2004

Electronic billboard : its influence on public space

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31979/etd.up6x-j228>
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ELECTRONIC BILLBOARD: ITS INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC SPACE

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Television, Radio, Film, and Theatre

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirement for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Kyung Lee

May 2004

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FILM THEATRE

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "David Kahn", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. David Kahn

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Kimberly B. Massey, Ph.D.", written over a horizontal line.

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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Anne Marie Todd", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Anne Marie Todd

APPROVED FOR THE UNIVERSITY

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Pamela C. Starker", written over a horizontal line.

ABSTRACT

ELECTRONIC BILLBOARD: ITS INFLUENCE ON PUBLIC SPACE

By Kyung Lee

As an outdoor advertising medium, the electronic billboard, which is a combination of a billboard and television, has been emerging. However, little research has been done concerning the medium. Using multiple methodological approaches, this thesis investigates the influence of the electronic billboard on public space. Initially, it explores the space-altering characteristic of the electronic billboard by examining billboards and television respectively in terms of their relationships with environments. Secondly, it conducted observational research in Times Square, New York, and Shibuya, Tokyo, and recorded the phenomenon of electronic billboards. The information and data gathered from this research are discussed ethnographically and analyzed using typology. Research on this subject reveals that the electronic billboard makes its location placeless by delivering messages which are not relevant to its geographical origin. In the larger context of urbanization, the electronic billboard represents a birth of antigeographical place.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped in the completion of this thesis. I am grateful to the faculty of the Department of Television Radio Film Theatre, specifically Dr. David Kahn for his willingness to review my thesis and Alison McKee for her insightful comments. I also appreciate my other two readers, Kim Massey and Anne Marie Todd.

I also would like to thank my friends for their encouragement throughout this lengthy project. My deepest thanks are to my boyfriend Mike, his mother Mercedes, and most of all, my mother for not only her faith and encouragement but also giving me a great opportunity of learning.

CONTENTS

Chapter		Page
1	Introduction	1
2	Billboard Nature	24
3	Television Nature	47
4	Electronic Billboards Phenomenon in Tokyo and New York	71
5	Conclusion	120
Works Cited		127

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1	
Top 100 Program Rankings Household Rating Full Year 1/1/03-12/31/03	63
Table 2	
Contents Showed on Q-Front Screen	105
Table 3	
Contents Showed on 109-2 Screen	109
Table 4	
Contents Showed on Superlisa Shibuya Screen	111
Table 5	
Typology of the Contents	114

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 1 Environmentally Safe Ads	6
Figure 2 Bristol-Clear Channel, United Kingdom	12
Figure 3 Interbest, Den Haag, Netherlands	13
Figure 4 MTRC Hong Kong, China.	14
Figure 5 Emirates Neon, United Arab Emirates.	15
Figure 6 Hollywood & Highland, United States.	16
Figure 7 MTA Installing Bright Electronic Billboards in Subways	69
Figure 8 An LED Billboard Along Banksville Road	69
Figure 9 Wrigley’s Electronic Billboard	82
Figure 10 NASDAQ MarketSite Tower	85
Figure 11 Lehman Brother’s Building	88
Figure 12 Three Electronic Billboards in Shibuya	97
Figure 13 Momo in Three Screens and a Giant Billboard	100
Figure 14 Momo Bus Running in the Area	100
Figure 15 Momo Riding a “Momo-Smart” Car in the Area	101
Figure 16 Brand Ambassadors	101
Figure 17 Momo and Komomo	102
Figure 18 A Friend of Momo, Postman Wandering Around the Shibuya District	102

Chapter 1

Introduction

The stretch of urban areas in the twentieth century does not produce a variation of urban places. At the start of the twentieth century, 10 percent of the world's population lived in cities. In 1950, only New York and London had over 8 million inhabitants. By the year 2000, around 50 percent of the world population lived in cities. Today there are 22 metropolises (Rozenblat 1-4). Urban inhabitants have increased, and cities in the world are growing in size. Furthermore, landscapes of metropolitan areas, which include both cities and suburbs, appear to be uniform and homogenized. Architectural globalization creates the similar look of streets in urban places, which is a part due to the global trend of commerce. An architect, Roger K. Lewis argues that this global trend of commerce is driven by "changing consumer expectations," "market opportunities" and "business agendas" (Lewis H05). These three keywords are not necessarily connected to a specific geographical place. In a typical city, a clump of skyscrapers towering above their neighbors is the most outstanding object and, to a great extent, this feature determines the city's appearance. For some people, distinguishing an aerial image of the city of Hong Kong from an image of Tokyo, or an aerial view of San Francisco from one of Seattle might be difficult because of the common appearances created by the towering buildings. The similarities are visible in groups of look-alike skyscrapers flanked by an interstate highway, huge shopping malls with gigantic parking lots consisting of the same line-up of department stores, and fast food chains on every corner of

the street. That is because they are the easiest form of modernity visualized in our imaginations that we could turn into reality. As a result, the distinction between urban places has become obsolete.

One of the causes of this obsolescence in urban places is the influence of the media. Shohat and Stam insist, "the media are absolutely central to any discussion of multiculturalism, transnationalism, and globalization" (145). The prevailing metaphor among critics, historians and architects about new cities is, in Sorkin's words: "like a television."

TV's main event is the cut, the elision between broadcast bits, the seamless slide from soap opera to docudrama to a word from our sponsor. The "design" of television is all about erasing differences among these bits, about asserting equal value for all the elements in the net so, that any of the infinite combinations that the broadcast day produces can make "sense." The new city likewise eradicates genuine particularity in favor of a continuous urban field, a conceptual grid of boundless reach. (Sorkin "Variations on a Theme Park" xi-xii)

Sorkin's "Television city" has visible characteristics in its architecture. The design theme is based in "the same calculus as advertising, the idea of pure imaginability, obvious to the real needs and traditions of those who inhabit it" (Sorkin "Variations on a Theme Park" xiv-xv). Television city is constructed on a certain theme that is not totally related to its geographical distinctiveness, but to a theme that is adopted from the world of television.

Television city no longer contains or has lost a sense of place, more importantly, it does not have a proper public place. A “proper” public place takes the form of a street, a square, a park, a courtyard, or a lobby, all of which are supposed to maintain a sense of community. These attributes of a “proper” public space are symbols of the civic and space-binding agent that makes sense of a place. Instead of “proper” public space, we now have a “pseudo public place,” which is commercialized and neither has spatiality nor intimacy inherent to a genuine place.

The concept of public space, through which electronic billboards communicate, must be comprehensible in order to recognize the influence caused by this media. According to Margaret Crawford, a public space should be viewed as a situation that can be experienced in multiple, partial, and even paradoxical ways (Crawford 22). A place that is controlled for a single purpose is not a genuine public space. For instance, the streets are where public and private interests often intersect and multiple layers of functions exist in one place have been positioned as a crucial element in constructing a public realm.

However, the streets with controlled access, in other words “pseudo public spaces,” are emerging. Themed streets, as represented in Universal City Walk in Hollywood, are an extreme example of a pseudo public space, as people who arrive by car are required to pay a parking fee to enter. Dining, entertainment, shopping are three predetermined objectives in the spot. These places have authority or authorities that control the place to a certain degree. Although its exterior mimics a real street, as Purinton and Potteiger state, it lacks

in qualities that make streets intriguing, such as the mix of social classes, visibility of aberrant behavior, and indeterminacy. Purinton and Potteiger further state, that this linking of public and commercial culture has foreboding implications for the open narrative of the street (14). A public space is where unanticipated activities will happen, such as performances of street musicians or street artists, spontaneous appearances of audiences, and arrivals of street vendors. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues that control, such as auditioning street musicians and designating places and times for them to perform, or moving vendors away from heavily trafficked areas does not produce vibrant public places (20). Consequently, a public space becomes a pseudo public space with determined plans, sponsoring organizations, funding, publicity, announced schedules, or single-purpose architectures.

Out of Home Media

The form of control over undesignated activities in public space from private interests or corporate ownership varies. It is not necessarily an urban development of a new town. Sometimes a former lively public space becomes a pseudo public place due to the infiltration of a new medium over the place. Advertisers often sponsor those mediums. Today, they put their messages into places that are beyond our expectation. In New Jersey, a company named “Beach’n Billboard” started to commercialize the landscape. Early each morning, they mold the sand into endless advertising for soft drink companies, dotcom

start-ups and other clients. Beach'N Billboard claims its uniqueness on their website:

Imagine seeing miles and miles of your ads creating the world's largest billboard. That's over 600,000 square feet of beach with your name on it! A half mile of your Beach 'N Billboard ads will dwarf the famous Hollywood sign in California by four times! In addition, a "Please Don't Litter" public service message is included as a part of your ad.

You won't believe the reaction from people who view your Beach 'N Billboard ads. Most everyone will think that they're cool. As the day passes, beach patrons naturally walk over your ads fading them into nothing more than footprints in the sand. Don't worry, your ads will be impressed anew each day for an entire month or as long as you want.

(Beach'N Billboard "About Us," par. 2-3)

Beach'N Billboard offers not only to advertise their clients, but also to incorporate a public service announcement such as, "PLEASE DON'T LITTER." Advertisers found a way to break in upon public spaces by offering free public services to cash-strapped public authorities, for example, providing bus shelters, benches and kiosks in exchange for the right to advertise on the streets in cities (Tomkins 20).

Fig .1. Environmentally Safe Ads. Beach'N Billboard.

<<http://www.beachnbillboard.com/pic08.htm>>

Examples of advertising overload are plentiful. Advertisements are popping up in unusual places. In San Francisco, the owner of a Mexican restaurant came up with an idea that he could advertise his restaurant without spending any money. He offered a lifetime supply of free lunches to any customers who would get a tattoo of the restaurant's logo somewhere on his or her body. So far, more than 50 people walk around San Francisco with pictures of the restaurant's sombrero-topped Corn Man tattooed on their biceps, buttocks or thighs (Tomkins 20). In certain public toilets, one may encounter a small sticker above the urinals which tells you about "Amstel Light Beer." At an ATM, you may find yourself gazing at a commercial on the screen while your transaction is being processed. While filling up a gas station, you may end up seeing the news with ads or purely ads in the screen attached at the gas pump. In an elevator, a small screen may deliver news and weather information with advertisements to you, so you do not have to gaze vacantly at its ceiling (Beardi 40; Wells 12B). Even if you do not turn on the TV, do not read a newspaper nor tune in a radio, there is a high possibility that you will encounter an advertisement. There are few ad-free zones left in our out of home space.

An alternative media called "out of home media" is a new vehicle created by striving advertisers. According to Diane Cimine, executive VP-marketing at the Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA), "Advertisers now see outdoor as a collection of different means of reaching customers along the routes of their daily lives. It ends up being a continuum" (Beardi 40). Outdoor advertising, a \$5.2 billion industry in 2002, is growing every year and the

industry has doubled its revenue in the past ten years (OAAA “Facts and Figures”). These figures clearly show this industry is promising for advertisers. The epoch in which opinion leaders communicated to “selected” people through the top people’s newspaper or the financial press is over. In an age of increasing conglomerates, companies are talking to a broad public—often from billboards (Bernstein 210).

The traditional mass media, like network television, are gradually losing the power to attract the mass audiences that it once did. Even though the number of television channels has increased due to the birth of cable television networks, the size of the U.S. television audience and the amount of time that viewers spend watching television have increased very little over the past few years. Some reasons for this slowed increase are: the hectic daily life schedules that do not give people enough time to spend with television, newspapers and radio and the introduction of new forms of entertainment such as home VCRs, video games, and computers (Budd et al 26). Hence, the new channels did not make the overall numbers of audience larger; they just sliced it into more and smaller pieces. For advertisers, this fact means that people are less exposed to their advertisements, making it more difficult to reach their target audiences.

With so much competition for consumers’ attention, advertisers try hard to reach their audiences. Advertisers put more and more advertisements in everywhere they can to attract audiences. Consequently, advertisers began to put their advertisements on unconventional sites and to capture an audience at the times when their potential viewers are not engaging in anything other than

looking at somewhere vacantly or at some engaging content with 15-second commercials. The advertisers even try to get attention by using advertisements that irritate people. Irritation has a brilliant “attention-getting power” from an advertiser’s standpoint (McLuhan Essential McLuhan 18). Consequently advertisers started putting advertisements where people have nothing else to do besides wait; they have to watch no matter how nauseating the content might be. Out-of-home media is the advertiser’s desperate hope to attract people’s attention.

Outdoor advertising has been recently praised as “the last mass medium” among advertisers who are keen to look for any effective outlet for their products.

Outdoor is –more than ever before – the last mass medium... Outdoor always has been and always will be pure and unadulterated advertising. Not an editorial delivery device, not an addendum to defray the expense of something else. Outdoor IS the message, and as such will always be the last mass medium, a sure fire way to get noticed, to draw attention, ultimately to sell...which is, after all, outdoor’s *raison d’être*. So as long as there are widgets in search of a buyer, outdoor will be out there, out-doing everything else! (OAAA “About outdoor,” screen 1).

The improvement of the audience measurement system that gives advertisers ratings data and frequency with complete demographic breaks that used to measure television and radio audiences and is a crucial element that has raised its rank as a reliable media. For seventy years, the outdoor advertising

industry has relied on counts of cars passing particular billboards and other displays, provided by the Traffic Audit Bureau (Bachman 20). Without a credible rating system, advertisers had been reluctant to drop their skepticism. Thanks to high-tech global positioning systems, the industry is able to offer detailed demographic data about the audience of the medium. Now they can tell from where people are coming, when they pass in front of a medium and who is exposed to the advertisements.

Today virtually every type of business uses outdoor advertising for their marketing campaign, such as McDonalds, Washington Mutual, Miller Beer, AT&T Wireless, and various industries (OAAA "Facts & Figures"). Our public space has a variety of corporate sponsors similar to the television world. Moreover, as in television advertising, the era in which the tobacco and alcohol beverage industry dominated outdoor advertising is gone.

Electronic Billboard

In the context of the outgrowth of out-of-home media, the electronic billboard is establishing its status as a bearer of the industry's future. Although its inception to the market is a few decades ago, the medium is still in its infancy as a video message board for outdoor advertising systems. Until now, electronic billboards have matured in two specific applications of use. The first application is spectacles that are flamboyant signs which often signify the surrounding place. Examples of spectacles can be seen in the Strip in Las Vegas, in Times Square, in sports arenas or in high profile shopping malls, which are usually

centralized zones of leisure and consumption. The second application is the roadside display which appears in our every day space, such as alongside the highways of commuting routes, on streets, or (what is supposed to be) any open space. A third application, which utilizes multiple displays as a network system, is just beginning to emerge as a viable outdoor advertising format. Although electronic billboard networks have yet to happen to any degree in the United States, versions of these systems are taking off in Canada, Asian and European countries (Brill par. 6). Figures 2 through 6 are examples of electronic billboard installations in the world. Figures 2 through 5 are set in roadside or pedestrian-walkways and they are also connected to other displays in the each country as a network system. Figure 6 is located in a high-profile shopping mall in Hollywood, California. As may be noted from these photographs, the sizes and shapes of electronic billboards can be tailored substantially for its most appropriate presentation.

Fig. 2. Bristol-Clear Channel, United Kingdom. Barco.

<<http://www.barco.com/branding/en/references/references.asp?ref=12>

61# >

Fig. 3. Interbest, Den Haag, Netherlands. Barco.

<<http://www.barco.com/branding/en/references/references.asp?ref=1262#>>

Fig. 4. MTRC Hong Kong, China. Barco.

<<http://www.barco.com/branding/en/references/references.asp?ref=1343#>>

Fig. 5. Emirates Neon, United Arab Emirates. Barco.

<<http://www.barco.com/branding/en/references/references.asp?ref=13>

36#>

Fig. 6. Hollywood & Highland, United States. Barco.

<<http://www.barco.com/branding/en/references/references.asp?ref=12>

67#>

The term “electronic billboard” is not yet a common phrase used to describe the medium. However, the familiar word, Jumbotron®, a trademark for Sony Corporation, has more familiarity among the public as a pronominal term for an electronic billboard. According to the research conducted by the U. S. Department of Transportation on the subject of potential safety effects of electronic billboards, it defines this medium as “a programmable display that has the capability to present a large amount of text and/or symbolic imagery” (1). Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) also describes its visual and operational characteristics.

EBBs (Electronic Billboards) present high-resolution color images, complex visual arrangements, rich variation in color, and a vast amount of images. Operational characteristics include electric power and remote control through a computer terminal. The EBB screen display elements are typically arranged in a matrix. The shape of the EBB is usually rectangular, but irregular shapes are possible (FHWA 2).

This research will address the medium as an electronic billboard. Seemingly there is not a unified name for the electronic billboard medium as of yet, and the name varies from place to place and in complexity. Some terms used for the electronic billboard are “electronic video advertising boards,” “Jumbo TV screen,” “Jumbotron (a term specific to Sony technology),” “LED (light-emitting diode) displays,” “LED signs,” “Digital Signs,” “Electronic Scrolling Signs,” “Moving Message Displays & Tickers,” “Outdoor Electronic billboards,” and “Video Billboards.” No matter what the electronic billboard is called, the

definition above expresses the criteria of the medium sufficiently. Any advertising objects that are bright, flashy and programmable and look like a television screen are considered to be an electronic billboard.

Billboard + Television < Electronic Billboard

An electronic billboard is a medium that is the sum of two conventional mediums, which are the television and the billboard. The evidence is clearly shown in the distinctive characteristics of electronic billboards that marketers analyze as following:

- 1) Teichi baitai nanode, chiiki no symbol to nari, landmark kouka ga aru.
It is fixed to its setting; therefore it becomes a landmark or a community symbol.
- 2) Butsuriteki ni kyodai de arutame, scale ni yoru tsuyoi impact wo hakki dekiru.
It has strong impact on audiences because of its physical size,
- 3) “Eizou, Onsei, Moji” Jyouhou wo douji ni hasshin dekiru koto kara kizon no okugai koukoku to kurabe jyouhouryou ga ooi.
It can send more information than other outdoor media in terms of visual, sound and characteristics,
- 4) “Eizou, Onsei, Moji” no fukugou jyouhou nanode hyougen houhou ha taki ni watari, hyougen no tasaisa kara creativity wo hakki shiyasuku, entertainment sei ni sugureteiru.

It has various means of expression so that it is apt for creative and entertainment projects,

- 5) Real time de hasshin dekiru tame news ya live chukei nado sokuhousei ni tondeiru.

It is capable of programming contents spontaneously so that it is suited for news or live broadcasts,

- 6) Hokano mass baitai to hikaku shite cost-performance ga takai.

It has relatively good cost/performance compared to other media,

- 7) Chiiki micchyaku gata no jyouhou hassin ga dekiru.

It enables the dispatch of community-based information. (Shibuya Keizai Shinbun par. 4)

Regarding 1) and 2), the claim that an advertising object is a landmark or a community symbol is a method used by advertisers to justify a billboard's existence in public space, taking advantage of its undeniable size. 3), 4) and 5) are the same capability as with television content. 6) means that it can reach more people than other traditional media, which is the value of this medium. 7) says that they can program the content appropriately for the demographics at the location of the medium. The combination of 6) and 7) means that they can reach a potential critical mass with their target audiences.

The interpretations of electronic billboards' characteristics give this paper a crucial formula: Billboard + Television < Electronic billboard. Electronic billboards are more than the sum of their constitutive parts, which are drawn from both traditional billboard advertisements and television. Like the billboard,

they exist in public space for 24 hours and 365 days a year. Like television, they deliver dynamic visual presentation to viewers. United in the electronic billboards, these elements do occupy a certain space in public space, deliver messages of moving images and not give people a choice to turn off the medium. Electronic billboards control their locations more than billboards and television. In terms of the medium's physical influence on public space, the billboard, which is the oldest form of advertising, will be examined in how it has become a part of our environment. The power of television that blurs the public/private boundary of domestic setting by bringing outside world and corporate messages to a household is important to investigate for the effects other than physical one that electronic billboards cause. Physical size, content and the location of this medium are three criteria that this paper will take a close look at. Examining these three factors gives an interesting insight into how advertisers utilize, shape, and even occasionally transform our environments.

As long as electronic billboards are positioned in public space, it is definite that they contribute in part to the intertwining of our sense of private and public space. In this case, "public space" should be defined as a place other than domestic places. However, this paper confines the meaning of public space to a place that is out-of-doors and does not belong to any corporate entity, in other words, a place in which the public does not expect or does not have an obligation to encounter any commercial materials. In this sense, the interiors of shopping malls or restaurants are eliminated from "public space."

Each chapter includes the critical insights from written resources and the author's personal observations of the medium. This paper supports Marshall McLuhan's theoretical standpoint that effective study of the media deals not only with the content of the media but also with the media themselves and the total cultural environment within which the media function. The structure of the thesis is a result of contemplation in order to theorize what influences electronic billboards bring to public spaces, according to McLuhan's method that only by standing aside from any phenomenon and taking an overview one can discover its operative principles and lines of force (McLuhan Playboy Interview 236).

Multiple methodological approaches are used throughout this paper. In chapter 2, the organization of billboards as an advertising medium will be scrutinized historically. By tracing the history of billboards in its relation to public space, it will reveal how the medium became a part of our environment. People are so used to the existence of billboards in public spaces since the medium has existed from the earliest times. Historical methodology is the most appropriate for the purpose of clarifying the background of the medium in public space. Chapter 3 will explore the impact of television on our perception of private/public space with a critical approach. The spatial influence of television has been actively discussed in the realm of media ecology, which is a study that considers media as an environment. This paper will refer to the thoughts of the media ecologist like Marshall McLuhan, Joshua Meyrowitz, Neil Postman and others. Chapter 4 is constructed based on the author's fieldwork of two sites, Tokyo, Japan and Times Square, New York. The purpose is not to theorize the

use of this medium, but to describe the phenomenon that is caused by this medium. Therefore it will examine two sites with an anthropological approach. On top of that, typology is used for the content analysis of the medium in Tokyo, Japan. These sites are representative of the phenomenon caused by electronic billboards. Tokyo is a great example of the use of electronic billboards as outdoor television sets; the mediums used by the multiple advertisers and the frequent broadcast of television commercials. While Times Square often use the electronic billboards as electronic marquees; the mediums with unique shapes, structures and flamboyant appearances.

The electronic billboard, just like a huge television screen inside a football stadium, possesses a power that injects a theme park atmosphere into a place. From the glorious scenery of the strip of Las Vegas, to the famous sight seeing spot, New York's Times Square, electronic billboards and other electronic devices play a major role in establishing the city's identity. Some people fly or drive to Las Vegas to see and feel the electronically decorated town. Others walk down and take a picture of Times Square where one is surrounded by corporate billboards. Those specific places feed people's visual pleasure whether it is for entertainment, information or advertisement purposes. While there are people who view electronic billboards as a visual pleasure, others think of them as a visual nuisance to their landscapes. The medium must have power to influence people's perceptions about the places.

It suggests that there is an emerging medium that helps in the birth of the anti-geographic places and pseudo public space that do not contain locality. This

medium has power to broaden of privatized pieces of the city and help public space commercialize. The hypothesis in this paper is that medium is an electronic billboard. This paper is based on the belief that this medium plays a part in the birth and growth of a new anti-geographical city. Thus, it poses the following questions: Do electronic billboards influence our public space? In what ways do electronic billboards commercialize public space? How does this medium become a part of pseudo public space, in other words, what potentials of this medium have a power to become a part of its landscape? Hence, this thesis intends to elucidate on the power of the medium and further, explore the influence of this medium on our commercially driven environment.

Chapter 2

Billboard Nature

As the oldest form of advertising, outdoor advertising has come a long way to become a part of our environment, changing its form and its surroundings. Throughout its history, the progression of outdoor advertising mediums has been deeply connected to the changes in society: rapid urbanization, industrialization and the changes of people's life styles brought by those developments. As a result, different forms of outdoor advertising exist in our public space at present, such as signs, posters, billboards and electronic billboards. Although forms of outdoor advertising have diversified, its location has never changed; it has always been located in public space. From outdoor advertising's inception, public space has been used as a catalyst to communicate people messages sent by outdoor advertising mediums.

Intrusiveness, therefore, is inherent to outdoor advertising media. Accordingly, electronic billboards also share an invasive quality as an outdoor advertising medium. The formula introduced in the previous chapter, $\text{Billboard} + \text{Television} < \text{Electronic Billboard}$ suggests that the billboard like nature of electronic billboard is a major component of the medium. Electronic billboards inherited their intrusive nature from billboards. The purpose of this chapter is to investigate billboards' intrusiveness nature by conducting a historical analysis of the relationship between billboards and public space.

When media that is intrusive by nature, such as posters and billboards, became common, their existence forced people to consider the significance of outdoor advertising, especially its obtrusiveness into public space.

As a private person, I have a passion for landscape, and I have never seen one improved by a billboard. Where every prospect pleases, man is at his vilest when he erects a billboard. When I retire from Madison Avenue, I am going to start a secret society of masked vigilantes who will travel around the world on silent motor bicycles, chopping down posters at the dark of the moon. How many juries will convict us when we are caught in these acts of beneficent citizenship? (Ogilvy Confessions of an Advertising Man 127)

As the quotation above notes, even the legendary ad man and founder of the advertising agency, Ogilvy and Mather, David Ogilvy, shows discomfort with billboards. Although as Wilson argues, attacks toward billboards as an environmental blight have never ceased from the medium's birth (394), this medium still exists as a legitimate advertising medium and used by advertisers as one of their outlets. Gossage states that we get so used to the existence of this medium, that most people do not question why the medium is in our public space.

It must be that billboards have somehow acquired an easement across our minds just as they have gained squatter's rights on our visual air space. They've been there – everywhere – for a long time and we have grown used to them. . . outdoor advertising has come to be regarded as an

institution like any other overtly respectable industry. This is where the confusion starts, for if one accepts this premise all sorts of preposterous assumptions seem worthy of consideration; indeed, it would be positively un-American to question them. (109)

What consequences caused us to not question the presence of outdoor advertising mediums, which are likely to destroy our landscapes?

The *raison d'être* of outdoor advertisements in public space has been discussed on behalf of the industry, rarely for the sake of citizens. Therefore, the core issue of outdoor advertising was shifted to “how to reconcile the interests of businessmen with the social welfare of the citizenry at large,” (Bogart M 80) and the reason for its existence in public space was hardly in the argument. Tracing the history of outdoor advertisements and regulations toward them reveals how outdoor advertising mediums have become a part of our environment coaxing the public around to the outdoor advertising industry’s point of view, and emphasizes its intrusive nature, which does not yield to anti-billboard campaigns.

The History Toward the Establishment of the Billboard

Public persuasion and visual communication, the core principles of advertising, developed from cave paintings like in Altamira, Spain and Lascaux, France, created between 15,000 and 10,000 B.C. Although we are uncertain of the exact purposes of the murals in this era, their creators must have intended to communicate using visual symbols. The oldest form of outdoor advertising was

known as early as the era of Egyptian civilization. Egyptian merchants chiseled sales messages on stone tablets and placed them along public roadways over four thousand years ago. After centuries passed, Greeks posted schedules of public games on tablets. Roman signs pertained to slave trade business as well as politics. In Pompeii, most of the walls were hung with a billboard message (Henderson and Randau 9). Outdoor mediums used in those periods already included many usages not only for service advertisements but also for public address. It is inferred that people relied on these mediums as a source of information in this period.

Outdoor advertising drastically evolved along with the leap of communication methods and the technical advancement of machines around the fifteenth century. When Gutenberg invented printing from movable type and the duplication of messages became a reality in 1450, the whole concept of mass communication changed. Before then, public posting was the only means, other than a public address, of spreading information to the broad public. After Gutenberg's invention, wide commercial application became economically practical, so people could distribute more information more quickly to more people. According to Henderson and Landau, by the late fifteenth century, billposting became common practice in Europe. Bills were actively posted on the walls of churches and public buildings and were used to air grievances publicly in the era of religious unrest (9). Gutenberg's invention also brought a new way of communication into life: the handbill. Advertising, in the modern sense, was launched in the form of the handbill. The handbill, because it could be spread

out in quantity, turned out to be a circulating medium as contrasted with the posted bill. The circulated bill was the ancestor of our newspapers and magazines, while the posted bill was the precursor to the modern medium of outdoor advertising (Tocker 24-25). It is no exaggeration to say that the history of outdoor advertising media is bound to the history of mass communication.

On-premise outdoor advertising media, which was inaugurated around 3000 B.C., flourished during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a form of the outdoor sign. On-premise outdoor advertising is referred to as the sign industry, and is defined as sign structure advertising a business, product, service or entertainment on the property where the sign is erected. For instance, signs at the place of sale are in this classification. Merchants' signs in England, Italy and France had a strong artistic influence and provide outstanding designs and colors. Surplus wealth brought by the prosperity of business encouraged the arts in this era. Signs became the means for artists to express their talents, not just as the means of commerce. The flourishing of outdoor signs also caused the beginning of sign regulation. As a social background, signs got extended over the street in order to attract customers. Consequently the signs became heavier and a real danger to pedestrians. In the early 1700s, Charles II promulgated the law that no sign should hang across the street. However, the problem continued, resulting in a 1797 ordinance to remove signs "which projected or could be in any way be considered a problem to the public." During the same period in France, the law "requiring signs to be fixed against shop walls and projection from buildings was limited to four inches" was set up due to the increasing size

of signs (Claus and Claus screen 1). The continued increase of size of the medium was the first known concern that led to regulations of outdoor advertising.

Off-premise outdoor advertising is the opposite of on-premise outdoor advertising and is represented by billboards or posters. Like on-premise advertising, the aesthetics of off-premise outdoor advertising was also improved due to the perfection of the lithographic process made by a German inventor, Alois Senefelder in the late eighteenth century (Henderson and Landau 9). Senefelder's technology provided the means to improve the art forms with the handbills and make the illustrated posters possible. This advancement facilitated the development of aesthetic qualities in advertising design and contributed to the flourish of the poster art afterwards. The method of billposting was rather primitive at this point of outdoor advertising history, compared to the aesthetic quality of the posters. Tocker describes the situation of billposting at that time,

A boy was given a fistful of bills to stick on the walls and fences of London and paid a few pennies. As the medium became more popular, and good locations scarce, the piecework billposter had no scruples about following his competitor around and slapping bills on top of those newly applied. (26)

The billposting technique was spread from England to the colonies. It occurred especially in metropolitan areas. The lack of law regarding the size and placement of billposters resulted in congested landscapes in conjunction with on-

premise signs. The problem of visual clutter and its impact on public space was becoming a subject of question.

As billposters' competition for the space intensified, a way to secure the space and duration of a message became necessary. Finally, permission was required to post and it had to be purchased from the owner of the wall or fence. Henderson and Landau argue that at this juncture, the outdoor advertising company selling his poster area to advertisers was born, although the time was varied from country to country (15-16). In order to offer more desirable locations where the traffic was heavy, they began to build their own structures. The special structure that was called "billboard" or merely a "board," and it was called "hoarding" in England. Outdoor advertising companies started leasing those billboards and patronizing a nationwide service from the late 1860s. At that time there were about 275 outdoor advertising companies in the United States employing from two to twenty men each (Tocker 29). In the beginning of the 1870s, the web perfecting press, paper-folding machines, stereotyping, and lithography were developed. Those advancements made the multiple sheet display of a poster possible, made up of sheets twenty-eight inches wide by forty-two inches high. Each poster was printed separately to make up a big image. The establishment of both a structure and a big poster made "billboard," which was going to be a dominant medium in the advertising industry.

The social context that escalated outdoor advertising was, according to Myers, partly due to the inception of branded commodities. If hundreds of people were making soaps locally, there was no use in squandering money to

say, “buy soap.” However, since they started making Ivory or Pears brand soap, they needed to keep reminding people of their brand name. As new brands were introduced almost every day, the only way to be more effective was to put up more and bigger posters (Myers 98). The fact that in 1871, 121 brand names and trademarks were registered with the U.S. patent office and just four years later, almost ten times the number of brand names were registered, substantiates Myer’s argument (EAA “Timeline”). The birth of the brand signified the importance of advertising to the modern practice of business, which continues to exist and develop to the present day.

Another huge influence on outdoor advertising was the growth of cities and mass transportation. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the development of the automobile was to extend the function of outdoor advertising far beyond its roots. Henderson and Landau describe the effect of the revolution in transportation:

An intense connection between the automobile, auto travel and the outdoor poster was the natural outcome of a society in which individuals were becoming increasingly mobile. The outdoor ad had been waiting all along for the one product to come along that would change the world’s habits, styles of living and advertising modes: the automobile. (18)

The invention in auto design and popularity of the automobile was accompanied by the steady development of a network of fine roads. America began to emerge as a nation on wheels, and the outdoors was one means of communicating with

this moving market. Consequently, posters that targeted and were tailored to pedestrians and bicyclists faded, and billboards replaced them.

A new outdoor advertising medium, the electric sign, which is a precursor to the electronic billboard, was born around the same period, with Thomas Edison's creation of an incandescent electric lamp. The first electric sign was erected in New York in 1892 (Holliday screen1). As the twentieth century approached, the widespread use of the electric light was greeted with enthusiasm in America. Cities acquired a dramatic and bright new beauty at night. The man who had a product to sell or a service to render was quick to recognize the many advantages of an illuminated sign. The electric sign industry was started (Tocker 18). Around this time, the notion that the electric sign was the sign of the future was dominant. It is a common perception for people that when they encounter a new medium applied with a new technological invention, they often view it as being futuristic. This insight worked well for outdoor advertisers who need to direct peoples' attention to their messages.

Associations of Outdoor Advertisers and Anti-billboard Campaigns

The industrialization and urbanization of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century brought the eruption of billboards and electric signs on the streets. The revolution in transportation accounted for the huge leap in this phenomenon. Advertisers changed the American roadside as they discovered new venue.

Initially most roadside businesspeople represented themselves to the traveling public with simple buildings and identifying signs that were large enough to be seen through the windshield of an automobile traveling 30 miles per hour. But competitors soon realized that visibility and the image their building facades presented to the road were just as important to their success as was the quality or price of the products or services they offered. One solution was to place buildings as close to the edge of the road as possible and to paint them in bright colors to attract attention. Signs became larger, at times covering a building's entire side walls, and they were vividly painted for daylight viewing and illuminated at night. (Raitz 380)

As a result of the flood of outdoor signs and architectural advertising, the criticism against outdoor advertising rose.

The urge for the outdoor advertising industry to form an association and the start of citizen's action against outdoor advertising began almost at the same time in the United States. The first association was formed in St. Louis in 1872, the International Bill Posters Association of North America (OAAA "About Outdoor"). About twenty years later, the first nationwide organization for outdoor advertisers, the Associated Billposters Association of United States and Canada was inaugurated in Chicago (EAA "Timeline"). This organization changed their name to Outdoor Advertising Association of America later and served as a strong political billboard lobby. The establishment of the billposter organization had three missions; the standardization of size, cost and placement

of a medium, to set limits on competition among billposters and to promote the outdoor advertising medium (Bogart M 81, OAAA "About Outdoor"). By regulating their medium, the advertisers tried to reconcile the abuse caused by the industry that had no rules as yet. In the 1870s, several states started imposing limits to protect the natural landscape from advertisers in response to the high volume of advertising such as posters, signs painted on rocks, building and barns in cities and rural areas (EAA "Timeline"). The anti-billboard organization in Britain, Society for Checking the Abuses of Public Advertising (SCAPA) formed in 1898 and had some local successes in controlling signs. In the 1890s, other regulations were set by the efforts of SCAPA; prohibiting uniforms for sandwich-men, regulating skyline and balloon advertisements and restricting flashing electric signs, which had been blamed for street accidents (Williams par. 17). The activities of SCAPA inspired the American anti-billboard campaign, and scattered anti-billboard articles were seen in the 1890s in the United States (Wilson 397). Afterwards, APOAA (the American Park and Outdoor Art Association) and ACA (the American Civic Association) started to work against the abuses of public advertising at the national-level. At the end of the nineteenth century, an indication of the real arguments between advertisers and the civic organizations was seen.

Around the twentieth century, the full-scale anti-billboard campaign emerged as one aspect of the City Beautiful Movement, "a turn-of-the-century reform effort mounted by professional architects and planners as well as citizen activists concerned with the degenerating conditions and appearances of the

country's urban areas" (Senie 15). The advocates and defenders of the City Beautiful Movement raised various reasons for billboard control. Although the billboard antagonists varied from the moderates to the extremists, their opinions were consistent in that the billboards needed to be controlled. According to their arguments against the medium, billboards were nuisances, criticized for their lurid content, their pervasiveness, their scenic desecration, their physical danger, their threats against home, their encouragement of littering, and their invitation to criminality (Wilson 402).

The first task for the anti-billboard campaign was to make the public turn to their view. According to Wilson, the campaigners worked to educate the public and alter public opinion against outdoor advertising through organizations and mass media. In the anti-billboard campaign, J. Horace McFarland, a president of the ACA played an important role and influenced other organizations throughout the country.

Organizations such as the St. Louis Civic League, the Massachusetts Civic League, and the Municipal Art Society of Hartford employed the panoply of City Beautiful argument to rouse the public to resentment and action.

National magazines, notably the *Ladies' Home Journal* through McFarland's "Beautiful America" column, attacked the boardings with photographs of tattered ads in front and litter behind. (Wilson 402)

Letter-writing campaigns and boycotting were another effective method of fighting advertisers. Adopting the method which McFarland suggested in his "Beautiful America" column in the Ladies' Home Journal, the North End

Improvement Society in Tacoma, Washington, sent letters to advertisers to request them to drop their billboard advertising. If the letters didn't work, the society voted not to buy the advertised products. As a result, some advertisers surrendered to their demand and removed the giant billboard hoardings, which had blocked a view of Mt. Rainier (Wilson 404-405).

Rebuttals from Outdoor Advertisers

Outdoor advertisers responded, stating that outdoor advertising was an inevitable part of modern business methods. The billboard industry exclaimed the economic advantages of their product. Billboards produced revenues for property owners who leased their space or buildings, lumber and hardware trades, and the printing and graphic design industries. The billposters and their allies defended their industries by touting the economic and non-economic benefits brought by billboards. As one of the proofs of the economic advantages, they asserted the medium's powerful ability to deliver messages to the illiterate and those who usually do not read. They referred to a control test in 1894, which compared the sale of two products, one was advertised only in the boards and the other was advertised exclusively in newspapers (Wilson 406-407). The result was that the product advertised in the boards sold better, giving an undeniable fact to the billposters.

Also the billposters never forgot to stress the medium's non-economic values. The so-called-public relations activities of billboards were found in the industry magazines in the early twentieth century. E.F. Trefz wrote an article in

1908 titled "Influence of Outdoor Advertising on the Sub-Conscious Mind" in Billposter and Distributor magazine. In the article, Trefz introduced an anecdote related to a billboard and a sick child.

One billposter told of visiting a tenement sweatshop where he met a pathetic, wasted six-year-old "whose pale and emaciated countenance foretokened the approach of death." The boy's mother, then the billposter, held the youngster up to a window so he could gaze upon a billboard depicting a marine in its foreground. . . A few hours later the boy died. At his funeral the grieving mother confided to the billposter that for eighteen months her son had gone to the window first thing in the morning and the last thing at night to look at the "brave soldier [in the billboard]." (Wilson 408)

The argument for advertisers was that the billboard was not a nuisance but an inspiration for a sick child. They did not forget to emphasize that the billboard helped healthy children "by heightening their appreciation of colors, shapes and language" (Wilson 408).

The outdoor advertisers coped with the anti-billboard protests through reforming the industry internally. First, the moral issues were resolved after the Associated billposters announced the refusal of advertisements for private diseases and anything obscene. Second, the outdoor advertisers started philanthropic activities in 1913 by providing free billboard space for public service, a practice that has continued to this day (OAAA "About Outdoor"). Third, the Associated billposters set up the industry ordinance so that they

would not violate the legislations and would forestall new strict legislation. The advertisers answered directly or indirectly the complaints from the City Beautiful Movement reformers, however they succeeded in avoiding responding to the major criticism from reformers, which was that the billboards were aesthetically nuisances. Instead, police power followed the City Beautiful Movement to regulate billboards' aesthetic requirements of advertisers.

Advertising Regulations Afterwards

As Lears remarks, the policy of the City Beautiful Movements made an important legal principal clear: the right of private property did not always override the interest of the public in preserving the aesthetic value of the landscape (Lears 294). For the most part, the court decisions supported the City Beautiful Movement's assertions (Wilson 412-419). Besides, several victories were brought in some cities concerning billboards' aesthetic impact on environments. In 1906, a judge declared billboards as a public nuisance and banned billboards in East San Jose in California under the Civic Code that "anything that was offensive to the senses could be declared a nuisance and prohibited, and that an offense to the sense of sight might be included with nuisances offensive to other senses" ("Offence to the Public Eye a Nuisance" 63). Following this case, the city of Los Angeles adopted the taxation on billboards by the square foot and limited the height and location and required consent of neighboring property owners when a billboard erects (McFarland 38-39, Allen 70-73). The biggest victory of the City Beautiful movement was the court

judgment of "Gunning versus St. Louis" in 1911. After six years of trials, the Gunning Company, an outdoor advertising company in St. Louis, lost the case completely to the St. Louis Civic League. The evidence that showed the ruined land behind the billboards made the court proclaim the billboards' inartistic nuisances. The court concluded "billboards were in a class by themselves, thus subject to separate regulations" (Wilson 418). This ruling was remarkable since it expanded the control of private property on behalf of the civic betterment.

The Establishment of Zoning

However, with the Gunning ruling the City Beautiful Movement had decelerated the anti-billboard movement force. While cities started to have a powerful weapon against billboards: zoning. Bosselman explains the birth of zoning as follows:

Zoning originated about 1910 as a result of what might be called a historical accident. There was a pressure from a number of sources to keep the living and shopping areas of the upper classes uncontaminated by uses of land that would attract the lower classes. Attempts to use the power of local government to do this were hampered by a rule which the courts had created, the rule of anti-discrimination. . . Then some lawyers came forth with the idea of dividing the town into districts and creating regulations that applied uniformly within each districts. Eventually, after a long battle, the courts agreed and the old anti-discrimination rule was forgotten by most people, and zoning became the way of life. (99)

The class system in the United States was a hidden cause in the birth of zoning, although the literature on advertising history does not explicate this background in outdoor advertising regulations.

Schultze concludes that the City Beautiful Movement won the battle against outdoor advertisers with zoning regulations. The reformers were mostly from the middle class or upper class. With zoning regulations, the land for middle class and upper class became free from billboards. Zoning discriminated against lower class people and immigrants who lack “the political knowledge and legal skills necessary to change the law” and gave middle class and upper class people a way to “protect their cultural expressions as well as their property values” (Schultze 42). As a result, billboards were removed from the nice areas and were left to grow elsewhere. Billboards prospered, especially in the 1950s, known as the “Golden Age of Paint.” The painted billboard, which was bigger, sleeker and glossier than the printed posters, began appearing with increasing frequency. Also advertisers made it possible to put billboards on rooftops and rotate their signs around this time (Henderson 48-56). The criticism that zoning did not create attractive areas may have come from the fact that zoning did not help to constrain billboards. Zoning regulations continue to exist today, dividing the space typically into three main categories: commercial, industrial and residential.

Highway Beautification Act: Broken law

Fifty years after the launch of zoning, the outdoor advertising industry confronted the new regulation that was seemingly going to weaken the force of

the outdoor advertising industry. Then President, Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Highway Beautification Act of 1965 (HBA) with the intention of controlling outdoor advertising along Federal-Aid Primary, Interstate and National Highway System roads. He stated,

More than any country ours is an automobile society. For most Americans the automobile is a principal instrument of transportation, work, daily activity, recreation and pleasure. By making our roads highways to enjoyment of nature and beauty we can gently enrich the life of nearly all of our people in city and countryside alike. The roads themselves must reflect, in location and design, increased respect for the natural and social integrity and unity of the landscape and the communities through which they pass. (qtd. in Johnson: 113)

The highway beautification act was designed to forbid construction of new billboards on scenic and rural federal-aid highways and remove illegal billboards. If the act had been enforced in a way loyal to its goal, this would have been a successful environmental law in the United States.

The regulation initially appeared harsh to the advertising industry, but has ended up protecting the industry after about forty years of its enactment. The act has loopholes, which enabled the industry to get around the law in several ways. Floyd explains this is due to “phony zoning” in rural areas. The highway beautification act counted out all land zoned for commercial or industrial uses and all unzoned land where there was an existing commercial or industrial activity. Many towns, particularly in rural parts, have “phony zones”

that are long stretched rural roads categorized into commercial or industrial zones (Floyd 49). Besides, an unzoned space can be considered as a commercial or industrial zone with the existence of just one business, whether it is functioning or not. As a result, the act permitted the erection of thousands of new billboards in totally rural districts where scenic beauty was supposed to have been preserved by it. To make matters worse, the law has failed to control the size or height of new billboards. New billboards are typically twice as big as they were in 1965 and their numbers have increased fifty percent. ("The Highway Beautification Act" par. 2).

The outdoor advertising industry took advantage of the act and went onto public fearlessly. What's more, taxpayers have had to pay compensation to advertisers to remove billboards after 1978. The highway beautification act added an amendment to obstruct the community efforts for the removal of billboards and protect the outdoor advertising industry. Moreover, the outdoor advertising industry has succeeded in lobbying more than twenty-six states to allow them to cut down trees that hinder the view of billboards. This tree cutting activity called "vegetation control" by the outdoor advertising industry had been illegal, and a serious problem in the many states. At the request of the outdoor advertising industry, the Federal Highway Administration worked out the problem by legalizing this activity (Floyd 51). In 1985, General Accounting Office stated,

Without additional funding or a change in the compensation requirement of the Highway Beautification Act, the 1965 act's goal – to control outdoor

advertising along federally funded interstate and primary highways – will not be accomplished. (qtd. in Green Scissors “Bill the Billboards Highway Beautification Program”)

Unless the Highway Beautification act is reformed, the outdoor advertising industry will not abandon their pampered status. This act allows billboards to be erected virtually anywhere and makes it virtually impossible to remove nonconforming billboards.

The outdoor advertising industry is using a series of tactics to keep the Highway Beautification act. First, they have formed a billboard lobby that influences the lawmakers to defeat the regulation attempts. According to Scenic America, an organization working for scenic beauty, the billboard industry contributes a considerable amount of money to political campaigns. The billboard lobby goes so far as to donate money to politicians in the House Transportation Committee in the election cycle. By being free-spending, the billboard lobby has been powerful enough to push the enactment of detrimental legislation over public interest protests (Scenic America “Billboard Control: Fighting Visual Pollution” par. 22). Outdoor companies get strongly involved in political campaigns by not only hiring lobbyists, but also making contributions as a donor. For example, the campaign finance report maintained by the Secretary of State shows that in California, California State Outdoor Advertising Association donated \$600,000 for 2003 and 2004 session. Also Clear Channel Outdoor, Inc. made contributions as much as \$191,092 for one quarter, October to December 2003. (Shelly [Cal-Access](#)).

Secondly, the industry has donated free billboard space for public service announcements. This industry tradition began during World War I. The industry offered patriotic messages on their billboards. Among them, the well-known World War I recruitment poster was James Montgomery Flagg's image of a pointing Uncle Sam, "I Want You for the U.S. Army." Some advertisers did not miss this chance to associate their products with the war cause and succeeded in making their consumption seem patriotic. The industry gave more than 1.5 million dollars to the war cause during WWI (Senie 17) and continued to do so during the World War II. The industry is using this strategy currently for War on Iraq. The industry benefits from this campaign in which users of free billboard space will not support the reforms of billboard regulations. Also they can use this activity to justify their existence when encountering the public interest groups who prefer billboard reform. The outdoor advertising industry has maintained costly legal, public relations, and legislative advisory staffs. They have built up nearly impregnable defenses to criticisms.

As billboards are around in our public space, people become to be responsive to the medium. People often react to visual and text messages of billboards when billboards attract their attention. Witty copywriting, stunningly beautiful images or gigantic posters tend to be talked about among those who have seen them. People have their attention caught by what and how a billboard is saying, and hardly considers why billboards are in their public space. Billboards established the position that is able to put their messages under people's nose without being accountable for its existence in public space. Therefore, people are unconsciously responsive to the medium.

Conclusion

Throughout its long history, outdoor advertising has grown and formed itself out of the social necessity. The advancement of technologies broadened the capacity and aesthetics of outdoor advertisements. The birth of the automobile urged the shift of the dominant outdoor advertising medium, from poster to billboard. The inception of brands created competition among the same types of products and the need for advertisements more than ever before. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the outdoor advertising media had established itself as an advertising medium in public space.

The industry was never giving in to the criticisms that first arose from the City Beautiful Movement. Although the movement's argument was focused on the aesthetic problem of the outdoor advertising, the anti-billboard campaign had never reached the degree to regulate the aesthetics of the medium. The campaign tried to educate the public in terms of enlightening the need for visual and environmental regulations, and became a pathfinder for the later reformers. The dispute on outdoor advertisements' aesthetic values has never ceased to present day. However, zoning, an unfortunate result of the City Beautiful Movement, excluded outdoor advertisements from residentially zoned areas and left them to flourish elsewhere. The separation of space created the attitude of "out of sight, out of mind" in people.

The industry formed a monolithic organization and has been influenced lawmaking decisions to protect the industry. The Highway Beautification Act, the governmental attempt to protect scenic rural areas from outdoor

advertisements, did not fulfill their mission due to loopholes in the act. Again, zoning regulation was the major reason that the Outdoor Advertising Association of America could get away from the Highway Beautification Act. Residential zoned areas gradually shaped the suburbs. Outdoor advertisements occupy the rest of the places.

The outdoor advertising industry forced us to not think about the reason for the existence of outdoor advertisements in public space by keeping residential areas free of outdoor advertisements. People give up a part of their public space to outdoor advertisements because they cannot argue with the outdoor advertising industry, which insists that outdoor advertising is an inevitable part of modern business methods. Outdoor advertising clutters public space where people feel they do not have a choice in the appearance of the space. Suburbs, which do not want to have unsightly public space, started to build their own protected and controlled "pseudo" public space and isolated itself from the outside world. Outdoor advertisements are left for "poor man's art," and still exist without its right to existence being questioned.

Chapter 3

Television Nature

These things may be old hat in Las Vegas and New York City's Time Square but here they still get people's attention. "Right now, they're new and different," said Chris Black, senior vice president and media director for Marc USA/Pittsburgh at Station Square. . . . Bill Kolano, at Kolano Design on Penn Circle South, sees the electronic revolution as both inevitable and, in the right places, exciting. He helped write regulations to encourage more of the things at Station Square, and he could support more in the theater district, as well. "It all comes down to the city wanting to create an entertainment district." (Lindeman par. 5)

State Assemblyman Scott Stringer (D) of Manhattan's Upper West Side questions the city's claim about establishing an aesthetic standard for its neighborhood. Already, constituents have inundated his office with phone calls and e-mails complaining about the high-resolution screens mounted above five subway entrances. . . . Some have noted that subway stations have print ads, but Stringer, who would like to kill the project, said the screens represent **a new phenomenon**. "Advertising pollution has been taken to a new level," he said, by importing some of Times Square into residential neighborhoods. (Garcia A03) [Emphasis by the author]

The novelty of electronic billboards lies in the "electronic" part. In other words, its television-like appearance and function attract people's attention. As the formula "Billboard + Television <Electronic Billboard" shows, electronic billboards have a unique characteristic due to its television feature. A programmable nature, bright screen and delivery of moving images are distinctive characteristics of the medium and those characteristics differentiate it from a billboard.

Electronic media influence people in a special way. For instance, the traditional outdoor advertising medium's existence of being out there seven days a week, three hundred sixty-five days a year, alters a place by occupying the

place physically. As people in Pittsburgh experiencing an electronic billboard located in their city felt the medium's striking newness, which stands out from the landscape, people who live in the Upper West side of Manhattan felt the medium's intrusiveness more than any other advertising media. Electronic billboards can influence public space to an extreme degree. The distinctive features of the omnipresent, television-like electronic billboard changes its surrounding environment differently and as a consequence affect people differently.

Media theorist, Joshua Meyrowitz claims "electronic media affect us, then, not primarily through their content, but by changing the "situational geography" of social life." He argues that electronic media blur "the clear spatial segregation of situations" like private space and public space and undermine "the traditional relationship between physical setting and social situation" (6-7). Since the advent of electronic media, like radio, television and Internet, those mediums have been able to interpose people's private places. Thus, media have blurred our definitions of public space and private space. Furthermore media, especially television, has taken over our culture by being in the mainstream. Then what would happen to public places when an electronic billboard appears there? How does a television set's influence on domestic settings work when a medium goes outside of the house? McCarthy interprets this phenomenon as follows:

On the one hand, it would seem, television "privatizes" public space, but on the other, TV's role in public space is the *invasion* of privacy. If TV can be the agent of both privatization and its destruction, a wrecker of both

public life and privacy, of both community and individuality, then clearly it is a highly elastic phenomenon! (253)

This chapter hereby proposes the hypothesis that the power of electronic mass media in public space, represented by the electronic billboard' phenomenon, is to create a new space around the medium. In order to shed light on this elastic phenomenon, this chapter first examines the influence of the television set on domestic space. It later estimates the impact of electronic billboards in public space from the examinations of domestic influence of television. The forthcoming chapter will examine the phenomenon by investigating the locations of electronic billboards.

Television Is a Place?

Before discussing the influence of television, the concept of a place needs to be clarified. When it comes to arguing the influence of television on a place, a place has more meaning than merely a physical space. We use the word "place" in different situations with different meanings. Adams claims that a place has three conceptions, which are "center of meaning," "social context" (or simply "context") and "physical space. "

A river system is a place, as is a market system, and a university. The first example illustrates a conception based on physical processes, the second on societal integration, and the third on the construction of meaning.

Vernacular speech and unscientific thought take this triadic division to an extreme. People will say: "I was at a very bad place in my life" (i.e., a

crisis of meaning), “school was the right place for me in my early twenties” (i.e., social context), and “my glasses weren’t in any of the places I looked” (i.e., locations in the physical world). (Adams 117)

Television can satisfy two of three conceptions of a place that are “a center of meaning” and “social context.” For example, television creates consumption trends, dispatches news, and popularizes slogans and values. This function of television is becoming “a center of meaning.” Also television involves elections, cultural celebrations and sports competitions. Television provides crowds those televised events as opportunities to join. To put it another way, television is a social context when those events occur. Both functions of television are often interrelated. A televised event sometimes creates commercial slogans (i.e. the word “stoked” which was used by the Salt Lake City Olympic Snowboarding gold medalist during a televised interview, became popular in society) or sensational news on TV becomes a media event (i.e. The news of Michael Jackson’s arrest for child molestation became a recent media event). The two conceptions of place equal what Meyrowitz calls the “situational geography.”

In the academic world of geography, a place is no longer ultimately defined by location (Adams 120). In J. Nicholas Entrikin ‘s phrase, “place presents itself to us as a condition of human experience” (1). A place where a television set is situated will provide the experiences with the meanings and social context that a television set delivers. A television set is included in an environment, not as another piece of furniture but as a signifier. Before the technological advancements in communication and transportation, each place

was granted to be unique if its meaning and cultural significance were specific, in other words, if we assign specific value to a place in relation to our projects (Entrikin 16). However the notion that each place is unique is not necessarily supported if Meyrowitz's "situational geography" of a place is influenced by a medium. A specific value to a place is no longer what we assign, much as what comes from a television set. The medium has changed its surrounding environment since its installation.

The idea that television is a part of a place, and further, that mass media is a part of the environment, has been argued in the realm of media ecology. Media ecology emerged in 1960s with its representatives like Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, Walter Ong, and Neil Postman. Neil Postman explains media ecology as follows:

Its intention is to study the interaction between people and their communications technology. More particularly, media ecology looks into the matter of how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival. The word ecology implies the study of environments: their structure, content, and impact on people. An environment is, after all, a complex message system which imposes on human beings certain ways of thinking, feeling and behaving. . . . In the case of media environments . . . the specifications are more often implicit and informal, half concealed by our assumption that what we are dealing with is not an environment but merely a machine. Media ecology tries to

make these specifications explicit. (Postman "The Reformed English Curriculum" 161)

Postman defines a medium as "the social and intellectual environment a machine creates" (Amusing Ourselves to Death 84). A medium denotes a whole circuit where a machine creates. Consequently, studying the whole circuit around a machine becomes critical to understand a medium. Probably the most famous theorist in media ecology, Marshall McLuhan also emphasizes a medium's influence on environments and insists that effective study of the media deals not only with the content of the media but with the media themselves and the total cultural environment within which the media function (McLuhan "Playboy Interview" 236).

Media ecologists' thinking, as the name of the discipline shows, involves ecological perspective, that is a new medium affects society as one plant affects a whole eco system. Both media ecology and ecology as a social science put an emphasis on "how changes in a single variable alter the configuration of the whole" (Heise 156). McLuhan advocates the initial idea of the argument metaphorically:

All media work us over completely. They are so persuasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the message. Any understanding of social and cultural changes is impossible without a knowledge of the way media

work as environments. (McLuhan and Fiore The Medium is the Message 26)

By installing a medium in a place means that it takes over the place by changing the flow of an environment. To comprehend the changes in an environment after the installation of a medium, we first know how a medium influences an environment. With McLuhan's influence, the idea is well summarized in the work of Neil Postman.

Technological change is neither additive nor subtractive. It is ecological. I mean "ecological" in the same sense as the word is used by environmental scientists. One significant change generates total change. If you remove the caterpillars from a given habitat, you are not left with the same environment minus caterpillars: you have a new environment, and you have reconstituted the conditions of survival; the same is true if you add caterpillars to an environment that has had none. This is how the ecology of media works as well. A new technology does not add or subtract something. It changes everything. In the year 1500, fifty years after the printing press was invented, we did not have old Europe plus the printing press. We had a different Europe. After television, the United States was not America plus television; television gave a new coloration to every potential campaign, to every home, to every school, to every church, to every industry. (Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology 18)

The same argument appears quite often in other media ecologists' work (i.e. Kuhns 4-5, Meyrowitz 19, Fekete 140 and Mumford 296). A medium is a new

element to a whole environment that reconfigures a whole. The theory above can function not only at a global, but also at a regional and local level. As a new medium, electronic billboards must reconfigure our environment by appearing in our public space.

The metaphor of “environment” or “place” suggests a medium’s influence on spatial perception or the experience of human beings. It is true that people describe the usage of relatively new media like a television and a computer in spatial terms. Heise claims that both the television and computer “are routinely experienced as windows or portals that open up onto realms difficult to conceptualize in other than special terms” and foregrounds that “the World Wide Web, with its ‘virtual space’ and ‘websites’ that one can ‘go to,’ persistently encourages the user to think in terms of spatial categories, as do the visual scenarios that make up most video and computer games” (165-166). Many critics describe the experience of television viewing in spatial terms. Eric Barnouw called television as “a bright world in the middle of the home” (63). Lynn Spigel claims television “bring[s] another world into the home” (Make Room for TV 102). From these expressions, it can be speculated that human beings consider a medium as not an object, but an environment. Marshall McLuhan converged a television and other electronic media use to the shifting meaning of space, place, and time:

Electric circuitry has overthrown the regime of “time” and “space” and pours upon us instantly and continuously the concerns of all other men. It has reconstituted dialogue on a global scale. Its message is Total Change,

ending psychic, social, economic, and political parochialism. The old civic, state, and national groupings have become unworkable. Nothing can be further from the spirit of the new technology than “a place for everything and everything in its place.” You can’t go home again.

(McLuhan and Fiore The Medium is the Message 16)

Our lives divide broadly into two places: where we live, and our television set. Most of our cultural experiences come from television and other electronic media, and cultural unification is occurring globally.

If media creates its own environment or space, the examination of how the environment relates to its surrounding environments is crucial. Therefore, in order to understand television’s role in public space, which is equivalent to an electronic billboards’ function, we need to be aware of the functional relationship between television and environments. Then it is practical to refer the existing examinations of television’s influence on human perceptions and television itself as clues to elucidate the electronic billboard’s phenomenon.

From its entry into American home after World War II, television has been the most influential medium in American society and culture. The major reason that television could be the most influential medium is its unique capability; it can deliver moving images and can reach mass quantities of people. This capability of television worked well for advertisers in conjunction with the advertising system in television of the United States. Television programs that we watch at home are commercialized and programmed on behalf of their sponsors (with the possible exception of PBS or community channels). Ien Ang

calls the United States' broadcasting system "audience-as-market," compared to "audience-as-public" system in other countries such as the Western European countries (26). Under this "audience-as-market" system, the pure matter is the building programming assured for profit and the use of television channels for preliminary advertising. Consequently, the driving force of the system is an economic issue: how to maximize their profit from their television programming. Thus, commercial television networks and stations transmit programs in order to carry commercials, which are usually inserted between programs or sections of programs and even in programs themselves. The advertisers whose products are offered for sale in the commercials pay large amounts of money to the broadcasters in exchange for the airtime they acquire to disseminate the messages. The system operates according to the laws of the capitalist market economy, so that advertising time in the most popular programs is generally the most expensive (Ang 26-27). We tend to think of television programs as products, ourselves as "consumers," and advertising as the price to be paid in order to watch the programs. However, the truth is that the products are actually the viewers who are sold to advertisers (Meyrowitz 73). It is natural that the audience maximization became the most crucial principle under this "audience-as-market" broadcasting. As CBS executive Arnold Becker expressed his honest feelings about his stations' programming, he is not interested in "culture" nor "pro-social values" of their programs, his only concern is "whether people watch the program or not" (qtd. in Ang 27). For him, audience is not public, so he does not have to think about the quality of programming. What he

has to think about is how to generate their profit from audience.

With the advertising system in the United States, advertisers are able to make hit products almost overnight by the exploiting the dynamic power of television's capabilities: mass audience reach, dynamics of moving images and the repetitive force of immense audience loyalty to the programming. Artzt L. Edwin, until recently Chairman and CEO of Procter & Gamble, once told an audience of advertising insiders that the advertising industry took control of the environment after the advent of electronic mass media.

Advertising started in print. When radio came along and we all had to buy time as well as space – and sell with words and music and no pictures – we the advertising industry, took control of our environment. We created programming. We molded the environment to fit our needs. We were no longer dealing just with newspapers and magazines that people bought and read every day. We had to create listener loyalty to programming we sponsored. . . . Then along came television and everything changed again – back to pictures, the era of visual demonstration, a boom time for the advertising industry. With television, we could do more than describe the benefits of our products. We could show those benefits. . . . And again, the advertising industry grabbed the technology in its teeth and turned it into a bonanza for advertisers. (qtd. in Budd et al 9)

The difference between photographs and moving images are, as Edwin told the audience, the latter's dynamic visual presentation. People see the reality in a photograph, which drawings and writings could not fully reproduce. Moving

images are a series of photographs edited together to create the impression of movement and are thus more dynamic than photographs. Mitchell Stephens discusses the increasing use of moving images in The Rise of the Image the Fall of the Word. According to him, we read successions of moving images as we read words and comprehend the meanings.

Indeed, the increasing reliance upon images, which began with photography and accelerated with film, certainly seems to have contributed to a decreasing concern with our inner lives and an increasing concern with *image* – with style, possessions and public relations, with surfaces and appearances, with what Coke commercials are selling. (107)

Due to the installation of television in public life, moving images saturated people's domestic environment. Television succeeded in bringing corporate messages into viewers' households much more animatedly than radio did. A television set changed the domestic boundary of private and public spaces drastically with attention-getting images.

For that reason, an existence of a television set has a distinctive meaning compared to other fixtures in a household. Even though a television set is individually purchased and installed in each household, the function of the medium is the same in any household. The contents of television are mostly identical although the channels you get vary depending on where you live or how much you pay. Meyrowitz claims that television has served as America's "shared arena" for the last fifty years.

In its electronic space, we have lauded our heroes and reviled our enemies.

We have turned to it for solace at times of tragedy. And we have celebrated national victories, anniversaries and the starts of new years in its glow.

People and issues that do not appear on television seem almost not to exist in our culture. A political candidate who does not appear frequently on TV has virtually no chance of being elected to national office. Those issues and people who fill the TV arena, on the other hand, usually are treated prominently in most other media. They typically loom large in our daily thoughts and conversations, and even in our dreams. (Meyrowitz "Where Is All The Shuttle Grief?" A.30)

Watching television in one's living room is a private activity, however, at the same time, television programs brings the outside world to the living room.

Lynn Spigel states that the ideology of privacy is not experienced simply as a retreat from the public sphere, rather as a sense of belonging to the community.

In her phrase, privacy was something which would be enjoyed only in the company of others ("Installing the Television Set" 6). From her content analysis of the sit-coms in the 1950s, she found the discourses of television different from theater or cinema. It was a fact that the sitcoms were produced with theatrical techniques and in a way that "the spectator of domestic comedy was not simply placed in the scene of a story – but also at many points in the text the spectator was placed on the scene of action, addressed as part of an audience watching a play," such as characters telling a dialogue or advertisements to camera out of the stage, which equals to the spectators, and editing without the point-of view shots and the existence of studio audiences. However, television was meant to

provide the home audience “not just a view, but rather, a *perfect view*” (Spigel “Installing the Television Set” 23-24). She concludes as follows:

The perfect view in the cinema was intended to evoke a state of forgetfulness – to make the spectator feel immersed in the fantasmatic illusion of presence rendered by the scene itself. But in the discourses on television, the perfect view was meant to produce a different kind of spectatorial fantasy. Implicit in these discourses was the notion that the television text should address its spectator as an audience member – as someone present on the scene of action. . . the spectator of domestic comedy was not simply placed in the scene of a story – but also at many points in the text the spectator was placed in the scene of a story. . . This illusion of presence was part and parcel of the surrounding discourses on television, discourses which promised that TV would give its audience a sense of connection to the outside world. In this way, the private activity of watching television was made pleasurable precisely because one could remain alone in the living room, but at the same time sustain an illusion of being in the company of others. (24)

The way of producing a program by incorporating the audience is a main discourse of television. So-called “reality TV” programs are trying to maximize audience participation and create the atmosphere of being there. For instance, scenes where the contestants talk to camera about their honest feelings make the audience feel intimacy to them. Also the use of surveillance cameras set up in the contestants’ bedrooms give the audience a sneak peak of what is “really”

going on. The winner of the popular show American Idol is determined by the audiences' telephone votes. The medium of television itself is a stage for the contestants where America chooses its idol. As Spigel claims, Television is a contradictory object where people can satisfy their desire for "community involvement" maintaining their "domestic seclusion" ("Installing the Television Set" 35). People find the virtual public sphere in their private space by feeling as if they are a part of television programs.

Television Creates Media Events

The viewers most feel the "shared arena" of television when it comes to media events such as the Super Bowl, the Olympics, a Presidential election, etc. These occasions attract larger audiences than every-day programming. Dayan and Katz call media events the "high holidays of mass communication" and explain as below:

The most obvious difference between media events and other formulas or genres of broadcasting is that they are, by definition, not routine. In fact, they are *interruptions* of routine; they intervene in the normal flow of broadcasting and our lives. Like the holidays that halt everyday routines, television events propose exceptional things to think about, to witness, and to do. Regular broadcasting is suspended and preempted as we are guided by a series of special announcements and preludes that transform daily life into something special and, upon conclusion of the event, are guided back again. In the most characteristic events, the interruption is *monopolistic*, in

that all channels switch away from their regularly scheduled programming in order to turn to the great event, perhaps leaving a handful of independent stations outside the consensus. Broadcasting can hardly make a more dramatic announcement of the importance of what is about to happen. (5)

The monopolistic characteristic of media events denotes the control of the television programming, which further means the control of the public sphere. Moreover, media events are often live broadcasts, such as sport games and concerts. In a live program, something may go wrong. It gives the audience a sense of unpredictability and therefore, intensity. A media event is intriguing and usually stands out from other programs as Dayan and Katz say because it is a celebrated holiday of mass media.

The household ratings also support the fact that media events perform well. According to the Television Bureau of Advertising, Super Bowl XXXVII, the reigning media event champion, earned the top household rating of 40.7% in 2003. The second highest rating program is Super Bowl Post game and scored 23.44%. Academy Awards ranked third with a 20.4% rating.

Table 1

Top 100 Program Rankings Household Rating Full Year 1/1/03-12/31/03

Rank	Program	Network	HH rating
1	SUPER BOWL XXXVII	ABC	40.17%
2	SUPER BOWL POST GAME	ABC	23.44%
3	ACADEMY AWARDS	ABC	20.40%
4	FIESTA BOWL	ABC	17.23%
5	AMERICAN IDOL – WED SPECIAL	FOX	17.22%
6	FOX MLB ALCS GAME 7	FOX	17.15%
7	FOX MLB NLCS GAME 7	FOX	16.94%
8	20/20 SPECIAL – 2/6	ABC	16.82%
9	JOE MILLIONAIRE SPECIAL	FOX	16.60%
10	AFC/NFC PLAY OFF GAME 2	ABC	16.03%
11	FOX NFC PLAY OFF SAT	FOX	14.82%
12	GRAMMY AWARDS	CBS	14.67%
13	MY BIG FAT GREEK LIFE SPECIAL	CBS	14.28%
14	FRIENDS 2/6	NBC	13.63%
15	AFC/NFC SHOWCASE 2	ABC	13.57%

Source: Nielsen Media Research, Galaxy Explorer. "Viewer Track: Top 100

Programs in 2003." Television Bureau of Advertising.<<http://www.tvb.org/rcentral/index.html>>

*Shows identified by date or as specials were one-time programs, programs that aired outside the regular time slot, or episodes that extended beyond regularly scheduled time periods.

As the footnote says, the sit-coms (MY BIG FAT GREEK LIFE, FRIENDS) or reality TV programs (AMERICAN IDOL, JOE MILLIONAIRE) and 20/20 episodes that ranked in the chart can be included under the genre of media events since they were specially programmed. On that account, all programs in the charts are media events, although there are gaps in the ratings.

The reason that media events reach the larger audience is in part due to the mass media's self promotional nature. More than the average program, media events evoke a higher profile of media coverage and, subsequently, can become part of mainstream culture. For instance, the Super Bowl is famous for being a showcase for creative advertising. By promoting not only the game but also television commercials beforehand, broadcasters succeed in keeping most of the audience during the commercial time. Tim Spengler, executive vice president, director of national broadcast, remarks on the result of Super Bowl 2003:

The value of the Super Bowl extends far beyond the :30 second spot – it's not only the highest rated event in television but it is also the most covered and talked about event in all of media. The Super Bowl is an incredibly powerful platform that many marketers have taken advantage of throughout advertising history. The combination of high ratings and incredibly engaged viewers help to ensure that advertisers are the real winners of the Super Bowl. (Initiative 1)

The phenomenon that the audiences of televised media events are highly engaged substantiates the theory that television is carefully created to be a "public space" by the dominant power of mass media. Mass media in the world

is owned mostly by eight global corporations, which are AOL Time Warner, Viacom, Disney ABC, News Corporation, ATT, Vivendi-Universal, Comcast and General Electric NBC. The last few years have seen intense consolidation of media companies resulting in many fewer decisions determining what messages are disseminated through the media. Media events are advertised through the network of those media corporations, which own most of the mass media outlets.

Viewers have a plethora of entertainment options other than television these days. In addition, new technologies such as digital recording equipment allow viewers to have more control over their program choices. As these options increase and continue to break the audience into more discrete groups, viewers are more likely to be lured to media events. That is because media events provide the chance to share a television experience simultaneously – enabling them to belong to a television “public space.”

The sense of belonging to a television community infers that our connection to a physical place is being weakened due to the penetration of electronic media into our domestic environments. Meyrowitz names this phenomenon metaphorically “no sense of place.”

Electronic media have combined previously distinct social settings, moved the dividing line between private and public behavior toward the private and weakened the relationship between social and physical places. The logic underlying situational patterns of behavior in a print-oriented society, therefore, has been radically subverted. Many Americans may no longer seem to “know their place” because the traditionally interlocking

components of “place” have been split apart by electronic media. (308)

Viewing television is a main activity in our society. Our cultural experience often comes from television since it is a most accessible medium. At the same time, creators of television programs and advertisers try to include us into the television world. Our public space exists in our living room. Television is a place we go to.

Television Outside of a Living Room

The examinations conducted above draw the conclusion that television is a place, further, a public place with no sense of place. The basis of this rhetoric is that television is a space-binding medium blurring the boundaries of public and private lines. Spigel comments on television’s space-binding nature as “Television was caught in a contradictory movement between public and private worlds, and it often became a rhetorical figure for that contradiction”(Make Room for TV 109). Then what influence would be assumed that television brings to environments when it is set outdoors?

It is beyond doubt that television has become a fixture in public space. The ubiquity of television screen in our everyday locations outside the home has become part of our environments. Glancing at a flashy jumbo screen standing next to a highway while driving, witnessing a car equipped with a DVD player with a small screen when stopping at lights, watching the musicians in the jumbo monitors in a big arena when attending a concert; these experiences may give you an illusion that television screen goes almost anywhere you go.

However the shared account for the relationship of the television screens to their locations is not simply comprehended. McCarthy states that the discourse of television would be changed depending on its location and it is impossible to single out one mode of spectatorship to define the relationship between screen and environment, regardless of the latter's particular features (3). It is affected by where it is located, what size of a medium is, what kind of contents it plays and what situation it is meant to be placed in. As the first quotations of this chapter show, two sites, the two media in Pittsburgh, PA and West Upper side of Manhattan, NY reported about the installation of an electronic billboard quite differently. The responses from people to an electronic billboard show the site-specific nature of a medium.

First of all, the locales are not equal. Each place has different roles and consequently different characteristics. In the second article, the phrase "by importing some of Times Square into residential neighborhoods" (Garcia A03) implies that electronic billboards are considered to be a part of the landscape of Times Square, but never to be one of the residential neighborhoods of Manhattan. This remark also indicates the residents are very familiar with electronic billboards and they recognize that an installation of electronic billboard means to bring a site what a place like Times Square embodies. Later, one of the electronic billboards the residents were against was taken down by the owner of the medium, Clear Channel Communications, due to their campaign effort (Luo 3). Likewise, a few paragraphs in the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette article are about the concern that electronic billboards will not fit in residential settings

if they are installed. However, electronic billboards would be welcomed in a more commercial district in Pittsburgh, PA (Lindeman B-14). “A new phenomenon,” the utterance used to express the electronic billboard atmosphere by a New York State Assembly man refers to the invasion of the electronic billboards to a residential area. The fear of the electronic billboards taking over un-commercialized areas is common in the two sites.

In these two cases, the sizes of the mediums differ. In the site of the Upper West Manhattan, the electronic billboard is a 30 by 60 inch, essentially a big screen television and is located at eye level. On the other hand, the ten electronic billboards installed in the Pittsburgh area are 10 by 22 feet ones and are placed alongside of highways (Yeomans par. 11). As Figures 7 and 8 in the next page show, the differences in sizes and locations of the two mediums are clear. Consequently, the situation in which people in these two places encounter the electronic billboards is presumed to be different. The site in the Upper West Manhattan is a residential area. On the other hand, the site in Pittsburgh is the roadside of the highway going toward downtown.

Fig. 7. MTA Installing Bright Electronic Billboards in Subways, WABC-TV New York.

<http://abclocal.go.com/wabc/news/wabc_101303_billboards_slides/wabc_101303_billboards1.html>

Fig. 8. An LED Billboard Along Banksville Road, Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.

<http://www.pittsburghlive.com/x/tribune-review/business/p_52986.html>

Electronic billboards that appear in public space are very likely to demonstrate television's power which removes a geographical origin of a place. As the two examples of Pittsburgh and Manhattan illustrate, electronic billboards would bring the locations more entertaining atmosphere. Television can "link the site of reception to other ideological and geographical places" (McCarthy 9). In the case of electronic billboards in public space, the ideological and geographical agendas of a medium would vary depending on contents of a medium, surrounding environments of a medium, and if any, a political situation of a medium. In the next chapter, the phenomenon of electronic billboards will be examined site-specifically.

CHAPTER 4

Electronic Billboards Phenomenon in Tokyo and New York

Outdoor surrounds consumers with ubiquitous presence offering media choices that suit every target audience, geography and strategic plan.

Outdoor is a comprehensive mix of effective media delivery mechanisms that reach people in their cars or on subways, in airports and malls or in any number of growing outdoor media settings. Outdoor is roadside, outside and inside, above and below ground and on the move. (About Outdoor screen 1)

As the Outdoor Advertising Association of America describes the essence of the medium above, outdoor advertising aims to capture the attention of audience or passer-bys in every possible way. Two observational research sessions were conducted in two different countries: Tokyo, Japan and Times Square, New York. The objective of the research was to determine whether television's environmental nature alters its surrounding into a more materialistic setting. This nature of television is elaborated upon in chapter 3. In order to figure out what a television screen is doing in the immediate space around it, it was assumed that the best way was to record the phenomenon and analyze the data. The other reason is that there is not enough academic research to analyze specifically the electronic billboard phenomenon. The medium's novelty in the market accounts for the limited academic coverage of electronic billboards. Anna McCarthy's work, Ambient Television is mainly interested in a small scale of television's influence in ambient space. Her focus is on "the more *unremarkable*

and *everyday* forms of the apparatus" (McCarthy 9). The singular phenomena in sites like Times Square or Tokyo, Japan are not in her scope of examinations. Unlike her, this thesis examines the influences of electronic billboards as an advertising medium. Investigating electronic billboards' influence on public space is important and meaningful for any sized television's influence on public space. The research emphasizes on how advertisers modify public spaces for their purposes. Therefore, the modernized cities that are in the center of materialism like New York and Tokyo are suitable for the research.

Both sites are known for highly commercialized landscapes and have been showcases for state-of-the-art electronic billboards. They have been famous sightseeing places due to a group of larger-scale electronic billboards that are not seen in elsewhere. The phenomenon those huge electronic billboards bring to public spaces are often called as "privatization of public space." The term includes the whole incursion of corporate power (often for advertising purposes) into public realm. However, in urban places like New York or Tokyo, the landscapes are a battlefield among advertisements, skyscrapers and media-makers. The phrase "privatization of public space" cannot fully express the situation of those urban places.

As discussed in the previous chapters, billboards have established their existence in a public space by physically occupying the space. People are numbed to the physical intrusiveness of advertisement. Chapter 3 discusses that television has been a cultural public sphere for all of us. This chapter continues to examine the question of the electronic billboards phenomenon in the urban

public space. When television screens go to a public space, would a public place lose its local distinctiveness and become a “television city” as Michael Sorkin claims?

Methodology

According to the suggested formula, Billboard + Television < Electronic billboard, historical analysis was conducted regarding the billboards' establishment in chapter 2. In chapter 3, content and contextual analysis was chosen regarding television's relationship with environments. Two different methodologies will be used for the two observational research sessions discussed in this chapter with the purpose of clarifying the effect of the formula. The phenomenon in Times Square was examined ethnographically with an emphasis of physical effects of an electronic billboard. Content analysis was performed for Shibuya, Tokyo's electronic billboards focusing on television-like effect of the medium. McCarthy's theory will be referred in the examinations of the electronic billboards in the both sites. Her theory is that the influence of television screens on their locations should be examined by its use (personal or public), its function (individual or collective), its location (inside or outside) and in addition, its three types of conventional placement (overhead screens, single-viewer structures, and screens in store windows). She proposes that this method investigates the different modes of spectatorship that each television in public space entails. For Times Square, looking closely at the rapid changes happened in the site, the research reveals how corporate power has transformed Times Square for their purposes. For Shibuya, the analysis of contents of electronic

billboards shows the relationship between the site and the advertisers. It helps to investigate what signifier Shibuya bears due to the group of three electronic billboards. The limitation inherent to these two methods is that the outcome of the research is uncertain to apply for other locations with electronic billboards. However, researching two prominent cites for electronic billboards will provide the key points to comprehend the electronic billboards' phenomenon.

Times Square, New York, United States of America

What does Times Square filled with excessively decorated electronic billboards imply to us? Times Square is examined historically to pursue the question. The result of city's partnering with outdoor advertising companies shapes the appearance of highly advertised district like Times Square. Hollywood & Highland project in Hollywood and The Block E project in Minneapolis would also be in the same category where cites incorporated outdoor advertising media into urban renewal projects with the cooperation of advertisers and outdoor operators (Freitas par. 5). But Times Square is a unique place as a pioneer of the advertised in large scale. Most of major media companies are based in New York and they dispatch messages from there to all over the world. Hence, there are a plenty of opportunities for the district to be shot or used as a backdrop of programs. Therefore, the electronically decorated advertisements in the district might be considered these companies' pure messages to people.

The initial purpose to go to Manhattan, New York, was to find out how electronic billboards exist in public space there. As expected, there were the numerous types of electronic billboards around Midtown, Manhattan. At the spot, electronic billboards are fitted into a sea of different types of signs and marquees, and tactfully positioned. It appeared that electronic billboards are part of the architecture, part of the building, and are part of the town's established identity. At the time of the research, the United States had just entered the war on Iraq. The news shown on the electronic billboards was related to the situation of the war. One pedestrian who was gazing at the news about "America on war" on the CBS electronic billboard on West 42nd street, between 8th Avenue and Broadway, described this medium as "informative." He added if he owned a big business, he would consider putting his advertisement on this electronic billboard. Another pedestrian, who was waiting for the signal in front of Reuter's building, expressed his feeling that it was a nightmarish environment to work in. A homeless man, who was collecting donations for a homeless organization he belongs to, told me that Times Square is a cheap, tacky and loud theme park. "There is nothing inside of those buildings. There are only exteriors." As these people's opinions differ, McCarthy's theory that there are different modes of spectatorship is supported. The meanings of electronic billboards to people fluctuate depending on the situation of the medium and of the audience. If you are a tourist and visiting the town for your first time, the group of electronic billboards looks fresh to you and makes you excited. If you work in the area and you see the electronic billboards every day, you may be

exhausted by the excessive visual presentations of the buildings surrounding you.

Contrary to most cities where their guidelines are about restricting the size and output of signs, in Times Square, it is just the opposite. All of the buildings in the core of Times Square are required to have large, flashy signage as part of a Midtown special district passed in 1990. The executive of Spectacolor®, a media management company whose Times Square clients include Kodak, JVC, and Mr. Peanut, tells the alluring part of his business, “We build enormous signs over windows and block people’s views, and the signs emit huge amounts of light. But it’s what the city wants. That’s what Times Square is about” (Day 74). Times Square distinguishes itself from other parts of Manhattan and other place in the world with ultimate electronic decorations.

Since 1995 Times Square has been undergoing a huge renovation which is planned to continue until 2005. The redevelopment plan, called “the Forty-second Street Development Project,” started planning from the late 1960s to build four new office towers and several new entertainment centers along both sides of Forty-second Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenue. According to Samuel R. Delany who wrote essays about the transitions of Times Square affected by this project, it is a culmination of forty years’ expectation and attendant real estate and business machinations, not to mention much concerted public disapproval and protest (Delany xi).

The Times Square area, before the renovation, had been synonymous with commercial sex. In the 1960s, the enlarged drug trade was brought into the area

with the element of crime and violence. The libertarianism of the sixties caused a boom in the already established sex business. Peepshows, massage parlors, "adult" bookstores and movie houses, and prostitution quickly became the dominant features of the area, continuing to do so for the next two decades (Gagentaan 4). Times Square was an infamous "seedy" place in Manhattan. The Forty-second Street Development Project wants families to spend their money there. Consequently, the visible signs of sex had to go. In order to bring about this redevelopment, the city has instituted not only a reconfiguration of its own landscape but also a legal and moral refurbishing of its own discursive structures, changing laws about sex, health, and zoning, in the course of which it has been willing, and even anxious, to exploit everything from homophobia and AIDS to family values and fear of drugs (Delany xii).

The reports of the Forty-second Street Development Project, however, continually note that the signage is a very serious part of Times Square's tourist attraction (Gagentaan 7). According to Daniella Eidelburg of the Times Square Business Improvement District, the intent of the regulations was to preserve the bright lights and signs that made Times Square famous. The developers believed that the lights and signs help create the ambience of Times Square and distinguish it from other parts of Midtown (qtd. in Gerend 39). Delany gives some deep insight into the reason the Project wanted to keep the signage in Times Square Red, Times Square Blue:

As a sign system, what the neon visibility of sex shops and peep shows and porn theaters signaled to people passing by was: Unattached men (or

men whose attachments are, however temporarily, not uppermost in their mind), this is the place for you to spend money. Such men have traditionally spent freely and fast. . . Remove those signs in an area where once they were prominent, and it's like reversing the signal: Now it means that men *with* attachments can spend their money here—which is often men with a great deal more money, men who want to spend it in business.

(95)

After the renovation, instead of those sex-related signs, Times Square has approximately fifty super-sized corporate signs. This transformation of the area was called “Disneyfication” by New Yorkers due to the opening of Disney Store, and the dominance of Disney-inspired Broadway shows, and the general sanitization of the district. Mark Eliot, the author of Down 42nd Street: Sex, Money, Culture, and Politics at the Crossroads of the World, which is about the history of Disneyfication of the neighborhood, mourns the homogenization of Times Square.

“Every great city needs to have a fringe. . . A cultural fringe, a moral fringe, for a specific reason: So you can define the mainstream and the cutting edge of the avant-garde. If you haven't got that, there is nowhere for someone to come to rebel against the structures that are laid down by the mainstream. Whether it's politics or drinking or New Age theater, there's gotta be a place that people can go that they feel they are out of the mainstream. Otherwise everybody drowns in a cultural swamp.” (qtd. in Bowman screen 1)

Then what does the new family-friendly Times Square look like? Does everybody in the area drown in a cultural swamp, which is saturated by the corporate' brands? What was seen as a decayed neighborhood filled with porn-shops and peepshows was replaced by "new" Times Square.

The start of becoming Times Square known as a showplace for commercials is Sony's Jumbotron® video screen, placed at One Times Square in 1990. It has capability of offering a mixture of news, sports, weather, music videos, infotainment features, behind-the-scenes looks at Broadway shows, and commercials (Elliott D18). Although its name is a trademark of Sony Corporation, Jumbotron® has become the generic name for all huge display devices. The device was spread in no time and installed worldwide, especially in sports arenas. It, of course, found its way into indoor ad markets, for instance in shopping malls or sports bars. The arrival of Jumbotron® into the transformed Times Square was the cue of its electronic billboard saturated phenomenon. The tide of this trend does not seem to change even after its pioneer, Sony Jumbotron® went dark in June 1996. A 27 percent bigger screen than Jumbotron®, operated by Panasonic and NBC, replaced the site. NBC's Astrovision carries 18 hours of its programs daily along with Panasonic product commercials, other television commercials and public announcements. The screen is silent, though with subtitles. On the day NBC and Panasonic announced their joint plans, the then New York mayor, Rudolph Giuliani greeted their venture.

I am pleased to welcome this exciting, state-of-the-art videoscreen to the heart of our city, Times Square. . . Thanks to some great teamwork between NBC and Panasonic, New Yorkers and visitors alike will be able to enjoy a cross section of entertainment at the crossroads of the world.

(Panasonic.com par.5)

The statement above explicitly represents that this new screen, which broadcasts the New Year's Eve Parade annually, is a valuable asset for the city. As a governor, What Giuliani said was the city's intention. The whole city encourages Times Square to become a cross section of entertainment.

An article about the return of a classic American brand, Wrigley to Times Square after forty years is indicative of the reason why big brands still want to put their names in cluttered Times Square area.

Times Square is a place "a phenomenal amount of people move through," said Rory Finlay, senior director for consumer marketing at Wrigley in Chicago. "This allows us to do some 'pervasive branding' that connects Wrigley brands with consumers... As we move forward, our vision is weaving our brands into the everyday lives of consumers around the world," Mr. Finlay said. "The sign will be very engaging and will really break through." (Elliott 6)

In the article, the spokesman of Wrigley also mentions additional exposure of the medium through television broadcasting. The sign regularly appears on television programs for networks including ABC and MTV, as well as during coverage events like the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and the New Year's

Eve celebration. The medium's capability of changing the contents enables Wrigley to "show multiple brand messages" aimed at different audiences at different times of the day. For instance, when the kids are waiting outside the MTV studios in the afternoons for "Total Request Live," Wrigley can run advertising relevant to them like a campaign for Orbit, a new brand of sugar-free gum (Elliott 6). Figure 9 shows the Wrigley's electronic billboard, which is surrounded by ABC's electronic billboards and JVC's globe-shaped object attached to its billboard. The red and white stripes in its background are also an electronic billboard, or rather, the "wall" of the NASDAQ's building projecting the national flag. The United States was at war on Iraq; patriotic messages were often seen on electronic billboards around Times Square.

Fig. 9. Wrigley's Electronic Billboard

As you may notice in the top picture, the place Wrigley put its electronic billboard is very cluttered. Wrigley's own billboards also have complicated structure: neon, a video screen, a backlighted lightbox and a zipper-style message. It seems that this clamorous situation diminish the effectiveness of each billboard. However, the spokesman of Wrigley tells New York Times that he did not think the district was overcluttered, saying "things have been done to make Times Square a great place to be. This is a great opportunity to capitalize on" (Elliott 6). It is said that approximately 1,500,000 people pass by the district daily. On New Year's Eve, 500,000 people come to Times Square and 500 million more watch the festivities on television worldwide (Hot Stats screen1). Besides, most of the traffic in Times Square is foot traffic, and for advertisers have befits of images being picked up in photographs, videos, movies, TV shoots, post-cards and calendars. Kodak estimates that 90 million photographs are taken in Times Square every year (Hellman 46). As the president of Coca-Cola U.S.A, whose sign is on Two Times Square, acclaims, what his company needs to do is to find that medium that does something spectacular, so that their corporate message has more impact. "For us, the message is that wherever people gather, Coca-Cola is going to be there" (Elliott 15D). This tells the reason that big corporation compete with others in buying advertising space in the district. This place is still worth capital investment.

Some buildings are now worth more on the outside than they are inside (Hellman 46). One Times Square symbolizes this phenomenon. It has only one tenant, a Warner Brothers, retail store filling the first three floors. The remaining

nineteen floors are vacant. It is not that the owner, Sherwood Outdoor, cannot fill the space. "Who needs pain-in-the-butt tenants when you've got the largest sign tower in the world?" says Brian Turner, president of Sherwood Outdoor (Day 74). As a homeless man expressed his opinion that the corporate interest toward the exterior supersedes the interior.

It is assumed that corporate tend to compete their electronic billboards in its technologically advanced presentation of an electronic billboard in order to stand out in the cluttered area. From the observation, the electronic billboards of NASDAQ MarketSite Tower and Lehman Brothers are the ones of them, which look very eager to be technologically at the forefront.

Fig. 10. NASDAQ MarketSite Tower, Nasdaq.

<<http://www.nasdaqnews.com/private/images/1011.jpg>>

The magazine introduces the NASDAQ electronic billboard debut in 2000:

It's a sight right out of the film *Blade Runner*—a 13,000-sq-ft. sign, 70% of it dedicated to a video screen standing seven stories high. Just staring at its swirling images is enough to induce vertigo in the average spectator. It is, in fact, the largest LED display in the world. Even in overcrowded, overstimulated Times Square, it's enough to make you gasp. (Barbour and French 32)

At present, this electronic billboard is the largest in the world. What NASDAQ tries to do with this building is to entertain tourists with a dazzling visual presentation of its outside and with a venture capitalism themed exhibition of its inside. About the outside, the manufacturer of the curved screen says, "What makes this display so significant is that it's really a television set. The pixel—being the essential interface—has to carry the proper base colors in the right wavelengths and has to be able to operate at speeds that are compatible with TV systems, which is not easy" (Day 74). During the observation of the medium, a commercial of Toshiba's laptop was on screen. The flexible movement of a laptop on the display was attention-grabbing. Its speed of the movement resembles the effects shown on television programs or commercials. Technologically advanced presentation of which television or Internet is considered to be cutting-edge is now available in our public space. This presentation on a huge screen gives people the illusion that they were inside of television or World Wide Web world.

The broadcast facility located on the first floor of the NASDAQ building is used by network television stations and dispatch the stock information to the media. On the second floor, high-tech exhibition called MarketSite Experience is designed theatrically to “let visitors feel as if they were inside the network.” As a souvenir, visitors can take a digital postcard which has their faces superimposed on the NASDAQ video sign on Times Square (Barbour and French 33). Both the exterior and interior of the NASDAQ building are inspired by television. The whole building offers a “television” themed entertainment.

Lehman Brothers also follows the rule that their billboards should look like a television set. A two-and-a-half-story-high electronic sign does not stick out or cover up the building. It is the base of the building. Lehman brothers asked Imaginary Force which is known for creating title sequences for films such as Harry Potter to produce the contents for its sign. The comment of one of the architects of this building tells the reason why he brought in Imaginary Force, which is not in the sign business. He said that this sign is a layer of the architecture and he wanted to create a series of images that would constantly change the façade’s appearance. “It’s structured like television, with themes, interstitials, transitions” (Goldberger 33). The contents of the electronic billboards in Lehman Brothers building were created mixing the images of various locations in the world in order to appeal the tourists from all over the world in the area. On the site, the non-linear images on the sign seem perpetually changing and reminded me of music videos without a singer.

Fig. 11. Lehman Brother's Building

The reason these stock market and stock companies, once considered an arcane area of knowledge, are eager to have cutting-edge electronic billboards and creative content for them is that an electronic billboard itself is their brand message. The interior of this district also establishes their themes. All Times Square is designed to send good corporate brand images to the world through its visitors. Globally formatted image could be applied for a brand wherever a brand goes. Since Times Square is a Mecca for visitors from all over the world, a brand is crafted to have a global image that should unite their brand with tourists. Therefore, the locality is incompatible with a global brand.

All of the three electronic billboards introduced with pictures (Wrigley's, NASDAQ, and Lehman Brothers) are positioned above-eye level and out of reach of the casual user of the space. McCarthy argues the effect of this positioning:

This overhead placement guarantees equal visual access for all viewers. It is a positioning that designates the screen as public address, perhaps even public service. Yet on the other hand, putting the screen out of reach like this marks it as private property. . . In discouraging physical interference with the TV, overhead placement also prevents the users of a space from accessing its controls. . . Overhead placement is thus a physical positioning that addresses the viewer as an anonymous individual, physicalizing a modern conception of the subject in public space as a stranger – a subject whose motives are, to some extent, unpredictable and

perhaps even counter to the collective ethos of the space through which he or she moves. (121-122)

Overhead placements, or a high-story structure of electronic billboards such as NASDAQ or Lehman Brothers building represents authority to the passer-bys and also to the world throughout media attention they get. Especially the latter two creates the environment that would be difficult for pedestrians or drivers to not watch their screens. That is because their presentations of the contents and the form of the screens that are incorporated to the building structure captivate them. Those screens create a paradoxical environment in the area by restricting a public space and at the same time extending it with many choices of screens. In other words, a large area of NASDAQ' or Lehman brothers' electronic billboards offer equal views to people in its proximity. However, the attentions of people who are passer-bys or tourists never remain in one spot since there are so many screens to look up to. Therefore, the spontaneous public space an electronic billboard creates is relentlessly divided into parts due to the existence of other electronic billboards.

In terms of television's use (personal or public) and function (individual or collective) of McCarthy's theory, its use is public and its function is collective as long as it works as an advertising medium in public space trying to reach as many people as possible. Nevertheless, the activity of viewing screens reminds people of their private spectatorship of television in their homes. Gazing at a screen helps you isolate yourself from the surroundings and others and lets you concentrate on what is going on inside of a screen. Among the crowded people

waiting for some celebrities to appear in the MTV studio across the street, none of the few people knew who was going to show up when they were asked. Those people might have been looking up into glass windows of studio where the inside of the studio is visible and focusing on watching the studio, or electronic billboards surrounding the studio's window, instead asking people around them about who were going to show up and sharing some instant excitements with them. This may be interpreted that a mode of spectatorship remains private even though an electronic billboard is in public space and it is placed for a public use and collective function.

NASDAQ building's exterior and interior themes are both "television." Its electronic billboards are incorporated into the outside wall of the building. Inside the building, there are numerous numbers of televisions emphasizing the creation of its theatrical experience. The first floor is a state-of-the-art broadcast studio that "transmits 175 live market updates by a host of networks including CNBC, CNN Headline News, CNNfn, Bloomberg, BBC, Reuters, and other financial networks to reach millions of viewers around the world with up-to-the-second market news" (Nasdaq.com par. 3). The effect of the television set outside is, according to McCarthy, "extending private rhetorics of commerce into the street's public world" (147). In the case of the NASDAQ building, their commerce is "network" and "television." The content of television does not come from the inside, but somewhere else in the world and are not necessarily relevant to the location. Displaying the information coming from the major cities in the world gives a more global feel.

To conclude the analysis regarding the electronic billboards in Times Square based on the McCarthy's theory, electronic billboards separate one's experience from his or her physical location. The mass of people who visit Times Square does not consist only of its inhabitants, but are mostly visitors, especially from foreign countries (Wickstrom 288). Accordingly the many numbers of similar-looking electronic billboards fragment the mass audiences who come to see the collective of electronic billboards. Electronic billboards themselves are set to attract as many people as possible as an advertising medium. However, the activity of watching a screen is extremely private unless the content is a sport game or emergency news. When viewing a screen, one loses some of the feeling of its geographical location. Finally, the electronic billboard contents are typically not connected to the geographical nature of the location. Michael Sorkin calls Times Square "antigeographical space" ("See You in Disneyland" 208), which is the place avoiding the connection to its original cultural and historical roots. The whole notion of the place is carefully structured by corporate developers to maximize the profit from the place. He explains the purpose of this area is "branding everything, including experience."

For this to work best, both the site of experience and the experiencer must carry the brand. Think of the teenager in the Tommy T-shirt or the tourists in the MSNBC baseball cap. A deal has been cut here. By agreeing to bear the brand, we express our willingness to surrender our identities and be seen as...advertising... Times Square has become the epicenter, a universal photo-op, pure celebrity. Celebrity thrives on

branding and branding is the theme of the New Times Square. In our media age, brands are no longer static, optic things, but are transmitted by all available means – flashing lights, skyscrapers, coffee mugs, T-shirts, TV shows, magazines, postcards, ashtrays, margarita glasses, plastic bags, you name it. Times Square – one of the few places in America where the zoning laws oblige every building to advertise as intensely as possible – has become Brandland, U.S.A. (Sorkin “The Big Peep Show” 9)

To a greater or lesser extent, as Sorkin argues, an electronic billboard at Times Square contributes to branding something and package its experience. The phenomenon of placing a brand as a most important factor will likely accelerate in the future. This medium itself is also a brand. That is why some people are eager to put their personal message on the screen. That is why people want to get a postcard that their faces are on an electronic billboard. Being on an electronic billboard means something, which may be the easiest form of getting their instant and moment fame in their lifetime.

Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan

The history of Jumbo electronic billboards in Japan for commercial use started in 1980. Shinjuku, the other thriving town in Tokyo, where major business corporations and governmental facilities gather, is the first place in the world that installed an electronic billboard (Shibuya Keizai Shinbun par. 2). Five years later, SONY ‘s Jumbotron® first appeared in the Expo in Tsukuba, a northeastern city of Tokyo. The size of the first Jumbotron® was 40 x 25 meters (approximately 131 x 82 feet), almost as high as an eleven-story building. This

giant television screen attracted lots of attention all over the world. This Jumbotron® was active for only the duration of the Expo, 184 days. During the Expo, the most popular program on the Jumbotron® was “Zoom in JT,” in which the cameras set up at the top of the screen capture the audience and zoom in to a few of them. Souichiro Tahara, who documented the birth of Sony’s Jumbotron® in his book, describes the audience excited by the program.

As it was getting dark, the jumbo screen was shining more and more. When one’s face was zoomed in and projected in the bright screen, some gave a faint smile and looked around, and others grinned and made a victory sign to the camera. The audience, who got familiar with how the camera works, caught the moment that the screen froze, turned back to the screen and took a picture with the backdrop of the Jumbotron® on which he or she appeared. Some kids detected quickly the movements of the camera and chased the direction to which the camera aimed to shoot.

(Tahara 17) [Translated from Japanese by the author.]

The Jumbotron® had all kinds of rarities at that time. The audience was thrilled just to view the medium; therefore they were more than pleased with the Jumbotron®’s performance of making them appear on the screen. The Jumbotron® was placed in the field where the attendees could eat and take a break. Unsurprisingly the Jumbotron® became a landmark of the whole Expo site because it was visible from anywhere in the site.

This outstanding introduction of a huge television set in public space and people’s reception to it blazed a trail for electronic billboards in public spaces.

From the late 1990s, the installation of electronic billboards proliferated in the urban places in Japan. Among the sites with electronic billboards, Shibuya represents a Mecca for electronic billboards. Shibuya is a town located in the center part of Tokyo, Japan. Skyscrapers began to appear in the town's landscapes and a commercial area as soon as a business area started developing in the 1950s. Around the time of Tokyo Olympics in 1964, Shibuya had developed further with the construction of new roads. The urbanization of the area continued and, as a result, the numbers of the residents decreased gradually. Currently, the Shibuya area is known as a center of fashion, geared to youth culture with a myriad of stores and hotels. Shibuya, where about three million people gather in a day, creates trends and dispatches information to all over the country. It is a sleepless, noteworthy materialized town.

The reason Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan was selected as the primary site for the experiment is that it was the place that made the author start to ponder the influence of electronic billboards on public spaces. The distinctive characteristic of the site, which has common things with Times Square, is also a major reason to choose this site. For three million pedestrians passing the district every day, various marketing events are held almost all the time. In particular, several gigantic electronic billboards located in front of the train station play significant roles for those events. Therefore, they often broadcast unique projects in electronic billboard content as their market promotions (i.e. a live broadcast of a press conference of Tom cruise's movie Mission Impossible II, a projection of a

short film which is a 90 second episode and consists of sixteen episodes, an initial broadcast of a singer's music video).

In 2000, the domestic biggest electronic billboard, "Q's Eye" started broadcasting in conjunction with its building Q-Front's opening in Shibuya. Soon after, the surrounding two buildings mounted electronic billboards, "109 Forum Vision" and "Super Lisa Shibuya." This area has transformed into the prominent electronic billboard group in Japan. Unlike electronic billboards in Times Square, electronic billboards in the Shibuya district project images along with sounds. All three electronic billboards have individual sounds and they compete with each other and other noises in the town. Figure 12 shows the scenery of the area.

Fig. 12. Three Electronic Billboards in Shibuya

<<http://www.qfront.co.jp/image/QS/promo/img1.jpg>>

Super Lisa Shibuya

Q's Eye

109 Forum Vision

The CEO of Q-Front, Mr. Tazawa states that electronic billboards in Japan are under the heavy influence of television commercial spots. Corporations who target young generations tend to use electronic billboards in Shibuya, but they rarely create original spots for this medium. Usually advertisers buy commercial slots on electronic billboards in Shibuya and on television synchronously as their media plan (Shibuya Keizai Shinbun par. 2.). Consequently, the pedestrians and drivers who pass the electronic billboards are inclined to get exposure to the same commercials at home.

These three electronic billboards are capable of synchronization of sounds and visuals. This means that clients can play their commercials using all of three electronic billboards at once. The synchronization of three screens is a part of a marketing method called “Shibuya Jack.” The moment of moving images and sounds coming from the three screens surrounding the area is astounding. According to Hojo, the term “Shibuya Jack” is created by advertisers and means the marketing effort using multiple outdoor advertising media available in the Shibuya district (43). “Jack” comes from the word “hijack,” so it contains the meaning of occupying a space for a short time.

Further examples of outdoor advertising media in the district are advertising-wrapped buses covering the area, the walls of buildings with capabilities to become an instant billboard, billboards, and electronic billboards. During an advertising campaign, brand ambassadors are often seen distributing a marketing kit to pedestrians with a background of the same brand’s posters or billboards. Also advertisers sometimes buy the whole space of train

advertisements. Some of the interiors and exteriors of trains coming into the Shibuya station could be wrapped by one brand's advertisement. Therefore, before entering the district, the marketing effort that makes a visitor experience "Shibuya" is already starting. Tazawa interprets the effectiveness of the synchronization of three screens as powerful impact with the identical sounds from all screens (Shibuya Keizai Shinbun par. 7).

An example of "Shibuya Jack", a marketing campaign of Sony Communication Network's "So-net/Shibuya Town Jack event, was held in the Shibuya district on December 2002. As the competition among ADSL providers intensified, Sony Communication Network had a two-day event for its ADSL service promotion and its email software "PostPet V3." The event pushed forward its famous character "Momo" and intended to distinguish its service from other competitors (Hansokukaigi 20-21). Figure 13 to 18 are snapshots of the event.

Fig. 13. Momo in Three Screens and a Giant Billboard

Fig. 14. Momo Bus Running in the Area

Fig. 15. Momo Riding a "Momo-Smart" Car in the Area
This is collaboration with a DaimlerChrysler car "Smart."

Fig. 16. Brand Ambassadors

Fig. 17. Momo and Komomo

Fig. 18. A Friend of Momo, Postman Wandering Around the Shibuya District,
Post Pet. <<http://www.postpet.sonet.ne.jp/free/contents/report/shibuya/shibuya.html>>

The field research was conducted on December 18, 2002 on the street of Shibuya to investigate the content of the medium. The content analysis of the medium is the most accessible way to find out how mass communication works thorough its message and meaning (McQuail 304). However, one must note that the distinction between message and meaning certainly exists. It is a conventional pitfall that we can equate the media with the message. McQuail explains this reason as follows:

The physical text of the message in print, sound or pictorial image is what we can directly observe and is in a sense 'fixed.' But we cannot simply 'read-off' the meanings that are somehow 'embedded' in the texts or transmitted to audiences. These meanings are not self-evident and certainly not fixed. They are also very diverse and often ambiguous. (304)

The context in which the message is delivered has the same importance. Without considering the context, the meaning would not be fully comprehended.

Possibly the context may be more crucial than the content, according to

McLuhan's opinion that the content plays a distinctly subordinate role (247).

However, the subordinate part of the medium is needed in order to understand the meaning of the medium.

The research was conducted at the spot where three screens are visible at the same time. As you will notice in Figure 12, three jumbo electronic billboards are adjacent each other. There is a famous meeting spot in front of that location. From the meeting spot, all of three screens are visible. There is an intersection close to the Shibuya station. If you are coming out from the station and want to

cross the intersection, you are automatically looking at one of, or all of the electronic billboards. Due to the existence of a famous meeting spot and the huge intersection, the flow time of people at the spot is relatively long. Shibuya Keizai Shinbun tells the average flow time of people in the spot is 5 minutes (Shibuya Keizai Shinbun par. 5). The content on the screen was observed from the spot and recorded for five minutes for each billboard with a camcorder and a belief description of a spot was written down during the research. After the experiment, the outcome was analyzed and categorized by types. Each of the three media was observed for 5 minutes. The following tables present a recording of the research.

Table 2.
Contents Showed on Q-Front Screen

Q-Front (The center one)						
Duration	Audio	Brand	Program	Description (Texts)	Characteristics	Sub screens
1 30 sec	x	Avex (Record Company)	TV commercial	CD ("Rainbow" In Stores Now)	A girl fades in from the blue background with water paint like transitions	Magazine CM
2 20 sec		Jiji Thusin (News Wire)	News w/ pictures	Business (General Mortors' Electronic Car "Hydrogen")	Static images and letters	-----
3 20 sec		Jiji Thusin (News Wire)	News w/ pictures	Economy (The birth of new stock market in Osaka)	Static images and letters	
4 20 sec		Jiji Thusin (News Wire)	News	Loyal Family News (Prince and Princess visit Sydney)	Static images and letters	
5 20 sec		Jiji Thusin (News Wire)	News	National News (South Korea Presidential Election Results)	Static images and letters	

Q Front (The center one)							
	Duration	Audio	Brand	Type	Description (Texts)	Characteristics	Other screens Sync 3 screens
6	20 sec		Jiji Thusin (News Wire)	News	Business News (Toyota's 2003 Business Plan)	Static images and letters	
7	30 sec	x	Mazda	TV commercial	Car (Mazda MPV)	"Is that a new sport car?" "No, this is a new MVP." "Is that a slide door?" "No. it's an automatic slide door."	Business News
8	15 sec	x	Software	TV commercial	XBOX Video Game	Animations consist of dynamic transitions "The disruptive hero comes to birth"	Business News
9	15 sec	x	Unidentified	TV commercial	Britney Spears Live DVD	Quick cuts, flashy transitions of Britney's live footages. "Now Watch me."	Business News
10	15 sec	x	XBOX	TV commercial	XBOX	Film-noir like video A lady is attacked by snowballs "Play beautifully."	Business News
11	18 sec	x	Q-Front	Own commercial	Corporate commercial	Fast moving animation. "Christmas Q-Front"	Stock News
12	15 sec	x	Cannon	TV commercial	Digital Camera (Cannon IXY)	Sepia color video. No specific story. "3 mega pixel"	Stock News

Q-Front (The center one)						
Duration	Audio	Brand	Type	Description (Texts)	Characteristics	Other screens
13 15 sec	x	Mt. Naeba	TV commercial	Ski Resort	Successive images of animated ski players. Flashy transitions. "New Nescafe Resort Open in Mt. Naeba."	Weather News
14 30 sec	x	Tokyu Group	TV commercial	Corporate commercial	Two kids trip to the future. Riding on a roller coaster in the futuristic moving images. The company logos are inserted. "To the beautiful future, Tokyu group."	National news
15 30 sec	x	Mods Hair	TV commercial	Shampoo	A girl has been taken care of her hair by a hairstylist. "Mod's hair in Paris"	Economy News
16 30 sec	x	Disney	TV commercial	PeterPan2 movie trailer	"The Disney's best fantasy." Its backgrounds are movie clips. "The peter pan's 100 birthday memorial project." "PeterPan2"	3 screens in sync

Q-Front (The center one)						
Duration	Audio	Brand	Program	Description (Texts)	Characteristics	Sub screens Sync 3 screens
17 15 sec	x	Q-Front	Own commercial	Message Board	"Message Board 2002 Christmas Special" "Would you like to send a heartwarming message to your loved one?" "Access for PC/ Cellular Phone www.qfront.co.jp / m55"	National News
18 30 sec	x	AIWA	TV commercial	Corporate commercial	A dog and a lion are running toward the screen. In other two screens, different characters are moving in the screens. "Enjoy 100%. Aiwa. We only have now. SO now is the time to play, laugh, enjoy. Give it 100%."	Business News A bear dancing in the left (109-2). Birds are flying in the right (Superlisa). The same music used in three screens.

Table 3
Contents Showed on 109-2 Screen

109-2 (the right billboard)						
	Duration	Audio	Brand	Program	Description (Texts)	Characteristics
1	30 sec	x	AIWA	TV commercial	"Enjoy 100%. Aiwa. We only have now. SO now is the time to play, laugh, enjoy. Give it 100%."	An animated bear dancing.
2	15 sec	x	PARCO (department store)	TV commercial	"Believe in Wonder." "PARCO"	A guy (a musician) is playing the different instruments.
3	15 sec	X (Voice Over)	Panasonic Cellular Phone	TV CM	"P509 IS" "Panasonic"	An animated character describes the new feature of a cellular phone (it has a two camera lens).
4	15 sec	X (Voice Over)	Message Board	Message Board	"Happy Birthday, Kazuma. 4years-old!"	A static image with texts and animations.

Sync
3 screens

In the center screen, animated birds are flying. In the right, an animated dog and lion are running.

Slightly out of sync. But 3 screens are showing the same commercial.

In sync with the center screen (Q-front).

109-2 (the right one)						
Duration	Audio	Brand	Program	Description (Texts)	Characteristics	Sync
5 15 sec	X (Voice Over)	Panasonic	Cellular Phone (TV CM)	"P509 IS" "Panasonic"	An animated character describes the new feature of a cellular phone (it has a two camera lens). Edited music video of the band	In sync with the center screen (Q-front).
6 60 sec	X (Music)	Avex (Record Company)	TV CM (CD)	"Avex Tracks"	Recommended artist's music. Edited Music video. Pretty similar with a CD commercial.	On the left screen, the original commercial of this CD is on.
8 60 sec	X (Music)	Kids Station (Cable channel)	TV commercial	"Now it's broadcast on Kids Station."	CG animation.	In sync with Superlisa.
9 35 sec	X (Music)	Suitechic. com	TV commercial	"suitechic"(repeated) "just say so" (in sync with music lyrics)	CG animation	
10 35 sec	X (Music)	Suitechic. com	TV commercial	"suitechic" (repeated) "just say so" (in sync with music lyrics)	CG animation	

109-2 (the right one)							
	Duration	Audio	Brand	Program	Description (Texts)	Characteristics	Sync
11	60 sec	X (Music)	Avex (Record Company)	TV CM (CD)	"Avex Tracks"	Edited music video of the band.	3 screens

Table 4
Contents Showed on Superlisa Shibuya Screen

Superlisa Shibuya (the left one)						
Duration	Audio	Brand	Program	Description (Texts)	Characteristics	Sync
1 15 sec	x	CD	TV CM (CD commercial)	"Song title" "Singers"	Edited Music Video	In sync with other two screens
2 15 sec	x	Cannon	TV commercial	Digital Camera (Cannon IXY)	Sepia color video. No specific story. "3 mega pixel"	In sync with other two screens
3 15 sec	x	Mt. Naeba	TV commercial	Ski Resort	Successive images of animated ski players. Flashy transitions. "New Nescafe Resort Open in Mt. Naeba."	In sync with other two screens
4 15 sec		Public service announcement with a sponsor	Information	Modern Japanese Water paint Exhibition	Sponsor's name is appeared in the bottom.	

Superlisa Shibuya (the left one)							
	Duration	Audio	Brand	Program	Description (Texts)	Characteristics	Sync
5	15 sec	X	Superlisa	Own commercial		Recommended singer's music video edited with clips of pedestrians in Shibuya	3 screens
6	15 sec		Tokyo Bunko Tower	Local commercial	"The world will change, Japan will change, and Shibuya will change."	Texts fade in and out	
7	60 sec	X	Superlisa	Own image commercial		The clip of recommended singer singing on the Superlisa's screen is edited with clips of pedestrians in Shibuya	
8	15 sec	X	Unidentified (Pharmaceutical company)	TV CM (Eye drop)		Soy source drops to an egg. Soy source changes to an eye drop, and egg changes to eye.	In sync with other two screens

Superlisa Shibuya (the left one)						
Duration	Audio	Brand	Program	Description (Texts)	Characteristics	Sync 3 screens
9 30 sec	X	Taiseidou	Local bookstore commercial		Local Shibuya scenery. A camera zooms into the bookstore's marquee.	
10 15 sec	X	Soukagakkai	TV CM (Image commercial)	"Renew your tomorrow"	CG animation . A fairy tail looked person appears from water.	
11 30 sec	X	JR (Train company)	TV CM (Shinagawa Bullet train Station Open)	"2003 Fall" "Shinagawa will change"	Edited quickly. Bullet train's fast moving clips with fast moving texts.	
12 25 sec	X	Superlisa Shibuya	Own image commercial		The clip of recommended singer singing on the Superlisa's screen is edited with clips of pedestrians in Shibuya	
13 30 sec	X	GAP	TV CM (Image commercial)			

From these results, the contents of the electronic billboards were categorized into six types: television commercial, local commercial, own commercial, original program, news and public service announcement. During 18 minutes, nearly 65 percent of the content were commercials that were also broadcast on television. About 4 percent of the contents were related to local businesses that were usually not seen on national television. 9 percent of the contents broadcast news, which were accompanied by text-based advertisements in the bottom of the screen. The commercials categorized into “own commercial” were advertisements of the buildings in which the electronic billboards are situated. Original programs that consist of a message board, and program introducing recommended artist. The latter was pretty similar to an artist’s CD commercial. The synchronization of three or two screens happened 12 times in 18 minutes of the observation, occupying approximately 29 percent of the all spots.

Table 5

Typology of the Contents

Types of programs	Percentage (1083 sec in all)
Television Commercial	64.6 % (700 sec)
Local Commercial	4.2% (45 sec)
Own Commercial	6.7% (73 sec)
Original Programs	12.5% (135 sec)
News	9.2% (100 sec)
Public Service Announcement	1.4% (15 sec)
<i>3 or 2 screen-synchronization</i>	29.1 % (315 sec)

The data in the table shows that the three electronic billboards in Shibuya district are operating together with television and most of the airtime is devoted to commercials. Most of what was advertised on the electronic billboards is targeting young generation (i.e. CDs, Video games, Digital Camera, Cellular Phone). This is because Shibuya attracts the younger generation and, as logical consequence, companies who attempt to acquire young consumers are eager to become advertisers for the screens. The three electronic billboards are located in front of the intersection. If people want to across the intersection toward the direction where three electronic billboards are located, they are inclined to glance at or watch one or all of the screens when they are crossing the intersection or while they are waiting for the signal. One of the main shopping zones in Shibuya starts from the other side of the electronic billboards. All products that are advertised on the screen are obtainable in the shopping zone. Electronic billboards are welcoming people coming to the town while arousing their consumer interest. The three electronic billboards symbolize the town's retail nature.

For marketers, giving consumers more opportunities to see and hear the same commercial spot is a favorable thing. Especially, the audience in front of the three electronic billboards is captive and they do not have the choice to shut off the media. However, studies show that the audience is more receptive to those repetitious commercials. According to the study of the effectiveness of outdoor advertising, 57.2% of the study participants answer that they memorize the product when they see the advertising both on television and electronic

billboard (Hansokukaigi 131.) Some says that they think the product is worth trying if advertisers advertise using different media. This opinion somewhat proves the success of multi-media advertising campaign of advertisers. The other opinion among the participants of the study refers to this medium as prompt information sources of new products, music and events. The three electronic billboards established its authority as mass media through its dynamic presentation which cannot be found anywhere else in the country so far.

It is notable that almost 30% of the spots synchronize one or two other screens. The impact the three screens give to the area is astounding. It creates an instant environment you have to watch the screen. When this synchronization occurred, it was as if watching television commercials on the enormous screens. The method of this synchronization is, as mentioned earlier, a part of "Shibuya Jack." When advertisers conduct "Shibuya Jack," for example, they will broadcast their new commercial first exclusively on electronic billboards; they often announce it through different mass media or the electronic billboards beforehand. On September 11th, 2002, the unit from the idol group (Hideaki Takizawa and Tsubasa Imai) released their debut album and their music video was supposed to be on the electronic billboards in Shibuya. This event was advertised a month earlier. On the date, two million fans gathered in the area and the event had to be canceled due to the security concern (Shibuya Keizai Shinbun par. 8). This incident shows that Shibuya is becoming a sanctuary of media. By advertising an event using multiple advertising vehicles, an event itself got bigger than reality. The advertisers or the record label where the idol

group belongs to did not intend to have two million audiences for a three-minutes music video that would be shown on the electronic billboards. Mass media's self-promoting power made the event a real big deal for the fans of the idol group. Instantly the place in front of electronic billboards transformed to a place where fans could meet their idol closely even though their idol is in the screen. What happened at this event shows that people are so receptive to the relentless messages from mass media.

Unlike those in Times Square, multiple advertisers share the Shibuya electronic billboards. Therefore, it is impossible that one brand establish its existence geographically. However, with the method of "Shibuya Jack" and multiple media campaign, advertisers can alter the space spontaneously into a brand commodity. Most of people coming to Shibuya are not its inhabitants and they are coming to the town for work, leisure or sightseeing. What they experience in the place is spread to their friends in different places by word of mouth. Marketers calculate the ripple effect on this word-of-mouth communication into their marketing plan in Shibuya (Oricon 20-21). Also people are exposed to the same brand messages at home from watching television advertisements. Their "Shibuya Jack" experience is recalled when they see the same commercial or the same logo.

The electronic billboards in Shibuya are definitely targeted for the public and function with the existence of a mass of people. The experience in Shibuya is an instant public experience, however, their experience spread to the rest of the country both by the mass media coverage or word-of-mouth communication.

Through this process, the instant public place in a specific part of the geography becomes an instant public space for the whole country. With a corporation of other mass media, electronic billboards play an important role to make Shibuya famous.

The experiences of standing in Times Square and Shibuya epitomize Michael Sorkin's insight. Mass media built up their own brand commodity occupying a place. Electronic billboards physically occupy the place and remotely occupy other spaces through media coverage. Locally and globally, electronic billboards establish an authority. The gigantic medium talks to you often wherever you are. Times Square is a global image format as much as Shibuya is a Japanese image format. The common symbols in two places are electronic billboards, which embodies corporate messages.

Times Square and Shibuya shares a common characteristic, which is the heart of consumerism. Historically Times Square has been altered to be a showcase of corporate America with large and flashy signage. During the process of renovation, there were little considerations for the public who protested and disapproved it. Numerous electronic billboards are needed for tourists from all over the world, not for the New Yorkers. Shibuya intensified its commercialistic mood with the introduction of three gigantic electronic billboards at the gate of the town. Three electronic billboards connect the television world to the place by showing the television commercial relentlessly. Shibuya has everything you see on Television, and even celebrities frequent the site or the electronic billboards for their promotions. The whole town is simply

geared to the desire of consumers who visit the place. The people who gather at the famous meeting spot where used to function as a public space in the busy urban setting is now a suitable location to watch the three electronic billboards. As a television set brings the corporate messages directly into a household, electronic billboards brings the corporate messages into a public space. The major difference between a television set in a household and an electronic billboard in a public place is that the latter cannot be turned off. The messages of electronic billboards surpass the locality of a place before one realizes it. The electronic billboard phenomenon is compatible with Michael Sorkin's television city.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusion

The dissolution of TV into life, the dissolution of life into TV. (Baudrillard 55)

Electronic billboards make a place placeless. Both externally and internally, electronic billboards influence public space. The medium inherited intrusiveness and omnipresence from billboards. In its long history, billboards have established their existence in public space, overcoming public criticism such as the City Beautiful Movement and Highway Beautification Act. Gossage describes the difference between seeing an ad on a billboard and seeing an ad in a magazine as “permission” or “freedom of choice” (114). By being omnipresent in public space for a long enough time, billboards won the permission from people offering them advertisements in return. In other words, people have reached to the point where they learned not to argue with the monolithic outdoor advertising industry and to give up their freedom of choice over outdoor advertising. Middle and upper class citizens got zoning regulations and succeeded in excluding billboards out of their proximity in return for providing other places for the outdoor advertising industry.

During the course of the establishment of the medium, people’s perception of public space had changed. Commercial interests repeatedly override the interest of the public in protecting natural beauty of places. Commercial messages from advertisers can obstruct a distinctive characteristic

inherent in a place or its natural landscape. By being present in public space, billboards changed our perception of it and its scenery.

The television part of an electronic billboard alters the meaning and context of public place. In Meryowitz' phrase, television changes "situational geography" (6). The "situational geography," such as physical setting and social situation, is what makes each place unique. Television is not merely a piece of furniture, but a spatial fixture where we can enter and experience its world. The world of television influences the outside world with dynamics of moving images and relentless advertisements. E. Ann Kaplan describes the television world below.

While the filmic spectator is drawn into the filmic world through structures that appear to satisfy the desire for plentitude and for the unification of split subjectivity, the TV spectator is drawn into the TV world through the mechanism of consumption (i.e., constant unsatisfied desire, the constant hope of a forth coming but never realized plentitude).
(28)

As Kaplan claims, television and commercialism are strongly tied to each other since television's introduction to households in the 1950s. Under the television system in the United States, viewers are considered as a market, not as a public. Consequently, they are subject to be influenced by frequent insertion of commercials and the programming that induce desire of consumption. Television delivers corporate messages into people's living room, and consequently alters the boundary of private and public space in a domestic

setting. The activity of viewing is quite private, while what are on the television screen connects to the outside world. The outside world television offers, as Kaplan claims, is constructed for consumers. Things projected on television are ready to be packaged and be purchased by viewers, who become customers in the real world. Television indeed alters spatial setting and social context. Television creates the social context where consumer culture does matter and consuming is highly encouraged. Electronic billboards function the same way as television in our public space. Commodities advertised on electronic billboards are ready to be purchased and are closer with consumers than on television.

The ubiquity of television screens in our every day place influences its ambient environment. The site-specific nature of television, which Anna McCarthy emphasizes, affects an electronic billboards' surroundings depending on their size, use, function and placement. This site-specificity helps the medium fit into the environment. With technological advancements, television screens can be flexibly shaped and installed into various outdoor situations. The increasing installations of electronic billboards are due to the site-specificity.

The observational research in Shibuya, Tokyo, Japan and Times Square, New York shows how the electronic billboard phenomenon modifies and commodifies public space. In Times Square, electronic billboards were used in the whole area's ongoing development. Sex industries that used to make the area infamous disappeared and Disney and media corporations changed the place into a glitzy tourist spot. During the course of the Times Square redevelopment, the media companies as well as retail companies installed

electronic billboards as a sign of their presence. Now the area is said to own more than fifty super-sized electronic billboards. All of them contribute to sell their brand or corporate image and make visitors feel as if they are in the fantasy world of corporations. This phenomenon called “entertainment retail” is “a union of theatrical and commercial space and activity” (Wickstrom 286). Russell interprets the reason for the prevalence of this phenomenon as follows.

Faced with too little time and too much choice, consumers are increasingly choosing brand names that have a reputation for quality, a trend not lost on marketers. Brand mavens have discovered that stores, uniquely, could immerse patrons in an experience – one that offers a powerful means to imprint a brand name in the consumer’s mind. And the only way to lure patrons into the experience was to amuse as well as sell. (91)

Electronic billboards are easiest objects to create a themed atmosphere. The contents are projected on electronic billboards ceaselessly, while altering a place into a brand-signified environment. A completely calculated environment is to provide visitors an ultimate branded experience, which is closely connected to consumerism.

The branding and theming effort using electronic billboards to create an instant themed atmosphere, which represents their brand, is far from local flavor. Since a purpose of establishing a brand for a corporate is to be able to provide the same signifier wherever it is. Therefore, a brand is supposed to have a global image that is usually not related to any specific place. Times Square epitomizes this “entertainment retail” phenomenon. Corporations’ buildings compete each

other to push forward their brands playing the video embodying the corporate concepts on electronic billboards in the district. Even though the companies are not based in New York, they are eager to hold advertising spots in Times Square. Retail stores are trying hard to be a “fun” and “entertaining” place by putting electronic billboards in Times Square. Those moving images showing on the electronic billboards are usually not related to its location. But, as a whole, Times Square is an entertainment theme park whose theme is various and somewhat imaginable: NASDAQ building are representing the center of information, Nike Town and ESPN zone are sports-themed, and Disney store, Warner Brothers etc. are entertainment. However, as Russell states, a store, restaurant, amusement or those physical architects may be only a part of a large multiple-media marketing campaign.

The big corporate players now follow a formula developed by Disney.

The company introduces new characteristics into the marketplace through an animated film. A theme-park attraction follows; then characters become products, “so that people can take away a piece of the story,” as Wing Chao, senior vice president at Disney Imagineering, explains. The retail outlet is simply the last link in this orgy of synergy. The store or restaurant must toe the larger marketing line, which leaves little room for idiosyncrasy or local flavor. (92)

The era of displaying products for purchase in stores is gone. The current technique of marketing is to use multiple advertising media and to seek any possible product exposures to people. Therefore, installing electronic billboards

in Times Square does make sense for companies since they can be a tangible destination of the brand. Wickstorm interprets the trend in terms of commodification of life.

In a globalized market, characterized by transnational competition and potentially world-wide reach, the industry can no longer rely on the old techniques of displaying goods as objects for purchase. It is not enough to encourage consumers to have commodities; they must be compelled to become them. By creating environments and narratives through which spectators/consumers are interpellated into fictions produced by and marketed in both shows and stores, entertainment and retail based corporations allow bodies to inhabit commodities and so suggest that commodities, in turn, can be brought to life. (285)

Electronic billboards in Shibuya, Tokyo play the same role as the ones in Times Square: an agent of commodifying environments. By relying heavily on television commercials as the content, electronic billboards in Shibuya alter a site into a destination of television world. Extensive marketing technique “Shibuya Jack” accelerates its commodification and a tie to television, while decreasing its historical and cultural characteristics. Electronic billboards in Shibuya embody a concept where you can obtain everything on television. Due to the size and the location of the media, electronic billboards are towns’ proprietors and welcome people coming in town to consume. By encouraging people to consume and projecting television commercials on the electronic billboards, Shibuya got a new signifier for itself, which is a media town. The town promotes itself claiming

everything advertised or mentioned in the mass media is available in Shibuya. This signifier has a strong meaning for the town in the consuming society than emphasizing its historical value as a signifier.

A roadside electronic billboard functions as if it is a commercial break that connects between programs. One's commute from a suburb to city needs something to fill its gap like there are commercials between news program and a sit-com. Now roadside electronic billboards are networked and show the same commercials covering a wide range of places. Our life style is getting close to what we watch on television. Television packages ways of how to live and present them to us. By consuming them, we experience television. Consequently, our life consists of experiencing television.

Electronic billboards have ability to connect location to the television world. What television world delivers to a place overrides its locality. This makes a place placeless and similar to television. Electronic billboards play an important role towards making a "Television city." Television has been our public sphere. Watching television, we laugh, cry, fear and desire. Michael Sorkin says that television city is missing in the spaces in between, the connections that make sense of forms ("Variations on a Theme Park" xii). Electronic billboards are placed to fill the spaces in between, however not to make sense of a place, but to make people stay in a television world.

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