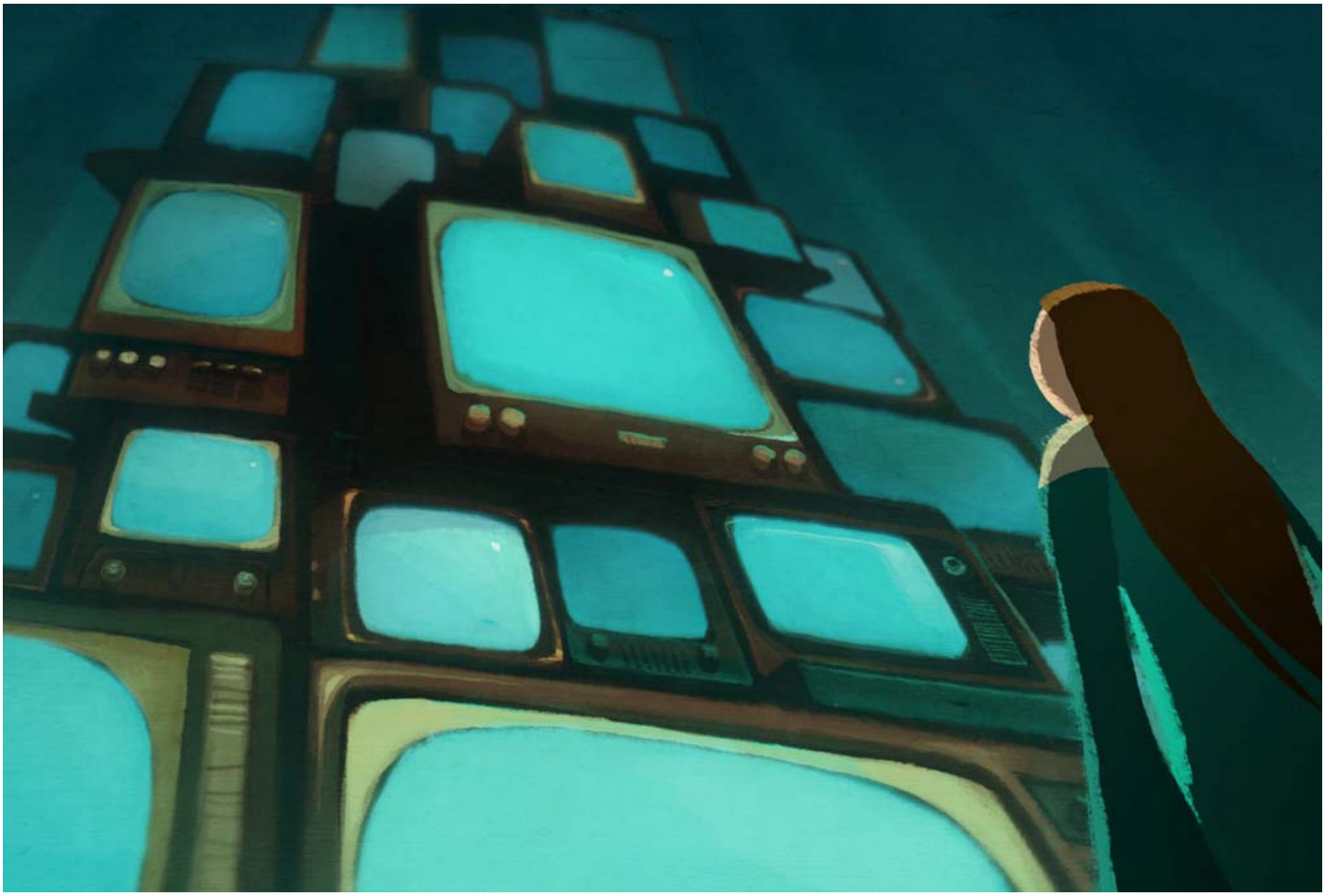
Entertain Me

The added value of Animated Shorts as Advertisements



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Summary

This thesis is an investigation of the use of animated shorts as an advertising medium, specifically its added value and effectiveness. I approached this topic by first looking at advertising in general, particularly its relationship to animation. This establishes a backdrop against which the phenomenon of animated shorts as advertisements, including the factors which led to the creation of these animated shorts, can be placed.

Following this are two case studies of animated shorts as advertisements: *Trembled Blossoms* by Prada and *Happiness Factory: The Movie* by Coca-Cola. These case studies include a look into the overall campaign in which the animations were created, a synopsis and analysis of the animations, and conclusions on their added value and effectiveness. Also included in this thesis is a chapter on the animated short I created for this EMMA project, Trichrome Blue.

After completing the case studies and reflecting on their relevance to current advertising practices, it became clear to me that the main added value of animated shorts is their entertainment value. This is an enjoyable detail for viewers, but most importantly, it has become a marketing tactic for companies to make themselves stand out and appear to rise above less popular advertising practices. By presenting higher quality and a more enjoyable experience to viewers, companies hope to gain the approval of audiences and, crucially, emphasize the fact that they have the funds and fame to take animated commercials a step further.

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1. Introduction

If there's one thing I can be certain of after a good five years of studying animation, it is that studying animation changes how you see things. Not only does one begin to measure movements in keyframes or see beautiful scenery as potential establishing shots, but one also begins developing a talent for identifying and analyzing any and all animation in sight. This occurs much to the irritation of any non-animators in the area who do not care to hear any speculation on how a particular effect was achieved, or confusing animator terms which don't make sense to anyone who has never used Adobe After Effects. When I end up watching animated films with non-animators, I'm often told to keep my mouth shut and just let them watch. However, ever since I began to notice the abundance of animation during the commercial break, there has been no stopping me. Not a single animation passes by unnoticed, from simple motion graphics to fully animated commercials.

In my long journey towards becoming a full-fledged animation critic for almost every commercial I see, I have begun to notice subtle changes in how animation is being used. It appears that the quality of animation is increasing, as well as the use of interesting and appealing style choices. Certain brands seem to be investing in animation that tickles the imagination of not only any viewer, but that of artists and designers as well. Even animation students such as myself may find themselves impressed by some of the animated commercials that pass by.

Of course, there is no need to limit oneself to the relatively small and repetitive selection of commercials viewable during the commercial break. From the portfolio websites of animation studios to YouTube, one can find almost anything on the internet. Scattered across the web are commercials that flaunt exceptional quality, entertaining narratives and attractive visual styles. These are commercials that have a life of their own, and which people actively go out of their way to watch, regardless of what it is advertising. They can almost be seen as animated shorts in their own right, even though they do promote a brand. In fact, two animations – *Happiness Factory: The Movie* for Coca-Cola and *Trembled Blossoms* for Prada – actually are animated shorts, but are also commercials.

Is this a new phenomenon? Has the demand for animated commercials grown to such an extent that companies are funding the creation of entire shorts? Surely Coca-Cola and Prada have more than enough exposure through other advertising media. Magazine spreads, television spots, and

numerous other ads for these companies can be seen everywhere. These brands, although enormously different from one another, are both so famous that perhaps their reputation as cultural icons is promotion enough. And yet both of them have invested in the creation of animated shorts to promote themselves.

My fascination with these new developments in the advertising industry has formed the inspiration for my EMMA project. As a commercial animator, I am very curious as to how the workings of an animated short can serve commercial needs rather than conflict with them. Being someone who enjoys making shorts as well as working commercially, I feel this knowledge would be useful to me, not to mention provide a good excuse to explore the relationship between advertising and animation in general, both in the form of research as well as creatively, in the form of an animation.

The research question for this paper is therefore: "What is the added value of using animated shorts as an advertising tool?" In order to address this question, I will look into the history of advertising in chapter 2, particularly its relationship to visual media, as well as newer developments in the advertising world. Hopefully, this will form the background information necessary to investigate the need for animated shorts as advertisements. Next, I will be looking into the relationship between advertising and animation in chapter 3, particularly the reasons why animation is used for advertising purposes. Newer developments in the animation world will also be taken into account, especially developments that affect the ways in which animation is used commercially. After establishing a clear definition of the phenomenon 'animated shorts as advertisements' in chapter 4, two animated shorts which fit the definition will be analyzed as case studies in chapter 5: *Trembled Blossoms* by Prada and *Happiness Factory: The Movie* by Coca-Cola. Finally, chapter 6 will be dedicated to fitting my own animation, *Trichrome Blue,* into the context of this thesis.

Before continuing, I'd like to address the term 'added value,' which is troublesome due to its subjective nature. Basically, it means different things to different people. In the case of this thesis, there are three main groups which are relevant to the subject of animated shorts as commercials, but which may all have different opinions of what its 'added value' may be. These groups are:

a. The **company** commissioning the animation, who may be primarily interested in its potential as a promotional tool.

b. The **animator** creating the commercial, who may be primarily interested in the creative possibilities the animation provides.
c. The **audience** viewing the short, who may be primarily interested in its value as a form of entertainment.

For each different group, an entirely different paper could be written. Taking all of these different views, needs and roles into account may result in too much information to answer the research question clearly.

In order to prevent this from happening, the following sub-question will be kept in mind throughout: *What does the animated short achieve that a different advertising form could not?* This means that only the aspects of the commercial that are specific to its nature as an animated short will be taken into account. To illustrate, the fact that the coca-cola bottle is featured in *Happiness Factory: The Movie* is not relevant to assessing the animation's "added value." However, the way in which the coca-cola bottle becomes a plot device in an almost 4 minute narrative, something a TV spot cannot achieve, is relevant. This way, the amount of information regarding the commercial can be filtered, and thus the 'added value' can be clearly and thoroughly assessed.

2. The evolution and current state of advertising

2.1. History

The origins of advertising can be traced back to the Middle Ages[1], but advertising as we know it today took its form in magazine ads and billboards at the turn of the century[2]. What started as simple images and signs soon turned into a more sophisticated enterprise, with campaigns and slogans to capture the attention of potential customers. This increased sophistication resulted in the birth of advertising agencies, which provided a solution for companies that did not understand how advertising worked.[3] Thus, advertising became a field of work in its own right.

Many factors shaped advertising during the first half of the 20th century. New media came into existence which provided new venues for advertising, such as radio and television, not to mention a new consumer culture which resulted from the birth of mass production. In Rothenberg's *Advertising Century* article for Advertising Age, this new suburban setting could be described as "a landscape of vast sameness -- one in which a powerful brand could have national, even multinational reach -- and a desire for individuality that could only be satisfied by brand differentiation."[4] Despite this, many campaigns focused not on brand identity but instead consisted of testimonials by doctors and scientists, or long lists of characteristics which was intended to prove the superiority of a given product[5].

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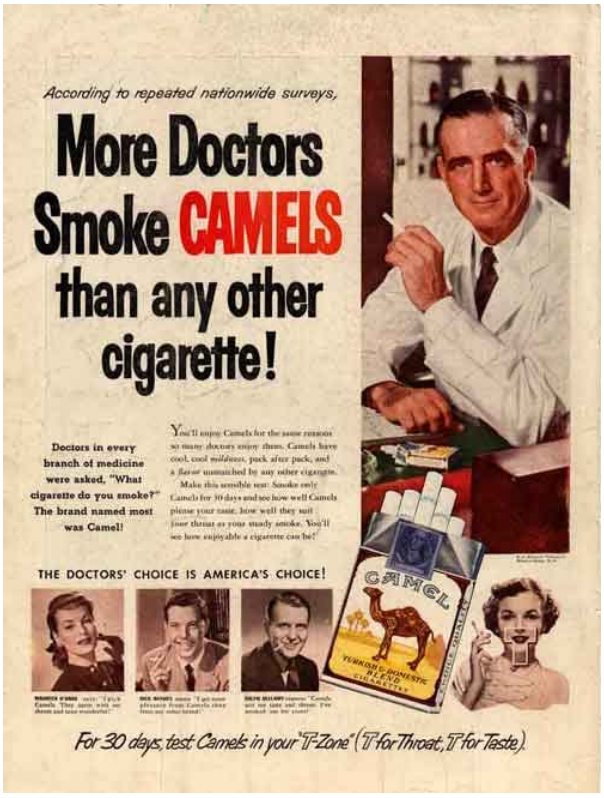
[1] Odih, 2007, p. 23
[2] Rothenberg, 1999.
[3] Rothenberg, 1999. An excerpt from his article *The Advertising Century*: "Advertising was undeniably working to draw these modernizing Americans to all manner of new product, yet no one knew how it worked. 'I know I waste half the money I spend on advertising,' department store pioneer John Wanamaker said. 'the problem is, I don't know which half.'"
[4] Rothenberg, 1999.
[5] Rothenberg, 1999.



An ad for Camel cigarettes, featuring testimonials from doctors.

Source: http://smartideamarketing.com/

By the 1950's, there were numerous advertising agencies who all practiced the same tried-and-true techniques of repetition and simple, memorable slogans. It was high time for some change, which occurred in 1959, when Volkswagen published a number of magazine ads by Bill Bernbach. They were funny, clever, simple, and celebrated the unique and arguably quirky characteristics of the Volkswagen. Rather than pretend to be something else, the ads capitalized on the familiar and recognizable identity of the Volkswagen brand. These ads had a refreshing touch of "personality, humor, and overall creative touch"[6] which ultimately resulted in what is known as the Creative Revolution in advertising. This 'revolution' can be described as a period in which steps were made towards "creating a more informal and egalitarian atmosphere … in the ad agency so as to encourage creativity."[7]

[6] *Advertising Legends: Bill Bernbach*
[7] *Advertising Legends: Bill Bernbach*

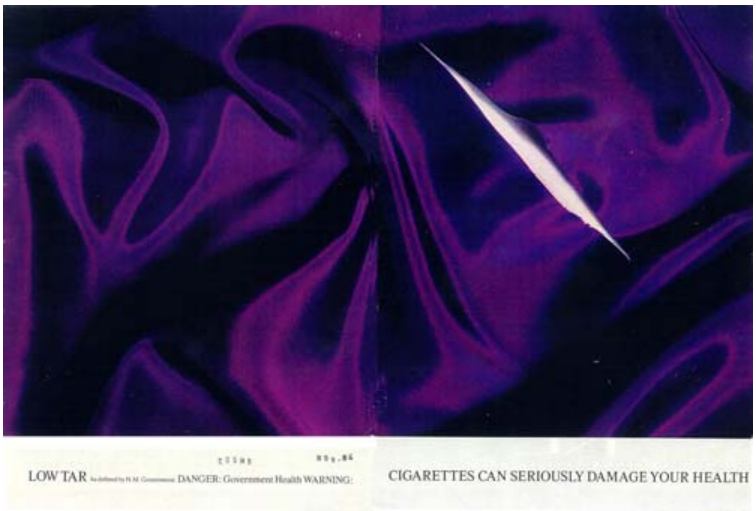
Volkswagen Ad, 1959.

Source: icmcreative.co.uk

This revolution provided more room for creative approaches within the advertising industry, and above all, proved that these approaches could be effective, thus paving the way for the future of advertising. Later in the 20th century, new rules for cigarette ads motivated another creative and innovative campaign. In 1976, it was decided that smoking ads were no longer allowed to misrepresent the consequences of tobacco by portraying healthy and happy people[8]. This put an end to the majority of smoking campaigns and called for a new attempt. For the new Silk Cut campaign, inspiration was drawn from dadaists and surrealists to create highly suggestive visual puns[9]. The ads contained very little information about the cigarettes themselves, instead leaning heavily on the strength of the visual puns to work. Of the fact that the agency was accused of shamelessly borrowing the style of the surrealists in their ads, they said that "by turning to these

[8] Gibbons, 2005, p. 61
[9] Gibbons, 2005, p. 62

sources, they had experienced a marked degree of creative liberation as well as the opportunity of functioning as artists."



Silk cut ad, 1984

Source: creativereview.co.uk

In recent years, advertising has become increasingly brand oriented. Rothenberg points out that "the boundary-blurring Internet has placed renewed emphasis on the importance of brands, now deemed the only forces powerful enough to draw the audience's eye and income through the chaos of the World Wide Web. "[10] Products exist in huge numbers and countless variations, and on top of that, are highly accessible not only in stores, but also through the internet. Brands must go even further to be noticed, and thanks to the creative revolution, allowing artists a great deal of creative freedom has proven to be one of many techniques that may help brands to increase their popularity and fame.

2.2. Advertising and Visual Media

Central to advertising as a whole are visual media. Throughout its history, advertising depended heavily on logo design, style, illustrations, photographs, and more. These elements served to define the style and attitude of the product, and speak to specific target audiences. On top of that, the creative revolution and many campaigns that came afterward set the example for a new take on visuals. A "less is more" approach became preferable to more detailed ones, using imagery to its maximum suggestive potential in the form of visual puns.

[10] Rothenberg, 1999

Another way in which visual media and advertising are closely linked is due to their role as communicative tools which companies use to reach out to consumers. In his investigation of how to develop a brand's visual identity, Jozua Douglas discusses the crucial reasons for companies to adopt a consistent and effective system of visual information, which includes the need to appear unified and structured to the outside world[11]. Douglas suggests techniques for developing this visual identity, including an "identity matrix" in which companies make a list of important characteristics to describe themselves and translate this into understandable and clear adjectives. These must form the inspiration for a designer or artist to translate these qualities into logos, stationary, or even advertisements. In this way, the nature and character of the company becomes translated into the universal language of visual media, which consumers, who are often foreign to the inner workings of corporations, can easily and quickly understand. Visual media are clearly the communicative link between the company and the consumer, of which advertising forms a significant chunk.

More evidence of how advertising clearly leans heavily on the effectiveness of visual media is its close relationship to the visual arts. In her book *Art and Advertising,* Joan Gibbons discusses the various ways in which the art and advertising world have drawn inspiration from one another[12]. Although these two worlds are seen as opposites, artists such as Norman Rockwell are proof that it is possible to function in both fields simultaneously, despite the fact that these worlds are still not seen as one and the same[13]. The fine art world has also been known to draw inspiration from the world of advertising, ranging from Andy Warhol to Tracey Emin, whose neon signs Gibbons investigates thoroughly. Conversely, art movements have inspired advertising campaigns, such as the surrealists for the Silk Cut campaign or the influence of the abject art movement on Benetton's famous Shock of Reality campaign[14].

In some cases, the use of art has formed the brand image completely, such as in the case of Absolut Vodka. The iconic bottle shape and design, combined with the name and standard layout, was portrayed by a huge variety of artists in an ad campaign, initiated by Andy Warhol's version in

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[11] Douglas, 2003
[12] Gibbons, 2005
[13] Bogart, 1997. In the introduction of her book *Artists, Advertising and the borders of Art,* she analyzes Rockwell's work in order to address the tension between different fields of art. An excerpt: "… Rockwell's work – both as image and as productive activity – raises important issues that are central to the definition of art in this century. It highlights questions – still unresolved – about the status of the artist, the nature of artistic work, the relationship between artist and public, and the relationship between fine art, popular culture, and commerce in a society shaped by national advertising and mass media." pp. 3
[14] Gibbons, 2005, p. 80

1985. This increased the fame of Absolut Vodka, a phenomenon which Gibbons describes as the creation of a celebrity brand[15], facilitated purely by an essential and recognizable visual cue. The creation of such a visual signature style can become the central strategy of an advertising campaign, showing how visuals can not only be important, but even essential to advertising.

Artists' editions of Absolut Vodka ads.

Source: absolutad.com

2.3. New developments

Since the creative revolution, a number of developments have taken place which are changing the landscape of advertising. One of these is economic change. Globalization has resulted in a gradual stagnation of markets, with very few holes left to fill. According to Jan Rijkenberg in his book *Concepting,* companies are starting to grow "sideways" rather than "upwards," a process in which most products which can be sold already exist[16]. Much like the economic atmosphere of the 50's, when suburbanization occurred on a large scale, companies compete fiercely to sell what are, at the end of the day, very similar products. Rijkenberg argues that, although companies try and make their product stand out by making superficial changes to its design, the most effective and successful approach is to create a more concept-oriented brand identity.

[15] Gibbons, 2005, p. 138
[16] Rijkenberg, 2001

Another important development is the growth of a new kind of audience and consumer base. Although the existence of postmodernism has been debated[17], there has definitely been an increase in certain mindsets which are associated with postmodernism. These mindsets include increased self-awareness, a heightened ability to understand different signs and symbols, and, resulting from that, an ability to grasp intertextual meanings. Today, an audience can easily pick up on references to an enormous range of texts, including films, books, comics, TV shows, and so on. This provides new possibilities but also new challenges for advertising campaigns today.

Another interesting factor is the evolution from the conventional target group into a new kind of group[18]. Whereas traditionally a group of individuals with certain characteristics and mindsets were chosen as the target of advertisements, nowadays it is possible to work the other way around. Mindsets can be created and promoted by companies on a much broader scale, which consumers then choose to associate themselves with because it helps them to develop their own identity and way of thinking. In this sense, an advertisement functions as a way for people to define their own lifestyle, and consumers are the ones that target companies instead of the other way around. Rijkenberg argues that this is the most effective approach for companies to take if they want to survive in the long term.

Of course, the most enormous change to advertising has been the growth of the internet. Besides obviously providing a new venue for advertising, it has impacted western culture at large. The accessibility of information, particularly through search engines, has spawned a generation of curious and investigative individuals. Internet communities and discussion forums are also an important source of information and forms the basis for viral internet campaigns, in which information is spread across the internet like a virus, facilitated by the huge numbers of communication media available to internet surfers. Besides internet, there are other media which enhance one's ability to communicate and engage in media, such as mobile phones and portable music players, for example iPods.

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[17] This has been argued by a number of individuals, but for the sake of reference I can name *Against Postmodernism: A Marxist Critique* by Alex Callinicos, published by Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990.
[18] Rijkenberg, 2001. In *Concepting*, he uses the Dutch terms "doelgroep" and "volggroep," which literally translated by myself means that the conventional "target audience" has now turned into a "follow audience." Although the statement still makes sense, it is unfortunately not a graceful translation.

2.4. A new audience: the Cloverfield campaign

In order to illustrate how this new audience can be exploited, I will summarize the viral campaign for the film Cloverfield, released in 2008. A mainstream campaign was released involving trailers and posters, but parallel to this was a less obvious campaign conducted on the internet.[19] It began with a website for a fictional company that manufactured drinks called Slusho!. The site was reported to be owned by a company called Tagruato, a reference to a TV show which is directed by one of the directors of the Cloverfield film. The website contained a number of other references to the upcoming movie, which was picked up on by investigative internet surfers and which became the subject of many people's curiosity. The website was later supposedly hacked by dissatisfied Slusho! customers, creating the impression that there was something fishy going on. Of course, each new development was closely followed by a group of fanatics desperately in search of more information.

Slusho! website screenshot as of August 2009

Source: slusho.jp

On top of that, Myspace accounts were made which supposedly belonged to fictional characters from the film, which became the source of plot hints and information for Cloverfield. Similar

[19] *Movie Marketing Madness: Cloverfield*, retrieved 2009

websites belonging to fictional characters of the film revealed plot hints as well. Both these sites revealed that the characters were moving to Japan to work for Slusho!, although once in Japan, strange things began to happen to them. Soon, things started to get dramatic. Sonar images were released showing a large object moving through the ocean and stopping at a drilling station owned by Tagruato. Filmed footage of the drilling station being destroyed was later posted to YouTube. All over the web, people were speculating on the activities of the mysterious Tagruato company: who were they? What were they doing? And what was the large object in the sonar images?

Of course, all of these events were fictional and merely a way to generate interest in Cloverfield. The important thing is that the campaign tapped into a new audience which searched and investigated, understanding the references to other television shows and drawing links between tidbits of information posted across the web. This audience was internet-savvy and made use of the resources available to them, searching and discovering on their own initiative. Basically, they became active participants of an advertising campaign rather than passive receivers.

2.5. Conclusions

By investigating the progress of advertising throughout the 20th century and up until today, it is clear that standards have changed since the advertising of the early 1900s. Not only has the market become flooded with an infinite amount of products, but consumers have become much more open to creative and innovative advertising techniques. After all, a long century of repetition, cheesy slogans and product details has not passed by unnoticed, although they are most certainly not dead. As the viral Cloverfield campaign shows, there is room for different approaches, and companies are, of course, perfectly willing to fill up that room.

A crucial thing to keep in mind is that advertising now has a myriad of different media at its disposal, as well as different formats and genres. What started as murals and signs has now become internet ads, pop-ups, viral campaigns, TV spots, mobile phone games, stickers and posters, sponsors, and more. There is virtually no end to the ways in which companies can make their brand name known to the world.

Of course, one of these ways is through the fascinating medium of animation, an approach which will be addressed in the following chapter.

3. Animation as a medium for advertising

3.1. History

The first animation to ever be created for advertising reasons was an animation by Arthur Melbourne-Cooper for Byrant and May matches, called *Matches Appeal*. Made in 1899, it is referred to as the earliest surviving example of stop-motion[20] and featured a number of matches in the form of a little man writing an appeal on a wall. Apparently, the potency of animation as an advertising medium extends back to the early years of its existence.

Matches Appeal by Arthur Melbourne-Cooper, 1899

Source: YouTube.com

Television provided a new venue for animation and advertising in the 50s. For the most part, these commercials portrayed cartoon figures and mascots, plus some minor applications of motion graphics, such as animated logos. Animation was primarily used as a way to draw the interest of children, and were usually employed in food and snack commercials[21]. This approach generally carried negative connotations, described by Margaret F. Callcott and Wei-Na Lee as "a technique reserved for situations where there was little money or motivation to do something more creative. … In this sense, animation has been regarded as some time as the 'retarded brother' of advertising."[22]

[20] De Vries, 2005.
[21] Calcott and Lee, 1994.
[22] Calcott and Lee, 1994.

In their article *A content analysis of animation and animated spokes-characters in television commercials*, Callcott and Lee conducted a detailed analysis of how animation was used in commercials around the time of the article's publication in 1994. However, the article narrowly preceded an explosion in new and affordable digital techniques which brought huge changes to the use of animation in advertisements. This is a factor of which Callcott and Lee were well aware, as they note in the limitations: "Future research on animation should move beyond spokes-characters to address other forms of animation now appearing in advertising."[23]

More than ten years later, new developments and techniques no longer limit animation in advertising to animated cereal mascots. It can be found in almost every commercial in one form or another. The birth of 3D animation is definitely a contributing factor, but most importantly, animation techniques have become much less tedious, more realistic, and more accessible due to the digitalization thereof. A large, structured studio is no longer necessary to create an animation. All one needs is a laptop and some software, evidenced by the explosion in amateur animation genres on the web. Facilitated by distribution channels such as YouTube, genres such as Flash animations and even the relatively new Brickfilms (stop-motion animations created with LEGO bricks)[24] are flourishing on the web. The commercial animation world is blooming as well, with a significant growth of small animation studios across the globe.

3.2. Animation as a medium

There are many characteristics inherent to the medium of animation which make it ideal for advertising goals. For one, it is well suited for transferring a maximum of information in a short period of time. The reason for this is because it is often manipulated frame-by-frame, and is therefore tedious and time-consuming. Animators are forced to think about every frame they create, and make sure that every element carries meaning. As the cultural historian Robert Hewison puts it in the BBC documentary *Animation Nation,* "The point about animation is that it's a graphic medium, and that means that ideas are very quickly illustrated. So you could absolutely simplify a message down to a simple set of images, very few words, a very minimal amount of

[23] Calcott and Lee, 1994.
[24] *Brickfilms and the amateur animation community*. An amusing quote from the article: "It used to be that animation was the realm of specialists. … Today, however, any 9-year-old can create animation using the laptop and digital camera in front of them. … It has yet to pay off in any appreciable manner but I can't help and think that with so many young people knowledgable about the animation process, good things won't come from it."

movement.. just to get a single message through."[25] Paul Wells, in his book *Understanding Animation,* lists a number of techniques through which animation transfer meaning, including metamorphosis, symbolism and metaphor, synecdoche, associative relations, and so on, thus arguing that animation can transfer meaning in ways that no other medium can.[26]

Another important aspect of animation is its ability to portray serious or even traumatic subject matter in a light-hearted way. A strong example is the use of theatrical cartoons as propaganda during WWII by Warner Brothers. A number of animations were produced that portrayed the U.S.A's war situation in humorous slapstick cartoons, featuring hateful caricatures of America's enemies. By translating a very serious issue into a humorous cartoon, they became easier to swallow and could even be interpreted, despite its initial appearance as innocent and unassuming, as an indoctrination tool for ideological views. In a much less obvious way, these same techniques are employed in advertising. Advertising can be said to exploit the mindsets and ideas of their target groups, creating desires or capitalizing on common fears and offering products as a solution. Animation has the ability to conduct this in a light-hearted way, often being associated with innocence and imagination and thus masking the more serious intentions behind the commercials in which it is used.

Animation also has the potential to reach out to large groups of people. As opposed to live-action, animation often features stylized characters which, due to their detachment from the real world, can function as universal. In the documentary *Animation Nation*, two examples are shown of wartime films which encourage civilians to donate their scraps to the war effort: *Salvage with a Smile,* a live-action film, and *Mobilize your Scraps,* an animation. According to Paul Wells, *Salvage with a Smile* was perceived as patronizing instruction by the middle class to the lower class, whereas *Mobilize your Scraps* was perceived by all classes as entertaining, clever and good for morale[27], thanks to its highly likeable and classless animated characters. Clearly, animation has the potential to appeal to large numbers of people. On the other hand, it can be used to target a very specific group, with the ability to carefully manipulate every last detail to appeal to a target audience.

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[25] *Animation Nation*, 2005.
[26] Wells, 1998.
[27] *Animation nation*, 2005.

Left: Salvage with a Smile; Right: Mobilize your Scraps

Source: YouTube.com

3.3. Animation today

As mentioned earlier, animation has become an affordable technique. Before digital techniques became widespread, animation tools were expensive and creating an animation usually required a structured, heirarchal studio. Getting funds to make and distribute animation was not a simple matter. For this reason, the animation industry was dominated by large studios such as Disney and Warner Brothers, which could handle these difficult activities as well as guarantee the production of likeable and popular animations.

Of course, these studios are still alive and well today. Animation remains expensive, tedious, and dominated by large studios. However, it has become much easier for animation to exist on a small scale. New platforms for displaying and distributing animation, such as internet communities and animation festivals, provide a venue for smaller studios and independent animators. Because of this, many relatively small studios that combine commercial and independent work have come into existence. These studios earn money from commercial work, which gives them the freedom and funds to make independent work. The publicity they get from independent work helps bring in more commercial work, and so the cycle continues.

An example of such a studio is Studio AKA, based in London. Phillip Hunt, the creative director of the studio, claims that the studio is “predominantly involved in commercials. That’s how this studio

stays alive."[28] However, over time the studio has developed a preference for independent work despite their initial goal of working mainly on commercials. Their animated short, *Jojo and the Stars,* was actually based on an abandoned commercial project which formed the basis for an independent short. The short later was the reason the studio was approached by Guinness to do a television spot. By now, members of the studio, although active in creating exquisite animated commercials, have discovered their desire to become "filmmakers"[29] and make animated shorts. Evidently, a background in advertising can evolve into a new passion for independent filmmaking. The studio is a fascinating example of how the fields of advertising and animated shorts can overlap and interact, showing that the two worlds have more inherent similarities than one would expect.

3.4. Conclusions

Even though animation is still cheaper than live-action techniques, it is no longer the "retarded brother of advertising" as it was previously considered. What used to be primarily useful for animating anthropomorphic cereal mascots has become an extremely broad and versatile medium. In fact, barely a single commercial is without any form of animation whatsoever. Animation is used to place new logos over old ones, slide shampoo bottles gracefully into view, animate logos and slogans, and show off every angle of a smoothly cruising car.

Although those are probably the most common use for animation in commercials, it is not only employed for the purpose of creating the illusion of live-action and tweaking images to perfection. It is also used to create entire commercials, or, as we already know, entire animated shorts. The following chapter will address this phenomenon and establish a definition for 'animated shorts as advertisements.'

[28] Phillip Hunt at Annecy Animation Festival, 2009.
[29] Phillip Hunt at Annecy Animation Festival, 2009.

4. Animated short as an advertisement

4.1. The animated short

In order to establish a definition for the animated short as an advertisement, it is important to first look at the definition for the animated short. The dictionary definition of a "short" is "any film lasting less than 45 minutes," which is arguably more plausible for a live-action filmmaker than an animator, given the tediousness of the medium. A strict definition for the "animated short" is hard to find, but an average length for a short ranges from 3 to 15 minutes, although they can indeed extend up to 45 minutes.

Animated shorts have been around since the birth of animation. A well-known example is of course the theatrical cartoon, which was popular in the early days of film. Later on, Pixar started producing shorts which were played before their feature films in theaters. These shorts are usually around five minutes long and tend to include anthropomorphic characters involved in comical plots with large amounts of slapstick humor.

Independent shorts are also a popular choice for animators. The style and content of these shorts can vary enormously depending on the creator(s). Experimental shorts have also been around since the birth of animation and include the creations of animators such as Oscar Fischinger, Jan Svankmajer and many others. Developmental animation, a type of animation which according to Paul Wells contains elements of both experimental and more conventional approaches, can also take on the form of animated shorts, such as the famous Creature Comforts by Aardman studios[30].

Approaches to the content and style of animated shorts vary greatly, as to the venues through which animated shorts are promoted and marketed. Nowadays, animation festivals play a huge role in providing an arena for animated shorts to be viewed, particularly graduation films by animation students all over the world. Award ceremonies such as the Oscars also contain a category for animated shorts. These shorts can also be promoted through DVD releases, including DVDs that bundle together numerous shorts such as Stash DVD magazine, as well as, of course, the internet. Despite these numerous promotional opportunities, it is clear to see that animated shorts are not marketed on the same large scale that high-budget animated features, television

[30] Wells, 1998.

commercials and TV series are. They do not have a slot available for them in conventional mass media channels and must thus be marketed in alternative ways.

4.2. Quality animation as a promotional strategy

In order to establish a definition of the animated short as an advertisement, it is crucial to also address animations that fall outside of the definition. There are many animated commercials that lean in the direction of animated shorts but are, in fact, not really animated shorts. They are evidence of a higher investment by both the creators and their clients in the quality of the commercial and helped pave the way towards the production of animated shorts for advertising purposes.

The Big Smile: Lottery commercial by studio AKA

Source: http://studioaka.co.uk

This animation illustrates a day in the life of a family who has just won the lottery, but rather than portray this literally, we see the family receive a bag full of smiles which they proceed to distribute amongst themselves and amongst the town in which they live. This short commercial flaunts breathtaking quality of animation: unique and attractive designs, spot-on camera movements and editing, high quality modelling and rendering, and, at the end of the day, a highly enjoyable short film which can be watched over and over again. This animation stands out due to its use of symbolic imagery to deliver the message rather than voice-overs or other conventional advertising techniques, as well as its unique style, which Phillip Hunt of Studio AKA describes as "strange but appealing."[31] Although this animation steps beyond the conventional animated commercial and

[31] Phillip Hunt at Annecy Animation Festival, 2009.

sets a new standard, it is technically too short in length to qualify as an animated short and is, in fact, just a TV spot.

My Drive Thru: Music video by Psyop

Source: http://psyop.tv

This music video was created to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Converse[32]. To make it, numerous popular musicians came together to record a song, which was supplemented with a stylish animated video clip. The movie features the musicians as paper cut-outs moving across a blank white space. Although it has the appearance of having been meticulously cut-out and animated traditionally, it was actually created digitally with 3D and compositing techniques. Again, this creative and well executed approach sets this music video at a much higher standard than many other promotional animations, not only in terms of quality but also in terms of originality of style. It could be considered an animated short in terms of length, but it is in fact marketed as a music video and consequently contains little to no narrative information or structure beyond the performance of the musicians.

[32] *Interview with Psyop directors (…),* 2008.

Journey to the East: Olympics television coverage leader by Passion Pictures

Source: http://passion-pictures.com

This animation is not a commercial but a very elaborate leader. It features animation work by the designer of the Gorillaz, Pete Candeland, the music videos of which are already well known for their quality as animations. The leader shows numerous characters migrating eastwards to the Olympics stadium in China. What stands out about this leader is that it is clearly the result of a long and expensive production process, featuring numerous characters and environments, as well as a narrative which lasts longer than the average leader. Clearly the BBC seek to distinguish themselves from other networks which may have been covering the Olympics by investing in a stylish and attractive animation, intended to draw viewers to the network and generate enthusiasm for the Olympic games. Although this animation is well executed and contains numerous characters and an exciting plot, the story does not lead anywhere because it is intended purely as an introduction to a TV show, making it a leader and not a short.

4.3. A definition of the animated short as a commercial

Based on information gathered about both animated shorts and promotional films that lean in the direction of short in various ways, we can set up a definition for animated shorts that are commercials.

1. **Length**: An animated short that is a commercial must distinguish itself from the shorter TV spot in length. As a minimum length, I will therefore propose that the animated short must be at least 2 minutes long. As for a maximum length, considering the expensiveness of the medium and the limited attention span of individuals viewing commercials, it is not likely

that an animated short that is a commercial will ever exceed 5 minutes. However, for the sake of creating a concise definition, a maximum length could be up to 15 minutes.

2. **Narrative**: The animated short must have a self-contained narrative with a clear beginning, middle and end. Any voice-over that is present should serve narrative techniques, as opposed to many voice-overs employed in commercials which merely describe the product or deliver slogans.

3. **Commercial purpose**: although I have often used the word 'promotion' to refer to commercial purposes, the animation cannot merely be promotional in nature. Promotion is a broad word and can include charity organizations, political agendas, religious or moral views, or even just the promotion of a specific point of view, in which case almost any animated short promotes something. The animated short must actually function as an advertisement for a specific product or company.

Now that a set of criteria have been established for identifying animated shorts that are commercials, we can proceed with case studies of two examples of this specific phenomenon: *Happiness Factory: The Movie* by Coca-Cola, and *Trembled Blossoms* by Prada.

5. Case studies

5.1. Trembled Blossoms by Prada

5.1.1. Background information

Prada, the famous designer clothing line now run by Muiccia Prada, started out as a leathergoods shop in Milan and rose to fame in the 90s. It was characterized by sophisticated and simple clothing for working females, and supposedly distinguished itself by having a more intellectual image than other fashion houses.

In 1993, as an expansion on a previous project, the Prada Foundation was created.[33] It was originally intended as a space in which art could be showcased and exhibited, as well as a way to aid artists in making the "projects they had always dreamed of constructing."[34] In 1997, they began to work with more contemporary art projects, and in 2001 they decided to expand their activities to fields such as architecture, which was how they came into contact with Rem Koolhaas, a famous Dutch architect from Rotterdam.

Their work with Rem Koolhaas resulted in the restructuring of the Prada epicenters, the large stores in which Prada goods are sold. This restructuring included a wallpaper project which 2x4 inc., a design studio for numerous projects and activities, developed[35]. Simply put, it was a project in which different wallpaper designs were periodically used to decorate the epicenter stores. Hearing of this project from a fellow artist, the artist James Jean decided to approach 2x4 to make some wallpaper designs for the stores[36].

These designs were well received, to say the least. Another wallpaper design was commissioned from James Jean, and the designs were incorporated onto the fabric of the new spring fashion line in 2007. The drawings became the central theme for Prada's magazine ads as well. The final touch was the creation of the film *Trembled Blossoms*, an animation which premiered in the store at an exclusive launch party for the spring line. For the film, James Jean "wrote the treatment for the

[33] Grosvenor, retrieved 2009
[34] fondazioneprada.org, retrieved 2009
[35] 2x4.org, retrieved 2009
[36] *Interview/Preview: James Jean "Kindling" @ Jonathan Levine Gallery*, 2008

film, created finished style frames, designed the characters, and roughed out 75 or so storyboards."[37] The animation itself was made by the Los Angeles studio Sight Effects. The soundtrack was created as part of an online contest in which participants were free to make their own musical track and submit it to be used for the final movie. After the exclusive premiere, the animation was posted on the Prada website.

5.1.2. Synopsis

The animation, which is 4 minutes and 47 seconds long and features a 3D computer animation technique, begins with the imposing black on white text: "PRADA PRESENTS… TREMBLED BLOSSOMS." After crediting the soundtrack, the story begins with a bizarre flower floating in a white space. A hummingbird suddenly appears and punctures the center of the flower with its thin, long beak. A drop emerges and drips onto the ground, which breaks open to reveal a white, naked, nymph-like creature.

A hummingbird punctures the blossom.

Source: http://www.prada.com

The nymph stands up and observes her surroundings. Two decorative beetles approach her and wrap themselves around her feet, forming heeled shoes: nature appears to be offering itself as fashion items to this blank character. The nymph starts to walk and reaches a branch from which one plump, red fruit hangs; of course, she takes a bite. Suddenly the previously white and empty

[37] Jean, 2008.

surroundings start to grow flowing, decorative and surreal shapes. Resembling flowers and trees, a strange and beautiful version of nature slowly reveals itself to the viewer.

Floral shapes begin to grow.

Source: http://www.prada.com

The nymph continues to walk forwards in what is now a thick forest. Characters resembling the nymph in shape but covered in different colors and patterns pass by. A blue-and-red plaid patterned female approaches her and touches her shoulders, which somehow triggers the formation of a dress around the nymph's body. In the style of Cinderella's transformation by the fairy godmother, the nymph suddenly finds herself wearing a colorful Prada dress.

As she continues her journey, the nymph's surroundings become thicker and denser. Eventually she reaches a pond, in front of which a Pan-like figure sits on a throne. He watches as a snake-like creature appears and flies through the air, taking a deep dive into the pond where it becomes a fish. When the pond dries up, we see that the fish has transformed into a Prada purse, which of course the nymph inherits.

A Prada purse at the bottom of the pond.

Source: http://www.prada.com

Now wearing a complete outfit, the nymph stands up. The beautiful forms and shapes which surround her start to disappear and fade away as blossoms fall from the sky. It appears that the end of this surreal world has come. The camera zooms in on Pan's face, which suddenly splits in half. Inside of his head is the blossom from the opening shot. The nymph sits down and releases a small hummingbird from her purse before pulling the white ground over her. The image fades to white before the end credits are shown in the same imposing text as the beginning.

5.1.3. Analysis

This animation contains a number of central themes that are carried out from beginning to end. One of the first things that the viewer may notice are references to mythological creatures. The main character is thin, graceful and youthful, but has features which make her slightly inhuman, such as 'hair' which is actually a solid form extending straight from her head, smooth white skin with no genitalia, and eyes which are completely black without eye-whites. She has the appearance of a graceful nymph-like creature. When Pan, the Greek god who resembles a goat, appears, it is clear that she is indeed a nymph. Pan was a mythological being who was known for his fondness of nymphs and is associated with eroticism and fertility[38]. Besides mythological references, the animation also contains a reference to the Christian biblical creation story with the plump fruit that the nymph eats. It resembles the forbidden fruit, and the forest which blooms after the nymph's first bite has the beautiful and mysterious appeal of the garden of Eden.

[38] Parada and Förlag, 1997.

Another theme is that of nature and the seasons. The narrative is cyclical, hinting at the end that the story will repeat itself again. This can be seen as a reference to the cyclical nature of the seasons, particularly that of spring, where flowers bloom and nature appears to come to life again. By integrating actual clothing by Prada into the plot, a link is made between the coming of spring and the clothing that comes with it, a reference to the seasonal changes of the Prada clothing line. In fact, the movie goes so far as to suggest that the clothing comes directly from nature itself.

The central theme of the animation is that of creation. Initially this is expressed in the form of reproduction and birth. The swollen blossom at the beginning of the animation, which is heavy, red and pregnant, must be punctured by the sharp beak of the hummingbird which brings forth a fluid. This is a very sexualized portrayal of the fertilization of a flower, showing imagery that is sooner associated with flesh than with plants. The presence of the erotic character Pan further validates this sexual tint, whereas the presence of the forbidden fruit validates the setting as one of creation. The nymph, the product of the reproductive opening scene, is truly a blank character, completely white and wearing nothing. As the story continues, she evolves into a fashion icon as nature provides her with clothing; this is the place where not only creatures but also fashion is created.

The overall style of the film has a huge effect on how it is perceived by viewers. While decorative and stylish, with flowing forms and a soft, feminine palette, it is also estranging and mysterious, with surreal characters and visuals as well as a strange and slightly unsettling soundtrack. The morphing, ever-changing setting has an almost hallucinogenic quality. This style sets a certain tone for the film, emphasizing its artistic and creative touch and making it appealing for a somewhat older audience. Rather than fall within the conventions of animations that target children, with cute, unchallenging visuals and a catchy, innocent soundtrack, this animation borrows ideas from more experimental animated shorts by challenging the viewer’s expectations of an animated film.

A section of James Jean's wallpaper design for Prada.

Source: jamesjean.com

The style is, of course, the birth child of concept artist James Jean. His already existing body of work created before the Prada project included a library of imagery which can be found in *Trembled Blossoms* as well: hummingbirds, graceful nymph-like creatures, floral shapes and forms, as well as the color palette and the overall atmosphere. On top of that, the two wallpaper designs he created prior to the animation are full of imagery which lies parallel to the themes of the animation: mythology and fantasy references, references to birth and reproduction, flowing forms, and so on. One could go so far as to argue that the animation, while having been funded and organized by Prada, is simply a James Jean creation.

Illustration by James Jean. Note the similarity of the character to the nymph of *Trembled Blossoms.*

Source: jamesjean.com

5.1.4. What is the added value?

Of course, the big question is whether this animation contributes anything to the Prada campaign that could not be achieved otherwise. The main thing this animation does is provide a narrative supplement to the spring line. It could simply be described as a "creation story" for the clothing, which is a way to give life to the otherwise inanimate apparel. It also emphasizes the creative value of the clothing which makes them high fashion items, seeking to distinguish it from cheaper brands. The romanticized creation of these accessories and clothing products in *Trembled Blossoms* adds to the mystery and appeal of the final clothing line, suggesting that they are rare and beautiful gems found at the bottom of mysterious ponds and in the form of exquisite beetles. This creation concept was also visible in the wallpaper designs and could have been expressed in other media, but the animated short seems ideal for the job, providing enough time to tell the story, enough flexibility to translate the concept art into moving visuals, and the added value of a soundtrack to set the tone of the animation.

This animation also has the added value of expanding the portfolio of artistic work that Prada can associate itself with. On the Prada.com website, there is a section for "projects" which showcases various artistic work Prada has done, such as collaborations with famous directors and projects

with architects, photographers and artists[39]. The Prada Foundation is of course also linked from their site. Clearly, it is important to Prada's identity as an artistic and creative company to not only concern itself with art, but newer forms of media as well. Famous for his work with comics but also his personal exhibitions and ongoing painting projects, James Jean was probably an ideal choice for Prada to experiment with a younger generation of artists and newer media such as computer animation. He is arguably an artist with what Joan Gibbons, in her book *Art and Advertising,* calls a "celebrity style," who has accumulated much fame and respect in the comic and increasingly popular lowbrow art fields. Prada could use this to their advantage not only to gain the respect of a new audience, but also to create the image of Prada being an innovative sponsor of art, willing to try new things and keeping up to date with new developments in different fields of the art world.

Of course, one of the main added values was purely a strategic move on the part of Prada. Posting the animation on their site was probably a way to lure potential buyers to their online store, since, outside of the exclusive launch party, the animation was only promoted on the internet via their website, Prada.com. Prada also used the animation as an excuse to conduct an online contest, which Joachimsthaler and Aaker refer to as "involving the customer in brand-building experiences,"[40] which, they argue, is an excellent way to generate interest in your brand without turning to conventional mass media channels such as television spots.

Interestingly, Prada, being a fashion house, is in a good position to conduct advertising campaigns such as these, and artists such as James Jean gain the advantage of having a large amount of artistic freedom and an overall enjoyable experience[41]. The reason for this is because fashion changes cyclically. Like any brand, fashion brands must retain some kind of core identity which makes them stand out against others, but fashion brands are much more flexible, constantly having to keep up with the times and stay on top of changes in the fashion world. *Trembled Blossoms* promoted a concept and style which would be over by the time the next season began, because fashion brands are able to refresh their image and try new things, allowing them much more flexibility in their advertising campaigns and making the creation of an animated short a much less risky endeavor.

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[39] Prada.com, retrieved 2009.
[40] Joachimsthaler and Aaker, 1997.
[41] *Interview/Preview: James Jean "Kindling" @ Jonathan Levine Gallery*, 2008

5.2. Happiness Factory: The Movie by Coca-cola

5.2.1. Background information

Coca-Cola is the one and only all-American soda drink that has been around since 1886[42]. It has competed with other sodas, such as Pepsi, in the past, but never lost its position as one of the main players on the soda market. The brand has a long and rich history of advertising campaigns which began with promotional activities like coupons, calendars and setting up soda machines in pharmacies and stores[43]. Advertising was always at the core of the brand, with a budget of one million a year in 1911, which was spent on campaigns which included pin-ups, celebrities, and commissioned artwork from artists such as Norman Rockwell and Gil Elvgren. In the 60s, the company began to adopt different sodas, and today it has around 400 brands to its name, including popular drinks such as Coca-Cola Light, Fanta, Sprite, and so on.

In 2006, the company launched a new campaign called "the Coke side of life."[44] At its core was the suggestion that Coca-Cola stood for positivity, optimism and happiness. One of the early advertisements made for this campaign was a parody of the videogame genre: what appeared to be a videogame with stealing cars and violence as its central theme, the main character, after drinking a bottle of coke, performs a number of surprisingly friendly acts, at which point the entire street breaks out in song and the commercial ends in an absurdly happy parade.

[42] www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/ourheritage.html, retrieved 2009
[43] www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/ourheritage.html, retrieved 2009
[44] www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/ourheritage.html, retrieved 2009

Car-thief character shares a coke with fellow citizen.

Source: wk.com

Via the advertising agency Wieden and Kennedy, the animation studio Psyop came into contact with a script for the "coke side of life" campaign[45]. It was the initial script for the Happiness Factory concept, although the treatment of the concept was yet to be determined. After Psyop came up with some ideas and pitched them, they got Coca-Cola's approval to make the commercial.

Promotional image for Happiness Factory.

Source: cocacola.com

[45] Cone, 2008.

The result was an animated TV spot about the world inside of Coca-Cola vending machines. It featured an entire little universe, with a gigantic cast of different creatures and a lush, green setting. In this world, the creation of every Coca-Cola bottle was a little miracle. The campaign, although not originally intended to be a big one[46], became huge and widespread. The original commercial, made in 2006, was followed by the animated short *Happiness Factory: The Movie,* which was promoted with short "trailers" on television and online. This animated short aired in theaters and was posted online after a launch party on the virtual website Second Life[47]. In 2009 another commercial was made which featured a collaborative song by a number of famous American musicians. In between these releases were numerous activities conducted worldwide, such as online games, mobile phone games, merchandise handouts, and so on. As of 2009, the campaign is still active.

5.2.2. Synopsis

Knowledge of the original 2006 TV commercial is somewhat necessary to follow the initial events of this animated short, since it does not take a lot of time to introduce the overall concept to the viewer. Live action footage shows a male character approaching a vending machine in order to obtain a bottle of coke. He inserts the coin and we see the animated world inside, although this is presented as if it was, as the trailer for the movie states, "business as usual."

However, it is not business as usual – the large, mechanical contraption that inserts the coke into the bottle backfires and nothing comes out, except for one last drop of precious Coca-Cola, which a worker leaps towards and manages to catch inside a tiny glass bottle. He offers it to the three leaders of the happiness factory, who sit on thrones on top of a tall platform. In epic fashion, the leaders synonymously point westwards, a gesture which indicates that the worker must depart on a long journey to solve the problem. He has become the chosen one.

[46] Cone, 2008.
[47] *Coca-Cola launches Happiness Factory: The Movie*, retrieved 2009.

Worker catches last precious drop of coca-cola.

Source: coca-cola.com/hf

Determined, the little worker gets his gear ready, not forgetting to pack the glass bottle with the last drop of Coca-Cola in it, and departs. He pedals forward in his bizarre flying vehicle, braving storms along the way. A lightning bolt destroys his means of transportation and leaves him stranded on the ground of a thick forest. While chasing a love puppy who has decided to run away with his glass bottle, he falls through a deep pit. Alone and comforted only by his bottle and a love puppy which has now become his companion, he spends the night in strange and unfamiliar territory. The next morning, he is awoken by a stampede of large, blob-like creatures. He rides these creatures westwards, eventually ending up in a cold and barren land. He climbs high cliffs, following the loud noise of the alarm, the source of the problem in the land of happiness factory.

Having reached the top, our worker is exhausted and cannot resist drinking the last drop of coke. Realizing only afterwards what he has done, he regrets this act deeply and breaks down in a heap of tears. In his state of hysteria he accidently lets out a huge burp, a familiar feeling for anyone who has drunk Coca-Cola. Surprisingly, a nearby flower bud, previously closed, suddenly opens up, releasing a small burping sound as it does. More and more flowers open up in the same fashion, and slowly the large tree to which they are attached begins to return to life. Purely by accident, the worker has found the way to heal this sick tree.

The enormous, mechanical, coke-delivering limb swings back into action.

Source: coca-cola.com/hf

As it turns out, the Coca-Cola in the happiness factory comes from a huge, ancient tree which has mechanical limbs. Healthy once more, it replenishes its supply of coke and swings back into action. A hole opens up in the air, having the appearance of a portal to another dimension, into which a limb of the tree enters with a fresh supply of coke. On the other side, the familiar world of the happiness factory appears, and the elated worker rides the tree's limb back into his old home. He has saved the day, and this is celebrated with an extra huge parade and a big, sloppy kiss from a cheerleader.

Joyful parade.

Source: coca-cola.com/hf

Meanwhile, the bottle finally comes out of the vending machine and into the live-action world. The male character, oblivious to the epic events in the happiness factory, takes his bottle and runs to the theater, where he and his date watch a movie.

5.2.3. Analysis

The main impression a viewer may get from watching this animation is that it borrows heavily from the epic fantasy genre, which includes films such as Lord of the Rings and The Chronicles of Narnia. For starters, the worker who embarks on an epic journey to save the happiness factory is just a regular guy who suddenly becomes the "chosen one," assigned to conduct a nearly impossible task. On his journey, he encounters landscapes and wild creatures that he had never seen before, with lush forests, deep oceans and high mountains. Faced with these difficulties, this character only has companions and his last drop of Coca-Cola to keep him going. These are all plot devices commonly employed in the epic fantasy genre. To top it all off, the soundtrack of the movie completes the epic vibe, with a dramatic orchestra score.

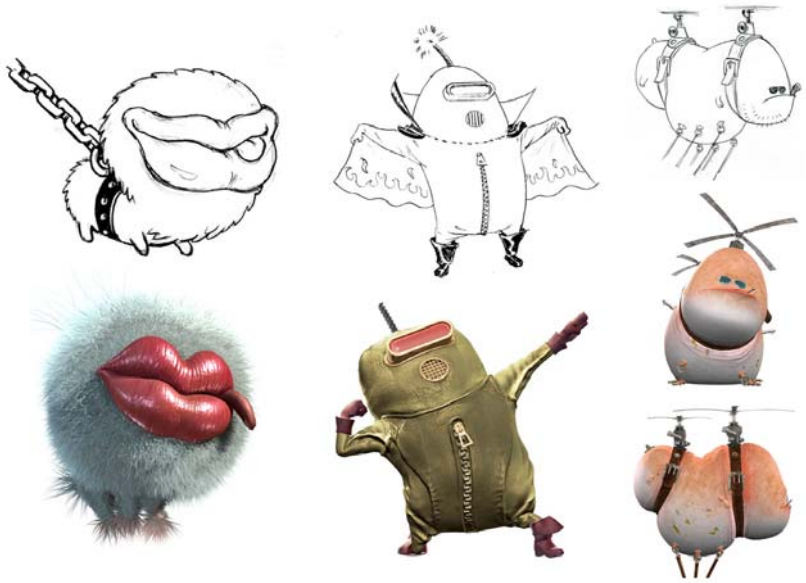
However, it is a compressed epic story with a twist. The characters are bizarre and somewhat comical. With tiny little eyes and strange proportions, they fit into the "strange but appealing" category. The overall concept of the Happiness Factory world is in and of itself a slightly twisted one. As Todd Mueller, a director of the original TV spot, puts it: "Factories aren't happy. That was our instinctual response. It was like, 'okay, let's just make it ridiculously happy.' … Just keep cranking up the happiness to a point where it's like fully Scientology-approved elatedness."[48] In order to express this positive approach to the factory, Psyop chose to put it in a lush, natural setting with connotations of balance, beauty, and "ancient sacredness,"[49] rather than what factories are usually associated with: pollution, industrialization, and unpleasant work. The clearest expression of this idea in the film is the portrayal of Coca-Cola growing from an ancient tree rather than being the outcome of an industrial process.

Another aspect of the Coca-Cola short is the way it capitalizes on the fame of the drink. To begin with, the short begins with a character that buys some Coca-Cola from a vending machine, which is plausible: coke is a popular drink, especially for at the movies. The animated portion of the film also draws on familiarity with Coca-Cola. The contrast between a drink which has become an

[48] Cone, 2008
[49] Cone, 2008

aspect of many people's daily life and is therefore common, and a world in which Coca-Cola is sacred and special, accounts for a large portion of the comical effect. The use of the classic coke-induced burp as a plot device is also one that is only effective due to people's familiarity with the phenomenon.

The central theme of the short is that of love and affection, specifically towards the Coca-Cola bottles. This is most obviously expressed in the production process presented by the film, such as the love puppies that kiss the bottle, and the closing parade which turns the successful production of a bottle into an enormous celebration. The inhabitants of this world attach great value to what is, in their eyes, a precious drink. Many aspects of the film are intended to present Coca-Cola as opposite to what it often really is: a mass-produced symbol of capitalist society and production processes. The style choices for the film emphasize the happiness factory as a rare, special, and beautiful little universe, with a host of characters that all have their own special function, personality and appearance. They, too, are all special in their own way, and in no way remind us of the generic, soulless, clone society that has often been associated with our current age of mass production. Interestingly, their odd appearance makes them even more universal and loveable, proving Paul Well's point about animation having the potential to be classless. Todd Mueller of Psyop stated that the simplicity of the character designs made them "easier for people to identify with emotionally."[50]



Some character designs from Happiness Factory.

Source: motionographer.com

[50] Cone, 2008

Of course, part of the film's appeal is that its presentation of how coke is made is in stark contrast with our knowledge of how it is actually made. This is not intended to mislead viewers, but rather to present the idea with a sense of irony and humor. Instead of actually addressing the issue, the movie appeals to our imagination and sentiments instead of our logic. It does this in such an exaggerated way that it becomes hard to criticize its plausibility and we have no choice but to be entertained.

5.2.4. What is the added value?

Happiness Factory: The Movie basically expanded on a lot of the ideas that the original *Happiness Factory* television spot introduced. It delved deeper into the world of the vending machine, giving more depth to the characters and showing a wider range of landscapes and environments. It also took everything a step further, with more spectacular effects, a bigger and happier parade, more drama and tension in the plot, and generally a more impactful film due to its extended length. Much like *Trembled Blossoms,* Coca-Cola exposed the fictional source of its product in the movie, in this case an ancient tree, thereby providing a creation story to viewers. In short, the added value of *Happiness Factory: The Movie* was the way in which it gave viewers a deeper and more detailed view into the delightful world of the Happiness Factory.

However, Coca-Cola chose to make an animated short for a reason: to generate an image of coke being a unique, authentic, and high-quality product. Even for viewers oblivious to the relationship between budget and animation, *Happiness Factory: The Movie* feels like an expensive, high-quality ad. For the most part, the fact that it is a "movie" achieves this effect. By using a format which is not often employed for advertising purposes, it distances itself from the more obvious, repetitive, and often irritating television commercial. It also suggests that the story it has to tell is worthy of a longer 'movie,' providing not only an advertisement, but also quality entertainment.

However, unlike Prada, Coca-Cola is a company that invests heavily in mass media channels and has no pretentions of being associated with an upper class. Coca-Cola wants to be universal, a drink for everyone – "I'd like to buy the world a Coke," a song written for a campaign back in 1971[51], has been used numerous times over the years as a way to express Coca-Cola's desire to reach out to every person, all over the world. This attitude is reflected in the Happiness Factory

[51] www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/ourheritage.html, retrieved 2009

campaign. As Cathryn Sleight, marketing director at Coca-Cola in Great Britain, puts it: "Using key teen passion points of music, social networking and gaming allow us to reach a new generation of 'Coke' fans, whilst more traditional routes continue to reach the older demographic."[52] Basically, Coca-Cola is covering all of its bases, and ensuring that the central parts of the campaign, the animations, are still tasteful and of a high standard.

In many ways, Coca-Cola is in a unique position to conduct such a campaign. Its name, like Prada, has a celebrity status and therefore its advertisements can build on already existing familiarity with the brand. Most importantly, Coca-Cola is a company which, besides the classic drink, sells numerous other brands on its name. It targets more specific groups with these brands, such as Coca-Cola Light for young working females, Coca-Cola Zero for young working males, Fanta for a younger teenage audience, and so on. It takes the safe, old-fashioned targeting route for these labels, and can therefore take a much more universal and creative approach with the classic Coca-Cola drink. If the campaign proves to be unpopular, Coca-Cola has the rest of their advertising framework plus a huge budget to patch things together again.

5.3. Discussion of case studies

In both cases, it is clear to see that animated shorts are often one piece in a larger campaign. They were never the first idea, but rather resulted from earlier activities: for Prada this was the wallpaper project and clothing line, and for Coca-Cola this was the original TV spot. Both shorts also required promotion via other advertising channels, such as the internet or television, in order to be seen. Finally, both shorts were starting points for other promotional activities, particularly online. *Happiness Factory: The Movie* led viewers to an online game, and *Trembled Blossoms* drew viewers to their online store. It is clear to see that one of the functions of the animated short is to lure viewers to these other media channels. It is also clear to see that an animated short will probably not function well as an advertising medium all by itself: it must be supported by other media as well.

The role of artists in each of the campaigns is interesting to observe. In both cases, the artists who conceptualized the films were given a lot of freedom. Kylie Matulick of Psyop stated that Coca-Cola "came to us with this idea … [and] how that was executed was up to us,"[53] while James Jean

[52] *Coca-Cola's new 'Happiness Factory'*, retrieved 2009
[53] Cone, 2008

explained that "I sent in my own concepts inspired by some key words provided by Prada … [and Prada] wanted to expand upon this world with an animated film, which I wrote and designed. If Prada wanted to work with me again in the future, I'd certainly be interested."[54] The freedom these artists enjoyed was something these companies undoubtedly gave them on purpose, realizing that this creative touch would set the tone for their campaigns and account for their success, an approach which began with the creative revolution of 1959. Clearly, the creativity that commercial artists can bring to an advertisement are as effective an approach as ever.

Both commercials present imaginary worlds from which the products literally bloom, and surreal characters which travel and explore these worlds. Furthermore, both movies borrow elements from already existing genres and stories. *Trembled Blossoms* contains references to mythology and fairy-tales, whereas *Happiness Factory: The Movie* borrows queues from epic films and fantasy. This style borrowing actually enhances the fictional quality of these commercials, adding extra emphasis to the fact that the commercials are in no way realistic. They are clearly just telling a story, a sign that these commercials are mainly intended as entertainment.

Entertainment for who, though? In the case of *Happiness Factory: The Movie*, the 'strange but appealing' quality of the characters is a strong example of the 'classless' potential animation can have. These characters do not physically look much like people, but have recognizable traits, such as little faces and clothing that resemble that of people. Because of this, they are almost universally loveable. Because of their tiny little eyes and strange appearance, they can appeal to both children and adults: they are not too scary for kids, but also not too cute for adults. In *Trembled Blossoms*, the surreal and stylish quality of the animation is clearly not intended for kids, but can appeal to a wide range of teenage and adult viewers. The blank quality of the nymph makes her beautiful and fashionable, but also innocent and mysterious. She, too, is a classless character. The appeal of the characters in both animations crucially contribute to their entertainment value, making them identifiable and therefore prompting viewers to become more engaged in the story.

Finally, an interesting aspect of both animated shorts was that they were made for large and famous brands. After looking into both the Prada and Coca-Cola campaigns, it was clear that these companies have unique advantages. Where Coca-Cola targets more specific sub-groups with other drinks, like Coca-Cola light and Fanta, Prada is a fashion house and can change its image cyclically

[54] *Interview/Preview: James Jean "Kindling" @ Jonathan Levine Gallery*, 2008

without losing its reputation for quality haute-couture. Where other companies might have to lean more heavily on a consistent brand image, Coca-Cola and Prada have more room and funds to experiment with their image, not to mention exceedingly famous brand names that almost have a life of their own. It seems that making an animated short for smaller and less famous companies might be a different issue altogether. It is hard to say whether it would be effective, but one can say with certainty that it probably could not function on the same level as the Coca-Cola and Prada campaigns.

On what level would a completely independent short which addresses similar issues then function? The following chapter will address my personal animated short, Trichrome Blue, and fit it into the context of this thesis.

6. Trichrome: We can color your world

My project began as simple curiosity towards the phenomenon of animated shorts as commercials. Having embarked on my research paper and finishing with a number of research results, the question remained: what to animate? It seemed obvious at first: simply approach a client and make an animated short that functions as an advertisement. However, as the project evolved, this became an increasingly less plausible and less interesting idea.

After the customary art block which precedes the creation of most animations I've ever done, I finally settled on an idea: rather than simply imitate the animations I'd analyzed, I was going to make an animation which interpreted my research findings. I would take the conclusions that stood out to me, use them as inspiration, and leave the rest behind. The result, I hoped, would be an animation that functioned on the same level of advertisements, without actually being one.

6.1. Finding inspiration

The first step was of course to reflect on the aspects of animated shorts as advertisements that stood out to me. These included:

1. Animated shorts express style

Brand identity has become the crucial backbone of many advertising approaches. A brand is linked to certain tones, moods, attitudes, and lifestyles. It becomes a kind of accessory that consumers wear to define their style. What better way to express style than through animation? It can be trendy and cutting-edge, but also quaint and old-fashioned, scribbley and low-key, shiny and sparkley, and so on. This, to me, is the main reason why *Trembled Blossoms* and *Happiness Factory: The Movie* were made in the first place, and were also relatively successful advertisements. They portrayed a certain style, which said something about the brand. Furthermore, they are not just ads but also something more: an animated short, an entertainment product. Reducing the connotations of commerce and product boosting, the shorts became a more acceptable and enjoyable way to indulge in a certain style than more conventional ads.

2. Animated shorts generate interest

Another thing I found interesting about the animated short is the way it is promoted within the campaign. It is used as a way to generate interest, to lure viewers in for more. Using an animated short for advertising purposes can be ideal for this goal. Simply due to the fact that animated shorts are not conventionally used as advertisements, viewers are likely to be particularly curious about the animation. Even though the animation may have a satisfying ending, viewers will probably want to know more when the animation is over, prompting them to surf the web or participate in any other available activities the brand has to offer.

3. Animated shorts create associations

The main thing that characterized the animated shorts as advertisements were they way they associated certain elements with the product. *Trembled Blossoms,* for example, associated nature, fruit, and flowers with a clothing line in a very sensual way. For example, the apple that the nymph bites into can be seen as a reference to forbidden fruit and therefore be narrative in nature, but it also brings forth associations of holding a sweet, ripe fruit, smelling it, and finally biting into it. Suddenly the soft colors and smooth flowing shapes have a sweet, fruity dimension to them and remind us of fragrant, sweet things. The movie almost has a flavor and smell, although this is purely achieved through the imagery of the fruit and flowers. Animation can maximize the potential to make a product more attractive by means of creating these associations.

6.2. Trichrome: advertising a mood

The research results that fascinated me were related to the power of the animation to provide rich imagery and create a strong impact on its viewers. I soon realized that the products which the animated shorts advertise were less important than the imagery of the animation. Because of this, I decided to leave the idea of advertising a product behind me. I would skip this phase and cut straight to the exciting part: the mood and atmosphere that animation can provide.

To me, color is one of the central components of mood and style. One simple color can already evoke an emotional response and even be an experience for someone. Colors are universal, freely available for everyone to experience and even use, but it can also be claimed by people and used

to define style and identity. What if colors, instead of products, were marketed? What if a company laid claim to a certain color and offered the experience of that color to customers?

Trichrome logo and slogan

Resulting from this line of thought was a concept for a fictional company, Trichrome. Instead of offering products, this mysterious company offers only the experience of three colors. Each color symbolizes a different mood, inspired by the moods that advertising tries to evoke in its audience. The meanings behind each color were established as part of a personal creative process, in which I tried to make sensual and appealing associations, keeping animation in mind throughout.

1. Trichrome Red

Trichrome Red symbolizes luxury and sensuousness. Although it is a loud and aggressive color, it can also be appealing, attractive and warm. Imagery that can be associated with Trichrome Red are roses, lipstick, red fruit, and fabric. The color is meant to give viewers the illusion of luxury and sensuality.

2. Trichrome Yellow

Trichrome Yellow symbolizes optimism and energy. Where other colors can envelop and sedate someone, Trichrome Yellow is meant to have a refreshing and cheerful effect. Imagery which inspired this interpretation of the color includes flowers, lemons, fruits and sunshine.

3. Trichrome Blue

Trichrome Blue is the sedative of the three Trichrome colors. Imagery which inspired Trichrome Blue is primarily underwater imagery, where everything moves more slowly and which has a touch of the surreal. The color is meant to take viewers out of their daily lives and into a calm, gentle and relaxing world.

Through Trichrome, a company is presented as something that can offer a spiritual experience, much like a drug, but through advertising and animation. It links not only moods but also objects, smells, feelings and personality traits with a company that promotes its view of the world through animated advertisements. Ideally, an animated short would be made for each color, but due to lack of time, one color was chosen and made into a short: Trichrome Blue.

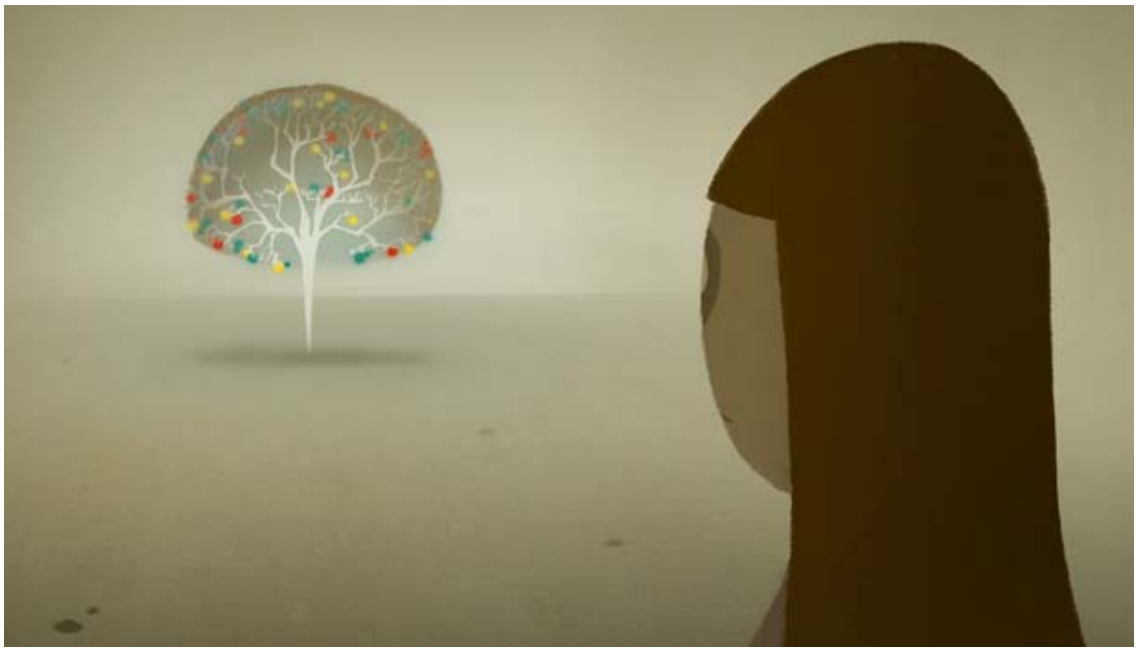
6.3. Trichrome Blue: the animation

Although I had already established what Trichrome Blue symbolized, I had to figure out a way to translate it into an animated short, the same challenge that the creators of *Trembled Blossoms* and

Happiness Factory: The Movie were faced with. There were a myriad of possibilities, ranging from experimental abstract animations to cartoons. After a long period of creating concept art, storyboards and animation tests, I settled on a story and began animating.

6.3.1. Synopsis

The story features a character wandering through a blank space. This space is grey and empty, much like the character, who stares ahead with blank eyes. Eventually she reaches a tree, the only feature in an otherwise perfectly straight horizon. The tree is the only source of color, its branches decorated with heavy colorful fruits, each in one of the three Trichrome colors. On the front of each fruit is the Trichrome logo.



The character cannot help but pick a blue fruit. Rather than bite into it, she discovers that it has a seam and can be opened, like a plastic toy. Inside, there is a button which can be pressed. Upon doing so, she suddenly finds herself falling through the ground into a deep blue universe. In this universe, she is different too: her formerly grey and blank appearance is now a blue one, and her face carries a smile.

She wanders through the blue world and encounters numerous things. Bubbles grow from the ground and envelop her, a city grows slowly upwards like anemones, whales swim around her on

the surface of blue television screens, and lotus blossoms bloom from the ground. All the while, she continues to wander, letting the surroundings grow around her.

Eventually the journey ends and she reaches the fruit again. The button, previously pressed shut, clicks open, causing the fruit to snap shut and the blue to disappear. Wanting more, the character picks up the fruit and tries to open it, but it's too late: it decays and disappears onto the ground. However, from the decayed fruit, a new tree grows, and the character reaches for another fruit. Instead of seeing the rest of the story, the Trichrome logo appears with the slogan "We can color your world."

6.3.2. Analysis

One of the main themes I tried to integrate into my story was that of nature versus fabrication. In the two animated shorts that I analyzed earlier, both animations covered up the industrial origins of their products by suggesting that they grew straight from nature. However, in both cases, it was clear that the product could never actually grow from a tree or originate from insects or fish, creating an odd effect. I expressed this in my animation by having the object which triggers the events be a plastic ball with a logo stamped on it, but still growing forth from a tree. Other elements in the animation, such as the anemone-like skyscrapers and television-screen dwelling whale, are meant to echo this strange unity between nature and conventionally factory-produced objects. Ultimately, the intention was to give a twist to the natural elements in the film, suggesting

that they are not truly natural but just attractive images conjured up to mask the fact that the experience is triggered by a brand.

Another theme I tried to communicate was the use of advertising to create the illusion of a better self. The character at the beginning of the animation is blank and soulless, but ultimately becomes relaxed and sedated. All of these character traits are expressions of the mood which Trichrome Blue symbolizes, calm, but before she opens the fruit, she is *too* calm – she is empty. After she presses the button, is a better kind of calm – she is content. The way that commercials seek to idealize and romanticize various lifestyles and attitudes is much the same to me. Viewers feel drawn to certain commercials and associate themselves with the product because they think it suits them, and in doing so, are trying to become better versions of themselves through these products. Commercials often, on a certain level, give the viewer the impression that they can improve themselves and their lives with the products they offer. However, like the character in Trichrome Blue, this feeling is only temporary.

Finally, a huge inspiration was the way in which animated shorts as advertisements generate interest from the viewer and actually function as a kind of bait to catch potential customers with. Especially with the internet, animations are seen by many and can be used as a way to draw viewers to websites or even to just search the internet for more information. This was one of the ways in which I wanted my animated short to function on the same level as a commercial: I wanted it to evoke the curiosity of viewers, and make them wonder what Trichrome really was. I wanted the logo and company name at the end of the animation to contrast with the more emotive narrative, and therefore draw extra attention to the fictional brand. If the animation achieved this, it would be evidence of the fact that making animated shorts as commercials helps the commercial to stand out and draw in audiences despite the fact that it is not marketed through mass media.

6.4. Conclusion

Upon completing the Trichrome concept, I have finally approached the subject of animated shorts as advertisements in two completely different ways: the fact-oriented research, and the creativity-oriented animation. In my research, I enjoyed gathering knowledge about the evolution of advertising and the significance of animation therein. On the other hand, I enjoyed being able to express a more critical and analytical approach in the creative side of the project. For the first time,

I approached research and creativity as different but essential parts of one whole, an approach which will hopefully pave the way for my future work as well.

7. Conclusion

It is clear that animated shorts as advertisements are a product of today's day and age. We can thank developments in technology, advertising, and society at large for the fact that animated shorts can be produced affordably, promoted plentifully, and actually viewed by people, who actually enjoy watching them. Given this atmosphere, figuring out why animated shorts can serve as advertisements is not a complicated matter. Today, it seems, is a better time than ever for commercial animators to flex their creative muscles and produce an entire story for purely corporate needs; or, on the other hand, for companies to seek creative storytelling animators to do their advertising work.

But what makes animated shorts so special? For one, where TV spots are often short, repetitive, and easily forgotten, animated shorts can give products a creation story which they would otherwise never have. Infusing a product with fictional life and injecting it with imaginary added value, animated shorts help to make a product appear unique and alive, something which in actual fact it is not. Although animated TV spots can attempt to do the same thing, a product with an entire movie made in its honor can truly distinguish itself from the rest. After all, it came from a small universe, a tiny little world all of its own, from which no other product emerged. It is unique, alive, and special (or so it appears).

And let's not forget the appealing nature of the animated short to the average media-guzzling potential consumer. Certainly the fact that a promotional activity can be genuinely entertaining and not a transparent, disruptive attempt to steal money out of one's pocket will pique the interest of a precious few at the very least. If the animation is any good, one may even find themselves watching the animation *for fun*, out of their own free will, rather than being confronted with it during commercial blocks or every other form of advertising which confronts people every day. If this is not the case, at the very least the animated short can serve as a reminder to consumers all over the world that this brand is not dead, but still out there, pumping money into advertising agencies and flashing its already famous name into the eyes of people all over the world.

If the growth of mass production in the 20th century led to a period of "vast sameness," then today is arguably even worse. There are even more products to choose from today than in the 50s, more than someone could ever purchase in their lifetime. Where we used to have a lot of choice, today

we have *too much* choice. Yet we are not all clones. It seems that diversity has only increased, and originality has become a much more desirable character trait. With our ever active economy and myriad of choices, the demand for something new, different and authentic has only become greater, although we are all still enthusiastic participants of a product-oriented society. What better way to stand out than to provide consumers with a truly entertaining, high quality advertising experience? What better time to let consumers indulge in their need for products, without compromising their desire for something unique and authentic? Why not unite the quick, flashy and exploitative world of advertising with the entertaining, stylish and likeable animated short? If it helps a brand stand out from the vast ocean of brands in today's world, then the application of animated shorts as advertisements is a more than likely phenomenon. One thing is certain: as long as this form of advertising is possible, commercial animators may have something to look forward to, whether it's a stimulating job opportunity or just the possibility of being entertained.

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