.

Modes of Address

As already alluded to, the information-oriented advertisement relies on direct modes of audience address. The direct viewer address provides the shortest route for the information to travel from advertisement to viewer as well as removing to a large extent the additional layer of audience interpretation. There are no subtleties within this genre of advertisement.

This direct address with the audience is achieved primarily through the ‘talking head’ approach in which a figure looks down the camera, as if looking *at* the viewer. This talking head then verbalises the information. This of course gives the viewer the impression that this figure on the screen is talking to them, suggesting that there is a direct connection between audience and presenter. A similar approach is that of the news presenter conveying information directly to the audience. The direct viewer address can also be achieved through a voice-over or narrator. The voice-over still gives the viewer the impression that the voice is directed *at* them, but in a more omnipresent sense within the context of the advertisement. Yet it is still focused towards the viewer in the phrasing to suggest that there is a direct engagement between presenter and viewer, absorbing the audience into the advertisement.

Function

To consider the information-oriented form the lowest common denominator of the advertisement would be unfair. Yet when we think of ‘traditional’ forms of advertising this is the genre with which we associate, perhaps because it has been there in some form since the beginning of television. Yet it is that endurance that suggests that this is a form of advertisement that works. It is cheap and easy to produce and does not require large scales of economy, which is why it is a form common in regional programming schedules. The information-oriented advertisement gives the audience hard information. Generally speaking, it presents them with a problem (a headache) and a solution to that problem (a pain-killer) emphasising why that product should be chosen over another. Or, alternatively it simply presents the audience with some basic facts – this product can be found at this location for this amount.

Aesthetically, the information advertisement can be as simple or as complicated as needed, but its focus is on the clear representation of the problem and solution and the delivery of that basic information to the audience in a very direct and engaging way.

Narrative-Oriented Advertisements

Form & Elements

The narrative-oriented advertisement is perhaps the broadest genre of advertising and therefore makes it the hardest to classify in general terms. Hybridisation with other forms (namely the information-oriented advertisement) also makes a clear definition problematic. For example, a narrative advertisement in the last moments may switch to an informative approach, perhaps putting the narrative into the context of the product, service or brand. While not a *pure* form of narrative in the Classical Hollywood sense, the narrative-oriented advertisement *principally* remains a narrative form.

The most notable elements characterising the narrative advertisement is, unsurprisingly, its coherent diegetic form and its basic story structures and characters. In terms of form, the shot selection and mise-en-scene shifts to a far more Classical Hollywood style of production than that of the information-oriented advertisement, using a greater variety of shots that emphasise and ensure the spatial and temporal continuity (Bordwell & Thompson 2004, p.310-333) of the sequence. With regard to story structures and characters, Proctor, Proctor and Doukakis, say; “People often try to make sense of their lives by seeing themselves as the characters in a story interacting with different environmental events: this is referred to here as a narrative.” (2002, p.32)

The narrative advertisement, then, can be said to function on different levels. Primarily what the narrative advertisement aims to do is to build up a relationship with the audience. Unlike the direct address employed in information-oriented advertisements, the narrative advertisement relies on the viewers ‘seeing’ themselves in the illusionistic story-world of the narrative and characters. The audience isn’t acknowledged directly but is placed or sutured

into the narrative advertisement's story-world and hence become voyeurs looking in on these characters and stories. These characters *are* the audience and we associate and identify with them.

On a deeper level, Proctor *et al* continue: "The creators of advertising messages expect viewers to perceive and process these messages into favourable inferences that may result in behavioural reactions in terms of obtaining attention, developing interest and stimulating desire for what is being advertised" (Ibid.) The narrative-advertisement draws the audience in through the narrative in such a way that the audience is on some level unaware that it's watching an advertisement. Rather, the viewers are watching a story which they later infer on or associate with the product or brand.

In the 2001 example of a narrative advertisement directed by Paul Middleditch (fig. 2 below) - a humorous take on a 'heist' style film - two male characters break through a wall into a neighbour's fridge. "I'm in," says one, crawling through the wall cavity. Through sheer coincidence, the wife in the neighbouring apartment opens the fridge door at exactly that moment to see what appears to be a head in her fridge. She screams in terror at her husband, who, looking in the fridge, sees no head but sees his beer (Bud Light) has gone missing. He also starts screaming in terror. A shot of a bottle opening interrupts the narrative as a narrator's voice says "For the great taste that never fills you up and won't let you down..." We cut back to the two male characters, screams in the background, watching the television and casting a sideways glance at the other. The sequence closes with a bottle cap, slogan and narrator saying "Make it a Bud Light".





Figure 2: Bud Light

In this Bud Light example, the shift from narrative (the ‘heist’ section) to informational approach (narrator suddenly interjecting in the sequence) is sequential and abrupt. What we see is a predominantly ‘pure’ narrative that takes place for the first twenty-three seconds of the thirty-second advertisement, followed by the contextualising informational aspect of the narrative.

In another example of a narrative advertisement from Telstra (2006, directed by Simon Frost, fig. 3 below), we see two families in a van on a road trip, destination unknown. The sequence opens with an establishing shot of the van driving along the road. Cutting to a mid-sized shot, we see the two families singing the same lyrics and tune over and over. “Hold on. There have to be more lyrics than that” says the first man. “Yeah?” replies the second. Using a selection of shots that firmly establish the spatial dimensions (figure 3c, 3d), the dialogue steers towards an informational approach. The first man says “Well, I’ll look it up on the ‘net.” The second responds, “What? From here?” To which the first replies, “It’s wireless broadband” and so on. The filming style establishes the situation, location and uses the service (wireless broadband) as a sort of *deus-ex-machina* for the narrative.

What we see in this Telstra example is the informational aspect of an advertisement worked into the narrative itself. The transition from narrative to informational is less abrupt for the audience as the classical techniques are maintained overall while the informational aspects are

embedded within its form. The advertisement closes with the car driving away and reverts to a pure informational approach with a 'Bigpond wireless broadband' logo clearly visible to ensure clear information transferral to the audience.



Figure 3: Telstra Roadtrip

(a) Establishing shot (b) The families sing (c) The move into informative mode of address (d) Reaction shot.

We can see, then, that informational elements constitute a significant part of the narrative advertisements form, whether sequentially added to it or embedded within it. Overall, though, narrative structures and elements dominate the narrative advertisement.

Modes of Address

What we see in both the Bud Light and Telstra advertisement is characters never looking directly at the audience in the tradition of the classical Hollywood style. Rather, they are always looking off-screen or in such a manner that the audience makes sense of the off-screen

space. That is in the Bud Light example we see the female character looking directly at the audience, but as the 'head' has been located spatially already by the previous shot, the audience understands that they are seeing the shot from the point of view of the 'head in the fridge'. As with the classical Hollywood style, this suture places the viewer within the space of the narrative. 'There arose the enduring Hollywood image of the spectator as an invisible onlooker present on the scene [of the film's action]' (Thompson cited in Rushton 2004, p.230). The narrative advertisement is very much related to narrative cinema and television in its mode of address and as a result it is very much absorptive in nature for the audience. However, the notion of voyeurism is not a clear-cut matter within classical narrative advertisements due to the hybridisation of the form. Ultimately these are designed to inform the viewer in some capacity, not just to tell a story.

In the Bud Light example once the narrative is complete, at the point where we see the male neighbour scream at the sight of an empty beer carton, the audience address slips into a direct mode of address as a narrator's voice starts listing the 'benefits' of the beer. It then briefly returns to the narrative (the two males looking at each other) as a post-script, the voice over continuing over the top of the imagery. The advertisement moves from the voyeuristic mode of audience address in which we associate with the characters in some capacity, which then peaks at the 'punch line' of the empty carton and the male neighbour's reaction. At no point do the technical aspects draw attention to the fact that this is an advertisement within the narrative section and it is not until that moment of narrator interruption when the audience connect the narrative with the product.

In the Telstra example, the fact that the informational aspects are worked into the dialogue creates a more coherent narrative. Ostensibly this creates a better relationship between the audience and characters in that the audience remains within the diegesis of the advertisement. The audience is invisibly "there" in the van with the two families, sharing their experience.

To suddenly turn to the audience directly, however, would break that illusion of voyeurism, dislocating the audience from the narrative. Other Telstra advertisements share similar narratives of ‘family situation’ – small instances from different lives (at times portraying the same characters) with which the audience ideally draws parallels from their own lives. The underlying message that the narrative results in is that Telstra should then be a part of the audience’s lives too.

Function

What is interesting in the Bud Light example of a narrative advertisement, is that the product being advertised is completely replaceable, not only with another beer brand, but almost any variety of foodstuffs. This implies that the advertisement is not about the *product*, but the *stories and characters* associated with it. The audience watch the Bud Light commercial and remember the story, not the images, with the exception of the absurdly comedic ‘head in the fridge’. As the story is presented in such a form (the Classical Hollywood style), the image itself becomes ‘invisible’ and the story and characters are fore-grounded. Bud Light’s theme seems to be one of ‘shenanigans’ and the Telstra theme seems to be one of ‘family and friends’. The audience laughs at the situation and associates that situation and theme with the product.

The narrative-oriented advertisement functions as a connection between audience and product, not on a rational product benefit level, but rather on a story and character level. The audience is being sold the idea, the story. Writing on the topic of branding, Twitchell writes:

It’s the stories we’re after as well as the material goods. The coupling of concocted stories with machine-made objects, plus a willingness to ‘suspend disbelief’ and accept that such stories could be true, if only for a moment, allowed the phenomenon of branding to take hold. Essentially, we made dreaming a central part of consuming: look, desire, dream, buy.

(Twitchell 2004, p.36)

Looking to an extent beyond narrative in the next chapter, we look at the cinematic-spectacular advertisement which downplays its narrative aspects and places the emphasis on the idea of the advertisement as an *event* rather than a *story*.

Chapter 2: Cinematic-Spectacular

The cinematic-spectacular advertisement marked a shift in advertising that occurred in the mid-1980s. These advertisements were epic in their approach - large productions comparable to that of Hollywood cinema. Indeed, Hollywood directors started taking the helm of these productions: Ridley Scott for the Orwellian *1984* Apple Computers commercial, David Lynch for Calvin Klein's *Obsession*, Francis Ford Coppola for General Motors, Jean-Luc Godard for Nike, and so-on (Caldwell 1995, p.10). These were not *advertisements per se*, but were rather billed as *events*. 'For it [the *1984* advertisement] did something that advertising has since repeatedly attempted. It got talked about. A lot.' (Twitchell 2000, p.189)

Much like how the classical-narrative advertisements borrowed primarily from the classical Hollywood style, the cinematic-spectacular advertisement borrowed from the New Hollywood style. The 'New Hollywood style' is a style of filmmaking that is attributed to the rise of the 'summer blockbuster' in the 1970s. Typified by the movies of Lucas (*Starwars*, 1977), Spielberg (*Jaws*, 1975; *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, 1981; *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, 1977) and the other 'movie brats' (Coppola, Scott, Cameron, to name but a few), this was a form of cinema that fore-grounded the concept of the film as an 'event' (King 2003, p.114). *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981), according to Buckland: "thus highlights the extent to which narrative condensation and narrative economy – as well as spectacle and special effects – are hallmarks of this particular New Hollywood blockbuster..." (Buckland 1998, p.175).

The fact that the New Hollywood style is an 'event' that relies heavily on spectacular imagery is not to say that the New Hollywood blockbuster is devoid of narrative aspects. As King again writes: "From the very start, throughout the 'classical' era, and today, narrative and spectacle have existed in a series of shifting relationships in which neither has ever been entirely absent" (King 1999, p.25).

The cinematic-spectacular advertisement relies to some extent on absorption through the classical narrative form, because while the *content* is spectacular the *techniques* are ultimately familiar to the audience having been borrowed or adapted from film production modes. The spectacle generally happens within the diegesis of the advertisement or ‘film’ so it is the *content* that is being fore-grounded as opposed to the *techniques*.

Geoff King in his article ‘Spectacle, Narrative and the Hollywood Blockbuster’ breaks spectacle down into two differing forms. “One has its roots in the creation of impact on the big screen. The other draws on techniques associated in part with small screen spectacle” (King 2003, p.116). The first form of spectacle King refers to is ‘contemplative’ spectacle in that it allows the viewer to assess the image with some scrutiny, admiring the production values. In this sense, while suggesting to the audience that this is a ‘theatrical’ form, “the viewer might as a result be taken more effectively “into” the diegetic world on screen” (Ibid.). While to an extent ‘theatrical’ in its presentation, the contemplative spectacle is fundamentally absorptive in its nature. It draws the viewer into the story-world’s diegesis through the spectacle of that world, its striking and awe-inspiring sights and sounds.

The latter form King does not explicitly name as he does ‘contemplative’ spectacle, but we can refer to this simply as ‘small screen spectacle’. This form of spectacle relies on techniques such as unstable camera movement, fast editing and rapid montage-effect editing to ‘maintain heightened levels of stimulus on the small screen’ (Ibid, p.117). In this regard, it is a far less contemplative form of spectacle, more an ‘instant’ or ‘presentational’ form of spectacle that does not allow a deep level of scrutiny on behalf of the viewer and foregrounds the techniques used to construct the sequence. As we will see, however, the spectacle in this regard is driven by the narrative or the content – it is a motivated stimulus. However, these special effects within the cinematic-spectacular advertisement are predominantly ‘pro-filmic’ in their nature, the spectacle ultimately happens within the diegesis of the story-world,

motivated by the narrative. While spectacular in content, the overall effect of the cinematic-spectacular is not one of presentationalism or theatricalism as the techniques *themselves* are not fore-grounded, but rather hide behind a veil of ‘realism’.

Forms and Elements

Cinematic-spectacular advertisements remained relatively popular ‘well into the 1990s’ (Caldwell 1995, p.10) and have very much remained a popular form of advertising well into the first decade of the 21st century. A recent example on the high-end of this cinematic-spectacular scale is the Baz Luhrmann (*Romeo + Juliet*, 1996; *Moulin Rouge*, 2001) directed advertisement for Chanel No.5 (2004, fig.4 below). The marketing hyperbole, as reported in the *London Telegraph Online* asserted “It’s a film, not an advert” (Edwardes 2004). And indeed, it is shot as a small film running at two minutes (three including the credits, released also as a more traditional thirty-second edit). However, in this context – regardless of what the publicity says - we can consider this as an advertisement that firmly sits within the cinematic-spectacular genre, aesthetically and thematically borrowing heavily from Luhrmann’s *Moulin Rouge* (2001) with its main goal being the promotion of a product. With a budget of eighteen million pounds, it is reportedly the most expensive advertisement ever made (Ibid.) and generated a wide amount of media attention around its release.

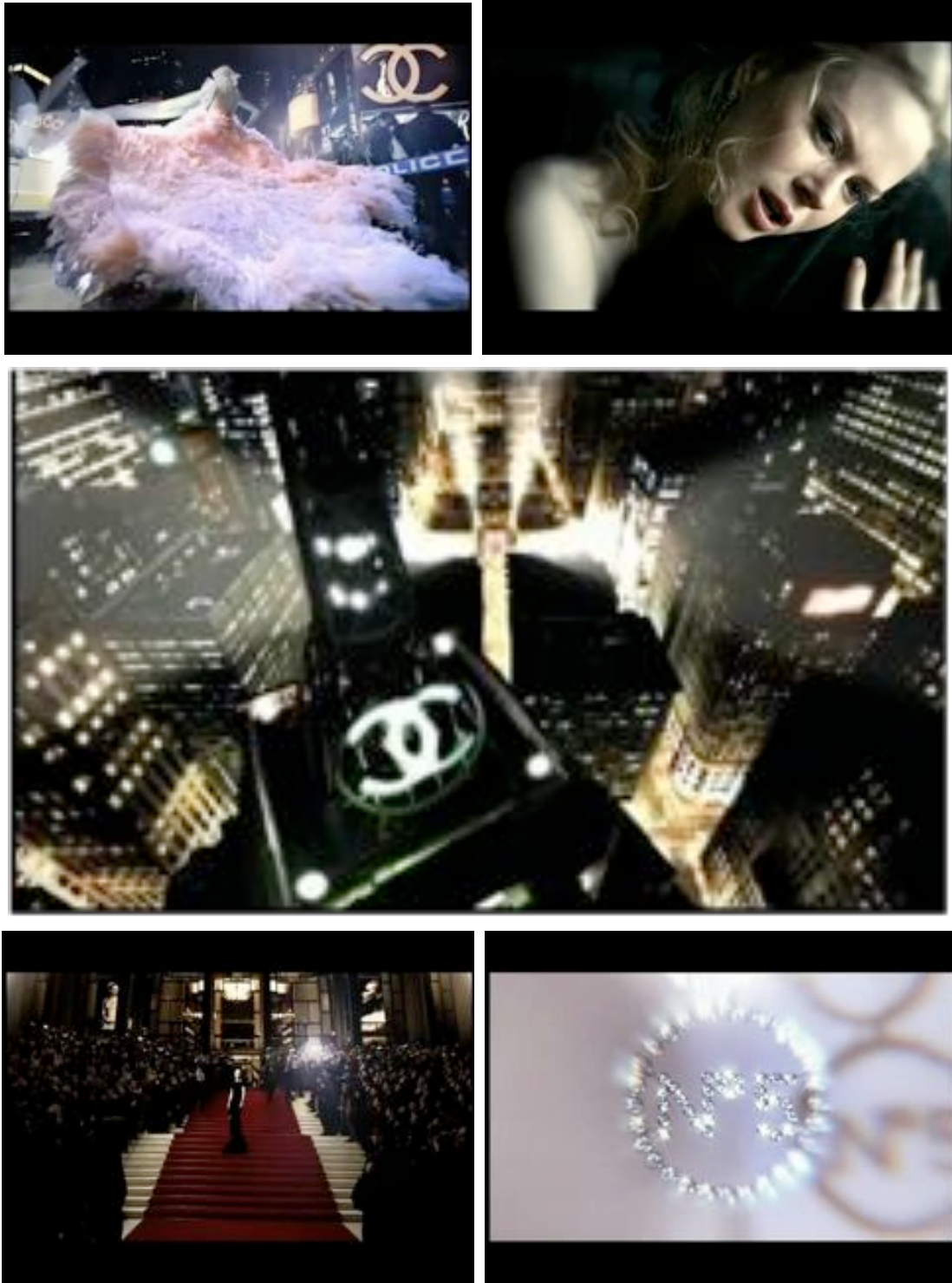


Figure 4: Chanel No.5

Chanel No.5's cinematic-spectacle; cinematic aesthetics and high production values.

One of the most notable elements of the Chanel No.5 advertisement is its consistent use of wide vista shots – shots of the city (fig.4c), buildings, crowds (fig.4d), etc. This is very much a ‘big’ production, aligning itself as a ‘blockbuster event’ advertisement as presented through

the sheer lavishness of the mise-en-scene. And for as much as the sequence borrows a relatively fast editing style (as per *Moulin Rouge*), it gives the audience moments to absorb this lavishness of the overall design, utilizing slow motion effects in a number of instances (fig.4a). To come back to King (King 2003, p.16), we see the combining of ‘contemplative spectacle’ (vista, slow motion) to which he attributes the audience going “‘into” the diegetic world on screen...’ and the presentational effect of ‘small screen spectacle’ - montage and fast editing that give a sense of ‘heightened levels of visual stimulus’ (Ibid, p.17) (fig.4e). Yet the montage sequences are still driven by a narrative logic. One sequence for example fills in the story of the female character for the audience in a ‘flash-forward’. “Emotional Breakdown” and “Gone!” we see written newspapers, combined with faux news footage, before returning to the actress.

The visual effects in this example, while not inherently ‘realistic’ because of the relatively stylised application, are at least ‘pro-filmic’ in nature, which is to say the effects do not present themselves as special effects - the sweeping shots of a lit city, while spectacular, function as establishing shots used to draw the audience into the story world. The fireworks when the couple are on the rooftop function as both a spectacular image element as well as metaphor. The basic narrative in this sense functions as a device around which to build these spectacular shots.

Another example of the cinematic-spectacular advertisement is the Carlton Draft *Big Ad* (2005, fig. 5 below) directed by Paul Middleditch. In a completely opposite approach to the Chanel No.5 advertisement, the *Big Ad* is very much based on pastiche of the cinematic-spectacular advertisement genre. Featuring what appear to be many thousands of people flooding across an expansive valley, the sequence opens with a single man who points across the valley surrounded by snow-capped mountains (fig.5a). The next shot shows a large crowd of people who start singing in operatic tones to the tune of ‘O Fortuna’ by Carl Orff. They start marching, the camera in successive shots pulling back wider and wider, and inter-cutting

between the 'yellow army' and the 'red army'. Lyrics are sung, with subtitles provided, reading, "It's a big ad. Very big ad. It's a big ad we're in..." and so-on. As the shots get wider, we see that there appear to be many thousands of people marching and we see that one 'army' is in the shape of a beer glass. Then they break into a run as the music builds, the 'yellows' struggling to get over a fence. The sequence reaches its climax when the two 'armies' collide, the lyrics reading "This better sell some bloody beer!" and we see the 'reds' form the shape of a figure drinking the 'yellows' (fig.5e and 5d). The sequence ends with a close shot of the crowd all holding glasses of beer in the air, the camera tracking in on one glass.

This visually epic advertisement utilised crowd-generation animation technology that were originally developed for the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Peter Jackson, 2001-2003). In this regard, the advertisement starts to steer towards the digital-spectacular advertisement becoming slightly more presentational in its form. However, again what is being primarily fore-grounded here is not the technologies, but the content. It is not presented as digital effects, but again as a 'pro-filmic reality'.

The combination of closer shots with the ever-increasing distance of the 'vista' shots gives us two distinct concepts of the advertisement. The closer shots are mostly comedic in nature; we see the 'yellows' struggle and trip over a fence in the middle of the valley, for example. The crowd we see is made up of a variety of characters that one wouldn't associate with the 'operatic' theme of the advertisement, consisting of a variety of generally portly men – hardly Adonis-like warriors. In this regard, the advertisement leans towards a more narrative-oriented approach on that we start to see some characterization with which the audience can identify. The wider shots, however, function entirely as a spectacular element displaying the sheer scale of the production in a highly realistic manner.



Figure 5: Carlton Draft *Big Ad*

(a, b) Two opposing 'armies' march towards each other. (c, d & e) Utilising crowd generation technologies.

The cinematic-spectacular advertisement is, in essence, the link between old advertising production methods and the digital-spectacular advertising production methods – the merging of image creation technologies and traditional concepts of advertising, all combined to be presented as an 'event'. This is perhaps exemplified in an example from Guinness. *Surfer*

(1999, fig. 6), directed by Jonathan Glazer, opens with a man's face looking not at the audience, but towards the top of the screen (fig. 6a). Cutting to a wider shot, we see standing on a beach a group of surfers who pick up their surfboards and run into the ocean (fig. 6b). We see a brief shot of horse legs under water as the music builds. The shot pulls out wider showing a building wave, pulling out again into a high over-head shot. Cutting back to the surfers, we then see another brief shot of a horse with water splashing around. Cutting back again we see the wave build and the first glimpse of the 'horses as a wave'. The next 25 seconds is a series of fast shots (around 30) in a montage mixing wider shots of the scene with tighter shots of the surfers (fig. 6c). We see one surfer 'victorious' as the music stops (fig. 6d), the surfers back on the beach in ecstasy, the scene pauses, the final shot showing a glass of Guinness (fig. 6e).

Again we see the use of visual effects which, while not 'realistic' in *theme*, still provide a level of realism within the diegesis of the advertisement. The mixing of a selection of wide shots with fast, non-continuous editing creates a sense of chaos for the sequence. The music that builds throughout the sequence – a dance music track – never reaches a climax but stops at the point of 'victory'. The 'narrator' of the piece reads extracts from *Moby Dick* throughout the sequence. The footage is discontinuous and has a hand-made quality – black and white footage is over-exposed in a number of shots, light-leakage can be seen in another. The camera shifts and re-frames on occasion as well as pauses moments towards the end of the sequence.



Figure 6: Guinness Surfer

(a,b) The build up (c) The spectacle (d) The triumph (e) Good things come to those who...

The combination of all these seemingly opposing elements – ‘poor’ footage mixed with visual effects, electronic music mixed with readings of classic literature creates a strange dichotomy. What holds the sequence together is the basic goal-oriented narrative: surfers go surfing, catch a large wave, and only one of the three is able to ‘hang-on’ – the audience watches not only for the spectacular elements, but to see what the outcome of the narrative will be.

To summarise, the cinematic-spectacular advertisement’s form and elements are primarily the presentation of visual effects structured around a basic narrative. The spectacular element is primarily presented as a ‘pro-filmic’ reality as the effects function in an absorptive fashion for the audience. Based on the ‘New Hollywood’ style of filmmaking, providing both cinematic-spectacle (in the form of vistas, special effects) as well as faster, ‘small screen spectacle’ moments in the form of montage (Chanel No.5) and fast editing practices (*Surfer*), the cinematic-spectacular advertisement is above all presented as an *event*.

Modes of Address

The mode of address for the cinematic-spectacular advertisement starts to shift away from the voyeuristic modes of the purely narrative advertisements. While still voyeuristic in nature, in that there is no direct audience address, the cinematic-spectacular starts to provide a sense of presentationalism from the sequences. The advertisements position themselves as blockbuster events and the audience seems to be positioned as a privileged viewer, which is to say, while still voyeuristic, the audience becomes *part* of the event – the advertisement is an event that the audience are participating in or *experiencing*.

In *Chanel No.5* the audience is primarily voyeuristic, borrowing heavily from ‘classical Hollywood’ modes of address. While the audience is at times drawn along by the narration of the male character, it lacks the direct address of the information-driven advertisement. Presentational aspects can be seen in parts of the sequence that display to the audience a

collage of imagery that fades in, combining the characters with fireworks, or newspaper footage. So in this regard, it steers away from the narrative aspects into presentational aspects that start to foreground its construction and techniques to the audience, but still remains grounded in that narrative-motivated form.

The *Big Ad* is slightly more complicated in its audience address due to its satirical approach. In one sense, the audience is an omnipresent observer being able to view the scene in its entirety from a great height. Its extensive use of vista ‘contemplative’ shots combined with closer more ‘classical’ shot selections seem to shift the audience address back and forth between classical modes and contemplative spectacle modes. To add to this, there is a performance aspect in this piece as given by the characters within that story world, as it is presented as an opera. This is opposed to a ‘technological’ performance by the creators. At the same time the lyrics clearly indicate that this is an advertisement generated for the sale of beer, which borders on a direct mode of audience address, almost informative in nature (“It’s a big ad we’re in”). The hybridisation of forms within the cinematic-spectacular advertisement in this example creates an almost schizophrenic mode of audience address.

In Guinness’s *Surfer* the audience is a combination of omnipresent observer, in that they can observe the scene from great distances, as well as voyeurs – accentuated in the sections of the sequence at the beginning and end where the camera takes on an almost Neo-Realist approach due to the previously mentioned ‘hand-made’ qualities of the footage. Audience address in the *Surfer* example is clouded further with the introduction of the voice-over of excerpts from *Moby Dick* that again almost takes on a direct audience address approach, but not in an informative manner.

Ultimately, what the cinematic-spectacular form achieves for the audience is the creation of a story world - a basic story world, but a story world none the less. While it mixes aspects of

voyeurism and presentationalism, the sequences aim to draw the audience into the on-screen world that is being created through a combination of narrative and spectacle. While the advertisements are primarily absorptive in their audience address in the classical sense there is also an undercurrent hinting that these are still advertisements, albeit spectacular ones, that are being presented to the audience for their scopophilic entertainment, á la the New Hollywood style of ‘event cinema’.

Function

Again, much like in the Bud Light advertisement mentioned in the narrative-oriented advertisement, the product itself is almost completely interchangeable within these examples here. The Chanel No.5 advertisement functions as an advertisement entirely through product placement: the Empire-state-like building features the double-C logo, Times Square is populated entirely by ‘Chanel No.5’ billboards, another building’s rooftop features a storey-high double-C logo and the ‘Chanel’ name, as well as the necklace at the end of the sequence featuring the ‘No.5’ name. However, switch these logos and words and the advertisement – the spectacle, the narrative – still function. The perfume could be *any* perfume provided it fits with the targeted demographic. In the *Big Ad*, the beer could be *any* beer and the advertisement would still work as intended. The *Surfer* advertisement – aside from being only one advertisement in a series based on the concept of ‘Good things come to those who wait’ – could be any drink.

The narratives and the spectacle of the cinematic-spectacular advertisement are indeterminate. Where the narrative advertisement creates an association with the audience through characters, plot and situation, what we see with the cinematic-spectacular is something somewhere between the narrative advertisement and, as we will see, the digital-spectacular advertisement, as it sits in an uncertain position between narrative and spectacle. While the audience is drawn into the diegetic world of the advertisement through a combination of

narrative and imagery, what the audience starts to do is to associate the *event itself* with the product. This genre of cinematic-spectacle is not about the *product* but rather the *event*. It is that event status that the cinematic-spectacle needs to generate for the audiences' attention, and that idea of the big event is in turn associated with that product or brand. The overall function of this 'event status', to come back to Twitchell's assessment of Apple Computer's 1984 advertisement, is to generate talk and attention – to position the advertisement as a blockbuster that will get talked about.

In part two of this study, we look beyond the cinematic-spectacular to the digital-spectacular advertisement. The digital-spectacular works on a much smaller scale than the cinematic-spectacular, taking digital-imaging techniques and technologies and foregrounding them for the audience, steering away from realism and narrative towards a far more stylised aesthetic.

Part 2: The Digital-Spectacular

As we have seen, the cinematic-spectacular advertisement places the emphasis for its form on a combination of contemplative spectacle and small-screen spectacle built around a basic narrative. It emphasises scale, vista and ultimately bills itself as an ‘event’. However around the mid 1990s we see the emergence of a new form of advertising. Visually it works on a much smaller scale than that of the cinematic-spectacular advertisement, placing its emphasis on technology that allowed new approaches to imaging – morphing, transitions, virtual space and digital compositing. Landmark films in the late 80s and early 90s paved the way, developing new digital imaging technologies (*The Abyss*, 1989; *Terminator 2*, 1991; *Jurassic Park*, 1993) (Pierson 1999). While these digital effects were primarily geared towards a ‘pro-filmic’ reality, as with the cinematic-spectacle, it was the wider adoption of these technologies within advertising that started to expand the possibilities and applications of the digital imaging technologies.

To look at the digital-spectacular then, we cannot simply apply the classical narrative aesthetic framework as that is based on a narrative motivated aesthetic. The digital-spectacular advertisement, as we will see, lacks characters and narratives. As a result we have to turn to a spectacular aesthetic framework in order for us to fully understand and appreciate the form.

The spectacular image needs to be divided broadly into three different eras; The first of these can be seen in the early development of spectacular entertainment where many of the foundations for our understanding of the spectacular image originate. This will be placed at the early period of motion pictures, but it should be noted that the notion of the spectacular image can be traced back many centuries. Norman Klien traces the concept of the spectacular image as far back as the 16th century in frescos (Klein 2004). Andrew Darley in his book

Visual Digital Culture begins by placing the roots of contemporary visual spectacular aesthetics in 18th century Europe (Darley 2000, pp.39-43) with the development of centralised, commercialised entertainments such as the Phantasmagoria and the Panorama. The Phantasmagoria was essentially a show that consisted of lighting effects – gauze curtains, projected images, mirrors and lenses. In their own, specially built exhibition spaces, these effects were combined with sound effects as well as audience plants to create illusions of the supernatural and to astonish the audience. “Clearly, popular entertainment forms of the late 18th and 19th centuries diverge greatly from conventional or classical models in terms of aesthetic properties. Designed to stimulate and capture the eye and, often, the gut as well, rather than the head or intellect [...] Such forms seem to exist for their own sake” (Darley 2000, p.40)

The end of the 19th century, around 1893, saw the development of motion pictures and the ‘cinema of attractions’ (1890s-1910s), a term coined by Tom Gunning in a series of papers that re-evaluate early film form (Gunning 1989, 1990, 2004a, 2004b). The term ‘attractions’ originates from the Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, writing: “An attraction aggressively subjected the spectator to ‘sensual or psychological impact’” (Eisenstein, cited in Gunning 1990, p.59). The following ten to fifteen-year period would see the emergence and popularisation of film as a primarily ‘spectacular’ medium before it would transform into the ‘Classical Hollywood’ style, heavily influenced by narrative motivated aspects as opposed to spectacular image-based forms. The spectacular aesthetic, while certainly present throughout the 20th century in some form was not the driving force behind a majority of media which remained primarily narrative in form.

“This cinema [of attractions] differs from later narrative cinema through its *fascination with the thrill of display* rather than the construction of a story” writes Gunning (Gunning 1989, p.9 emphasis added). A popular myth about early cinema Gunning notes is the belief that

audiences at the Grand Café screening of the film *'Arrival of a train at a station'* went into hysterics, either screaming, rearing back in their seats or running out of the theatre. This was not entirely the case. "The first audiences, according to this myth," writes Gunning "were naïve, encountering this threatening and rampant image with no defences, with no tradition by which to understand it" (Gunning 2004a, p.863). These first projections, however, were the "crowning achievement" of the magic theatre – the art of confounding the expectations of the audience. The audience *did* have a tradition of visual spectacular entertainments to understand film, or at least the illusionary aspects of it (Ibid, p.865). If we discredit this 'naive' understanding of audiences, then there must be some other underlying trait within the spectacular image that results in a strong reaction from the audience.

What is interesting to note is how some of the first projections were presented to the audience. For example, only the first frame would be projected as a tableau and then, perhaps after a few moments, the image would become animated. "The shock of the film image comes from a sudden transformation" (of still image to movement) writes Gunning (Ibid, p.867). The cinema of attractions then, is about making the viewer conscious of the fact that what they are watching is in fact an illusion – an attraction – being presented for its effect of astonishment. That transformation and presentation aspect as we will discuss later, is a crucial point for the spectacular aesthetic.

The cinema of attractions was gradually displaced by narrative film starting around 1907 through 1917 which later became known as the Classical Hollywood style. While still present in the cinema, the spectacular aesthetic took a back seat to the narrative-driven audience address and aesthetic. It wouldn't be until the late 1970's and the 'New Hollywood' style when audiences would see a resurgence of spectacle in the cinema (Gunning 1990, p.61), albeit still reliant on narrative.

The second era of spectacular imagery begins post-1980 and is generally attributed to the rise of the 'MTV aesthetic'. Again, as with the development of film in its day, this period was a major step forward in technological terms with the development of digital image creation and manipulation which expanded creative possibilities that were offered to image makers. Beginning in the early 1980s, a new style was forming not from within cinema, but from within television – the 'MTV aesthetic'. Primarily an aesthetic of temporal density, shots would follow one another in quick succession, along with the merging of a variety of film and video formats (Caldwell 1995, p.13). It was, as Caldwell writes, the “give ‘em hell” look. It is in this period that we see early prefigurations of digital-transitions such as page curls and shattering glass (Ellis 2000, p.93). This MTV aesthetic was a form of technological theatricality in which the technologies and techniques themselves were being fore-grounded for the audience. Throughout the following ten year period we see the developments of morphing effects (*Willow*, 1988), 3D animation (*Terminator 2*, 1991), digital compositing and image manipulation (*The Abyss*, 1989) (Pierson 1999). Yet it wasn't until the mid 1990s when the digital-spectacular came into its own, re-visioning the possibilities that digital imaging offered outside of the filmic context. This is the third era of spectacular imagery.

The digital-spectacular advertisement emphasised spatial aspects of the image, perhaps as a result of the non-linearisation and spatialisation of the production process itself. Within this period, the way in which image makers interacted with the machines used to create or manipulate images also underwent change where they would interact more spatially with the computer through graphical user interfaces and in a non-linear fashion due to the increase in random access digital storage capabilities (Caldwell 1995, p.139-159).

What we see with the digital-spectacular is that it parallels to some extent the cinema of attractions, a point noted in Punt's article, 'Parallel Histories' (Punt 2000). Almost devoid of narrative, the emphasis in both forms is on the transition that results in a reaction of astonishment or wonder from the audience. This moment of astonishment is wrapped up in an

act of presentation and as a result, the overall relationship that the audience has with the spectacular aesthetic (attraction or advertisement) is one that is entirely different to that of the classical, narrative driven aesthetic.

The cinema of attractions utilised the latest in imaging technologies and techniques to create spectacular imagery. The digital-spectacular today is doing the very same thing, although audience expectations of what constitutes a 'spectacular image' may have somewhat increased since the late 19th century. The following chapter will focus on the digital-spectacular's different forms and elements, isolating some of the common techniques used within these advertisements that elicit moments of astonishment. Most notable are 'transitions' and 'spatial density' and its associated virtual space along with the 'micro-aesthetic' and particle effects.

Chapter 3: Forms and Elements

It should be noted that in certain instances, some of the concepts and techniques of the digital-spectacular form collide. For example the concept of the ‘transition’ and ‘space’ can collide, the two elements being inextricably linked with one another. That is, the transition occurs *within* the virtual space, or the transition itself *creates* virtual space. In this regard, the various elements within the digital-spectacular advertisement are tightly integrated and flexible in their functions, and should be kept in mind when analysing and describing the digital-spectacular advertisement.

Transitions

One of the defining elements that occurs repeatedly within the digital-spectacular is that of the transition. What sets the transition within the digital-spectacular apart from ‘regular’ transitions associated with the classical form is the notion of space and morphing. In the 1980s any technologically advanced transitions between one shot and another were limited to an early prefiguration of digital transitions such as page curls and shattering glass (Ellis 2000, p.93). But in this period we see the early indications of the image’s increased spatial density as we start to see the image being treated as an object within a virtual space. These changes in the concepts of the transition would intensify throughout the 80s and 90s. The idea of the transition between one image and another would become less clearly defined with the introduction of non-linear digital compositing and morphing with increased processing power and the continuing expansion of digital aesthetics into the 3D realm. In short, the process of how one image could be transitioned with another underwent a transformation in itself.

In this example from Nike (*Total 90*, 2005, fig.7) we see an advanced transition that is not only a transition from one ‘shot’ to another, but also transitions from one space to another, resulting in a transitioning of the mode of audience address.



Figure 7: Nike *Total 90*

(a, b) The player kicks the ball and the camera pulls back while the image fragments. (c, d) The camera glides back in as the image reforms back to the original frame and the action continues.

The transition occurs after an extended sequence in which the advertisement purports to be a regular broadcast soccer match (fig. 7a). We see the standard ‘replay’ graphics wipe across screen, the commentators are talking, the crowd can be heard chanting – all aspects that would be associated with a sports broadcast. When the transition occurs at the point when the player Wayne Rooney kicks the ball for the goal, the now virtual camera pulls back slightly, revealing that the image we were just watching is in fact an image within another space (fig. 7b). This image quite literally fragments within this space in which it is floating and the word ‘power’ is revealed through the camera pulling back (fig. 7c). The image reforms as the

camera moves back in and the action continues (fig. 7d). This visual transition is also accompanied with a transition in the soundtrack, the crowd and commentators replaced by a music track. The remainder of the sequence is a montage with recurrences of this transition.

In this above example, the moment of astonishment is delivered through the transition taking the audience from one mode of aesthetic presentation (that of the narrative aesthetic) to a digital-spectacular aesthetic. It utilises virtual space with the application of particle effects to create the transition. What is also notable with the transition in this example is how the time within the fragmenting image stops as the transition occurs. This acute manipulation of time through the transition – displacing time into space – is also a recurring element within the digital-spectacular advertisement, as we will see in the next example.

The Coke commercial *Snowboarder* (1997, fig. 8), directed by Michel Gondry (a master of the morph, as demonstrated in a number of commercials and music videos) consists entirely of still shots of a snowboarder and crowd. However, while being entirely constructed using still photography, the ‘camera’ rotates around the snowboarder figure and spectators. What the viewer sees is a series of still images – moments in and around the motion of the snowboarder jumping. No ‘actual’ motion appears in the sequence. It is as if the scene is a tableau, but the shots are connected through a morph transition between similar shots. That is, a shot from one angle of the snowboarder is morphed into another shot of the snowboarder from a different angle. The resulting ‘motion’ of the camera is virtual, as it could not take place in reality as time stands still.



Figure 8: Coke Snowboarder

(a, b) The spray from a can of Coke remains motionless as the camera rotates around it. (c, d) The snowboarder stays fixed in the air again as the camera 'moves' around the figure.

Within the above example, the transition/morph between the beginning and end point of a shot is seamless and as a result it creates 'camera' motion – there is a beginning and an end position, but the points in-between have been generated digitally. So again we see the transition between shots displacing temporal elements into a virtual space (a more in-depth analysis of *Snowboarder* can be found in Spielmann's article 'Aesthetic Features in digital imaging: Collage and Morph' (1999)).

In the final, and most complicated, example of advanced transitions in this section we can see a range of techniques being applied within the single transition from one shot to another. The station ID *Evolution* (2004, fig. 9) for American television network ESPN was created by the production company Motion Theory. In it, we see a graphically stylised surfer transition into a differently stylised skateboarder, as well as the surrounding environment. So not only do we see the shapes of the figure, the board and the wave, but also the transition between graphical styles, textures, colours and patterns.



Figure 9: ESPN Evolution

(a, b) The surfer begins his transition into a skateboarder as textures begin to change. (c, d) The animated underside of the board transforms as the transition completes.

A graphically stylised figure, shaded in flat colours, comes towards camera on a wave (fig. 9a). At this point, the speed of the sequence noticeably slows down, as if to add emphasis to the transition and to display itself. The edge of the wave dissolves into the edge of the pool, fading in colour as it does so. At the same time, the texture and shading on the surfer “wipes” from the flat-shaded form to a more volumetric form (fig. 9b). In the next image (fig. 9c) we see that the underside of the surfboard is animated, the patterns retracting to the sides, as wheels appear to ‘grow’ out of the bottom of the board. At the same time, the blue shading from the wave fades further. At the end point of the transition (fig. 9d) all shapes, colours and textures have been replaced and the speed of the action returns to its original pace. The remainder of the sequence again repeats this type of transition four more times, much like the recurring transitions in the previous examples *Snowboarder* (fig. 8) and *Total 90* (fig. 7)

The concept of the transition is a much more complicated concept within the digital-spectacular advertisement. The classical advertisement, as well as the cinematic-spectacular advertisement, primarily relies on the ‘invisible’ transition between shots – matching action, cuts that observe screen direction as well as spatial and temporal continuity. The digital-spectacular advertisement, on the other hand, uses these advanced transitions to draw attention not only to the image but the transition itself, foregrounding the content but also the technology and techniques as part of the attraction.

The Spatial Effect

As seen in the previous section on transitions, the notion of virtual space plays a large role in the digital-spectacular advertisement. The advent of digital composition also introduced a new axis that could be spatially exploited and accentuated more successfully than with previous modes of animation and film. As there is no physical camera within the virtual environment, the image becomes something that can be manipulated in virtual space, as seen in Nike’s *Total 90* (fig. 7). The camera can pass through the image; images can be layered, manipulated and morphed ad infinitum. As such, this introduces a *depth* to the collage that foregrounds the spatial density of the image (see Diesel’s *Lost Paradise* as a prime example (fig.12)).

This idea of the depth of the aesthetic and editing within the frame is by no means a modern concept that developed with the digital age. Georges Méliès experimented with the concept of the layer and depth within his films in both the late 19th and early 20th century (for example, *Les Cartes Vivantes* (1904) and *Un homme de têtes* (1898)). Sean Cubitt writes “Méliès displaces rather than repositions [...] he cuts, not just between but within frames” (Cubitt 2004, p.42). Digital composition has *intensified* the depth and the ‘edit within the frame’. The resulting construction is that of a collage of mixed media, each on their individual layer within a virtual space. Yvonne Spielmann refers to this as a ‘visual cluster’ (2001, p.57) in

which the layering of imagery within a virtual space results in a spatial density (see Reebok's *Wrapshear* below (fig. 10)). In another of Spielmann's articles (Spielmann 1999, p.138-139), she refers to this as the 'spatial effect' – a term borrowed from Sean Cubitt – to illustrate this component of the digital aesthetic. Again, this has arguably occurred in part through the de-linearisation and virtualisation of the production process itself as well as the virtualisation of three-dimensional space (Geuens 2005, pp 32-33) (Caldwell 1995, pp. 138-159). As the production process became more spatially oriented and randomly accessible (non-linear), we see the resulting images accentuate their spatiality.



Figure 10: Reebok *Wrapshear*

Increased spatial density – the virtual camera moves through 'growing' buildings and focuses in on a runner all in the one shot.

The digital-spectacular advertising aesthetic is not based on a temporal-linear structure like previous forms of film and advertising in which one image follows another in a 'logical' manner, allowing the audience to be 'stitched in' to the story world. Rather, the digital-spectacular is based on a far more spatial-oriented aesthetic in which the images are there *all*

at once, the transition becoming a part of the image or shot itself and not simply a way of connecting individual images.

While the digital-spectacular advertisement has displaced time into space, there are other elements that help create the illusion of space for the audience. In three-dimensional space, the different dimensions are commonly represented by X, Y and Z (with X being width, Y being height). If we accept that the plane of the television screen is X and Y, then the 'Z-axis' refers to the movement in and out of that plane. Kirsten Whissel refers to this as 'verticality' in her article 'Tales of upward mobility' (Whissel 2006) that looks at the emergence of the accentuation of the vertical axis within film since the late 1990s, predominantly driven by developments in digital visual effects. I hesitate to refer to the effect as 'verticality' within the digital-spectacular advertising aesthetic, as it generally does not function as a vertigo effect – perhaps as a result of the reduced scale of the image. Rather than accentuate the macro end of the spectrum (being great heights), in advertising the z-axis is used to accentuate 'depth' at the other end of the spectrum: the micro. The principles are the same, however - the (predominantly) virtual camera moves along the z-axis of the screen either through image layers or passing by objects that are positioned within a 3-dimensional space. This can be accentuated more by having the layers and objects pull in and out of focus according to the depth of field of the virtual camera.

In the example below from Nike (directed by Ryan Dunn & Matt Wilson, 2006, fig. 11) we see a series of abstract shots that culminate in a single shot that pulls back out through the side of a shoe (fig. 11a-c). We go from the micro (the 'air' inside a shoe) to the macro (the shoe itself).

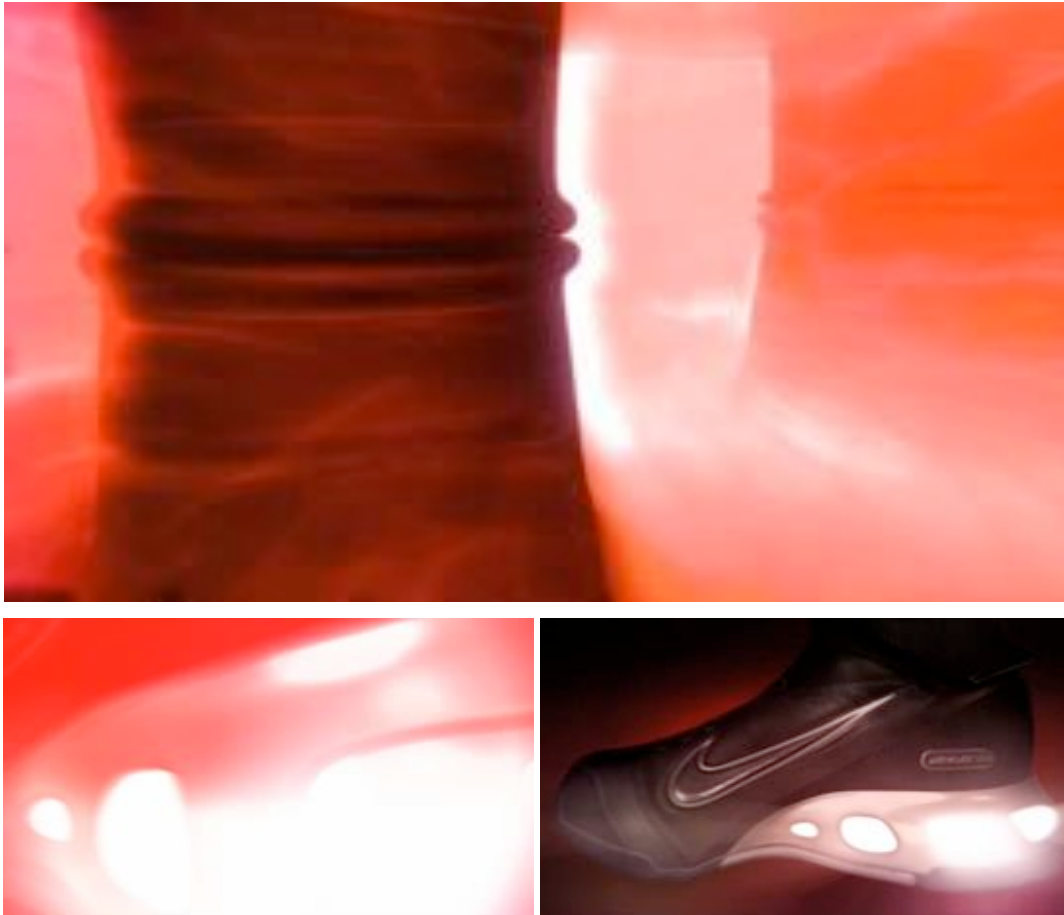


Figure 11: Nike Air
(a, b, c) from the micro to the macro in the one movement.

In the above example, the transition – and moment of astonishment – occurs when the camera pulls from the micro to the macro in what appears to be the one shot. The underlying principles of Whissel’s ‘verticality’ are the same as the digital-spectacular’s notion of ‘depth’, in that even though the two function on entirely different scales, both accentuate the space of the image.

In this example below from Diesel’s advertising campaign, *Lost Paradise* (2004, directed by Brazilian firm Lobo, fig. 12), the z-axis of the screen is much more aligned with Whissel’s concept of verticality but fails to provide the same sense of scale. The camera begins on a detail shot of a pattern being drawn on the seabed (fig. 12a). The camera pulls away, revealing the full image (fig. 12b) and passes through the ocean surface as the original image fades (fig. 12c) and finally through layers of cloud that obscure the ocean surface (fig. 12d)

before fading into the next shot. Within this one shot, there are three distinct layers of imagery – the seabed, the ocean surface and the cloud layer. The depth of the image is accentuated by having the camera pull from the seabed through the virtual space until above the clouds.

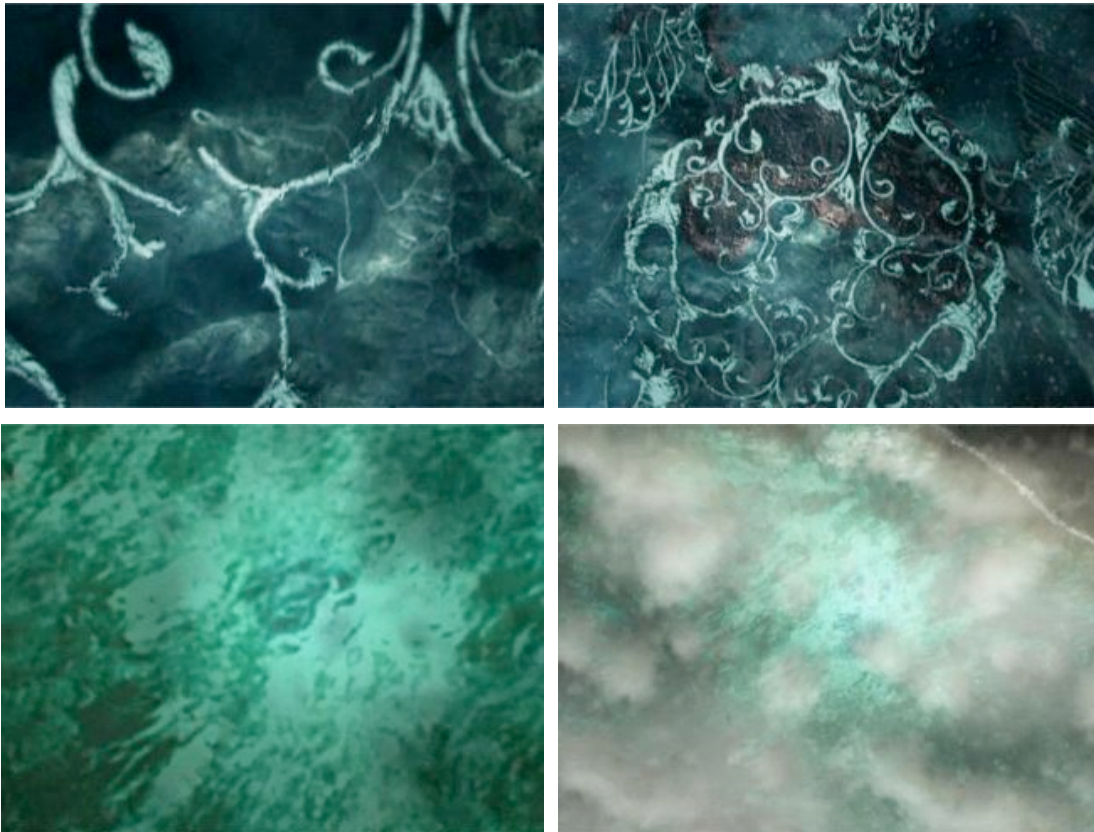


Figure 12: Diesel *Lost Paradise*

(a-d) Starting on the seabed, the camera pulls back passing through the ocean surface and a layer of clouds.

The *Lost Paradise* series uses movement along the z-axis extensively, moving in, out and through foliage, fields, water, etc. The effect of this movement is a sense of getting ‘deeper’ into the image, or – if the movement is in the opposite direction – the audience gets a sense of overview. Regardless of the motion being in or out, the overall effect is one of depth and an increased sense of space within the image.

Another element that is common within the digital-spectacular's accentuation of space is that of the particle effect. A computer-generated system of 'particles' creates a volumetric space that accentuates the depth of the image as the viewer has some sort of scale to judge the image by - particles closer to the camera will appear larger than those further away.

In this example below from Apple Computer, *1000 songs in your pocket* (2005, fig.13) utilises particle effects to construct a 'city' made from album covers. Individual particles firstly construct the buildings (fig. 13a) before deconstructing themselves (fig. 13b) into a stream of particles that flow into the music player (fig. 13c, d).

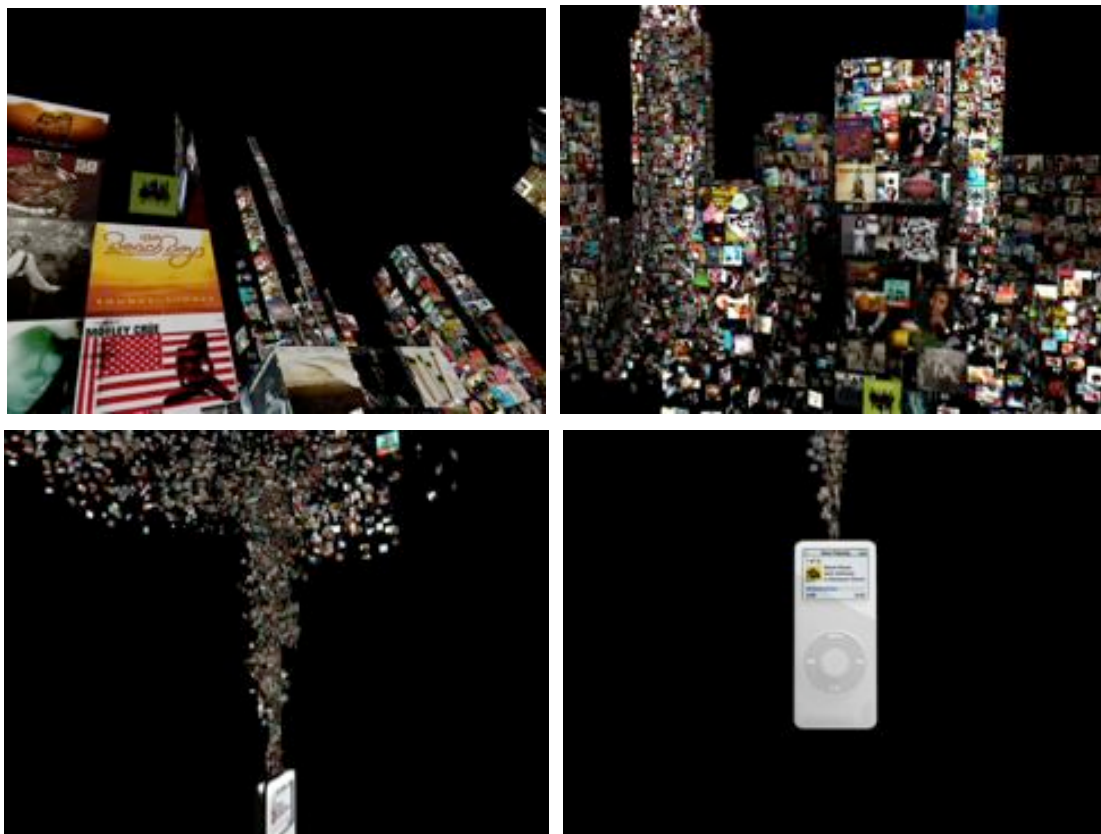


Figure 13: Apple *1000 Songs in Your Pocket*

(a-d) Album covers fly in to construct buildings, before coming down like a house of cards.

The benefit of particle systems, aside from accentuating space, is that more complex animations can be created in much less time as opposed to animating them by hand, as the computer calculates how each particle should behave in the environment. The resulting

aesthetic can be very dense made up of highly complex imagery. Combined with the movement of the virtual camera through a particle system, the spatiality of the image can be greatly accentuated. More recent advancements of particle effects include flocking behaviours in which particles will behave based on other particles around them (fig. 14 below).



Figure 14: MTV HD Station ID
The 'Psyop'-directed MTV HD station ID, emphasising 'flocking' particle effects

The ninety-second (also released as six fifteen-second) station ID for MTV's high definition channel, MTV HD (2006), opens with a series of crows and 'branches' that grow and morph

in size. One crow lands and a network of branches grows from where it lands. As the camera pans, following the growing branches, a flock of crows flies out (fig.14b). The camera holds on this flock for some time, seeming to emphasise the particle effect. The flock then morphs into an abstract pattern which is revealed to be a tree-trunk as the camera pulls back. More trees grow, filling the screen as another, much larger, flock of crows flies between them. Again holding for some time on the larger flock of crows (fig.14a), the image then transitions to a single crow as the camera pulls back. The single crow flies away, dropping a feather as it does so, black lines streaming from the feather. These lines animate and morph to create the 'MHD' logo.

Aesthetic Density

The overall result of the combination of these different elements – advanced transitions, morphing, accentuation of spatial aspects and its related techniques of movement along the z-axis and particle effects – creates a dense and complicated image. This notion of aesthetic density - the highly complex image with large amounts of movement and depth - is another factor that sets the digital-spectacular advertisement apart from other forms of advertising. While the cinematic-spectacular at times has a 'dense' image, this doesn't seem to be accentuated to the degree that the digital-spectacular accentuates the complexity and depth of the image. Simply put, the 'aesthetic density' of the digital-spectacular can be said to have more happening within the frame in terms of movement created through camera motion, animation of 'image clusters' (Spielmann 2001, p.57), accentuated depth of the image as well as temporal aspects such as fast 'editing' and transitions.

This aesthetic density is not just a stylistic choice, but I would suggest that it also takes into account the physical screen size and how the image is viewed by the audience. Advertising's foremost goal is to get the attention of the viewer. Yet how we view television works against this, as it does not have the viewer's undivided attention. It is a disjointed medium (albeit a

modular one), which is not viewed intently by the audience like one would when in a cinema. So there is the assumption that there are outside competing forces jostling for the attention of the viewer – a conversation, a phone call, making dinner and so on. Then there are competing forces from within the television medium – other channels, other advertisements and so-on. “The infamous “rule of two thirds” applies:” writes Twitchell, “two thirds of all viewers surf as a matter of normal viewing, and two-thirds of all the surfers start surfing whenever any commercial comes on” (Twitchell 2000, p.201). For a small screen in the living room (and increasingly, smaller screens on portable video devices) the advertisements’ purpose is to grab the attention of the viewer watching. As Darley at the beginning of this thesis states; ‘The aim is to take possession of the eyes, to surprise and hook the viewer to a *brief yet intense image display*.’

The spectacular advertisement, then, needs to capture the attention of the audience visually and quickly (don’t want the ‘god-like viewers’ using their ‘wands’ to mute the audio or worse, change the channel (Twitchell, 2000, p.153)). It achieves this through using this idea of aesthetic density. The dense aesthetic draws the viewer’s attention through large amounts of movement, transition and illusion happening within that small area of the television screen. It is an attention seeking form that attempts to ‘wow’ the viewer away from the competing forces momentarily so the message can be delivered – whatever that message might be.

How high the density of the image on a TV screen can go might be seen as a counter-productive aesthetic strategy. The MTV HD station ID (fig. 14) for example is an incredibly complicated series of images featuring a variety of transitions, morphs, animations, particle effects and extensive movement in and out of the image. As there is more visual information being compressed into the image, the viewer is going to find it harder to absorb that visual information. However, the denser an aesthetic, the higher the replay value for the advertisement over the life of the campaign. Its density encourages the viewer to watch again and again, noticing more subtleties within the image.

This concept of *encouraging* the viewer to re-watch an advertisement for its technical and stylistic approach also leads on to the notion of the ‘microsite’. We will come back to this in more detail later. Suffice to say that some websites that are associated with an advertising campaign offer the viewer the option to download and watch the advertisement at will. Diesel’s *Lost Paradise*, Adidas’s *Hello Tomorrow* and the assorted iPod commercials all offer video on demand or downloads of their advertisements from their associated websites. This suggests, again, that there is a certain degree of replay value within these texts that lies on a technical or spectacular level.

The digital-spectacular is a form that emphasises repetition, not only in repeat viewing, but also within the individual advertisements. In the examples cited in this chapter, any complex effect or transition is repeated for the audience. We see repeated transitions in nearly all these digital-spectacular advertisements from the repeating ‘exploding’ images in Nike’s *Total 90* (fig.7) to the repeated transitions in ESPN’s *Evolution* (fig.9), among others. The form nearly always culminates in an informative aspect be it a logo, web address or product title.

The transition, the ‘spatial effect’ and high aesthetic density are defining elements in the spectacular advertisement. With roots in early cinema, the accentuation of depth has seen a resurgence within recent years in both film and advertising. The digital age brought about the concept of the virtual camera, allowing for the expansion into a full 3-dimensional space. Yet this spatial effect has been more prominently used and tailored within the context of the advertisement as designed for the television screen than in cinema, allowing for a higher aesthetic density to be achieved for the television medium. The resulting image is complex in its appearance and as a result allows for repeat viewings in order to absorb more of the visual information.

In the next chapter, we will look at how the digital-spectacular addresses the audience by fore-grounding the image and techniques, and the resulting effect this has on the audience's relationship to the advertisement.

Chapter 4: Modes of Address

Having established what the digital-spectacular advertisement looks like, we now need to move on to how this genre addresses the audience. This audience address is another defining characteristic of the digital-spectacular advertisement, in that it is markedly different from ‘classical’ forms of advertising and sets itself apart from the cinematic-spectacular on a number of levels. This characteristic is one of *presentation* or theatricality, as opposed to the classical forms of advertising that exhibit either voyeuristic or direct modes of viewer address.

Rushton in ‘Early, classical and modern cinema: absorption and theatricality’ defines theatrical artworks as “those that attempt to attract their audience by effectively proclaiming ‘look at me!’” (Rushton 2004, p.228). He continues: “Theatrical artworks explicitly address their audience – their *beholders* – in order to announce themselves as worthy of attention.” (Ibid. emphasis in original). Classical modes of advertising rely on absorption through voyeurism and direct address (the latter as I have argued is to an extent absorptive in nature in that the viewer is being absorbed into the advertisement and its content world by the presenter). The digital-spectacular effectively suggests to the viewer to ‘look at me! You’re about to see something *amazing!*’

In this sense, the digital-spectacular advertisement can be seen as an act or a performance. Rushton writes, “[theatricality] can in fact be associated with the oldest type of cinema, [...] the cinema of attractions” (Ibid. p.230). It is from this connection with the cinema of attractions that we can draw some parallels regarding the audience address of the digital-spectacular advertisement.

Darley writes of the spectator being a 'seeker' of 'unbridled visual delight and corporeal excitement...' This firstly implies that this is an active audience, as opposed to a passive audience. This audience is not voyeuristic, they are spectators to an act of exhibitionism. Gunning, in his article 'Now you see it, now you don't' writes about early cinema being a cinema of attractions: "The attraction directly addresses the spectator, acknowledging the viewer's presence and seeking to quickly satisfy a curiosity" (Gunning 2004b, p.44). "This cinema addresses and holds the spectator, emphasising the act of display. In fulfilling this curiosity, it delivers a generally brief dose of scopic pleasure" (Gunning 2004a, p.869). While there is no direct presenter address in the sense of the cinema of attractions, the digital-spectacular is presentational in that it addresses the audience through the presentational display of the imagery. It is in such terms that we can see the digital-spectacular advertisement as an attraction, the audience the thrill-seekers looking for the latest developments in spectacular imagery.

The viewer as the thrill-seeker *expects* these spectacular advertisements to deliver visual shocks or surprises through image manipulation, transformation and transition. The audience wants to be astounded by the spectacular, to be dumb-founded by the latest visual trickery. Meeting this audience desire is what motivates and explains the digital-spectacular advertisement's mode of address and general aesthetic.

These digital-spectacular advertisements have no people looking out at the audience, vis-à-vis the cinema of attractions in which the 'magician' would 'look' out at the audience, and indicate to the audience to "watch!" with a sweep of their arm (Gunning 2004a, p.869). Rarely do spectacular advertisements have characters of *any* description. If, for example, they do include human figures these function purely as an aesthetic device, stylised beyond recognition (see, for example, ESPN's *Evolution* (fig.9) and Apple Computer's iPod series, (fig. 16)). The 'obvious' form of audience address from the cinema of attractions as mentioned by Gunning has been left behind, yet the audience is still prompted to 'look' using

slight camera movements and design to focus their attention. Transitions are emphasised; in ESPN's *Evolution* time slows down during the transitions allowing the viewer more time to absorb the effect. In Nike's advertisement – also titled *Evolution* (Blomkamp 2004, fig. 15) – the camera momentarily lingers on a regular shoe before dramatically and organically morphing through a series of different styles.



Figure 15: Nike *Evolution*
The shot holds on a shoe momentarily before transforming

The result of these presentational aspects combined with the lack of characterisation is that the audience stays almost distanced from the advertisement. As ‘seekers of visual delight’, the audience is highly aware that it is viewing the imagery itself – the result of the technical and artistic aspects – rather than being absorbed into the sequence. The promise of spectacle keeps the audience assessing the image at a ‘distance’. If the classical advertisement’s modes of presentation and audience address can be considered to be based on our everyday lives or ‘reality’ through voyeurism and illusionism, then the digital-spectacular advertisement’s presentation and mode of address can be seen as removed from reality almost all together. Only vestiges of what we recognise as our reality remain as the audience is presented a fictional-world – as opposed to a story-world – of which they are aware that they are not a part of – nor can they ever can be. Darley writes: “...these image forms [...] are more about themselves, they are not attempts to represent the world. There is little reference outside or beyond their own stylistic, decorative, dazzling, fascinating and manipulable circularity” (Darley 2000, p.184) The audience is acutely aware that this is *not* representative of their lives

but rather a world of tricks and illusions – a world of imagery. “Contemplative absorption is impossible here. The viewer’s curiosity is aroused and fulfilled through a marked encounter, a direct stimulus, a succession of shocks.” (Gunning 2004a, p.871). As a result of this ‘separation’ of advertisement from audience the digital-spectacular advertisement becomes almost entirely a sensual and visual experience for the audience, an object to be looked at rather than a world to be lived in.

There is one more aspect of audience address and presentation that we have to take into account that parallels both the cinema of attractions and spectacular advertisements. The idea of the sequence as only a *part* of a larger show is an important one. The ‘variety show’ format was present in the early cinema of attractions. Gunning writes “Film appeared as one attraction on the vaudeville programme, surrounded by a mass of unrelated acts in a non-narrative and even nearly illogical succession of performances” (Gunning 1990, p. 60). This vaudevillian format is ultimately much like television – masses of unrelated ‘acts’ all vying for the audience’s attention all presented one after the other. The idea of the main act (the television show itself) surrounded by these smaller performances (advertisements) is a strong parallel that can be drawn between the cinema of attractions and television.

The strong parallel between the digital-spectacular advertisement and the cinema of attractions is based around the relationship of the showman and the audience. It is the showman who builds up the audience, readying them for the presentation, hyping the atmosphere (see for example (Gunning 2004a, p.868)). Yet this relied on an audience that was there in the theatre. This sort of showmanship hype is, for the most part, gone. However, the idea of showmanship remains, but the showman is no longer the individual. Rather, the showman is the brand itself. Once recognising that the advertisement is from brand *X*, the audience *expects* surprise or novelty.

The early cinema is predicated on an anticipation bargain that is struck between exhibitor and audience. In a sense, one may always be surprised by what one sees, but in the context of early cinema one is never surprised that one is surprised, not shocked that one is shocked: one always anticipates the shock to come.

(Rushton 2004, p.239)

As Miêlés would have wondered what other directions he could go to keep his ‘magic act’ new to audiences utilising the film medium, so the pressure is on the brand to produce a sequence that will go a step further than the previous campaign in terms of spectacular aesthetics. See, for example, the evolution of the Apple iPod commercials (fig. 16 below), which are increasingly accentuating depth and complexity of the image. Starting in 2004 (fig. 16a) the stylised ‘silhouette’ imagery is predominantly simple in style. A 2005 example (fig. 16b) introduces a much denser aesthetic that involves more animation and greater accentuation of space. The final example from 2006 (fig. 16c) almost inverts the original concept and uses large amounts of movement along the z-axis combined with large amounts of motion along with what appears to be an interesting application of particle effects as found in the ‘trails’. The result is that we see an increasing intensification of the digital-spectacular aesthetic introducing new techniques and styles in order to remain a ‘fresh’ visual experience for the thrill-seeking audience.

This gets to the heart of what we mean by a theatrical or presentational mode of address. The digital-spectacular advertisement is presented as the latest attraction that is aware that it exists to be seen - to be admired - almost purely for its visual qualities. It is as if the brand is placing the advertisement before the audience and announcing ‘Look what we’ve come up with this time!’ These aren’t positioned to the audience as blockbusters, à-la-cinematic-spectacle, but rather they are the latest technological offerings of optical illusion. It is this act of presentation that has played a large role in the history of the spectacular aesthetic. As Darley says: “The spectator of visual digital culture is positioned first and foremost as a seeker after unbridled visual delight and corporeal excitation”. The audience is seen as thrill-seekers, the

television is vaudeville, the advertisement is the performance and the brand is the excited, extroverted showman exclaiming, “Ladies and gentlemen, I promise that you will be astounded!” The audience watches expectantly, waiting for the spectacular sights, surprises and shocks to come.



**Figure 16: Apple iPod comparison
2004 (a), 2005 (b) and 2006 (c)**

It is this game between showman and audience that is one of the major draws of the spectacular advertisement. The texts themselves suggest to the audience that they are highly contrived images in that they have little representational imagery in them. We as an audience know they are not real, yet we question them like one questions how a magician performs a magic act. The audience *knows* that the assistant was not sawn in half, as that would defy

common logic. So we question the techniques and processes involved in the act as to how it *appears* that the assistant is sawn in half.

Georges Méliès utilised the cinema form to develop the idea of the spectacular aesthetic over a century ago. Indeed, many of his early short acts are highly similar in theme and structure to the texts being considered here. They start quite normally, Méliès prompting the audience to look at either him or an object within frame. The whole time, the audience is encouraged to watch closely and *question* the production, revelling in the trickery of the image. This same process is enacted by the audience today when watching a spectacular advertisement. The major difference between the aesthetic of the Méliès' cinema of attractions and the contemporary spectacular advertisement is the interaction with the audience. Whereas Méliès directly suggests to the audience from the screen to “look!” with a sweep of his arms, the spectacular advertisement directs the audience in more subtle techniques of camera framing and movement – a camera will linger on an object or figure momentarily, long enough for the audience to begin to expect something to happen. Alternatively it will depict something banal, something familiar, before the moment of transformation. Tom Gunning writes:

Rather than being a simple reality effect, the illusionistic arts of the nineteenth century cannily exploited their unbelievable nature, keeping a conscious focus on the fact that they were only illusions.

(Gunning 2004a p.865)

Gunning refers to this as the art of *trompe l'œil*. *Trompe l'œil* is a presentation of the illusion of reality, while at the same time, according to Gunning, sending ‘conflicting messages’ to the viewer. Referring to Méliès and magic theatre, Gunning writes, “Its visual power consisted of a *trompe l'œil* play of give-and-take, an obsessive desire to test the limits of an intellectual disavowal – I know, but yet I see” (p.865)

The audience knows and understands that what they see is an illusion, a trick of the eye, yet the fact that they *are* seeing it raises questions within the viewer and results in the ‘conflicting

messages'. The spectacular advertising aesthetic follows a similar method. It invites the audience to watch a normal representational scene and introduces a transition or transformation into a presentational scene. While ultimately the effect on the audience is the same (one of surprise or shock) the way in which each is presented changes the mode in which the audience views the sequence.

Upon the first projections of film, the act of presentation is highlighted as a game with the audience. The projections didn't just start, as recounted in writings of Gunning and Cubitt, rather, the projection would hold on the first frame – a still image. This projection of a still photograph was nothing new. "The projection of still photographs had been a staple of the magic lantern long enough to be banal" writes Cubitt (Cubitt, 2004, p.15). The audience was presented with something familiar – just another projection. But then "suddenly a strange flicker passes through the screen and the picture springs to life" (Gorky, cited in Cubitt, 2004 p.15).

And in that instance of transformation from banal to astonishing, even if expected, the audience is drawn in, their eyes transfixed – I *know*, but yet I *see*. Applying this to the spectacular advertising aesthetic, we again see a similar approach. The spectacular advertisement uses the audience's familiarity with the form of advertising and other media to give the idea of at first banality – that of 'just another ad' and then translates that into astonishment. A city 'grows' out of a shoe (fig. 10), a shoe morphs as if organic (fig. 15), a soccer broadcast fragments into thousands of particles (fig. 7). Yet all this is done with an astounding surface accuracy – no strange flicker passes through this image – the audience is simply left with the transformation or transition and a resulting astonishment.

Being tricked is the whole point. Signification does not run very deep here: for the most part the plots (if they exist at all) are extremely basic, involved meaning non-existent. We are at the magic show, where being fooled is enormous fun, and although we are not sure precisely how it was done, we are amazed at the cleverness of it all.

(Darley 2000, p.55)

The audience for the digital-spectacular advertisement are first and foremost image thrill-seekers. These are people who revel in the 'cool' image and, as a result of this, I would suggest that the advertisements make some assumptions about the audience. They assume that the audience knows what a spectacular visual effect is – that is, what sets it apart from other spectacular image forms and techniques. To again draw parallels with the first projections of film, the showman would project a still frame – the first frame in the film, static projections being a technique that the audience were familiar with. The showman would then start the film rolling, introducing motion to the image, which acted as the spectacular transition. There is some level of assumed knowledge regarding the technologies and form, which is where this game of give-and-take between audience and showman comes into play. The showman wants the audience to have some basic concept of how the image was created, but nothing too concrete – they still need to maintain that air of mystery. Simultaneously, the audience has its suspicions of how it was done, but for the most part the image appears to be 'magic'.

The mode of audience address introduced with the digital-spectacular and the associated cinema of attractions is a complicated one. It is not simply a case of being absorbed into a narrative where the audience relates to characters or situations. In these situations, it is the content that draws the viewer in and involves the audience with the advertisement itself. The digital-spectacular, however, requires an intricate understanding between the audience and the presenter. The viewer places expectations of shock, novelty, surprise and astonishment on the advertisement. The showman – the brand – wants to deliver the answer to these audience expectations. Within this theatrical mode of audience address it is not so much that the audience is drawn into the *content* of the advertisement, but rather the *presentation*. In doing so, however, the presenter must constantly update their 'act' in order to keep the audience entertained.

The next chapter will consider the culmination of the digital-spectacular aesthetic and its audience address, looking at the overall function of the digital-spectacular advertisement, noting its relation to the internet.

Chapter 5: Function

Thus far, we've established the appearance of the digital-spectacular advertisement and how it addresses the audience, drawing parallels between it and the cinema of attractions. As with the previous modes of advertising, each genre has a certain function as an advertisement that we can attribute to its form and style. Information-oriented advertisements function as a medium to deliver simple messages and information, while narrative-oriented advertisements function through association with the audience. The cinematic-spectacular advertisement functions as an "event" in itself, or according to Twitchell, a "pseudo-event" that the audience associates with the product.

To begin to understand the general function of the digital-spectacular advertisement we have to look at how it integrates with the wider media landscape. All other genres of advertisements mentioned in this study are primarily designed for television distribution. The digital-spectacular advertisement, however, is designed for a wider gamut of delivery methods – portable devices, computer screens as well as television. It is part of the wider network. In this regard, the digital-spectacular advertisement is not only multi-media in form but also in function.

The television landscape is changing considerably as it shifts towards digital distribution. Bolter and Grusin in *Remediations* talk of television's ability to constantly refashion itself in order to stay relevant in the face of new media (Bolter, Grusin 1999, p.15). 'Video on demand' and 'time shifting' technologies are de-linearising the traditionally linear medium of television. As television and the internet converge, the overall function of the advertisement changes considerably as television moves to a more 'interactive' model.

We have established that the function of the digital-spectacular advertisement is not one of information transferral: The ‘hard’ information it contains is minimal at best. We know that narratives are next to – or completely – non-existent and as a result the audience doesn’t associate with the advertisement on the level of characterisation and story. The digital-spectacular operates on a much smaller scale than that of the cinematic-spectacle, and as a result they don’t function as blockbuster ‘events’. Because the digital-spectacular advertisement is so visually oriented and at times abstract in its presentation, to simply *talk* about it makes it difficult to convey the images and audience reaction. The digital-spectacular advertisements, then, are not made to be talked about, but rather are made to be *seen*. These are ephemeral advertisements - short-lived and soon ineffectual as spectacular entertainments as a new, more spectacular image comes along.

While television and internet are in the early stages of converging, there is still a large divide between the two. What these digital-spectacular advertisements primarily function as is a *gateway* - a bridge - between television and Web. A large majority of the digital-spectacular advertisements function as a driver for the audience to go to the associated website: A web address enclosed within a spectacular wrapping.

The viewers of the digital-spectacular are web-savvy. To finish the advertisement on a logo prompts the viewer to type the name into a search engine and visit the associated website is invariably the first option that is returned. What we are seeing in some cases, however, is the user being directed to more targeted ‘microsites’. A microsite is a generally small, specifically designed website. For example, the Diesel *Lost Paradise* campaign had¹ an associated microsite. In the first instance, the user continues the ‘experience’ of the advertisement as they download the advertisements and associated imagery to adorn their computer monitors. More importantly, the microsite is linked to the online catalogue – thus the advertisement that

¹ The *Lost Paradise* website has been removed since commencing this study.

lacked 'hard' information now acts as a gateway to a far more informative source, possibly more so than any advertisement.

Darley continually positions 'digital visual culture' as a game – or at least, it consists of playful aspects (Darley 2000, p.170-173). The extension of that 'game' or interaction with the advertisement can be extended from one form of media to another. A passage of text taken from the *Lost Paradise* website reads:

A precious passport. Your ticket to an intrepid voyage of discovery and exploration of a lost forgotten land, far, far away. Experience its unique spirit; Green Encounters and a Birds' Paradise. Fish Ahoy! and onwards towards floral eruptions.

(Diesel)

The microsite, then, extends that original 'experience' of the advertisement. The Nike *Evolution* advertisement as another example ends with a web address that directs the user to the Nike Basketball microsite (NikeBasketball.com 2006) where once again the user can view the shoe catalogue, watch other videos and extend the experience of the digital-spectacular advertisement. In some cases, as already mentioned, the website will allow viewing or download of the advertisement again as seen with the Apple iPod commercials.

The drawback in these cases of digital-spectacular advertisements is the fact that for the advertisement to function as a 'gateway' to a website, it relies on the strength of the brand or product. *Because* the advertisements are spectacular, abstract and 'informationless' they seem to rely to an extent on assumed brand knowledge. The advertisements figured in this study are all well-known brands that operate on a global level. Ostensibly, in order for the digital-spectacular advertisement to lure the audience to the website, the brand needs to be already established.

This established brand requirement, however, is not an absolute given. If the main function of the digital-spectacular advertisement is the delivery of a Web address enclosed in a veil of spectacular imagery, provided the advertisement offers an astounding ‘experience’ and promises to continue that that experience, the digital-spectacular advertisement for a ‘lesser’ brand or product should function in the same manner as a well recognised brand that employs a similar advertising approach. Both use the digital-spectacular image as a hook to draw the viewers. The major difference being the well recognised brand need not provide a specific Web address.

Ultimately, the digital-spectacular advertisement’s function is to connect the television viewers with the targeted website. As the ‘gap’ between television and internet gets smaller through convergence, the more direct, instantaneous and functional this form of advertisement will become. This will be briefly explored in the final chapter where we consider the future of the digital-spectacular advertisement, looking at real-world applications, possibilities and implications that the changing form might bring.

Conclusion

Joe Cappo in his book *The Future of Advertising* writes, “Today, after having watched hundreds of thousands of commercials in our lives, we have mental filters that are virtually impenetrable.” (Cappo 2003, p.86) He notes that advertising is getting harder and puts this down to three points: 1) broadcast television not having the same coverage as it did in the 1970s; 2) advertising’s waning influence; and 3) the ‘creative aspects of advertising is not as important as it was twenty or thirty years ago’ (Ibid, p.87)

These three points illustrate the changes that have occurred in advertising over the past decades due to changing media, changing audiences and changing expectations and understanding of the medium. The digital-spectacular advertisement, however, seems to be a response to these points. The digital-spectacular advertisement is not simply designed for television, but also for other digital delivery methods, namely via the Internet. It is visually dynamic, constantly pushing the digital imaging technologies and functions as a gateway to a website. With the growth of ‘social networking’ video-sharing websites like YouTube, and the gradual adoption of video streaming and download services, the digital-spectacular advertisement seems to have a bright future. ABC America, for example, now offers full episodes of shows to watch within an Internet browser window – some ad breaks are included, which can be clicked on and launch a new window, taking the viewer directly to the product page/company page/online store. Instant gratification. The digital-spectacular advertisement’s effect of astonishment is an instant effect – it does not rely on building campaigns over months - *years* - like those of ‘traditional’ advertising campaigns. The image is constantly being re-invented. So to counter point one of Cappo’s arguments, the fact that corporate-sponsored broadcast television viewership has less coverage than the 1970s ultimately does not matter, because the ‘television’ advertisement will follow the audience in some form regardless of delivery.

His second point – the concept that advertising is ‘less important’ than before – is also arguable. Cappelletti puts this down to advertising being diluted into other forms such as sponsorship. BMW sponsored a series of short films entitled *The Hire* (2003), all featuring big-name directors (John Woo, Ang Lee, Guy Ritchie to name a few) so certainly the traditional – the *classical* – advertisement form is fading. The proliferation of visual media (television, the Internet and increasingly mobile devices in their various forms) in recent years has given advertisements multiple new media through which to be delivered. At the moment, however, I would suggest that the traditional television models and concepts are trying to be shoehorned into these new media. While the view advertising on television is ‘less important’ rings true, to say that advertising is less important overall is perhaps not taking into account the shifting of technologies, audiences and forms.

Cappelletti’s third point accentuates the shift that has occurred between ‘classical’ advertisements and the digital-spectacular advertisement. Visually, these advertisements are highly creative, but I believe that what Cappelletti is angling at is the content itself is not as creative. To come back to the quote about our ‘mental filters’, this is just another development of the advertising medium, accommodating new production methods, new delivery methods and new viewing practices. We are increasingly living in a ‘digital visual culture’ and we are seeing the traditional forms of advertising struggle in that environment because audiences recognise a traditional advertisement when they see one, and up goes their mental filter.

The changes that we have seen in the last fifty years or so - both from within television itself and developments outside of television - stand as a testament to the staying power of the advertisement and television’s ability to incorporate other media. Here is a form that can constantly re-invent itself as audiences ‘tune out’ as they become familiar with one genre of advertising. This is not to say that traditional forms of advertisements are never seen again – the audience will always appreciate a good narrative if done well while an information-

oriented advertisement will always get basic information across. This of course all depends on target audiences, how much attention the advertisement needs or wants to get not to mention production costs. So the digital-spectacular is another development in advertisements trying to remain relevant to new audiences. The audience for the digital-spectacular is the generation that has grown up with the MTV aesthetic, 'televisuality', spectacular Hollywood blockbusters, video games and the music video, and the aesthetic and audience address has shifted to accommodate for that.

The digital-spectacular advertisement is clearly a different form of advertising. It is visually stunning in its approach to digital imaging, consistently applying new techniques, technologies and styles to a broader framework that emphasises virtual space and a 'transitional aesthetic'. The relationship that the digital-spectacular advertisement sets up with its audience is one of a showman presenting his latest 'performance' to the audience. The audience is encouraged to 'look' and subsequently be astounded by the image's transformation, depth, effects, etcetera. With astounding levels of detail that are apparent in some of the examples, the advertisements warrant repeated viewing, this notion being supported by the product websites offering downloadable versions of their advertisements for users. Designed for delivery not just on television, but a range of different small-screen media from computers to portable video devices, it acts not as an advertisement in the traditional sense, but as a 'gateway' to a website.

We can see, then, that a new and quite different television advertising form has emerged over the last decade, marked by the logic and aesthetics of spectacle and display rather than the logic and aesthetics of information and narrative which marks traditional television advertising forms. Aesthetically and functionally a very different form in comparison to previous television advertising forms, the digital-spectacular advertisement displays a significant change in the television advertising form generally. How significant remains to be seen. What is clear, however, is that another distinct television advertising form called 'the

digital-spectacular advertisement' has taken its place alongside 'classical' forms of television advertising.

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Visual Appendix

See accompanying DVD.