MA MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

VERTIGINOUS PLEASURES

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> In the last century there was an inn by the name of "Au Temps Perdu" at Grenoble; I do not know whether it still exists. In Proust, too, we are guests who enter through a door underneath a suspended sign that sways in the breeze, a door behind which eternity and rapture await us.
> (Walter Benjamin)

Introduction

In the opening lines to his unique collection of cinematic art, Italian Movie Posters, Dave Kehr reminds us that "in the final analysis, movie posters are advertisements—in other words, promises made to be broken. But what glorious promises they make" (9)! In large part this text is dedicated to exploring these very promises, not so much to celebrate the grandeur and bombast of the film poster but to understand the complex processes of interaction that exist between a film, its posters, and their audiences. Of course, the promises that Kehr is referring to are the more or less straightforward ones posters make when they implicitly offer us the chance at experiencing the films they promote as glamorous, adventurous, terrifying, and seductive. In this respect, film posters, like all forms of advertising, seek to create audiences by attaching a fixed social identity to a product that is by its nature polysemic, representing too many things to too many people to be completely represented by any single combination of text and image. Unlike most consumer products however, films are ephemeral in nature, disappearing from view the minute they have been consumed, and like dreams they are only half-remembered by those who have consumed them. Consequently, the relationship between the film and its poster is not quite the same as the relationship between a tangible consumer product and the advertising imagery

that sells it. The intangibility of films, in that they are seen only temporarily in the dark and quiet confines of the theatre and our living rooms, make them especially in need of a body, a corporeal vehicle with which they can circulate in the world. In a consumerist culture such as ours, where social relations are structured through the fetishization of commodities, ephemeral products such as films leave consumers needing a tangible emblem, either because they crave owning a piece of what they love or simply to see for themselves whether or not a film is in fact "my kind of movie." The purchasing and collecting of DVDs is also an attempt at overcoming the ephemeral quality of the cinematic moments we love, but the drive to materialize the experience of the film is nevertheless impossible. The closest fans can come to owning the experience of a movie is the purchase and display of its emblems, whose relation to the original is dependent upon the faithfulness of their reproduction. In his fascinating essay "Tracing the Individual Body," Tom Gunning suggests that "techniques of circulation define the intersecting transformations in technology and industry that we call modernity" (Gunning "Tracing," 15). Movie posters, like all forms of film publicity are interesting yet underexamined social texts whose study sheds light upon not only the unique workings of the film industry but the modern condition more generally.

Although in the history of Hollywood publicity there is no shortage of stories that demonstrate the complex processes of interaction at work in marketing campaigns, a recent example comes to mind that is perhaps particularly insightful. In the summer of 2006, after what was considered by the Hollywood press to be a hugely promising marketing campaign, New Line Cinema released David R. Ellis's Snakes on a Plane to disappointing box office receipts. The Hollywood Reporter, like many entertainment publications and websites, announced on the eve of the film's release that,

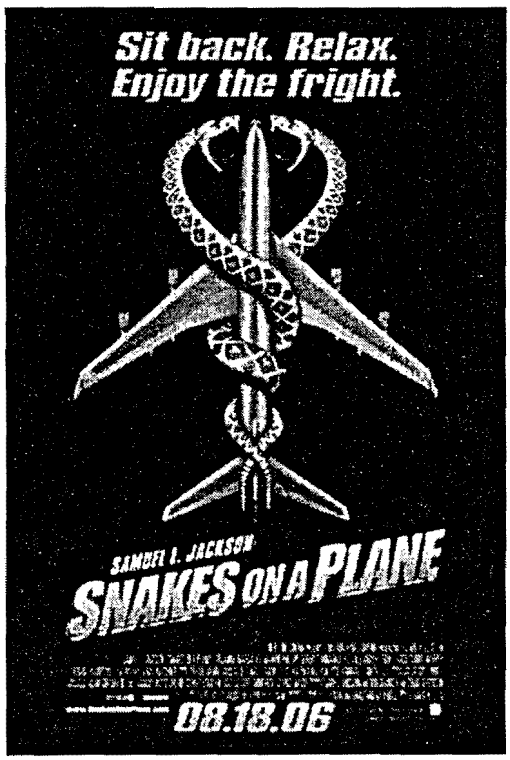
> New Line remains confident. The studio is opening the film in 3,555 theatres, the widest release for an R-rated film ever--630 more than "Wedding Crashers" last year. Even if it opens at the low end of expectations, most handicappers are confident that "Snakes" will be the top grosser of the frame. Estimates for the $35 million production range from the low-$20 millions to the low-$30 millions." (Sperling, August 18, 2006)

After bolstering its opening weekend figures by $1.4 million by releasing the film on a Thursday instead of the usual Friday, New Line reported that Snakes debuted with a disappointing $15.25 million opening weekend (David Germain Associated Press "news.yahoo.com," August, 20 2006). Without the somewhat controversial inclusion of Thursday's receipts into the opening weekend tally, Snakes On a Plane would not have even been the top earning film for that weekend, perhaps encouraging potential viewers to see the film as an over-hyped bust. The plight of Snakes on a Plane's opening weekend attracted significant press coverage as articles in newspapers such as The New York Times speculated on how a film as "wildly hyped" by "Internet buzz" could have failed to meet expectations (Waxman "nytimes.com," August, 21 2006). This "buzz" was apparently stoked by innovative and interactive approaches to marketing the film, such as a promotion whereby a voicemail from the star of the film, Samuel L. Jackson, imploring the recipient to see the picture is sent to phone numbers that have been voluntarily sent to snakesonaplane.com. Bloggers and other Internet writers became so involved in the picture leading up to its release that the studio decided to shoot added lines of dialogue written by the online community during the film's postproduction. Recalling the gritty

language Jackson used in Pulp Fiction (Quentin Tarantino, 1994), these additions helped the film achieve an R rating, thereby contributing to a reading of the film as a brash and unapologetic lowbrow thriller. Such promotional tactics, along with the appeal of its somewhat ironic B-movie title and poster imagery helped propel the film onto over 75,000 blog posts during the first week of its opening. The web blog search engine Technorati reports that on one day during its opening weekend, nearly 7,000 bloggers referenced the film in one way or another (technorati.com). Not only did the studio run a sophisticated and innovative online campaign, it also spent an estimated $20 million on traditional marketing techniques (Waxman "nytimes.com," August, 21 2006). Nevertheless, the considerable interest implied by the film's popularity among bloggers failed to translate into similarly impressive revenues for the studio. Left to ponder the lessons from this episode in Hollywood publicity, Paul Dergarabedian, the president of box office tracking company Exhibitor Relations, suggested that discussing the film online may have become "the most fun part of it. The picture became an afterthought" (Waxman "nytimes.com," August, 21 2006).

Implied by this statement is the idea that a film's publicity campaign, having created such a clearly defined and popular social identity for its subject, essentially made going to the theater redundant. The content, look, and feel of the movie, in other words its essence, was so thoroughly transmitted to fans that a wholly satisfying interaction with the film was delivered outside of the need to actual screen it. Although Snakes on a Plane is perhaps a somewhat extreme example, publicity campaigns for films inevitably seek to create audiences by translating visual narratives into tangible entities that can be circulated in the world outside the theatre. Essentially this is a simulacral

process of translation and inscription, whereby designers, filmmakers, and marketers transform films into a kind of promotional, imagery-based avatar of the picture. While it is understood that film marketers often mislead by selling movies not as they actually are but rather as they would want them to be seen, it is nevertheless true that publicity creates a kind of double for the films it promotes. As social agents our interactions with films are to some degree influenced by the discourses created through this doubling. What is somewhat ironic in all of this is that without seeing a film, none of its pre-release fans can be sure what it is actually about. As Barthes explains in "Rhétorique de l'Image," "the more technology develops the diffusion of information (and notably images), the more it provides the means of masking the constructed meaning under the appearance of the given meaning" (201). Common to all Snakes on a Plane publicity is an attempt at creating a persona for the film as a self-consciously lowbrow movie that proudly flaunts the need for films to please critics. In a series of interviews with magazines such as Entertainment Weekly, Samuel Jackson recounts the often-told story of how online postings along with his own personal insistence succeeded in convincing the studio not change the title of the film to Pacific Air 121 (Jeff Jensen "ew.com," August, 17 2006). Both fans of the Snakes concept and



Jackson felt that a more conventional persona for the film would "ruin the fun" of its overtly unpretentious social identity. Posters for the film (see below) emphasize this identity through its retro B-movie typeface, and its use of imagery that recalls the gaudy artwork made to promote 1980s heavy metal bands. On the poster, the snakes are depicted outside and on top of the plane, essentially highlighting the improbably literal quality of the film's title. Not only has the studio decided to call their film about snakes being released on a plane, Snakes on a Plane, but the poster used to sell the film depicts quite literally snakes on a plane. Creating a kind of metaphor for this film, the Snakes poster has a low budget feel meant to reinforce the impression that Snakes on a Plane is the kind of film that delivers populist entertainment focused squarely on delivering thrills and excitement without the presumably compromising effects of nuance and plot. What is perhaps unsettling here is that this new form of involvement so enthusiastically celebrated by New Line Cinema is built around a basic apathy towards the true potential of cinema. For those who gaze upon the poster for a film they have not yet seen, the poster acts as a tantalizing and potentially self-satisfying glimpse into an unseen world of characters, events, and places. Whereas for those who have seen the film, the poster acts as a portal offering a glimpse of a world they have seen, and perhaps forgotten. Either way, the poster is a token of a particular place and a time (of either a past viewing, or a potential future one), and its possession marks an attempt and a desire to freeze not only that particular time and place, but meaning as well.

Perhaps the most eloquent and important cinematic expression of the modern preoccupation with doubling, look-alikes, time, and copies is to be found in Alfred Hitchcock's Vertigo (1958). The film's protagonist, John "Scottie" Ferguson (James Stewart) falls in love with a woman he has been

hired to keep an eye on, Madeleine Elster (Kim Novak). Apparently obsessed (or perhaps possessed) by her long deceased grandmother, Madeleine's penchant for drifting out of the present and into the past intrigues Scottie, and he quickly falls for her. When it appears as though she commits suicide, he finds himself wandering the streets heartbroken, and searching in vain for the woman he lost. Scottie falls deeper into loneliness until he happens upon a woman named Judy Barton, who bears a striking resemblance to the apparently deceased Madeleine. After persuading her to colour her hair and dress in exactly the same way as the woman he loved, Scottie notices how Judy just happens to possess the exact same necklace his precious Madeleine wore. At this point in the narrative, Scottie begins to figure out that the Madeleine he knew was only an imposter, and that he had in fact never met the real Madeleine at all. The woman he loved and the one he attempted to recreate in her image were all copies of the original Madeleine, whose true self will forever remain a mystery to Scottie. The "artistic achievement" (Durgnat The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock, 291) of Judy's performance is evidenced by the fact that she not only enchants Scottie as she was hired to do, but convincingly portrays a woman who is herself a kind of ghostly copy of Madeleine's grandmother, Carlotta Valdes. The scene in which she stares blankly into Carlotta's portrait is a somewhat surrealist and poetic expression of the kind of processes of interaction that occur when we gaze upon the imagery of the Hollywood publicity machine. Like Madeleine who drifts in and out of the present into a past she did not personally inhabit, the nostalgic movie poster collector is open to the possibility of escaping the here-and-now into the ambiguously real universes created by films. For Scottie, who is not intimately acquainted with Carlotta (as Madeleine appears to be) the observation of the painting is illuminating as it sheds light upon the trifles that for him mark her

split identity. Madeleine in this sequence is not unlike the nostalgic film enthusiast who yearns for contact with the ghostly world of the cinema, while Scottie is not unlike the curious but unfamiliar poster-viewer, focusing his attention upon details of the image to glean clues of its significance. The hallucinatory quality of Vertigo, in which the past and the present, the real and the imaginary, and the authentic and the reproduction mingle, provides an ideal case study for the exploration of these themes as they relate to our curious relationship to the film poster. In as much as Hitchcock's Vertigo provides an illuminating backdrop and a creative inspiration to my work, the promotional campaigns that have promoted Vertigo to a variety of audiences over the past six decades provide an ideal case study of the various social identities created to promote this singular cinematic text. What follows is intended to further our understanding of the meaning making processes used by posters to create audiences for films, but it also aims at explaining the processes of interaction that private exhibitors engage in when they gaze at the film posters they collect and display privately.

As much as this research is intended to investigate the production of a social identity for Hitchcock's Vertigo through publicity, it is equally concerned with how these messages are decoded and used by viewers. Consequently, what follows is as much in the tradition of semiotics as cultural studies, in that what is sought is a not merely a better understanding of sign systems but a cultural reading of how these sign systems are used by social agents. The history of Vertigo's original publicity campaign, institutional changes in the advertising landscape of the 1950s, the history of poster making, and the ability of marketing images to act as aides-mémoire, are all taken into account. The wide net being cast here is a testament to the fertile ground of this subject

matter, and to the surprisingly light treatment that movie posters have received academically.

Hitchcockian Publicity

When designing graphic identities for the films he worked on and promoted through poster advertising, the original designer of the Vertigo poster, Saul Bass, like many modernist graphic designers, believed that it was possible to "strip away layers of complexity and arrive at a single visual essence" (King A Century of Movie Posters, 54). The "juxtaposed images of eyes with dizzying Lissajous spirals" (McGilligan Alfred Hitchcock, 561) that introduce Vertigo (1958), the opening credit sequence to North by Northwest (1959), and the jagged typography used in both Psycho (1960) and its posters are examples of Bass's work that demonstrate this belief. While it is impossible to take at face value the notion that a single, totalizing graphic text could satisfactorily summarize films as elaborate, complex, and layered as Hitchcock's, the relationship between Hitchcock's filmmaking and the posters that promoted his work is stronger than we might at first think. After all, perhaps more than any director before or since, Hitchcock took an active role in publicizing his films, and in so doing sought to control the reception of his work by distributors, fans, producers, critics, and the ticket buying public. As Robert E. Kapsis chronicles in his Hitchcock: The Making of a Reputation, "From the beginning of his directorial career in England in the mid-1920's, Hitchcock used publicity to promote himself, his films, and the idea of directorial preeminence and authority" (16). Although it is true that "all his life Hitchcock had been a student of publicity" (McGilligan Alfred Hitchcock, 598), it was in the late 1950s and early 1960s that he began to assert greater control over the publicity campaigns that sold his films. As he did with Saboteur (1942), and later in "nearly all the films he did at Universal" from 1963 to 1976, Hitchcock

would star in a lengthy trailer for North by Northwest, a marketing approach attempted by only Hitchcock and Cecil B. DeMille (Auiler Hitchcock Notebooks, 555). The Saul Bass-designed art poster used to promote Vertigo was in fact Hitchcock's idea, and the director's name and image would figure prominently in various posters used to promote both films. When Vertigo was released in 1958, Hitchcock had been publicly received as a "master of suspense" and an entertainer, not really as an auteur, and "his firmly entrenched persona as popular entertainer and master of suspense" was not shaken until the mid-1960s (Kapsis Reputation, 11). This reputation as cinema's master of suspense was created and reinforced through countless interviews, the introductions he recorded for his television show, and his presence in publicity materials for his films and their trailers. Although Hitchcock was by no means the first director to effectively self-promote, his films and the marketing materials that sold them bore his own distinctive brand in a way that has not been repeated since.

Although the Lumière brothers' names appear on one exceptionally early movie poster, it wasn't until D.W. Griffith that steady ticket sales were sought by tying the name of a popular director to a particular film through publicity.

The original posters used to promote Vertigo are prime examples of this longstanding trend, in that they announce the film as "ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S MASTERPIECE 'VERTIGO'." Playing off of Hitchcock's previously established reputation as the preeminent Hollywood suspense director, these posters sought to sell tickets in part through the portrayal of these films as the latest installment in Hitchcock's proven body of work. Although it is true of his entire career, it was primarily during the 1950s and 1960s that Hitchcock himself emerged as a central element in the publicity campaigns for his films. During this period, he became a major celebrity in his

own right, starring in his own popular TV series, appearing in trailers for his popular Paramount thrillers, and delivering his dry wit through memorable interviews with the press. The first posters used to promote Vertigo featured Hitchcock's name written in a typeface only slightly smaller than was used for James Stewart and Kim Novak's. Although Stewart and Novak received top billing in these original posters, Hitchcock's name is nevertheless positioned with them at the top of the layout, while in the posters for The Wrong Man (1957), and The Man Who Knew Too Much (1956), his name is placed either at the bottom, or off to the left. The billing of stars, producers, and directors is one of the primary means of creating meaning through film poster advertising. As Haralovich chronicles in detail in her "Selling Mildred Pierce" as far back as the mid-1940s Hollywood pressbooks "contained an official billing chart of the cast and top production personnel" (197). The status of the director and stars of the film is "measured against a common standard: the type size of the title of the film" (197). In virtually every Vertigo poster produced in the United States, Hitchcock's name appears above the title (suggesting increased importance), but beneath the somewhat obvious and explicit use of Hitchcock as one of the main attractions offered by Vertigo, is it possible to detect some essence of Hitchcock's style and content in the content and style of this films' promotional posters? While it is understood that the advertising commissioned by the studios seeks merely to sell tickets, the designers they hired created a body of work that far outlived these narrow economic objectives. Bass was, after all, three times a collaborator of Hitchcock's.

Hitchcock was a savvy designer himself, whose "origin in art direction" is obvious in the remarkably "effective use of architecture and interiors" of his films (King Movie Posters, 51). Since Hitchcock "entered the movie business as a designer of title cards" (King, 51), and "proclaimed early in his career that a

successful director had to learn to sell his films to the critics-and audiences" (Auiler Hitchcock's Notebooks, 20), it is only to be expected that Hitchcock had a sophisticated understanding of, and involvement in, publicizing his work. Hitchcock scholars such as Patrick McGilligan have chronicled Hitchcock's "continual gripe" over the fact that he "had never enjoyed the big promotional and advertising budgets that came with studio affiliation" (McGilligan Alfred Hitchcock, 599). Hitchcock's image (both as photograph and as India ink caricature) on promotional material for his 1950s films and elsewhere, is evidence of his active involvement in the publicizing of his work. Perhaps more so than any other director in the history of Hollywood, Hitchcock's name and image became the centerpieces of much of the publicity that promoted his work. Unlike most other high profile directors of the time—such as Billy Wilder, John Ford, or Cecil B. DeMille--Hitchcock's celebrity transcended his association to particular films, as the idiosyncratic public persona he created through interviews, stories placed in the Hollywood press, and his television program became well known. Hitchcock's reputation as an accomplished director of intelligent thrillers, in combination with his recognizable accent, girth, and demeanor allowed producers and marketers of his work to exploit his name and likeness to a degree that was not been replicated since.

Poster Advertising and Nostalgia

Although it is certainly au courant, and not without good reason I might add, to regard advertising as a cynical game played by the manipulators of Madison Avenue (such as North by Northwest's Roger O. Thornhill), it is important to remember that poster advertising has not always been regarded in cynical light. As Marcus Verhagen chronicles in his essay "The Poster in Fin-de-Siècle Paris," "by the mid-1880s, posters were being collected by aesthetes and commented on enthusiastically by art critics" (103). Emerging as they did out

of the imageless, black-and-white posters of the Third French Republic, the colourful and imaginative posters of the late nineteenth century became the subject of serious debate in both high society and the bohemian community. The advent of the colour poster allowed artists to almost single-handedly bring the poster from "crude commercial tool" to a new artistic medium. Influential writer and patron of the arts Edmond de Goncourt was inspired to hold a banquet in honour of Jules Chéret to celebrate just such an achievement; he declared Chéret "the first painter of the Parisian wall, and the inventor of the art of the poster (Verhagen "The Poster," 103). The publicity poster of the early part of this period (1870-1940) was hardly seen as a hegemonic tool of the power elite, and socialist critics, such as Arsène Alexandre, enthusiastically celebrated it as a new, legitimate, and democratic art form. In the anarchist press of the time, Felix Fénéon argued that poster design was an art form whose "vitality . . . salon painting could never match," even encouraging his readers to "rip advertisements from the walls where they were posted and to use them in the decorating of their living quarters" (Verhagen "The Poster," 109). While we can only guess to what degree Fénéon's readers heeded his call to decorate their homes with advertising in the early twentieth century, it is clear that contemporary poster distributors have taken his advice to heart, offering, as they frequently do, a wide selection of advertising prints of this early period for contemporary consumption. These posters, along with other forms of persuasive graphic art (war bonds propaganda from WW II, for example), are a common enough sight in poster shops, and while their use in the contemporary context is in some part merely decorative, these prints often function as an aide-mémoire, bringing exhibitors nostalgically back to a romanticized past. Although film posters refer viewers to a past they did not personally inhabit, exposure to films is nevertheless an experience, one that is

stored in memory in much the same way as other "events" from the past. Film posters thus provide a unique opportunity to resurrect memories, thereby allowing the possibility of nostalgic indulgence.

The Madeleine

Central to an appreciation of the interactional dynamic between the poster and its audiences are the Proustian concepts of the mémoire voluntaire and the mémoire involuntaire. In the first volume of À La Recherche du temps perdu, Marcel Proust recounts his famous encounter with a madeleine:

> No sooner had the warm liquid, and the crumbs with it, touched my palate than a shudder ran through my whole body, and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary changes that were taking place. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, but individual, detached, with no suggestion of its origin...I do not know yet what it is, but I can feel it mounting slowly; I can measure the resistance, I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed. Undoubtedly what is thus palpitating in the depths of my being must be the image, the visual memory, which, being linked to that taste, has tried to follow it into my conscious mind. (40-41)

Up until this experience with tea and a pastry, Proust believed the only memories that remained of his childhood years in Combray were those that "obeyed the call of attentiveness" (Benjamin Illuminations, 160). Proust calls those memories that he was able to conjure through deliberate conscious effort, mémoires voluntaires. The primary characteristic of this type of memory is that the information that it provides of the past "retains no trace of it" (Benjamin, 160). While Proust certainly recalled the fact that he had lived in Combray during his childhood, the feel of the place and precise details of the town remained inaccessible to him. The other type of memory, which he

begins to experience in the above passage, he calls mémoire involuntaire. In addition to the rapturous and transcendent feelings he experienced while eating the madeleine, Proust also recounts how long forgotten details of the layout of the town, his aunt's house, the routine of Sunday morning, and the facades of buildings came back to him in vivid, sensuous detail. For Proust, the past is always "somewhere beyond the reach of the intellect, and unmistakably present in some material object (or in the sensation which such an object arouses in us)" (Proust, 40). While we are always able to recall certain facts and impressions of the past, our conscious efforts are ineffective at "taking hold of our experience," and reviving the past in vivid detail (Benjamin, 160). In that films are experienced somewhat secondhand, since we are really only watching as opposed to participating, the memories of film viewing are especially ripe for forgetting, and therefore for remembering later. In this sense, film is inherently a nostalgic medium, in that it is impossible to remember anything close to the depth and detail contained in the hundreds of thousands of frames that are animated before our eyes. The impossibility of keeping the infinite minutia of motion pictures in our conscious minds sets the stage for the nostalgic, familiar, and rapturous pleasure that we experience when the films we love come back to us in vivid detail.

For Proust, the madeleine acted as a portal to his past, because he had eaten madeleines as a child and not since then. The years between his time in Combray and the episode with the pastry and tea allowed Proust to forget their taste, creating the opportunity for him to remember it as an adult. In a similar way, reencountering the Lissajous spirals from Vertigo on the promotional poster affords us the opportunity to remember something from the film that we had, until seeing the poster, forgotten. In Proust's reckoning, the similarity of the taste of the madeleine to those he had eaten as a child brought about the

"magnetism of an identical moment" (Proust, 42), which lured his forgotten memories into his conscious mind. If the taste had proved to be sufficiently different, it stands to reason that this "magnetism" would be easily weakened, undoubtedly to the point that it would stir no memories whatsoever. Not all madeleines, it would seem, would work to the same degree. As Proust reminds us, the precise flavours of the tea and pastry "bear unfalteringly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection" (Proust vol.1 p.42). Just as Proust's mémoire involuntaire was stoked by a pastry whose taste was identical to one he once ate, the Kim Novak from a Vertigo poster looks just like the Kim Novak we remember from the film. Although we may remember the colour of her hair, or the curvature of her eyebrows, we nevertheless forget precise details of her appearance, and the encounter with her publicity image allows for a sudden recollection. If we accept the proposition that imagery, such as movie posters, can also function in the same way, then can we say that some posters function better than others at resurrecting the past? Do the photographic Vertigo posters work in the same way as the non-photographic ones, or do their invocation of Hitchcockian essences function for us in divergent ways?

A Transitional Moment

Early poster advertising, such as the posters Chéret made to promote the cabarets of 19th century Paris were made largely by individual graphic designers working alone and without the use of photographic techniques. The objective of a lot of this foundational work was to capture the feeling or essence of the free-spirited entertainment being promoted. Photographic movie posters, of course, appeared much later, under different conditions of production, and function on viewers in different ways. The ability of the production still and

blowups of actual frames from motion pictures to capture in detail a faithful representation of the screen moments is something that was simply impossible before the application of photography to advertising. Just as technological advances brought about a revolution in publicity posters in fin-de-siècle Paris, the application of photography to advertising posters in the 1950s and 1960s revolutionized the way in which designers approached their subjects, and more importantly how the ad agencies who hired them approached advertising. Market studies, motivational research, heavier investment in television, and most importantly the widespread application of photography to print advertising, created a revolution in the way in which the expanding American ad agencies sold us their products (Weill The Poster, 315). Armed with the predictability, accuracy, and quickness of the camera, large ad agencies expanded their influence over the production of poster advertising and "brought their working methods with them, and above all their creative practices in which artistic directors, idea-men, writers and even businessmen participated in a collective effort" (Weill The Poster, 315). The "old system... where the poster had remained in the hands of poster artists who both conceived the design and executed the image" was making way for a new era in which photographic imagery, corporate control over process, and market-research-inspired layouts rose to prominence. For viewers of this new form of advertising, the ability to literally see the stars of the screen provided a new and potentially engrossing form of engagement with the celebrated personalities of popular culture. Given the associations of objectivity and identity that come with direct perception of a person's photograph, film advertising acquired a new and powerful tool that allowed the accepted meaning and status of a star to transfer to the film being promoted like never before. The posters for Vertigo, produced as they were in the midst of this transitional moment, reflect

both the internal tensions that came with the diminished authority of the graphic designer over his work, and the change in the nature of the poster-viewer relationship that came about with the application of photography to poster making.

To promote major motion pictures, it is of course not uncommon for studios to commission several versions of a movie poster. For heavily anticipated blockbusters, this typically means producing a "teaser" poster that reveals as little as possible about the film, often showing nothing more than a simple graphic logo and the date when the film is set to open. Often used to promote installments of popular film franchises like Superman (1978-2006), X-Men (2000-2006), and Spider-Man (2002-2004), or highly anticipated films like Spike Lee's Malcolm X (1992), these posters are meant to generate interest by invoking the imagination of the viewer, appearing as they do before even a trailer has been released. Once the film has opened, posters that reveal more of the film's content, cast, and critical reception typically replace teaser posters.

Although Vertigo's original poster has a lot in common with teaser posters, it was replaced by the studio not as part of a pre-established plan but rather due to a disappointing drop-off in ticket sales between the first and second weeks of the film's release (Kapsis Alfred Hitchcock, p.257). Rather than obscuring as much as possible about the film, as a true teaser does, the original poster for Vertigo is perhaps much more revealing than its replacement, a classic example of "overly rendered pictorial narratives" (Graphic Design in America, 17) of the 1950s. While perhaps revealing more of the film's locations and stars, the replacement design's cluttered layout is at odds with the elegance and complexity of the film it advertises.

The original posters for Vertigo are notable in part for their lack of any photography or photo-realistic representation, whereas the posters that

replaced them several weeks after the film's release feature a classic example of the emerging application of photography to traditional graphic design techniques. The holistic attempt at capturing the essence of the film is evident in the original posters produced for Vertigo, and as such a comparison of the various poster campaigns used to promote the film affords us the opportunity to consider the role of photography in this process.

The inspiration for the original Vertigo poster would appear to be drawn from both the spinning spirals of the opening sequence and the unsettling orange colouring of Scottie's dream in the film. Somewhat abstract, the poster and the newspaper ads that were based on this sequence "suggest a more poetic and less mainstream film, which in fact [Vertigo] was" (Kapsis, Alfred Hitchcock, 52). Although designed by Bass, the idea for the poster was Hitchcock's, and Paramount only "reluctantly went along with it" (Kapsis, Alfred Hitchcock, 52). The advance publicity that Paramount produced for Vertigo was, after all, in stark contrast to the Hitchcock-Bass poster. In radio ads, press releases, and promotional articles, Paramount presented Vertigo as simply the latest in Hitchcock's series of commercially successful hits for the studio, such as Rear Window (1954), To Catch a Thief (1955), and The Man Who Knew Too Much (1956). The film was, of course, somewhat of a departure for Hitchcock in that its somber, meditative mood, and tragic ending leave no place for the romantic dénouement of his previous Paramount thrillers. Devoid of any photography, and with no graphic representation of the A-list stars of the film, this poster stands as a classic example of Bass's attempt at capturing the essence of a film through bold, simple, and powerful design. Recalling the same design concepts that inspired the metaphorical posters he made for Otto Preminger, such as The Man with the Golden Arm (1955) and Anatomy of a Murder (1959), Bass used graphic techniques, colour,

and typography to create a visual and dynamic shorthand of the picture. The original poster that Bass and Hitchcock produced for Vertigo is a mesmerizing and enduring symbolic work that has an ubiquitous presence in books on design and film. Interestingly, it would serve as the main publicity image for the film for just a few days until the executives at Paramount replaced it with a much more photo-realistic and representational poster.

Vertigo, of course, is much more than merely a departure from Hitchcock's previous Paramount films. As one of Hitchcock's most celebrated works, it has inspired perhaps more critical debate and discussion than any other film in the Hitchcock canon. In that film theorists and writers are almost always concerned with what films express, how they make us feel, and how they function either internally or externally, it follows that cinema studies is inherently concerned with not only the essence of films but also the essence of film itself. The challenge that faces the film scholar in pondering Vertigo is not entirely dissimilar to the challenge that faces the sincere modernist poster designer. Both begin with the same fundamental two-part question; specifically, what is Vertigo, and how do I go about expressing it on a printed, static page? While the hermeneutic scholar and the modernist poster designer have different ends and work in radically different ways, they are both drawing from the same raw material and seek to produce an interpretation that flows logically from the film. While it is assumed that most posters will not provide a sincere and sophisticated interpretation of the film, it is nevertheless true that some designers (such as Bass) "maintained the modernist belief that it is possible to strip away layers of complexity and arrive at a single visual essence" (King A Century of Movie Posters, 54). At least in the case of Vertigo we can see a kind of simulacral procession that has real consequences for not only film studios but more importantly those of us who love film and therefore yearn to

"take hold of our experience" (Benjamin Illuminations, 158) by freeing the film from the theatre and gazing upon its reproduction. In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin sees this compulsion as a pervasive signpost of modernity, when he observes, "Every day the urge grows stronger to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction" (52). This "urge" is not far removed from the compulsion that led Marcel Proust to try ten times over to recapture the insight of the mémoire involuntaire, only to realize that it was the taste of the madeleine, and not his conscious effort that transported him away. This "urge" is the very same that led Scottie to wander San Francisco in search of his own Madeleine, when, after her dramatic fall, "he spends his waking days searching for her everywhere with his hungry eyes--literally looking for what had once been looked at before time flew by" (Pomerance An Eye for Hitchcock, 238).

Implied in this is the idea that film posters perform an ideological function outside of merely drawing audiences to particular films. If film lovers seek to grasp films by way of visual and static reproductions, then it is crucial to ask how faithful such reproductions should be to the original. If, as Barthes suggests in "The Death of the Author," "the reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (148) then is it even conceivable that films have an essence to capture in the first place? As masterful a director as Hitchcock is, the reception of his work is something that not even he could control. Vertigo provides a classic example of a film whose reception has undergone dramatic change. From the initial, lukewarm critical response to its current status as one of Hollywood's most important films, Vertigo has been read in so many different ways that to suggest that one interpretative visual text could capture its singular essence seems to stretch the

imagination too far. Whether or not a poster in fact does capture some eternal essence of this film, or whether or not such an essence exists in the first place is certainly debatable, but what is certain is that one of the functions of all film posters is to mitigate the divergent readings that critics and audiences bring to motion pictures by offering potential consumers one coherent view of the film's style and content. Further, in Visual Persuasion Paul Messaris identifies as one of the primary goals of most advertising imagery the creation of a social identity that consumers can draw upon to make "a public statement about how they themselves wish to be viewed" (xx). While it would be both cynical and false to suggest that we only attend the films to socially benefit from being associated with them, it is somewhat less cynical to suggest that we display film posters in our homes and offices to "make public statements about how we wish to be viewed" (Messaris, xx). Either way, posters invariably seek to create a social identity for films, and this identity, more than the poster's ability to capture the eternal essence of the film, is the basis for a great many of the movie selection decisions we make. Determining whether or not a particular film is "my kind of movie" is a common enough question for moviegoers to ask themselves, and their answer is derived, at least in part, from exposure to the imagery produced by publicity campaigns. Although the once common practice of picking a film from the lobby of the theatre may be on the wane, contemporary film seekers engage in a similar decision making processes as they troll the local DVD rental shop scanning the poster-clad boxes that quite literally package films. Word of mouth, reviews in the media, and previous exposure to the director and cast of the picture all play a role, but ultimately it is the social identity of the film that is being discussed, an identity that is in large part created by design.

At the heart of this discussion is the role these texts play in defining the relationships between audiences and the films, stars, and directors of the cinema. Communication scholars such as Colin MacCabe have commented on the split that modernist technologies, such as the printing press, brought about in the relationship between writers and readers. In his view, while "before printing all reading involved the prior transmission of an individual text, printing suddenly produced an audience which with the author is not ... directly related" (MacCabe "The Revenge of the Author," 31). Although commercial filmmaking has always focused on the creation of public rather than individual texts, it is nevertheless a crucial function of the poster and other publicity apparatuses to build a personal bond between filmmaker and audience. The common practice of promoting films with taglines such as "From the director of..." and "From the producer of..." is indicative of an attempt at inserting the filmmaker into the pre-existing relationship between films and their audiences. The current practice of selling fans multiple posters for a film is a common way for studios to strengthen this bond while collecting profits on poster sales. The line between merchandise and marketing is blurred in this process, as the social identity of the film and its stars is both established by the poster and sold to fans whose own social identities are established by the display of the posters they have purchased. While studios seek at solidifying these relationships merely to turn a profit, film posters unquestionably perform broader ideological functions, by supplanting the inherent uncertainty surrounding the meaning of pop culture texts with readymade social identities. Through his hugely influential work "The Death of the Author," Barthes argues that the fragmentation of identity that defines the modern era has lead to a widespread preoccupation with not only authors but meaning in general (Barthes, "The Death of the Author," 148). In that publicity materials, such as

film posters, are among the chief means through which the social identities of films and their authors are solidified, it stands to reason that just as these promotional texts impose uniform interpretations of the films they promote, they succeed in doing so in part because modern audiences seek stable relationships to films with fixed, and therefore useful social identities. The "truth" of Vertigo, if there is indeed one, is far too complex and contestable to be used in most social situations, but the social identity of Vertigo, as "Alfred Hitchock's Masterpiece," is easily put to use by social agents who don't even have to see the film to make use of it. Roland Barthes explains the apparently timeless appeal of such anchoring techniques, when he writes,

> Polysemy poses a question of meaning and this question always comes through as a dysfunction, even if this dysfunction is recuperated by society as a tragic (silent, God provides no possibility of choosing between signs) or a poetic (the panic 'shudder of meaning;' of the Ancient Greeks) game; in the cinema itself traumatic images are bound up with an uncertainty (an anxiety) concerning the meaning of objects or attitudes. Hence in every society various techniques are developed intended to fix the floating chain of signifieds in such a way as to counter the terror of uncertain signs." ("Rhétorique de l'Image," 197)

One of the central positions of this study is that in as much as publicity creates a desire to see particular films, it fulfills a latent need within popular culture to escape the anxiety created by complex, polysemic texts. To better understand the various identities that have been promoted for Vertigo, and the relation that these representations have to the actual film, thirteen images have been selected for comparison. The sample includes as many Vertigo posters as could be found, and the

decision was made to exclude images that are clearly lobby cards. Although lobby cards are a kind of poster, they belong to a somewhat different species of advertising in that they are meant to be received as a collective and not as stand-alone images. Furthermore, posters made for foreign markets that maintained the same layout as the Saul Bass original were excluded because for all intents and purposes these are essentially the same poster as one already in the sample.

Literature Review

Although there wasn't a lot of writing on the subject until the 1930s, F.P. Bishop's The Ethics of Advertising quotes a prescient 1911 writer for The Times who found that "the distinguishing mark of modern advertising is that it does not merely direct an existing demand, it creates new wants" (54). Even earlier was Walter Scott's essay "The Psychology of Advertising," first published in The Atlantic Monthly in 1904. In relating the methods and theoretical foundations of the work accomplished by early advertising professionals, Scott observed that the methods employed typically involved first analyzing the "human mind in its various activities, then analyzing advertisements to discover what there is in them that may or may not awaken the activity desired" (Scott "Psychology," 32). While this work has a particularly psychological bent, the overall objectives are compatible with the research at hand, in that both seek to understand what is or is not awakened within the viewer by advertising, and how this outcome is created by the ad. Scott, like many of the early writers who tackled this subject, approaches the research from a predominantly psychological perspective. This approach was particularly prevalent when Vertigo's ad campaign was conceived during the 1950s when professional organizations such as The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising published booklets such as "Motivational Research" (1957). This

text helped usher in a massive paradigm shift within the advertising industry, as it now began to exploit the findings of psychology to "tap a deeper level of human attitudes" than was accomplished by previous forms of market research (Millum Images, 17). Critical writing on advertising, such as Vance Packard's The Hidden Persuaders, sought to expose the advertising industry's hijacking of psychological insights. Other writers, such as Arnheim in Art and Visual Perception, used psychological research to better understand how visual communication is dealt with by the human mind and eye. While the research on film publicity being done here is not undertaken from a classically psychological point of view, the insights of this type of work are often useful in pointing out avenues of exploration that might otherwise be overlooked. A consideration of Arnheim's work, for example, encourages a serious examination of the power and importance of the intertextual quality of celebrity imagery by remarking how "the mind contains a huge stock of images which tie with the image seen – what is seen will depend on the relative strength of the visual stimulus, and the strength of traces in memory" (Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception). Given that the meaning of film posters is anchored not merely by captions, but by our memories of stars and directors from previous films, this perspective is particularly significant to any study of film poster imagery. Although psychological perspectives are generally concerned with how individual respondents might react to advertising, certain perspectives such as Arnheim's are useful here if only because his focus on memory encourages us to consider the power of texts to invoke memories.

While incorporating insights from these psychological perspectives, this research intends on building from the work of writers who have managed to combine aspects of symbolic and iconographical research. Writers such as Ernst Gombrich in Art and Illusion and Erwin Panofsky in Meaning in the

Visual Arts seek to understand how metaphors and symbols are used across contexts to create different meanings. Unlike Alfred Jung, who believed that certain symbols had "intrinsic and constant significance" (Millum Images, 30), Gombrich explores the lore of a symbolic icon to examine how it can be placed in differing contexts to create a variety of meanings. This kind of thinking is important to the study of celebrity centered advertising in that stars function both literally (if they are on the poster they are actually in the film) and metaphorically (if a particular star is thought to represent "courage" then his meaning within the poster will be the product of the juxtaposition of courage with something else.)

Barthes's "Rhétorique de l'Image" is a seminal work in the semiotic analysis of advertising. In it, Barthes famously applies concepts such as anchorage, connotation, and denotation to the analysis of a Panzani pasta promotional image. By deconstructing the advertisement's meaning through a discussion of its linguistic messages, literal denotated messages, and connotated symbolic messages, Barthes attempts at understanding the "total system of the image" (204). This essay is particularly significant to the study of Vertigo's posters because of the attention that Barthes devotes to the roles that photographs and illustrations play in advertising. The unique status of the photograph as a sign that appears to us as "a message without a code" is significant given that many of the film's promotional images attempt to relate Vertigo's identity to the identities of its director and stars (199). Barthes's discussion of symbolic imagery and the anchoring effects of text are particularly illuminating and inform the analysis of the posters throughout. Despite his claim that qualitative visual research must be conducted in a total system of inquiry, Barthes leaves us without a clearly defined method of conducting this kind of work. For a more systematic approach to the study of publicity

imagery, the work of Erving Goffman, and Trevor Millum is somewhat more explicit.

According to writers such as Greg Smith, Erving Goffman's Gender Advertisements is nothing short of a sociological classic, a "rare and exemplary instance of a ... study which treats photographic materials as data, worthy of analysis in their own right, and not merely a handy illustrative resource intended only to vivify the serious business of analysis accomplished by the written text" (Ball and Smith, 1992). Although the originality of Gender Advertisements is obvious at a glance (the book is laid out like a photo album and two-thirds of its pages are photographs), its reputation as an innovative study is worth discussing briefly. Unlike the quantitative/empirical surveys of gender displays that are concerned with counting the instances of particular depictions, Gender Advertisements approaches its subject matter through a subjectivist/constructivist approach that allows it to make a large number of critical observations. Through this study Goffman provides an extensive analysis of the various displays of patriarchal dominance that were pervasive in the magazine advertising of the time. Gender Advertisements is able to arrive at these conclusions in part by sorting the images in its sample into the following categories of analysis: relative size, the feminine touch, function ranking, the family, the ritualization of subordination, and licensed withdrawal. After two chapters of "dense and extensive exposition of ...[his] analytic preoccupations and methodological reasoning" (Smith "GA Revisited", 4) Goffman groups the 500 images included in his survey into these categories so that he may discuss the heretofore unidentified conventions of each advertising "genre." His analysis is built upon his own observations of each grouping, and not some preconceived set of criteria that is universally applied to each image.

For example, in discussing a subset of images in which the nuclear family is shown together in one photograph, Goffman observes:

> Although in commercial scenes a unity is symbolized between fathers and sons and between mothers and daughters, there is a suggestion that different types of unity might be involved. In a word, there is a tendency for women to be pictured as more akin to their daughters than is the case with men. Boys, as it were, have to push their way into manhood, and problematic effort is involved. (Goffman Gender, 38)

This observation can be considered as one of the most astute in the book, and its placement above a series of photographs not only increases the persuasiveness of Goffman's conclusion on this point but also deepens the analysis. The methodological strategy of placing his observations in the same space as the images to which he is referring allows Goffman to go beyond simply describing the gender displays he discusses and to "exhibit" them in a way that allows the reader to perceive the subtle shadings of meaning that contribute to a deeper understanding of the subject.

This methodological tactic can be seen as sharing the same function as a transcript in conversation analysis. Just as the reader of conversation analysis is able to "assess the adequacy of the interpretations" of the researcher, so is the reader of this kind of pictorial pattern analysis able to verify the validity of Goffman's claims (Smith, "GA Revisited," 7). While there is no way to prove these claims objectively, the sophistication and appropriateness of each one is open to evaluation, given that Goffman's analysis and the image occupy the same page. Despite the opportunities that this method provides readers for validating the analysis for themselves, it nevertheless complicates an endogenous reading of the advertising images presented. Like the captions

under any photograph, Goffman's observations act as an "instructed reading" (Watson "Reading," 87-89), which strongly encourages the reading that Goffman prescribes. As such, the strength of this methodological approach is the very thing that introduces its primary limitation. Despite the somewhat built-in speciousness of this methodology, it remains nevertheless a compelling approach to decoding the underlying structure of promotional imagery and by extension the relationship between these displays and the social structure that created them. Goffman's basic method of categorizing, followed by an analysis of each category, is a logical and fruitful approach to unlocking the ideological underpinnings of various advertising materials such as film posters. Through this kind of recontextualization, the ability of advertising to present its imagery as "normal" is subverted, and the broader ideologies at work in these ads become apparent to the reader.

Trevor Millum's 1975 study of advertising in women's magazines, Images of Woman, provides a different, but similarly useful approach to the study of advertising imagery. Unlike Goffman, Millum is much more explicit in his discussion of methodology and emphasizes considerations that must be made if his methods are to be employed to study a different type of data. Millum's method has as its starting point a breakdown of the image into categories of form and content. Form, in Millum's analysis, is discussed in the following two-fold manner: "(i) the overall impression and style of the advertisement... and (ii) the techniques involved in the actual illustration" (Millum Images, 81). As broad as this initial framework is, Millum provides a detailed discussion of how to go about analyzing each of the ads along the lines of his form/content schema. For example, in trying to analytically describe the "overall impression and style" of an ad he suggests that we consider the "crowdedness" (83) of the image as well as the relative size and number of the

photographs used, the text used, and the relation of the various surface elements to each other. In terms of understanding the illustrative/photographic techniques of the image, Millum recommends breaking down each image along the lines of "focus, close-up (distance), colour, cropping, lighting, and angle" (83).

Additionally, Millum suggests describing an image in terms of rhetorical device, which "concerns the way in which the illustration works, including the interplay of form and content" (81). The analysis of explicit persuasive devices falls under the general heading of form, as it is concerned with interpreting the manner in which specific content elements are presented. To better explain how to go about analyzing the rhetorical devices used in print advertising, Millum uses a five-part categorization schema to provide structure to the analysis. The rhetorical aspects of an ad's content elements are discussed in terms of: (1) the ad's "product presentation" (this could be adapted to describe how the film's stars, locations, and actions are presented); (2) "typification" (is the director or the star breaking away from their previous work, or is this a typical film they would make?); (3) "association" (what does this combination of actors say about the quality of the film?); and (4) the "supervisual" (how does the totality of the image create an impression above and beyond its individual parts) (Millum, 85-87).

In terms of content, Millum recommends another two-fold process, first surveying meaning on the denotative level, and then using this information to better understand its connotative meanings. As such, the initial step is an enumeration of the presence or lack of "props, product, setting, and actor(s)" (Millum Images, 81). He also recommends noting the "types of setting, expressions, poses, directions of attention and other details" on a denotative level (81). Millum then calls upon the researcher to use the patterns of

occurrence of these elements to construct a more subjective analysis of its connotative meanings. Through an application of his categorization of content aspects, the significance of particular stars, their appearance in various settings with particular props, and the facial expressions used help to explain the meaning-making processes used by these ads. After analyzing each ad of the data sample along these lines, Millum is then free to draw correlations between ads in terms of their usage of particular content, and their application of specific form elements. This methodology is useful to our analysis, since it allows for a systematic, yet interpretive and constructivist method of qualitative study. While Millum and Goffman's approaches may appear to differ to a large degree, their methods both essentially aim at bringing out the significance of patterns of reoccurrence (or difference) to better understand the meaning making processes of advertising.

Methodology

Despite the somewhat easy adaptability of Millum's study of magazine advertising to film posters, the complexity of his methodology suggests that simply applying it towards the analysis of a relatively small sample of posters may be somewhat counterproductive (and overdeterminative). Goffman's inventive use of images and text in Gender Advertisements is notable not only for the effectiveness of the layout but also for the potent and critical findings it enabled. Essentially, Goffman categorized images along similar lines as Millum (some categories like "relative size" are form-based, others like "the feminine touch" concern content) and then set about distilling his analysis into a discussion of six basic thematic categories. A hybrid approach that incorporates the basic tactic of categorization (following Goffman), in

combination with an analysis of form and content attributes (following Millum) will be applied to the collected sample of Vertigo posters.

While the sample under examination (13 posters) is considerably smaller than Goffman's or Millum's, the objective of the semiotic section of this study is not to make large claims about the ideological underpinnings of advertising generally but to investigate the meanings that have been offered by publicity departments for one film, Hitchcock's Vertigo. The images selected represent the marketing attempts of both American and foreign distributors, and span the period from the 1958 original release to the 1983 re-release. Again, because the aim is not to investigate broader social norms as Goffman and Millum do, the cross-cultural nature of the sample is not seen as a limitation of this approach. Following Goffman, the images have been grouped into categories so that conclusions can be drawn based upon patterns of recurrence and similarity. To facilitate this analysis, the images selected are presented in the following three groups: symbolic posters, literal posters, and posters which combine both features equally. Given that the small size of each grouping somewhat limits the conclusions that can be drawn from applying only this approach, the images will also be analyzed according to Millum's form/content schema.

Mary Beth Haralovich's "Selling Mildred Pierce" is a fascinating study of film marketing that highlights the pivotal role the poster plays in establishing genre and using stars to create audience expectations for a film. The subtle ways that poster imagery positioned Michael Curtiz's Mildred Pierce (1945) as both a film noir and a domestic melodrama is relevant to the study of Vertigo in that its imagery was also used to promote the film as belonging to a variety

of genres. Just as "publicity treatment of Crawford shifts the genre focus from the film noir angle to that of the woman's film" (Haralovich, 200), so too does the emphasis on Vertigo's stars in some posters shift its genre focus from art-film to romantic suspense thriller. With this analysis in mind, segregating the Vertigo posters into literal, symbolic, and hybrid categories is useful in that it encourages us to consider not only how the images of the stars of the film help to establish its reputation, but also the ways in which different types of imagery influence a film's generic affiliation. Central to the marketing treatment of Mildred Pierce was its portrayal of Joan Crawford. By presenting Crawford alternatively as either a dangerous femme fatale, or a hard working "woman, mother, and actress" (200) the producers of Mildred Pierce were able to position the film in a variety of ways to appeal to different audiences. The portrayal of Vertigo's genre and stars were also subject to divergent treatments, and a comparison of its esoteric star-free posters to its more populist ads that variously depict Hitchcock, Novak, and Stewart is a particularly useful methodology for the study of Hollywood publicity.

(1) SYMBOLIC POSTERS

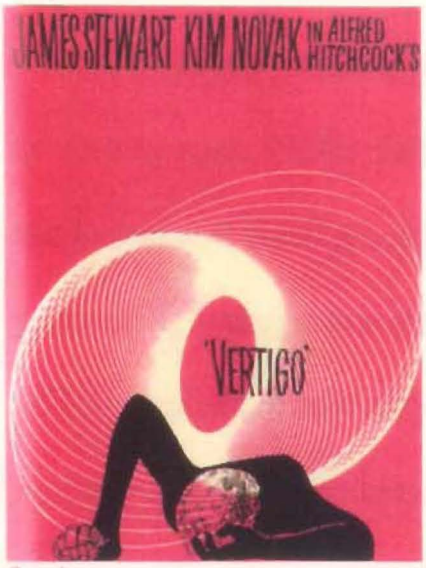


figure 1

While many of these posters can be said to literally portray images from Vertigo (the same Lissajous spirals depicted in many of these posters are seen during the credit sequence of the film) these posters nevertheless rely primarily upon the depiction of a metaphor to express the creative essence and experience of Vertigo. For the most part these posters are examples of Saul Bass's original poster artwork for the 1958 theatrical release. A notable exception of course is Figure 5, which was designed by the poster designer Roman Cieslewicz for the 1963 release of Vertigo (Zawrot Glowy) in Poland.

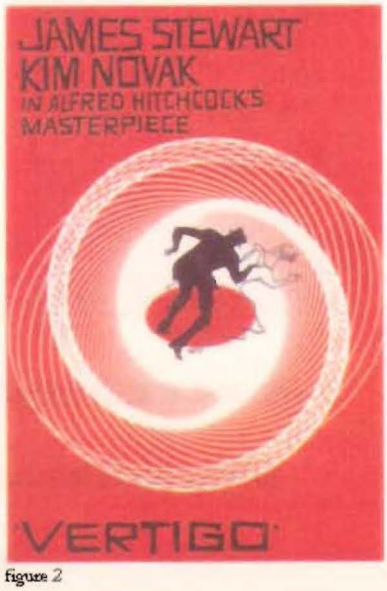


figure 2

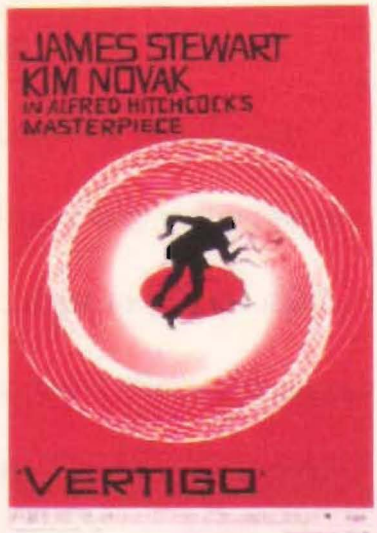


figure 3

Form

All of the designs in this grouping are classic examples of the kind of modernist design work that Saul Bass and Roman Cieslewicz performed

for the film industry. The images in this group are notable for their use of complex and provocative imagery, and the simplicity of their layouts. Unlike the more cluttered layouts of the hybrid and literal groupings, the layouts of these posters are homogenous and sparse. According to Millum, "crowded advertisements look old-fashioned and streamlined advertisements look modern" (Images, 83). The application of this kind of design aesthetic lends a connotation of sophistication to the film, and implies that Vertigo is a highbrow picture in the artistic tradition of the avant-garde. The use of imagery that is not only non-literal and metaphoric but also somewhat threatening and dangerous places this film artistically close to Dada and surrealism.

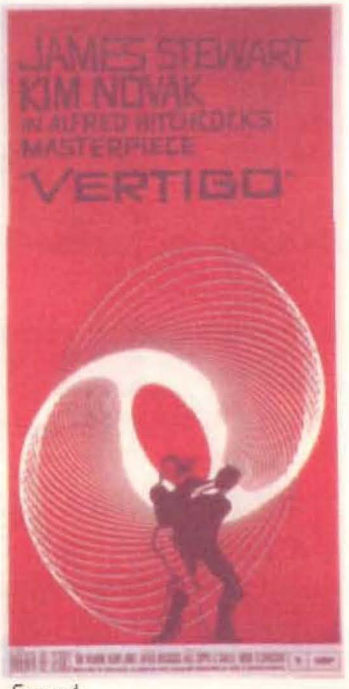


figure 4

In a departure from mainstream publicity posters of the 1950s and 1960s, none of these posters use photographs or depictions of identifiable characters or people. Although the couple in Figure 4 may very well represent Gavin and Madeleine Elster, the designer has taken no steps to capture their likenesses. This technique suggests that this film is not about characters, movie stars, or other aspects of the material world; rather, it explores psychological and existential realities. The bull's-eye type spiral used by Cieslewicz in Figure 5 is placed in a darkened area above skeleton's forehead, directing the viewer to

contemplate the mind of the skeletal figure. Implied by this sign is that this film is concerned with the internal crises of man and not the problems of the outside, physical world. The use of a skeletal figure in this image encourages this interpretation since a skeleton, after all, is what is hidden inside the body, and is revealed only after the body has died. Cieslewicz's skeletal figure appears to be dressed in a funeral suit drawn of fingerprints, a subtle, yet apt metaphor for the film's concern with issues of identity and doubling. Fingerprints are commonly thought of "as the sign of identity" (Gunning "Tracing," 43) and Cieslewicz's poster appropriates this conventional symbol to express a central theme of Vertigo through this illustrative technique.

The spirals found throughout the sample are another example of an innovative and expressionistic illustrative style. By recalling visual renderings of sound waves, or 3-D optical illusions in which objects on a page appear to move, the twisting spirals have an interactive quality about them. In part this is created by the size and prominence of the spirals in these images. In that most of the spirals in this grouping occupy the largest part of the centre of the image, they can be said to draw the viewer in through the implied spinning of the spiral. The use of illustrated figures cocked at an angle as if falling and spinning themselves (Figures 2, 3) supports the impression that the spirals are perhaps turning around the centre of the image. While it may seem implausible that these posters are intended to sell interactivity as a feature of Hitchcock's

Vertigo, poster experts have remarked that "common to all Hitchcock promotions is a direct appeal to the audience" (King Movie Posters, 52). With this in mind, it is not entirely unlikely that these images are indeed intended to "speak" directly to the viewers by engaging them in a type of trompe de l'oeil. The Cieslewicz poster is somewhat different in its illustrative technique, but its own version of a spiral similarly succeeds in drawing the viewer into the unknown depth of the image. Both approaches to illustration imply a film that is complex, modern, jarring, and aware of its audience.

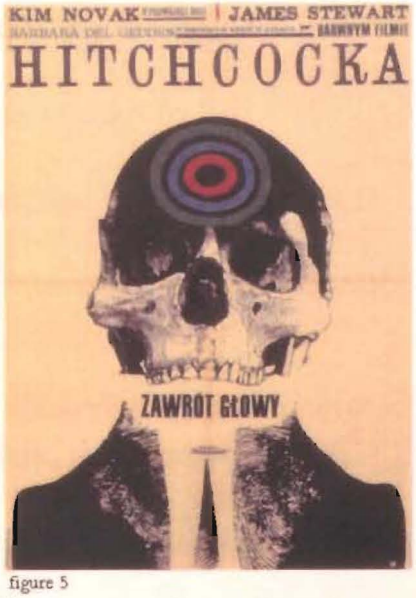


figure 5

Content

With the exception of Figure 5, the posters in this grouping are notable, in part, for a basic scarcity of content. Instead of devoting space to the representation of locations and stars, Figures 1-4 are in large part covered by empty spaces of orange or red. The uniform orange colouring of these posters lends them a stark and unnatural mood. Today at least, orange is the colour most often used for traffic cones, emergency vests, and hazardous road signs, in part because it doesn't occur in the natural environment and therefore stands out in sharp contrast to the greens and blues of the outdoors. Red, the colour of stop signs and blood, brings with it connotations of danger, perhaps playing off

Hitchcock's reputation as a director who relished exposing the violence and terror in everyday life. Hitchcock's public persona, as created by his appearances on his television program, in radio spots, and in interviews is a somewhat morbid humorist with a keen eye for the violence that lurks beneath our day-to-day relationships.

Unlike the literal and hybrid groupings to follow, the symbolic group neglects to portray any of the settings of Vertigo. Instead, the original posters (Figures 1-4) would appear to position the viewer at a point of elevation above the falling couple, but without a clear understanding of the fixed ground towards which they are descending. Consequently, the viewer of the poster is placed in a precarious position whereby the physical distance between his eyes and the poster itself remains stable, and yet the furthest and deepest point in the image stretches towards an undetermined and potentially infinite depth. As we stare into the poster and begin to appreciate that what we are looking is not merely a couple falling, but a couple falling into bottomless abyss we come to the unsettling realization that we are higher up than we thought we were. For if the couple is falling towards infinity, then the viewer herself must be placed, somewhat unexpectedly at an infinite height from any conceivable ground. When we are higher up than we thought we were, as Pomerance explains, we experience vertigo (Eye for Hitchcock). In this way, the Bass-Hitchcock original posters once again mimic one of the crowning achievements of

Hitchcock's filmmaking; the incorporation of the viewer into the action of the image.

(2) LITERAL POSTERS

As Barthes explains in "Rhétorique de l'Image," "the distinction between the literal message and the symbolic message is operational; we never encounter (at least in advertising) a literal image in a pure state" (Barthes "Rhétorique," 199). The images in this grouping, while perhaps not literal in some absolute sense rely primarily on a literal depiction of the stars, actions, and locations of Vertigo.

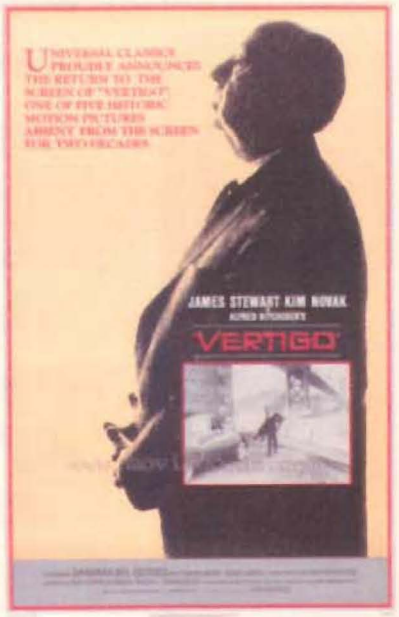


figure 6

Form

Stylistically, the literal posters represent a far greater diversity of approaches than is found in the symbolic grouping. Although only the 1983 re-release image (Figure 6) makes use of actual photographs, all three aim at representing action sequences from Vertigo, and all three aim at parlaying images of the film's famous personalities into ticket sales. Unlike the symbolic posters, which hardly use any text, the literal posters place a much greater emphasis on tag lines and descriptive language to explain the meaning of the ad. The 1958 posters in this grouping (Figures 7, 8) place a much greater emphasis on James Stewart and Kim Novak than on Hitchcock.

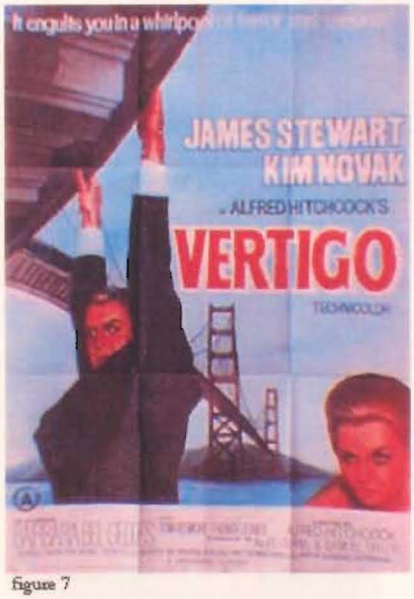


figure 7

Given that Bass's symbolic posters excluded images of Novak and Stewart, and that "Paramount blamed the Saul Bass-inspired ads" for poor box-office, Paramount's East Coast marketing office put together a replacement

campaign that "gave more prominence to the film's stars" (Kapsis Reputation, 52). Figures 7 and 8 are examples of this new approach, and in both, James Stewart and Kim Novak's names are printed in a different and far bigger typeface than is Hitchcock's. Although Stewart and Novak also receive top billing in figure 9, the large photograph of Hitchcock's profile makes it quite clear that by 1983, the film was once again being sold to audience's as a "director's film." The prominence that his image plays in promoting the 1983 release is a testament to the rise in his stature as an artist, something that Hitchcock historians such as Kapsis attribute to the rise of auteurism generally and Hitchcock's association to it via his connection to influential auteurists such as François Truffaut.

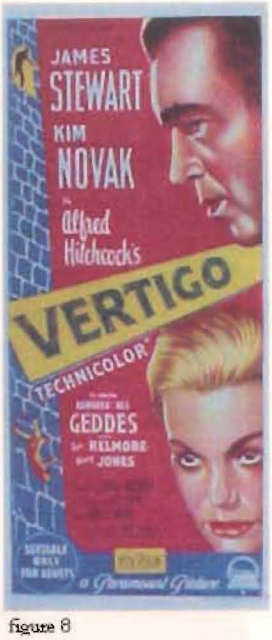


figure 8

In terms of overall illustrative and photographic styles, Figure 7 and Figure 8 use far more cluttered layouts than Figure 9. The classier and more elegant design used in Figure 9 is more in tune with its positioning of Vertigo as part of its collection of only "five historic motion pictures." In keeping with Paramount's strategy of replacing the earlier symbolic posters with ones that portray Vertigo as "simply another great thriller" (Kapsis Reputation, 52). Figures 7 and 8 provide multiple points of focus implying a film that is far more action packed than the cerebral and nihilistic film suggested by Figure 1. Unlike the posters in the

figure 8-1

symbolic group, these posters use photographs and photo-realistic illustrations suggesting a film that is less esoteric and more heavily focused on delivering physical action, terror, and romance.

figure 8-2

Content

A major difference between the literal and symbolic groupings, in terms of content, is the portrayal of actual settings from the films. Each of the literal posters, with the exception of Figure 8-2 and 8-3, offers a representation of a location from Vertigo. Many Hitchcock films of the 1950s such as North by Northwest, To Catch a Thief, and Vertigo were promoted in part as adventures that took the viewer to interesting vacation-type settings. In a lengthy trailer used to promote North by Northwest, Hitchcock plays the part of an ironic travel agent as he describes the film as "a vacation from all your problems, as it was for me." While Hitchcock himself never promoted Vertigo as a "vacation," the posters that replaced the ones he conceived with Saul Bass, did. The Golden Gate Bridge is a common motif of the literal and hybrid posters, and it lends a connotation of glamour and excitement to the film. Again, the emphasis is on what is seen and seeable, an interpretation that is supported by the prominence of images of Novak and Stewart in these posters. The treatment of the film's stars is noticeably different in the posters made for foreign markets in this sample (Figure 8-1 through to 8-4), which for the most part are much more

figure 8-3

heavily focused on representing Vertigo as a romantic melodrama, than a thrill ride. By illustrating Kim Novak and James Stewart in close physical proximity, a reading of the film as a love story is encouraged to a much greater degree than is by the other literal posters. Given the rising of Kim Novak's stature at the time of Vertigo's release and the considerable celebrity of James Stewart, who had successfully teamed up with Hitchcock twice before with Rear Window (1954) and The Man Who Knew Too Much (1956), the Vertigo of these images is a far more mainstream and populist production. An emphasis on the visual is further supported by the prominence that the literal images devote to word, "Technicolor," and "Vistavision." Of the American 1958 images surveyed (Figures 7 and 8), reference to Technicolor is positioned directly under title only in the literal and hybrid poster groupings, furthering a read of the film as a visual rather than cerebral experience. The excision of the word "masterpiece" from the poster is another significant alteration done to the original, symbolic approach to marketing Vertigo. "Masterpiece" and "Technicolor" brought with them vastly different connotations for the film viewers of the 1950s, who would have associated the former with a more theatre-like cinematic experience, and the later with the amusement park type thrills of the spectacular films of the time. Given that the early films in Technicolor tended to be costume period pieces or big budget musicals, the connotations of the word "Technicolor" still brought with it associations of populist entertainment.

figure 8-4

(3) HYBRID POSTERS

Although the posters in this grouping are to some degree more closely aligned with the look and feel of the literal category, they all make significant use of the metaphorical imagery found in the purely symbolic posters. The combination of these two approaches represents an attempt at distancing the film from the esoteric connotations of the symbolic camp by placing greater emphasis on the romantic bonds between the film's male and female leads.

figure 9

Form

Although the posters in this selection draw upon a variety of illustrative styles, all of the images use a combination of photographs, lifelike illustrations, and symbolic drawings. While Figure 9 is the only one without an actual photograph, the realistic depiction of James Stewart and Kim Novak accomplishes the function of exploiting the celebrity of these two stars to promote Vertigo. Despite the obvious variety of styles and illustrative techniques used in this selection, all the images share the same basic layout structure: the bottom left of each image is devoted to the representation of Stewart and Novak in an intimate pose, while the right side of each portrays a structure from which a fall is either implied or directly shown. While Figures 9, 12, and 13 do not show anyone physically falling, the juxtaposition of the Golden Gate Bridge with a drawing immediately to the left of it in which a woman is about to be thrown (Figure 12, 13) or else is falling

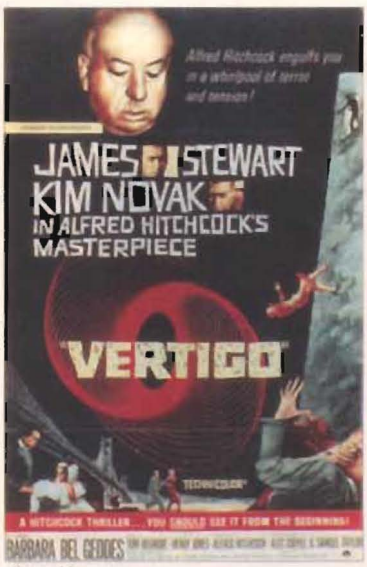


figure 10

into a spiral (Figure 9) accomplishes the task of lending a menacing connotation to the bridge.

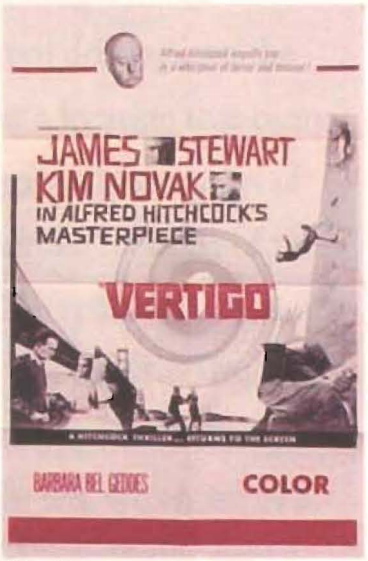


figure 11

Overall, the layouts used in this selection are far busier than the posters in the symbolic group, and arguably more cluttered than the literal images as well. The increased number of visual elements in these ads somewhat confuses the message of these posters by avoiding a centralizing nucleus or punctum to tie their meaning into a coherent whole. The overall identity of the film, as suggested by its general style, is somewhat ambiguous in that it seeks at creating an identity not by distilling the film into a central icon, or image, but by combining diverse signs more or less equally. The visual centre of these images is for the most part the title, a fairly common layout in terms of film poster design. Given that Paramount was unsatisfied with the previous campaign, it is hardly surprising that it would adopt a more conventional layout to promote a more conventional social identity for the film.

figure 12

Content

Many of these posters (Figures 9, 10, 11) feature multiple settings from the film, such as the Golden Gate Bridge, Scottie's bedroom, and the church tower at San Juan Bautista. Additionally, all of these images represent realistic locations in combination with figurative representations As a consequence of this combination of images, these ads position the viewer not in one particular time or place but at a vantage point to see virtually all the locations of the film

simultaneously. Furthermore, these posters combine two completely different types of signs through the mixing of literal and symbolic imagery. The impossibility of this subject position keeps the viewer from drifting into the coherent world of the poster, since it places the viewer at a location that cannot logically exist. The tag line, "Alfred Hitchcock engulfs you in a whirlpool of terror and tension" (see Figures 9, 10, 11) helps to anchor the meaning of these various signs to a connotation of chaos and upheaval. The spirals found in all of these posters support an interpretation of Vertigo as a film that is first and foremost a dizzying, disorientating, and frightening picture in which falling from great heights is a central motif. Unlike the symbolic ads, which imply a psychological or philosophical fall, or the literal ads which emphasize the physical perils of vertigo, the hybrid posters seem to promote Vertigo as a sensational film that pits the romance on the left side of image against the physical peril represented on the right side of each image. The Vertigo promoted by these hybrid posters is a more romantic film than is depicted in the other groups, but one in which physical danger "engulfs you in a whirlpool of terror and tension!" These hybrid posters would appear to promote a reading of the film as making a statement that the other two did not, namely that falling in love can be as vertiginous as a leap from the Golden Gate Bridge.

figure 13

Conclusion

One of the main tasks of film posters is to publicly typify films. Through the use of certain conventions of graphic design and star treatment, films are positioned in the minds of viewers as belonging to pre-established categories or styles of film. The similarities in terms of style and star treatment within each grouping of posters examined suggests that Vertigo's symbolic ads advance a reading of the film as an esoteric art house production, while the literal ads suggest a sensational thriller, and the hybrid group promote a view of the film as a somewhat romantic if dangerous melodrama.

In his seminal work "The Myth of Total Cinema," Bazin discusses the Platonic ideal that he feels lies beneath the invention of cinema, when he describes film as "the recreation of the world in its own image" (21). This has led scholars such as Gunning to notice the Golem-like nature of cinema, in which filmmakers appropriate a once divine privilege by using film to create worlds, and CGI to create life. The poster, as Tom Gunning might suggest (see Gunning's "Gollum or Golem"), is another kind of cinematic Golem, a creature that is animated by our love of films but created out of the studios' somewhat base but certainly material need for films to circulate in tangible form. Whether or not these graven images are an idolatrous blasphemy, or the means through which we fall vertiginously backwards in time, depends entirely the ability of the poster to capture what Proust called "the magnetism of an

identical moment" (Proust, 42). Whether or not the various posters produced for Vertigo capture something close to such an "identical" moment is a question riddled with theoretical problems. Does Vertigo, or any film for that matter, have some kind of timeless essence that reveals itself to audiences of all cultures, at all times in the same way? Of course not, but nevertheless there are interpretations of the film that strike us as more or less sophisticated. Certainly some of the posters discussed strike us as more true in this sense than others, and yet none of them could ever claim to satisfactorily capture the totality of a film as complex and nuanced as Vertigo. To work as an effective ad, however a poster need only create an alluring identity for a film, and one that is at least in some significant way related to the film itself. Film posters, as Barbara Klinger explains form "a tentative contract between producer and consumer" (Haralovich "Selling," 197). While refunds might not be issued for violating this contract, studio box office receipts are certainly not helped by releasing films that are significantly different from the one promoted. It could be argued that all of the ads in the sample accomplish the task of relating to potential viewers some significant aspect of the film. For the nostalgic film viewer such as myself, posters such as the original Vertigo poster offer at least the possibility of a nostalgic return to the film, and therefore insight into my own feelings towards it. In that instant of recollection, the "contents of the individual past combine with the material of the collective past" (Benjamin

Illuminations, 159), and I am allowed to linger in a state where my own personal memories are reconciled with the "official" memories, and the isolation of modern life is temporarily forgotten.

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