

PUBLIC SPACES OR PRIVATE PLACES?
Outdoor Advertising and the Commercialisation of Public
Space in Christchurch, New Zealand

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By: Jennifer Rose Molina
University of Canterbury

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This thesis is dedicated to friends, family, colleagues and even complete strangers who enthusiastically joined me in taking a more critical look at the messages surrounding us every day. I would like to thank Dr. Sue Tait for inspiring me to ask these questions, and Dr. Donald Matheson for his continuous patience, support and insight.

CONTENTS

1	<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	6
2	<i>LITERATURE REVIEW</i>	12
2.1	Outdoor Advertising: Various Perspectives	14
2.2	Global Corporate Domination	30
2.3	The Public Sphere and ‘Public Space’	40
2.4	Advertising and Culture, Discourse and Power	52
3	<i>METHODOLOGY</i>	63
4	<i>RE-THINKING HISTORY</i>	69
4.1	The Entrepreneurial Adexec	70
4.2	Adexecs & Their Enemies: Discourses in Action	72
4.3	Outdoor Advertising in Christchurch: A Portrait	75
4.4	The Global Connection	78
4.5	Social Responsibility?	80
5	<i>REGULATION OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISING</i>	82
5.1	The Governance of Public Space	83
5.2	Self-regulation: A Critique of OAANZ & the ASA	95
5.3	The Pornographication of Public Culture?	108
6	<i>REPRESENTATIONS & PUBLIC SPACE</i>	115
6.1	The Gendering of Public Spaces	115
6.2	Class and Ethnicity	133
6.3	Graffiti as Cultural Resistance?	140
7	<i>CONCLUSION</i>	147
8	<i>REFERENCES</i>	150
9	<i>APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS</i>	165

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the impact of outdoor advertising on public space, by situating outdoor advertising within arguments about global corporate domination. I argue that the implosion of commercial messages into ever-increasing amounts of public space has repercussions for our ability to relate to each other as anything other than commercial beings. Outdoor advertising necessitates the use of stereotypes to communicate with its audience. The regulatory mechanisms for advertising *sanction* this use of stereotypes, which puts commercial needs and rights to free speech before the public's right to distance itself from commercial messages and values. The discourses of advertising and its progenitors reinforce hegemonic conceptions of gender, class and ethnicity thereby imbuing space with values which do not encourage diversity but promote narrow and limiting options for the self. By carefully examining the 'entrepreneurial adexec' and 'public interest' discourses that surround outdoor advertising, I argue that its global privatising power has been able to continue without challenge, as potential criticisms are silenced before they are even articulated. It will be shown how the various regulatory mechanisms operating under discourses of 'public accountability' actually serve commercial interests rather than public interests by supporting private-public partnerships and focussing narrowly on the implicit meaning in ads. Particularly problematic representations of gender, class and ethnicity in outdoor ads will be analysed to discern the various ways these impose certain values on public spaces in Christchurch through the process of commercialisation. Finally, graffiti and billboard liberation as forms of cultural resistance to this commercialisation will be examined.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 6-1: Ad for <i>Bonds</i> female underwear	118
Figure 6-2: Ad for <i>Nivea</i> shower oil.....	120
Figure 6-3: Ad for <i>Rexona</i> deodorant.....	120
Figure 6-4: Ad for <i>Venus</i> razor	120
Figure 6-5: Ad promoting <i>Northlands</i> shopping centre	126
Figure 6-6: Ad for <i>Max</i> (women’s fashion store).....	126
Figure 6-7: Nostalgic style ad for <i>CocaCola</i>	126
Figure 6-8: Ad for <i>JetStar</i>	128
Figure 6-9: Ad for <i>PacificBlue</i>	128
Figure 6-10: “That man deserves a DB” ad.....	130
Figure 6-11: Ad for <i>Export Gold</i> (beer)	130
Figure 6-12: Ad for <i>Bert Badger TV</i>	131
Figure 6-13: ‘Yeah Right’ <i>Tui</i> (beer) Ad.....	132
Figure 6-14: Photograph by Margaret Bourket-White (Gudis 2004:209). 134	
Figure 6-15: Ad for <i>Fresh ‘n Fruity</i>	137
Figure 6-16: Ad for <i>CocaCola</i> ‘citra’	137
Figure 6-17: Ad for <i>Just Juice</i>	137
Figure 6-18: Public Service ad for <i>Salvation Army</i>	138
Figure 6-19: ‘Tagging’ on an <i>Adshel</i> bus shelter, Papanui.....	142
Figure 6-20: Graffiti near railway crossing and commercial district, Riccarton.....	143

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2002 the Advertising Standards Complaints Board (ASCB) received a complaint¹ about a billboard ad in Auckland for *Fruit Burst* candy. The complainant argued that the ad—which pictured two bananas with baseball bats about to attack a young man walking down the street, accompanied by the slogan ‘the real fruit hit’—made light of violence and was socially irresponsible in its placement “in one of Auckland’s most notoriously violent city blocks.” The complainant argued the ad’s humour was “of appallingly bad taste” and, through its promotion to the teenage demographic, advocating “the acceptance of casual violence among the young.” In its response, the advertiser claimed that the representation was merely cartoon-like and therefore not to be taken seriously. The comment of the advertiser brings attention to the politics of representation where metaphors used for humour are not held accountable for the deeper meanings they promote within society. The Board upheld the complaint, but disagreed on the decision. A minority of the ASCB agreed with the advertiser that the ad was “quite humorous” whereas the majority agreed with the complainant’s assertion that the ad advocated unacceptable violence. The complainant was not merely challenging an advertisement, they were challenging the presence of that ad in *public space*. What this example reveals is the way specific spaces can inflect meaning on an image and vice versa. It also reveals a struggle over interpretation, where the advertiser asserts their right to spread “creative and humorous” messages in the public domain, often in contradiction to their supposed ‘social responsibility’. The ASCB’s conflicted response to both the complainant’s and advertiser’s arguments illustrates that space is indeed a meaningful component of public discourse, and that disagreements of interpretation and ideology *in space* cannot be easily resolved.

¹ Complaint 02/13.

This thesis argues that the strategic use of two discourses by outdoor advertisers, which I refer to as ‘the pioneering adexec’ and ‘the public interest’, has enabled the saturation of public spaces in Christchurch with the *values* of commercialism. The interweaving of these discourses in urban planning and advertising regulation has meant that private interests trump public interests in control of ‘the commons’. The outdoor advertiser has constructed a coat of protection so impenetrable that *rarely* can a criticism be lobbied against this craft that is not labelled extremist or irrational. Not only are the medium and the power of the private interests it promotes prolific, the content—in its necessity for mass attention grabbing—contributes to the persistence of hegemonic representations through its reliance on stereotypes. This thesis challenges the discourses outdoor advertisers use to legitimise their role in the commercialisation of public space. By dismantling a global web of rhetoric, I suggest that in order to challenge the *role* of outdoor advertising in public space it is essential to understand the nature of its existence. In a physical sense, outdoor advertising is undoubtedly a ‘taken-for-granted’ aspect of our visual lives, but it is the less tangible chorus of discourses which support and sustain its control of public space.

I have chosen the question ‘Public Spaces or Private Places?’ as the title of this thesis because it is generally assumed that spaces remain public, despite the proliferation of outdoor advertising messages occupying them. I challenge this assumption by critically evaluating the disjuncture between what public space means and the influence outdoor advertising has on the ability of public space to function democratically. Harold (2004: 208) has argued that the success of the global dissemination of commercial culture rests on the proliferation of symbols and discourses that appear polysemic. In appearing humorous, playful and open-ended, the institutions of commercial culture appear neutral, heterogenous and therefore democratising. In the Foucauldian tradition of addressing the way power functions through seemingly neutral social and cultural institutions, this thesis argues that these seemingly polysemic discourses actually function to

homogenise the spaces they inhabit, creating spaces where commercial values offer a one-way flow of communication.

Morley and Robins (2001: 13) view the key intellectual challenge of our time as the development of a fuller understanding of the cultural consequences of privatisation. Critical media studies have not adequately addressed outdoor advertising as one such institution of privatisation, one which has evaded criticism for its contribution to particular forms of violence against public space. Outdoor advertisers have constructed their medium as contributing to ‘the public interest’ by emphasising its contribution to the creation of wealth through employment as well as the dissemination of information and entertainment. What this ‘public interest’ discourse obscures is the way outdoor advertising forces private values onto supposed ‘public’ spaces with a one-way flow of discourse, which is violent in its antagonism to competing discourses. The medium exercises a form of ideological violence through the perpetuation of stereotypes about gender, ethnicity and class. The issue becomes bigger because it is a global issue. The global trend towards de-regulation and commercialisation means that nothing is outside of the market.

I am writing about *standardized* non-site related outdoor advertising. Hoarding derived its name, “from the hoarding of space on the rough board enclosure surrounding construction work which was commonly used for posting” (Tocker 1969: 26). ‘Hoarding’ space now becomes an ironic reality, as commercial messages colonize the physical, visual and ideological public realm with values antithetical to the democratic interaction such spaces are assumed to facilitate. Billboards, posters and street furniture advertising hoard more than the physical space they inhabit – they hoard ideological space. I argue here that we cannot begin to understand how people use outdoor advertising without first understanding the medium’s construction, its place in society and its cultural significance. This thesis addresses outdoor advertising as a cultural product by scrutinizing the system of its production, the geography of its distribution and the situation of consumers in that geography.

People, when I told them the topic of this thesis, would respond “outdoor advertising...well what about it?” Advertising outdoors is so taken-for-granted that when confronted to think critically about its role in culture it is often a significant ideological leap. I feel there is more pressure to qualify my area of study than the usual suspects of print, television, radio and film advertising. Advertising has been theorised from several angles in terms of its social significance but little scholarly research has attended to the impacts of *outdoor* advertising – that peculiarly pervasive form of advertising that fills public space, disabling any escape from it. This thesis takes a step back by looking at the notion of ‘the public sphere’ more literally, by analysing a medium that more directly impacts physical public spaces. In a world dominated by commercial communication, taking those signs out of context and problematising them is an affront to our visual culture, a challenge to the common aesthetic discourse. Outdoor advertising is a significant medium that deserves attention in its own right, especially the way its ‘audience’ is constructed as a public through discourses of ‘the public interest’ and ‘social responsibility.’

Norton (2001: 192) argues that economic speech is shielded from political critique because it is assumed to be neutral. She argues,

In the economic zone of the visual there is no free speech at all. There is, however, all the speech money can buy. Normally, that speech echoes in the silence of opposing speech. All we hear is the speech of the billboard and the display window.

Similarly distressed by the lack of escape from what he calls ‘hyper-reality’ Baudrillard (1994: 76) mentions billboards in *Simulacra and Simulation*. He argues that billboards observe and surveill us much like the “policing television” which amounts to a spectacle so complete and absolute that we are unable to be outside of it:

[There is]...no relief, no perspective, no vanishing point where the gaze might risk losing itself, but a total screen where, in their uninterrupted display, the billboards and the products themselves act as equivalent and successive signs (Baudrillard 1994: 75).

The billboard is so powerful that it falls outside of critique because it has entered the realm of ‘common sense’ in a privatised, commercialised society. Despite a select group of subvertisers who ‘talk back’ to billboards, the general response to their presence is silence.

This thesis takes a multidisciplinary approach to the question ‘how does outdoor advertising commercialise the public spaces of Christchurch?’ using tools not only from mass communication but also sociology, cultural studies, urban geography, and the anthropology of space. To study public perceptions of outdoor advertising is beyond the scope of this project, however this thesis offers a starting point for such research, by mapping the terrain that has led to the development of a sophisticated and highly diversified ‘outdoor advertising industry’ in Christchurch. The material studied here includes interviews with stakeholders, critical reading of industry literature, including self-regulatory literature, analysis of ASCB deliberations, and a discussion of a sample of outdoor advertisements that are particularly problematic in their regimes of representation in light of their physical placement. I also review primary research relating to the City Council’s role in ‘governing’ outdoor advertising such as resource consent files for billboards and the City Plan.

In “Re-thinking History” I critically evaluate the rise of outdoor advertising in Christchurch through an analysis of the narrative of its patriarchs. Mike Gray, the most successful and prolific outdoor advertiser in Christchurch, uses what I call ‘the pioneering adexec’ rhetoric to explain his success in pursuing billboard advertising in a city where before there was hardly any. I compare this rhetoric to the available literature on outdoor advertising, arguing for the need to challenge the assumptions that have underpinned the stories adexecs tell. “Regulation of Outdoor Advertising” is divided into two parts: the first deals with forms of urban governance, the second with industry self-regulation. It is my contention that each of these forms of regulation uses ‘the public interest’ and other rhetorical devices which make assumptions about ‘generally prevailing community standards’ that are problematic. These discourses construct a curtain of accountability that

protects private interests, often at the expense of those who challenge the stereotypes and values perpetuated by the medium. By aiming to appeal to the highest income earners in society, the messages and values perpetuated in outdoor advertising rely on stereotypical representations of gender, class and ethnicity. Whilst the medium relies on attention-grabbing, its necessity for instant communication demands easily recognisable representations, which contribute to the inscription of particular values on public space. The final chapter challenges these stereotypical representations by analysing specific advertising themes that pose challenges to the supposed democratic function of public spaces.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

In attempting to answer the question ‘how does outdoor advertising commercialise the public spaces of Christchurch?’ it was essential to begin by researching the body of scholarly literature available on the subject of ‘outdoor advertising.’ It soon became apparent that this literature alone was not going to be sufficient to tackle that question. Not only was this body of theory small, but it was generally lacking a critical, cultural studies approach. It revolved around five general areas of inquiry: an industry-based history of the medium and ongoing research into its profit-generating effectiveness;² analyses of outdoor advertising regulation; ‘effects’ based studies focused on narrow issues such as tobacco advertising on billboards; feminist critiques of outdoor advertising imagery; and a few individual studies that opened the door to a critical analysis without venturing much further.³ While many of these studies were limited, they *did* provide ‘clues’ which signalled a host of theoretical literature that could be used to create a critical analysis of outdoor advertising as it intersects with the broader issues of globalisation, public space and consumer culture. I am interested in how outdoor advertising influences the ways we can think about public space, and how it contributes to the predominance of consumer culture as our everyday paradigm.

This literature review therefore begins by critically examining the scholarly literature on outdoor advertising in order to highlight how it is useful in some respects, and yet inadequate in central ways. I then show how these inadequacies may be overcome by creating a much *broader* theoretical

² The only scholarly study of this kind in New Zealand is an early University of Canterbury thesis (Graduate Diploma of Fine Arts in Design) but its content was not relevant to the arguments made here as it was largely based on the aesthetics of the medium (Griffiths 1967).

³ The exception to this is the work of Gudis (1999, 2004) who critically studied the social and cultural role of outdoor advertising in American history.

framework from which my area of enquiry may be contextualised. This theoretical framework begins with a discussion about globalisation, placing outdoor advertising in Christchurch within a global phenomenon of commercial saturation. Too often analyses of the medium have focused on its local manifestations rather than asking how global processes *impact* the locality through a process of gradual commercial appropriation of public space.

Next I link these issues of globalisation with relevant theoretical literature on 'public space'. Public space is central to a critical discussion of outdoor advertising because it is the rhetoric of what constitutes 'public' that pervades the medium's history. The problematic distinction between 'private' and 'public' is well documented and can shed light on why outdoor advertising takes its current form in culture. Other media forms have been critically evaluated in light of these theories, especially Habermas' notion of the centrality of 'public space' to the functioning of a democracy. Urban geographers have provided interesting ideas on the centrality of space to postmodern urban life, specifically the way that architecture and city planning contribute to the gendering and socio-economising of public spaces. I also draw on anthropological work regarding 'space' and 'place' in order to establish how these concepts are central to culture and society, and what can be extrapolated about the problematic phenomenon commercialisation creates in regard to 'public' spaces and places. De Certeau's distinction between place and space will be drawn upon to examine the way (public) places *become* commercialised (private) spaces through outdoor advertising.

Lastly, the literature review focuses on the centrality of *advertising* to debates about the way public space is increasingly commercialised on a global scale. This is achieved through an analysis of scholarly research within the cultural studies and social-science traditions which use tools such as semiotic and content analysis to theorise the relationship between advertising, cultural discourse, knowledge and power. Of particular interest in this section is an analysis of Foucault's concept of power in relation to

the way public discourse (particularly *regulatory* discourse) continuously legitimises commercial imperatives in the use of public space. Also important is the way that advertising discourse and imagery in outdoor advertisements can be analysed in relation to generally prevailing discourses around gender, class and ethnicity. This section will also explore discursive analyses of stereotypes in advertising. Lastly I will be drawing on the work of Lloyd (2003) and Makagon (2000) who analyse graffiti and ‘culture jamming’ as forms of cultural resistance, to form a basis for talking about the discourses that *compete* with the commercial in public spaces.

2.1 Outdoor Advertising: Various Perspectives

“Over the years, advertising has been both condemned and eulogized. By some, it has been characterized as an insult to the intelligence of thinking men. Others profess that advertising is a necessary and desirable catalyst of our private enterprise system” (Enfield 1969: 149).

“Certainly advertising, like propaganda, seems almost inescapable. It is visible in city and country and intrudes incongruously at almost every vantage point” (Horsbrugh 1969: 190).

In one of the early volumes dedicated to the history and regulation of outdoor advertising, Houck (1969: 8) stated, “we confront the real danger of the complete homogenisation of American culture... We will be miles ahead of the rest of the world in creature comforts, but we will have paid a price by the loss of variety and personal identification.” This and the two statements above seem odd in the context of a book that also *praises* outdoor advertising, declaring the benefits of the medium for society.⁴ It seems unusual because today not only is the literature on outdoor advertising sparse, but completely polarised between advocates on one hand, and critics on the other. There are those in the industry who laud the

⁴ All of these articles appear in a collection edited by Houck (1969) titled, *Outdoor Advertising: History and Regulation* (see reference list for full details).

medium's graces through discourses of 'egalitarianism',⁵ 'community support' and its ability to reach a mass audience. There are those who maintain a relatively 'cool' distance from any sort of judgement and present a largely descriptive account. Lastly, there are a handful of critics who analyse outdoor advertising in terms of its representational regimes and social and cultural consequences. It is this body of critical literature that is taken further in this thesis. The existing literature does not even begin to do for outdoor advertising what has been done for other media forms. So to summarize, outdoor advertising's existence has been recorded either: in its own interests, in the interests various group taking issue with it (particularly the advertising of tobacco on billboards), or by detached others who seem convinced that there is nothing worth getting too excited about. This chapter overviews these accounts in an effort to chart a new territory from which outdoor advertising may be analysed.

THE OLD PARADIGM...

The earliest 'scholarly' writing on outdoor advertising available is eerily optimistic. Authors such as Frost (1941) wrote about it in such a gleaming light one would have thought it was owed the highest award for bringing humanity into the modern age. Frost (1941) went to great depths 'grounding' outdoor advertising as the earliest form of mass media, connecting it with the early stone tablets of the Egyptians and the crests worn by the Crusaders, claiming: "The medium mightily helped in the propagation of Christianity by its exaltation, multiplication and display of the cross throughout Europe and the near East" (Frost 1941: 4). He goes to lengths that are even more ridiculous when he states,

The darkness of the Middle Ages began to gather. For over a thousand years the people of Europe were to live in that darkness and in fear and ignorance which it induced, save when here and there and now

⁵ For instance, Bernstein (2004: 122) states, "The upside of this is the medium's democracy. There is no restriction. No payment is required. There is no discrimination whether by age, race, gender, occupation or status."

and then that enveloping gloom was occasionally pierced by the feeble light of outdoor advertising which would everywhere become radiant and powerful when the Catholic feudal state was achieved (Frost 1941: 2).

Frost (1939: 4) seems to argue that outdoor advertising assisted in the development of a ‘moral society’ through the standardization of images. The book then focuses on the tales of ‘mighty advertising men’ whose moral stature led the medium into a shining age of prosperity. Despite how ridiculous such claims may appear now, judging by this literature they appear to have been taken very seriously by outdoor advertising’s early proprietors.

Agnew (1985) (first published in 1938) was part of a series of 40 books called “The History of Advertising: 40 Major Books in Facsimile.” This particular book was, “designed to give the fundamentals of the outdoor advertising industry and...show how it is related to the general marketing system” (Agnew 1985: vii). The ‘proof’ he gives for the medium’s effectiveness is mostly psychology-based information making claims such as, “It is one of the laws of psychology that the great majority of people like the same thing” (Agnew 1985: 198). Agnew’s text is also full of contradictions. At one point he states, “Most people are accustomed to believe the most of what they are told and what they read. ...the reader will believe what he is told; and in the smaller things of life, he will do what he is told” (Agnew 1985: 201). However he then completely contradicts himself by arguing that ‘sincerity’ in advertising is difficult to fake and that “The logic of the American people may be faulty, but their ability to recognize sincerity seldom errs” (Agnew 1985: 209). He reduces the controversy over outdoor advertising to a matter of ‘intelligence’ labelling those who take issue with it as “unintelligent” (Agnew 1985: 232). He claims that most criticisms of outdoor advertising are unfounded and that “the outdoor advertising industry has adopted the policy of controlling the locations of advertising displays so that *no fair-minded person finds serious grounds for criticism*” (Agnew 1985: 243, my emphasis).

It was not until Houck's book (1969) that there was a critical industry text. Houck's edited collection offers various perspectives on controversial issues such as private land use, the rights of the public and critical questions about regulation.⁶ Such historical accounts are useful because they show how controversy over outdoor advertising highlighted the social values at a particular historical moment, and how those various values were competing for power over public discourse. They also show how these struggles encouraged people to ask more questions that they had previously taken for granted, such as what constitutes 'beauty', who should be able to determine the uses of urban spaces, and to look more critically at the division between public and private spaces and interests. What they are lacking, however, is a link to the present situation, where indeed outdoor advertising is regulated and standardised, but it is so prolific that macro-theoretical commentators such as Klein (2000) and Baudrillard (1994) see it as devouring all space into the monster that is consumer capitalism. Indeed Baudrillard (1994: 75-76) even contends that billboards represent the complete implosion of media and reality, where media has become reality, and the vacuousness of its value system denies any escape from it as it swallows any form of resistance.⁷ Both Klein and Baudrillard have not been applied to outdoor advertising in detail, an oversight this thesis attempts to rectify.

⁶ Various other authors have looked critically at the regulation of outdoor advertising, which is discussed in more depth in the chapter on 'regulation'.

⁷ He argues that there is no longer media, it has imploded into the message to the degree that nothing is other than the mediated: "Finally, *the medium is the message* not only signifies the end of the message, but also the end of the medium. There are no more media in the literal sense of the word (I'm speaking particularly of electronic mass media)—that is, of a mediating power between one reality and another, between one state of the real and another. Neither in content, nor in form. Strictly, this is what implosion signifies. The absorption of one pole into another, the short-circuiting between poles of every differential system of meaning, the erasure of distinct terms and oppositions, including that of the medium and of the real..." (Baudrillard 1994: 82-83).

A more contemporary body of literature exists, that relates to outdoor advertising from a marketing perspective. There is a great amount of literature in advertising trade journals and publications (particularly the Outdoor Advertising Associations' and *Ad/media*) declaring the versatility of the medium and praising its contributions to visual culture and society at large, often using quantitative 'evidence' to support its effectiveness at 'capturing' the attention of consumers. In Bernstein's (2004) *Advertising Outdoors: Watch This Space!*, a very shiny, contemporary celebration of the outdoor advertising form, the discourse resembles the likes of Frost and Agnew in its praise for the medium and condescension of its opposition. He claims that the most understated strength of the outdoor medium is: "A poster message happens in the public arena where important things take place" (Bernstein 2004: 114). For instance, the *DKNY* marketing philosophy sees a use-value in the street for creating a relationship with the consumer: "The use of the term 'street' today suggests that one is in touch. Streetwise. Street cred. Street smart. The news on the street." (Bernstein 2004: 116). Bernstein (2004: 207) also signals how outdoor advertising can be related to globalisation:

Outdoor is arguably the international corporate advertising medium. For those advertisers needing to be seen to be international, outdoor ads provide immediate evidence. They say 'we're here, we're important, we're part of the local scene, we offer the same values worldwide'.

The advertising industry has continuously sought to improve its image in the public eye through the use of self-regulatory discourse and the 'legitimizing' of itself through targeted research. The overwhelming number of studies (often appearing in *Ad/media*) using traffic counts and other forms of 'consumer research' to argue that outdoor advertising is indeed one of the most versatile of all advertising mediums, *completely outweigh* (in influence) and outnumber critical studies that look at the social and cultural implications of the commercialisation of 'public spaces' that outdoor advertising represents. It is no wonder under such conditions that the medium proliferates, and indeed is even metamorphosing into 'new

marketing' (Moor 2003) where all spaces in culture are completely commercialised. With such an overwhelming volume of positive rhetoric, any form of resistance to it cannot be sustained because there is no infrastructure or discourse available from which to position oneself. Outdoor advertising has been 'commonsense-alised' by its progenitors to such a degree that all arguments made against it appear as nothing more than the ravings of conservative, old stuffy people resistant to 'progress'. This situation needs to be pulled apart from the inside so that the values from both sides can be looked at in relation to the prevailing ideology of our society, where what constitutes 'progress' shapes what is taken for granted. Some studies based in the industry do take more of a critical stance, such as Taylor and Franke's (2003) article, "Business Perceptions of the Role of Billboards in the U.S. Economy" that aimed to fill a perceived gap in academic literature about why advertising firms use the outdoor medium. They claim that the questions they are asking are all relevant to the policy debate, however I think the study lacks critical depth because of the way they simplify the debate over outdoor advertising, and expand on the side that arguably needed it least. In the process they completely make null the 'opposition' side of the argument. They simplify a complex argument by creating two simplistic, opposing categories:

The long history of controversy over outdoor advertising continues to the present. On one side of the debate are those who argue that outdoor is an effective medium that helps to create jobs and is widely appreciated by the public. On the other side are the critics of the industry who use terms such as 'visual pollution,' 'sky trash,' 'litter on a stick,' and 'the junk mail of the American highway' to describe billboards (Taylor & Franke 2003: 150).

This article is clearly written and researched from a background that privileges more 'scientific' analysis methods including a hypothesis and content analysis as well as statistics. I am not contesting the reasons they give for businesses wanting to use billboards. What I *do* take issue with, however, is that this article goes to great lengths to justify the 'business' side of the argument, to prove why billboards are essential to the 'chain mail' of society and to its economic growth and prosperity. Such studies

work to legitimise the dominant commercial hegemony that pervades our public lives and it is the goal of my research to explore further the *other* side of the argument; what it is about billboards that make them a contestable issue. I feel delving deeper into that will create a more balanced and knowledgeable argument for this ongoing controversy.

Richardson and Figueroa (2004) posed some rarely asked critical questions about the media practices of the multinational, multimedia conglomerate *Clear Channel*.⁸ In 1997, *Clear Channel* made a series of acquisitions, including major billboard companies, enabling the company, “to achieve powerful, frequently dominant market positions” (Richardson & Figueroa 2004: 84). Because these acquisitions put the company \$7 billion in debt, it has been argued that the company “may not be able to *afford* to operate in the public interest” (*Essential Information* cited in Richardson & Figueroa 2004: 92, emphasis added). Richardson and Figueroa (2004: 84) point out, “there is scant evidence to conclude that powerful and politically connected media conglomerates will ever place the public interest above their self-interest. This is not only bad public policy, but it is also a dangerous threat to democracy.” The reason Richardson and Figueroa (2004: 85) single *Clear Channel* out as such a bad actor is that, “as the company has grown, it has used its power to radically alter established methods of doing business in the industries in which it is dominant. ...Competitors, artists, and workers have complained that *Clear Channel*’s negotiating style, predicated on reducing costs, is quite ‘heavy-handed’.” *Clear Channel* now has the capacity to blanket a town with an advertising campaign as it owns stakes in all forms of advertising media (Richardson & Figueroa 2004: 92). What all of these ‘old paradigm’ studies do contribute to my analysis is an awareness that commercial voices indeed predominate in public space.

⁸ *Adshel* in New Zealand (who has a contract with the Christchurch City Council for providing all of the bus shelters in the city) is a subsidiary of *Clear Channel*.

THE TOBACCO WARS

Another body of scholarly literature published on the subject of outdoor advertising represents an ‘effects’ based approach by particular interest groups aiming to prohibit the advertising of tobacco products. Taylor & Franke (2003: 151) pointed out that most studies into outdoor advertising have been related to the targeting of minorities with alcohol and tobacco advertising. This research has been done within the fields of psychology and social science, drawing on the ‘effects’ tradition where the questions that have been posed concentrated on the potential negative ‘effects’ outdoor advertising messages have on people. Studies such as Taylor & Taylor (1994)⁹, Lopez et al (2004)¹⁰, Luke et al (2000)¹¹ and Hackbarth et al. (2001)¹² have explored this issue through a lens that is critical of outdoor advertising because of its public accessibility to people of all ages and its targeting of minorities for its messages. These studies are somewhat limited in their capacity for other forms of critical analysis. However, Luke et al

⁹ A study of 700 billboards in Michigan which investigated: the amount of information content, the categories of products and services and the use of billboards by small businesses (Taylor & Taylor 1994: 98). It uses a largely ‘positivist’ approach in an effort to get the attention of regulators.

¹⁰ This longitudinal study, based in a region in the north of Spain called Asturias, aimed to determine whether there was a correlation between smoking in adolescents and the tobacco advertising they were exposed to, which included “awareness of billboard advertising” as an independent variable. They only looked at billboards on the highways and excluded residential areas, including industrial zones, choosing billboard advertising instead of other forms “because it has been found, in some countries, to be the form of cigarette advertising to which young people are most exposed” (Lopez et al 2004: 429).

¹¹ The goal of this study was “to collect data on all billboards in the city and county of St Louis in order to examine characteristics of tobacco billboard advertising. These data would then be used to address two research questions – what are the basic characteristics of tobacco billboard advertising in St. Louis, and is there evidence that tobacco billboards are used to target specific vulnerable populations in St Louis?” (Luke et al 2000: 17).

¹² This article shows a correlation between class, ethnicity and the placement of outdoor advertising which will be discussed in more depth in the section ‘class and ethnicity’.

(2000: 22) showed an awareness of the globalized nature of outdoor advertising stating,

It is important to look at how billboards are used in other countries, to examine the success or failure of formal or informal efforts to restrict billboards in other parts of the world, and to describe how the tobacco industry used outdoor advertising to target specific sociodemographic groups.

Lang et al (2003) carried out a study showing a correlation between the presence of sexual appeal and increased attention to billboards. By measuring heart rate and carrying out 'skin response' tests, they ascertained that "the presence of a sexual appeal in the billboards significantly increased resource allocation for male participants but had little or no effect on resource allocation for women" (Lang et al 2003: 119-120). The second positive correlation they deduced was between level of alcohol consumption and "increased arousal" in relation to sexual appeal in a billboard. Lang et al (2003: 120) concluded "the presence of sexual appeals in product and alcohol billboards clearly increases attention, seems to increase positive valence, and, at least for some groups, increases arousal."

DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNTS

There have been various studies published in books and journals on the subject of outdoor advertising that are contemporary, yet share the nostalgic tone of earlier works, but perhaps with less optimism. Marlow (2001) studied billboard advertising for cigarettes in the United States in the 1990s and talked critically about the way cigarette advertising associated its products with intangible things like freedom, sexiness, attitude and even politics yet her account was largely a descriptive and historical account of billboard advertising, rather than a critique of it. Very little has been written academically in New Zealand about outdoor advertising, apart from an article by Roberts (2003) about the use of billboards in election campaigns.

This study focused on the various visual techniques used by parties and candidates to draw attention to themselves and their messages.¹³

Myers' (1999) chapter on 'posters and space', although largely descriptive and focussed on the United States, provides some interesting information for critical analysis. It draws attention to "the enormous cultural importance of posters" as illustrated by the frequency with which they appeared in literature, art, and memoirs. Also useful is Myers' (1999: 99) discussion of the way that outdoor advertising gained importance as society became more mobile:

Living patterns changed, as people moved to the suburbs and began to use public transport and cars to commute to work instead of walking. They then began to travel much farther, but along certain well-defined lines of daily routine. So instead of putting posters everywhere you could reach, it made sense to compete for a few well-placed sites, such as at train stations or road junctions.

This attention to targeted placement relates to *Adshel's* strategy for the placement of advertising on bus shelters in Christchurch, as will be discussed in "Regulation of Outdoor Advertising." Another way in which Myers contributes to a critical analysis of outdoor advertising is by drawing attention to the link between outdoor advertising and the notion of 'the public' when posters become a topic of everyday conversation (Myers 1999: 110). He continues, "the issue of what is public and what is private arises with every advertisement that calls out to us as individuals in public. Outdoor advertisements illustrate these constraints and uses of space in a particularly bald and direct way" (Myers 1999: 112).

In a much earlier book, *The Shocking History of Advertising*, Turner (1952) devotes an entire chapter to the history of outdoor advertising. Unlike the 'old paradigm' accounts of Frost, Agnew and Houck, Turner's analysis

¹³ She found, "only 14 percent of the 1,000 people interviewed in the 2002 Victoria University election survey said that billboards and hoardings had been 'particularly important' to them in deciding how to vote" (Roberts 2003: 270).

highlights some critical issues. For instance he was one of the first to comment that certain parts of town seemed to ‘escape’ from outdoor advertising because of the higher socio-economic status of their residents.¹⁴ Similar to all of the paradoxes and contradiction of consumer capitalism, the audience most desired for outdoor advertising (the wealthy) protect their areas from the medium they see as devaluing to space, and yet it proliferates in inner-city areas where the less wealthy live. Turner (1952: 253) also highlighted the way that global corporations use outdoor advertising to spread their brand: “Aggressive, too, were the thousands of bright red Coca-Cola signs – the same red signs that today spread like a measles rash over scores of countries...” (Turner 1952: 253). But, like the other historical-based accounts, Turner’s work has a nostalgic tone which speaks of the impact of this commercialisation on public space as something beyond reproach, rather than an important issue deserving thorough critical attention.

FEMINIST APPROACHES

Unlike the largely descriptive accounts described above, two feminist scholars, Winship (2000) and Rosewarne (2004, 2005), have written about the politics of representation in outdoor advertising, arguing that provocative images of women in outdoor advertisements constitute a form of ‘street harassment’ which ‘masculinizes’ public space thereby making it

¹⁴ “Model towns like Port Sunlight and Bournville escaped the attention of bill-posters, yet a few miles away less privileged communities would be plastered with posters for ‘Sunlight Soap’ and ‘Cadbury’s Chocolate’” (Turner 1952: 244). “Industrial towns suffered renewed indignities. Here the bill-posters’ argument was the old familiar one that there were no amenities to destroy. The streets were so drab, they said, that the plastering of bridges and gable ends could only serve to brighten them. To some observers it seemed that these mean streets might recover a little of their lost dignity if they were stripped of the advertisers’ motley. It was a strange arrogance on the part of a soap-maker or a pill-seller that he should presume to decide which streets stood in need of ‘brightening’” (Turner 1952: 247).

less accessible to the needs of women.¹⁵ Winship (2000) says we should understand these ads within the context of a ‘liberation’ discourse where marketers are increasingly aiming their messages at ‘upwardly mobile’ and independent women. She writes about the ways that three particular ad campaigns give the woman ‘power’ through consumption, but in each instance she is still the subject of a sexual male gaze. Even though there may be ‘postfeminist’ aspects of the image which draw a different gaze, contradictions emerge and these translate to the way public space is experienced differently by women and men. She uses the notion of a ‘bipolar self’ to explain the way these advertising messages draw on conflicting discourses of pre and post-feminism. Her analysis is also attentive to the problem that outdoor advertising creates for private/public binaries that exist in our culture, stating, “Issues and arguments grounded in private relations enter the public domain of representation and debate and then return to personal life” (Winship 2000: 48).

Rosewarne (2004) is highly concerned about the ‘street harassment’ that sexualised imagery in outdoor advertising creates. She enables a discussion of outdoor advertising in a post-feminist context, re-igniting issues that ‘common sense’ tell us are not issues anymore, but which clearly are. In discussing ‘public space’, Rosewarne (2004: 4) uses a much broader definition than previous scholars do which has been very useful for enabling the development of further critical analyses. She chooses the model of ‘street harassment’ because it is a measurable concept and “a simple term that, if extended to incorporate graffiti and sexualised outdoor advertising, will give legitimacy to concerns and, ideally, attach stigma to the kinds of

¹⁵ In relation to the *Wonderbra* campaign of the 1990s Winship (2004: 43) argues the tagline, ‘Hello boys,’ “becomes a provocative invitation to sexual advance if not attack. ... The female onlooker, fictively positioned by the ads, is palpably reminded of a gendered and subordinate identity.”

socially exclusionary activities constituting harassment occurring in public space” (Rosewarne 2004: 4).

Rosewarne (2004: 18) makes a very important argument about how power and control of space operate through the *gendering* of public space. She argues that masculinity dominates public space because outdoor advertising helps construct (or maintain) that space as a visual playground for men:

It is important to note that it is men who assume the voyeur position in the realm of outdoor advertising, taking the seat of power as spectator, while it is the woman who is subordinate, featuring far more often than men in outdoor advertisements and routinely being portrayed as merely decorative... Using the binaries referred to earlier, public space is perceived to be a male realm because it is associated with masculine traits like action, power and production. It is also perceived to be a male realm visually, particularly, when images of women feature prominently throughout. As argued earlier, ‘visuals’ are very important to the construction and reaffirmation of masculine culture. ...it can be argued that the same thing is happening in outdoor advertising: the erection of a sexualised billboard is a way for men to externalise their sexual interests and desires (Rosewarne 2004: 17).

Much of what she is arguing also relates to Foucault’s notion of ‘docile bodies’ in the way she argues women restrict their actions in public space through fear of violence (Rosewarne 2004: 25). She argues that just as the display of ‘sexually suggestive’ material in the workplace is deemed sexually harassing, such publicly displayed material on outdoor advertising should also be dubbed ‘street harassment’ (Rosewarne 2004: 27).

In “The men’s gallery: Outdoor advertising and public space: Gender, fear, and feminism,” Rosewarne (2005) furthers her argument about the gendering of public space through outdoor advertising by drawing from the disciplines of criminology, architecture, and feminist geography, and using the concept of ‘social exclusion’. Whilst I agree with where Rosewarne has begun this analysis, in that the representations in outdoor advertising constitute an important cultural production with implications for policy and our experience of ‘public space’, I argue that there is far more at stake than that. The implications of representations in outdoor advertising for public space are much more complicated. My argument draws from the disciplines

of sociology, mass communication, anthropology and cultural studies to look at the complex web of representational politics discernible within the most public of advertising mediums. There is merit in Rosewarne's argument that outdoor advertising is inescapable and hence a 'pertinent public policy concern', but as my analysis will show it is not only representations of sexualised women at stake, but a much wider cultural discourse of commercialisation that uses various representational devices and strategic uses of public space to reinforce a society of commercial values where *everyone* becomes implicated in the commodification of culture.

BEGINNINGS OF A CRITICAL PARADIGM

Lewis's (2003) analysis of subway advertising is particularly pertinent to the argument I am putting forth, as he explores the cultural and social role the outdoor advertising medium plays in current urban life in what he calls 'global cities'.¹⁶ Lewis (2003: 266) looks at what the spaces mean within culture first, before looking at the way advertisements in those spaces are meaningful in that context. He states,

Subways have always been potentially important spaces for some forms of public discourse... The recent rapid development of transportation infrastructure in global cities, however, seems to have taken the commercialization of these public spaces to a more advanced level, exposing urban commuters to accelerated, dynamic environments with unique sets of media and social interactions (Lewis 2003: 261).

He argues that subway ads both contribute to and constrain certain types of interaction and public discourse, because "subways are themselves subjects of public discourse" (Lewis 2003: 265). He argues that early public sphere

¹⁶ He asks, "Is 'globalization' changing the structure of and content of public discourse in Asian cities through these media-rich new public spaces? Are the media of consumption changing collective identification, with potential impact on nationalism, cosmopolitanism and local identity formation?" (Lewis 2003: 266).

theory, particularly Habermas', focused on "the circulation of fairly elite cultural materials: novels and newspapers. In the mass-mediated environment of the new global cities, however, the place where identity formation and globalization may first meet is in the media of consumption: advertising, and in particular, outdoor advertising" (Lewis 2003: 267). He also discusses the way that "these heralds of consumerism" play an important role "in the broader exchange between the local and the global" inviting city dwellers to share in consumer culture (Lewis 2003: 268).

Another author who looks seriously at outdoor advertising in terms of the public sphere is Irene Costera Meijer, who argues the medium can be placed within a "traditional Habermasian public sphere as a legitimate object of discussion and civil consideration" (Meijer cited in Winship 2000: 47). Meijer (1998: 246-247) argues,

...outdoor advertising stimulates people to think about themselves in terms of liberal or conservative, masculine and feminine, even black and white. Precisely because of their public display and their resulting enforced public reception, they incite public debate much more than the private consumption of other forms of promotional culture.

The first of three thoroughly critical studies of outdoor advertising is Bogart (1995), who ironically dedicated an entire chapter in her book about art and advertising to posters and billboards. At first glance this would not seem like an ideal place from which to begin a critical discourse on the topic, but Bogart illuminates several key theoretical ideas. Firstly in regards to public space she argues that the appearance of posters forced people to, "confront the question of the limits of the free enterprise system in an urban context: how to reconcile the interests of businessmen with the social welfare of the citizenry at large" (Bogart 1995: 80). Secondly she points out that the rhetoric of 'the city beautiful' ran, ironically, through both the adoption of artistic posters *and* arguments against them (Bogart 1995: 82). Lastly she articulates the way struggles over outdoor advertising led to a wider debate about how "to determine the appropriate place for commerce and the proper use of urban space" (Bogart 1995: 92). There existed a situation where "the commissioners aimed at realizing a distinctly middle-class vision of modern

urbanity as attractive, rational, efficient, uplifting, and discreetly lucrative” (Bogart 1995: 100), acknowledging that struggles over the meaning of space were deeply rooted in class and ethnicity. Bogart had a significant amount to say about the regulation of outdoor advertising in the context of power relations in the control of urban space. Anti-billboard advocates had to convince the courts that ‘aesthetic arguments’ were justification for regulation but this was difficult because they were not classified as ‘a matter of necessity’ (Bogart 1995: 97). From the early activists’ perspective, “government intervention, even the use of the police power, was necessary to protect the citizenry from the unsafe and degrading forces of the billboard, just as it was necessary to eliminate crime and prostitution” (Bogart 1995: 97). Such an argument would seem completely laughable now as the globalisation of consumer culture has confused the line between public and private.

Lastly, Gudis (1999, 2004) has published two landmark works that trace the history of outdoor advertising in the United States from a cultural studies perspective, and begin asking questions that delve *deeper* into the social and cultural consequences of the commercialisation of public space which outdoor advertising represents. She states, “Though there is a great deal of literature on consumer culture and on roadside architecture, there is little that examined the intersection of the two” (Gudis 1999: 2). The early work that did, failed to,

...consider the social, political, and economic forces at work in the cultural creation of the visual forms it analysed. ...environments are located within historical time and place and they bend to the all but *invisible* forces of mobility, privatisation, and the market, which is shaped by politics, business, and corporate culture (Gudis 1999: 4).

Gudis (1999: 1-3) refers to “the contemporary vernacular landscape,” which caused problems for public space because it occupied private property yet broadcast into shared spaces, raising such questions as, “who owned the road, the roadside, and the broadcast space around it, and whose interests should prevail in controlling its use and appearance.” Hence outdoor advertising decentralized the urban environment, altering both the physical

locations and the perceptual understanding of public space, the public sphere, and the marketplace. She argued that the privatising of public spaces through outdoor advertising set the stage for a “spectacle of public communication in and out of the city, training audiences in the lessons of individual and collective identity and altering the boundary lines of where such communication and consumption take place” (Gudis 1999: 11).

Each of these approaches, while useful in drawing attention to the importance of critically analysing the phenomenon of outdoor advertising, has been limited. Aside from Bogart (1995) and Gudis (1999, 2004), each approach has neglected to address the wider implications to public space posed by the increasingly pervasive global medium.¹⁷ I argue that there is a wider picture to address, where what is at stake is much more complicated than these studies have been able to portray. These articles have given me the ‘cues’ however, from which I have been able to explore a relevant literature. Many accounts of outdoor advertising were written in a ‘nostalgic’ way, rather than addressing the medium as an important cultural institution in the context of a globalized, mediated world.

2.2 Global Corporate Domination

When reviewing the marketing literature about outdoor advertising, it becomes apparent that its proponents envision they are affecting a new audience in a ‘new society’ where people are busier, more mobile and less inclined to use traditional media, hence getting their attention outdoors is the best option.¹⁸ The situation in Christchurch mirrors this global trend of mobility and an emphasis on the visual. Some theorists question the power of global corporations to ‘kidnap’ local culture through its technologies of

¹⁷Winship (2000: 41) states that in Britain, “By 1999, outdoors represented 5 percent of the media mix.” In the United States, expenditure on outdoor advertising exceeded \$5.1 billion in 2001” (Taylor & Franke 2003: 150).

¹⁸ See *Ad/media* (2003a).

homogenisation and standardisation. This analysis steers away from simplistic ‘hypodermic needle’ arguments that would suggest outdoor advertising directly affects people’s attitudes and behaviours, asking instead, what *are* the structural and ideological powers at play? It would be equally simplistic to assert that individuals in Christchurch have complete autonomy in their relationship to these images. I am arguing that outdoor advertising is a two-way conversation between global commercial discourses and their local manifestations or interpretations. In turn, the Christchurch ‘public’ is invited to form a relationship with these new ‘imaged’ spaces. I want to explore how this global process of the commodification of ideas and meaning, particularly in public spaces through outdoor advertising, impacts culture.

GLOBAL CORPORATIONS & CONSUMER CULTURE

This thesis looks at the relationship between globalisation, commercialisation¹⁹ and ‘visual culture’ as they are manifest in outdoor advertising and asks, what happens to local culture at this juncture? I would like to attempt to answer that question by looking at outdoor advertising as a special media form that is locally specific and yet globally contingent; as both a *consequence* of global trends of commodification and also instrumental in the maintenance of a ‘global commodity chain’ (a term coined by Goldman and Papson 1998: 6). The concept of ‘Disneyization’ theorised by Bryman (2004) provides a useful starting point for venturing into a discussion about global corporate domination. Disneyization is defined as “the process by which *the principles* of the Disney theme parks are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well

¹⁹ In his discussion of ‘the privatisation of public space’, Mosco (1996: 144) “distinguishes commodification from commercialization and objectification processes, with which it tends to be associated. Commercialization is a narrower process that specifically refers to the creation of a relationship between an audience and an advertiser.” Commodification is viewed as a much broader process.

as the rest of the world” (Bryman 2004: 1). Bryman (2004: 4) sees Disneyization as parallel to Ritzer’s notion of McDonaldization. I argue that such ‘postmodern’ conceptions about the macro-processes that shape our everyday reality can be applied to an analysis of outdoor advertising, by providing a lens through which to view what is happening to ‘public space’ in a commercialised culture. Bryman (2004: 4) argues,

In a sense, Disneyization takes up where McDonaldization leaves off. McDonaldization is frequently accused of creating a world of homogeneity and sameness. One of the main foundations for Disneyization is that of increasing the appeal of goods and services and the settings in which they are purveyed in the increasingly homogenized environments that are the products of McDonaldization. In essence, Disneyization is about consumption...and in particular, increasing the inclination to consume... Disneyization seeks to create variety and difference, where McDonaldization wreaks likeness and similarity. It exchanges the mundane blandness of homogenized consumption experiences with frequently spectacular experiences. In addition, Disneyization seeks to remove consumers’ need for the prosaic fulfilling of basic needs and to entice them into consumption beyond mere necessity.

Outdoor advertising can be seen as a combination of both: McDonaldization because of its homogenized form, standardization and organisation in both industry and regulatory mechanisms, leading to a sense of ‘familiarity’ through the homogeneity of street furniture designs; and Disneyization in that outdoor advertising is linked to an increased push to consume, creating a ‘visual spectacle’ of commercial messages so that no space is outside of consumer culture. Cities become more like each other by adopting outdoor advertising as a money-generating mechanism for both property owners (through billboard leasing) and for city councils aiming to supply public amenities such as bus shelters. The commercial infrastructure/solution then *becomes* public policy and hence the ‘public’ becomes inextricably linked to the ‘commercial’. The global influence must not be understated here as the outdoor advertisers I interviewed pointed to *travel* as influential in the decision to adopt commercialized street furniture solutions in their home localities.

As Bryman (2004: 157) argues, “globalization is frequently motivated by pressures to spread the canon of consumerism and to provide an infrastructure for it.” Combined with global corporations like *Clear Channel* entering local markets you have a monolithic and very powerful situation. David Ogilvy (cited in Klein 2000: 3), the founder of the Ogilvy & Mather advertising agency, wrote in 1963,

As a private person, I have a passion for landscape, and I have never seen one improved by a billboard. Where every prospect pleases, man is at his vilest when he erects a billboard. When I retire from Madison Avenue, I am going to start a secret society of masked vigilantes who will travel around the world on silent motorcycles, chopping down posters at the dark of the moon.

This thesis is inspired by Klein’s (2000) masterpiece critique of corporate control *No Logo*. My aim is to investigate her conceptualisation of a global, commercial world where the public encounters what she defines as ‘no space’ and ‘no choice.’ Klein argued that space and meaning are the two most precious commodities in culture, yet capitalism is predicated on the belief that *everything* is for sale, and this often leads to violent struggles over the use of these precious commodities. In *No Logo*, Klein drew attention to the importance of the way the local is negotiated *within* the global because of the way the world and culture is organised through globalisation. By ‘no choice’ Klein means we cannot turn off the commercial:

It’s in the streets, it’s right in front of your face, even in the [public] bathroom, so that’s the point...to take choice out of the equation because choice...is seen as the enemy in the world of marketing. ...[There is] no aspect of our lives that cannot be used for this theatre of the brand....Companies try to feed off meaning and feed off of space so everything is a potential prop. ...This radical shift in corporate philosophy has sent manufacturers on a cultural feeding frenzy as they seize upon every corner of unmarketed landscape in search of the oxygen needed to inflate their brands. In the process, virtually nothing has been left unbranded (Klein 2000: 8).

Klein (2000: 30) argues, “The project of transforming culture into little more than a collection of brand-extensions-in-waiting would not have been possible without the deregulation and privatisation policies of the past three

decades.” This was largely enabled by a political climate which “ensured that there was almost no vocabulary to speak passionately about the value of a non-commercialized public sphere” (Klein 2000: 30). Klein (2000: 64) argues that as privatisation and corporate sponsorship become the cultural paradigm, “as privatisation slithers into every crevice of public life,” even resistance becomes commercialized.

Achbar et al (2004) carry the same critical view of our global consumer culture as Klein. In their film *The Corporation*, they argue that the corporation reaches everywhere and has become almost impossible to avoid. After the civil war and the industrial revolution took hold in the United States, corporations began to say in court that they had rights under the 14th amendment.²⁰ They then applied these rights to capital and property, while stripping these rights from ordinary people whose interests the amendment was supposed to protect. The corporation is legally a person, but it has no moral conscience and can therefore operate as an ‘externalising machine,’ able to shift social responsibilities to an imagined ‘someone else.’ Jackson (in ‘Special Features’ of Achbar et al 2004) argues that capitalism is amoral but it has emerged as the global theology. It is ironic that a system driven on competition actually has no competition to its model. Klein (cited in Achbar et al 2004) argues that brands have ‘imperialist aspirations’ and are succeeding in making all our relationships commercially arbitrated. Achbar et al (2004) introduce the notion of “Democracy Ltd” signifying a problem of accountability that arises because corporations want to be *seen* as responsible, rather than actually *being* responsible.²¹

²⁰ They argued a corporation was a person and so should have all the rights and privileges individuals are entitled to according to the Constitution.

²¹ This relates to Baudrillard’s (1994) notion of ‘simulacra’; there is no such thing as social responsibility, only the illusion of an idea of something called ‘social responsibility.’

Although their focus is on the global commercial broadcast of television, Herman & McChesney's (1997: 2) arguments regarding the implications of the globalization and commercialization processes are very relevant to this thesis. They argue,

The global media system may not produce commercial robots, but it will provide billions of 'consumers' by means of a thoroughgoing and incessant indoctrination in commercial values, whether audiences like it or not. And it seems likely that over time this is going to have effects, probably large and almost certainly negative from the perspective of civic and communal values (Herman & McChesney 1997: 195).

They are not optimistic about this form of globalisation, arguing, similarly to Klein, that we increasingly have *less* choice about what we view, although it may seem otherwise. Walter Hale Hamilton wrote in the 1930s (cited in Herman & McChesney 1997: 190-191), "Business succeeds rather better than the state in imposing restraints upon individuals, because its imperatives are disguised as choices." The central idea they are espousing is that advertising proliferates as the predominant voice in society, with the power to influence information and knowledge, even knowledge about how we should act as individuals and as members of the society and culture in which we live.

FEARING THE WORST ABOUT GLOBALISATION

In their discussion of conglomeration, synergy, and global media, Andersen & Strate (2000: 57) argue: "It is uncontrolled growth through conglomeration that is the driving force in the media marketplace. Size brings with it power and control, in an attempt to reduce the uncertainty inherent in the free market." The transcendence of national boundaries means, "multinational corporations yield global media which not only continue the pattern of growth and acquisition but also free the conglomerates from significant regulation or accountability" (Andersen & Strate 2000: 57). Taking these debates to an even further pessimistic place are theorists such as Schiller (2000), who imagines all social institutions are "caught in the iron demand of the bottom line" (Schiller 2000: 197). For

Schiller there exists the possibility of “the corporate takeover of culture.” In his pessimistic conclusion he declares:

On a global scale, the functions of most nation-states will erode further as their capabilities are transferred to global corporations and the workings of the global capital markets. The most important remaining task of national governments will be policing their restless populations. The atrophy of the democratic political system will continue, if not accelerate, undermined by its impotence to manage the global economic system while its constituents are the beneficiaries of torrents of TV commercials exhorting them to buy whatever is on offer (Schiller 2000: 145).

Schiller (2000: 139) shows how important cultural institutions such as schools, scientific discovery and research, are being transformed into selling spaces. Health care, education, the arts, and urban functions are also “being taken over by corporate enterprise” (Schiller 2000: 195). This leads to a situation whereby “A corporate-dominated economy, lacking strong social direction and oversight, can be expected to generate ideas, data, and products of interest and value primarily to its paying constituents, leaving social needs largely unattended” (Schiller 2000: 141-142). At issue for Schiller (2000: 144) is the question of “How will voices that might express opposition to the deepening inequality and public-sector immiseration be heard?”

Barber (2001: 203) shares some of Schiller’s sentiments, arguing for the resurrection of Herbert Marcuse’s 1960s prophecy about the reduction of humanity to one-dimensionality:

The potential of the new global markets for assimilation of all distinctions and the blurring of all ideological oppositions...give his perhaps overwrought sixties’ fears renewed currency. The pervasiveness of consumer identity today is evident in market research profiles, which classify people not by race or gender or even traditional class, but by segmented market inclinations.

Hence, capitalism becomes omnipresent to such a degree that it becomes invisible, *transcendental* (De Cauter 2002: 271). De Cauter (2002: 271) argues, “one can no longer understand our world without taking capitalism as a starting point, an axiom. Nothing is thinkable any longer without the input of capital, not even culture.” Golding and Harris (1997: 4) also agree

that “corporate giants” continue to dictate the global flows of business and media, but point out that the interest of communications research in its international manifestation has gone through three crucial phases: optimism, cultural imperialism, *then* globalization. There has been a significant ‘postmodern turn’ in communications research where focus is now on what is happening *at* the local level in response to globalisation, rather than seeing globalisation as happening *to* the local.

THE POSTMODERN TURN: A FOCUS ON THE LOCAL

Arguments that emerged in the 1960s emphasised “a monolithic global capitalism” (Crang and Jackson 2001: 331). More recently scholars are looking at consumer culture as less one-sided and as more of a conversation or interaction between the local and the global, determined by the complex networks of power and politics operating transnationally. Crang and Jackson (2001: 332) believe that, “even (and perhaps especially) for archetypically global products such as Coca-Cola, consumption is locally specific, bound up with variable imaginative geographies.” They argue that our understanding of the global needs to be localized by exploring “global-local geographies of consumption” which are *not* characterized by creeping global sameness (Crang and Jackson 2001: 330). Various theorists support the notion that there are these things called ‘geographies of consumption,’ and that by looking at them intricately we can learn something about how commercialism is transforming individual local cultures without resorting to simplistic arguments about a ‘monolithic global capitalism.’

Barker (1999: 57-58) employs the phrase “*Coca Cola culture*” to explain the global reach of promotional culture and to highlight “the alleged link between global capitalism, advertising and cultural homogenisation.”

Goldman and Papson (1998) argue that such a ‘Coca Cola Culture’ is enabled through the circulation of images and signs of commercialism. In looking at *Nike*’s advertising they argue that “the hallowed corporation is heavily dependent on the circulation of images or sign values to generate profits” (Goldman and Papson 1998: 4). Outdoor advertising is significant

because it enables the predominance of sign value in our global commodity culture, marking the shift away from the product and enforcing a trend towards symbolic meaning and *image* consumption in local commodity culture as well. Goldman and Papson (1998: 14) argue that instead of focusing research on morally attacking global corporations like *Nike* we should shift our focus “to the contemporary capitalist world economy to examine the relationship between sign production and the global production system.” Taking the example of *Nike*’s swoosh, outdoor advertising can be located in a politics of representation where something global takes on locally specific meanings, thereby enabling an analysis of what happens at that locality as a consequence (Goldman and Papson 1998: 15).

Twitchell’s (1996: 10) work also points to the importance of what advertising does besides moving goods through a market; what it does to society and to culture. He claims, “For in that swap of entertainment for attention—the most central quid pro quo of commercial speech—resides the essence of what draws us together, what we share, what our culture is.” Twitchell proposes that ‘Adcult’ (his term for the ultimate proliferation of advertising in American and global culture) enables *shared* cultural understandings that replace ‘lost’ forms of social interaction, those that have been superseded in a capitalist system. The thesis of Twitchell’s book is that ‘Adcult’ is overpowering *all* the high, folk and popular cultures: “Modern advertising’s overwhelming mandate to attract attention has made it invade provinces hitherto off-limits to commercialism. In so doing Adcult has collapsed these often contentious cultures into a monolithic, worldwide order immediately recognizable” (Twitchell 1996: 43). It has been argued that what enables this proliferation of commercial visual culture is global corporations’ attention to the way different cultures are “impervious” to global campaigns, hence adapting their content to appeal to local audiences. Twitchell (1996: 22) states,

The British, for instance, like ads that have the temerity to assume some knowledge of history. The French love language, especially puns. The Germans are controlled, and the Japanese often outrageous, whereas the Spanish have an exquisite sense of class distinctions.

Worse still, in a cluttered environment ads often rely on humour, and humour depends on a shared culture and language.

Twitchell (1996: 23) further argues, “Advertising is *syncretic*. In addition to living with other cultures...Adcult layers itself on top of other cultures. ...Adcult ceaselessly covers the patterns and rhythms of yesterday with today’s commercialism.” Advertising most definitely influences culture: “Advertising is the educational program of capitalism, the sponsored art of capitalism, the pornography of capitalism” (Twitchell 1996: 41).

Lash & Urry (1994: 280) argue that perhaps it is neither a focus on the global nor a focus on the local alone that is relevant, but asks “Are there not *two* parallel processes here proceeding side-by-side, of globalization and localization?” Lash & Urry (1994: 296) state,

...the pleasure principle becomes dominant. Pleasure seeking is a duty since the consumption of goods and services becomes *the* structural basis of Western societies. And via the global media...this principle comes to be extended worldwide. Social integration thus takes place...through the ‘seduction’ of the market-place.

Therefore the development of “an overwhelming global consumerism has the most profound of consequences for the physical environment” (Lash & Urry 1994: 296). They are referring to the way that consumerism is applied to environmental problems, such as the depletion of the ozone layer and the destruction of the rainforests, but I would argue that the consequences are the same for our ‘mental environment’ or the visual environment we have no choice to encounter.

Harvey (2001: 409) believes that “The shameless commodification and commercialisation of everything is, after all, one of the hallmarks of our times.” Human geographers explore the link between globalisation and the commodification of space by asking, “Is there a clearly visible direct impact of globalization on the internal spatial pattern of cities?” (Marcuse & van Kampen 2000: 2). Urban geographers have asked, “Have city administrations reacted broadly in the same ways to the challenges of global economic change or is there evidence of a diversity of local political

responses?” (Clarke & Gaile 2005: 159). These important questions have generated considerable controversy. Theorists such as David Harvey argue

...the new global regime of ‘flexible accumulation’ leaves localities engaging in a reactionary, place-based politics with cities largely competing against each other to attract footloose multinational capital in order to secure a better position within the global urban hierarchy. Local politics in this context is heavily weighted towards entrepreneurial economic development issues while questions of social policy are marginalized (cited in Clarke & Gaile 2005: 159).

The nature of the global world is economic, political, cultural and environmental. The rise of homogeneity in the aesthetic and functional aspects of cities around the globe has not occurred in a vacuum but is intertwined in several processes, specifically the corporate consolidation of advertising companies which has led to homogeneity of the design and forms that cities take. All these things coincide with each other to lead to a world infiltrated with out-of-home marketing where capitalist values inscribe themselves in our everyday practices. Corporate consolidation mixed with a global atmosphere of deregulation and access to global street furniture markets has led to the homogeneity of products, especially bus shelter advertising. But, as discussed above, diversity is central to the success of a venture because all products need to draw from the culture they are working in, hence street furniture has various designs that aim to fit in with the architecture of a locality. Corporations *think globally* in terms of using street furniture as another way to make cash from catching eyeballs, but they *act locally* through the ‘diversity’ of the product which enables the media to be futuristic and global while changing the local scenery as little as possible and therefore meeting with less resistance.

2.3 The Public Sphere and ‘Public Space’

The previous section discussed the globalisation of consumer culture. I would like to shift now to discussing how the issues associated with a global ‘corporate-dominated’ world impact public space. McLaughlin (2004) looks critically at what he calls ‘transnational public spaces,’ arguing that the theoretical frameworks we have for examining ‘the public sphere’ are

deficient in their “overall failure to confront adequately a contemporary scenario in which a globalizing capitalist economy is restructuring the public sphere and reshaping its modes of exclusion” (McLaughlin 2004: 156). He believes that public sphere theory is still relevant but only if it acknowledges the “impact of globalization processes on the public sphere, and, indeed, on almost every aspect of cultural, social, political, and economic life” (McLaughlin 2004: 157). The idea of what constitutes public space has become blurred. Publicness is actually an ideal, hence tensions play out between the ideal and the real. The way scholars conceptualise ‘public’ shapes the outcome of their arguments, and it seems to me that the ways ‘public space’ have been theorised depend on or reflect the object of study, making it an unstable category upon which to base an analysis.

There is little agreement on a coherent theory of ‘public space’ and in lived reality it is a huge point of contention, because there are always duelling discourses around what constitutes the public and the ‘citizen’s right’ to certain spaces. Myers (1999: 97) argued “this boundary between public and private is an important part of the way people respond to, and complain about, posters.” Another of the more critical commentators argued, “My own research on outdoor advertising shows that billboards displayed in public spaces can lead to considerable debate among citizens over, for instance, the boundaries of private and public decency” (Meijer 1998: 245). Theorists use the idea of ‘public space’ in their discussions about outdoor advertising but often do not make explicit the assumptions underpinning their particular notion of what is ‘public.’ The central questions this section investigates therefore are: Is there such a thing as ‘public space’? How has ‘public space’ been conceptualised in the past? Is there a crucial difference between what we think of as public *space* and public *place*?

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY ‘PUBLIC’?

Hénaff & Strong’s (2001: 1) version of ‘public space’ is concerned with “the nature and status of the space in which human beings encounter each other with the intention of determining how their lives in common shall be

lived.” They argue that ‘public space’ is inseparable from the idea of democracy in the tradition of Western thought:

We may initially understand public space as a disposition to open and contradictory debate with the aim of making possible a reasoned understanding between citizens with regard to the matter of the definition of institutions, the formulation of laws, and their enforcement. From this point of view, *public* means simultaneously: open to all, well known by all, and acknowledged by all. Public space is citizen and civic space of the common good; it stands in opposition to private spaces and special interests (Hénaff & Strong 2001: 35).

They argue that public space is a human construct and hence will always be contentious because people will disagree about the rules of use of that space. The *category* of a space is determined by the criteria that must be met for one to enter that space. Hence at one extreme is private space, where an individual or group of individuals is recognised as having the right to establish the criteria for entry, and at the other extreme is *common space* which “admits of no criteria...is not owned or controlled. ...What makes it common is that all can go there to extract from it what is there” (Hénaff & Strong 2001: 4). Public space, on the other hand, is a man-made space that lies somewhere in-between:

Public space...is the space created by and for humans that is always contestable precisely because whereas there are criteria that control admission to its purview, the right to enact and enforce those criteria is always in question. It is open to those who meet the criteria, but it is not owned in the sense of being controlled (Hénaff & Strong 2001: 4).

Herman & McChesney (1997: 3) argued “the public sphere works most effectively for democracy when it is institutionally independent of the state and society’s dominant economic forces.” They claimed that private interests were antithetical “to the cultivation and nurture of the public sphere” (Herman & McChesney 1997: 7). One of the central theorists who argued there *was* such a thing as public space (or ‘public sphere’) central to democracy was Jurgen Habermas. Habermas (1989: 177) argued that the ‘public sphere’ was being depoliticised “through a preoccupation with consumption of culture” (Habermas 1989: 177). Habermas noted that a danger existed in that “the public sphere may be ‘refeudalized’ by the

market and the state...the organs of publicity that are supposed to dispense enlightenment to the public may revert to being the stage managers of spectacles that keep the citizens in awe rather than in discussion” (Peters 1997: 76).²²

Other theorists claim, however, that it is impossible to separate the ‘public’ from the ‘private.’ For instance, Baker (1998: 1) claims, “The idea of a ‘public’ private space is an oxymoron only if we idealistically claim discrete and opposing private and public spheres. This is actually a false dichotomy. Since the advent of urban renewal, these distinctions have become increasingly blurry.” Another major criticism of the Habermasian notion of a distinct public sphere is its implication of being founded upon free and equal access and upon willing consent between participants, which overlooks “the more coercive and power-driven attributes of the bourgeois public sphere” (Crossley & Roberts 2004: 11). Hence, this chapter looks closely at postmodern responses to Habermas which focus attention on the historical *limits* of publicness (Crossley & Roberts 2004: 15). These limits of publicness are exemplified exceptionally well in discussions about the supposed ‘threat’ that private interests pose to public rights. The notion of what is ‘public’ is always problematic because private interests are always involved.

ENCLOSURE OF THE COMMONS

The issue of ‘private and public’ emerged with the ‘enclosure of the commons.’²³ Speaking about ‘public space’ in the context of a theory of

²² Peters (1997: 76) stated that “Habermas’s publicity becomes Foucault’s panopticism.”

²³ Schiller (1989: 89) also wrote about the enclosure of the commons and how it relates to today: “In the early nineteenth century, British landlords took over the lands of the Commons—the acreage for use by the entire community—and those of small proprietors as well in a series of acts of enclosure. Enclosure is the appropriate description for what has been happening in the United States in the last twenty-five years...to the sites and channels of public expression and creativity. ...These are all sites of public involvement and can be viewed much like renewable natural resources. They are not exhausted or depleted by use.

media, Murdock (2001: 443) refers to “a guerrilla war against land enclosure that had stretched over several centuries.” As Murdock (2001: 444) argues, “Disputes over what constituted public space and how it should be used were a constant feature of life in the industrial cities.” There is always a power struggle and a struggle over ‘the commons’ which is central to an analysis of the role of the media in public life. Murdock (2001: 449-450) believed that the four basic cultural resources for citizenship were information, knowledge, representation and participation yet in the mass consumer system,

...people were encouraged to think of themselves not as members of moral and political communities with a responsibility to respect other people’s needs and identities but as actors in the marketplace whose necessities and desires could be met by a proliferating array of commodities.

In an earlier lecture series on the commercialization of public space, Murdock (1994) employs a political economy perspective to argue that advertising is an immensely powerful source of influence over the whole of political communication. He argues that advertisements are themselves a universal form of communication that completely saturate the cultural environment. The problem, he argues, is that as more space is occupied by advertising, less space is available for other voices, particularly *non-commercial* speech. He argues that if ‘commercial speech’ is the dominant voice, then the system is radically distorted. Not only are there more ads, Murdock (1994) argues, but the brand images and messages are increasingly incorporated into everyday life. Political economy draws attention to the problem of diversity in a system that is completely commercial, where commercial imperatives make the rules.

In the second part of his lecture series, “Consequences of Private Media for Democratic Society” Murdock (1994) argued that the concentration and

They provide daily replenishment for the body’s physical and emotional needs. If these vital resources are seized for private ends, human health and consciousness itself are held hostage.”

conglomeration of media companies is a problem, “further compounded by globalisation,” as the capacity of these multi-media conglomerates to control the cultural environment is crossing national borders, giving them worldwide cultural power. To Murdock (1994) the central issue is the power that these new global mega-corporations have. Also concerned about the power of global media conglomerates to control access to public space is Schiller (1989). He states that the central theme of his book *Culture Inc.: the corporate takeover of public expression* is, “the envelopment of informational and cultural space by the transnational corporate system” (Schiller 1989: 5). Democracy is in trouble, he contends, as increasingly more elements of economic and social activity are brought under corporate management (Schiller 1989: 3). An important element that has aided this progression of privatisation is that “corporate speech, advertising in particular, has been granted fundamental, First Amendment protection. The corporate voice, not surprisingly, is the loudest in the land” (Schiller 1989: 4). Corporations are now not only selling their goods across the globe but are also able to “express their views and perspectives on issues that affect people everywhere” (Schiller 1989: 52). As a consequence, “Ways of organising projects other than by private initiatives and reliance on market forces have been put beyond the boundaries of political consideration” (Schiller 1989: 5).

In writing about the postmodern city Short (1996: 33) argues that city governments are largely responsible for an enclosure of the commons through land-development with an entrepreneurial focus. Drawing on the work of Foucault he points out that space is a central aspect in the exercise of power in cities as “discourses are anchored in sites, and places embody and reflect wider social discourses” (Short 1996: 407). He argues that the power struggle revolves around the meaning of the city (Short 1996: 390). Kunstler (cited in Short 1996: 412) exemplifies this ‘death’ of public space through the image of a ‘scary’ landscape full of ‘scary people’ left with nothing but “private life in our private homes and private cars... wonder[ing] what happened to the spirit of community.”

THE 'MALLING' OF PUBLIC SPACE

Klein et al (2003) conceptualise this commercial takeover as 'No Space':

...when you lose the commons, the very idea of the public, when schools start to look like malls, when libraries start to look like Barnes & Nobel book stores...you lose the idea of there being *any* place that is outside the market...and this has drastically weakened our democracy because we have fewer and fewer places where we can relate to each other as non-consumers, as citizens.

As Klein argued, space is an essential component of a democracy, which is why the notion of 'public space' becomes so contentious in the use of outdoor advertising. Gudis (2004: 19) argued that intellectuals such as Walter Lippmann were troubled by this perceived shaking of the foundations of democracy and the undermining of public discourse outside of the market, stating,

The formation of billboard companies and their more formal claims to urban and rural space meant that outdoor advertising had begun to carve out a legitimate place in the rapidly changing commercial landscape of the industrial age...now permanent and semi permanent structures were devoted to the signs of commercial development. Like the buildings rising in growing metropolises, billboards contributed to the accretion of commercial centres and formalized the incursion of pictures and texts in the public sphere.

Gudis (2004:5) wrote extensively about "the cultural implications of the market on our built environment and, therefore, on our experiences of these most basic facts of daily life." On the 'Buyway', (her term for the commercialised roads of capitalist society), "the lines between private and public space blur along with what constitutes the public sphere and public discourse" (Gudis 2004: 7).

Likewise, Jhally (2000: 28) agreed "commercial interests intent on maximizing the consumption of the immense collection of commodities have colonized more and more of the spaces of our culture." He states that as public funds decrease, institutions thought to be outside the market are selling themselves to sponsors (Jhally 2000: 28-29). Jhally (2000: 29), working from a Marxist point of view, was appalled by the way our social domains have been permeated by the discourse of commercialism, now

constituting “the lens through which we come to understand the world that surrounds us.” Barber (2001) also worried about the way that the manifestation of private and public in space would impact democracy, and focused his concern on the mall. He argued that far from bringing a comforting sense of familiarity to a ‘global public’ the mall embodied “the privatisation and commercialization of space associated with the forces of...McWorld, turning our complex, multiuse public space into a one-dimensional venue for consumption” (Barber 2001: 203). The homogenising discourse of the mall extends even further into culture, however, demanding “the commercial colonization of every location, the malling of every public space. Decaying downtowns (like New York’s Times Square) are ‘saved’ by yielding to the safe mall aesthetic and its cookie-cutter vendors” (Barber 2001: 205).

Whilst agreeing that the ‘mall’ of society is indeed evident, as well as inducing through its privatisation and homogenisation the ‘domestication and purification of space’ at the cost of social exclusion and increased inequality, critical theorists such as Jackson (1998: 176) are sceptical about such arguments. They believe that “in lamenting the privatisation of public space in the modern city, some observers have tended to romanticise its history, celebrating the openness and accessibility of the streets. Such spaces were, of course, never entirely free and democratic.” Jackson (1998) draws attention to the central contradiction of our ‘public’ spaces—they are actually private—and encourages a more robust criticism of this contradiction:

My findings would suggest that notions of ‘consumer citizenship’ need to be carefully situated and socially differentiated (by class, race, gender and generation). Rather than assuming that commodification and privatisation are inherently undemocratic and reactionary social processes...I would argue us to trace out the specific contours of these processes in particular spaces and places. A more complex cultural politics might then emerge with which concerns about the ever-increasing penetration of the market might be more critically addressed (Jackson 1998: 188).

Chaplin and Holding (2002: 185) have created a critical analysis in urban geography that analyses the issue of the ‘mallings’ of space. They argue that McDonaldisation and Disneyfication “have come to affect and inform people’s expectations and use of urban spaces” (Chaplin & Holding 2002: 186). In proposing to show that the city has been reconfigured as “a space of consumption,” they situate themselves *beyond* traditional critiques of commodification, believing “people’s relationships to spaces of commodification and hence to capitalism itself have changed” (Chaplin & Holding 2002: 187). They claim:

To re-think the urban is therefore to pass beyond an oppositional Marxist schema and the persistence of polarised categories such as rural/urban, public/private, place/non-place, modern/traditional or real/virtual. These fixed formulations do little to extend our understanding of the built environment, and we need instead to address the particularities of each socio-cultural construction of meaning before we analyse the physical construction of a specific locale (Chaplin & Holding 2002: 188).

Ultimately they argue that the very definition of ‘post-urban’ (the phase they argue we have now entered) “blends past and present, real and virtual, public and private in ever-more complex scenarios. Rather than dismissing these new experiences as wilful acts of corporatism, it is first necessary to examine their status as spaces of consumption” (Chaplin & Holding 2002: 198). Goss (2005: 293) takes a similar approach to Chaplin and Holding by arguing for a close examination of “the connection between environmental design and the ‘consciousness industry’ since they are both ‘media of mass communication,’ employing rhetorical devices to effect hidden persuasions.” It is argued here that the postmodern design principle of nostalgia for an imagined, shared public life of the past, creates ‘pseudoplaces,’ “profoundly contradictory spaces which articulate a desire for ‘genuine’ urban life with an expectation of a public accessibility while providing opportunities for social control” (Goss 2005: 294). This leads to a post-urban environment of simulacra where spaces built for consumerism are designed to appear as though they are for something ‘more’ that never existed in the first place, i.e. public space (Goss 2005: 295).

THE VALUES OF COMMERCIAL SPACE

As Goss (2005: 299) argues, “the politics of exclusion involves the exclusion of politics.” This critique of society and space as being ‘malled’ has led scholars to question the *values* controlling the spaces we think of as being public. Marcuse & van Kampen (2000: 260) argue “Sometimes, ironically, the privatisation of public space comes about through the offering of semi-public facilities in legally private spaces, e.g. malls, shopping centres. The net result is the same: the amount and openness of space for ‘public’ activities is eroded.” Mitchell (cited in Paddison & Sharp 2003: 5) stated, “more and more of the public spaces of the city are being produced *for* us rather than *by* us.” He argues “the successive rounds of expropriation and commodification of public space emphasise its fragility, defining limits to its publicness” (Paddison & Sharp 2003: 5). They introduce the notion that what defines public is socially constructed and exclusionary, consisting of spaces inscribed with the values of the middle class (Paddison & Sharp 2003: 5). These middle class ideals about the city became normalised through modernist planning discourse, concealing their power through a discourse of the ‘public interest,’ which enables ‘public space’ to be used as a technology of power rather than a tenant of democracy (Paddison & Sharp 2003: 6). Schirato & Webb (2003: 166) state that far from being an ‘empty’ space in terms of power and control, every group in society attempts to use “the public sphere” for their own purposes. This struggle for meaning and control is not even, however, as “those without power are only occasionally invited in, and then only when it is deemed to be in the interests of its inhabitants” (Schirato & Webb 2003: 172).²⁴ As Noam Chomsky insisted, “advertisers pay for certain things. They’re not going to pay for a discussion that encourages people to participate democratically and undermine corporate power” (cited in Schirato & Webb 2003: 175).

²⁴ This can be seen in outdoor advertising by the way that space is given to interest groups only to serve the capitalists’ interests by solving the need for ‘public accountability’.

SPACE VERSUS PLACE

Space has always created a problem for the exercise of power (Rabinow 1984: 243). Foucault argued that power functions in society through ‘disciplinary architecture’ (Rabinow 1984: 252). The shift from production-oriented to consumer-oriented society led to city planning which aimed to make the city an attractive place for people to consume (Baker 1998: 2). Lefebvre argued that the spatial order controls the inherent contradictions of society for the benefit of those in power (Baker 1998: 2). This is clearly manifest in the way that the meaning of ‘public’ functions ideologically within the discourse of redevelopment:

By evoking the public good and concretising it in the form of art, redevelopment is able to mask and neutralize the interests of social groups that threaten the harmony that goes hand in hand with hegemonic definitions of ‘public.’ Thus, we need to come to terms with the fact that ‘public’ is not a real category, but is always contested and fragmented, despite redevelopment’s claim that the public is unified (Baker 1998: 4).

Baker (1998: 5) argues public art and gentrifying practices collaborate “to make places appear more public than they actually are, acting as a kind of public relations agent for redevelopment.” As this thesis shows, the same could be said of street furniture, produced within a discourse of ‘public amenity.’

Gottdiener (1985) traces ‘macro’ theoretical approaches from Marx onwards, leading to a debate on ‘space’ and its importance. This earlier work set the groundwork for Gottdiener’s later work on the ‘theming’ of space in capitalist society. Here he draws attention to the pitfalls of many theories, especially those in the Marxist tradition, which ignored the importance of ‘space’ to social, cultural and political realities and especially the functioning of power. This work provides an excellent overview of key theoretical approaches that makes us aware of the importance of looking at space. Drawing on Lefebvre, Gottdiener (1985: 123) argued that space is productive:

Space cannot be reduced merely to a location or to the social relations of property ownership—it represents a multiplicity of sociomaterial

concerns. Space is a physical location, a piece of real estate, and simultaneously an existential freedom and a mental expression. Space is both the geographical site of action and the social possibility for engaging in action. That is, on an individual level, for example, it not only represents the location where events take place (the container function) but also signifies the social permission to engage in these events (the social order function).

The central thesis of the ‘space is productive’ argument is that capitalism fills all available space with images for and about consumption so that there is nowhere outside the market, the economy, the profit imperative.

De Certeau’s (1984) distinction between space (*espace*) and place (*lieu*) is essential to understanding outdoor advertising in Christchurch in terms of power and discourse. He argues:

A place (*lieu*) is the order (of whatever kind) in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence. It thus excludes the possibility of two things being in the same location (*place*). ...Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. On this view, in relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken, that is, when it is caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, transformed into a term dependent upon many different conventions, situated as the act of a present (or of a time), and modified by the transformations caused by successive contexts. In contradistinction to place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a ‘proper.’ In short, *space is a practiced place* (De Certeau 1984: 117).

Therefore place is something confined to the rules of its geography and its physicality, whereas space is much more malleable, made through the processes that happen in a *place*, especially through discourse. My question about outdoor advertising in Christchurch asks what sort of ‘space’ is constructed when a ‘place’ is shaped by the trends of global consumer culture, particularly commercialised city planning—do we actually have public ‘places’ or merely private ‘spaces’?

Rantanen (2005: 54) also writes about this important distinction: “In contrast to place, space is a much more abstract term; but at the same time it is related to place. ...De Certeau observes that...space is a lived place; thus, through (inter)action and communication, places are transformed into spaces

and become *spaces of communication*.” To de Certeau (cited in Rantanen 2005: 54-55): “places are fixed and stable. Borders of places are set and can precisely be determined. Borders of spaces are flexible and are constructed in a symbolic, interpretative way.” Neither spaces nor places are free of power, “and struggles are fought over who is taking control over them” (Rantanen 2005: 55).

PERSPECTIVES FROM URBAN GEOGRAPHY

Urban geographers such as Valentine (2005: 263) often abandon the problematic term ‘public space’ preferring to refer instead to ‘the street.’ This shift away from the term ‘public’ is sensitive to the way, “What is ‘private’ for some may be ‘public’ for others, and what should be ‘public’ for all often remains ‘private’ for the few” (Short 1996: 322). As Barker (1999: 153) points out, “social inequality means that not only are citizens denied equal access to the public sphere, but also subordinate groups are denied participatory parity and the space to articulate their own languages, needs and demands.” Rabinow’s (2003) discussion of technologies of power is pertinent to such limited access spaces. It is the issues that urban geographers identify, such as the finance and planning of space, that can shed light on how power functions in ‘the street’. Rabinow argues that often it is individual capitalists with common interests who shape urban spaces in their interests (Rabinow 2003: 360). In this way outdoor advertising evolves out of the institutionalisation of commercial-controlled space, expanding capitalist power by building on what was already inscribed. Ultimately, however, ‘public space’ is less something physical than something discursive, and the analysis of outdoor advertising presented in this thesis illustrates a battle of discourses over what is public, what is local, what is global and what is ‘acceptable.’

2.4 Advertising and Culture, Discourse and Power

“Under monopoly all mass culture is identical, and the lines of its artificial framework begin to show through. The people at the top are no longer so

interested in concealing monopoly: as its violence becomes more open, so its power grows” (Horkheimer & Adorno 1973: 121).

As it has been argued in the previous sections, exploring the relationship between global advertising discourse and its impact on the local requires analyses of “geographies of consumption.” For the purposes of this thesis, that involves looking at the localisation and contextualisation of outdoor advertising and how this relates to the way power functions. Analyses of advertising and its social implications often situate themselves within ‘homogenisation’ arguments about global domination. I am working from a ‘bottom-up’ approach by showing how local advertising forms can shed light on global ideological discourses of consumerism. This requires moving beyond the aesthetic discourses and preoccupations that have characterised the ‘outdoor advertising’ debate thus far, and drawing on a combination of political economy and cultural studies approaches to explore how hegemony functions through ads.²⁵ There is more than a mere visual distraction at stake, so there is a need to expand on the frame through which outdoor advertising has traditionally been criticised. Other advertising forms, specifically static images in magazines and newspapers, have received critical attention in terms of their content, but few have looked closely at the static image in the outdoor advertising context within commercial culture.

A WORLD OF SIGNS & IMAGES

Perry (1994:8) argues that popular culture is a site for serious investigation because what people venerate, those things which give their life meaning, are signs, hence we are in an era he terms ‘the dominion of signs’. These signs are “rarely simple and never innocent” as they signal who we are to other people hence, “we are all routinely implicated in reading the messages they carry and in tacitly deciphering the social, moral and cultural values that they imply” (Perry 1994:8). Postman (1985: 10) argues that it is the

²⁵ This will be discussed in greater detail in the next section, “Methodology.”

media forms we encounter everyday that determine the forms these signs can take:

Each medium, like language itself, makes possible a unique mode of discourse by providing a new orientation for thought, for expression, for sensibility. Which, of course, is what McLuhan meant in saying the medium is the message. ... Whether we are experiencing the world through the lens of speech or the printed word or the television camera, our media-metaphors classify the world for us, sequence it, frame it, enlarge it, reduce it, colour it, argue a case for what the world is like.

McAllister (1996b: 38) traces “the more salient points made by social critics about advertising” to ask, “What effect does a discourse that is so economically and symbolically pervasive have upon us? What has been the impact of the advertising institution upon democracy?” He details the two main ways of approaching these questions—political economy and cultural studies:

Although both traditions are interested in the relationship of the ‘cultural industries’ to social power, their respective foci reflect the different training and perspectives of the two positions. Political economists emphasize studying the media as profit-driven economic entities, often showing how the forces of capitalism push media organizations—despite their self-trumpetings as purveyors of democracy—toward monopolistic control and economic safety in decision making. Symbolic critics focus on the manipulation of meaning and signs in media, sometimes highlighting the media’s symbolic perpetuation of the status quo (McAllister 1996b: 38-39).

The political economy approach argues that advertising induces a form of ‘external control’ on culture by seeking ‘desirable audiences,’ those with disposable income, and the willingness and opportunity to spend it, and that this skews media content as the desirable audiences have a louder and more refined voice in the media (McAllister 1996b: 46). Therefore, advertising’s economic presence has an ideological effect upon the view of the world that media present, “a view embedded in and influenced by social power and social relations” (McAllister 1996b: 47).

The cultural studies approach, on the other hand, sees this control as ‘internal’ as advertising focuses not on the product, but on the intangible benefits a product is imagined to bring with its consumption, and symbolic

critics ask what the ideological consequences of such a system are for the way we view society, social power and social relations. They employ the concept of ‘hegemony’—“a circumstance where the power differential of a social system is made to appear natural and inevitable”—to explain this (McAllister 1996b: 58-59). They argue, however, that although advertising often creates an image of capitalism that naturalizes it, the ‘hegemonic effect’ is not purposeful, but a consequence of the *techniques* used in ads (McAllister 1996b: 59). They explain how this works:

Advertising constantly implies that values like love, security, peace of mind, fun, peer acceptance and hipness can be acquired with the product. In other words, consumers can *buy* love, security and the other values. ...Cumulatively, advertising overwhelmingly endorses the consumption ethic. In the world of advertising, self-actualization is achieved not through political participation or intellect or world awareness, but through consumption. It is a one-solution discourse, with the one solution—spending—being presented in the mass media over and over (McAllister 1996b: 60).

One of the earliest and most well known critics working in the cultural studies approach was Williamson (1978: 11) who argued “even if you do not read a newspaper or watch television, the images posterred over our urban surroundings are inescapable.” Another example of a cultural studies approach is Bignell (2002), whose work in ‘semiotics’ focuses on the analysis of magazine and poster ads. Bignell (2002: 31) introduces the notion of ‘ideology’ as the way that ads encourage us to “engage in their structure of meaning” by “decoding their linguistic and visual signs.”²⁶ It is important to note that these signs rarely just ‘denote’ something, but have *connotations*, “meanings which come from our culture, some of which we can easily recognize consciously, and others which are unconsciously recognized and only become clear once we look for them” (Bignell 2002: 32). Ideology works in ads by calling on “systems of differences which

²⁶ The drawback of analysing ads in semiotic terms, however, is it “involves a number of ‘unnatural’ tasks. In order to study them closely, we need to separate ads from the real environment in which they exist, where they often pass unnoticed or without analysis” (Bignell 2002: 31).

already exist in our culture, and which encode social values” (Bignell 2002: 35). Ultimately, ads serve the interests of those in power, as “Ideology consists of the meanings made necessary by the economic conditions of the society in which we live: a real way of looking at the world around us, which seems to be necessary and common sense” (Bignell 2002: 37).

Goldman (1992: 16) also argues that ads perpetuate a dominant ideology through constant images of commodified social relations. Ads are so pervasive that we “tend to take for granted the deep social assumptions embedded in advertisements. We do not ordinarily recognize advertising as a sphere of ideology” (Goldman 1992: 1). He argues, however, that cries of manipulation and ‘subliminal seduction’ are not useful as they “divert attention from the far more mundane structural role advertising plays in reproducing social domination” (Goldman 1992: 1). He also prefers to utilise the notion of *hegemony* to explain how “advertising has become a form of internal cultural colonialism that mercilessly hunts out and appropriates those meaningful elements of our cultural lives that have value” (Goldman 1992: 8). His approach is similar to both Williamson (1978) and Bignell (2002) in that he believes decoding ads enables a thorough analysis of ideological hegemony as something we enter into and participate in (Goldman 1992: 9).

Meijer (1998: 237) also argues that advertising serves to promote consumption as a way of life. Meijer (1998: 240) outlines the argument that advertising promotes a culture of self-obsession:

This is partly because we not only have to choose a self but, as Foucault suggests, we have to constitute ourselves as a self who chooses, as a person who consumes, a consumer. Slater claims that one implication of this ‘ideology of choice’ is that we are deemed personally responsible for every aspect of ourselves... As a result, all aspects of our existence are monitored and scrutinized as objects of instrumental calculation in the creation of the self...

The consumerism process dissociates us from one another through the rhetoric of individualism, and, as Chomsky argues, it is through advertising that people are moulded into this mind frame (Achbar et al 2004).

Jean Baudrillard (1994) wrote extensively about the way that traditional barriers between the ‘mediated’ and the ‘real’ were collapsing,²⁷ arguing that in order to understand the society in which we live we must formulate new understandings based around the ‘mythology’ of late modernity. Baudrillard re-affirms the importance of advertising, arguing that the image rules over substance, appearance rules over use-value, and manipulation dominates over rhetoric and logic, and that all of this derives “from the central role that the advertising industry plays in American life” (Gottdiener 1997: 67). Baudrillard (1994: 81) draws on McLuhan’s notion of *the media is the message* to argue, “the media are producers not of socialization, but of exactly the opposite, of the implosion of the social in the masses.” By implosion he means that all models of expression have been absorbed into advertising, signalling the “triumph of superficial form” (Baudrillard 1994: 87). He declares,

When one sees Las Vegas rise whole from the desert in the radiance of advertising at dusk, and return to the desert when dawn breaks, one sees that advertising is not what brightens or decorates the walls, it is what effaces the walls, effaces the streets, the facades, and all the architecture, effaces any support and any depth, and that it is this liquidation, this reabsorption of everything into the surface (whatever signs circulate there) that plunges us into this stupefied, hyperreal euphoria that we would not exchange for anything else, and that is the empty and inescapable form of seduction (Baudrillard 1994: 91-92).

Gottdiener (1997: 4) also lamented the implosion of all space into the arena of commercial interests, but the focus of his argument concentrated on the ‘themeing’ of increasing numbers of physical spaces. By ‘themeing’ he means that everyday spaces are “dependent on and organized around overarching symbols, many of which are clearly tied to commercial enterprises” (Gottdiener 1997: 4). Gottdiener (1997: 142) argues that since the 1920s,

²⁷ “The medium and the real are now in a single nebula whose truth is indecipherable” (Baudrillard 1994: 83).

...both private space and public space, along with the powerful tension produced by the private-public dichotomy, were eradicated from contemporary social processes. In their place are the thoroughly commodified spaces of consumption that now exist everywhere... [T]hese new spaces are also themed environments. They are not 'public' because they are owned and controlled as commercial businesses.

The commercial control of spaces is accomplished, Gottdeiner argues (1997: 10) by the constraint and control of interpretation by powerful interests in society such as corporate business leaders or government officials. He draws on the notion of ideologies to explain how this interpretive control is exercised (Gottdeiner 1997: 11).

Robins (1996) claims that we have reached an interesting impasse in consumption and audience studies as conceptualisations such as Stuart Ewan's of 'corporate control' and 'the domination of consumer consciousness' first gave way to arguments of 'active audience' and 'consumer sovereignty' and now the focus seems to have returned to the former. He argues that our attitude to consumer culture has become much more accepting, and that we now need to work *within* it to examine its social and cultural consequences (Robins 1996: 107-108). The dilemma, however, is that "we find ourselves still caught up in the stalemate encounter that has affected media and cultural studies for so long: the false polarisation that opposes those concerned with the shaping force of structural and 'macro' processes against those interested in questions of agency and in 'micro' processes" (Robins 1996: 110). He argues for a middle ground between 'consumer freedom' and 'global control' but points out, "Although criticisms have frequently been made of this theoretical dualism, it has actually proven extremely difficult to overcome and still remains a powerful factor in the way in which culture and media are understood and researched" (Robins 1996: 124). I would like to focus now on the work of various theorists who attend to the actual physical consequences of an advertising-drenched society, in the hopes that it will shed light on a workable paradigm.

CONSEQUENCES OF AN ADVERTISING-DRENCHED SOCIETY

As Andersen & Strate (2000: 125) point out, Americans are inundated with up to 3000 marketing messages a day hence a commercialized environment has become 'naturalized' to such a degree that our current generation does not remember a time when every message was not "tied to the sell." Herman & McChesney (1997: 2-3) argue that the media, "provide information (or myths and disinformation) about the past and present that helps to create a common culture and system of values, traditions and ways of looking at the world." They argue that hegemony can clearly be seen at work in advertisers' demands for "a suitable program environment for selling goods...[which] does not challenge materialistic values and is not set in grim circumstances" (Herman & McChesney 1997: 140). This can very clearly be seen with place-based advertising as noted by McAllister (1996b: 78) who claims that, "Sales pitches for place-based media often stress the behavioural control within the advertiser's grasp. Much of the discourse surrounding this media reveals a 'master/slave' rhetoric describing producer and consumers." McAllister notes how advertising aims to control the external environment to make it 'commercial friendly' and that this has very worrisome consequences for space (McAllister 1996b: 80). Control of public space is increasingly dominated by commercial private interests within a justificatory rhetoric of 'saving the day' from lack of public funding (McAllister 1996b: 83).

This control of some spaces is more effective because of the advertising-free nature of them (McAllister 1996b: 84). It can be argued that in this sense advertising is "geographically imperialistic, looking for new territories it has not yet conquered" (McAllister 1996b: 85). Symbolic critics hint at the added control that place-based advertising offers:

Besides these two levels of control [internal and external], place-based offers a third level: the use and manipulation of the symbols of the place. The physical and social place becomes a symbol system—a text—that advertisers can purify, recuperate and link in a self-serving way to their product (McAllister 1996b: 85).

McAllister (1996b: 87) points out that the consequence of this third type of control may be the dulling of our critical thinking ability “by the fact that we receive persuasive messages so close to a place where we can act on the persuasion.” The most important consequence of the commercialisation of space, I would argue, is that those groups and spaces who are not perceived under the rules of consumerism as ‘desirable’ could find they have no “sense of place” (McAllister 1996b: 91).

In his study on the social implications of alcohol advertising, Strate (2000) argues that the promotion of particular products is more worrisome than others because of the way that values are tied to products. He asks, “Is there a point at which the risk to public safety and security outweighs commercial rights to freedom of speech?” (Strate 2000: 145). Alcohol advertisers draw on pre-existing cultural values without regard for the consequences of doing so and, “may, for example, claim that images of attractive young women in bikinis are used solely to attract the viewer’s attention, but the result is that a strong message about the role of women is sent to the audience” (Strate 2000: 147).

Another important area of analysis in studying the consequences of a commercial-saturated environment is the link between advertising and identity. Morley & Robins (2001a : 2) argue that there is a connection between increasing trends towards privatization and consumerism in culture and the way we shape our identities. Turner (2004: 90) argues “a seminal and still primary function of television in Aotearoa New Zealand is to give us our country (constructing the public as nation). ... This is to say that producing the local, ‘something’ called New Zealand, is the not-to-be-questioned agenda of local production.” As Barker (1999: 23) points out, “Language and discourse do not *represent* objects or reality but *constitute* them, bring them into being, so that social reality and social relations are discursively constituted in and through language rather than represented by language.” Drawing on Foucault, Barker (1999: 26) argues,

...discourse concerns both language and practice and refers to the production of knowledge through language which gives meaning to

both material objects and social practices. Though material objects and social practices ‘exist’ outside of language, they are given meaning and brought into view by language and are thus discursively formed.

Hence, “there can be no identity, experience or social practice which is not discursively constructed since we cannot escape language” (Barker 1999: 31).

FOUCAULDIAN DILEMMAS

Foucault offers a way of looking at how power functions through ads by maintaining that all discourses are characterised by hidden power and can only be understood by attempting a “structural analysis of discourses” (Foucault cited in Schmidt 1997: 151). Foucault identified three modes of ‘objectification’ the most relevant of which is ‘subjectification’ or “the way a human being turns him- or herself into a subject” (Rabinow 1984: 11). Foucault maintained that this subjectification took place through a “disciplinary technology” forging a “docile body that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved...through *standardization* of actions over time, and through *the control of space*” (Rabinow 1984: 17, my emphasis). Using this framework it becomes possible to ask, how are we made ‘subjects’ by outdoor advertising? If outdoor advertising represents the complete enclosure of all space into the discipline of consumer capitalism, we inevitably become docile consuming subjects. The ‘institution’ (of outdoor advertising) has been standardized and ‘common-sensalised’ and hence able to ‘subjectify’ in Foucault’s terms the public to the hegemonic ideology of a capitalist way of life. To make the power even more invisible in its operation, discourses of ‘public accountability’ and ‘service to the community’ mask the profit aims.

The notion of ‘normalization’ was central to Foucault’s concept of subjectification. Absolute power is able to function through “what Foucault calls a systematic ‘normalization’ of the law—that is, towards an increasing appeal to statistical measures and judgements about what is normal and what is not in a given population, rather than adherence to absolute

measures of right and wrong” (Rabinow 1984: 21). His rationale is that if power were merely repressive, people would not obey it. Rather,

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body (Foucault cited in Rabinow 1984: 60-61).

This type of normalization permeates advertising and regulation discourses disabling certain criticisms of it.

As this literature review has shown, the research available on outdoor advertising has not fully applied the ideas about the contribution of globalisation to the commercialisation of public space as signalled by theorists such as Klein (2000). Scholars writing about the medium have not made explicit their definition of ‘public space’ despite the fact that it is the very definition of ‘public’ at work within the chorus of discourses performed around outdoor advertising which has enabled private interests to trump public interests in control of ‘the commons.’ Advertising has been theorised as a technology of power within consumer capitalism, yet the *particular* problems outdoor advertising poses for public space have not been fully articulated. The following section outlines a methodology that attempts to remedy these oversights.

3 METHODOLOGY

In order to answer the question, ‘how does outdoor advertising commercialise the public spaces of Christchurch?’ I focussed on two areas of inquiry. My first task was to determine the forms outdoor advertising takes in Christchurch and secondly to investigate the various forms of discourse that exist about outdoor advertising. In order to determine the former I chose four sections of the city based on their socio-economic status. I then photographed 25 ‘sites of interest’ in each of these areas between July and September of 2005. By ‘sites of interest’ I refer to particularly problematic images relating to class, ethnicity and gender stereotypes, as well as sites that were representative of the types of ads one would often see in a particular area, including graffiti. I initially paid attention to bus backs and posters but focused my analysis exclusively on billboards and bus shelters as these are the most noticeable forms and therefore attract the most public attention. In order to determine the latter aim, I decided to interview people who could be defined as ‘stakeholders’ in outdoor advertising: business people, city councillors and those involved in advertising self-regulation. I also read all articles on outdoor advertising published in the marketing journal *Ad/media* since its inception (1988-present) as well as consulting relevant news articles. Finally to get a sense of the way outdoor advertising is ‘governed’ or ‘regulated’ I reviewed the deliberations on all complaints made to the Advertising Standards Complaints Board (ASCB) about outdoor advertising between 2000 and 2004, as well as a selection of materials available through the Christchurch City Council (CCC) including resource consent files for particularly conspicuous billboards, the City Plan, and other ‘governance’ related literature. In order to answer the question ‘how does outdoor advertising commercialise public space?’ I needed to be familiar with the nature of outdoor advertising in Christchurch as well as the way it is discussed ‘in public’, from which point I could combine this with the theory in my literature review to make a critical analysis.

THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The question ‘how does outdoor advertising commercialise public space?’ is about advertising discourse, culture and globalisation and to answer this I looked at what is happening at the local (Christchurch) in relation to the global—seeking to learn what locality can tell us about the power and force of global discourses. I am positioning myself as a theorist who sees an intricate connection between the local and the global, seeing globalisation as driven by corporations and as a cultural phenomenon (as opposed to social) because it is about how people make *sense* of what they do. In order to look at how outdoor advertising influences the ways we can think about public space, I took a ‘top-down’ approach, starting with the ‘big’ ideas (about transnational corporatization, public space theory and the advertising analysis) and worked my way to the ‘micro’, to an analysis of the specific sites where these macro forces show their impact. I am taking a cultural studies approach rather than a ‘social science’ approach although I am using elements from both paradigms. This thesis is indeed multidisciplinary; although it takes as its subject ‘media’ it combines the academic discourses from history, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology and geography.

SITES OF INTEREST

The sample of photographs represents four different sections of Christchurch, selected on the basis of their socio-economic differences to see what (if any) the variances of content are. Each section includes main roads and major social institutions such as the university, schools, churches and shopping centres:

- *Central CBD*: between Salisbury, Madras, Moorhouse and Montreal streets (looking especially for differences between the Hagley Park and Christchurch East sides)
- *High Socio-economic*: between Fendalton Road/Memorial Avenue, Straven Road, Riccarton Road and Clyde Road (looking especially for differences between Fendalton and Riccarton sides)

- *Middle class*: between Northcote, Main North, Harewood and Greers roads (looking especially for differences between Papanui and Greers road ends)
- *Low socio-economic*: between Linwood, Hargood street, Ferry Road and Aldwins Road.

My analysis of these ads used a semiotic approach, similar to Bignell (2002). This approach was chosen because it “assumes that the meanings of ads are designed to move out from the page or screen on which they are carried, to shape and lend significance to our experience of reality” thereby encouraging us to see ourselves “in terms of the mythic meanings which ads draw on and help to promote” (Bignell 2002: 30). I identified gender, class and ethnicity as particular areas of meaning where ads create problematic choices for the people they confront in the street, and therefore grouped samples of the images together to form an analysis based around the “mythic meanings” inherent in each theme.

INTERVIEWS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

I interviewed representatives from companies producing each of the major outdoor advertising forms: billboards, bus shelters and street posters. The largest billboard company in Christchurch is *isite* (formerly known as *Waho*), and I was able to interview the original owner/operator, Mike Gray, as well as the current site-development manager, Frank Costello. The major poster company in the South Island is *Phantom Billstickers* and I interviewed their manager, Jamey Holloway. Finally for bus shelter advertising I interviewed two representatives from *Adshel* who have a contract with the CCC which gives them exclusive rights to operate street-furniture in Christchurch. The interview with Kevin and Andrew from *Adshel* gave me the name of Neil Carrie, a heritage planner who has dealt with outdoor advertising, since its inception, through the CCC. I also had brief phone interviews with the owners/operators of *Adfence* and *ParkingSpace* to get their views on the medium. Both of these interviews provided me with useful information on the distinctions within this ‘mass’ referred to generically as ‘outdoor advertising’. Lastly, to understand the

forces involved in the regulation of outdoor advertising I interviewed current director of the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), Hillary Souter, who is well versed in the policies and functions of the ASCB.

In my interviews I took a semi-structured approach²⁸, whereby I created a list of open-ended and general questions to guide the conversation but allowed the interviewees to talk about issues they saw as important. The generality of my questions enabled me to keep control over the discussion thereby ensuring the usefulness of the information towards answering my research question, but the flexibility of this conversation-like approach brought out ideas and information I could not have anticipated.²⁹

According to Berger (2000: 114-117) there are several factors required of a good interviewer, some of which include: accuracy, being prepared, being non-judgemental, avoiding leading questions, staying focused, ensuring questions are clear, asking for amplifications and examples, and being a good listener. For this project I found that being clear, prepared and focused was essential to the quality of information I was able to gather, and asking follow up questions was also useful. Berger (2000: 120-121) also says to look for the classifications and categories used by the informant as a way to learn about the culture, and to do this by using coding. The coding I did involved carefully reviewing all transcripts and making a list of topics and themes that ran across them. This greatly helped my textual analysis of the material.

On the subject of ‘asking questions’ in Deacon et al (1998: 62), one of the central questions is “What are the ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions used by social actors when engaging in particular personal, social and professional

²⁸ Berger (2000: 111-112) distinguishes between four main types of research interviews: informal, unstructured, semistructured and structured. ‘Semistructured interviews’ are where, “the interviewer usually has a written list of questions to ask the informant but tries, to the extent possible, to maintain the casual quality found in unstructured interviews” (Berger 2000: 112). Deacon et al (1998: 66) also espouse this interviewing technique.

²⁹ See Appendix 1 for a list of my interview questions.

interactions?” New Zealand is a good place to begin this sort of enquiry because of the accessibility of the advertising elite. The ‘taken-for-granted’ assumptions underpinning my interviewees’ responses have been analysed and critiqued throughout the thesis. I have used a textual analysis approach in order to focus on themes in discourse.

PRIMARY SOURCES

In order to look more closely at the regulation of outdoor advertising, a component of my primary research was analysing complaints made about outdoor advertising to the ASCB and the discourse the complaints board and advertisers used in response to them. I chose complaints between 2000-2004 inclusive, looking at not only the content of the complaint and response, but qualitative elements such as the trend over the five year period in the number and nature of the complaints, as well as the nature of the decisions made. Read discursively they tell us much about the assumptions that underpin the regulatory decisions and response to public views on outdoor advertising. They can also inform us on the way the public is responding to this phenomenon. This enabled a closer look at the discourses and rhetoric that prevail between the ‘public’ and those who are responsible for maintaining advertising ‘standards’. I also consulted a sample of resource consent files for outdoor advertising held by the CCC, along with the City Plan and other policy-related documents, which reveal the public response to outdoor advertising, the legislative response to public concerns, policy discourse and the balancing of power and knowledge in the way the city is designed. My aim in looking at the CCC material was to explore how power functions in urban planning discourses.

Lastly, my primary research involved the reading of 16 news articles to get a sense of the public response to the medium, as well as all articles on outdoor advertising ever published in *Ad/media* (the New Zealand advertising industry’s key journal) to discern the way it was talked about in

the business community.³⁰ This approach is similar to that of Moor (2003: 39-40) who combined a reading of marketing texts with conversations with advertising professionals. These texts shed light on how a ‘common sense’ discourse is constructed and maintained, which is crucial to understanding how public space is able to be commercialised.

Although I hope that my approach to the analysis of the advertisements, the complaints and the articles on outdoor advertising will enable a close examination of the way public space is commercialised by the outdoor advertising medium, I agree with Myers (1999: 203) who states:

I’ve watched these particular ads endless times, analysing every frame and sound, trying to reconstruct the strategies underlying them; clearly the response of ordinary people in ordinary TV watching is different from mine. ...they care much less about the ads than I do; they treat the ads as not worth thinking about.

Myers’ approach was similar to mine in that he travelled around aiming to capture as many advertisements as possible, and in doing so began to think about *how* ads are placed in a contemporary setting. I hope that this thesis will inspire future scholars to pay attention to outdoor advertising not merely as a visual distraction, but as a highly politicised cultural institution with implications for ‘publicness’ (as discussed in Section 6). My findings supported my early contention that the discourse available is fractured and inadequate, thereby leaving outdoor advertising outside the regulatory ‘grasp’ of any of the agencies claiming to control it. The discourses and the results they eventually constitute, reveal that the various bodies claiming to ‘regulate’ outdoor advertising are open to interpretation, which has led to those with more power having their interpretations shape the city, despite their appeal to ‘the public interest.’

³⁰ See reference list for complete list of articles.

4 RE-THINKING HISTORY

When Tocker (1969: 24) made the bold assertion that the history of outdoor advertising is *the* history of mass communication, there was actually some truth in it as public posting of notices and public address, until the fifteenth century, was the primary means of disseminating information on a wide basis. There appears to be continuity amongst authors writing from a business point of view, that outdoor advertising originated in ancient societies such as Egypt (Bernstein 2004: 12). It is my contention that this constant reference back to ancient civilisations has served the medium well by lending it legitimacy through a carefully constructed modernist form of storytelling. The more modern history of outdoor advertising is dominated by the theme of ‘standardisation’ as outdoor advertisers saw homogenisation of form and content as a way to deflect criticisms of the medium.

The literature on the history of outdoor advertising has been dominated by a modernist approach. Authors have constructed outdoor advertisers as ‘progressive’ pioneers, fighting against Victorian and antiquated (or ‘prudish’) norms of visual culture. The approach of this thesis is *postmodern*, as it begins to think critically about the constructions adexecs have built to tell their history. Such a critique enables an understanding of the implications outdoor advertising has on public spaces at present. According to Featherstone (1993: 171) postmodernity is, in part, awareness that modernity’s assumption of Western history as ‘progress’ is flawed. The assumption of progress, I believe, has disabled an in-depth criticism of the medium’s impact on society. Postmodern approaches require a “greater awareness of the constructed nature of history” (Featherstone 1993: 171). The postmodern approach,

also points to a greater awareness of the plurality of history, the suppressed narratives within history that suggest that there is no unitary privileged history, only different *histories*. From this perspective, there clearly are global developments and processes that increasingly bind together the individual histories of particular nation states and blocs... (Featherstone 1993: 171).

This thesis therefore begins by finding adexecs' narratives and deconstructing them in the light of competing discourses (or 'suppressed narratives') which thus far have been limited within the literature. Instead of assuming a coherence of direction amongst outdoor advertising's progenitors, my approach is attentive to the *diversity* of interests and ideologies within the outdoor medium thereby exploring the way these struggles shape the meaning of public space. I argue that ultimately, outdoor advertising creates homogenous public spaces, the nature of which adheres to middle class values (as I discuss in the analysis section).

According to Berger (2000: 128-143) in the section on writing history and doing historical analysis, historians have to be selective in choosing the facts to illuminate, and biographical studies are useful as they can place a context around the media being examined. I cannot claim to have a comprehensive biography of the 'Adexecs' who appear in this section, but hearing their versions of history created a context within which to begin a postmodern approach. My 're-thinking' of the history of outdoor advertising has included information emerging from discussions with stakeholders and material held at the Christchurch City Council (CCC), so this particular 'history' is based on the subjectivities of the people who told it to me and also on my subjective selection and interpretation of the material.

4.1 The Entrepreneurial Adexec

A central actor in the development of poster and billboard advertising in Christchurch is Mike Gray. A discourse of opportunity predominates in Mike's autobiographical narrative. Billboards appealed to Mike (who began as an artist and comedian) because of their 'humour' and 'visual nature.' He started the business, which became *Waho* (and is now *isite*), with Jim Wilson from *Phantom Billstickers*³¹ using an enterprise grant from the government. He tells a 'rags to riches' story of a 'naïve young man' becoming a 'media mogul' by struggling against the oppressive and

³¹ Mike describes Jim as "instrumental in changing the face of the city in that respect."

backward ways of a small-town council determined to oppose the ‘big city’ ideology that billboards represented. In talking about how his persona changed and grew, Mike’s story resonates with those discussed in section 1 of the literature review; authors who glorify the entrepreneurial spirit of the adexec. The discourses he used to convey his ‘entrepreneurial journey’ were international trends, pressure, having everything riding on getting consent for a site and risking it all:

MIKE: Basically it went from first seeing the medium, starting to see it grow, seeing the opportunity, then someone else doing it, realizing I had the ability to see something and then as I travelled around the country realizing that other markets were a lot further behind Auckland. Then when I wrote my business plan found out who did all the printing, how it all worked, market, international trends, and that NZ was *way* behind, it was a growing medium, it’s the oldest form of advertising, dates back to the Egyptians, biblical times basically. And yeah, that we were way behind world trends so it could only get bigger.

My interview with Mike reveals that the modernist approach to making sense of outdoor advertising is indeed pervasive. Mike approached it and retold it as his forebears in the US did. It is in describing his struggle to overcome these impediments that a ‘pioneering adexec discourse’ emerges. This discourse relies on the strength of ‘common sense’ arguments as well as appeal to ‘the public interest’. His goal was to gain market dominance by being based in Christchurch because all the billboard companies were based in Auckland. The major impediments to his success were a lack of money and rules that did not allow for billboards:

MIKE: The advertising companies that you were selling to, they saw it as a new medium, as a sort of add-on and it went Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch in terms of how they would have seen the markets so they might do a few billboards in Auckland, but Christchurch seemed too far away and there was a lack of trust in the medium itself, so it was real pioneering stages so everything was pretty much against us. But that, ironically, became our strength, because later on the entry into the market was difficult because we got so far ahead of everyone else and the cost of trying to get a simple site through got so much higher...

I asked how he got an enterprise grant for billboards when they were not allowed in the city and his response further reinforced the idea of a pioneer,

pushing at established boundaries in the interests of ‘progress’. Mike found loopholes in the Resource Management Act as well as the earlier Town and Country Planning Act.

One way that the trumping of public interest by private ones throughout the history of outdoor advertising has been obscured is through the construction of this ‘pioneering Adexec’ rhetoric. Adexecs such as Mike Gray construct themselves as the ‘underdog’ fighting the system and because such enterprising spirit is praised within the social structure of western capitalism, there is little room to challenge this hard work ethic in terms of ‘public interest’; the public interest has already been appealed to, appropriated even, through the rhetoric of a man ‘beating the odds’. He also constructs his argument against the council as an ‘appealing to common sense’ where his right to advertise on public land makes ‘sense’ and to deny him is ‘senseless’. The strength of such ‘rational’ arguments further narrows the gap for one to challenge these private ‘rights’. His contention that outdoor advertising contributes to the city by bringing vitality, drawing attention to public events, creating jobs and economic sustainability, supporting the arts and providing public information contributes to the strength of this ‘common sense’ viewpoint, further constructing those opposed to the medium as ‘emotional’ and thereby invalidating their position.

4.2 Adexecs & Their Enemies: Discourses in Action

In order to elicit how Mike conceptualises the anti-billboard arguments I asked him to explain why *he* thought the CCC was declining his proposals for more billboard sites. His sentiments reflect those of his predecessors, who argued that those against ‘progress’ are old and conservative and can offer only ‘aesthetic-based’ arguments:

MIKE: Certain people in the council didn’t like them and that was the policy line that they expected the other planners to follow. ...If you took the emotion out of it they would argue that I didn’t meet the rules... they’re big, bigger than most signs, they might be unnecessary because they don’t relate to the site, they could cause clutter because

there's more signs as a result, they're dangerous, you could look at one and crash, they can have offensive material displayed on them. *They're the sort of typical arguments that any council or any group has about anything new. They're generally unfounded, they're illogical, they're just emotional responses to something they don't like...*" (my emphasis).

Another strategy to counter opposition was to support local arts. His tactic was to provide free advertising space for shows in exchange for tickets, which he would then give to property owners and contractors as a way to build 'good will'. In this way he gave away \$1 million worth of advertising space over a decade for such causes as; the Canterbury Football Union, road safety campaigns like Students Against Drink Driving as well as CCC events such as Christmas in the Park or the Summer Times Festival. It was especially effective and a bit cheeky to give the CCC free advertising space since they were the main opposition to billboards. The early practice in the US of securing protection of poster sites by giving the landlord or tenant "trinkets or tickets of admission to a circus" draws an interesting parallel to Mike Gray's approach to the billboard business (Tocker 1969: 29).

After a few years of winning his case, the amount of 'resistance' he faced with each new proposal grew. He had to convince traffic engineers, planners, urban designers, heritage planners, "any type of planner they could bring up would write a report and say why this sign shouldn't get approved." He puts down his amazing skill for winning to his combination of skills and experience—a keen debater at school as well as an accomplished performer—as well as the huge amount of time and money he had invested: "if I didn't get them approved that could sink my business so I *had* to win, always, every time." He had the most to lose so losing was not an option. Ultimately the outcome of the struggles between adexecs and those who design and uphold rules and regulations about the use of a city's spaces is dependent on interpretation and persuasion. It would seem that those with the money and the risk have more weight to their interpretations. In arguing that he *had* to break the rules because otherwise his business would fail, the ultimate triumph of commercial interests over public interests is obscured since it is not acknowledged that by breaking the rules

the public's interest was arguably compromised, since the rules, regulations and procedures are put in place to *protect* the public.

Finally the CCC adopted the strategy of 'just saying no', decisions which Mike sometimes appealed to the environment court. It is here where the adexec shows his disdain for the regulations hampering 'progress', and is able to blame them for his own fierce business strategies:

MIKE: I only pursued one case and the judge [of the environment court] ruled that the council treated our company differently from my competitors and we didn't get the cost because I only *partly* won... that's the problem with justice in this country, it's 50 cents each way, they don't actually make a decision.

After this Mike's growth strategy was to take sites from competitors who were not performing well: "I grew through stealing or poaching existing sites off my competitors because the council wouldn't let me grow."

He sees outdoor advertising's appearance in popular culture, such as on television commercials and in video games, as a sign that the medium is now commonplace and therefore 'accepted'. Although he sees the medium as being common place, he thinks for the most part it is taken in 'subconsciously'. He believes his business trained the Christchurch audience to accept the medium as a part of daily life:

MIKE: I mean driving to work, let's face it, pretty tedious if you don't want to be there, if you're tired, traffic problems, and so billboards or outdoor can be just something that amuses you along the way. And I think that's why people accept it. Like the *Tui* ones I think some people actually look *forward* to it because it makes you laugh, it brings you joy.³²

Such sentiments support adexecs' position over that of the regulators. The other progenitors of outdoor advertising in Christchurch used a similar rhetoric of 'public service' as well as 'social responsibility' to convey the integrity of their enterprise.

³² See figure 6-13 for an example of this satirical beer campaign.

4.3 Outdoor Advertising in Christchurch: A Portrait

Currently in Christchurch there are four main types of outdoor advertising: billboards, bus shelters, bus backs and street posters. Billboards generally run on a lease system where a property, irrespective of a change of ownership, earns a specific amount of revenue each month from allowing a billboard to be erected on the site. Mike claims that there are about 160 billboard sites in Christchurch now, whereas a decade ago there were only about 30. Bus shelters are owned and operated by *Adshel*, in agreement with the CCC. *Adshel* have been operating in New Zealand for seven years, since they bought *3M-Posters* who began operating in Christchurch about 20 years ago. There are now approximately 215-220 shelters. Bus backs are part of *Look*, New Zealand's largest 'outdoor' operator, with a head office in Auckland.³³ Street posters are confined to poster bollards and specific sites on walls and fences and are maintained almost exclusively by *Phantom*.

In my interview with Frank Costello from *isite* I learned that the company Mike Gray started was designed to gain market dominance and do billboards better than anyone else did. Frank (using the pioneering adexec rhetoric) said that Mike caused the change in legislation in Christchurch by "being an absolute pain" to the council. The outcome was allowable zones for billboard advertising:

FRANK: Billboards weren't allowed. So every time you wanted to do it you had to go through a whole planning consent, so it was very, very difficult but just by a process of wearing them down, and careful cajoling and positioning and strategizing, Mike positioned the council into a position where they put *him* in the position of power, which Mike was brilliant at doing. Mike's a cunning little weasel, he's pretty sharp. When you're working with anything with the council it's a matter of not annoying them, just keeping at them, keeping at them, and keeping at them, and generally they tend to make a mistake at some point, and once you get that mistake you can actually capitalize on it. That's the way I operate too...

³³ As I mentioned in "Methodology" I have chosen not to include an analysis of bus backs in this thesis as billboards and bus shelters are more prevalent.

Dear (2000: 119) has argued that urban planning is about power and “achieving urban outcomes that serve the purposes of powerful agents in society.” Inevitably planning is also about conflict “as agents attempt to manoeuvre to achieve their ends” (Dear 2000: 119).

In terms of feedback from the public my interviewees from the industry were unanimous in saying that the bulk of responses they get are positive, reflected by frequent requests for posters and billboard skins. This serves to construct outdoor advertising as a *service* for the public or something that is enjoyable, rather than a nuisance. In response to my question about ‘negative consequences’ Frank said having market dominance in Christchurch meant that there would never be the “saturation of billboards that there is in Auckland” which leads to “visual clutter” and “bad quality billboards” as operators race to be the first to fill a space. Frank also argued that it is not in their best interest to clash with the environment, especially plastering over major architectural features. Despite his statement that the CCC could be ‘worn down’ over time, he contradicted this by saying that the resource consent process ensures quality. In this way he and Mike were both able to legitimate their point of view whilst denying any responsibility for the effects of the medium on public space.

Phantom Billstickers began in 1982, and in my interview with the general manager a new and interesting set of discourses were projected around outdoor advertising that did not appear in previous literature. Jamey Holloway describes the company’s goal as taking a medium, “that’s been something that roadies did or that was done in the middle of the night, done on the sly and done without any real accountability or anyone keeping track of it or anything like that, and make it something...bring it into the daylight.” They have a ‘crew’ of thirty, twelve of whom are in Christchurch, which enables them to offer their clients advertising across the country.

There is an animosity between the ‘major’ outdoor advertising forms (billboards and bus shelters) and street posters. The major discourse that arose in the interview with *Phantom* was that of street poster as

egalitarian compared to billboards. Jamey argued that corporations will ‘tie up’ billboard space, whereas the nature of the poster medium means advertising is more accessible to groups that cannot afford the high prices of billboards. They were very aware of placing posters in ‘appropriate’ places, such as advertising events at the Court Theatre near the museum. In this way posters contribute to an already determined meaning of spaces.

A major point of difference between street postering and other outdoor advertisers, is that *Phantom* see themselves as more independent, as “an infrastructure for the arts”:

JAMEY: We don’t try to be moralist about it. I think a lot of street media has traditionally been a voice for people who don’t have another way of getting out. We’ll be postering for people that don’t have the ability to book a TV ad or they can’t afford an ad in the press or something like that, they’re just starting out in a rock band or something like that and so if they want to do something a bit edgy we’ll support them as much as we feel we can.

They believe their medium in particular contributes to the ‘liveliness’ of the city, by making visible the cultural opportunities available:

JAMEY: I feel really strongly that’s about having an infrastructure for the arts. ...they add a hell of a lot to a city. I think it’s the difference between a city that’s alive and a city that’s just dead, and it’s our role to help them get the word out about the shows without costing them the earth. I mean those people are ongoing clients and have been clients since the 80s, and it’s because what we do works and it’s almost an artificial subsidy for the arts in a way, just a part of the arts infrastructure.

On the other hand when I asked *Adshel* about their medium Kevin stated firstly the goal was to generate revenue, and to do so in a way that would provide benefit to the community. They conceive bus shelters as a way to achieve this dual aim:

KEVIN: We still need out-of-home advertising on the street, but we want to do it in a way which wasn’t visually polluting the city and in a way which actually provides benefit back to the community. And doing it through street furniture was the best way we could see of doing it; providing bus shelters, bollards, bins, actually providing a streetscape and beautifying the city while at the same time providing a way for us to generate a revenue source.

Adshel have a carefully designed and selected set of bus shelters which are used in Christchurch. The *Black Classic* range, which dominates Memorial Avenue, is described as “an old colonial style, which fits in with the colonial Christchurch,” whereas the yellow *Metro* style “is sort of a sturdy robust shelter that’s out in the suburbs, and it still fits in with the modern, the way Christchurch is heading...” In this way *Adshel*, like *Phantom*, borrows or ‘poaches’ meaning from space, thereby imbuing their commercial spaces with a certain legitimacy.

In response to my question about whether *Adshel* targeted particular market segments in Christchurch Kevin explained that they have four “Targeted Supernets” which are “about trying to target the consumer in the right frame of mind when they’re receptive to the product and receptive to the idea and in the right frame of mind to purchase...” With an FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) Supernet all the panels are selected within a 500m radius of a supermarket or of a shopping centre, or a retail precinct. The Homebound Supernet targets consumers on their way home with ads for products like television shows, and in the morning the Workbound Supernet advertises such things as radio stations, coffee and newspapers. In this sense they are “trying to get into consumers’ lifestyles and make the product relevant and when they’re receptive to the idea.”

There are very different philosophies behind the different outdoor media. Billboard operators aim to keep up with world trends by adding interest to a city as well as creating jobs and revenue. Street Furniture operators see their medium as a way to provide public amenities. And Street Posterers are different again, viewing their purpose as being ‘a subsidy for the arts’, and the ‘edge’ of the city. In total they commercialise public spaces, but individually they have their own unique goals and set of discourses for making sense of their achievements.

4.4 The Global Connection

The globalisation of commercialisation is discursively produced as positive through arguments about public service, generating revenue and creating a

‘homely’ homogeneity. There is a clear tendency to use ‘global’ discourses, to ‘think big’ about not only the medium’s beginnings but also its potential. Not only did Mike Gray’s inspiration for *Waho* come from international trends but he also relied on research from overseas to build trust in the medium for clients locally. He recalled using outdoor advertising whilst touring around Europe, seeing it as especially useful because of its visual nature, as opposed to other mediums which relied more heavily on the foreign languages he could not understand.

I drew attention in my interview with *Adshel* to the promise on their website of offering ‘local vision and global support’ in order to ascertain how they negotiate the ‘benefits’ of global trends with the intricacies of local customs and needs. Kevin and Andrew both agreed that homogenisation is comforting for consumers because it creates a sense of familiarity in big cities:

ANDREW: Yeah it’s that sense of homeliness isn’t it, you can be in a foreign city but you see this style of shelter or this style of poster and you think you’re at home. It takes the edge off, for someone wandering around who’s new to the area.

I also asked about the perceived benefits of being part of a larger media corporation. *Adshel* is a 50/50 joint venture between *APN* (the largest media network and out-of-home advertising media company in Australasia) and *Clear Channel* (who operate one of the largest out-of-home advertising businesses in the world). This combination is successful because it combines the local knowledge and expertise of *APN* in Australia and New Zealand with the international, global expertise of running a street furniture company through *Clear Channel*. They view society as very much global, with trends “trickling down to this part of the world”:

KEVIN: It’d be pretty hard to say that there’s local products these days. Pretty much a product you see in Christchurch you’ll see in London or the States, California you know, it’s just under a different name. But essentially the marketing program behind it and the tools they use to market it are the same.

This view of the world is very much underpinned by a middle-class bias. Andrew argues that it is largely members of the CCC and business community who, whilst travelling overseas, pick up on international trends and bring them to New Zealand. Andrew's assumption that "Everybody takes a holiday regardless of who you are or where you are" is ignorant of the class privilege necessary for an awareness of such international trends.

4.5 Social Responsibility?

I questioned all of my interviewees about the 'public information' campaigns I had noticed around Christchurch for groups such as the Salvation Army and the Human Rights Film Festival. As discussed above, Mike Gray found charitable work a good way to build confidence in the medium from both the public and the CCC. All of the adexecs had a strong 'social responsibility' discourse which seemed to serve as a 'moral compass' for the role their medium plays in the community. Kevin said *Adshel* has "a huge social philosophy" whereby each employee is given a day off and \$250 to donate to a charity of their choice, as well as donating space to support community charities:

KEVIN: It also goes back to trying to get the community to interact with the medium as well. If you have community-based messages on there, and community-based charities in there, people are actually receptive to that and then they're out there they're looking for that message again but then they're getting advertising messages so it makes the public interact with the medium and it's also good for the advertiser because the advertiser knows that there's content out there that isn't just purely advertising based. So it works both for the community and the advertiser. But we do it because we've got a social conscience, not just because of that.

Similarly, *Phantom's* rhetoric of posterage as an 'infrastructure for the arts' reveals that supporting the community is believed to be an integral part of outdoor advertising's business. Perhaps this is because of the medium's history as untrustworthy and unscrupulous. In the next section I explore further this rhetoric of 'social responsibility' as it evolves in the discourses of advertising regulators. It often appears that despite all this appeal to the 'public interest' and a 'social conscience,' when confronted by the public to

be accountable for the representations splattered throughout supposed democratic spaces, outdoor advertisers have a host of excuses, revealing that what they say is often very different from what they do. Their modernist forms of storytelling disguise the way their interests shape spaces with values that promote commercial options for the self.

5 REGULATION OF OUTDOOR ADVERTISING

In order to understand and critique the commercialisation of public space there is a need to deconstruct adexecs' claims to be operating in 'the public interest'. Nowhere is this discourse more evident than in advertising regulation. There are two predominant ways in which outdoor advertising in Christchurch is 'regulated' or monitored. Firstly, the Christchurch City Council (CCC) attempts to govern public space through the creation and implementation of various policies and plans regarding the built environment. The second is industry self-regulation, consisting of a complaints process organised and administered through the New Zealand Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), as well as a set of rules and guidelines for business practice set out by the Outdoor Advertising Association of New Zealand (OAANZ). My argument is that each of these 'regulators' use rhetoric appealing to 'the public good' and 'social responsibility' as justification for their existence. I take issue with this mandate by looking critically at the practices of these organisations, arguing that regulation constructs itself as meaningful and 'for the common good' while in actuality its presence is a smokescreen for the continual 'triumph' of private interests over public ones—as they relate to the use of public space—by continually reinforcing and supporting commercial discourses and values. The undisclosed yet overarching principal that defines these regulatory regimes is 'values', particularly *whose* values have more power and legitimacy in public discourse. Regulation was seen as a 'compromise' between business interests and those aiming to reform outdoor advertising. It is my contention that this 'solution' has disabled critical debate on the commercialisation of public space by consistently using rhetoric to make it appear that there is nothing to debate, other than the *content* of advertisements, and some aesthetic considerations. These various forms of governance purport to work in the public interest. This chapter begins with a critical analysis of the discourses underlying this 'governance'—those that

make up the City Plan—which reveal that particular values take precedence in space.

5.1 The Governance of Public Space

THE ‘PUBLIC INTEREST’

In early discussion of outdoor advertising regulation, Houck (1969: 9) assumed public rights would trump private interests. According to Litka (1969: 89), “regulation of outdoor advertising raises the problem of accommodating the interest of the community with the landowner’s traditional interest in a rather unrestricted use of his land.” Traditionally, it has been assumed that individual property owners should be free to use their property however they choose as long as this use is not a ‘nuisance’ (Litka 1969: 92). Despite this, court cases often ruled that the predominant interests of the community outweighed business interests (Litka 1969: 95). Bearing this in mind, the regulation of outdoor advertising in Christchurch brings about a complex dichotomy of rhetoric when the question is asked, ‘whose interests are *best* served through the proliferation of the medium?’ Private land owners should have freedom to use their land, but sometimes this freedom *to* constricts the public’s ability to be free *from* commercial messages.

Dear (2000: 119) argues city planners use sentiments of public interest and altruism to infuse the portrayal of their profession as the ‘rational’ use of public land. This tactic is powerful as it relies on persuasion, and those with greater financial and cultural capital have greater powers of persuasion because of their ability to discursively construct their interests as in line with those of the public. Generally ‘the public’ lacks the resources and infrastructure to challenge this ‘public interest’ rhetoric as it would appear that they are nonsensically challenging something that is in their interest. As Bogart (1995: 90) points out, it was predominantly lawyers and prominent businessmen who drafted legislation and lobbied politicians to standardise and control outdoor advertising.

THE CITY PLAN

In Turner's (1952: 249) discussion of the Town and Country Planning Bill 1947 (of England and Wales) he noted that such regulation discursively constructed the key issues around the control of outdoor advertising as amenity and public safety. My analysis of the Christchurch City Plan revealed a focus on those same two issues. In "A Vision for Christchurch" (Volume 2: Section 1 of the City Plan), particular words are used to describe a supposed 'ideal' place (attractive, creative, consultative, fair, productive, accessible, green, healthy, heritage, multicultural, safe, sustainable and efficient) which the rational implementation of policies will work to create. It is my contention that this focus engenders governance that is partial, fractured and inadequate thereby allowing private interests to shape public space. Outdoor advertising inevitably falls outside the regulatory and surveillance discourses of the council although it is assumed to be tightly controlled. The 'City Plan' has evolved as a major weapon against 'illegitimate' use of space, thereby controlling the ideological boundaries of acceptability. Private commercial values are then etched on space through policy and urban planning leading to the policing or "policy-ing" of space. Amenity is described in detail in Section 4: Objective 4.2 of the City Plan:

Amenity values are defined in the Act as meaning, 'those natural and physical qualities and characteristics of an area that contribute to people's appreciation of its *pleasantness, aesthetic coherence* and *cultural and recreational attributes*' (emphasis added).

The objective and policies that relate to outdoor advertising, however, focus only on aspects of pleasantness and aesthetic coherence, where terms such as 'visual harmony' are often used. Under the umbrella of "Amenity" is placed "Public Space" (Policy 4.2.4), the purpose of which is "to ensure the development and protection of public open spaces." These spaces are defined as "areas that the Council in the main has responsibility for" (this includes streets) and goes on to explain what contributes "to the pleasantness of public space". In this policy, public space is constructed mainly on visual terms, revealing that the way it *looks* is given greater attention than how it functions. It is also stated that such pleasantness and

coherence will “attract people and business” to public space, lending support to the argument that a focus on aesthetics discourages uses of public space that would conflict with the allure of commercial development.

Of greatest interest to my research was Objective 4.4 “Outdoor advertising,” which in its very narrow statement of purpose³⁴ reveals the values of urban governance and how those values determine the way outdoor advertising is discussed in public discourse. It assumes that outdoor advertising can exist *without* changing the character and amenity of the receiving environment. But by “character” the policy refers only to areas deemed significant enough to not warrant an intrusion:

Some environments are particularly sensitive to outdoor advertisements because they may be relatively free of intrusion from structures and/or possess significant natural and heritage values, are anticipated to remain dominated by a residential character or a very high standard of landscaping is sought, among other reasons. In other environments, such as inner city business areas, outdoor advertisements are an important part of the activities therein and the character of the environment. Where there is intensive, large-scale development, outdoor advertisements may contribute positively to the character and vitality of the environment (Policy 4.4.1, “Amenity values”).

There is also a focus on safety, particularly traffic safety, although my interviewees claim there is no evidence to suggest a link between outdoor advertising and traffic accidents.

In Policy 4.4.3 “Natural and built heritage” the emphasis is on ensuring outdoor advertising does not detract from “the integrity of important public open spaces,” explained thus:

Examples of important public open spaces include Cathedral Square, City Mall, and the Avon River corridor... Outdoor advertisements have the potential to adversely affect heritage values and detract from the coherence of these urban spaces through the potential introduction of *unsympathetic visual elements*...(emphasis added).

³⁴ “The provision for outdoor advertisements...that does not detract from amenity values, does not have a detrimental impact upon natural and built heritage values, nor cause potential danger to public safety.”

Further the policy states, “the display of outdoor advertisements can potentially have a major impact on the open, un-built and comparable natural and pristine character of these areas.” The triangle of regulation designed to implement this outdoor advertising objective consists of: the identification of zones across the city, city rules specifically for and related to the display of outdoor advertisements and finally the resource consent process. The City Plan also acknowledges relevant bylaws and the powers prescribed in the Resource Management Act.

Finally in “Display of outdoor advertisements” (Volume 3: Part 10: Section 3.0) there is a guide for establishing a site. First the zone of the potential site must be established, then the developer must check they meet the rules, development standards, critical standards and bylaws. If, however, they do not meet the rules and standards, they simply apply for a resource consent, and as Mike Grey’s experience has shown, with a bit of ‘wearing down’ the business wins, proving that the City Plan is merely a theoretical document written in a very narrow range of values with little ‘regulatory’ power over the development of ‘public space’. Perhaps the financial and time constraints created through the bureaucratic system would dissuade outdoor advertisers from ‘visually cluttering’ or otherwise damaging public space, but since businesses maintain it is in their best interests to standardise their operation, the Council seems impotent. Further evidence of the CCC’s ineffectiveness is its complete dependence on the ASA for the ‘regulation’ of advertising content (the futility of the ASA is even greater than that of the CCC as will be discussed in the next section). In “Advertising Standards Authority” (Section 3.2.2) it states,

Attention is drawn to the Advertising Standards Authority Code of Practice. The Code of Practice includes a code of ethics which specifies criteria for offensiveness and decency of advertising. The Advertising Standards Authority adjudicates in cases where there are alleged breaches of the Code of Practice. It is expected that complaints regarding offensive content of advertising will in the first instance be referred to this body.

The CCC’s ‘governance’ of outdoor advertising is further represented by several documents created by particular committees, which outline

acceptable limits to outdoor advertising based on the City Plan.³⁵ The restrictions laid out in these documents mainly revolve around the allowable size, placement and content of outdoor advertising. The general theme of the documents is that outdoor advertising is a desirable component of the city scene that can be informative and add interest to the cityscape. The CCC believes ‘clutter,’ excessive illumination and signs that are ‘out of context’ or character or are incongruous with the environment can be detrimental to the visual nature of the city. The concerns are environmental rather than concerning the cultural politics of commercialisation:

Signage in residential areas should be kept to a minimum so as not to detract from the domestic quality and visual amenity of these neighbourhoods. The ‘Garden City’ image of the city also relies on residential areas free of commercial activities where views of trees and other living landscape elements dominate the view from public streets (Christchurch City Council 2004b: 6).

I asked my interviewees from the industry about their experiences of regulation. In my interview with Frank Costello of *isite*, he mentioned that the public responded very well to outdoor advertising, so I asked him considering that, why did he think so much policy existed around outdoor advertising, and what their rationale could be for it in light of the public’s supposed acceptance. He responded,

I’m really anti-council because I have to deal with them all the time. People that work in the civil service tend to be ‘no’ people, people that stop it, a lot of them, well there’s good and bad in the council unfortunately the bad-influence ones are the ones that get to the top. They tend to get there and they don’t like change. They tend to be fairly conservative type people.

It is interesting that such an antagonism exists between business operators and the ‘regulators’ when inevitably, as discussed above, the rhetoric is very open to interpretation and as Neil Carrie said, quite allowable. I also found that my interviewees were able to shrug off responsibility for the presence

³⁵ Refer to the documents cited in the reference list: ‘A Guide to Outdoor Advertising and Signage’ (Feb 2004) and ‘Signs and Outdoor Advertising: A guide to The Proposed City Plan and Christchurch City Public Places and Signs Bylaw 2003’

of their ads in space by simply alluding to the policies and procedures they had to adhere to through the various regulatory bodies. They draw on the surveillance of these bodies to argue that their mere existence is enough to keep them in line.

In their consent applications, outdoor advertisers are requested to anticipate how their proposed billboard will impact the city. As defined by the City Plan, this mainly focuses on aesthetic considerations, traffic safety and ‘amenity’ value. Often in defence of their proposals businessmen appealed to the CCC on the benefit this outdoor advertising structure would bring to the community, especially bringing income that would pay for the repair of heritage buildings. The discourse in the resource consent applications mirrored Mike Grey’s discourse in our interview about the benefits of outdoor advertising for the city claiming it adds interest and vitality, as well as bringing income and employment. These applications also highlight the ‘interpretative’ nature of the Resource Management Act, which invested parties are able to allude to in terms of the Act’s ‘philosophy’ and ‘spirit’ much the way advertisers are able to argue for their particular interpretation of the ASA codes. In the summary of his application to erect a billboard on the *Science Alive* building on Moorhouse Avenue, Mike Grey stated,

Phantom Outdoor Advertising Limited has been operating since 1994, has shown positive attitudes towards *community responsibility*, and previously assisted in promoting civic events/facilities and the City as a whole. We have studied the outdoor advertising industries in Auckland, Wellington, America and Europe at length. We know that we have the skills required to build, maintain and successfully market billboards of outstanding quality in Canterbury. We are displaying higher quality advertisements around Christchurch and *benefiting the social, economic and cultural well being, and health and safety, of our city in doing so*” (section 5.6, pp. 14-15, my emphasis).

When such seemingly sensible appeals to ‘the common good’ are made, how is the Council to argue? Outdoor advertisers declare they are socially responsible, but if this responsibility is ever challenged they are able to fall back onto the CCC and the ASA who supposedly have the final say. But as I

have shown, those with the greatest power of interpretation of the regulatory discourse ultimately decide how space will be developed.

COMMERCIALISED STREET FURNITURE

An area of particular concern regarding the commercialisation of public space about which the public has little or no say is the reliance of the CCC on private companies for the provision of bus shelters. *Adshel*, in the marketing literature available on its website (*About Adshel* 2005) declares

Since its formation, more local councils and other authorities have put their trust in *Adshel*... *Adshel*'s prime objective is to assist councils, municipalities, transit authorities and retail developers to maximise the potential of their assets through the sale of advertising on high quality street furniture and public amenity structures.

They call these “advertising funded street furniture programs”, the word ‘programs’ implying ‘public interests’ rather than profit. A global trend of joining local politics and business under the rhetoric of ‘public interest’ is localised through the CCC’s relationship with *Adshel*. In a chapter from his book *Spaces of Capital* titled, ‘From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism: The Transformation in Urban Governance in Late Capitalism’, Harvey (2001: 346) draws attention to a trend, since the mid-1980s, for urban governments to be, “much more innovative and entrepreneurial, willing to explore all kinds of avenues through which to alleviate their distressed condition and thereby secure a better future for their populations.” What Harvey’s work draws attention to is the global trend towards cooperation between the private sector and policymakers in providing urban infrastructure, and the role this has played in commercialising public space.

Harvey argues that the combination of deindustrialization, unemployment, fiscal austerity, neoconservatism and a move towards privatisation have meant that many urban governments, despite their differing political persuasions, have chosen similar solutions where,

...investment increasingly takes the form of a negotiation between international finance capital and local powers doing the best they can to maximize the attractiveness of the local site as a lure for capitalist development (Harvey 2001: 348).

These factors shape a global trend towards privatisation at the local level as responsibility is shifted to the local. Harvey argues that in a ‘classbound’ society such as capitalism, ‘public-private partnership’ remains the hegemonic way to organise space because of the complex interaction of various social actors with their own agendas (Harvey 2001: 349).

Goodwin and Painter (2005: 179) argue that the postmodern city blends business and politics under the rhetoric of ‘progress.’ Urban geographers ask questions about the implications for the public of this trend towards the privatisation of local governance. Of particular interest is the way discourses of ‘progress’ are used to construct privatisation as the best solution for the overall public good. In Christchurch this type of urban growth strategy is embodied by the CCC’s relationship with the street furniture company *Adshel*. When *Adshel* purchased the contract to construct bus shelters with advertising from *3M New Zealand Limited* in 1998 it was given the right to construct and maintain shelters throughout the city, bringing outdoor advertising to the suburbs despite the City Plan’s claim that residential areas are more sensitive to such visual intrusion.

In 1994, the CCC “entered into an agreement with *3M New Zealand Limited* for that company to supply, install, clean and maintain bus shelters on footpaths” and in 1998 it “validly assigned all of its rights, interests, benefits and obligations under the Contract to *Adshel*” (p.2, deed of variation of contract). In information forwarded to me by Ian Thompson (a solicitor) I learned that the original contract period between *3M New Zealand Limited* and the CCC was 15 years with a possibility of renewal for another 15 years (1994: 189). *Adshel* committed to providing a total of 230 shelters by 2003 and therefore requested a renewal on the grounds that in order to meet that target, it would need extra time to recoup costs. Therefore the contract is now binding until 2023.

Another tactic *Adshel* used under the same pretence of “business costs,” was asking to amend the policy regarding the advertisement of liquor on the shelters. They stated,

Adshel would like to amend the current restriction on alcohol advertising from “*shall not display any advertisement depicting drinking alcoholic beverage or for an alcoholic beverage product.*” to [sic] “shall not display advertising targeted at, promoting and/or encouraging drinking amongst teenagers, in particular, but not limited to, the advertising of any product containing alcohol on any street furniture within 200 metres of any primary, intermediate or secondary school”. This would allow for the broad brand type of advertising and the opportunity to increase revenue for the Council.

The CCC ruled that this be allowed “subject to the company providing public service advertisements especially in relation to the promotion of safe drinking and driving” (page 189). I have indeed seen public service ads, but not of this type. So it can be seen that despite its call to ‘socially responsible’ practice and investment in ‘the common good’ the need to make the business profitable will ultimately trump any public reasoning behind urban governance of space. The claim to not advertise near schools is arbitrary since research shows this sort of self-regulation may not work (Hackbarth et al 2001: 564). In the original contract between the CCC and *3M New Zealand Limited* it states, “In selecting the site the Council shall take into consideration the business requirements of 3M NZ and the needs of the public” (page 3), but there is no clarification on how these interests are *weighted*, and judging by the evidence above, private interests usually come first out of necessity for a system that relies on private financial support to provide street furniture.

It is interesting that the core business and political strategy espoused by *Clear Channel* (*Adshel’s* parent company), as emulated in *Adshel’s* relationship to the CCC, exemplifies Harvey’s argument about the move “from managerialism to entrepreneurialism.” As Richardson and Figueroa (2004: 86) argue, “in the last four years the company has created a formidable political presence, and in late 2002, it established a permanent lobbying operation that involves enviable political connections throughout government all the way down to the municipal level.” Despite their political connectedness, *Clear Channel* has come under fire by groups concerned with localism and diversity (Richardson & Figueroa 2004: 87). By branding themselves *Adshel* in the Southern hemisphere the company is able to enjoy

the power of global networks under the freedom from certain responsibilities afforded by local disguises.

In its “Policy for Bus Shelter Advertising” the CCC states,

All request for bus shelters with advertising which are not located in Business zones shall be approved by an officer panel, consisting of the City Streets Manager and the Environmental Policy and Planning Manager or their nominees (Christchurch City Council 2004a: 27).

The “assessment matters” which guide the panel include the quality and design of the shelter, how it will look in, and its impact on, the proposed location, the need, the safety for public use and most interestingly, “the effect of advertising on the overall amenity and coherence of the area (including the cumulative effect)... Preference will be given to locations...where they will not be an incongruous element in the street scene” (Christchurch City Council 2004a: 27). The policy is monitored by the Environment Committee and requires that “unacceptable advertising” be removed within 24 hours, which is problematic because this is meant to be dealt with through the ASA. Also, the policy explicitly states there is a “high degree of public support for advertising bus shelters” (2004a: 28) despite there being a conspicuous lack of evidence.

Under the “campaign planning” section of its website *Adshel* claims to provide “a range of campaigns to meet your advertising objectives. *Broadcast SuperNet* offers mass coverage in prime locations throughout New Zealand. Targeted SuperNets including *FMCG* [“influencing consumers’ grocery buying decisions close to point of purchase”], *Workbound* [“targeting consumers’ morning frame of mind”] and *Homebound* [“taking advantage of opportunities later in the day”] allow advertisers to focus on distinct consumer environments by selecting sites in the right locations to create maximum impact.” It was my observation that these SuperNets varied depending on the socio-economic characteristics of an area, although *Adshel* denies that this is the case.

ZONING & THE CREATION OF DISPOSABLE SPACES

The “Critical Standards” section of the City Plan (Volume 3: Part 10: Section 3.5) deals with ‘zones’ as they relate to outdoor advertising. No non-site related advertising is allowed in zones other than: Businesses 3, 3B, 4, 4P, 4T, 5, Special Purpose (Airport) Zone and Special Purpose (Wigram) Zone – Areas B and B1. In “Reasons for rules” (3.7) it states,

...the rules for size of outdoor advertisements *recognise living zones as particularly sensitive*, with small threshold sizes for consent which reflect the *garden city character* and expected residential amenities.

...

Other sensitive environments such as the rural, open space, conservation and cultural zones also have strong limitations on sign size. Much more generous sizes are permitted in business and special purpose zones and in the central city, recognising that *outdoor advertising is a significant and essential part of the built environment in these zones* (emphasis added).

Although Bogart (1995: 105) argued that the war against billboards was bolstered by the passing of zoning ordinances in the early 1900s, it could be argued that zoning in fact bolstered private interests over those of the public. Zoning is a discriminatory practice as it demarcates public space, and therefore certain public spaces are marked ‘undesirable’ or even dispensable. Regulation leads to the demarcation of spaces as ‘us’ and ‘them’. From its inception in 1910, zoning was a discriminatory practice, promoted by the ‘upper classes’ as a way of keeping the ‘lower classes’ out of their area (Bosselman 1969: 99). The result was that cities divided themselves into “the better parts of town” and “garbage-can districts” in which everything was permitted (Bosselman 1969: 100). This demarcation of space is evident throughout Christchurch as allowable zones for billboards represent parts of town deemed ‘business’ zones despite the fact that many of these are also residential. As Neil Carrie pointed out, many complaints the CCC receives about outdoor advertising revolve around zone boundaries where a billboard might be in the correct zone, but it is still *visible* from a residential or otherwise ‘non-allowable’ zone. Despite this, residential areas near industrial zones are ‘out of luck’ whereas the higher

socio-economic areas, which are further away from allowable zones, are not areas outdoor operators would engage.

Mr. Carrie believed that the language of the plan as it relates to outdoor advertising is too permissive, and hence we have too much of it. He also talked about the Port Hills as an iconic feature of the sky line and suggested billboards took away from the character of the city, both visually and in terms of heritage and architectural significance. However, he felt there are places where non-site related outdoor advertising is appropriate, reflecting the dominant discourse that sees outdoor advertising as a “significant and essential” part of the city.

Schultz (1984) illuminates the politics of urban reform and how those politics are discursively produced through class, ethnicity, gender and morality ideals on the background of a rapidly industrialising cultural and social order. Middle-class reformers, according to Schultz (1984: 38), only began to protest outdoor advertising when it became aimed at immigrants. Particular groups in society did not want outdoor advertising that appealed to ‘the masses’. Mass appeal was seen as bringing together different classes, the upper of which wanted to remain elite and separate. Like the use of ‘public interest’ rhetoric today, the early reformers used the notion of ‘educating the public.’ By placing themselves in the supposed knowledgeable and benevolent position of educator, they were able to enhance their standing in the social order, reasserting their political power and cultural values (Schultz 1984: 37). However this conflicted with the desire of manufacturers to appeal to the widest possible audience, afforded by billboards because they had none of the ‘audience restrictions’ of other media forms, particularly literacy, geography and social class (Schultz 1984: 38). Most importantly, reformers equated ‘public interest’ with those of their own social position (Schultz 1984: 39).

Zoning generally meant the proliferation of outdoor advertising in areas frequented by industrial workers and immigrants (Schultz 1984: 42). Zoning was established as ‘the major weapon against outdoor advertising’ (Schultz

1984: 42). It meant the cementing of the class distinctions manifest in power over public space. As Schultz (1984: 42) argues,

In theory zoning provided for community autonomy, in practice it discriminated against neighbourhoods lacking the political knowledge and legal skills necessary to change the law. Reformers could now protect their cultural expressions as well as their property values.

This is clear evidence that ‘class’ is deeply embedded in outdoor advertising regulation. Interestingly, Neil Carrie pointed out that it is difficult to establish regulation that deals with social or cultural effects because it is “not an area that the community gets upset about, unlike heritage.” Perhaps it is not so much a lack of interest in such effects, but rather a lack of discourse available with which to make these sorts of challenges.

It is only in the *latter* part of the twentieth century that the public began challenging advertising as an institution. Until then the struggle was mainly around the *nature* of the medium, not the medium itself. Reformers never objected to advertising itself but to the aesthetics of it (Schultz 1984: 40). My argument is that in the history of the outdoor advertising debate the overall motives of the commercialisation of public space were not questioned and this neglect has had interesting consequences for today. Outdoor advertising may be standardised in terms of its aesthetics but the class/race/gender divisions remain because they have been neglected in regulatory discourse.

5.2 Self-regulation: A Critique of OAANZ & the ASA

As the previous section showed, the CCC is impotent in its attempts to protect ‘the public interest’ from the commercialisation of public space. The following section looks at regimes of self-regulation to show how discourses of social responsibility are often used as a shield from critique, rather than as a true measure of public protection. Whilst advertisers may say they will produce advertising that is ‘socially responsible’ their desire for profit will ultimately outweigh the public’s right to be free from stereotypical representations. As will be shown, the self-regulatory codes used in a complaints-based system have an in-built prejudice for advertisers’

interpretations of humour and artistic expression, which work to individualise complainants and keep advertisers relatively free from any accountability for the deeper meanings their messages promote in public space. This continuous process creates case-studies that are then used in future deliberations, resulting in the ultimate trumping of the ideology of freedom of private commercial speech over public concern.

OAANZ

Following the regulatory system in the United States and Great Britain, New Zealand has recently developed its own self-regulating body, the Outdoor Advertising Association of New Zealand (OAANZ), the head office of which is located in Auckland.³⁶ Of my interviewees, *i-site*, *Parking Space* and *Adshel* were members (<http://www.oaanz.org.nz/members.htm>). Their 20 page ‘rules’ document focuses on the objects for which the Association is established:

To promote the formulation of common criteria for the assessment of outdoor advertising. To educate the public, local and central government, and other local bodies and advertising agencies in order to promote a greater understanding of the outdoor advertising industry.

They also claim to be working to ensure a “high standard” of outdoor advertising, to be achieved through standardisation and consistency, as well as maintaining and enhancing the reputation of Association members by “creating and imposing rules and standards.” Another major object of the association is to influence legislation, policy and governance as they relate to outdoor advertising in New Zealand.

OAANZ has a “code of best practice” which requires sites and structures to be well-maintained, as well as ensuring advertising content adheres to the law. As well as this, the association has an internal complaints procedure supposed to ensure good business practice through peer-monitoring. There is a strong ‘disciplinary’ and ‘accountability’ rhetoric in the rules aiming to

³⁶ Their website can be accessed here: <http://www.oaanz.org.nz/>. It is not yet complete.

prevent any member from bringing outdoor advertising into disrepute through bad business practice. Despite all their ‘public accountability’ rhetoric, the members I spoke with expressed dissatisfaction with the operation of the organisation, and if the members do not respect the objects of their self-governing body it is unlikely it will have much impact on ‘the public interest.’ Ultimately OAANZ, and advertising associations in other countries, work as a smokescreen for accountability, creating a positive public image for their members. This self-regulation is superficial in that it has no legal power, but it makes it *appear* that outdoor advertisers are bound to a strict code, thereby negating any government attempt to control the medium. By joining together under the rhetoric of good business practice, outdoor advertisers are able to create a substantial lobbying group that will work together as necessary to ensure the public’s perceptions and the government’s interventions are advantageous for the medium.

THEMES IN SELF-REGULATION: AN INTRODUCTION

In an early text on outdoor advertising, Houck (1969) revealed how the mediums’ proprietors used a ‘public interest’ discourse to defend their ability to self-regulate. The code of ethics maintained by the Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA) since the early twentieth century stated that it placed its structures and displayed its copy “in terms of the best public interest... We actively and continuously support worthy public causes through our contribution of outdoor advertising displays” (Houck 1969: 49). Outdoor advertisers argued that although the medium operates “in the best interest of its customers and the general public” it faced criticism by a “misconceived” minority aiming to enact “discriminatory legislation” (Houck 1969: 50-51). This tactic of delegitimising opposition by labelling them ‘misconceived’ or emotional and uninformed continues to the present day when advertisers are asked to defend the representations they create when complaints about them are received by the Advertising Standards Complaints Board (ASCB). Regulation actually has the affect of making advertising more ‘acceptable’ or ‘legitimate’ in our culture (Myers 1999: 184). Advertising regulation began as a way to protect businesses

from *each other*, not to protect ‘the public’ evidenced by the fact that there are “no laws addressing public worries about advertising in general” (Myers 1999: 185). From its inception, advertising was not questioned for its inherent impact on culture.

Donating space to ‘charitable’ causes has always been a tactic of outdoor advertisers to defuse criticism. This rhetoric of ‘public service’ has long been a hole-proof defence against anti-commercialism arguments. In the struggle for power over the use of space, who ever makes the best argument, claiming to be helping the most people, wins. I argue that the ASA operates in self-interest under the rhetoric of public interest. In regards to the politics of representation, the discourse used in the deliberation often simplifies or undervalues representation. Representations are never simple and never innocent, yet the ASCB is ill-equipped to deal with them because of the inherently ‘open to interpretation’ nature of its codes and principles. The ASCB tends to uphold complaints which are ‘black and white’ as opposed to complaints which touch on complicated social issues, revealing that the codes and principles are too *literal* to be effective in ensuring ‘social responsibility.’ Myers points out that the involvement of lawyers in advertising regulation leads to a “focus on the explicit statement of an ad in a way that seems naïve” (Myers 1999: 193). Regulation is based on subjectivity but portrays itself as objective.

The codes assume that there are shared standards of ‘decency.’ It is ironic that we celebrate our diversity yet when it comes to monitoring public opinion, homogeneity is assumed. Regulation assumes people need ‘protecting.’ Myers (1999: 183) offers a very comprehensive critical analysis of advertising regulation arguing that regulators make assumptions about audiences they are ‘protecting’ such as: the literal reading of ads, the vulnerability of the audience to emotional responses and shared standards of decency. He states

There are clearly tensions between seeing the audience as sceptical and rational on the one hand, and as vulnerable on the other. There is also a tendency to generalize, to create a homogenous ‘public’ that

underlies that regulatory demands for honesty and decency (Myers 1999: 183-184).

In my analysis of the ASCB's deliberations certain themes emerged. Sometimes the complaints board would not address the specific complaint, for instance a critical public response to 'public health message' about immunisation where the issue for the complainant was with ideology, but the decision (which was settled) revolved around 'misleading information' so the underlying issue of the promotion of immunisation was not dealt with.³⁷ This example also illustrates the disparity of power engendered in a process where 'everyday people' and 'common language' are pitted against the rhetoric of lawyers which carries much more weight in such deliberations because of its social and cultural sanctioning as a 'viable' discourse.

Often the advertiser would define what is acceptable by comparing the ad in question to an *extreme* case such as full frontal nudity to make the claim that, in comparison, the image in question is 'relatively innocuous and perfectly tasteful.' The complainant is then individualised. Throughout these deliberations a clear pattern emerges where the complaint is first delegitimised through arguments about 'humour' and 'artistic expression' which then leads to the 'individualisation' of the complainant, cementing the 'common sense' assumption that the complaint should not be upheld. This happens continuously, and the fact that the decisions are then used as a basis for assessing future complaints means that the ideology of freedom of private commercial speech over public concern is reinforced and maintained. Minority views are often dismissed and drained of any power to interact with commercial discourses, reinforcing the one-way flow of communication in public space, which is, I argue, the central problem that outdoor advertising creates. Clearly there are complaints about the regulation system but little in-depth research. The most common complaint about the ineffectiveness of complaints-based advertising regulation is that

³⁷ Complaint 01/52

it is “absurdly literal-minded” (Myers 1999: 198). As Myers (1999: 200) states,

The things that really offend people, such as patronising tone, or the assumptions about women or men or children, or the ruthless appeals to one’s role as a parent and love of one’s family, aren’t covered by regulation. Instead the regulations focus on various claims and the details of how they are presented, as if all that ads did was to provide information to consumers. They tend to miss the big picture and concentrate doggedly on the small print.

ALCOHOL PROMOTION: INHERENT CONTRADICTIONS

An interesting case study for examining the literal-mindedness of advertising regulation is the way complaints made to the ASCB about alcohol advertising have been answered. Myers (1999: 187) argues that regulating the promotion of alcohol is problematic “because they are trying to find a way of resolving the tension between the promotion of an allowable product, alcoholic drinks, and the suppression of an unacceptable behaviour, drunkenness.” In a study of complaints made to the ASCB about the promotion of alcohol, Gray (1996) made some interesting observations. In the five years reviewed by Gray (1996: 4) two-thirds of the complaints were submitted by Cliff Turner through his former organisation GOAL (Group Opposed to Advertising of Liquor). She also noted that most complaints to the ASCB were not upheld (Gray 1996: 5). She noticed that there was a lack of trust in the complaints process amongst health professionals and consumer groups who believed the process was too lengthy to be effective and that the supposed penalties were ineffectual, thereby discouraging them from making complaints (Gray 1996: 11). They also argued “interpretation of the codes is too variable, depending too much on individual perspectives” (Gray 1996: 13). Interviewees expressed concern about the effectiveness of the pre-vetting service provided (Gray 1996: 15).³⁸ To the contrary, “Most advertising and broadcasting industry

³⁸ The Liquor Advertising Pre-vetting System (LAPS) is a voluntary system administered by the Association of New Zealand Advertisers. Details about the system are available online (<http://www.asa.co.nz/laps.htm>).

people interviewed believed that one of the effects of complaints is to ‘put pegs in the ground’ i.e. to establish precedents and boundaries within which advertisers, agencies and broadcasters must operate.” While complainants see the penalties as too lax, those in the advertising industry see them as being too harsh (Gray 1996: 16). What these disagreements highlight is the difficulty of ‘keeping everyone happy.’ It is impossible to regulate the specific nuances of ads for alcohol when often the complainants are fundamentally opposed to the product’s promotion.

As further evidence that self-regulation does not necessarily result in ‘socially responsible’ advertising, Action on Smoking and Health (ASH) (1990: 2) argued (when it was still legal to advertise smoking), “Despite self-righteous protestations to the contrary, the tobacco industry has really never taken its advertising code seriously.” They argue that advertisers find ways around codes by evolving new forms of marketing for which codes have not yet been developed, thereby succeeding in avoiding their own self-regulatory mechanisms. This is further compounded by the ambiguity of the codes as the advertisers and the ASCB can “interpret the phrases or sentences in any way they saw fit and were answerable to no one [sic]” (Action on Smoking and Health 1990: 6). Ultimately, ASH (1990: 12) argues, “Voluntary Codes were invented to avoid legislation.”

The current “Code for Advertising Liquor” is robust as it has evolved over time to take into account particular points of contention that have arisen through the complaints process (Advertising Codes of Practice 2005: 35). There are still groups, however, that are fundamentally opposed to the promotion of liquor. The Code is comprised of six principles aimed at ensuring alcohol advertising does not promote: drinking to excess, consuming alcohol “in potentially hazardous situations” (such as driving), or appeal to minors. I find it is in regard to Principle 2, that “Liquor advertisements shall observe a high standard of social responsibility,” that the guidelines are often contradicted in decisions, essentially because ‘social responsibility’ is such an unstable category.

If one looks at the guidelines under Principle 2 and thinks of recent ad campaigns for alcohol, it is obvious that the codes are flouted. Guideline 2(b) requires ads do not depict or imply “unduly masculine themes” (p. 36). How, then, is one to accept the “Bikinis are sooooo overrated. Yeah Right.” billboard featured in Figure 6-13? Guideline 2(c) requires advertisements shall not suggest “that liquor contributes to or is a reward for success or achievement of any kind” (p. 36). How do you explain the “THAT MAN DESERVES A DB” campaign featured in Figure 6-10? Or how can the recent television advertising campaign for *Tui* which features two men dressing as women in an attempt to disguise themselves amongst a staff of beautiful, scantily clad models operating a beer factory (and taking communal showers in the process) deemed to not disregard Guideline 2(d) that “advertisements shall not be sexually provocative or suggestive”? Of the 107 complaints about outdoor advertising I analysed, 12 were based on alcohol promotion, only 5 of which were decided in the complainant’s favour. My argument is that to some members of the public the advertising messages mentioned above blatantly contravene the codes, but it is not simple to prove, as advertisers have a sophisticated arsenal of excuses which are readily accepted by the ASCB as reasons why such complaints are unfounded.

For instance, in Complaint 01/277, a ‘play on words’ argument is used to shift the focus from the problematic meanings an ad for alcohol *connotes*, to the more easily regulated matters of denotation. The ad for Lion Breweries featured two young men with handles of Waikato Draught and the headline, “Bachelors of Communication. Why Talk When You Can Waikato.” The complaint was that this message promoted drinking to a student population already suffering from binge-drinking culture, and that such promotion contravened “social responsibility.” The advertiser argued that the headline merely “plays on the idea that males communicate in ways other than speech” and the ASCB agreed stating the advertisement was “simply a play on words...and in this respect...the pun weakened rather than strengthened the impact of the masculine image portrayed in the advertisement.” Both the

advertiser and the self-regulatory body focused their ruling on the superficial ‘play’ with words, rather than attending to the deeper messages such words distribute in public space. The issue of this billboard occupying a space near at-risk students was not attended to, revealing that the Codes are unable to truly ‘regulate’ social responsibility.

Complaint 01/323 for the *Export Gold* “Summer’s Here” campaign resulted in a 20 page deliberation with two appeals made. Complainants argued that the cartoon characters appeared to be under 25 years of age. The decision was to not uphold the complaint. Repeatedly the advertisers’ discourse draws a line between ‘reality’ and representation, maintaining that representations are innocent, for instance referring to the cartoons used in the campaign as “illustrations used to convey a theme in an innovative fashion rather than a serious attempt to closely reconstruct reality.” Advertisers are able to support their interpretation of an ad by appealing to the section of the Code of Ethics which states,

In interpreting the Code...the paramount consideration is the *spirit and intention* of the Code. Accordingly, upon complaint, the Advertising Standards Complaints Board is vested with a discretion to ensure a *commonsense outcome* (emphasis added).

In appealing to the ‘spirit and intention’ of the Code, advertisers can always find a way to maintain that their messages are ‘socially responsible’ by shifting the focus away from representations and instead arguing that their images are innocent, innocuous and playful, therefore cannot be taken seriously and are therefore no reason for complaint. The “absurdly literal-mindedness” of the guidelines and principles makes this easy, particularly when they depend on interpretation, and, as I have said elsewhere, advertisers have greater resources available to ensure that their interpretations are deemed more ‘commonsense’.

ADVERTISING & CHILDREN: THE PROBLEM FOR PUBLIC SPACE

Another common ground for complaint in my sample was outdoor advertisements visible to children that parents deemed unacceptable. Parents often were angered that outdoor advertising messages undermined their

rights as parents to shelter their children from certain images and messages. This tension reveals how the invasion by commercial messages of public space causes conflict between advertisers' freedom to express themselves, and citizens' right to be free *from* these messages. The fundamental issue that arises is should those who can afford to purchase the space have more power over the values it exudes than those who do not.

The Code for Advertising to Children (Advertising Codes of Practice 2005: 19) states, "Responsible advertising...can serve not only to inform children [about] products and services but also about many aspects of society and the world in which they live." Therefore it is implied that the ASA does acknowledge an *ideological* impact of advertising. It is assumed that guidelines must be put in place to ensure "protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being" but often when parents complain that they lack control over what their children view in public space, their complaints are not upheld. The Guidelines under Principle 2 characterise what defines 'socially responsible' advertising as it relates to children (Advertising Codes of Practice 2005: 20). Along with the usual suspects of avoiding representations of violence and sexual suggestiveness, Guideline 2(e) states, "Advertisements should not suggest to children any feeling of inferiority or lack of social acceptance for not having the advertised product." There is no rule, however, that such tactics cannot be used for products targeted at adults that appear in spaces where children may see them.

In Complaint 01/314, a father objected to an ad for *Magnum* ice cream cones depicting a nude woman reclining with the ice cream she is eating blurred through pixelation to connote it is something in need of censoring. The complainant said:

I am a 26 year old father of two and I think my children should be allowed the privilege of growing up in a morally decent country where they are not bombarded with sexual images in very public places. I personally as a married man want to do my best not to be aroused by anything other than my wife.

The father felt that the image undermined his position as role-model for his children, by displaying messages contradictory to the values he worked daily to encourage. In its deliberation the ASCB took into consideration the highly visible nature of the medium but decided that the ad was not offensive as “it showed a bronzed female body not dissimilar to those which may be viewed on a beach at this time of the year.” This comment suggests that the power an individual woman has to display her body in one particular setting is equivalent to the power an advertiser has to promote an image of a body that has nothing to do with ice cream in a space where “bronzed female bodies” are *not* generally seen. The father knows that if he takes his children to the beach they may be exposed to this demonstration of flesh, but the context and level of sexual explicitness are completely different. The father has no power to avoid the billboard on the street he must drive, yet this contradiction seems to escape the regulatory discourse.

Another area of contention for parents is language deemed offensive appearing on outdoor advertising that contradicts messages parents tell their children. In the instance of Complaint 01/146 the word ‘shit’ appeared on a billboard for a radio station. The complainant stated:

I am certainly not a wowser and am not averse to using the word myself on the odd occasion, however I would certainly be concerned if I had my young nephews and nieces in the car with me. I think it must be very disconcerting for parents with children who are trying to teach them some standards...to see this so blatantly up there and in your face.

In this instance the ASCB upheld the complaint, largely because it did not receive a response from the advertiser. It could be argued that had the advertiser had the chance to draw on its arsenal of justifications, the ASCB may have been convinced that indeed the ad *was* ‘humorous.’ This decision is also an instance where the ASCB took it upon itself to deliberate on an issue that was *not* part of the original complaint; that the ad ‘denigrated identifiable competitors.’ In essence they are taking it upon themselves to not only position themselves as the arbiters of ‘common sense’ but also deciding what should be complained about. This further disempowers

complainants by moving discussion away from representations, hence advertisers benefit by not having to answer to the implicit meanings of their messages.

STEREOTYPES & HUMAN RIGHTS

Before the ASA was the active body in regulating content, the Human Rights Commission (HRC) provided guidelines which, “merely requires that an advertisement shall not be worded in such a way that it could indicate, or could reasonably be understood as indicating, an intent to discriminate unlawfully” (Downey cited in Human Rights Commission 1982: i). As evidenced by the Code for People in Advertising (Advertising Codes of Practice 2005: 39) the regulations for advertising designed to prevent ‘offence’ occurring have grown, but the fact that the HRC received complaints early on can tell us something about the public’s response to advertising messages. Offensive messages are deemed an affront to people’s basic human rights. This is particularly problematic when the messages appear in the street, where there is *no choice* but to see them.

My analysis of complaints revealed people often believed³⁹ advertisements were contrary to Principle 3:

Advertisements should not portray people in a manner which, taking into account generally prevailing community standards, is reasonably likely to cause serious or widespread offence on the grounds of their gender; race; colour; ethnic or national origin; age; cultural, religious, political or ethical belief; sexual orientation; marital status; family status; education; disability; occupational or employment status (Advertising Codes of Practice 2005: 39).

But judging by my analysis, what the ASCB regards as “generally prevailing community standards” were often at odds with what the public believed them to be. There is one case in particular that despite its obvious disregard for the Basic Principles of this Code, was not upheld by the ASCB. In Complaint 03/320, an ad for *Max Fashion Ltd* used an image of

³⁹ 21% of the sample of complaints analysed were on the basis of this type of offence, i.e. 22 complaints. Only 4 were upheld.

two scantily clad women, one white-skinned and dressed as an Angel and the other dark-skinned and dressed like a Devil. The tagline for the billboard was, “Angels, Saints & Sinners.” The Complainant was offended because the image and tag line mixed “explicit and implicit Christian symbols with sexual connotations of lesbianism” which was deeply offensive in its public denigration of “symbols which I hold dear, and which give meaning to my life.”

The advertiser tried to “alleviate” the complainant’s concerns by stating:

Firstly, the advertising campaign was created to strike a chord with our target audience, young, aspiring New Zealand women. ... We used the term ‘Angels, Saints and Sinners’ not in a literal sense, but as a way of creatively expressing that this is a brand for all types of women. This is a well known phrase and while it may be derivative from religion, like other religious phrases it has entered the vernacular.

They further argued that this imagery should be viewed “in the context of advertising, which is a visual language that regularly employs metaphor to communicate quickly, constantly borrowing and reframing signs and symbols from popular culture to create impact.” Their appeals to the vernacular and to metaphor seem to miss the point that the complainant is *challenging* the use of religious imagery to sell a product in this way. The complainant’s argument is that using such ‘iconography’ is an affront to the highly symbolic value it holds for *Catholics*. Taking these symbols and imbuing them with a contrary meaning in order to appeal to a particular audience is problematic on the outdoor medium, because people outside the target market are forced to see it. The outdoor advertiser even suggested the Complainant’s view was “the exception, not the norm” and “a rather arrogant assumption.” The ASCB majority disagreed in their deliberation with the minority who agreed with the complainant “that the advertisement made unsuitable use of religious iconography to promote the sale of a commodity, and this was seriously offensive to some members of society.” The majority agreed with the advertiser’s assessment, “that the religious symbols displayed had, in recent years, become integrated into popular

culture as fashion accessories, and were no longer exclusively religious or, in particular, Catholic symbols.” What this example illustrates is the power of the commercial over all other forms of discourse, belief and expression. In allowing the commercial appropriation of religious symbols in this way, in *public space* no less, the public’s right to live in shared spaces according to individual values and beliefs is trumped by the right of advertisers to do what is necessary to sell their products.

In a speech presented to the World Congress of the World Federation of Advertisers, the former executive director of the New Zealand Advertising Standards Authority, Glen Wiggs (1999: 14) declared it the mandate of advertisers to

...ensure that the rights of marketers to advertise, and the rights of consumers to be protected, are in fair and proper balance. ...The answer to the question [of how to achieve this] is in your hands. The days of Government [sic] making the rules for cross-border advertising are over. In this borderless world we enjoy new freedoms. With these freedoms come new responsibilities. The challenge is how we respond to these responsibilities.

Judging by the discussion above, advertisers’ responsibilities are to their bank balances first and foremost. As long as they convince the self-governing body that their representations are innocent, humorous and artistic, balance is assumed to have been achieved. All symbols, despite their level of significance to particular groups of people, are available for appropriation into the all-pervasive commercial vernacular.

5.3 The Pornographication of Public Culture?

DEFINING INDECENCY

Rosewarne (2005: 72) states, “A discussion of pornography is relevant to outdoor advertising because it has been argued that pornography is moving into popular culture through ‘mainstreaming,’ with outdoor advertising facilitating this process.” Likewise Amy-Chinn (2006: 170), in an article critical of the self-regulatory response to complaints about sexualised advertising in the United Kingdom, alludes to “the growing eroticisation of

everyday life.” Of the 107 complaints analysed, 43% were based on sexual material (i.e. 46 complaints). Only 30% of these were upheld or settled (14 complaints), whereas *three quarters* were either not allowed or not upheld (30 complaints). The ASCB bases its decisions on complaints about sexual material around what it defines as “generally prevailing community standards” of decency. Decency is a slippery slope. Myers (1999: 194-196) discusses the issue of ‘decency’ in complaints made to the ASA. The trends he found in terms of advertisers’ responses parallel my finding that sexually provocative ads are generally justified on the grounds of humour or artistic expression. This is another area where advertising regulation reveals the contradictions of consumer culture. As Myers (1999: 196) states, “Ads push at the edge of any boundaries drawn, because their goals are both to attract attention and to define their brand as different from others.”

Because the majority of complaints were related to sexual content of outdoor advertisements, it is useful to reflect on the arguments of Rosewarne (2004, 2005) and Winship (2000). Rosewarne (2005: 67) argues that outdoor advertising is a pertinent public policy concern because, as opposed to “the ‘private’ world of magazine and television advertising, outdoor advertising is displayed throughout public space.” She mentions that the medium’s ‘inescapable’ nature is a key area of concern as it makes women especially feel ‘powerless’ in the face of a proliferation of sexualised images that go largely ignored by policy makers (Rosewarne 2004: 30). Although highly controversial images gain media attention, the general ‘sexual’ nature of images in the medium go unchallenged. I want to argue that the general pornographication of outdoor space is occurring largely because of the consistent stretching of the boundaries of what is ‘acceptable’ in regulatory discourse. Problematic is that the debate around sexual images always ends up as a conflict between those who are ‘liberal and open to change’ and the ‘conservatives’ who are seen as stifling creativity and unwilling to ‘progress.’ As “a cultural barometer of mainstream discussions” the ASA’s decisions (such as to not uphold complaints against the highly controversial *Wonderbra* ads in Britain)

greatly affect what is deemed ‘acceptable’ and ‘common sense’ (Winship 2000: 44).

The findings of Meijer (1998: 247) indicate complainants frame their opinion of outdoor in terms of age. She found that in complainants’ eyes, “age is the discriminating factor between their own ‘liberal’ views on public respectability and the supposedly conservative opinion of (other) older people” (Meijer 1998: 245). Likewise older people attempted to distance themselves from religious people or those older than themselves. Being seen as liberal was conflated with open-mindedness and tolerance as opposed to ‘conservatism’ which is seen as not being open-minded and therefore not a legitimate critique, hence why it is so often overruled. The rhetoric of ‘conservative’ versus ‘liberal’ corresponded to that used by respondents in my analysis. For instance in 01/23 the complainant said: “I am not normally prudish and I see the funny side of a lot of tongue in cheek advertising, but I do take exception to this advertisement.”

When it comes to provocative images, and the use of the female body to sell products, the problem is that people do not have freedom *from* these images when they are in public space. Regulation promotes freedom *to*: freedom to be artistic, freedom to be humorous, freedom to use stereotypes to get a message across in a short space of time. But what people largely complain about is their lack of freedom *from* the images that bombard them in their everyday world. They have little control over these images and messages, and hence the values that public culture is promoting to their children.

Decision 00/175, a complaint about an image of men in pyjamas with erections, was upheld on the grounds that, “once a billboard went up, the advertisement was no longer confined to that audience and any communication or message extended to the public at large.” In this deliberation boundaries between what content and context is ‘widely acceptable’ is discursively produced through such terms as ‘serious offence’ and ‘widespread offence’ with the variables being content and context. This also reveals that public space is here a marker of boundaries of social

acceptability with regard to how and where sexual information can be displayed. In contradiction to this decision, in 00/204 the argument of creative and artistic expression is employed in the decision to *not uphold* a complaint about the use of a naked model in an ad for a cosmetic product. Here the ASCB states,

When dealing with advertisements of this nature, care had to be taken to ensure that the line between modesty and indecency was maintained. To flagrantly cross the line could lead to a diminution of public confidence in advertising...

There is clearly a *very fine line* between what is decent and indecent, what is seriously offensive and what is widely offensive. Because of the vagueness of the codes, each individual complaint is open to the particular interpretation of them on a particular day. It is also clearly problematic that the ASCB claims throughout the deliberations that each ad must be considered on its own merits, but at the same time it uses past adjudications as grounds for decisions. This creates issues for how long a decision is relevant since “generally prevailing community standards” can shift over time. It is difficult to see how a system so rife with contradictions could maintain public confidence.

The discourse of ‘decency’ is outlined in the ASA’s code of ethics where it states, “Advertisements should not contain anything which clearly offends against *generally prevailing community standards* of decency taking into account the *context, medium, audience and product*” (Advertising Codes of Practice 2005: 17, emphasis added). The discourse of ‘offensiveness’ uses the same rhetoric of ‘generally prevailing community standards’ and ‘taking into account context, medium, audience and product.’ In the cases where a complaint is ‘settled’ (such as 01/153 use of the word ‘slut’ on a graphic image) there is no deliberation and all that is stated is that ‘the principles of self-regulation have been fulfilled.’ In these instances the images have *already* offended people. The ASCB argues that such decisions work as a deterrent for future advertising, but there is no guarantee that this works. More likely it does not as it prevents critical precedents being set.

One complaint stands out as particularly ‘educated’ as it delves into issues of discourse and gender, but it is treated the same way as other complaints that make less sophisticated arguments. I am referring to 01/211 where the female complainant argues that an ad for *Overland* shoe store is violent against women, misrepresentative of social reality and irresponsible because it is placed near a mall where children spend time with their families. The Complainant stated, “Never mind that potential rapists and murderers might find social legitimisation and reinforcement in the violent imagery. The cost of that is not borne by the advertiser.” Here the advertiser individualises and hence delegitimises the complainant by arguing,

The complainant clearly has an extremely active preoccupation with analysing possible interpretations of photographic matter. While articulate, his/her analysis is far more sophisticated than 99.9% of the population who is exposed to this image.

The advertiser then argues that the image is acceptable because it is designed to provoke interest through its ‘surrealism’ and ‘enigma’ and goes on to refer to the complaint as ‘over-zealous’ and ‘far-fetched’ and crediting the ad “with far more negative innuendo than was intended.” This distorts what the Complainant was saying as she was not complaining about what was *intended* necessarily, but how the codes may be read and interpreted by the public because of their familiarity to what people commonly associate with violence against women. The board’s decision further illustrates how the ASA’s process individualises and in this instance ridicules complainants when it states, “In the Board’s view to interpret the advertisement in accordance with the Complainant’s perception would require a significant leap in imagination.”

ADVOCACY ADVERTISING

Rule 11 of the Advertising Code of Ethics (Advertising Codes of Practice 2005: 18) states, “Expression of opinion in advocacy advertising is an essential and desirable part of the functioning of a democratic society. Therefore such opinions may be robust.” It is a familiar tactic of advocacy advertising to use shock tactics to engage public debate on an issue. Despite

the rule above, the ASCB tend to dilute this ability as the deliberation often focuses on *aesthetics* rather than on the political issue such robust ads are working to convey. The controversial case of a billboard for the group Mothers Against Genetic Engineering (Madge) highlights the way that provocative *political* ads are responded to differently than provocative images that are designed for commercial purposes.⁴⁰ The article ‘Madge delighted with ruling on ad’ appeared in *The Christchurch Press* on Monday, Feb 16 2004 (A7) stating, “A controversial anti-GE billboard featuring a woman with four breasts has been brought to its knees after a raft of complaints—and its creator is delighted.” According to the creator, the billboards were designed to shock and offend, and even won an award in an international art competition. As Myers (1999: 198) argues, such provocative images garner public controversy “the controversy gives more publicity to the organization than they could ever buy with their limited budgets.” Unfortunately this publicity is usually negative publicity.

Complainants found the “depiction of a female body in this manner totally disgusting” and argued “it is bordering on the pornographic and has no place in general public view.” *Madge* believed they were promoting social responsibility with the ad as they believed the message (GE-free New Zealand) was supported by the majority of New Zealanders and saw it as ‘political art’ in opposition to the usual sexualised images of women used to sell products. The issues raised concerned the image as inducing fear, distorting the issues related to GE, and causing denigration and offence, particularly to women. The ASCB disagreed in their deliberation with a minority being “of the view that the advertisement had been prepared with a due sense of social responsibility” and that “these considerations over-rode suggestions that the depiction was offensive.” The complaints were *upheld*, however, as the majority ruled that it had cause “serious and widespread

⁴⁰ Complaint 03/304. On the website there was only a four page deliberation on this Complaint, although over 30 complaints were received.

offence...in the light of generally prevailing community standards.” The outdoor advertiser, OGGI, had no opinion on the matter, perhaps hoping to shield the company from any association with the negative controversy. This lack of support for the image they promoted on their medium is further evidence that outdoor advertisers may claim to have a social conscience, but ultimately the commercial needs of the business trump those of the public. When equally provocative images appear in commercial advertisements they receive considerably less controversial attention, revealing that not only do commercial messages have more space, they have more *freedom* to use that space to serve their needs, and often this means the pornographication of public space to draw attention to a product. These sexualised images maintain dominant stereotypes about gender, however, with further consequences for public space, as will be discussed in the next section.

6 REPRESENTATIONS & PUBLIC SPACE

This section looks at the intimate connection between space and power by analysing the content and placement of particular outdoor advertising sites and the discourses circulating about them. Advertisements play on viewers' cultural knowledge in order to make sense, and meaning is constructed through various levels: denotation, connotation, and ideology. Outdoor advertising has its own particular set of problems because of its location in shared space. These problems are compounded by ads' reliance on myths, in Barthes' sense, about gender, ethnicity and class in order to service dominant belief structures (Bassett 1994: 7). As Bassett (1994: 7) argues,

Advertising utilises a variety of symbolic practices and discourses woven together and distilled from an unbounded range of cultural references. Advertising thus borrows its ideas, its language and its visual representations from literature, visual media, cultural myths, and its own self-generating experience. Advertising artfully recombines these meanings around the theme of consumption and in the process products are woven into the fabric of social life and culture.

The advertisements discussed in this section were chosen as characteristic of particular dominant lines of appeal. They reveal that gender, ethnicity and class stereotypes are prevalent and largely go unchallenged, despite cultural awareness regarding the politics of representation. When outdoor advertising does encounter resistance, it is absorbed into the hegemonic discourses of commercialism.

6.1 *The Gendering of Public Spaces*

I would argue that particularly gendered outdoor advertisements – those in which the imagery resonates with deep societal stereotypes about gender – inevitably *gender* the spaces where they appear through a continuously productive form of power. This power works through the repetition of particular visual signifiers in public spaces. The gendered imagery becomes part of the environment, hence imbuing public spaces with a certain ideology that, through fleeting glimpses, the public is encouraged to adopt.

This ideology of gender cloaks powerful ‘taken-for-grantedness’ of gender in society under the guise of ‘natural’, although they are actually productive and continually producing more power. The sum of outdoor advertising architecture commercialises public space, and through that commercialisation enables the gendering of space. Also, the ways of talking about these gendered ads in the news and complaints hearings, reinforce their ‘taken-for-grantedness’ by continuously establishing ‘legitimate’ ways of talking about gendered representations.

Of the 107 complaints made to the ASA that were analysed and discussed in the previous section, 46 were based on either sexualised images or innuendo, or offence caused by gendered representations in outdoor ads (approximately 43%). Out of the 100 advertisements I photographed for this research project, 38 were ‘gender specific’ meaning that the visual and textual signifiers drew on and reproduced notions of gender to sell a product. Thirteen of the ads were masculine and nineteen feminine, whereas six ads represented men and women together, nine were graffiti and the remaining 53 (53%) were neutral in that they had no ‘gender’ content at all. It is my contention that because at least a third of my data reveals gender to still be a major aspect of outdoor advertising, the notion that outdoor advertising is gender neutral is merely a myth. Ten years ago Pat O’Shane, a New South Wales magistrate, drew attention to the “sexist culture of outdoor advertising” and yet a decade on commentators such as Rosewarne (2005: 67) show that not much has changed, nor has the issue received a great deal of critical attention and debate. We do *not* live in a gender neutral society, and outdoor advertising contributes to gender stereotypes.

Rosewarne (2005: 75) is appalled at the lack of controversy on this issue and calls for the documentation of sexist imagery in outdoor advertising. The conundrum is that the type of publicity that these ‘sexual’ ads garner makes them more desirable. Outdoor advertisers need to convince their clients that the medium will be noticed, and press coverage, even if it is negative, is still publicity and hence any opposition merely fuels the desire for more of this sort of advertising. As shown in the previous section, the

regulatory systems that do exist merely reinforce this behaviour because precedents have been set where this type of advertising is seen as acceptable on the grounds of creativity, freedom of speech or the argument that ‘people just enjoy looking at beautiful women.’ As Short (1996: 324) argues,

Power is important to producing, maintaining, resisting, and changing gender relations. And the use and demarcation of space is integral to the exercise of power. There are connections between power and gendered spaces and space and power relations that can be uncovered by careful analysis of particular sites.

This section provides an analysis of particular sites, in order to show how power is produced and maintained through the proliferation of gendered commercial discourses in public spaces.

HOW ‘FEMININE’ REPRESENTATIONS ‘MASCULINISE’ SPACE

It is argued that gender is a product of our social history, a construction that varies over time and history as well as between space and place, reflecting and influencing the spatial and temporal nature of our environment (Short 1996: 321). The central issue in a discussion of gender and outdoor advertising is the way that the female body is commodified through the nature of its display, which reinforces the surveillance of the “silent male gaze” and thereby inscribes space with an ideology of gender that proclaims what is ‘normal’ from what is ‘deviant’ (Short 1996: 322). I am arguing that the ads which feature women fall into two categories: thin and beautiful women connoting that the role of women in public space is as creatures of sexual desire; and ‘fat’ or ‘distorted’ women who are used for humour in advertisements, connoting that such women are also subject to a gaze, albeit a more critical one which makes them less welcome in masculinized public spaces.



Figure 6-1: Ad for *Bonds* female underwear

Advertising for underwear represents the most obvious and direct form of gendered and sexualised advertising. In an interview with *Adshel*, the managing director argued that the complaints against underwear advertising were unfounded because, ‘how else are you supposed to advertise underwear?’ My argument is that such an attitude completely misses the point. While it may seem ‘common-sensical’ that underwear brands would want to advertise to the widest possible audience through the use of sexualised images in the outdoor advertising medium, there are consequences for public space. An ad for *Bonds* underwear (Figure 6-1) was placed at a bus stop outside a busy mall where teenagers catch the bus from the nearby high school. Teenage girls are socialised through the persistence of such images in their everyday spaces to see themselves as objects of sexual desire. The young model, it could be argued, is less than 16, yet her sultry pose indicates she is very much aware of her sexuality and the ‘importance’ of looking one’s best, even in undergarments. The connotation of such a message is that the underwear is going to be seen by someone (the male gaze) and that young women must be prepared for it. Here the right of ‘free speech’ for the corporation has the adverse effect of socialising young women into seeing themselves as objects of the male gaze. Likewise, it socialises young men to *adopt* the male gaze in relation to their female peers. The public space of the bus stop, imbued with a strong social power by nature of its daily frequency and centrality to everyday life, teaches

young people how to behave. Not only that, it tells *all* people that it is acceptable to look at teenage girls in their underwear. The female body, through the proliferation of images, is reduced to these products and what they symbolise; that women's role in public space is to groom herself for the male gaze. The connotation is that even down to the most intimate covering, her underwear, the woman must seek to be desirable. Nothing therefore escapes the power of this ideology of gender relations.

Ads for personal hygiene products such as those in figures 6-2, 6-3 and 6-4 also contribute to the colonisation of space with hegemonic gendered meanings that further control women. The ad for *Nivea* 'pampering shower oil' (Figure 6-2) features the image of a young woman naked, caressing herself and staring right at the viewer with a proud, seductive smirk on her face. The tag line, 'your skin will feel like silk' connotes that women need to buy such products so that they will feel and look attractive. The ad for *Rexona* deodorant (Figure 6-3) connotes that sweating is 'unfeminine' and should be avoided. The 'tick' on the woman's back is a symbol that denotes 'correct' or 'ok', the seal of approval. The connotation is that as long as women prevent themselves from sweating they are 'approved' to share in public culture. Likewise in the *Venus* razor ad (figure 6-4), the female body is largely exposed, and the connotation of the image combined with the word 'reveal' is that such exposure is expected, but you have to adhere to certain rules first: skin must be 'smooth as silk' to be acceptable for public view. In opposition to this feminine 'sweatless' discourse, masculine representations, discussed in the next section, *encourage* men to sweat.



Figure 6-2: Ad for *Nivea* shower oil



Figure 6-3: Ad for *Rexona* deodorant



Figure 6-4: Ad for *Venus* razor

Valentine (cited in Short 1996: 322), Short (1996), Winship (2000) and Rosewarne (2004, 2005) have all argued that the representations of women in outdoor advertising, particularly those that are sexualised, reproduce patriarchal power over space by making women continuously subject to a male gaze. Rosewarne (2005: 68) states,

It is my contention that such highly sexualised outdoor advertising displays work to make public space a gallery for men where women are used to decorate space in a way that sexually objectifies women and offends and harasses female public space users, thus making it less pleasant-and even possible-for women to enjoy public space.

The power of this patriarchal surveillance over space is a *productive* form of power, that works through not only the production and display of the sexualised commercialised female body, but through the available ways of talking about such representations in *regulatory discourse* as well as news media discourse.

The complaints made to the ASCB on the basis of such sexualised images prove the productivity of this power. Advertisers rationalise the use of images of the near-nude female body in ads for underwear and personal hygiene products as the image is seen as being ‘related’ to the product. Such images of women are only seen as objectionable when they are used to sell an ‘unrelated’ product, something that does not immediately relate to the body or would be used on it somehow. In the Board’s and advertisers’ point of view, it is perfectly reasonable to display an image that they argue ‘denotes’ the benefits of a product. But it is what the images *connote* that is problematic *in public space*. The persistence of such images adds up to the proliferation of a powerful ideology whereby public spaces are used as visual signifiers of ‘acceptable’ gendered subjectivities: women are ‘policed’ by such images to conform to their role as sexual subjects to the male gaze. For instance, in a complaint about an ad for ‘Palmolive Naturals’ shower gel⁴¹ which depicted an opaque image of a naked woman, it was argued that the image was degrading to women and in breach of the code of

⁴¹ Complaint 00/195

ethics. It was the Board's opinion that "the depiction was neither gratuitous nor offensive" and was "tastefully and sensibly presented and...the steam from the shower provided the model with sufficient modesty..." In complaint 00/204 where a near-nude model was used to advertise *Estée Lauder* body powder the Board again sided with the advertiser claiming that "the model, although naked, was posed in such a way that with the exception of her buttocks, there were no exposed body parts" and hence the ad was deemed "creative and artistic."⁴² It is common for the advertiser to justify its choice of images featuring naked flesh through the rhetoric of creativity and artistic expression. It is only when ads blatantly cross the line into 'indecent' that complaints are upheld. For instance a complaint was laid against a poster for the clothing label *Golf Punk*⁴³ where the image of a young woman in a pair of green bikini briefs suggested she was the '19th hole', a golf metaphor with a highly sexual connotation (the green bikini briefs denoted the golfing green). The complainant took exception to the suggestiveness in the ad, offended by the "chauvinistic and sleazy" message which served to "glorify caveman like attitudes" and this complaint was upheld. The definitions of such complex notions as 'decency' and 'offensiveness' hinge on the vague concept of 'generally prevailing community standards,' and hence the entire complaints process produces a limiting interpretive framework, which eventuates in success of the most articulate argument, rather than any sort of 'public responsibility.'

Complaint 01/81 reveals how images of nudity and ads for sexual-related products become problematic for public space. The ad for the erectile dysfunction drug *Viagra* depicted a naked couple. One of the complainants argued:

⁴² The Board also commented in this decision, "when dealing with advertisements of this nature, care had to be taken to ensure that the line between modesty and indecency was maintained. To flagrantly cross the line could lead to a diminution of public confidence in advertising."

⁴³ Complaint 01/23

“Should a child/teenager or anyone for that matter have to be confronted with pictures like this as they walk down the street... I believe that standards slowly and subtly get lower and lower and that people in general think there is nothing they can do about it. ...there will soon be nothing that is sacred, and nothing that is deemed unsuitable for young eyes.”

Clearly such sentiments reveal some members of the public feel powerless about the lack of control they have over the images they are confronted with daily in spaces they believe to be public. The Board’s decision to not uphold the complaint in this case reflects many similar decisions, where they take side with the advertiser, who positions themselves as objective and the complainant as subjective:

The complaint tends to focus on the complainant’s subjective perspective as to what acceptable community standards are, and the perceived lowering of those standards. Viewed objectively, it is submitted that the generally prevailing community standards have not been breached in this case.

There are various strategies used to argue that complaints are not legitimate, and arguing that the complainant is a ‘minority’ is often used. A very well-written and articulate complaint⁴⁴ about an image perceived to promote sexual violence against women, received the following response from the advertiser:

The complainant clearly has an extremely active preoccupation with analysing possible interpretations of photographic matter. While articulate, his/her analysis is far more sophisticated than 99.9% of the population who are exposed to this image. Our intentions in advertising are to gain the attention and to stimulate an increasingly media weary public (3-4).

The Board in this instance agreed with the advertiser concluding, “to interpret the advertisement in accordance with the Complainant’s perception would require a significant leap in imagination...” (5). I think it is problematic that in many of the complaints, the advertiser not only mocked the complainant, but showed a blatant disregard for the entire complaints process. When the complaints board makes statements such as the above, it

⁴⁴ Complaint 01/211, discussed in Section 5.

shows a lack of respect for the ‘standards’ of the public they are supposed to be serving.

A total of 46 complaints were made on the basis of advertising imagery perceived to be of an inappropriate sexual nature, and are therefore too numerous to discuss individually. However, there are common themes in terms of how complainants conceptualised certain material as problematic, and the way that advertisers responded to these complaints. It is also clear that the ASCB tended to side with the advertiser since 46% of these complaints were *not* upheld and 15% were upheld.⁴⁵ The complaints about sexualised images reveal a struggle in public space between commercial messages and individual rights over their environment.

Public space, as argued by Murdock (2001: 449), is a site where values compete for control, and certain commercial messages which use nudity to attract an audience create a struggle over meaning in public culture. The complainants in 01/314 articulated this struggle over public values. An ad for *Magnum* ice cream featured a nude female model eating an ice cream that was blurred out with the caption ‘the adults only cone.’ One of the complainants stated:

The law prohibits nudity in public places, Auckland is a multicultural city with diverse ethnic and religious groups; Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, these people groups would not consider or accept that nudity in public [is] a generally prevailing community standard.

The same complainant also argued, “advertising does act as a catalyst to normalising or entrenching trends and values” (2). Despite the fact that there were numerous complainants about this particular ad the ASCB only upheld it ‘in part’ because the image was one that could “be seen at the beach at this time of year.” This response reveals a lack of understanding of the different meanings of different spaces. The complainants’ discourse suggests a lack

⁴⁵ Another 20% of the complaints of this nature were not allowed, making the total of complaints dismissed as 66% or two-thirds. Of the other 34% of complaints, 15% were ‘settled’ 15% were upheld and 4% were ‘upheld in part’.

of power over their exposure to particular values in everyday spaces. Yet despite the strength of these convictions, the regulatory mechanisms designed to maintain ‘generally prevailing standards’ ignore such pleas.

Feminist geography, originating in the 1970s, explored “how gender relations are illustrated and amplified in the physical layout of spaces” (Rosewarne 2005: 70). I think the argument has some relevance to the gendered nature of outdoor advertising today. Rosewarne makes the point that public space has generally been perceived as ‘masculine’ and therefore the architecture of the city has been built to serve the ‘needs’ of men, whereas the ‘ornamental’ or ‘aesthetic’ aspects of space are perceived as feminine: “The sheer number of women portrayed in outdoor advertising far outweighs men, and therefore on a cursory level, advertising can be interpreted as contributing to the gendering of public space through its continued use of women as ‘artifice.’” (Rosewarne 2005: 70). She refers to the work of Mulvey (1985) who argued that men control space by constructing a male gaze that subjects women to itself. Figures 6-5 and 6-6 show how shopping is promoted as a female activity. Women are charged with ‘keeping New Zealand beautiful’ by keeping *themselves* beautiful, a goal to be achieved through consumption. The ad promoting Northlands mall (Figure 6-5) shows the female shopper in a state of exhausted ecstasy. Such an image defines certain commercial spaces as ‘feminine’ spaces through their privileged position as directional signs. The use of this sort of message to ‘stand for’ Northlands Mall connotes that not only is shopping a female activity, it is one in which women are expected to take pleasure – you are an acceptable woman in public space if you shop (the ‘shop therefore I am’ philosophy of global corporate domination).



Figure 6-5: Ad promoting *Northlands* shopping centre



Figure 6-6: Ad for *Max* (women's fashion store)



Figure 6-7: Nostalgic style ad for *Coca-Cola*

The CocaCola brand is a major user of the outdoor advertising medium in Christchurch. Their nostalgic campaign (captured in Figure 6-7) reveals how a ‘cheeky’ post-feminist imagery can contribute to the pornographication and gendering of public space without resistance. This is achieved through the construction of the nearly nude model as quaint, rather than pornographic, through the image’s deliberate pre-feminist stylisation. Coca-cola consistently influences public space with its corporate values by finding ways to articulate certain commercial ideologies disguised as ‘fun’ or indeed ‘national’ (as illustrated by the gross appropriation of the silver fern symbol made of coke bottles on page 2).

Images of women in advertising other than the ‘glamorous’ youthful model-type are rare. The few depictions of larger or older women are usually used for humour, as in Figure 6-8. Otherwise, the female body is distorted for humorous affect, such as the ad for *Pacific Blue* in Figure 6-9. This serves to distinguish masculine from feminine, telling us that anything outside those ‘culturally sanctioned’ boundaries is not to be taken seriously. Images such as this, which expect a humorous reaction because they are built on hegemonic stereotypes, exclude those who do not fit the gendered norms (and therefore rules) of public space, such as transsexuals. Such ads actually contribute to the persistence of societal attitudes to such people as a joke. As discussed in the previous section, the ASCB’s decisions reinforce such exclusion as they often side with the advertiser that ads are humorous and therefore not seen to be offensive. I disagree with their contention that humour is innocent or empty of meaning, arguing instead that these jokes, which are assumed to be publicly understood and therefore a valid and acceptable discourse, carry political weight which ultimately excludes those upon whose expense the humour relies.



Figure 6-8: Ad for *JetStar*



Figure 6-9: Ad for *PacificBlue*

BILLBOARDS, BEER & THE KIWI BLOKE

In terms of the portrayal of masculinity in ads, several theorists have shown that *alcohol* advertising predominates in the proliferation of masculine stereotypes. While his female counterpart is encouraged to shop and be beautiful, the male is supposed to be preoccupied with beer, women, and ‘taking care of things.’ But like women, men are also subject to a powerful public gaze whereby particular notions of masculinity are sanctioned by the commercial forms that expound them. As argued by Strate (2000: 149),

In the traditional myth of masculinity, men are characterized by their ability to handle stressful situations. Masculine identity is established...by risk-taking. Men seek out or create challenges in order to demonstrate their strength, courage, and skill. The challenge is a test of the individual’s ability to control his environment, and himself.

According to Bassett (1994: 3), one of the few theorists to look critically at representations of masculinity in advertising in New Zealand, beer advertisements are particularly potent sites of appeal to dominant notions of 'kiwi masculinity':

Beer advertisements tended to cater to a limited set of masculine values and qualities. Most notably the image of masculinity depicted was typically rugged, tough and physical. The narrow definition of masculinity contained in beer advertisements serves to reinforce the myth of the genuine kiwi male in contrast with a broader notion of masculinity. In reflecting a narrow range of male values and attitudes, liquor advertisements may serve to limit the development of wider social definitions of masculinity.

While images of women in advertising promote satisfaction as intimately linked to consumption and the beautifying of oneself, masculine satisfaction is promoted as the result of hard physical labour. These beliefs are well established in New Zealand culture, and because outdoor advertising demands quick communication, advertisers are reluctant to veer away from stereotypes that would challenge such 'common-sense' assumptions, for fear the commercial message would be lost. The lack of representations of alternative forms of masculinity in beer commercials, for instance men engaged in non-physical jobs and leisure activities, contributes to "the mythic creation of the 'genuine' kiwi male" (Bassett 1994: 77). As Bassett (1994: 77) argues,

In this sense these advertisements may merely reflect pre-existing, dominant cultural conceptions of masculinity. But in reflecting myth, advertising also reinforces it in what may be regarded as inappropriate ways, further limiting the social definition of masculinity which prevails. The point is that the archetypal male characters depicted in beer advertisements may wield a power beyond the context in which masculine advertising images may appear. ...This narrow image is only one conception of a wider multifaceted notion of masculinity which it would be more socially advantageous to reinforce.

Figures 6-10 and 6-11 reveal how the stereotypical masculine values promoted in television alcohol advertising over a decade ago are still prevalent today in outdoor advertising. The current 'that man deserves a DB' ad campaign features a string of advertisements showing men accomplishing seemingly impossible tasks, and being rewarded with a cold

beer. Such ideas may appear innocent because of their clear exaggeratedness, but nevertheless they add to a long legacy of promoting a limited form of masculinity in public space. The persistence of such ads outdoors reminds men what is expected of the ‘real’ kiwi bloke.



Figure 6-10: “That man deserves a DB” ad



Figure 6-11: Ad for *Export Gold* (beer)

Short (1996: 318) claimed that visual culture has played a particularly important role “in circulating images of male power and the norms of manliness.” Outdoor advertising is a neglected form of visual culture, despite its power. The representations of ‘manliness’ used to sell products such as beer not only circulate dominant notions of masculinity, they inform people of the gender of places and spaces, and position us as gendered subjects in relation to them. As Short (1996: 318) states,

Representations are neither socially neutral nor politically innocent. Between the complex realities of multiple masculinities and the simple, more partial views depicted in various cultural forms lies the

mark of power/lack of power, exclusion/inclusion, and a dominant/subordinate position in society. Representations reveal much about the operation of power in society.

In figures 6-12 and 6-13 the chauvinistic male attitude is again espoused through the male gaze. In the *Tui* ad (Figure 6-13) masculinity means taking pleasure in looking at women in bikinis. When we juxtapose ads such as the 'bert badger tv' ad (Figure 6-12) and the *Max* ad (Figure 6-6), which were photographed within metres of each other outside a Christchurch mall, it becomes apparent that commercial culture is much more flexible towards men than it is towards women. The connotation is that women need to consume personal hygiene products and wear high fashion items to 'keep New Zealand beautiful' whereas men can, basically, do 'whatever the f#@! I want.' As long as men are rough and powerful and strong, drink beer and stare at women then they are okay. And as long as women look and smell beautiful, our country will be in order. These masculine and feminine portrayals literally inscribed on public space tell us that such notions of gender are crucial to the functioning of our society.

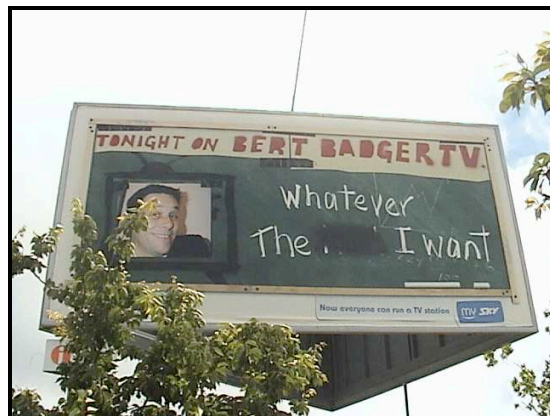


Figure 6-12: Ad for *Bert Badger TV*

Such consistent representations of the 'male gaze' (which polices both men and women with its gendered expectations), are integral to the construction of urban masculinity and femininity (Rendell 2002: 116). For instance the 'Yeah right' *Tui* ads play a role in the proliferation of an 'urban masculinity' in Christchurch, which is why they are so controversial. In Complaint

02/325 the *Tui* slogan “Her butt walked into my hand. Yeah right.” was deemed highly offensive by the complainant on the grounds that,

It encourages and supports behaviour that is demeaning and offensive to women, encourages sexist behaviour, encourages the use of alcohol to justify offensive behaviour by men, contravenes human rights which state that minority groups have a right to live safely in this society, must be illegal as sexual harassment and indecent assault is illegal.



Figure 6-13: ‘Yeah Right’ *Tui* (beer) Ad

DB Breweries Limited maintained that they are “committed to industry self-regulation of advertising” and an active user of the LAPS system. The advertiser’s argument in this case was that such statements, “are not meant to be taken seriously but are merely a humorous statement often reflecting an aspect of New Zealand politics of culture.” This attitude represents Barthes’ notion of the depoliticising power of myth. The advertiser argued that the ‘humour’ (in this case predominantly irony) takes away the social responsibility of the underlying message. They also said they “believe the complaint is narrowly based and a very uncommonly held perspective.” The Board ruled to not uphold the complaint but was in disagreement, stating:

A minority of the Board was of the view that the reference to sexist behaviour in the Advertisement was not saved by the over-all humorous theme of the ‘Yeah Right’ campaign and accordingly, the Advertisement contained an implication of an offensive, aggressive and unduly masculine behaviour... However, the majority of the Board concurred with the interpretation of the Advertisement as stated by DB Breweries, that it actually used humour to promote the fact that sexual harassment was not acceptable in today’s society.

The advertiser also noted that the ‘Yeah right’ campaign had been going since 1995. Complaint 02/352 was directed at the slogan, “I just had a massage. Yeah right.” which the complainant felt promoted the (then illegal) sex industry but the chairman ruled that the ad was humorous and therefore not acceptable to be decided upon. Such decisions reinforce that sexist macho attitudes are alright as long as they are ‘a bit of fun’ despite the fact that large amounts of New Zealanders do not think they are any fun at all. These macho campaigns for beer, combined with the persistence of outdoor advertising for beauty products aimed at women, reinforce that public space is masculine space, and that of the available meanings, the advertiser is only responsible for the literal ones.

As Jackson (1993: 213) argues, we must be aware of the culturally constructed nature of gender, and the way that “patriarchal ideologies operate in the field of visual representation” to be able to subvert those meanings and substitute alternatives for them. Perhaps outdoor advertising, through its continuous pushing of ‘gender boundaries’ is capable of revealing our taken-for-granted assumptions about the gendered nature of space, thereby inciting discussion about these issues that may lead to a shift in the nature of ‘power in space.’ But if outdoor advertising continues to draw on culturally sanctioned gender representations (because of the nature of its ‘three-second-window-of-opportunity’ form of communication) it is doubtful that this will happen, and these questions require much further research and debate. With such a lack of research available for advertisers on outdoor advertising effectiveness, they are sticking with the formulas they have used for the last 100 years: use of stereotypes and stripping meaning down into the most simplistic message possible.

6.2 Class and Ethnicity

Short (1996: 319) argued that masculinity intersects with other sources of social differentiation, including class, race and ethnicity, producing a “complex mosaic of identity and difference.” No place is this tense interconnection more profound than in commercialised public space.

Outdoor advertising, from its very inception, was divided (or divisional) in terms of race and class because it always assumed motorized travel and was aimed at a particular class. Gudis (2001) and Bogart (1995), as well as Luke et al (2000) and Hackbarth et al (2001) are all attentive to the ways in which representations in outdoor advertising, like those in other forms of advertising, were racialized, and that outdoor advertising as a medium presumed a middle-class audience that was mobile with disposable income. Because of these factors, outdoor advertising has historically contributed to the racial and class divisions in society by marking space with messages proclaiming a particular ‘middle-class’ way of life as the ‘right’ way, again relating to Foucault’s notion of the division of power in space through the normalisation of certain ideologies.



Figure 6-14: Photograph by Margaret Bourket-White (Gudis 2004:209)

The photograph in Figure 6-14 was taken as part of the New Deal photographers’ mission to document the disparity between the American dream promised by advertisers, and the reality (Gudis 204: 207). I selected this photograph as a way to introduce the notion that class and ethnicity are intertwined in their relationship to the struggles between ‘public’ and ‘private’ that are manifest in the assumptions of outdoor advertising. This ad mocks the inability of the poor to attain the ad’s promise. As argued in Worldwatch Institute (2006: 28),

The omnipresent billboard, one of the great hallmarks of the advertising age, can be a source of unintended truth or irony. For many of the world's people, the enormous posters feed material aspirations and offer the prospect of progression or escape to a more forgiving world. For others, the juxtapositions they present can appear downright callous, putting in sharp relief the lifestyles of plenty that most will never see.

This kind of juxtaposition was exemplified in Luke et al's (2000: 19) study of tobacco billboards in St Louis, Missouri, where they noted that tobacco billboards were located in the poorer areas whereas no billboards of *any* type were located in or near the most affluent suburbs. To further illustrate the relationship between tobacco advertising and sociodemographic characteristics such as income and race, they combined the billboard data with census data and came up with the same result. In their study of tobacco billboards in Chicago, Hackbarth et al (2001: 558) found a similar correlation between sociodemographic profiles of places and the placement of these types of billboards, despite the fact that the Outdoor Advertising Association of America's voluntary code of principles claims to restrict the placement of ads for age-restricted products. They proved that the voluntary codes were failing as the percentage of tobacco billboards within 500-1000-foot radiuses of schools, parks and playgrounds ranged from 0% to 54%. Also, "African American and Hispanic neighborhoods were disproportionately targeted for outdoor advertising of alcohol and tobacco" (Hackbarth et al 2001: 558).

The observations I have made of Christchurch reflect this sort of placement of billboards in general. Although tobacco advertising is now illegal, there is clearly a link between the sociodemographic nature of an area and the amount and type of outdoor advertising appearing there. For instance, in the more affluent suburb of Fendalton, billboards are strictly not allowed (and the area is zoned accordingly) and the only type of outdoor advertising found there is bus shelter advertising, and the company *Adshel* was not

allowed until recently to advertise liquor on the shelters.⁴⁶ Therefore, the only outdoor advertising for liquor appears on billboards, which are largely located in the central city or on main roads in suburbs zoned for that purpose, which are also residential but much lower socio-economic. In my interview with *Adshel* they deny that ad campaigns are placed based on the socio-economic nature of an area and that the only criteria they use is traffic count and ‘targeted-supernets’ where ads appear near the point of purchase such as shopping centres or grocery stores. Clearly though, the way that suburbs such as Fendalton completely restrict billboards compared to other areas shows a clear ‘class’ orientation to urban planning that resonates with the history of outdoor advertising placement in America.

CULTURE SELLS: ETHNICITY AS A MARKETING TOOL

In Figures 6-15 and 6-16 a Mexican cultural aesthetic is used to sell products completely unrelated to Mexico – yoghurt and coke. Both ads draw on a stereotype of Mexican culture, mainly the sombrero hat and ‘fiesta’ or party. The advertiser aims to use such stereotypes to imbue the product with a ‘party’ feel, but in doing so it connotes that Mexican culture is not to be taken seriously, that it is frivolous. I found that such stereotypical ethnic ads appeared almost exclusively in the higher socio-economic areas. In these ads, stereotypes about particular ethnic identities are used to imbue the product with a ‘cultural flavouring’ that must be quickly interpretable. Because of the nature of outdoor advertising, stereotypes are often used to communicate a message quickly. This type of commercial behaviour is then sanctioned by the ASCB’s reluctance (as discussed in the previous section) to take seriously the concerns of citizens about interpretations of, and connotations in, advertising.

⁴⁶ Agreement between Christchurch City Council and 3M New Zealand Limited 1994.



Figure 6-15: Ad for *Fresh 'n Fruity*



Figure 6-16: Ad for *Coca-Cola 'citra'*



Figure 6-17: Ad for *Just Juice*

CASE STUDY: 'DE' JUST JUICE

Lury (1996: 162) discussed how, since the early ads for Pears' soap, advertisers have continued to use imperial and colonial iconography to promote their brands. Facets of this iconography include the stereotype of the happy servant and the 'relaxed' islander. These 'racial' representations in consumer culture are promoted as a "matter of style, something that can be put on or taken off at will," which has the consequence of producing race and ethnicity as a cultural and aesthetic category, thereby emptying it of any real meaning or significance, other than its relationship to the product it is promoting (Lury 1996: 165). Lury (1996: 168) then asks, is the choice to adopt these racial subjectivities equally available to all? Some groups of people do not have the choice to 'adopt a race aesthetic' because they are already 'raced' and therefore already categorised, as opposed to the white person who is seen to be 'raceless' and can therefore take on any new form of identity. Therefore, is it really 'just' juice? Complaints about ethnicity in outdoor advertising did not appear in my sample, but I would argue that the stereotypical representations they espouse are legitimised through the general tone of regulatory discourses discussed in relation to gender. As Bourket-White's photograph illustrates, it is the presence of these representations in *public space* that makes the 'othering' so absolute.

CLASS & VISUAL CULTURE



Figure 6-18: Public Service ad for *Salvation Army*

Croteau & Hoynes (2000: 215) argue that class considerations underlie the media in a major way by connecting advertisers, producers, content, and audiences in the service of the class who can afford to consume, promoting consumerism as the ultimate value and belief system. They state,

Advertising presumes and promotes a culture of consumption, normalizing middle- or even upper-middle-class lifestyles and making buying power a measure of both virtue and freedom. In the process, advertising elevates certain values—specifically, those associated with acquiring wealth and consuming goods—to an almost religious status. Moreover, advertising promotes a worldview that stresses the individual and the realm of private life, ignoring collective values and the terrain of the public world (Croteau & Hoynes 2000: 184).

Bogart (1995) looked at the link between class and outdoor advertising in her discussion of urban planning. She argued that issues of race and class were at the heart of the urban planners' arguments, but were not expressed explicitly (Bogart 1995: 99). Advertisements for 'social services' such as the ad for the *Salvation Army* (Figure 6-18) generally appeared in lower socio-economic parts of Christchurch. Their lack of appearance in higher socio-economic areas is easily interpretable as making a judgement that they are somehow exempt from social problems such as child abuse and alcohol and drug addiction, although the advertisers maintain it is not deliberate. Such assumptions underpin and shape the spaces of the city. Short (1996: 207) considers the relationship between the city and class, ethnicity, gender and sexual identity, arguing that "The divisions of society are embodied in space and place" (Short 1996: 207). Short's work is useful as a basis for looking at the relationship between outdoor advertising, class and ethnicity in Christchurch. It was my observation in the field research that the outdoor advertising in lower-socio-economic areas consisted of highly masculinized representations in alcohol ads, along with a greater amount of ads for social services. Outdoor advertising in higher-socio-economic areas, however, consisted of beauty and 'ethnicised' advertising confirming the ideology that such aesthetic understandings of difference are only applicable to the 'unraced' – the rich and white who occupy those areas.

I questioned the representative from *Adshel* about the placement of advertising based on socio-economics. They argued, in the excerpt below, that their philosophy of ‘placement’ of ads was consistency, as it breaks down social barriers, since everyone is under the illusion that they are getting the same:

ANDREW: ...It breaks down social barriers as well. If you get a style of shelter here, in Fendalton for example, and the same style of shelter in Aranui, you don’t get the ‘us and them’ as well.

[...]

KEVIN: And we *would* want to avoid it as well because what that lends to is advertising in a particular area is more expensive than say a lower socio-economic area, when in theory you’ve got the same number of people going past a shelter, the same amount of exposure and both of them can be influenced in the same way.

As mentioned in “Re-thinking History” what outdoor advertisers say and do in relation to social responsibility is often quite different.

As Harvey (1993: 9), drawing on the work of Lefebvre, famously argues, “class struggle is everywhere inscribed in space through the uneven development of the qualities of places.” The silence that exists around this issue – the unwillingness to admit that the planning and development of public spaces is completely underscored by class difference – perpetuates the inequality of places. Inequality is literally *built into* public space. Places within Christchurch, such as Linwood, earn a particular reputation, which is continually reinforced by class and race prejudices in urban growth. The result for the public who inhabit these labelled spaces, Harvey (1993: 22) argues, are “patterns of behaviour, both public and private, that turn fantasy into reality. The political-economic possibilities of place (re)construction are, in short, highly coloured by the evaluative manner of place representation.”

6.3 Graffiti as Cultural Resistance?

“Corporate advertising is ubiquitous, insistent, and naturalized. It is identified not as political speech but as ‘economic speech,’ and this identification shields it from political critique. In the economic zone of the

visual there is no free speech at all. There is, however, all the speech money can buy. Normally, that speech echoes in the silence of opposing speech. All we hear is the speech of the billboard and the display window. In all this din, rarely is there objection or dissent” (Norton 2001: 192).

The concept of Disneyization (discussed in Section 2.2) is a relevant starting point for looking at graffiti as a form of cultural resistance to the commercialization of public space. As Bryman (2004: 172) argued,

Citizenship under Disneyization almost comes to be defined in terms of one’s capacity to consume. Consequently...those without the capacity to consume or who are deemed to have a limited capacity to do so, or those who might hinder the consumption inclinations of consumers are either excluded or are kept under the watchful gaze of security cameras and guards.

Hence anti-consumerist behaviour becomes criminal and deviant, and it becomes ‘natural’ to expect such behaviour to become punished, hence commercial culture and law become one and the same. The examples of graffiti I witnessed on outdoor advertising in Christchurch tell us much about the struggle over public space that exists everyday, but is never conceptualised as such. The rhetoric of commercial power and rights to control public space and amenities is so firmly entrenched in our society, that those acting under another value system, those who see public space as their own, are seen as deviant. There are two categories of graffiti discussed in this section: what I will refer to as ‘unorganised’ graffiti (seemingly random acts) and ‘organised’ graffiti which directly aim to subvert commercial messages on the street.

UNORGANISED GRAFFITI



Figure 6-19: ‘Tagging’ on an *Adshel* bus shelter, Papanui

Myers (1999: 112) argues that the modification of outdoor advertising messages reminds us that this is *public* space. Graffiti reveals the cultural resistance to the ‘top-down’ approach to city planning (Paddison & Sharp 2003: 7). In my discussion about graffiti with *Adshel*, Andrew said that Christchurch has one of the highest rates of vandalism of bus shelters. When I asked the *Adshel* representatives why they think people graffiti and vandalise outdoor advertising, one of the main reasons was for ‘a thrill’ and to steal the posters. To counter this, *Adshel* would encourage people to ask for them, and advertisers saw this as a positive response to their message. Another way that outdoor advertisers maintain control over their spaces is by creating obstacles to graffiti, such as patterned glass to discourage scratching. This response, however, leads to a continual struggle for control over the use of such spaces.

In ‘writing property and power’ Norton (2001) attends to the way discourses of legitimacy around what is visually ‘acceptable’ in the city are intimately bound up with the power relations of the city, in what is allowed to be seen and what is constructed to be invisible and work invisibly to maintain the social order. Graffiti, Norton argues, is delegitimised as a form of political or social protest through the rhetoric of ‘vandalism’ and hence commercial speech is given the power of legitimacy because it has been paid for (Norton 2001: 190).

Corporate advertising, on the other hand, is more obtrusive. We are forced to see “the visual assertions of capitalism” (Norton 2001: 191). In opposition to this inescapable commercial voice,

Graffiti calls forth all the anxieties of liberal modernity. The tension between property rights and the right to free speech is clear enough when the striker writes on the factory wall. The condemnation of such graffiti points out the radical disparity of power between capitalists and workers, and reveals how the seemingly neutral categories of art and speech and property reinforce the hierarchical relation of those who own and those who labor. Graffiti also makes it apparent that those with more property may also have more speech (Norton 2001: 194).

By ‘tagging’ and otherwise altering bus shelters, it could be argued that citizens are making a statement about the perceived ‘publicness’ of the structure. In inscribing their own messages on outdoor advertising, however temporary they may be, members of the public are refusing to accept the one-way-flow of advertising messages. Street furniture is provided as a public amenity and graffiti represents a resistance to the private rules imposed on these supposed public spaces. The graffiti in Figure 6-20 reveals a similar disobedience to messages of urban governance grounded in the middle-class values of ‘the city beautiful.’ The ‘tagging’ of public property that occurs regularly represents a form of resistance to the private ownership, and thereby the private rules, that govern space.



Figure 6-20: Graffiti near railway crossing and commercial district, Riccarton

SUBVERTISING

I also questioned *Adshel* about the existence of anti-advertising type vandalism and if they encountered in on their street furniture. They said they did not, and made sense of this by arguing that outdoor advertising which supports a public amenity, such as bus shelters, does not receive such overt resistance as the ‘white noise’ of billboards. As Klein points out, outdoor advertising has become such a taken-for-granted in our global western culture, advertisers are even conceptualising themselves as the *same* as graffiti artists, in that they think their use of space is equal. In Canada the adman Michael Chesney saw himself as “a distant relative of the graffiti kids... The way he saw it, as a commercial artist and billboard salesman he was also a creature of the streets, because even if he was painting for corporate clients, he, like the graffiti artists, left his mark on walls” (Klein 2000: 36). Similarly, as discussed in the literature review, Bernstein (2004: 116) equated presence in the street to ‘street cred.’ Clearly advertisers do not realise the difference that money and power bring to the equation.

As Heath and Potter (2004: 102) argue, there is evidence that individuals are critical of consumer society, reflected in a mass of ‘anti-consumerism’ cultural products such as the films *Fight Club* and *American Beauty*, and books such as *No Logo*. Forms of ‘guerilla subvertising’ existed as early as the beginning of the 20th century when the Reverend S.G. Wood, who became known as the ‘minister militant,’ scoured the town of Blanford, Massachusetts each morning for outdoor advertisements, ripping them down (Schultz 1984: 41). The insurgent political movement of ‘subvertising’ fronted by *Adbusters*, “seeks to undermine the marketing rhetoric of multinational corporations, specifically through such practices as media hoaxing, corporate sabotage, billboard ‘liberation,’ and trademark infringement” (Harold 2004: 190). Lloyd argues that subvertising, “reveals that the visual in the street is indeed a space of contested meaning and the site of a struggle for cultural power” (Lloyd 2003: 2). The main concern unifying culture jammers is contention over the commodifying of culture and public space (Lloyd 2003: 2).

This form of ‘culture jamming’ has taken place in New Zealand with subversion of the controversial *Tui* ‘Yeah Right’ billboards. An article titled, “The unlikely symbiosis between advertisers and those who hijack their campaigns” appeared in the July 17, 2004 issue of *The Listener* (Nippert 2004: 28-29). The article stated that advertisers relished the attention, perceiving it as a reflection of the “strength of the brand.” Many of the altered billboard messages, most of which were ironical statements on current political topics such as war and pesticides, were incorporated into the official campaign, although the advertiser did claim there was a ‘line’ of offensiveness they could not cross because they are “answerable to the Advertising Standards Authority.” What this confirms is what critics of “billboard liberation” have claimed all along—ultimately consumer culture will swallow resistance.

Harold (2004: 190) is critical of the value of ‘rhetorical sabotage’ as,

...it does little to address the rhetoric of contemporary marketing—a mode of power that is quite happy to oblige subversive rhetoric and shocking imagery. Indeed, parody and irony are the dominant motifs of many successful mass-marketing campaigns.

Her criticism of parody is that it tells the audience that things are not as they should be, but fails to provide possible alternatives (Harold 2004: 192). So with graffiti being outlawed and subvertising being ineffectual, what is left to challenge the commercialisation of public space? Culture jammers’ fiercest criticism of large corporations is that they believe they are ‘members of the public’ and therefore have the right to claim public space (Lloyd 2003: 3). Culture jammers argue, “they have a right to alter billboards they never asked to see and cannot afford to answer with advertisements of their own.” Lloyd is arguing that the public, citizens who own the public spaces, do not have power to ‘talk back’ to the messages they encounter in those commercial spaces which are meant to be their own. So when *Adshel* say they are providing a benefit to the community, does that merely disguise the greater issue of their ability to control public discourse? The proliferation of the commercial means that meaning only

becomes possible through purchase, or through ‘acceptable’ rhetorical sabotage.

7 CONCLUSION

Outdoor advertising in Christchurch takes its inspiration from around the globe. Billposters were plastering cities in the United States since the 1800s, and although the medium has undergone intense standardisation in response to criticisms by so-called ‘reformers’ the medium is still one that divides and classifies space according to middle-class values. As the world has become increasingly globalised, particularly the trend towards corporate consolidation and the interweaving of private interests with local politics, cities have become homogenised through the infiltration of out-of-home marketing, inscribing distinct one-way flows of communication upon shared spaces. The commercialism of space by outdoor advertising has largely gone unquestioned, or when it has been challenged the critical voice has not been one truly operating in the interests of ‘the public’ but rather a *particular* public – male, white and privileged. Governance and regulatory discourses assure us that there still exists a ‘public space’ despite clear evidence to the contrary. Certainly our streets are shared, but they are not public.

This thesis has argued that we need to revise our thinking about the discourses adexecs use to legitimise their colonization of space. Outdoor advertisers have generally been perceived as pioneers, striking out against conservative city planners. On the contrary, city planners have little more than the illusion of control over the proliferation of outdoor advertising. If anything city planners stand to *benefit* from cooperation with outdoor advertisers, particularly when amenities such as street furniture can be gained without a chunk of public funds. The Christchurch City Council has a City Plan with a specific ‘objective’ directed at outdoor advertising, hoping to ‘contain’ it within appropriate zones, at appropriate sizes so it will not detract from the ‘aesthetic coherence’ of Christchurch. This focus on aesthetics neglects the cultural consequences of commercialised public spaces, and disables critical conversations on them through sheer disregard. Opposition on a global scale has taken the form of subvertising which,

because of its reputation as extremist and ‘fringe,’ does not provide accessible discourses everyday people can use to challenge the invasion of commercial values in shared spaces.

Outdoor advertising as an institution of power in consumer capitalism has not received the critical attention that television advertising has. Scholars have, however, shown that its relationship to public space makes it problematic in unique ways, particularly by imbuing space with stereotypical notions of sexuality, ethnicity and class. Its presence supports the notion that public space is not ‘blank.’ Complaints made to the Advertising Standards Complaints Board between 2000 and 2004 reveal the stereotypes advertisers use in their necessity to communicate quickly pervade shared space and in doing so offend the public in serious ways. Generally the public’s offence to what is *implied* by advertising messages is undermined by a set of Codes ill-equipped to regulate the complex nature of interpretation. Because the complaints process is a model of self-regulation, advertisers are able to control it, ensuring discussion remains focussed on a narrow range of particularly literal interpretations of ads. Advertisers have access to lawyers and public relations experts who have an almost magical ability to transform a complaint about ideology into a simplified discussion of humour, artistic expression and innocent representation. Those who challenge advertising are often vilified and seen to not be representative of “generally prevailing community standards.”

Judging by a select sample of advertisements in Christchurch there is plenty to be worried about as regards the messages we lack the freedom to escape. Sexually suggestive advertisements for underwear are placed where high school children catch buses. Ads for female hygiene products loom large, offering up a dose of Foucauldian surveillance to the docile bodies of the consumer spectacle. Masculine-imbued beer advertisements remind men of their obligations to bravery, hard work and sexist attitudes. Advertisers wanting to ‘spice up’ their campaigns for soft-drinks can readily appropriate familiar ethnic stereotypes such as Mexican sombreros or the charming broken English of a Pacific people. As this thesis has shown, such limited

representational regimes are even more problematic in “a globalizing capitalist economy” that is “restructuring the public sphere and reshaping its modes of exclusion” (McLaughlin 2004: 156).

The writing on the wall—graffiti that is—offers some hope that the conversation is not completely one-way. The consistent struggle between outdoor advertisers and members of the public who find ways to deface their products can be read as a faint but definite challenge to the relentless commercial hum. This thesis has aimed to open a new debate on the consequences for public space of outdoor advertising. It is hoped that if the medium is better understood scholars can begin to do for this medium what has been done for television advertising. Further research needs to be done into what people do with outdoor advertising, and how they respond to it beyond the industry-sanctioned complaints process, in snippets of news coverage and in billboard liberation. Questions that emerge from this thesis include: How do everyday people navigate the commercially saturated terrain? How is globalisation influencing the responses of local governments to an increased push towards privatisation—and what role do citizens have in that response? Should scholars re-evaluate the way the notion of ‘public’ and ‘public space’ are often taken for granted in the mass communication discipline?

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9 APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Phone Interviews with *ParkingSpace* and *Adfence* and Interviews with *isite* and *Phantom Billstickers*:

- Can you please explain briefly what [COMPANY NAME] does and your role in that process?
- What do you personally *enjoy* about the Outdoor Advertising industry?
- Do you ever ‘self-regulate’ about the placement of particular ads?
- Who decides what ads are appropriate and where they will go?
- What sorts of reactions do you get from the public to this media?
- How does OA change or contribute to the style of Christchurch city?
- Do you think there are any *unintended* consequences of OA on the city or the public?
- How much of this process is ‘local’ and how much is determined by forces beyond Christchurch?
- Follow up questions as necessary depending on how the interviewee responds...

Interview with Mike Grey, former owner/operator of *Waho* (now *isite*):

- When did you decide to do billboards and what was it about that particular media that appealed to you?
- What were the arguments the Christchurch City Council put up against billboards and how did you overcome them?
- What other challenges did you face in growing your business?
- What regulations and regulating bodies were you governed by and how did these change over time?
- What are the most interesting things that have happened throughout your career in the billboard industry?

- What sorts of reactions did you get from the public to billboards and to any ads in particular?
- How do you think OA changes or contributes to the style of Christchurch city?
- Do you think there are any *unintended* consequences of OA on the city or the public?
- What do you see for the future of OA in Christchurch?

Interview with Kevin and Andrew from *Adshel*:

- *Adshel* describes itself as ‘a provider of street furniture solutions.’ How would you sum up the company’s philosophy?
- Who do you see as the ‘audience’ or ‘consumers’ of your products and services?
- In Christchurch, how many different street furniture designs are there and how did *Adshel* decide which designs were appropriate for certain spaces?
- Regarding the ‘Targeted Supernets’ in what ways do you target *particular* audiences through the strategic use of space in Christchurch?
- How do you think OA changes or contributes to the style of Christchurch city?
- What responses do you get from the public to the outdoor medium?
- What is *Adshel*’s relationship to *APN* and *Clear Channel*? What are the benefits of these partnerships?
- It also states on your website that *Adshel* offers ‘local vision and global support.’ What exactly does this mean and how do you negotiate global trends against local customs and culture?
- What is *Adshel*’s relationship with the CCC and what major rules and regulations are you governed by, here and globally?

- It says on the website that *Adshel* takes full responsibility for the cleaning and maintenance of the furniture and that “all designs and materials utilised are to help minimise the effects of vandalism” and *Adshel* also carries out “proactive and preventative maintenance.”
Why do you think vandalism occurs?
- I have seen many ‘public information’ campaigns on *Adshel* sites, such as the Salvation Army and the Human Rights Film Festival.
What is *Adshel*’s policy on this sort of charity?

Interview with Hillary Souter, Director of the ASA:

- What is the ASA working to achieve?
- Who is the ASA accountable to?
- Is it correct that there are 4 reps of the ad industry on the board, and 4 reps of the public? What is the rationale behind this representation and how was it decided upon?
- How are the representatives of the *public* on the complaints board decided upon?
- Is there an industry representative for ‘outdoor advertising’?
- How are the codes and principles created?
- How do you know what the public wants?
- Does the ASA re-evaluate its codes and principles in relation to the changes in what is socially acceptable?
- How are those principles and codes *applied* to complaints in the decision-making process?
- When the members of the complaints board disagree on a complaint, how do you negotiate to reach a final decision?
- Regarding the appeals process, what is meant by ‘natural justice’ and what does it mean when an appeal is ‘adjourned’?

- Since 2000 there has been a clear trend of an increase in the number of complaints about outdoor advertising, except for 2003. Did something change that year?
- Do you think this upward trend in the number of complaints is related to an increase in the *amount* of outdoor advertising, or people just *noticing* it more?
- Regarding the 30 complaints made about the *MadGE* billboard, why do you think that ad received so many more complaints than many other ads with provocative imagery? What was so exceptional about that one?
- What is the most important principle when making decisions about complaints related to outdoor advertising?

Interview with Neil Carrie, Heritage Planner at the CCC:

- What is your role in the CCC now and how has that changed over time?
- When did outdoor advertising (in terms of billboards and posters) first emerge in Christchurch as you remember it?
- When did you first become involved with the regulation of outdoor signage and advertising?
- What are the major issues that you take with outdoor advertising?
- What do you see as the City Council's role in relation to outdoor advertising in public space?
- What sorts of reactions do you get from the *public* to outdoor advertising?
- What do you see as the *benefits* of outdoor advertising?
- What would you like to see for the future of outdoor advertising in Christchurch?