Extensions, Intensities and the Convergent Advertisement

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ABSTRACT
Convergence media disrupts how advertising is constructed, disseminated and used by consumers. This paper asks whether assemblage thinking can be mobilized to apprehend this new advertising/consumer landscape. If viewed as complex assemblages, rather than as texts or persuasive devices, a more reflexive theoretical frame for convergent advertising may evolve.

INTRODUCTION
The current era of technological innovation has enabled the development of new media forms (Jenkins 2006), new consumer identities (Shau and Gilly 2003) and access to ever-evolving visual-affective worlds. The impact on advertising has been profound, suggesting “a disappearance of the advertisement in its traditional form… and its intensification and hybridization in oblique ways and through new media” (Campbell 2013,142). In effect, this transformation from static persuasive mechanism to integrated entertainment form (Campbell 2013) fundamentally challenges how advertising is constructed, disseminated and ultimately used by consumers (de Burgh-Woodman and Payne 2013). However, as different media channels continue to shape advertising consumption, equally traditional approaches to understanding both the dissemination and uses of advertising content come under increasing scrutiny as their capacity to adequately interpret and capitalize upon new consumer engagements with advertising is questioned (Taylor 2006).

The essential question posed in this conceptual paper is whether assemblage thinking, as imagined by Deleuze and Guattari (1980), can be fruitfully mobilized to better apprehend this new advertising/consumer landscape? While consumer engagement with the marketplace has radically changed through the advent of digital media, the theoretical evolution to understand these changes has lagged. As researchers grapple with the reality of the digital world, they are confronted with the need for theoretical resources for interpreting this landscape. In response to repeated calls for more nuanced theoretical perspectives that can deal with a rapidly transforming media landscape (Duguet 1981; Kuntzel 1980; Schroeder 2006; Speilman 2008; Taylor 2006), the present paper aims to show how assemblage thinking (Deleuze and Guattari 1980) as perhaps distinct from assemblage theory (De Landa 2015, 2006) enables a more reflexive perspective on how both the construction, dissemination and uses of advertising can be understood. To date, assemblage thinking has been applied in various contexts such as brands (Lury 2009), consumer communities (Parmentier and Fischer 2014) and the public sphere (Campbell 2013). However, assemblage thinking has not been applied extensively to advertising. In this paper, we focus specifically on how the advertisements by noted film directors blur cinema/art/advertising lines to form multi-faceted assemblages composed of filmic, artistic and persuasive components.

CONVERGENCE AND ASSEMBLAGE
Convergence
Based on Levy (2001), the term convergence was coined by Jenkins (2006) to explain the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, the search for new structures of media financing that fall at the interstices between old and new media, and the migratory behavior of media audiences” (p.3). The emergence of convergence catalyzes the shift from static advertising forms to the “re-appearance” (Campbell 2013) of advertising as a sophisticated entertainment form akin to a film, documentary or video game. The effect of convergence is that advertising becomes constructed for multiple media platforms, engages disparate audiences and utilizes creative modalities such as film, documentary and photographic production to generate content (Dena 2004). Convergence extends advertising aesthetics (Brown, and Patterson 2001; Joy and Sherry 2003; Schroeder 2006; Venkatesh and Meamber 2006) and provides a platform for diverse, enriched new forms of advertising production. These forms give rise to consumers engaging in ‘spreading’ (Jenkins et al. 2015) activities, whereby ads become shared cultural resources. Equally, the advent of embedded marketing “reflects the merging interests and priorities of the entertainment, communication, advertising and brand marketing industries” (Hackley 2005). This evolution has given rise to the “mini-film” (Copping 2010; Chen 2015) ad genre that consciously hybridizes advertising and traditional cinematic forms. The spreadable nature of convergence media potentially prompts the same self-extension, symbolic meaning and personal reflexivity we attribute to the object-possession (Belk 1988) transposed into a digital context (Belk 2013). It becomes important, then, to view advertising potentially as part of these kinds of culturally mediated collections.

Assemblage
Assemblage theory has attracted attention from consumer researchers seeking to understand diverse contexts such as individual consumption experiences (Canniford and Shankar 2013), consumer communities (Scrabotto and Fischer 2016; Thomas, Price, and Schau 2013) and families (Epp, Schau, and Price 2014; Epp and Velagelati 2014). As mentioned, assemblage theory has also been used to understand brands (Enwistle and Slater 2012 2013; Lury 2009). Assemblage theory allows us to excavae how ideas are composed to create new interactions between artistic, market and media platforms. Assemblage thinking was originally flagged by Deleuze and Guattari (1980) and elaborated as theory by DeLanda (2006, 2015). DeLanda describes assemblages as “agentic systems of diverse components that interact with one another in ways that can either stabilize or destabilize an assemblage’s identity” (DeLanda 2006, 12). Assemblages “draw attention to the material and expressive “capacities” of components: capacities are defined as what components have the potential to do when they interact with other entities” (Parmentier and Fischer 2015 p.1229). Material components have a function or presence, others have an expressive or symbolic function that organize the assemblage. Equally, assemblages are characterized by extensions (the evolving inclusion of new components via expansion) and intensities (the greater or lesser power of individual components within the assemblage) (DeLanda 2015). Finally, assemblages are not fixed in time or space. They are able to adapt and shift over time (DeLanda 2006). In the same way that research has suggested brands can hold together or dissipate as assemblages (Lury 2009; Parmentier and Fischer 2015), advertisements can also be regarded as assemblages in that they collate diverse components that interact to produce a tangible, stabilized (yet open to destabilization or deteriorationization) entity – the ad or campaign itself. Embedded within the ad or ads are an amalgam of components that acquire expressive capacities as they interact with other entities.
In this research, a two-step method was utilized. The first step was to undertake an analysis of the assemblage’s intensities. To achieve this, critical visual analysis (Schroeder 2002; Schroeder and Borgerson 1998) was used. Following the operations of description, interpretation, contextualization and finally comparison, Schroeder’s visual analysis method was adapted to take in diverse elements of the moving image such as its complex intertextual and technological qualities (Conomos 2007), spatio-temporal structures, perceptual and affective dimensions (Deleuze 1989) and audio-visual relationships (Chion 2009). The data used included 69 campaigns (sets of ads - some of which comprised multiple/numerous ads for the one campaign but captured here as one campaign count) directed by Wes Anderson, Darren Aronofksy, Michael Bay, Sofia Coppola, David Fincher, Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Spike Jonz, Ang Lee, Baz Luhrmann, David Lynch, Errol Morris, Martin Scorsese, Ridley Scott, and Joe Wright.

The second step was to map a classificatory typology of certain advertising forms. This classificatory typology reflects assemblage extension. Assemblages can be understood as accumulative to the extent that an assemblage can exist microcosmically (i.e. an individual ad), extend to a larger level (i.e. a suite of connected ads that extend the same set of structures and can be read as one large assemblage) or sit within an overarching assemblage (i.e. form a component of an entire oeuvre of inter-related transmedia communications for a particular brand). Therefore, the first step involved isolating a specific data set of ads made by film directors (described below), classifying said data set into one of three types i.e. 1. Singular, 2. Suite or 3. Oeuvre. Once the data had been organized into one of these three types, the nature of the typology was elaborated, tracing the accumulation of visual, rhetorical and symbolic force.

Deleuze and Guattari (1980) emphasize the rhizomic nature of assemblages as entities with ‘multiple roots’ that spring up across time and space. This inherent quality is reflected in convergence media itself and, by extension, convergent advertising as it moves across multiple platforms, springing ‘new roots’. Advertising created by film directors further augments this rhizomic nature as the ads can be viewed as rhizomic ‘lines of flight’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1980) connecting to greater cinematic, narrational, authorial and stylistic multiplicities that render our view of rhizomic advertising as ‘always in the middle, between things, inter-being, intermezzo…the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance” (pg. 26). Viewing advertising in this

Figure 1: Key Extensions and Intensities

Oeuvre
- More than three ads embedded in a cross-platform narrative i.e. Errol Morris for Miller

Suite
- Two to three ads in sequence or a grouping i.e. Wes Anderson for Prada

Standalone
- Singular ad i.e. Jean-Pierre Jeunet for CBA

Narrative
Visual-narrative affect
Stylistic audio-visual effect
Stylistic character (often replication of film maker’s cinematic stylistics)
Microcosmic storyworld
Consumer transportation
Authorial stamp
Reflexivity
Consumer affect and memory
Media platform

Extension of stylistic elements
Extension of narrative
Extension of product based brand name
Extension of film director brand
Extension to other media/marketing platforms
Extension of cultural forms/references or memories
Extension of consumer spreadability

Advertisiment intent
Narrative intent
Stylistic intent
Stylistic extension of cinematic content
Extension of film director identity
Extension of filmic references
Representation of other cultural forms/references or memories
Consumer spreadability
way also requires us to see its extensions and intensities as perpetu-
ally engaged, shifting and changing the nature of the assemblage.
The following figure (Figure 1) captures some of the dominant
components at work in an advertising assemblage, thus represent-
ing the core of the typology evolved from the classification of the
data along the axes of extension and intensity. The figure presented
here is not exhaustive but rather designed to demonstrate some of
the core relationships between components and how the nature of
the assemblage either alters or preserves certain core components
depending on whether it is a standalone ad, a suite or an oeuvre. The
relationship between extensions and intensities is symbiotic as the
affective, narrative, stylistic and referent intensities of the ad enable
both de-territorialization in the form of larger, emergent assemblages
and re-territorialization of key assemblage components. Like certain
forms of cinema itself (Brown and Fleming, 2011), the simultaneous
capacity for de-territorialization and re-territorialization through ex-
tension and intensification of affective, stylistic, narrative and refer-
ent intensities is shown to characterize the data presented here.

Intensities

DeLanda (2015) emphasizes intensities that interact within the
assemblage. As the valence of different intensities morph and re-
align within the assemblage, so too does the assemblage itself. Thus,
we should bear in mind these intensities are not static but always in
an iterative dialogue of becoming with one another. In the case of
convergent advertising, seemingly the most powerful intensity that
affects all others within the assemblage is narrative. In its shift from
persuasive spectacle to entertainment (Gurevitch 2010), convergent
advertising is marked by a return to strong narratives (i.e. Lee’s mini-
film for BMW, Anderson’s set of ads for Prada) that galvanize the
other assemblage components. Chen (2015) also notes that narrative
facilitates consumer transportation and fantasy prowess, both of
which appear as necessary intensities in the convergent assemblage
as they drive consumer affect (in the Deleuzian sense) and the desire
to seek extensions across platforms.

Drawing from narrative, particularly in the context of film
directors who make ads, visual-narrative affect (or the synergy be-
tween the storyline, its visual realization and the emotional affect on
the consumer) and the stylistic visual effects intensify the narrative
through aesthetic and audio cues (Chion 2009). Linked to stylistic
character, the style and effect of the ad is often a replication of the
film director’s cinematic signature (Wes Anderson for H&M, Da-
vil Lynch for Calvin Klein), intensified by similar visual styling,
use of the same cast (Lara Flynn Boyle for David Lynch’s Calvin
Klein Obsession, Adrien Brody as train conductor in a similar role
to his Grand Budapest character for Wes Anderson for H&M, Ni-
cole Kidman referencing her Moulin Rouge ‘Satine’ character for
Baz Luhrmann for Chanel) and a replication of similar cinematic
techniques and strategies to create a rich storyworld that harkens to
other similarly rich storyworlds (Jean-Pierre Jeunet for Chanel ref-
encing Amélie). Further intensities include the authorial presence
or stamp of the director (Gerstner and Staiger 2003) whose distinc-
tive stylistics and filmic techniques inhabit and frame the viewing
experience. Finally, convergent ads embody an inherent reflexivity,
moving somewhere between ad and art, low and high culture, dis-
posable snippet and cinematic experience. These multiple intensities
thus work within the ad itself but also affect consumer perception,
engagement and use.

Extensions

The convergent nature of these ads, many of which are part of
a set (in some cases like Errol Morris’ Miller ads, the set runs to 80
ads and each extends the ‘world’ of the Miller Man as he moves from
home, to diners, to lakes and open roads. Here one territorialized
space spills into the next, i.e. de-territorializes, only to be recuper-
ated or re-territorialized by the constant narrative thread), opens up
what DeLeuze and Guattari (1980) call ‘lines of flight’, reflecting,
again, a rhizomic multiplicity that can ‘turn up’ at any time. Extens-
ions in the convergent ad assemblage enable core intensities such as
narrative, stylistics, spatio-temporal parameters and authorial stamp
to spill over either into other ads to compose a suite i.e. a larger
assemblage that at once extends and intensifies core components.
David Lynch’s Calvin Klein Obsession ads represent this suite ap-
proach where each one of the four ads draws from a great writer
(D.H. Lawrence, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, Gustave
Flaubert), utilize black and white photography and evoke a similar
brooding mood with tell-tale Lynchian close-ups and abstractions
of bodily forms. While each ad is complete (or territorialized) in its own
right, there is nonetheless a larger narrative, stylistic and interpreta-
tive becoming that spills across the four ads. Where these compo-
nents are further extended into larger assemblages again, an oeuvre
is composed. Unlike a suite, which essentially replicates the intensi-
ties of the singular ad across a further two or three ads, an oeuvre
further intensifies its original components but embeds within a much
larger brand, marketing and cultural assemblage where the original
assemblage potentially faces de-territorialization as its components
moves across a greater diversity of platforms, confronts additional,
more complex branding/marketing/ cultural components and offers
maximum opportunity for consumer spreadability – which, in turn,
replicates further de-territorialization as components find new, pos-
sibility de-commodified, assemblages with which to interact. One
such example of an oeuvre is David Lynch’s four ads for Georgia
Coffee. The four ads make no sense unless they are viewed in se-
quence. However, the entire aesthetic, narrative and symbolic com-
position of the ads rely on the consumer’s thorough knowledge of the
Twin Peaks series. The ads’ mise en scènes such as the Red Room
in the Black Lodge, Ghostwood Forest and the local diner harken
back to the symbolic spaces of Twin Peaks with the return of Agent
Cooper and his love of coffee introducing the customary comedic re-
 lief. More broadly, the ad provokes troubling questions in the context
of oeuvre as the Twin Peaks season 2 cliffhanger (1990) left Agent
Cooper imprisoned in the Red Room with his body/soul taken over by
the omnipotent evil of “Bob”. While the fate of Agent Cooper
was resolved in the series 3 return (2017), these ads’ airing between
seasons posed questions around where and who Agent Cooper was.
Was he still trapped in the Red Room with his impotent doppelgän-
ger promoting Georgia Coffee? Read against the overwhelming cul-
following, the copious textual extensions (such as Laura Palmer’s
Diary and the Guide to Twin Peaks) and the larger cinematic opus of
Lynch himself, these ads take on monumental symbolic and narra-
tive intensity within a highly extended assemblage.

CONCLUSION

The question posed in this paper is whether assemblage think-
ing can be mobilized to apprehend a rapidly evolving advertising/
consumer landscape. The analysis of 69 ad campaigns by noted film
directors demonstrates how assemblage thinking enables us to re-
conceptualize convergent advertising as a rhizomatic intersection
of intensities (within the assemblage) and extensions that implicate
diverse components from media, filmic, cultural and persuasive in-
fluences. From the consumer perspective, new terrains of engage-
ment, sharing and spreadability (to borrow Jenkins’ term) are made
possible if advertising as static ‘genre’ is exploded, challenged by a
conceptualization of advertising as a liminal entity, working at once within and across its territories or planes.

This paper is an early step towards considering how assemblage thinking may account for the fluid nature of convergent advertising as it shifts and morphs into new forms. As such, further research is needed to see how this thinking might work as a sustainable framework. However, assemblage thinking animates the necessity to consider the intersectional, embedded nature of convergent advertisements, seeing them not as snippets of media ‘content’ or grasps of persuasive rhetoric but rather emergent forces, driven by the authoritarian, narratival, stylistic and cultural components that propel them across platforms, linking rich terrains of cultural referents, filmic influences and fantastical possibilities. At once de-territorialized so as to surge across platforms and re-territorialized back into the storyworld at the heart of the assemblage, this way of conceptualizing convergent advertising in the contemporary media environment opens up new possibilities for consumers and scholars alike.

REFERENCES


