

The [unseen] Modernist Eye: Minimalism, Defamiliarization and the Advertising Film

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Martyn Woodward's PhD research is sponsored by the (HERA) EU-funded project 'Technology, Exchange & Flow: Artistic Media Practices and Commercial Application' led by Transtechnology Research at Plymouth University.

Transtechnology Research • Reader 2011
Plymouth University
Portland Square, Drake Circus
Plymouth PL4 8AA
United Kingdom

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ISBN 978-0-9538332-2-1

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Abstract

What is the relationship between fine art / avant-garde practices and domestic television advertising form? In asking this question, this paper departs from the contemporary literature regarding this relationship, which it argues in situating the relationship within late Modernism, overprivileges the formal aspects of the interaction, neglecting the very creative nature of human experience, perception and agency. This paper thus aims to re-think the relationship between the practices of avant-garde and advertising in light of the involvement of the creative nature of human experience, perception and agency by recognising the centrality of human perception to both endeavours. In doing so the paper can begin to discuss the use of avant-garde techniques, such as minimalism and ambiguity, within advertising forms not merely as a formal strategy, but as underpinned by a very human creativity.

Introduction

The formal exchanges, convergences and crossovers between early commercial advertising and experimental avant-garde practices have been richly discussed (Gibbons, 2005; Spiegel, 2008). Contemporary accounts of this relationship describe it as an embracing of each other's formal styles, driven primarily by an economic engine, and one which treats the avant-garde and advertising forms themselves as separate, translatable formal styles (Cowen, 2010). These 'cross-overs' and 'convergences' here are considered in the light of the desire of advertising agencies to apply 'cutting edge' cinematic techniques to draw viewers' attentions during a period of advertising saturation in the 1960s (Spiegel, 2009, pp. 214-216), in which avant-garde techniques within advertising forms are considered to be a formal strategy employed primarily to stand out and to draw viewers' attention.

This paper traces this formal view of the relationship between avant-garde and advertising to lie within the Modernist 'autonomy of the arts' (Greenberg, 1960) during the 1960s, which maintained two fundamental conditions regarding the relationship: (1) that avant-garde (or arts practice) and advertising are treated as separate endeavours, with different agendas and (2) in privileging the formal structure, the literature overlooks the perceptual and experiential dimension of human experience, and as such neglects any human agency within the transaction. Current research concerning the relationship between avant-garde techniques and advertising film aims to compound the formalist approach in highlighting the mutually beneficial exchanges of print advertising and art into the practices of audio-visual media, in which the relationship is viewed as a complimentary mutual interaction that itself produces a creative synergy! This 'Exchange and Flow' between commercial advertising film and avant-garde art practice treads further new

ground by factoring in the perceptual dimensions of the viewers themselves, which has been overlooked within the literature. In proceeding from this position, this paper aims to re-think the relationship between the practices of avant-garde and advertising in light of the involvement of the creative nature of human experience, perception and agency by recognising the centrality of human perception to both endeavours. Through a case study revealing the use of the avant-garde technique such as minimalism within advertising film during the 1960s, through a core example of the UK campaign for Hamlet Cigars (1968), this paper focuses upon unravelling the perceptual dimensions of the use of minimalism, as recognised by art critics such as Rosalind Krauss (Gamboni, 2002; Krauss, 1993; Bearn, 2000) when discussing the pictorial arts, we can never fully exclude the domains of human knowledge and experience. This paper uncovers this [unseen] structuring of the visual through a focus upon the behavioural, psychological and multi-sensory aspects of perceptual experience, drawing upon the work of Ernst Gombrich, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Rudolf Arnheim, in which ‘visual’ perception is underpinned by the very experiences, desires and prejudices of an embodied subject. Within such a model, minimalism will be conceived not as a remove from human knowledge and experience, but as always being bound up within, supported by, and invoking the multi-sensory experiences, desires and prejudices of the embodied subject. These conditions of the embodied eye, maintaining that the familiarity of embodied experience will always remain the starting point, within perception, of the ambiguous and unfamiliarity of minimal and ambiguous forms, bring to light the discussion of minimalism at the heart of the Hamlet advertising film form as a condition to actively engage the familiarity of the experience of the embodied subject, which is also a tactic endemic of the artistic avant-garde concept of *defamiliarization*. It is through this interwoven context of commercial advertising, avant-garde art practices, psychology of perception, phenomenology and film-art practice, that the minimalism and ambiguity of the Hamlet Cigars’ campaign can be shown to work not merely as an artistic stylisation or a conscious formal strategy, but as a product of a very human creativity.

Prologue

[Happiness is a Cigar called Hamlet]

Cigar smoking is a reward or a reinforcement of other pleasures. Little things in life can get you down [...]. But on reflection and with a little quiet smoke, you can always rise above these petty aggravations. Happiness is a Cigar Called Hamlet. (CDP Account Review ‘Happiness is a Cigar called Hamlet’, 1995).

The message for the British campaign for Hamlet Cigars was simple: that life’s petty little aggravations can be soothed with a smoke of a Hamlet cigar. The campaign works on the premise of enhancing the quality of life of a victim of circumstance, such as a man in a neck brace unable to keep up with a fast pace of a tennis match; a sculptor breaking an arm of a piece he is working on; a music teacher unable to teach a young boy to play the piano, through a moment of calm created through a smoke of a Hamlet cigar. The everyday situations represented within the campaign portray a tension between the *chaotic* of the everyday and the *calm* created through

the smoke of a Hamlet cigar, which itself is always accompanied by Bach's *Air on a G-String*. Hamlet 'Music Teacher' (1968) describes the situation of a teacher's anxiety attempting to teach a young boy to play the piano, unsuccessfully, who persists in hammering the keys creating an out-of-key and out-of-time run of random notes. The teacher's anxiety eventually causes him to reach for his Hamlet cigars. As he lights the cigar he is transported into a world of his own, punctuated through the soothing sounds of *Air on a G-String*, of calm and tranquillity, ignoring the chaotic and noisy reality around him. The advert finishes with a soothing male voiceover proclaiming: 'Happiness is a Cigar called Hamlet'.



Fig. 1-4. (Top left to bottom right) Hamlet Cigars mise-en-scene analysis.

The work is persistently minimalist in its form, framed by a consistent fixed, straight-on point of view (Fig. 1, 2) with a static, minimal camera movement maintained throughout. The mise-en-scene is stripped to its bare minimum, using specific props to signify the context of a music lesson, such as a piano, metronome, boy and teacher, sparingly to punctuate the setting against a blank set (Fig. 1). The costumes are bare, the boy wearing a tie and glasses, the teacher a cravat and jacket (Fig. 1). The acting style is stripped down, held back through small gestures and minimal movements; the boy's playing is reduced to a physically tense, focussed and intense stabbing of the keys with his pointed fingers, the disdain of the teacher over the boy's playing is realised predominantly through his static posture and facial expression (Fig. 1), the soothing nature of the Hamlet cigar is presented through a gently swaying hand gesture in time to *Air on*

a *G-string* (Fig. 4). The use of sound is restricted to utilising music only, through the out-of-key piano notes and *Air on a G-string*, with no spoken dialogue throughout except with the spoken strap line ‘Happiness is a Cigar called Hamlet’ at the end.

	Shot No							
	1	2	3	3	5	6	7	8
Shot Angle	↗	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑	↑
Movement	↻	↻↻	↻	↻↗	↗↗	↻↻↻	↻↻	
Shot Length	S (1)	M (2.70)	M (4)	S (1)	L (5)	M (1.5)	L (5.5)	M (3.5)
Shot Type	CU	MS	CU	ECU	CU	MS	CU	CU

Fig. 5. ‘Music Teacher’ Formal Analysis

The structure of the work, the construction of its shots, shot types, shot lengths, movements, and rhythms, are constructed to describe the change from the chaotic and noisy to the calm and soothing through the minimum possible means. The entire advert consists of 8 shots (Fig. 5) utilising only 3 types of shots: close-up, extreme close-up and medium shot. The work uses a single repeated pattern of close-up and medium shots that is maintained throughout the entire work (Fig. 6). The work is divided into 2 halves, representative of the *chaos* of the out-of-key playing, and the soothing *calm* of the Hamlet cigar (Fig. 1).

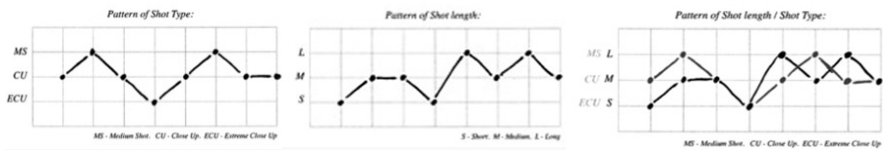


Fig. 6-8. Shot Length against Shot Type; Pattern of Shot Length; Pattern of Shot Length.

The first, chaotic, half is constructed from a pattern of small and medium length close-up and medium shots. The flow is broken by the introduction of the product through the only extreme close-up of the work, midway in shot 4, punctuating the shift to the soothing calm as the teacher smokes his cigar accompanied by Bach’s *Air on a G-string* in shot 5. Within the second, calming, half the pace of the work changes, and is constructed through long and medium length shots through the same use of medium and close-up shots (Fig. 7). The repeated pattern of close-up and medium shots maintains a constant, steady rhythm throughout the work that is interrupted

by the introduction of the product in shot 4 by an extreme close-up (Fig. 9), punctuating the calming shift in which the faster cutting between shots in the first ‘chaotic’ half is broken, and slowed down. The accompanying music accompanies the shift through a change from the out-of-key, and out-of-time, to *Air on a G-String* during shot 5 (Fig. 9).

The persistent use of minimalism within the form is utilised to set the context and scene, and to describe the changing shift from the chaotic to a calm. This minimalism permeates throughout the whole work, the minimal mise-en-scene, minimal camera movements and use of shot types, minimal acting and gestures and the minimal use of sound through music. Within the late Modernist landscape of 1960s, in which this work existed, the artistic practice of *minimalism* within the pictorial arts (through avant-garde, expressionist and abstract artworks (Greenberg, 1960) were critically understood as being a part of the Modernist conception of the ‘autonomy of art’, which conceived a specific visual model which was tied to the visual arts which, in the following, will be termed the *Modernist eye*.

1. The Modernist Eye

The senses are useful when their contribution is not overestimated. In the culture we happen to live in they teach us relatively little. The world of our century is a poor actor: it does show its variegated outside, but its true nature is not immediately apparent either to the eyes or the ears (Arnheim, 1959, p. 196).

As Perceptual Psychologist Rudolf Arnheim claims, the Modernist conceptions of the ‘visual’ and in turn of visual perception tied to the pictorial arts, underestimated the contribution of the non-visual senses within visual perception. Radically transforming visual models of the Middle Ages when visual perception was seen as intertwined directly with a human soul, and as a sensation through which ‘reality announces itself to a perceiving subject’, Modernism’s model of the visual aimed instead to escape the domain of human knowledge and experience in order to discover the qualities that defined an ‘absolute autonomy’ (from any human experience and knowledge) of a pictorial artwork (Krauss, 1981, p. 147). The focus on the ‘absolute autonomy of the visual arts’ is widely recognised as a systematic issue during the rise of Modernism (Gamboni, 2002; Krauss, 1993; Bearn, 2000). The notion held that the visual, as the only sense that a pictorial art can invoke, could be constructed outside of the experience of the rest of the experienced body, and defined as an absolute ‘pure’ irreducible ‘essence’ of a pictorial work (Greenberg, 1960, p. 86). This ‘autonomy’ of the visual and separation from the experiencing subject was theorised within the pictorial arts through a perceived notion that each of the arts were to demonstrate that “the kind of experience they provided was valuable in its own right and not to be obtained from any other activity” (Greenberg, 1960, p. 88). To Clement Greenberg, each art “has to perform this demonstration on its own account” (1960, p. 88). The Modernist task was to “eliminate from the specific effects of a visual art any and every effect that might conceivably be borrowed from [...] any other art.” (1960, p. 88). It is this logic upon which Modernism’s concept of the visual is built:

To achieve this autonomy, painting has had above all to divest itself of everything it might share with sculpture, and it is in its effort to do this, and not so much [...] to exclude the representational or literary, that painting has made itself abstract (Greenberg, 1960, p. 88).

Greenberg argues that in searching for its autonomy, the pictorial arts orientated themselves toward flatness, as this was the only condition that painting didn't share with any other art form (1960, p. 87). As such, he argued that representation, or illustration, does not attain the uniqueness of pictorial art in the way minimalism could, on the grounds that it is not confined to a two dimensional space:

All recognizable entities (including pictures themselves) exist in three-dimensional space, and the barest suggestion of a recognizable entity suffices to call up associations of that kind of space (Greenberg, 1960 p. 88).

It is through this autonomy, from any other art form, that Greenberg's Modernism rests upon on two key points: (1) insistence on the optical as "the only sense that a completely and quintessentially pictorial art can invoke" (p. 90) and (2) to exclude the domains of non-visual sensory experience, and to focus upon the relation to the 'essence' of the visual alone. It is through the autonomy from representation and recognition, within the pictorial arts, that the abstract and the minimal are seen as an artistic effort of painting to divest itself of the sculptural, and of subjective recognition.

Rosalind Krauss argues that such a construction of the visual as autonomous from human perception, dis-embodies it from the natural network it exists within, in contrast the visual is always "[d]ependent on the connection of the eye to the whole network of the body's tissue, [...] tied to the conditions of nervous life, it is by definition a function of temporality" (1993, p. 216). Krauss argues that vision is always located within a body, within the network of the body's tissue, and temporality of the body. The Modernist model of vision, she argues, lies outside of the temporality of the body: by separating the visual from the rest of the bodily experience it excludes the domain of human knowledge endemic to the visual:

To exclude the domain of knowledge [...] to rewrite the visual in the realm of a reflexive relation to the modality of vision rather than its contents, to savor in and for these qualities like immediacy, vibrancy, simultaneity, effulgence and to experience these qualities without objects (Krauss, 1993, p. 147).

She argues instead that visual phenomena, far from being outside and external to multi-sensory experience, have an "unconscious" that is internal to the perceiver that houses it (Krauss, 1994, p. 178). Her notion of the "optical unconscious", maintains that "the world of visual phenomena: clouds, sea, sky, forest- have an unconscious" (Kraus, 1993, p. 178) that lies within the body of the perceiver. Such a model aims to include the entire experience and knowledge of the perceiver, that works within "[t]he order that operates beyond the reach of the [*purely*] visual, an order that works entirely underground, out of sight" (Krauss, 1993, p. 217; author's inserts and italics). Utilising the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Husserl her "optical unconscious" lies within:

[A] [p]rimordial intuition that is not in need of “concepts” in order to grasp the world. Nothing comes “before” to shape the aperture that perception opens onto the field of experience (Kraus, 1993, p. 217).

To Krauss, Greenberg’s Modernism, tied to the privileging and separation of the optical over other sense experiences, dis-embodies vision from the perceiver’s multi-sensory perceptual experience and undermines the very ‘unconscious’ of where art comes from, that of the perceiver’s experience itself. Her ‘optical unconscious’ roots the visual within the ‘unconscious’ of the multi-sensory body, aiming to include this ‘forgotten’ ‘unconscious’ underground structuring of the body’s temporality and knowledge within Modernist models of the visual. To Krauss, the ‘visual’ model of Modernism thus has an occult, unseen, underground structure that lies outside of a purely artistic endeavour.

2. The [unseen] Modernist Eye

This occult, unseen structure of the visual can be traced throughout phenomenological positions and the work of constructivist artists and perceptual psychologists within the visual arts during the 1960s. Minimalism and ambiguity take on a different role within the work of Ernst Gombrich, Merleau-Ponty and Rudolf Arnheim, who embody visual perception within the behavioural, psychological and multi-sensory experience of the body, the synthesis of which will outline the conditions of an *embodied eye*.

For perceptual psychologist Rudolf Arnheim, the “prejudice” (experience) of the multi-sensory experiencing body always underlies visual perception. In refuting the argument that film cannot be art, as it does nothing but mechanically reproduce reality (1959, p. 8). Arnheim discusses the techniques by which film can be treated as an art form through recognising the embodied nature of visual perception of the spectator. For Arnheim, film’s relationship with reality resembles that of painting, literature and dance, and as such, as a medium can be used (but isn’t necessarily) to produce artistic results (1959, p. 8). Arnheim argues that *real life* is only ever real in the experience of an embodied subject, and that film - cinema as an event - should not be considered as merely a mechanical reproduction of reality, but should be recognised as a product of the prejudices and experiences of the viewer. To Arnheim, a mechanical approach to film denies the true functioning of the eye as embodied within the functioning of the rest of the body, and as Krauss, he argues:

Our eyes are not a mechanism functioning independently of the rest of the body. They work in constant cooperation with the other sense organs (Arnheim, 1959, p. 30).

Arnheim maintains that it is the cooperation of the rest of the body with the visual, and the structuring of the visual experience through the cooperation of the rest of the body (the kinaesthetic, aural, tactile and olfactory) that structures our experiences of a ‘visual’ work.² The eyes are not merely passive mechanisms functioning in isolation; they are in constant cooperation with the rest of the bodies’ sensory experiences, even when these sensory experiences are as-

sumed as absent within a visual work. It is this “absence of the non-visual world of the senses” within a visual work, that is always present within the viewers’ perpetual experience, “sensations of smell, equilibrium, or touch are [...] never conveyed in a film through direct stimuli, but are suggested indirectly through sight” (Arnheim, 1959, p. 30). Arnheim notes that the very absence of the kinesthetic within the visual representation of a film (arising from a body at rest) is always suggested indirectly, and is present within the perceptual experience of the spectators themselves. Recognising how surprising phenomena result if the eye is engaged and the body is static, Arnheim notes how a feeling of “giddiness” is produced when watching a film taken in which the camera moves rapidly back and forth. This “giddiness” is produced by “the eye participating in a different world from that indicated by the kinesthetic reaction of the body, which is at rest” (Arnheim, 1959, p. 30). Our sense of equilibrium within a film is dependent upon what the eye reports (in cooperation with the other senses), as the body itself receives no kinesthetic stimulation, the experience of equilibrium is absent from the materiality of the film, but is perceptually present within the experience of the film.

The absence of the ‘non-visual sense’ of sound is perceived through the visual, in the cooperation of all the senses, to construct, within perception, a materially absent sound. Arnheim discusses that within the experience of watching a silent film:

No one who went unprejudiced to watch a silent film missed the noises, which would have been heard if the same events had been taking place in real life. No one missed the sound of walking feet, nor the rustling of leaves, nor the ticking of a clock (Arnheim, 1959, p. 34).

To Arnheim, the absence of the sound in silent film is experienced within the imagination of the viewer as it is made visible within the work itself, citing Josef von Sternberg’s *The Docks on New York*, in which a gunshot is made visible by the sudden rising of a flock of birds (1959, p. 34). Here, the spectator does not infer that the shot has been fired, but actually sees something of the quality of the noise (Arnheim, 1959, p. 108). The ‘suddenness, the abruptness of the rising birds, gives visually the exact quality that the shot possesses acoustically’ (Arnheim, 1959, p. 108), making the invisible sound visible through an in-direct event, strengthening the effect, and being experienced perceptually by the spectator. For Arnheim, the multi-sensory ‘prejudiced’ experience of the body structures vision and the constant cooperation of all the sense organs contributes to the entire perceptual experience of the spectator. As such, the minimising of the whole sense experience to the visual (through silent film³) will always be structured by the ‘unseen’ world of the non-visual senses. For Arnheim, the ‘visual’ engagement with minimal formal structures, always involves the spectator’s recognitions and expectations.

Such psychological aspects of visual experience - expectations, intentionality, and desire - are the focus of the art historian Ernst Gombrich. To Gombrich, since in his view there can be no “innocent eye” (1964, p. 307), an eye that is merely passive in its perception of cultural codes, the eye is always historical and relative to the body that it belongs to and visual perception is no different. As such, Gombrich maintained that the beholder of the visual image had their own psychological ‘share’ of the visual representations that were depicted within them. Gombrich’s

“beholder’s share” (pp. 174-175) spoke of the incompleteness of painting arousing the bodily based imaginative faculty of the beholder; what is not depicted within these types of images arouses the beholder’s own experiences and expectations. Discussing the concept at work within the perception of ‘accidental’ shapes such as clouds he notes: “What we read into these accidental shapes depends on our capacity to recognize in them things or images we find stored in our minds” (p. 155). The beholder’s share relies upon the psychological concept of the ‘projection’ of our prior expectations and experiences, our schema, onto the world, in which we can “project’ the familiar form of a face onto the configuration of a car just as we project familiar images into vaguely similar shapes of clouds” (p. 89). This projection of familiar images onto “vaguely similar shapes” is seen within the psychological test of drawing consequences (Fig. 9), in which an original image (an Egyptian owl) is copied and re-copied until it eventually takes on the form of a ‘pussycat’ (pp. 64-65). Gombrich notes that where a pre-existing category is lacking, within the unfamiliar ‘vague’ shapes (at around reproduction 5), a distortion sets in (p. 64), and the shape takes on a new form dependent upon the perceiver’s schema of experience. It is here that “the first approximate, loose category [...] is gradually tightened to fit the form it is to reproduce” (p. 64). It is on this premise of projection that the beholder’s share rests, maintaining that “the familiar will always remain the likely starting point for the rendering of the unfamiliar” (p. 72). Exemplified within Eastern artwork, Gombrich points to how Chinese art theory discusses the power of expressing the “invisible” through the absence of brush and ink (p. 175).⁴ Within such images, intimate details such as facial features are absent, but the expressive marks that are present are enough to express what is absent, “invisible” within the depiction (Fig. 9):



Fig. 9. ‘Images from the Mustard seed Manual for Painting’, in Gombrich, 1964, p. 79.

Figures, even though painted without eyes, must seem to look; without ears, must seem to listen [...]. There are things which ten hundred brushstrokes cannot depict but which can be captured by a few simple strokes if they are right. That is truly giving expression to the invisible (Gombrich, 1964, pp. 174-175).

Gombrich believed that it is precisely the restricted visual language of Classical Eastern artwork that encouraged the beholder to complete the images by arousing their imitative faculty. In such

a theory the empty surface is as much a part of the image as the strokes of the brush, since the empty space arouses the beholder's share in the perception of the image. It is this power of expectation, rather than conceptual knowledge, Gombrich notes, that moulds what we see in life; the 'expected', projected image is structured from the beholder's temperament, personality and preferences, as such the experienced familiar is always the starting point in the perception of the unfamiliar.

The multi-sensory and psychological dimensions that underpin 'visual' perception are at the centre of Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. To Merleau-Ponty, however, the body alone is not seen as the core of all of our perceptual and cognitive experience, but is inseparable from the world in which it exists, subject and object are intertwined in reciprocal specification (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, p. 13). In recognising the reciprocity of object and subject, to which the organism both contributes, but is also conditioned by the external environment, Merleau-Ponty roots perception itself within behaviour:

Since all movements of the organism are always conditioned by external influences, one can, if one wishes, readily treat behaviour as an effect of the Milieu. But in the same way, since all the stimulations which the organism receives have in turn been possible only by its proceeding movements which have culminated in exposing the receptor organ to external influences, one could also say that behaviour is the first cause of all stimulations (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, p. 13).

To Merleau-Ponty, the reciprocity of the body *in* the world supports and maintains the spectacle of 'vision'. The visual cannot be detached from either the sensing body or the world as a system; as such vision cannot be dis-embodied and understood in isolation from the system, as the system itself maintains it. The visual is intertwined with the tactile, kinesthetic and temporal dimensions of the body. In recognising the embodied nature of visual perception, Merleau-Ponty is able to shift the 'cause of stimulation' within perception from a visual stimulus to the behaviour and movement of the body itself:

Thus the form of the excitant is created by the organism itself, by its proper manner of offering itself to actions from the outside. [...] The environment emerges from the world through the actualization or the being of the organism – [granted that] an organism can only exist if it succeeds in finding in the world an adequate environment (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, p. 13).

Merleau-Ponty shifts and underpins perception itself to the movement and behaviour of the body, a model of perception in which the environment emerges from the world through the very movements and behaviours of the body. The body and world are co-dependent; as such our primary way of relating to things is neither purely sensory, reflexive, cognitive or intellectual, but rather bodily and behavioral.

Through a synthesis of this literature an [unseen] Modernist eye is always *prejudiced* by its psychological and multi-sensory experiences. The 'visual' is never isolated from the temporality of the body that perceives it, the kinesthetic, tactile, aural and olfactory are always *present* within

the experience of the ‘visual’, and as such, *present* in their *absence* within the perceived work. The ‘visual’ is also always conditioned by the psychological, by expectations and by the desires of human nature. In realising the reciprocity of subject and object, Merleau-Ponty embodies this multi-sensual and psychological ‘visual’ perception within the behaviour of the body in reciprocal specification with the environment. The embodied eye functions as a part of and upon the presence of bodily behaviour, to construct the ‘visual’ outside of this reciprocal experience. To talk of ‘visual’ perception alone, is therefore a construction that privileges the visual over the importance of the other sense experience, radically overestimating the importance of the ‘visual’. Arnheim’s absence of the non-visual sense world present within the perception of a visual work and Gombrich’s notion of the minimal brush strokes enabling ‘invisible’ features of an image to be present within perception, are approaches that recognise the multi-sensory, embodied nature of perception. Through the minimalism of a multi-sensory experience, through the pictorial, of both the Chinese art and the silent film, the multi-sensory world of the senses is always present within perception. As such, the technique of minimalism through the ‘visual’ image is a technique that directly acknowledges the perceiver’s entire embodied experience, invoking the familiarity of the whole bodily experience within the experience of the perception of the unfamiliar, minimal and vague shapes. Uncovering the techniques of unfamiliarity through minimalism at work within embodied perception, places these techniques as necessary attributes of the human perceptual system itself, in which the unfamiliarity of a ‘visual’ experience is always structured by the familiarity of prior embodied experience.

3. The Defamiliarized [unseen] Modernist Eye

The conditions of the embodied eye maintain that the familiarity of embodied experience will always remain the starting point, within perception, of the unfamiliar. The unfamiliarity of the minimalist nature at the heart of the Hamlet advertising film form can therefore begin to be viewed as a tactic to engage the familiarity of the experience of the perceiver. Such techniques of ‘defamiliarizing’ an experience lie at the heart of the artistic avant-garde concept of defamiliarization, in which minimalism and ambiguity aim to do just this. The concept of defamiliarization describes a way of thinking characterised by the literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky during the early 20th century. The concept came as a method to attack the contemporary Modernist theories of the 20th century of the economy of mental effort within the arts (Crawford, 1984). Shklovsky aimed to create artistic literary devices that would create the strongest possible perceptual impression on the reader (Crawford, 1984). He understood perception as an “origin, a primary (originary) experiencing” (Crawford, 1984, p. 210), and foregrounds perception within his model of the arts, in doing so recognises the need to make things unfamiliar, to prolonging perception, in order to experience a work’s subjective ‘artfulness’:

[T]he device of art is to make things “unfamiliar”, to increase the difficulty and length of their perception, since the perceptual process in art is valuable in itself and must be prolonged; art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object, the object in art being itself unimportant (Shklovsky, 1914, p. 13).

His notion of estrangement based upon the concept of defamiliarization, aims to make an object strange by removing it out of its sphere of habitual recognition (Shklovsky, 1914, p. 6). This is achieved within the arts by a variety of means; specifically discussing the estrangement used by the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy he notes that “[Tolstoy] does not call a thing by its given name, that is, he describes it as if it were perceived for the first time [...]. He forgoes the conventional names of the various parts of a thing, replaces them instead with the names of corresponding parts in other things” (Shklovsky, 1914, p. 6). This device of estrangement, Shklovsky calls the “rotation” of an object within its semantic space (like turning a real object in space (Crawford, 1984), which shifts the object out of its typical associations into a radically different one, estranging the object. Shklovsky’s estrangement relies upon the concept of making strange an object or event through describing it from different points of view, or corresponding events, to invoke a new perceptual impression.

Shklovsky’s technique of ‘estrangement’ can be traced at work within the assumed ‘visual’ media of film through Arnheim’s concept of the ‘indirectness’ of the use of the medium. Applied to silent film, this concept works upon the principle of the “artistic use of the delimitation of the picture” (Arnheim, 1959, p. 78). Arnheim’s concept of indirectness relies upon a paraphrasing of the event through an *indirect*, or slightly removed, consequence, and the artistic exploration of the limits of the pictorial. Describing his technique at work within the literature of Dante, he notes:

When Francesca de Ramini tells how she fell in love with the man with whom she was in the habit of reading, and only says “we read no more this day”. Dante thereby indicates in-directly, simply by giving the consequences, that on this day they kissed each other (Arnheim, 1959, p. 107).

Such a technique describes a situation, rather than attempting to give a concrete action itself by using an *indirect* representation of the event. Returning to Von Sternberg’s *The Docks on New York* (1929), Arnheim shows how this indirectness is seen to function throughout the work. Describing a specific scene of a shooting, in which the sound of a gunshot is made visible through paraphrasing it through the visual of a sudden rising of a flock of birds (Fig. 11). Arnheim notes how such an editing choice is not merely a tactic on the part of the director to deal with the silence of the medium, (as it is enough to see the revolver fire, or see a wounded man fall (1959, p. 34)), but is an artistic paraphrase, an “indirect representation of an event that is strange to it” (1959, p. 107). The spectator, also, does not only infer that the shot has been fired, but actually sees something of the quality of the sound itself - the suddenness and the abruptness given visually, is the exact quality the shot possesses acoustically (Arnheim, 1959, p. 108). Instead of giving an audible occurrence itself, the transposition into something visual gives its “telling characteristics” (Arnheim, 1959, p. 109) enough to be experienced as present through perception. By using an indirect representation of an event (the sound of a gunshot) through a material that is indirect to it (visible flock of birds), or, as seen in Dante, by not directly giving the action itself but only its consequences, the techniques of indirectness allow the perceiver to experience telling characteristics of the event through an indirect transposition of another event.⁵

In an example of a different kind, the delimitation of the pictorial through the indirect framing of a shot is used to estrange the work. In *The Docks of New York*, Arnheim again discusses a scene that purposely ignores the framing of the most important part of the shot, a scene in which a woman commits suicide by jumping off a boat (Fig. 10). Arnheim notes how the only thing shown within the shot is that of the partial reflection on the quivering surface of the water, of a partially framed deck of a boat with the woman standing at first and then jumping overboard (1959, p. 78). This example demonstrates estrangement through the delivery of a “direct” characteristic (of the story of the suicide) through an indirect and unfamiliar view (Arnheim, 1959, p. 78).⁶ The camera is placed in such a position that the most important elements of the shot, the boat and the woman, do not directly appear at all.



Fig. 10-11. *The Docks of New York* Gun shot; *The Docks of New York* Suicide.

The utilisation of estrangement within silent film works to actively involve the spectator’s imagination by paraphrasing an event within the work through indirect representation of an event that is strange to it (Arnheim, 1959, p. 107). Describing the event of a gunshot through the image of a flock of birds paraphrases the event of the gunshot through this slightly removed event. Such a technique visually produces the ‘telling characteristic’ of the sound of a gunshot, instead of giving an audible occurrence in itself, as such the transposition into something visual gives its characteristic enough to be experienced as present within perception. The indirectness through delimitation of the image works through the removal of key elements from the composition, composed through an unfamiliar point of view. The ambiguity of the suicide (Fig. 12) estranges the event through the minimalism of recognisable elements of the mise-en-scene and through the ambiguity created through the reflections of the water.⁷ Arnheim’s focus upon silent film, in particular its artistic potential, demonstrates the defamiliarizing effects within a silent film, through estrangement, indirectness and delimitation. The synthesis has revealed three conditions by which defamiliarization may be at work within film: (1) the paraphrasing of one sense or event (sound) through an indirect, or slightly removed consequence of another (visual); (2) transposing an event through an indirect, and unfamiliar point of view and (3) through the work of ambiguity and minimalism of mise-en-scene and composition. Such formal treatments at work within an advertising film aim to catch the imagination of the spectator, to enthrall them through unusualness, to actively involve their familiarity, to invoke the unseen.

Epilogue

[The unseen Chaos]

But the spectator, who perhaps might have watched a direct shot of the event with merely passing interest, is caught and thrilled by the unusualness of the presentation (Arnheim, 1959, p. 79).

As Arnheim notes, the techniques of indirectness can catch the attention of a spectator, with just a passing interest, with an unusualness that thrills and engages. The contextual literature uncovered through the workings of the [unseen] Modernist eye have positioned, through artistic techniques of estrangement, the techniques of minimalism and ambiguity as core attributes of the human perceptual system, a system which constantly enacts a experiential familiarity. It is through this context that the minimalism and ambiguity of the *Hamlet Cigars Music Teacher* advert can be shown to defamiliarize the work, utilising the three conditions of defamiliarization: (1) through the work of ambiguity and minimalism of mise-en-scene and composition; (2) the paraphrasing of one sense or event through an indirect, or slightly removed consequence of another and (3) transposing an event through an indirect, and unfamiliar point of view.



Fig. 12 - 13. *Hamlet Cigars Music Teacher*.

The work primarily aims to defamiliarize, through the use of ambiguity and minimalism of mise-en-scene, composition and construction. The framing of a consistent fixed straight-on point of view (Fig. 12) with minimal camera movement. The mise-en-scene is stripped to its bare minimum, using specific props to signify the context of a music lesson, such as a piano, metronome, boy and teacher, sparingly to punctuate the setting against a blank set (Fig. 12). The acting style is defamiliarized, held back through small gestures and minimal movements; the boy's playing is reduced to a physically tense, stabbing of the keys with his pointed fingers, the disdain of the teacher over the boy's playing is realised predominantly through his static posture and facial expression (Fig. 12). Little is given through the mise-en-scene itself, the tension between chaos and calm within the work is defined through the structure of the work itself and the use of the sound.

The structure of the work itself, aims to defamiliarize through presenting the minimal possible construction of its shots, shot types, shot lengths, movements, and rhythms. The entire advert consists of eight shots, which utilise only three types of shots. The work uses a single repeated pattern of close-up and medium shots that is maintained throughout the entire work. This pattern of shot types describes the change from chaos to calm through a change in the accompanying shot lengths. The first, chaotic half is constructed from a pattern of small and medium length close-up and medium shots. Within the second, calming, half the pace of the work changes and is constructed through long and medium length shots through the same use of medium and close-up shots (Fig. 13). The shot lengths are constructed to describe the change from the chaotic to the calm, and through a single change in a repeated pattern of shot types, defamiliarizes the pattern in the second half, describing the tension between chaos and calm.

The minimal mise-en-scene of the work gives little in the way of the presenting of the tension between chaos and calm; it is the sound that functions to paraphrase this emotional feeling within the work through the aural. The characteristics of the chaotic and physical playing style of the young boy in the first half of the work is paraphrased through the sound of the out-of-tune notes. The second half characterises the feeling of calm paraphrased through the use of *Air on a G-string*. This tension between the chaos and calm of the sound also works over the image by ‘estranging’ the experience through an indirect, and unfamiliar sonic experience during the first half. The chaotic unfamiliarity of the out-of-tune notes (notes that are ‘estranged’ from *Air on a G-String* itself) defamiliarizes the work, creating the chaotic anxiety of the first half, before eventually leading into the calming familiarity of Bach’s *Air on a G-string*.

Conclusions: A Very Human Endeavour

The discovery of defamiliarizing techniques within the Hamlet Cigars advertising film is not surprising given the conditions of embodied perception outlined throughout this paper. As the multi-sensory world of the senses is always present within the perception of ‘visual’ media, this specific treatment of the film form aims to catch the imagination of the spectator, to enthrall them through unusualness to actively involve their familiarity. The concept of the ‘autonomy of the pictorial art’ relied not just upon the autonomy of the purely visual from human experience and knowledge, but also on the autonomy of art itself from any other human endeavour. The assumption of these techniques as endemic to autonomy of the *artistic*, as exemplified through Greenberg and Arnheim, is challenged through evidence of these techniques permeating throughout psychology and studies of perception. Subtly traceable throughout the literature, everyday perceptual experiences and ‘visual’ ephemera such as ink blots, images within clouds, calligraphic marks, ambiguous doodles and the medium of comics, all work within the parameters of defamiliarization. The treatment of advertising forms, from the assumption of an autonomy within the arts, subsequently separates artistic practice from other human activities such as the psychological sciences and crafts, which undermines not only the contributions through the interactions between the practices themselves, but also clouds the very nature of these practices – as a part of a very human creative endeavour.

Notes

¹ Endemic to the European funded research project (HERA) ‘Technology Exchange and Flow’ led by Prof. dr. Michael Punt, Transtechnology Research, Plymouth University.

² Arnheim’s discussion is based upon the viewing practices of the cinema event, and the ideology of the apparatus. Such events restrict the experience of the media – touching and smelling of painting etc.

³ This minimalism of a whole multi-sensory experience is also utilised through the accompaniment of music with the projection of the silent films.

⁴ Such evidence is also found within the medium of comics, in which the minimal visual style of the comic actively involves the reader’s own experience. Scott McCloud presents a multi-sensory notion of ‘closure’ in which the visual is supported by the reader’s experience, which constitutes much more than the visual, by providing an example of being within a kitchen environment. McCloud notes how we can ‘hear’ the boiling pot, we can almost *smell* the food being cooked in the kitchen, even *feel* it or *taste* it (McCloud, 1993).

⁵ The structuring of the narrative or expression of a film work through the audio accompaniment is well documented (Chion 1994, 1999). Through such evidence, Arnheim may seem to ignore the use of the accompaniment of sound with the film event as structuring the visual work, however, his focus lies not upon the reduction of a film work to the audiovisual, but upon the concept of the “parallelism of complete segregated representations” (1959, pp. 202-205), which argues that the expression through the combination of separate means of expression of the work (audio, visual, etc.) lies not in the work itself, but at a ‘second layer’ of a higher faculty, that of the perception of the spectator. As such, no one media track is privileged in forming the expression, they all combine in the experience of the spectator themselves. Arnheim’s focus here is upon the expressive visual track, as such he does not mention any other accompaniment.

⁶ Such a formal technique was prominent within Russian Constructivist photography of the early 20th century. Alexander Rodchenko’s concept of rotation fought against what he called the all too familiar ‘navel’ point of view (with the camera resting on the stomach) that had become canonised within amateur photography. He aimed to photograph from unusual, unfamiliar and strange points of view; photographing everyday objects in everyday situations in ways so long as they remained unrecognised.

⁷ Such techniques of estrangement through minimalism can be seen within the work of the German playwright Bertolt Brecht, the early productions of whom Arnheim attended shortly after he began to write critically about film.

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