2. Advertising and Modernity: A Critical Reassessment

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Abstract

This chapter aims to deconstruct the category of modernity by confronting a prevailing abstracted view on screen advertising with the contingencies of its archival history. Taking as a case study the 1960s 'cola wars' and the marketing of cola soft drinks, the chapter shows how this competition between Pepsi and Coke related to stylistic innovations such as montage sequences, and what relevant mid-level finds can be made regarding one specific Pepsi campaign of that era without indulging in overly general arguments about modernism or modernity.

Keywords: modernity, cola wars, spot commercial, creative revolution, Ed Vorkapich, montage

The most general and widespread category for thinking about advertising in the 20th century seems to be the category of modernity.[1] Advertising, historians tell us, has 'dreamed', 'made way for', and 'sold' modernity.[2] It

[1]   My point here is to identify a categorial descriptivism (Brian Carr) in the way that 'modern' and 'modernity' are often spoken of when it comes to advertising: in academic discourse, modernity, the modern, or even modernism are used interchangeably not to describe a historical reality, but to draw out ontological categories and categories of meaning. My argument here largely follows Peter Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013) and Don Slater, 'Marketing as Monstrosity: The Impossible Place between Culture and Economy', in *Inside Marketing. Practices, Ideologies, Devices*, ed. Detlev Zwick and Julien Cayla (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 23–41.

[2]   See, for instance, Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity 1920–1940* (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 1985); Pamela E. Swett, Jonathan Wiesen, and Jonathan R. Zaitlin, *Selling Modernity: Advertising in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); or the advertising-related chapters in

is seen as the very epitome or 'sign of sweeping change in modern society', forming part of interlocked processes of 'advertising-modernising' that often clashed with the sensibilities of 'avantgardists-modernists' of the past.[3] In this view, advertising appears to be inextricably linked to art, urban life, and new technologies, promoting a visual culture that is said to have recast the nature of memory, experience, and desire. Consequently, it is also seen as having deeply affected the human sensorium, assaulted and reconfigured the subject, and contributed to the creation of cinematic or televisual spectatorship.[4] Advertising has arguably 'metastasized [...] into a twentieth-century mechanism that radically reshaped the experience of idle *flanerie* into distraction with an applied purpose'.[5] Moving picture advertising, we are taught, has become integral to the genealogy of the *dispositif*, informing widespread public perceptions of corporate power, subliminal communication, and the 'terror' exerted by various 'influencing machines'.[6] And even those that have come to critically distance themselves from the category of modernity, such as Jacques Rancière, still maintain that advertising historically introduced 'new styles' that proposed 'a new way of living amongst words, images, and commodities'.[7]

Advertising, then, is *also* treated as a kind of category – one that is useful to frame and explain both the dynamics of the new and the unwanted effects, contradictions, and struggles at the core of what is understood to be 'modern'. While the adjective 'modern' has come to designate a 'new

Laura Markus, *Dreams of Modernity: Psychoanalysis, Literature, Cinema* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

3   Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 125; Thomas Elsaesser, *Weimar Cinema and After: Germany's Historical Imaginary* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 394.

4   Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 37.

5   Janet Ward, *Weimar Surfaces: Urban Visual Culture in 1920s Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 101.

6   Theodor W. Adorno, *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), 47; Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectics of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), passim; Jeffrey Sconce, 'On the Origins of the Origins of the Influencing Machine', in *Media Archaeology: Approaches, Applications, and Implications*, ed. Erkki Huhtamo and Jussi Parikka (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), 70–94; Charles R. Acland, *Swift Viewing: The Popular Life of Subliminal Influence* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011).

7   Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics. Translated with an Introduction by Gabriel Rockhill* (London: Continuum, 2004), 25.

regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time', as Bruno Latour pointed out,[8] 'advertising' as a noun seems to signify all those combined forces provoking that rupture, that very break in the passage of time we have come to understand as intrinsically modern. Indeed, it appears difficult to describe the modern without also referring to advertising. How could we ever have been 'seduced by modernity'[9] if promotion had not tempted us? Put even more poignantly, how to speak of reification, 'banal expropriation', the 'deterioration' of high culture, the 'absorption' of art or surplus value, 'self-destructive consumerism', and the 'junk spaces' of contemporary urban life without immediately evoking modernist commercials, screaming billboards, or consumer discipline?[10] What would Marxists have done without J. Walter Thompson and the 'commodity as spectacle',[11] and Jean-Luc Godard without Coca-Cola? How could it ever have been possible to make philosophical claims about the malleability of time, and the representation or experience of the present, and how would a critique of modernity and its afterlives have been forcefully articulated if advertising had not existed?[12]

As a category, then, advertising has markedly contributed to an idea of the modern that involves, as philosopher Peter Osborne argues, a temporal logic of negation splitting the present from within. The modern sense of the present as an irreversible break with the past rests on this logic that picks out from within the present those things that are new and makes them constitutive of its historical meaning. 'In the modern', Osborne notes,

> the new within the present does not merely demand more attention than what is not new; increasingly, it negates the latter's claim on the definition of the present itself. 'Modern' is both a term of temporal ontology and a critical term. [...] The present becomes divided internally into the new and the old.[13]

8   Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 10.

9   Markus 2014, ibid.

10   Adorno, *The Culture Industry*, 47, 68, 85; Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (London: Continuum, 2004), 235; Fredric Jameson, 'Future City', *New Left Review* 21 (June 2003); Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Sage, 1991), 24; cf. Sean Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2004), 287.

11   Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect*, 52.

12   See, for instance, Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of Consumer Culture* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976); Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders* (London: Longmans and Green, 1957).

13   Osborne, *Anywhere or Not at All*, 73.

Not only is advertising often considered a 'new' phenomenon. The top cliché of categorical thinking about advertising states that advertising precisely operates, as capitalist economies do more generally, by parsing the present as new. In this view, advertising not only lures buyers by appealing to newness, it essentially functions as part of an endless devaluation spiral that both constantly destructs the old and creates new value. Versions of this view have circulated widely and in what follows I am not at all aiming to refute its ambitious and general claims. My proposition will be rather modestly founded on the fact that, despite its proven usefulness in defining the idea of the modern, and in generating various meta- and counter-narratives of modernity, 'advertising' remains a cliché of categorical thinking. Hence, what screen advertising research obviously needs to begin with is not another critique of advertising's twisted relation to the modern, but a critique of the *category* of advertising.

We could argue that it is the very idea of the modern – the 'modern' in the sense of a critical term – that picks out from within the present those things that are new and makes them constitutive for 'advertising'. Outside of any categorical reasoning, advertising indeed may appear as something altogether different. Historically, it is of course hardly confined to promoting the new, for instance, or to shaping consumer desire; there is immense variation when it comes to the ways advertisements over time have related, for instance, to price competition, product differentiation, trademark reputation, consumer benefit – *or* novelty. Emotional persuasion, often considered a key trait of contemporary 'modern' advertising, appears contingent upon systems of production that may be situated in a longer view reaching back to the eighteenth century.[14] Advertising's complex relationships to a given historical time are thus neither captured nor explained by relying on any category. Rather, that relationship would need to be explored by studying in more detail the ways advertising – and in our case, moving picture advertising – has indeed, or has not, contributed to a 'break' in the passage of time.

Rope Swing, the Modern, and Advertising History

The broader aim of this chapter is to deconstruct the category or conceptual framework that screen advertising research tends to be locked into.

14   Liz McFall, *Advertising: A Cultural Economy* (London: Sage, 2004).

The way the chapter proceeds is neither theoretical nor philosophical; rather, the chapter confronts the prevailing abstracted view on screen advertising with the contingencies of its archival history. To do this, I have chosen as my starting point cola soft drinks, a product often deemed quintessentially empty to the degree that its producers are described as 'want makers', who allegedly succeed in persuading people to buy something they don't need or like.[15] More specifically, the focus is on the so-called 'cola wars' of the 1960s, a period when Coca-Cola and Pepsi engaged in identifying, and then constantly recreating, the differential boundaries between their brands. This inter-cola competition spurred stylistic innovations such as montage sequences, which, according to Lynn Spigel, were a key marker of modernism in 1960s American television advertising. In her book *TV By Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television* (2008), Spigel contrasts these montages with the 'static, talky feel of 1950s demonstrational ads', claiming that this formal device worked together with 'moving camera, mood lighting, location sets, and/or color photography' in creating something new, the 'art-cinema commercial'.[16] Did art and modernism, epitomized by the cinematic device of montage, help television advertisers to sell the present as new? Is Spigel's comment itself indicative of a modern sense of history that selects from history those things that were new, in order to make them constitutive for advertising?

To answer these questions, I will focus on one particular television 'spot commercial' produced and screened in the United States in 1968–1969 for Pepsi, and now circulating on YouTube and elsewhere, entitled *Rope Swing* (USA 1968, 60 seconds). Part of a sports-themed campaign, Pepsi's spot develops a simple scenario of two young couples having fun in nature on a late summer afternoon, repeatedly jumping off a diving platform, swinging on a long rope and arching before hitting the water of a lake. For reasons not entirely clear, the *Rope Swing* spot has been singled out by historians as symptomatic of 'advertising' in its alleged entanglement with 'modernity', if only in a negative sense. Noted advertising historian T. Jackson Lears, for instance, speaks of a 'formalist modernism' that allegedly had come to mark the decade. If advertising's 'purpose' was 'persuading people to buy goods',

15   See, for instance, Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country, and Coca-Cola* (New York: Penguin, 2000) and his entry 'Cola-Wars', in *The Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink*, ed. Andrew F. Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 139–140.

16   Lynn Spigel, *TV By Design: Modern Art and the Rise of Network Television* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2008), 216–217.

then, 'like political propaganda', it 'needed "human interest" and "real life"'
to fulfil this goal.[17] Pointing specifically to Pepsi's *Rope Swing* commercial,
Lears suggests its director, Ed Vorkapich, borrowed backlighting styles
from Leni Riefenstahl, crediting *Triumph des Willens* (1934–1935) as having
shown backlit divers jumping off a platform into water (although the correct
reference here should have been to Riefenstahl's *Olympia*, 1936–1938). *Rope
Swing*, he conceded, was a film in which

> the imagery of Currier & Ives met the propaganda techniques of the Third
> Reich. If one defined one's modernism solely as formal innovation, then
> modernist experiments could be used to promote just about any sentiment
> at all. In the world of advertising, as in that of mass politics, the courtship
> of avantgarde and kitsch could finally be consummated in marriage.[18]

While Lears saw *Rope Swing* as a mixture of mass printing and propaganda
technologies, cultural historian Michael Thomas Carroll even interpreted
that same film as 'fascist', claiming that such allegedly Riefenstahl-inspired
'aesthetic borrowings cannot be made without carrying traces of their
original ideological content. [...] Both fascism and consumerism are strategies
for managing mass populations in the context of popular modernity'.[19]

   Although crystallizing around one specific commercial, such arguments
are not uncommon when it comes to the alleged functions of moving image
advertising in 'modernity' at large. A widespread tendency is to use the
notion of modernity – and by extension, modernism – as a template block
periodization, based on the belief that advertisers and avant-gardists shared
the same 'culture', and by treating 'advertising' as a noun or series of cultural
artefacts. For instance, in his book *Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of
Multiplicity: Avant-Garde, Advertising, Modernity* (2014), Michael Cowan aims

> to examine how the commissioning occasion of the films at hand and
> the broader context of German and European questions of modernity
> are intertwined: i.e. how did Ruttmann's commissioned works enfold
> questions of modernity into their more immediate contexts and projects.[20]

17   T. Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New
York: Basic Books, 1994), 301–343.
18   Ibid., 342–343.
19   Michael Thomas Carroll, *Popular Modernity in America: Experience, Technology, Mythohistory*
(New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 127.
20   Michael Cowan, *Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity: Avant-Garde, Advertising,
Modernity* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2014), 11.

Distancing himself from the type of 'Mephisto question' often brought up in advertising research – namely, how an avant-garde artist of the political left such as Ruttmann could collaborate both with capitalist industries and a totalitarian regime[21] – Cowan avoids treating Ruttmann's oeuvre as an auteur's compromise to his time. While following research on industrial and sponsored film in suggesting a relational view that would neatly link the practical or use value of those films to their aesthetic, he nevertheless suggests that the analysis of such commissioned work should not be confined to the immediate purpose of its commission.[22] Emphasizing a notion of design over form or style, Cowan analyses Ruttmann's works as emerging at the intersection of avant-garde aesthetics and the science of advertising, tracing analogies to science in design practices within a broader context of interwar avant-garde visual culture understood as a sphere uniting often contradictory identities, projects, and aesthetic programmes.

It is worthwhile to examine the notion of modernity at the heart of such an account. Cowan here draws from Mary Ann Doane's attempt to describe the emergence of cinematic time in the context of an epistemological framework arguably shared by cinema, science, and industry since the late nineteenth century.[23] As Doane states, 'the manifest project of modernity – and of the cinema in the wake of Marey and Muybridge – is to make time visible, representable, to store and, hence, to defeat time as relentless passage'.[24] Doane relates this project of representing and managing time to an 'epistemology of contingency' in emerging disciplines such as statistics, and in capitalist modernity at large.[25] Following Doane's line of thought, Cowan's key framework for explaining Ruttmann's works are the shared conditions for the possibility of knowledge imposed by the capitalist system of his time. Accordingly, advertising appears to be a technique of regulation; it is, as is film more generally, an 'instrument for regulating multiplicity'.[26] This approach allows, for instance, the linking of the famous 'cross-sectional' montage or 'Querschnittmontage' in Ruttmann's *Berlin – Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* (1927) to scientific illustrations,

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21   Ibid., 14.

22   See Vinzenz Hediger and Patrick Vonderau, eds., *Films that Work: Industrial Film and the Productivity of Media* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009).

23   Mary Ann Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2002).

24   Ibid., 190.

25   Doane narrows down Foucault's argument to a simple binary.

26   Cowan, *Walter Ruttmann and the Cinema of Multiplicity*, 18.

and to a then widespread form of sociological analysis based on statistic epistemology. If the overall function of (sponsored) film was to regulate multiplicity, such statistical montage developed as a form of 'contingency management', Cowan argues.[27]

Accounts like these are productive in deviating from a static and self-evident notion of 'media' as objects already given, highlighting the many cultural linkages between forms of mediation at a given point in time instead of isolating a given commercial from the situation it was commissioned for. Again, montage sequences are specifically singled out to make an argument about modernity. Given that modernity's 'project' was to make time not only visible but also mutable, it is suggestive to claim that montage, with its capacity to manipulate temporal order or speed, became a key cinematic device for 'contingency management', perhaps even in a 1960s television advertising context. And yet, I would argue that historians of screen advertising might learn more by turning the premise of this and similar arguments on its head. What might we gain by suspending the conventional relationship between modernity, the avant-garde, cinema, and authorship? Insofar as it remains indebted to a categorical notion of advertising, Cowan's history may be seen as itself deeply invested in a nostalgic project of modernity – to the degree that it displaces all that which always already contradicted this project's own promises: interminable series of industrial and political failures to capture, and manage, contingency; strident differences in the knowledges produced by science, cinema, or industry; the situatedness of moving images within an abundance of other, aesthetically unremarkable promotional forms and practices; the non-theatrical life of film; and the ultimate insignificance of film for advertising in a wider context of institutions, technologies, and cultural intermediaries that included broadcasting or ad agencies.

Dissecting a Spot Commercial

While most screen advertising research seems to suggest that it is insufficient to merely study one spot commercial, this chapter follows the opposite approach and does precisely that. Let's have a closer look at *Rope Swing*, the spot's production history, the context of the Pepsi campaign, and of course the montage sequence. My main point here is not so much

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27 Ibid., 55.

to prove conventional screen advertising histories wrong, but to follow through on their intuition to look more closely at the 'dynamics of the new' associated with advertising, without delving into categorical assumptions about societal change or the alleged determinist powers of filmed screen advertisements.

The Agency

In *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (1997), Thomas Frank has written in great detail about the 'cola wars' of the 1960s that made the market practice of product differentiation well-known to the lay public. While Coke had massive success as early as 1904, based on a mass retail marketing paradigm at the time, Pepsi's late rise during the 1960s was 'made possible by an ad campaign that made skilful use of the subversive, anarchic power of the carnivalesque and of the imagery of youth rebellion', Frank observes. In massive print ad and television commercial campaigns, Pepsi positioned 'Pepsi-ness' against 'Coke-ness': 'Pepsi is hip, Coke is square; Pepsi is youthful, Coke is fogey; Pepsi smashes rules and inhibitions, Coke is hopelessly entangled in the stultifying post-war order; Pepsi is for individualists, Coke is for conformists'.[28] While Coca-Cola offered a uniform product, distributed worldwide in one uniform package, and closely identified with all things American, Pepsi offered a new American model consumer, identified with youthfulness and vitality in a countercultural sense. Starting in 1960, after having shifted its advertising account from Kenyon & Eckhardt to the ad agency of Batten, Barton, Durstine & Osborn (BBDO), Pepsi's ad campaigns turned against the adult, workplace-oriented, suburban imagery of Coke, featuring instead a fictionally liberated generation (the 'Pepsi Generation', as the slogan went) engaging in fast-moving pleasures of leisure and consumption: riding motorbikes, sand sailing, playing rugby at the beach, and the like.

When BBDO took over the Pepsi account from Kenyon & Eckhardt in 1960, the agency faced the problem of a soft drink whose taste was indistinguishable from Coca-Cola in blindfold tests. Retrospectively assessing its strategy for the client around 1970, BBDO reminded Pepsi executives that colas did not 'have sharp demographic profiles or even sharp psychographic profiles',

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28   Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1997), 170–172.

and that Coke had managed to establish itself as the standard during the 1950s.[29] A previous campaign, entitled 'The Sociables', that had aimed to position Pepsi as a 'modern' refreshment for the young urban elites of its time had disastrously failed to lift the brand's image from merely being Coke's cheaper alternative. Pepsi's strategy was to combine basic product promises of soft drinks such as 'superior taste, thirst appeal, lift, coldness, sparkle, refreshment', with a demography that targeted older pre-teens, teenagers, and young adults while cautiously avoiding the exclusion of other segments of the population.[30] The scope of this youth market was outlined as 'a 13- to 19-year-old segment that possesses a 440-bottle per capita, spends some $30 billion annually, and accounts for 12 per cent of the population and 18 per cent of the soft drink consumer public'.[31] Between 1960 and 1969, BBDO devised five different campaigns building on the youth trend observed by its strategists:

> 1961 Now Its Pepsi for Those Who Think Young
> 1963 Think Young
> 1964 Come Alive: You're in the Pepsi Generation
> 1966 Taste that Beats the Others Cold – Pepsi Pours It On
> 1969 You've Got a Lot to Live, Pepsi's Got a Lot to Give

During that same period, Coca-Cola settled on three campaigns with no comparable demographic or strategic intent. While direct causal relations between marketing and sales are hard to prove, the BBDO strategy for Pepsi was considered hugely successful, managing to turn Pepsi 'from a poor second in the soft drink industry to the neck and neck leader with Coke'.[32] Between 1960 and 1970, net sales increased from about $158 million to $1,123 million.[33]

29   BBDO, 'Pepsi-Cola: The BBDO Point of View.' BBDO Archives, New Jersey (uncatalogued, c. 1970). Thanks to Cynthia B. Meyers for providing me with this document.
30   Ibid.
31   Anon., 'Sweet Worth of Youth', *Pepsi Cola Magazine* 27, no. 2 (February 1966): 2. The National Museum of American History. Archives Center. The 'Pepsi Generation' Oral History and Documentation Project. Series 1: Research Files. Subseries b: Materials produced by Pepsi-Cola. *Pepsi-Cola World*, 1963–1966. Collection 111, box no. 5.
32   Scott Ellsworth, 'Project Handbook. Coming Alive: A Historical Context for the Pepsi Generation', 1984. The National Museum of American History. Archives Center. The 'Pepsi Generation' Oral History and Documentation Project. Series 1: Research Files. Subseries a: Materials gathered by Archives Center, 1969–1985. Collection 111, Box no. 1.
33   Ibid.

In branding its soft drink, Pepsi had long engaged with Hollywood. In the 1950s, this partnership had been marked by Pepsi's chairman Albert Steele, who married film star Joan Crawford in 1955. Subsequently, Crawford became Pepsi's number one spokesperson and was featured in many of its ads. In 1964, Pepsi commissioned arranger Sid Ramin, who had won an Academy Award for *West Side Story*, to compose the theme song for the Come Alive! campaign, which launched the Pepsi Generation strategy that would be maintained for the rest of the decade. While employing Joanie Sommers to perform the song – 'a voice so young, so special, so right, that it's actually the sound of the Pepsi Generation', according to Pepsi's Marketing Services VP at that time, Alan Pottasch – the score itself was still more traditionally conceptualized as a swinging big band song.[34] Pepsi then teamed up with more youth market–oriented celebrities such as Ryan O'Neal, and consciously built on 'new media concepts' such as a 1965 television 'full-color spectacular' of 'violent refreshment' featuring James Bond star Sean Connery, shared via NBC's network, and finally, in 1966, 'disk jockey radio'.[35] Music – and especially jingles, that is, brief, catchy tunes with lyrics that included the name of the advertised product – were indeed considered to be of key importance. Marketers had used radio jingles regularly since the 1940s, and in the 1960s, standalone songs became a key driver in consumer interest, with Pepsi investing heavily in attracting top musicians for its ads. For instance, while Coca-Cola had teamed up with Aretha Franklin, Petula Clark, or Ray Charles for its Things Go Better with Coca-Cola campaign (1963–1967), Pepsi involved The Turtles and The Four Tops for their Taste that Beats the Others Cold campaign, and Johnny Cash, B.B. King, and Roberta Flack for the You've Got a Lot to Live campaign.

BBDO's approach differed from Kenyon & Eckhardt's not only in terms of demography and media but the agency also commanded a much higher budget. Overall, its five campaigns in the 1960s were both versatile and

34   Anon., 'Advertising: The Why and the What', *Pepsi-Cola World*, October 1964. The National Museum of American History. Archives Center. The 'Pepsi Generation' Oral History and Documentation Project. Series 1: Research Files. Subseries b: Materials produced by Pepsi-Cola. *Pepsi-Cola World*, 1963–1966. Collection 111, box no. 5.

35   Anon., 'The Bondwagon', *Pepsi-Cola World* 26, no. 10 (November 1965); Anon., 'Sweet Worth of Youth', *Pepsi Cola Magazine* 27, no. 2 (February 1966). The National Museum of American History. Archives Center. The 'Pepsi Generation' Oral History and Documentation Project. Series 1: Research Files. Subseries b: Materials produced by Pepsi-Cola. *Pepsi-Cola World*, 1963–1966. Collection 111, box no. 5. See also Timothy D. Taylor, *The Sounds of Capitalism: Advertising, Music, and the Conquest of Culture* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2012), 154–155, for a background documentation of this case.

innovative. Versatile in their ability to adapt to societal change and wide-spread feelings, such as those caused by the Vietnam War, reflected in the muted You've Got a Lot to Live campaign of 1969. Innovative in their high impact on TV advertising, and more specifically, in bringing 'motion picture quality cinematographic techniques, "cinéma verité" approaches, professional film-makers, and rock music' to television.[36] In this context, it is somewhat ironic that *Rope Swing* tends to be singled out by advertising historians, given that both Pepsi and BBDO regarded the campaign it belonged to as an aberration, a 'change in direction', which they later felt 'was a mistake'.[37] What happened?

The Campaign

To understand the decision for *Rope Swing* and the Taste that Beats the Others Cold – Pepsi Pours It On (1966–1969) campaign, it is necessary to get a sense of how the process of adopting an ad campaign worked in general. Usually, the company (Pepsi) would inform the agency (BBDO) and its creatives of the message or image that their marketing people wanted to convey, alongside some ideas and suggestions of how this message could be executed. The agency would then propose five to six possible solutions, of which three would be put onto storyboards with rough demo music. A subsequent process of reviewing and decision-making would involve the company's president and key executives.[38] Campaign proposals were then discussed with Pepsi's bottlers, a powerful group in the soft drink franchise business. Six to eight of Pepsi's bottlers were elected to the Marketing Committee of Bottler's Association (MARCOM), a sounding board for Pepsi's campaign ideas that met before the campaign was presented at a convention, a major event that took place every third or fourth year, often involving a stage show with Broadway talent, and culminating in the presentation of the new campaign.

   The idea for the Taste that Beats the Others Cold campaign was based on tests Pepsi had conducted, and which seemed to indicate that 'Pepsi served

36   Ellsworth, 'Project Handbook', 1984.
37   BBDO, 'Pepsi-Cola: The BBDO Point of View'. BBDO Archives, New Jersey (uncatalogued, c. 1970).
38   Scott Ellsworth, 'Oral History Interview with Alan M. Pottasch', Purchase, New York, 1984. The National Museum of American History. Archives Center. The 'Pepsi Generation' Oral History and Documentation Project. Series 2: Interviewee Files. Abstracts of Interviews. Collection 111, box no. 13.

very cold was considered better tasting than Coke and other colas'.[39] Pepsi's then CEO James B. Somerall as well as Sidney Maran, its marketing head and company vice president, aimed for a more product-centred approach than the one employed by the Pepsi Generation campaigns of the past. As Pottasch, who was against this idea, later recollected,

> They conducted taste tests on Pepsi and Coke and found that Pepsi – when chilled to a certain temperature – beat Coca-Cola. Presidents usually like to leave their 'thumbprint' on the company in the area of advertising and 'Taste' was Somerall's 'thumbprint'. Maran thought that this 'hard-sell' campaign would benefit the product enormously.[40]

BBDO, however, found 'this product claim represented a trivial advantage to the consumer', later calling it 'an example of artificial product differentiation'.[41] The result was a campaign that was not primarily youth-oriented, but rather aimed to remind consumers of Pepsi's basic soft drink promises while highlighting its alleged superiority in taste when drunk really cold. The campaign was presented to Pepsi's bottlers at the 1966 convention and launched that fall.

The Spot

Rope Swing was conceived in 1968, nearly two years into this campaign, as part of an attempt to adjust spot production to earlier audience responses. Previous spots had featured several sports scenes, and the adjusted television strategy wanted to move away from 'multi-situation commercials' to instead include only one situation. The reason for this was the marketers' aim 'to facilitate an "easier involvement" on the part of the viewer' and to present 'the expenditure of energy and its reward, Pepsi-Cola, in its strongest, barest and most exciting terms'.[42] To do so, one type of athletic action – in this case, to swing from a rope into a lake – was meant to be combined with

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39 BBDO, 'Pepsi-Cola: The BBDO Point of View'. BBDO Archives, New Jersey (uncatalogued, c. 1970).

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Anon., 'New Flight', *Pepsi-Cola World* 29, no. 10 (November 1968). The National Museum of American History. Archives Center. The 'Pepsi Generation' Oral History and Documentation Project. Series 1: Research Files. Subseries b: Materials produced by Pepsi-Cola. *Pepsi-Cola World*, 1963–1966. Collection 111, box no. 5.

some formal 'device that would catch [the viewer's] attention, the way slow motion does. While working up the story boards, the agency hit upon the idea of the "stroboscopic" visual device and the "water guitar" sound to accompany it'.[43] While in *Rope Swing*, stroboscopic effects were not used, the so-called Hollywood montage in the film was also a formal device 'accomplished via a film-editing technique in the laboratory': montages are a form of compositing, a visual effect pioneered by Slavko Vorkapich, the father of Ed, who shot this commercial.[44]

The spot formed part of a colour 'package' for network television, consisting of a series of 60-second commercials with fast-action scenes and visual effects, and accompanied by five 20-second spots and eight shorter-duration 'lifts' based on the 60-second spots.[45] *Rope Swing*'s production lay in the hands of BBDO's young agency producer, and later famous Hollywood director-producer, Jerry Bruckheimer, working together with the recently founded, New York–based production house BFB. At BFB, production was executed through a division of labour between producer Herb Freed, art director Kong Wu, director Ed Vorkapich, and editor Jack Cottingham. As the cinematographer, BFB had hired Bert Stern, one of the so-called creative revolution's top advertising and celebrity photographers, known since 1953 for his backlit Smirnoff magazine ads, for directing the documentary *Jazz on a Summer's Day* (USA 1959), and for his 1962 portraits of the late Marylin Monroe. The jingle for the revamped television package was composed by freelance composer-arranger Anne Philips with her band, Queen Anne's Lace (Jerry Kelly, Jerry Duane, Trade Martin, Gene Maharry, and Gene Steck). Shooting took place at Malibu Lake in California and involved 'some of the world's best divers and gymnasts, including Ron Rondell, Hollywood's famed stunt man, and Dave Smith, who has accomplished such feats as swimming the shark-filled Straits of Gibraltar'.[46] Vorkapich later claimed that he did not follow BBDO's storyboard, and that the agency only 'put jingles together and sold the client on the idea', implying that he and Stern, whom he had first met during the Korean War in a camera combat unit, decided the spot's final design.[47] Shooting in the late afternoon and using high-speed footage,

43   Ibid.

44   I have detailed the genealogy of Vorkapich's montages in 'Hollywood Montage: Theorie, Geschichte und Ästhetik des "Vorkapich-Effekts"', *Montage AV* 25, no. 2 (2016): 201–224.

45   Anon., 'Pepsi Action Spots Build a New Thirst for a Young America', *BBDO Newsletter*, October 1968.

46   Ibid.

47   Scott Ellsworth, 'Oral History Interview with Ed Vorkapich', 23 November 1984, New York City. The National Museum of American History. Archives Center. The 'Pepsi Generation'

an Imar combat and an Aeroflex camera, trampolines, and backlighting, *Rope Swing* managed to turn 'what is ordinarily a child's sport into a graceful art', Pepsi found.[48] *Rope Swing* and the new 'Pepsi package' first aired in mid October of 1968 and ran until replaced by the subsequent campaign, You've Got a Lot to Live, in 1969.

As of today, all that remains of this production effort is a low-resolution, black-and-white version of the former colour television spot on YouTube, where it forms part of an aggregate reel entitled 'Pepsi Commercials 1960s'.[49] By analysing these remains, what can be learned about the spot's montage and, following up on earlier arguments, about advertising's allegedly persistent relation to modernity? To come to terms with *Rope Swing*'s production of temporality, a storyboard-like rendering of its shot breakdown, often used in contemporary trade journals such as *Madison Avenue*, may help describe its editing pattern.[50]

Rope Swing roughly consists of six sequences. The first one establishes the action, followed by the second sequence repeating and detailing this action, and by the product claim and benefit. The fourth sequence links the previously seen action to drinking Pepsi, followed by a fifth, elaborate montage sequence that renders this action, including the drinking of Pepsi, in a more graphical way, using multiple shots and intercut lines of action. The sixth sequence repeats the diving action from a girl's viewpoint and matches the man and the woman drinking Pepsi, interrupted by a graphical and acoustic rendering of Pepsi's key slogan. The spot ends with the man, already seen earlier in this sequence, falling out of the frame and into the water. In sum, what characterizes *Rope Swing*'s editing is not just its frantic pace, but rather a calculated mix of (elliptic) continuity editing and discontinuity editing – the latter including a mismatch of spatial and temporal relations, violations of axis of action, graphic matches, jump cuts, and non-diegetic inserts. Most remarkable, however, is indeed the use of the extended, twelve-second montage, or what in Hollywood parlance had long been known as the 'transition shot' or 'Vorkapich effect'.[51] Codified in

Oral History and Documentation Project. Series 2: Interviewee Files. Abstracts of Interviews. Collection 111, box no. 13.

48   Anon., 'Pepsi Action Spots Build a New Thirst for a Young America', *BBDO Newsletter*, October 1968.

49   By the time this book is printed, the spot might of course have disappeared. musickeys8, 'Pepsi Commercials 1960s', www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Vf9g5yC_pg (last accessed 5 April 2021). The title of this video is incorrect, as it also includes spots from the 1950s and 1970s. *Rope Swing* can be found at 6:38–7:38 in this video. Other versions of course exist elsewhere.

50   In what follows, I use the YouTube version of the spot, because it is most widely accessible.

51   These and similar coinages, such as 'Vorkapich shot', circulated widely in *American Cinematographer*, *Motion Picture Herald*, and other trade periodicals.

Figures 2.1–2.52: *Rope Swing* shot breakdown (YouTube).

the late 1920s by director Ed Vorkapich's father, the Serbian émigré Slavko Vorkapich, as a suprarealistic form of montage, this effect has been widely used in commercials before and after 1967.

As Spigel correctly notes in her book, rapid montage and graphic collage belonged to a 'cinematic' repertoire of stylistic codes that had become standard by 1967. In adopting this design, BBDO's and BFB's producers opted for Ed Vorkapich, Slavko Vorkapich's son, as a director known for his work at Filmex, a 'top company' for TV commercial production, according to trade papers, where he was employed as part of a newly founded 'experimental film division', together with his father, 'a well-known Hollywood movie director [who] has developed many montage principles which apply to today's TV commercials'.[52] Rather than vaguely borrowing from Nazi propaganda, *Rope Swing* thus explicitly integrated Hollywood montage as a key principle for designing time and objects in motion.

Conclusion

Vorkapich offers more than a just biographical thread through the anonymous assemblage of advertising styles. Instead of being an auteurist

52   Anon., 'Slavko and Edward Vorkapich Join New York Staff of Filmex', *Business Screen Magazine*, vol. 28 (January–December 1967). Anon., 'Filmex adds unit', *Broadcasting* 72, No. 32 (15 May 1967) and 'Balancing art and business in film making' (5 June 1967), in the same journal.

exception, Ed became an award-winning role model for aspiring advertising directors in the 1970s before turning to video and MTV in the 1980s. In statements and interviews, Ed's persona was crafted through references to his father's montage principles as guiding current practices of television advertising. 'Both men' were said to have 'agreed that the hand-held style which has become so closely associated with [Ed] Vorkapich's work for Pepsi, 7-Up, Noxzema, Revlon and other top advertisers was incredibly similar to the material he [Slavko]'d shot years ago'.[53] In taking up the standardized stylistic codes of his time, the younger Vorkapich thus supported agencies, trade organizations, and production houses in actualizing an aesthetic programme dating back to the 1920s. He would, for instance, describe a 'director's job' as 'to transfer an idea rhythmically to film', insisting on each shot having 'its own "note"', as it 'is the organization of these notes that creates the visual music'.[54] Such statements and Ed Vorkapich's kinaesthetic montages in *Rope Swing* or Pepsi's earlier *Girl Watcher* (USA 1967, 60 seconds) evoked the theories Slavko had articulated between 1926 and 1973 with surprisingly little variation in trade articles and lectures. These theories were in themselves deeply rooted in 1920s avant-garde discourses revolving around notions of visual music, as they defined 'cinematics' as an art of pure motion, 'spatial like painting and temporal-dynamic like music', and 'comparable to a symphony' in its 'organization of the moving volumes and their rhythmical arrangement from shot to shot'.[55]

Rope Swing presents its branded bottles and cans in movement, 'life flowing through them', in Raymond Williams's words, as they chill, turn, are lifted up, emptied out. Following the idea that, in order to find 'a new kind of visual beauty in the ordinary world', motion pictures of all sorts would have to 'liberate bits of dynamic visual energy, extracted from a simple event in reality', Slavko Vorkapich had codified a Hollywood best practice of montage, rather than 'inventing' it.[56] Montage, initially developing as a form of 'time effects' based on optical compositing in Hollywood's special effects departments, was described by Vorkapich as the

53   Anon., 'Close Up: Ed Vorkapich', *Millimeter* 5, no. 8 (September 1977): 70.
54   Ed Vorkapich, 'Directors Should Get A First Cut', *Backstage* 25, no. 8 (24 February 1984): 36.
55   Slavko Vorkapich, 'Cinematics: Some Principles Underlying Effective Cinematography', *Cinematographic Annual* 1 (1930): 29–33.
56   Slavko Vorkapich, 'Towards True Cinema', *American Cinematographer* 54, no. 7 (July 1973): 884–886, 930–933. For a summary of Vorkapich's theoretical positions, see Arthur LeRoy Swerd-loff, *A Comparative Analysis of the Filmic Theories of Slavko Vorkapich* (dissertation, June 1950, University of Southern California, unprinted manuscript).

putting together two or more images, one next to another, one after
another, one on top of another – so-called superimposed shots – to depict
an event, to suggest lapse of time, to convey an idea, to arouse an emotion,
to express a state of mind or create a mood or atmosphere.[57]

In a similar vein, *Rope Swing*'s montage employed 'graphic picture symbol-
ism', what in 1970s art, design, and advertising circles became known as
'graphic dynamism', to create meaning through movement.[58] While film
scholars continue to label Vorkapich as an aesthetic 'modernist' influenced by
Eisenstein, he indeed had a background in advertising and kept contradicting
Eisenstein and other avant-gardists of cinema by stating that the art of
cinematics was not at all bound to the cinema.[59] Objecting both to cinema's
narrative content and the 'empty formalism' of contemporary television,
Vorkapich envisioned moving images as an art of attraction, similar to the
techniques 'advertisers use to attract buyers: barber-poles gyrate, windmills
revolve and electric signs do a dervish dance every night'.[60] Such art, he
concluded, some decades before Williams, would only be possible in the
cultural form of short 'passages'.[61] Vorkapich indeed sometimes used the
diving sequence in Riefenstahl's *Olympia* in lectures to illustrate his idea
of kinaesthetic montage.[62]

As this chapter has shown, there is no simple or direct relation between
advertising and modernity. Using *Rope Swing* as a case in point, the chapter
has demonstrated that historians need to relate a given spot and its campaign
to the broader marketing trends of its time, to specific agency practices,
aesthetic concepts, and even to biographies. Given contemporary network
television's 60-second slots for advertising, montage allowed an advertiser

57   Swerdloff, *A Comparative Analysis*, 71; Slavko Vorkapich, 'Montage and the Creative Camera',
National Board of Review Magazine 14 (5) (May 1939): 8–12.

58   Slavko Vorkapich, 'Montage: A Look Into the Future with Slavko Vorkapich', *Cinema Progress*
2 (5) (December–January 1937): 18–22, 34; see also, Julie A. Turnock, *Plastic Reality: Special Effects,
Technology, and the Emergence of 1970s Blockbuster Aesthetics* (New York: Columbia University
Press, 2015), 49. Thanks to Julie Turnock for her comments and suggestions.

59   Swerdloff, *A Comparative Analysis*, 1950, passim. Cf., for instance, David E. James, *The Most
Typical Avant-Garde: History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University
of California Press, 2005). See also the excellent article by Barbara L. Kevles, 'Slavko Vorkapich
on Film as a Visual Language and as a Form of Art', *Film Culture* (Fall 1965): 1–46.

60   Slavko Vorkapich, 'Cinematics. Some Principles Underlying Effective Cinematography',
Cinematographic Annual 1 (1930): 30.

61   Swerdloff, *A Comparative Analysis*, 19 and passim.

62   Turnock, *Plastic Reality*, 64.

to 'cram dozens of ideas and suggestions into a brief footage'[63] and to evoke the effects tradition of the big screen for an audience that had become used to the small screen. In employing montage, Filmex, BFB, and other production companies established a standard that put more emphasis on visuals,[64] filling the breaks in television's programme flow with an art of the intermittent. This aesthetic standard was neither entirely new to television, nor a simple adoption of earlier film practice. Rather, it employed a trope of designing time that had circulated, and continued circulating, from early electronic moving image displays via Hollywood to MTV.[65]

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63   Anon., 'The Hollywood Scene', *Motion Picture Herald* 131, no. 7 (14 May 1938).

64   Anon., '12-time-and-dollar savers to check before shooting', *Sponsor* (8 June 1964): 48–49. This article describes Filmex's efforts to streamline and standardize the visual design of the commercials produced. Thanks to Cynthia Meyers for pointing me to this article.

65   See William Boddy, 'A Genealogy of Electronic Moving Image Displays', *Rebecca. Revista brasileira de estudos de cinema e audiovisual 2*, no. 3 (January–June 2013): 15–32; and Turnock, *Plastic Reality*.

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