ATTENTION ADVERTISING: THE CULTURAL ECONOMY OF VOLUNTARY WATCHING AND INVOLUNTARY LOOKING

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the visual event of consuming advertisements as a form of labour. Using Beller's “attention theory of value,” the thesis argues that among the most valuable forms of labour in today's capitalist society is the productive value of human attention. The attention of viewers is interpellated by advertisements in two ways: watching and looking. To illustrate how viewers consume advertisements by watching, a case study focused on product promotion on the “Ellen DeGeneres Show” is presented. In order to interpellate viewers attention, companies use product promotions such as “free gifts” within shows in order to avoid possibly losing their attention in commercials. Looking as labour is illustrated via a case study of advertisements in three different Vancouver restaurant restrooms: 99 Chairs, Moxie's Classic Grill and TGI Friday's. The placement of advertisements in restrooms is also strategic, in that viewers attention is captured by the simple act of looking.
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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this to my parents Floreen and Christopher, for all their love and support and for giving me all the opportunities I have had in my life.
“Advertising has become not just a way of selling goods but an inescapable mode of everyday communication in the new commodity culture of the twenty-first century.”

Sturken & Cartwright, 2002

Introduction

Advertising images are central to our commodity culture. With strategically chosen images and text, wherever they are placed, advertising images attempt to interpellate viewers as ideological subjects. In order for ads to hail viewers they must sell more than just a product – to hail viewers, ads must add symbolic value to products. Symbolic value is added by turning products into identifiable brands which are thus associated with particular “lifestyles” or cultural ideals. Consider for example, a white t-shirt. Without a logo or brand name it is an insignificant, inexpensive t-shirt. When the t-shirt has a “Nike” logo placed on it, however, its value is increased by virtue of representing a lifestyle: athleticism. Today’s branded advertising necessarily operates in a competitive market full of uniform mass production so that corporations can distinguish their products from others (Klein, 2000: 6). Through advertising, each brand must appear different from the others by standing out from the others and capturing the attention of the viewer. As a consequence, the viewer’s attention becomes like the branded products themselves: a “hot” commodity.

Today, successful corporations “must primarily produce brands, as opposed to products” (Klein, 2000: 3). In order to sell a brand and brand lifestyle rather than a product, advertising has changed. This change has led many companies to drastically increase the amount of advertising they do and to place ads in a new variety of places.
As a result, advertisements are increasingly found in much more intrusive places. Ads are placed on stall doors in public washrooms, above urinals, at gas pumps, on park benches, bus stops, on buses, on the Internet, and even on pieces of fruit (Klein, 2000: 9). The more intrusive placements of ads allow the advertisers to hail the attention of viewers in more and more places throughout the entire course of the day. With so much exposure a brand often becomes better known than the product the ad is trying to sell. “Consumers no longer are sold or buy products, they consume and buy brands” (Klein, 2000: p.7). Brands like Nike no longer need to promote their sneakers as the best on the market; they can simply associate their shoes with the athletic lifestyle through the ambiguity of their logo, “Just Do It”. Whether it is actually the best in the market or not, the product has become second to the brand. People see the “swoosh” and buy the shoe to associate themselves with that brand lifestyle, thereby demonstrating how branded products create consumer loyalty with brands they trust. They are buying into the symbolic capital that Nike’s advertising has created for its consumers.

With viewer’s attention being hailed in both public and private spaces, consuming ads has become more than just a visual event; it has become a form of labor. In “Kino-I, Kino-World: Notes on the cinematic mode of production”, Jonathan L. Beller (2002) constructs a parallel between the cinematic mode of production (CMP) and its viewers (the spectator) on the one hand and Marx’s theory of capital and value-productive labor on the other. In the cinematic mode of production, “cinema and its succeeding [forms]…are deterritorialized factories in which the spectators [or viewer(s)] work, that is, in which they perform value-productive labor” (Beller, 2002: 60). As the factory work of the proletariat created capital, the work of the spectator or viewer is the practice of
looking which also creates capital. Beller therefore suggests "that looking is posited by capital as labor" (2002: 61).

Beller reformulates Marx's labor theory of value into what he calls the "attention theory of value" by theorizing "the productive value of human attention" (80). In this thesis, I argue that under capitalism today among the most valuable forms of labor is the productive value of human attention. Where Beller utilizes cinema and film to provide examples of the labor of looking, I consider whether his "attention theory of value" is also exemplified by how the attention "seekers" of the advertising industry interpellate the attention of the "labor of looking" of the spectator. I believe that advertisements represent the "deteriorialized factories" in which the spectators through their consumption of ads are performing "value-productive" labor. The attention of the spectator has henceforth become a valuable product or commodity, as looking is now posited by labor (Beller, 2002: 60). Using Beller's (2002) "attention theory of value", I shall address the issue of how and why advertisements appear to be everywhere, in particular by querying the location of advertisements in both public and private spaces.

This project is an ethnographic and interpretive reading of two case studies from my own observations of where advertisements appear and/or are placed in everyday life situations. It is an anecdotal analysis rather than a systematic one, although the case studies have been chosen with a set of criteria in mind. My first case study will be the Ellen Degeneres Show. Ellen's show is a one-hour talk show airing Monday to Friday on Warner Bros. Television. I chose her show because I have watched it many times and noticed that she often gives away "free gifts". The free gifts on Ellen's show illustrate one way by which viewers consume advertisements through product promotion as well as
how advertising has become more like entertainment. Ellen’s show is full of product placement, thus providing a good example of how our attention is captured by advertisers through the act of watching. I chose to use the case study of a television talk show to illustrate how product promotions on television have drastically increased. I have noticed over the years that talk shows are increasingly full of product promotion – while watching talk shows these days I feel like I am watching one long advertisement. In the past, the host or hosts would interview celebrities promoting new movies, book releases, and so on. Today, not only do we find promotion of movies and books by celebrities but also mention of clothing or other products they love and swear by, as well as “free gift” give-a-ways. All are forms of product promotion. Another reason for studying a talk show is that it is something that the viewer chooses to watch. Television captures our attention, but we have the choice to look away or turn it off. As well, watching television is something that people consider to be a leisurely activity, not something they think of as a form of labour. In this thesis, I will demonstrate that it is a form of labour.

My second case study will consider advertisements in men’s and women’s public washrooms. I will present photos of advertisements that I will analyze. I took the photos in the women’s washrooms and a male partner took the photos in the men’s washrooms. The public washrooms represent a wide variety of contexts. The restrooms are located in the coffee shop 99 Chairs on the UBC campus, Moxie’s Classic Grill Restaurant on West Broadway Ave. at Burrard St. in Vancouver, and T.G.I. Friday’s Restaurant in the Metrotown Mall in Burnaby. A photo was taken of one advertisement from each of the men’s and women’s washrooms in each restaurant, making a total of six washroom advertisements to be analyzed. I have been a customer in all three restaurants. As a
student, I have been to 99 Chairs for lunch after class, meetings with professors and
meetings with other students. I have been to Moxie's Classic Grill Restaurant to have
lunch with friends or my partner in a casual atmosphere (also the food is good and the
prices are reasonable). Lastly, I have eaten at T.G.I. Friday's for lunch while on
shopping outings at a mall. I chose to eat there because it has fairly quick service and
because I thought it would have better food than at the food court. The three times I have
eaten there the food has not been very good and the service was poor, but you can be in
and out for lunch in thirty minutes or less.

I chose to analyze washroom ads in contrast with product promotion on television
because of the drastically different way in which we encounter ads in these structures. As
mentioned earlier, product promotion captures the viewer's attention by choice; in the
washroom the ad is placed above the urinal or on the stall door at eye level, meaning that
the viewer's attention is captured by involuntary looking. Where else can one look while
going to the washroom? The two case studies I have chosen therefore illustrate different
ways in which advertisers capture the attention of visual subjects and thus how their
watching or looking is translated into labour.

Theoretical Background

In capitalist society, business is primarily and ultimately interested in increasing
capital. How do today's conglomerates attempt to gain capital? Companies attempt to
lower production costs while increasing market value, creating what in Marxist theory is
called surplus value. They often attempt to lower production costs by outsourcing
production overseas while in turn either increasing commodity prices (exchange value) or
lowering prices while increasing market sales by creating new demands and new
scarcities (use value).
Surplus value is created as a result of the unequal relations between production costs (by firms), exchange value (on the market) and use value (for consumers). The exchange value refers to the cost of a particular product in a given system of exchange. For example, a GAP t-shirt costs twenty-five dollars, its exchange value. Use value on the other hand is the use a product has for consumers (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001: 199). A GAP t-shirt’s use-value depends on how useful or desired having a GAP t-shirt is within society. This is where advertising plays a large role. Advertising that sells brands and branded lifestyles functions in this process to increase a product’s use value. By creating a need for that GAP t-shirt, advertising increases its use value which in turn increases its exchange value as more people feel they need and want a GAP t-shirt. The GAP can therefore increase its t-shirt prices as they increasingly become a “hot” commodity. When production costs are lowered and exchange value is increased as a result of an increase in use value, surplus value is created. Companies want to generate surplus value above all, since it is the basis of their profit margin. Branded advertising is an important tool which companies rely on today to achieve that goal.

A commodity’s use value or symbolic capital is increased through outsourcing and advertising. The process of surplus value can be illustrated by again considering the example of a GAP shirt. A GAP shirt may cost five dollars to make in China but is sold at The GAP for twenty-five dollars. So how is it that The GAP can charge so much for something that costs so little to produce and how is it that people are willing to pay twenty-five dollars for a simple t-shirt? Consumers buy the shirts because their use value or symbolic capital has been embellished through advertising. The consumer is sold the idea (and thus the desire) that if they shop at The Gap and buy this particular shirt they
will be perceived as a casual and in-style person. Advertising that promotes brands and branded lifestyles maintains consumer desire by creating false use values that nevertheless increases their symbolic capital. For example, a high school student that wears GAP clothing gains a certain status that helps him or her to fit better into certain groups because his or her clothes are from the GAP rather than low-end outlets such as Winners or Zellers. Given their high use value and symbolic capital, GAP shirts can be sold for twenty-five dollars. As the value of the t-shirt remains twenty-five dollars, The GAP will continually seek to lower production costs in order to increase its surplus value and thus profits. With this example of a regular shirt it is evident how advertising plays a necessary and strategic part in any company’s desire to gain capital and create surplus value through the production and marketing process. Hence, surplus value has both a symbolic and an economic dimension. As Bourdieu argues, “an ordinary property which, perceived by social agents endowed with the categories of perception and appreciation permitting them to perceive, know and recognize it, becomes symbolically efficient, like a veritable magical power” (Bourdieu, 1998: 102). Through the creation of branded lifestyles, advertising creates symbolic capital. Consumers believe that via consumption of certain products they are participating in, or are perceived to be participating in, a particular lifestyle which has a predominantly symbolic value distinguishes them within social space in terms of their class and status. Brands carry markers of class and status. It is evident that someone displaying The GAP logo is of lower class than someone wearing Lacoste (recognized by its alligator logo). This aspect of the capitalist market is a focus throughout this thesis: how are increases in symbolic (use value) and economic (exchange value) value created through advertising? My main focus throughout this
thesis is on the virtual consumption of the images of brand name products, and thus on
the commodification of vision and attention.

Advertising has never been more important for major conglomerates that wish to
expand their capital: that is why advertising seems to be ‘everywhere’. However, it is
actually deliberately positioned in specific places. I will discuss the particular position of
product placement in a television talk show and in restrooms to demonstrate the value of
the labor of looking, utilizing Beller’s “attention theory of value”. Since placement of
advertising has created such a competitive market, seeking the attention of spectators is
of great economic and cultural value to today’s conglomerates.

A comparison of the labor of the spectator to the labor of a Marxist proletariat
illustrates why the attention of the spectator is fundamental to contemporary corporate
capitalism. Just as the labor of the proletariat created capital for whichever company they
worked for, so too can the labor of spectators create capital for corporations. As the labor
of the spectator consists largely of consuming advertisements, advertisers must create a
market demand for the goods in the ads: consumers need to consume what they see in the
ads, either by buying them or simply desiring them. By being interpellated by
advertisements, spectators are drawn to consume goods, materially or imaginatively. In
their virtual or real consumption of goods, spectators create symbolic or economic capital
for the companies whose goods they consume. The value productive labor of the
spectator is consequently twofold. On the one hand it creates value in the products they
consume by allowing advertisements to interpellate them as spectators, while on the other
hand they increase the symbolic capital of the major conglomerate that can then
interpellate them further.
As spectators in a visual culture we are all *visual subjects*. As defined by Nicholas Mirzeoff, a visual subject is a person "who is both constituted as an agent of sight (regardless of his or her biological capacity to see) and as the effect of a series of categories of visual subjectivity" (Mirzeoff, 2002: 10). While Mirzeoff examined images of tele-visual warfare to demonstrate how images create visual subjects, the same theory can be applied to advertising. As the images of war create a sense of agency and power for visual subjects which they are lacking in their daily lives, advertising creates a sense of false need for visual subjects. With images of advertising all around us – at home, at bus stations and on billboards riddled throughout our cities – as visual subjects we are constantly fed the message that our clothes are not good enough unless we have the latest fashions, that we are not beautiful unless we use specific beauty products, and so on. The myth of visual subjectivity that advertisements create for us conveys a message that we are perpetually incomplete. Advertising keeps the visual subject feeling as though the products in ads are exactly what they need. As visual subjects we have the ability to create our own meaning out of visual images, but importantly images also interpellate and construct us as visual subjects. Althusser suggests that ideology interpellates individuals as subjects, "all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individual as concrete subjects, by the functions of the category of the subject" (Althusser, 1971: 173).

Interpellation is the process of hailing, recruiting or calling someone. As ideology interpellates subjects, advertisements interpellate visual subjects.

Since the meaning of a visual image is ultimately left to the viewer to interpret its content, there are at least two levels of meaning in any image. Roland Barthes discusses levels of denotation and connotation in his semiological analysis of the mythology of
modern consumer culture. For Barthes, ordinary language is a first order semiological system containing a signifier, signified and sign. This level operates at the denotative level, where the explicit or direct meaning is extracted. Only at the connotative level does mythical language form. Myth therefore is a second-order semiological system. At the level of connotation there is still the signifier, signified and sign, but through a lateral shift added meaning is attached to the explicit, denotative, or primary meaning (Barthes, 1973: 114-115). The second-order semiological system adds the ideological layer of meaning that Barthes calls myth. Any image can be analyzed at the denotative and connotative levels: in a consumer culture, like ours, the many images that surround us can also be analyzed at both levels.

Along with the images themselves, it is also important to recognize their placement, medium and context. As McLuhan has stated, “the medium is the message” (McLuhan & Zingrone: 1995: 151). In the case of the placement of advertising, the medium includes the placement that helps perpetuate and shape the message. Ads are placed within other visual mediums, constituting what Mirzeoff calls “intervisuality” (Mirzeoff, 2002: 3). The strategic purpose of putting one visual medium into another is often to make the ad less obvious, or more entertaining. When products are placed within television shows, that is, when the free trips and gifts also serve as advertisements, viewers are relieved of having to change the channel as if they were watching a commercial because such ads already function as a form of entertainment. Restroom ads are situated in such a way that visual subjects take notice when they are involuntarily looking around, sitting on the toilet or standing at a urinal, when they are therefore bored and in need of entertainment. The success of these types of ads derives from the fact that
Part I: The Cultural Economy of Voluntary Watching

As visual subjects we encounter advertisements in many places throughout the day. Depending on where the advertisements are placed, they interpellate us in a variety of different ways. One of the most common ways today in which advertising interpellates spectators as consumer subjects is through product promotion on television shows and product placement in movies. As a result, it is becoming more difficult to distinguish the line between advertising and entertainment. Advertisements have become more than just commercials; they have developed to become more like entertainment in order to better effectively appeal to viewers. As Beller (2002) posits, insofar as the spectator's labor consists of looking, watching a movie or a television show is hardly merely a leisure activity anymore. When advertisements are shown in obvious or subliminal ways throughout a movie or television show, viewers perform a kind of \textit{labour}, sometimes without even realizing it. More than ever, advertising needs and relies on the entertainment industry just as the entertainment industry has needed and relied on advertising. Through various techniques of "intervisuality", product promotion on television has changed the way we watch television. It is not a leisure activity anymore but has been transformed into labor, as looking is now itself a form of labor.

It is important to distinguish the ways in which viewers view an advertisement within television shows from the many other ways and places in which viewers consume ads. When consuming an ad in a television show through product placement, viewers are \textit{voluntarily} watching. Watching is a choice made by the visual subject to become a
spectator. In using television as their medium of communication, advertisers know and realize that people have a choice to change the channel during commercials; they also know viewers have the choice to mute the television during commercials. Therefore they have learned to strategically place advertisements within television shows by offering "free gifts" or prizes; thus viewers are less likely to evade the advertisement by changing the channel or muting.

A famous example of how product placement on a television show can interpellate viewers as consumers is Oprah’s infamous car give-away. With an audience full of teachers, Oprah gave every audience member a GM G6 car for free (although it was discovered later that the audience members were responsible for the taxes). This episode made National News in the United States and Canada. As the Oprah give-away of GM cars was discussed over and over in the news, GM received the best possible publicity without having to pay for it. By giving away the product instead of paying for an ad campaign, GM found a cheap route to getting their brand name and product out to consumers. Oprah is also well known for her once-a-year episode “Oprah’s Favorite Things”, where each audience member receives one of each of Oprah’s favorite gifts, in all worth thousands of dollars. Other talk shows like “The View” and “Live with Regis and Kelly” are also known for their free vacation gifts, again an easy way for companies to advertise their products.

Production promotion on television must follow two strategies. On the one hand, it should appear 'hidden' within a television show so as not to come across like a commercial (although most of the time, especially in talk shows, they come across as commercials). On the other hand, in most cases, the products promoted on television
shows are usually products owned by the show’s broadcast network, and thus constitute a form of self-promotion. Consider for example, the television talk show “The View” carried by the ABC network. The most frequent trips that are given away on “The View” are trips to Disney World or Disney Land. Would you be surprised to know that Disney owns ABC? Certainly not a coincidence.

The reasoning behind such self-promotion can be best explained by Noam Chomsky’s propaganda model. Chomsky’s propaganda model, presented in his book *Manufacturing Consent* (Herman & Chomsky, 2002) lays out five filters that news media must go through before becoming a news story. The model suggests that within the news media and other mass media a “systematic and highly politicized dichotomization” serves the interests of the higher powers (p.35). Chomsky’s model lays out the inequalities of wealth and power and its multilevel effects on mass-media interests and choices [by] tracing the routes by which money and power are able to filter out the news to print, marginalize dissent, and allow the government and dominant private interests to get their message across to the public (Herman & Chomsky, 2002: 2)

Five filters comprise the model.

1. size and concentrated ownership of the mass media firm
2. advertising as a primary source of income for the mass media
3. the sourcing of the media information provided by the government, business and “experts”
4. “flak” as a means of disciplining the media
5. “anticommunism” as a national religion and control mechanism

(Herman & Chomsky, 2002: 2)
All together these filters are what the mass media use to marginalize dissent. These filters are built so deep within the system, and the constraints are so powerful, that news media people believe them to be a natural process.

Product promotions within television shows can be shown to make use of the first and second filters in Chomsky’s model. The first filter relates to one of the primary aims of product promotion, mentioned earlier, namely, self-promotion. Due to the size and concentrated ownership of mass media firms, it is increasingly the case that some firms own both the television broadcast network and the products being promoted on their television shows. The second filter refers to how advertising plays a large part in keeping production costs low, using the example of a newspaper (Herman & Chomsky, 2002: 14). The more advertising a newspaper can attract the more they are able to lower their copy price and thus to sell their paper at a lower cost. Similarly, on television shows the promotion of products owned by media conglomerates makes them money and thereby lowers the cost of producing the television shows they broadcast.

“The Ellen DeGeneres Show”

Using Ellen DeGeneres’ talk show “Ellen” as my case study, in what follows I will exemplify how Chomsky’s model is put into practice. Ellen DeGeneres’ talk show has been a huge success since the beginning. The show began in 2003, but this has not been her first attempt in television. In 1994 she starred in the self-titled ABC sitcom “Ellen”, cancelled in 1998. The show brought her to national attention when in 1997 Ellen and the character “Ellen” both came out of the closet. She became one of the first openly gay performers playing an openly gay character. It was noted that the show’s focus became centered on her sexuality. Ellen attempted again in 2001 with a new CBS sitcom called
“The Ellen Show”. This time she was a gay character but her sexuality was not the central theme, and the show was cancelled after one season. In 2003 her hit television talkshow began. Her humor has been described as quirky observational humor; her sitcoms are often referred to as “female Seinfelds”. Since the talk show’s beginning it has won fifteen Emmy Awards: three for outstanding talk show and two for outstanding talk show host.

Ellen’s show is best know for her dancing. At the beginning of each show, aired at eleven in the morning and again at five in the evening, she delivers a monologue and then dances with and through the audience. The show features a unique mix of celebrity interviews, chart-topping and up-and-coming musical performers, audience participation games, and segments spotlighting real people with extraordinary stories and talents. Ellen’s show has become a destination for Hollywood’s biggest stars. Her love of hip-hop music sets her show apart from other talk shows and makes it a desired venue for big hip-hop names like Usher, Kanye West and Snoop Dog to appear. Every day or week there are new segments added like “My Crazy Dreams”, where Ellen makes the dreams of audience members or viewers at home come true. Her audience and viewers appear to be primarily women, of all ages and walks of life, including stay at home moms, due to its airtime.

As I frequently watch “Ellen” I have noticed that she often gives away TiVos. In one episode, Ellen read a letter from a viewer who mentioned how much she loves Ellen and her show but could not make it home in time from work to watch her show. Ellen then called the viewer at home to tell her she was giving her a TiVo and one-year free subscription so she would never have to miss the show again. TiVo is a digital television
box which uses TiVo's patented DVR (digital video recording) technology that allows subscribers to play one television show while recording another. It is distinguished by its unique storage format; which allows subscribers to pause, rewind and fast forward live television. As well, it records up to 150 minutes without using a tape or DVD, which it stores like a computer for easy accessibility (M2 Presswire, 2006). TiVo provides its subscribers with what it calls branded entertainment (TiVo.com, 2006). Branded entertainment relates to the new advertising option TiVo is offering where companies can place a “showcase” advertisement which subscribers can chose to watch and if they are interested in the product being sold they can select the ad and their address will be sent to the company so they will receive more information on the product. Thus, it is branded entertainment as all advertisers must pay a fee to advertise a “showcase” ad with TiVo; therefore, unlike cable viewers, TiVo subscribers are not exposed to the endless commercials of regular cable. There are two different types of TiVo subscribers. The first is the standalone subscriber who uses the TiVo DVR along with regular cable. The second type of TiVo subscriber includes those who use their DVRs with satellite television from TiVo's only satellite supplier, DirecTV, the largest satellite provider in the United States (M2 Presswire, 2006).

TiVo became a technological fad, and is now even used as a verb in common place: “did you TiVo it?” One big fan of the TiVo was Ellen herself. She proclaimed her support for TiVo on her show by giving away TiVos to audience members so they too could have “a TiVo experience”. If, as I argued earlier, product promotion is tied to network broadcasters, how then is Ellen’s show linked with TiVo? To begin, Warner Bros. Television (WBTV) broadcasts Ellen’s show. Warner Bros. is owned by Time
Warner and Time Warner also happen to own HBO and New Line Cinema who happen to be two of fourteen equity investors of TiVo (Figure 1). Equity investment refers to “refers to the buying and holding of shares of stock on a stock market by individuals and funds in anticipation of income from dividends and capital gain as the value of the stock rises” (www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equity_investor, 2006). Equity investment then refers to the acquisition of equity (ownership) participation in a private (unlisted) company or a startup (a company being created or newly created)” (www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Equity_investor, 2006). As HBO and New Line Cinema are equity investors of TiVo they are therefore part-owners of TiVo. If TiVo does well in the stock market then HBO and New Line Cinema profit. TiVo will do well in the stock market when consumers purchase more TiVos. Thus when Ellen is giving away a TiVo she is also gaining profit for HBO and New Line Cinema, and if they profit so too does Time Warner. Along with Warner Bros., DirecTV profits from TiVo clients. DirecTV is a licensing partner of TiVos, and is the only satellite television provider to its subscribers. Product promotion, like the TiVo give-away on Ellen, creates a closed circuit in which giant media conglomerates make themselves richer by promoting umbrella company products on their media networks.
What is interesting here is the idea that these free give-away gifts given on talk shows are in fact “free”. Since talk shows like “Ellen” create a game show atmosphere by holding question-and-answer trivia contests about celebrities and pop culture, it appears as if audience members win “free” gifts by displaying some knowledge; in fact, even if audience members answer questions wrongly they still “win” the prizes. But are these gifts really “free”? It is absurd to believe that the gifts are merely kind gestures given away to the lucky audience members who participate in the game show style portion of Ellen’s show. The fact is that they are not just a “free” gift, a kind gesture; it is simply advertising. DirecTV will donate TiVos for Ellen to give away in order for their product to be seen on television by millions of people, and to be promoted by a popular celebrity. The gesture of giving a lucky audience member a free TiVo also allows the company to portray themselves as kind and generous. In reality giving away their product on a television show is cheaper for them than to spend millions on advertising via other avenues. The “free” gift is not free, because there is a great deal of money saved and money made through giving away “free” merchandise.

Some might ask what the benefits of promoting and giving away TiVos might be if, once people become subscribers, they can fast-forward through commercials and avoid advertising. In fact, it is for this precise reason that talk shows and other television shows have so much product placement within them. Broadcast networks know that people can now mute or fast forward through commercials. TiVo has changed the way people watch television and more importantly, how viewers watch (or shall I say do not watch) commercials. Last year TiVo announced a revolutionary way for subscribers to watch advertisements. Consumers buy TiVos for a number of reasons, the most prominent one
being to record movies and television shows. However, users quickly realize the benefits of zipping past ads they are uninterested in. Most users learn quite quickly that if they begin to watch a show five to ten minutes after it begins they can skip all commercials by fast-forwarding through them and be finished watching the show by the time the broadcast ends. TiVo has come up with a solution to get people back to watching ads, or at least only the ones they wish to watch: TiVo will allow viewers to download and watch long-form commercials called “Showcases”. They currently allow this already with movie previews and car ads. TiVo would like to open the market to all advertisers, allowing viewers to watch these “Showcases” and request more information from advertisers by contacting them directly and sending some personal data (Online Reporter, 2005). Interestingly, General Motors and Warner Bros. Television were the first advertisers, thus offering ever more incentive for Ellen to give away TiVos. TiVo has created a branded form of watching television. These companies have created a circular economy of watching by controlling how and what viewers are watching.

Product promotion such as TiVo illustrates that while watching television, which you have voluntarily chosen to do, you are working as a viewer as you consume the products the television broadcast networks wish for you to consume. Advertising has crept enormously into our leisure time. Even while in the comfort of your own home watching television, advertisers are interpellating you as a working, consuming visual subject.

Product placement on television and in film has become quite prevalent. I can remember when product placement in film was very minimal. Today there are movies made around brand names, such as, the movie “Cast Away” (2000) starring Tom Hanks.
The movie is about a FedEx employee who becomes stranded on a deserted island and befriends a Wilson volleyball. The movie is essentially one long ad for FedEx and Wilson. Consider the film, also starring Tom Hanks and coming out in 2008, called “How Starbucks Saved My Life”. The film is about a sixty-year-old man, downsized out of a job and with a failed marriage, whose luck changes when he enters a Starbucks and leaves with a job offer from the store’s manager. These are only two examples of how product placement has not only become more prevalent in movies but how products and brand names themselves have become the premise for movies. On television talk shows, product promotion used to be merely a movie plug or a book release; today celebrities make appearances on talk shows and not only plug their movie or book but also their favorite clothing designers, purses, make-up companies, household cleaners, and so on. The line between entertainment and advertising is drawing thinner and thinner. As people become more deeply plugged in – their attention detained by all sorts of electronic entertainments like the Internet, iPods, cell phones, television, video games – capturing people’s attention to consume advertisements has become more difficult, thus leading advertising agencies and companies to become more creative in the ways visual subjects attention is sought and how ads for products are consumed.

In this section, I discussed product placement and how visual subjects watch; another innovative way in which advertisers seek viewers attention is by placing ads in washrooms. Visual subjects encounter these ads not by watching, defined by choice, but by looking, seeing without choice. The following section will chronicle three different restaurants with ads in their restrooms and how visual subjects visually experience them differently.
Part II: The Cultural Economy of Involuntary Looking

The terms watching and looking imply two very different aspects of visuality. In the first part of this thesis I discussed how advertisements can be placed where they are voluntarily watched. As mentioned above, watching television is a choice and you have the choice to look away or not watch, especially when you can record shows. Looking, on the other hand, is something we do by our nature as visual subjects, usually without any thought. As visual subjects we do not have the option not to look, unless we are blind. Advertising placed at a bus stop or on billboards in a city appears in places where people will always be looking and cannot avoid seeing. Many people use the bus, and while waiting for the bus to arrive what else is there to do but observe one’s surroundings, which entails looking and thus consuming the ad at the bus stop? Walking around downtown in any city, one cannot avoid having one’s gaze cross a billboard or some other form of advertisement. We are visual beings who live in a visual culture and looking is fundamental to our everyday existence. This type of involuntary looking is what I also call “vernacular looking”. Vernacular looking involves the kind of casual looking that we do everyday, often in moments of boredom and distraction. The term vernacular looking is borrowed from Mirzeoff’s term “vernacular watching”. Vernacular watching which is “epitomized by looking that is done while waiting, whether in a formal waiting room, in a car, or for some appointment. Waiting engenders boredom and distraction…” (Mirzeoff, 2005: 30). The point is to put the ad in places where you are going to look anyways, and where it therefore does not feel out of place.

Although it seems as though advertising is everywhere, it is actually strategically positioned in places you commonly find yourself looking. In the case of advertisements
that appear in the course of our vernacular looking, advertisers clearly understand McLuhan's maxim that "the medium is the message". In the case of vernacular advertising, the medium is the place in which the advertisement has captured your attention, for example, when ads are strategically positioned in washrooms. The medium includes not only the frame and mode of communication of the ad (e.g., as a poster that uses images and text), but also its placement in a washroom in a way that entices you to look at it. The message is of course the ad itself, that is, the product it is trying to sell, but the ingeniousness of these types of ads is the medium. Although you find yourself involuntarily looking at the ad, out of boredom or a need for distraction, the ad literally captures your looking and consequently your attention. Advertisers know that at some point while you are out in public place you will have to use the washroom: when you have to go you have to go. Placing an ad on the back of the washroom stall door or above a urinal captures your attention while you relieve yourself: where else are you going to look? It is basically the same idea with ads at a gas pump. Pumping gas is not the most exciting of things to do but at some point you have to put gas in your car. If there is a television screen playing ads on it, why not watch it to entertain yourself while you fill up? Positioning ads in such places as washrooms or gas stations represents what I am calling the medium of vernacular advertising, which involves the vernacular looking of visual subjects.

What is it that ads in washrooms and at gas pumps are advertising? I remember from my experience with ads running on a television screen at a gas pump in Toronto that the ads were appropriate to the situation, namely for drink specials the convenience store had inside. With the introduction of quick pay at the pump, sales inside of the
convenience store must have dropped – advertising is likely a tool to entice people into the store to buy something. As for washroom ads, most of my memories of ads in women’s washroom stalls are of birth control or tampons. After doing my case study I realized that in the restrooms I chose many of the ads are now much different than what I remembered. None of the ads in both the men’s and women’s washrooms were for personal hygiene products. For my case study of washroom ads I took photographs of ads in the men’s and women’s washrooms in three different locations: 99 Chairs Restaurant at UBC, Moxie’s Classical Grill (Burrard St. and W. Broadway) and TGI Friday’s in Metrotown Mall in Burnaby, BC. I have been to each of these restaurants myself and felt they represented diverse locations: a university campus, a city street and a mall.

To analyze the photos of ads in washrooms, I will use Barthes’ theory of myth and its tri-dimensional pattern of signifiers, signifieds and sign which are combined to form a second-order semiological system. To begin, Barthes defines myth as a type of speech, a system of communication, a mode of signification and thus a form. Photographs may thus function as a type of mythical speech, which impose meaning (Barthes, 1973: 109). Accordingly, Barthes’ model of second-order semiological systems is useful in helping us to decipher the meanings of modern consumer culture myths, in this case, as they are conveyed in advertisement photos. The three terms of the system can be correlated with one another. The first term, the signifier, is the form, which in the example of a photograph is what is literally seen in the photograph. The signified refers to the concept, which can be seen as the motivation behind the photograph. Lastly, the
sign, or signification, involves the association of the first two terms. What the form and the concept together represent is the sign, which in advertising is the myth itself.

Advertising images convey myths. They are myths insofar as they create false needs. In consuming ads and thus consuming the advertised products, viewers are interpellated as consumer subjects and buy into the symbolic value created by the ad. In order to interpellate the greatest number of viewers, advertising agencies spend lots of time and money determining the best placement for ads. In order to interpellate viewers more effectively, advertisers also spend a lot of time determining who their consumers are in terms of age, income, and gender. Thus the placement of advertisements must be very carefully thought out. For example, ads placed in washrooms must consider who the audience will be in specific washrooms. Or are the ads in all restrooms similar? In what follows, I will analyze what types of ads are placed in each washroom. Do the ads differ between men’s and women’s washrooms? If so, why, and how are they selling products differently along the lines of gender? Do the ads differ amongst my three case studies? What is being sold in washrooms?

As companies have become more concerned about branding, advertisements themselves have become a visual “representation that [dictates] the terms of cultural theory” (Mitchell, 1994: 13). As companies are selling brands, the more people are exposed to their brand, the more likely people will remember it when shopping. Creating symbolic value entails a good deal of advertisement. People must believe the myth of the advertisement. They must buy into the idea that buying certain products will help them to attain a certain class and status, a particular “life-style”.
99 Chairs is located on the University of British Columbia campus (Figure 1.1). It is centrally located on campus and is only one of the many food options offered on the campus. The campus offers choices from fast food venues, such as in the Student Union Building, to sit-down restaurants like 99 Chairs. 99 Chairs offers an upbeat, pub-style atmosphere with comfortable lounge furniture. The menu includes salads, burgers and fries, sandwiches, wraps, appetizers, sushi, and a vast selection of baked goods. 99 Chairs brews specialty coffees and offers a selection of draught beer, wine, cider and coolers. In comparison to the food services in the SUB building or the residence cafeteria’s, 99 Chairs is a more commercial venue. On a daily basis, 99 Chairs is full of students studying, meeting friends for coffee or having lunch between classes. I went for coffee with my partner when we took the photos on April 27th 2006 presented in Figures 1.1-1.5.
The first advertisement from 99 Chairs I shall discuss is an ad in the men’s washroom (Figure 1.2). The ad is for a Nintendo game called “Brain Age”. The ad is a poster ad placed above a urinal. It consists of image and text and thus requires the viewer to consume it visually both by looking at the image and by reading the text. The image of the ad comes across as if from an academic (biology) style textbook. It depicts a man as a muscular figure performing workout exercises accompanied with text: a headline and a description of the game (Figure 1.3). The tagline states: “Get the mental equivalent of 19-inch pythons”. The physical equivalent of “19-inch pythons” is big bicep muscles. On the right hand side of Figure 1.2 you can see that the man is lifting weights working out his bicep muscles in order to acquire “19-inch pythons”. In other words, “pythons” is a slang way of describing a man or woman’s bicep muscles.
The way in which the viewer encounters the ad is through the medium of the washroom. The significance of the washroom as the medium consists in how the visual subject’s attention is captured. It is the mode of captivity of the ad that is most important. A restroom ad is consumed with the viewer’s captive attention. Unlike product placements, you cannot change the channel – you can look away but through sheer boredom most people do not. It is also important to note the medium of this ad is a men’s washroom. Thus the space is an all male, masculine space. An ad with images of a muscular man would catch the attention of the men as they are probably performing their masculinity while around other men, standing next to them while going to the washroom. Calling attention to the ad would be a way that the men could perform their masculinity: “Hey look at this cool Nintendo ad...I love to play video games”.

The content of the ad is what the ad is selling: a Nintendo game that purports to help stimulate and exercise your brain (www.nintendo.com: 04/27/06). The text in the ad states that just as you work your body you also need to work your brain: “Train Your Brain in Minutes a Day!” At the denotative level this ad is for the Nintendo game “Brain Age” that helps exercise your brain. As the ad suggests, just as you would exercise your
body muscles you need to exercise your brain muscles. The ad's image also denotes officiality and scientific truth because of its academic appearance.

At the connotative level the ad says much more. First, it assumes that all men are interested in working out and building muscle. Nintendo must have done market research and discovered that men who play video games tend to be concerned with their muscles and looking fit as the ad connects the two ideologies. Second, it implies that men who work out their bodies do not work out their brains enough, which is why they have suggested a fun way to work out your brain almost without even knowing it. They are, however, advertising in a university venue which means that most men entering the washroom do work out their brains while attending university. But the ad is, of course, selling a fun way to work out the brain. Lastly, it connotes a certain type of masculinity. The ad suggests that men like to workout and play video games and neglect their brain. The ad connotes a hegemonic masculinity (not all men are equally interested in playing video games or working out). Also the use of the word “python” implies, that men are aware of this slang term, a term used by men who work out a lot, thus referencing a type of macho masculinity. The myth of the ad therefore is that having “19-inch pythons” (big muscular arms) is an important part of being masculine, and that macho masculine men forget to work out their brains as they do their “pythons”. In order for Nintendo to sell a game that stimulates the mind, they must associate brain games and intelligence with something that is more hegemonically masculine such as pumping iron or working out or playing video games, not a cheesy educational brain workout computer game. This ad is clearly targeted to a particular type of man. But men who play video games, computer nerds, or men who are less interested in working out to get big pythons can be masculine
too. It is almost ironic that Nintendo placed this ad in a university washroom. Although many university men play video games, as I have experienced, they are attending university and are working out their brains. There are many forms of masculinity and this ad connotes and presents the myth of one type of masculinity: hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995).

The ad in the women’s washroom at 99 Chairs (photographed on the same day as the men’s washroom ad) was for a very different product, also gender specific (Figure 1.4 & 1.5). It is an ad for the “The Spring for Life” campaign to support the stores listed (such as Stoneridge, Body Energy Club, Yaletown Gelato, Sweet and Healthy, Flower’s by Kelly and Priape) who will donate some of their proceeds to HIV/AIDS charities. The Spring for Life campaign is a national event that engages a coalition of Canadian AIDS agencies and the private sector in the fight to end HIV/AIDS. This spring, hundreds of businesses nationally and in Vancouver, such as BMO Finance, Krups, Viacom and Dose, will participate by donating a portion of their sales to Spring for Life in support of Canadian HIV/AIDS research and enhanced prevention work, services and care for people living with HIV or AIDS in communities across Canada (www.springforlife.ca, 2006). The form of the ad is similar to the ad in the men’s washroom. It is a poster ad with both image and text, although this ad is mostly text. The medium is slightly different. Rather than at eye level above a urinal, the ad is placed on the back of a women’s washroom stall door, again at eye level. While using the washroom, as a captive audience member and visual subject one is inclined to look at and hence consume the ad. The content of the ad reads as an ad for shopping. Once you read the ad you will discover it is not an ad to shop at the stores listed just for regular shopping purposes but
that if you shop at the stores listed during the days listed a certain amount of their profits that day will be donated to help HIV/AIDS research.

Figure 1.4: SHOP “Fill a Bag” ad in 99 Chairs women’s washroom

Figure 1.5: Close-up of SHOP ad
A "Barthesian" analysis might suggest that at the denotative level this is an ad about shopping for charity, while at the connotative level this ad claims that shopping is a hegemonic feminine quality. At the denotative level the ad presents to the viewer that shopping at the above-mentioned stores on a specific day will benefit charities that support Canadians with HIV/AIDS. At the connotative level, the ad implies that women like to shop (as it is placed in a women’s washroom and not in the men’s washroom). The myth the ad presents is therefore a characteristic of hegemonic femininity, in this case regarding shopping. But just as there are different types of masculinities so too are there different types of femininities. Although this ad does advertise shopping at the connotative level it is not merely shopping or “filling a bag” for oneself, which the ad at the denotative level suggests is selfish. The ad connotes that shopping and buying things for yourself and “filling a bag” knowing that some of your money spent will go to charity is a less selfish act and can make a difference. Rather than “fill a bag” for charity why not just donate to charity because you want to; is not that a more selfless act? The charity organizers obviously realize that a way to get people to donate more money to charity is to get them to shop so that they benefit as well as give to charity. The audience of this ad again is most likely university women, assumed to be at least middle-class and perhaps more likely then men contribute to a charity campaign.

**Moxie’s Classic Grill Restaurant**

Moxie’s Classic Grill is on West Broadway in Kitsilano, Vancouver, at the intersection of Burrard Street. Moxie’s Classic Grill is a warm, casual to semi-formal restaurant (Figure 2.1). The restaurant is known for its eye catching dark wood décor,
river rock fireplaces and granite bar tops. From my experience eating at Moxie’s, it serves mainly a middle-class young professional clientele. The average price for an entrée is twenty-dollars. The food is presented well and the food options range from salads and pasta to pizza and steak. I took my photographs at a new location, around a year old, so the appearance of the restaurant is clean and modern. The casual component of the restaurant is illustrated by a sports bar which attracts its other clientele: men who watch hockey, drink beer and eat steak. They can be university students to young professionals. The photos of the washrooms illustrate the atmosphere and class of the restaurant (Figure 2.2-2.3). Instead of poster ads there are flat screen televisions, one for all six urinals in the men’s room plus another above the fireplace. Having a fireplace is also indicative of the “class” of the restaurant. Not many restaurants have fireplaces and flat screen televisions in their washrooms.

Figure 2.1: Moxie’s Classic Grill on West Broadway, Vancouver
The ads in Moxie's differ greatly from those I found in 99 Chairs (the photos were also taken on April 27th, 2006). The first most notable difference is their form (Figure 2.2 & 2.3). Instead of poster ads, they are flat screen televisions. Rather than still images as in the form of the poster ad, these images were moving, supported by subtitles as there was no sound (the sound in the washrooms was the same music as in the restaurant dining area). The viewer is at the same time consuming an image and reading. I found myself more captivated by the image rather than interested in spending the time to read the subtitles. The medium of these ads can again be understood to include the washroom itself but additionally the form of the television. In the men's washroom there are televisions above each of the six urinals and also one above the fireplace (Figure 2.3). The televisions were playing the television channel TSN (The Sports Network), the content of the ad. The importance of having a sports channel like TSN on in a men's
washroom cannot be overstated. Analogous to the ad in 99 Chairs having a male orientated channel like TSN playing in a male space perpetuates a certain type of hegemonic (overtly stereotypical) masculinity. Although it is dissimilar to the poster ads and does not appear to be a clear-cut ad selling a specific product, having TSN playing is a promotion of the television channel and thus makes it a form of advertisement. As well there is the suggestions that the televisions themselves are a form of product promotion. The television above the urinal is an LG plasma, the one above the fireplace is JVC and the television in the women’s washroom is a Phillips. So along with the channel advertisement and the commercials, LG, JVC and Phillips are being advertised. Having the sports channel on in the bathroom helps promote the sports grill aspect of the restaurant. Men who are at Moxie’s to drink, eat and watch sports, can go to the washroom and not miss a minute of the game, whereas at many other restaurants this may not apply. As well, as they may go to the washroom while the hockey game is on a commercial they are still able to be consume the commercials in the washroom. As the televisions are placed at eye level above the urinals, as visual subjects they are engaged with looking and consuming the commercials as an automatic act.

At the denotative level, this ad for TSN and the flat screen television match the sports atmosphere of the restaurant. It is the men’s washroom and men like to watch sports, therefore TSN is the right channel to play. At the connotative level, like 99 Chairs, the choice of playing TSN supports the myth that all men like to watch sports, perpetuating a hegemonic masculine ideology. As noted earlier, there are many forms of masculinity and not all men watch sports.
In the women's washroom, by contrast, MuchMusic was playing on the only flat screen television (Figure 2.4). There were no televisions in the individual stalls toilets; there was only the one television in the main area of the restroom. There were, however, two bucket seats with vanity mirrors. What does this imply? Clearly that women are not eating and drinking and watching sports while at Moxie's and do not need to be kept updated on scores while they go to the washroom. Secondly, it implies that for women, using the washroom is a more social act, with mirrors in a common area provided to watch the single screen. The content of the ads in the women's washroom is most notably different. Although MuchMusic appears fairly gender neutral, in fact it is often geared more towards women. Perhaps not coincidentally, I walked in on a Madonna music video. MuchMusic promotes such pop cultural values as looking good, having a hot body, wearing trendy fashions, and the like. In this sense MuchMusic is an appropriate channel to create a very feminine atmosphere in the washroom.

![Figure 2.4: A Madonna music video playing a flat screen television in the women's washroom in Moxie's Classic Grill Restaurant](image)

At the denotative level, MuchMusic is an entertaining station. Visually, without sound, it is easy to follow and understand what you are looking at. MuchMusic connotes
a different atmosphere than does TSN. MuchMusic visually illustrates beauty, fashion and sex. It is all about pop culture. In its female setting, the myth perpetuated by MuchMusic is one of hegemonic femininity. Women should care about their bodies, the way they dress and fixing their make-up. But not all women wear make-up or care about wearing the latest fashions.

The washrooms in Moxie’s are clearly of a different class than those of 99 Chairs. Their ads also differ in form and thus illustrate a class difference between the two venues. The ads in 99 Chairs are poster ads and the ads in Moxie’s promote certain television channels rather than a particular product. I am not sure what channels would be more appropriate to be shown in each bathroom but it is significant that the channels differ by washroom. Why have different channels? Answer: men like sports and women like pop culture.

*T.G.I Friday’s*

T.G.I Friday’s is located in Metrotown Mall in Burnaby (Figure 3.1). Burnaby is a suburb of Vancouver located at the center of the Greater Vancouver Regional District. Metrotown Mall is located in downtown Burnaby and is home to over four hundred and fifty stores. It is the largest mall I know of in the Greater Vancouver area. I go to Metrotown for a real shopping mall experience, as there are no malls of its kind in downtown Vancouver. As a native of Toronto I grew up shopping in large malls; the Pacific Centre Mall in downtown Vancouver and Oakridge Mall in south Vancouver do not have the variety of shopping options found at Metrotown.
T.G.I Friday’s is an American chain restaurant. I remember the great experience I had eating at T.G.I Friday’s in Florida. It is what I would call a pub-style restaurant. The food is pub food such as sandwiches, wings and burgers, all of which come with french fries. The décor of the restaurant is pub style and the walls are littered with antique knick-knacks. The service is quick; I consider it a place to have an inexpensive quick meal, with an average entrée price of fifteen dollars. The clientele of this specific location is a result of its location in a mall which appeals to mostly middle-class shoppers.

The first advertisement in T.G.I Friday’s Restaurant I will analyze is from the men’s washroom. It is an ad for a gambling help line (Figure 3.2 taken April 27th, 2006). The form of the ads is the same as 99 Chairs. It is a poster ad with both image and text. The medium of the ad includes its placement in a washroom. Placed above the urinal it is easily consumed by all who use the men’s washroom. The ad is funded by the provincial government and advertises the services of a gambling help-line.
At the denotative level the ad depicts a King of Hearts card with the subheading “when your luck runs out…” and the text clearly indicates that this is an ad about gambling addiction. The card is gender-specific as it is the King card. The washroom is also a private area and by implication a gambling addiction is considered to be a private or secret matter, making it appropriate for its location. At the connotative level it is interesting that a King was chosen as the card for the men’s washroom. The facial expression of the King displays frustration and disappointment. Unlike the ads discussed in the preceding sections, this ad concerns a private issue. Addiction is not something people are proud of. Like the ads in Moxie’s, this ad is not selling a single product. In addition, it is an ad sponsored by the provincial government, which differs from the previous ads that promote a single company interested in making a profit (although the BC government earns millions of dollars annually from gambling proceeds). Upon visiting the website listed in the ad, I found along with the help-line number a section about responsible gambling (again, it is necessary to note that gambling profits the
The website is sponsored by the BC Lottery Corporation, the BC government and gaming service-providers. So although at first glance the ad appears to be a not-for-profit ad for a gambling help-line, the website it advertises is connected to a government and to corporations that make billions of dollars year from people who gamble.

The ad in the women’s washroom in TGI Friday’s has the same form and medium as in the men’s room but a slightly different context (Figures 3.3 & 3.4). Although the message is the same the content appears to be different as the card image is a Queen rather than a King. The context is thus gender specific. In view of my experience at 99 Chairs and Moxie’s I was surprised to find that the ads in the women’s washroom were the same with the exception that instead of a King the card was a Queen. This clearly connotes that the ads are specific to each gendered washroom, even when the message is basically the same. Like the King, the face of the Queen depicts frustration and shame, although she is crying: a very feminine emotional reaction and quality. In contrast to the King who displays his emotion but is not crying. A gambling addiction is a private affair that one should be ashamed of, but at the same time responsible gambling also promoted by this ad supports a billion dollar industry.
The ads in TGI Friday's seem to follow the pattern I discovered within all of the restaurants I chose to look at of gender specific advertising in washrooms. I was surprised to discover in my case study of washroom ads that personal topic ads such as condoms, tampons, birth control were not prevalent. Along with a pattern along gender lines there also was a pattern of class through the form and content of the ads.

Conclusion

As visual subjects, by watching and looking we make meaning of the world around us (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001: 10). The meaning viewers make of the world through images is influenced by the ideologies produced and projected through such images. The aim of advertising images is to create ideologies and to project them upon the viewers. As the viewers absorb the ideologies that advertisements project, advertisers hope that this will entice them to consume their products while creating symbolic capital for their products. As Sturken and Cartwright state, "practices of looking, then, are not
passive acts of consumption”; they are, as Beller also suggests, a form of value productive labor (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001: 42).

Images therefore have the power to interpellate viewers. Interpellation “refers to a process by which we are constructed by the ideologies that speak to us every day through language and images” (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001: 52). All images interpellate us, but advertising images interpellate visual subjects in order to convince them to consume, and as a result, they designate “the kind of viewers they intend us to be” (Sturken & Cartwright, 2001: 52). Along with designating the kinds of viewers advertisers intend us to be, with the placement of ads they determine how we consume them.

Two ways we consume ads are through watching and looking. As illustrated with the example of product placement on television, watching is an act of choice. Turning on the television and watching a show and the commercial breaks is a choice. However, advertisers are aware that some television viewers choose to change the channel or mute the television during commercials. In recent years advertisers have chosen to expand the amount of product promotion in shows. This decreases the chances the viewer will change the channel or mute the television if the product is being promoted within the show itself. Again using Ellen’s show to illustrate, during every episode she will have a musical guest, noting in recent episodes that the musical guest appearance was sponsored by “Garnier Fructis”, a shampoo company. Her segment on “making people’s dreams come true” is sponsored by American Express, a company for whom she coincidentally does television advertisements.
Another way in which visual subjects consume ads is through looking: looking is differentiated by its almost unconscious, natural aspect. Looking is a part of our everyday lives. As visual beings it is natural for us to look around and observe our surroundings. Advertisers have taken advantage of our natural practice of looking by placing ads strategically in areas where our looking is captured by the ad. The placement of ads in washrooms illustrates that out of our boredom while standing at a urinal or sitting in a stall, as visual subjects, we consume. Although it may seem that an element of choice still remains when it comes to looking at an ad in a washroom stall, the fact remains that you are looking. Looking is not a choice unless you are blind. You may look away from the ad on the stall door in the washroom but you will look again as it catches your gaze. Watching a television requires a more lengthy and determined process of vision; there is a choice whether to turn the television on or off.

Although throughout this thesis watching and looking are discussed as highly distinct from one and other, their relationship could be problematized. As I do not consider how watching and looking could occur simultaneously. Television ads, something viewers watch, placed in a mall food court, a place where viewers look, may illustrate how the relationship watching and looking is multifaceted.

In each of the strategic placements of advertisements, the ultimate goal is to attain our attention. Whether consuming an ad by watching or looking, our attention is caught and our watching and looking is turned into a form of labor. Beller’s “attention theory of value” is demonstrated here through the ways in which the placements of advertisements have diversified. Product placement in movies, product promotion on television, ads in washrooms, at bus stations and so on all depict how our attention is sought after and
clearly a valuable commodity. In a society full of mass production, each brand product seeks to be different from the other. The purpose of advertisement is to interpellate the viewer and consumer into believing that Calvin Klein jeans are different from and better than GAP jeans. Our attention and therefore our watching and looking become a form of labor. As viewers are interpellated to believe that certain brands are better than others when in reality they are all selling the same mass produced product, the advertising industry and ultimately the viewers have added symbolic capital to brand names and thus their products. This addition of symbolic capital is the result of looking as labor as the attachment of such capital interpellates viewers to become consumers of their products. While we are in the comfort of our own homes or in the privacy of a washroom, far from the office, we continue to perform value productive labor.
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