On the Road: The Rhetorical Action of Billboards

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As landscape theorist J. B. Jackson emphasized in Landscape Magazine: “Never before had there been so total and dramatic a transformation of a portion of the American landscape, so sudden an evolution in habits, nor such a flowering of popular architecture” as demonstrated by the introduction of the automobile to our society. With the increased mobility of this invention, Americans began experiencing life in ways they never had before. The pace quickened as further technological advances in media reduced the attention span and evolved literacy of the public eye. These developments were recognized and capitalized by business entrepreneurs of industry, particularly outdoor advertising. Public communications in the form of billboards are an American invention that has displayed levels of versatility through creative expression that only a free-market system could harbor. Through a rhetorical perspective, billboards are cultural artifacts that allude to the American consciousness in context with history. Though there continues to be much controversy over the responsibilities for use of roadside space, the medium remains a prominent aspect of the American landscape. Even while situated within the high-speed internet age, billboards continue to evolve through and directly reflect the cultural fluctuations that implement them.

Roadside Evolution

An overview of historic events and the parallels between a morphing culture and vernacular qualities of public space preserve an interesting narrative. I will examine society's progress while keeping in mind Robert Bales' concept of "fantasy themes" and Ernest Bormann's application of these themes to small groups in the realm of mass communication. To provide insight into how messages were passed from small groups to contexts such as the media and public address, Bormann noted that Bales' work implied "the dynamic process of group fantasizing" which was an extension of individual fantasies. As the American consciousness evolved under a capitalist system, alternatives to traditional values emerged in contrast to a source of authority attempting to govern and establish order. Such forces have influenced social climate and appeared as artifacts in forms of architectural design, public policy and aesthetics. These cultural artifacts will be highlighted in the evolution of public space as demonstrated by the growth of cities and business at the turn of the twentieth century.

In addition to the rapid development of urban downtowns and Main Streets, the introduction of the automobile has drastically shaped the vernacular space along the road. In particular, drivers and passengers became a profitable audience and the road, a space of freedom which I will more thoroughly examine later. With the recognition of this opportunity, public roadside space was quickly implemented as a medium for mass communication.

Ever since lithography was invented in 1795, the potential for poster advertising has existed as an effective medium for persuading viewers. Advertising comes from the two Latin words, "ad," meaning "toward," and "vertere," meaning "to turn." Therefore, the objective of advertising is defined: to turn the attention of any given market buyers toward a product, service, idea or personality. As a tool and technique, advertising is a vital part of marketing, an overwhelming force within a free-market economy system and in effect, has created an industry of itself. Advertisers "buy" an audience by most effectively communicating to consumers through an appropriate medium. Since very few people are exposed to advertisements during work and none during sleep, advertisers must communicate to the audience during their leisure time or while driving. The unique benefit of roadside advertising minimizes the work of circulating a message within the market of buyers by instead, allowing the market to circulate around a message.

Outdoor advertising can be divided into two major classifications—on-premise and off-premise—within which exist more categories ranging from small store signs to huge electric billboards. The on-premise aspect of outdoor advertising is most commonly referred to as the sign industry. Such signs are used to physically identify roadside businesses and draw attention to the products and services that are offered by that location. Off-premise advertising allowed opportunities for businesses to lure consumers and generate anticipation as advertisements were used as tools for directing the market. Many retailers chose to escape the chaos, leaving crowded downtowns behind and embracing the freedom of the open road spaces where regulations were less stringent.

The concept of constructing a special structure dedicated for poster advertisement was a seemingly modest development but a revolutionary one as the standardization allowed the
advertisement to be placed in a landscape with a certain authority over the medium. Although the British history of leasing space for posters and billposting as an occupation predates American methods by nearly a decade, the United States was the first to implement a standardized, freestanding billboard structure solely dedicated to these purposes. Britain did not develop regulated structures until the early twentieth century, making the bold, framed figure of the billboard a true American invention.

A billboard is any large poster mounted in a public place, whether for advertising, political propaganda, or even decoration. Most common billboards are outside structures that are freestanding and often lit for visibility at night. As described by the curators of a 1999 Massachusetts Museum of Contemporary Art (MASS MoCA) retrospective exhibition highlighting artist’s billboards, the poster is an “active medium for the selling of ideas, the motivation of consumers and the expression of artistic and design ideals.”

Jared Bell created the first forms of billboard advertisement in New York by placing multiple nine by six foot posters in an arrangement to produce a larger image. As the printing press technology progressed, larger sheets were produced and soon the limitations in size were only constrained by the structure to which they were ultimately fastened. During the mid-nineteenth-century, circus and theater groups were natural clients for posting ads in this way. Almost any surface could be made suitable for poster display: fences, building walls, windows, rocks and especially the train systems when the NYC elevated railway opened in 1867. City centers and even larger outskirt towns quickly became a clutter of crudely posted signs, flapping and fading in the streets. With all this potential in plain sight, advertisers began to capitalize on the benefits of organized and regulated marketing systems.

By 1890, posting services in Chicago, New York and St. Louis began reflecting more awareness of their responsibilities when occupying public space. The members of the International Bill Posters’ Association formed an associated group for the United States and Canada lead by founding President Edward A. Stahlbrody of Rochester, New York. Stahlbrody outlined purposes to promote a greater understanding of the poster medium, to organize and coordinate services all while addressing ethical concerns. As businesses within town and cities began to develop across the nation, the technology and competition of the outdoor advertising industry progressed respectively.

Main Street became a site of a “full-scale visual tug-of-war” between the traditional structures of the past and the new commercial presentations of modern design. Builders of new downtown structures included decorative details in brickwork and facades but also were attentive to including storefront windows for advertisement. Designers began to collaborate with sign makers for the most effective use of roadside space and the attraction of customers. The 1879 invention of electrical light was welcomed with enthusiasm as cities soon became a dramatic and sparkling sight of illuminated signs. As author John C. Van Dyke describes, “letterings, patternings, arabesques, figures
outlined by small electric globes...sometimes blinking...All told, the glitter and glare of these signs make up a bewildering and...brilliant sight.”

Such illuminations soon became overwhelming and littered the night sky. Architects, contractors, city planners and citizens concerned with the degenerating conditions and appearance of these urban areas recognized a need for reform. In the early 1900s, Daniel Burnham became a key figure of the City Beautification Movement by suggesting, “the landscape [would] complement the burgeoning reforms in other areas of society” referring to the poverty and crime that was plaguing crowded urban centers. The City Beautiful leaders were mostly upper-middle class, white, males who believed that an emphasis on creating a beautiful city would in turn inspire its inhabitants to moral and civic virtue. This discourse became more and more complicated as conditions in the country’s urban areas continued to fluctuate within a web of interconnected factors, specifically transportation and architecture in relation to outdoor advertising. Arguments of the movement more or less concluded that billboards should be recognized as a separate class of structures requiring distinct regulations of their own.

There were many opposing opinions around this verdict, many of which remain issues that continue to be of active debate.

Billboards as Rhetorical Artifacts

Advertising practice encouraged self-regulation and organization, however, the extent to which the billboard’s innovated opportunity was utilized within culture multiplied

Figure 3: This 1965 Ford billboard encourages a suburban family to own more than one vehicle; father drives to work while mother drives to the grocery store. Reprinted in American Billboard: 100 Years, 97.

Figure 4a., 4b: Tri-vision
The Volkswagen campaign and McDonalds ad both present simple designs with reduced text that are most effective for communicating memorable messages. 
Reprinted in *American Billboard: 100 Years*, 125, 158.

The advertising industry mirrored this explosion of consumption with immense marketing campaigns. Roadside business began to boom as the nation embraced a release of a youthful, carefree, rebellious attitude that identified with the jazz age. In 1921, the Federal Highway Act was passed to enable economic growth to continue with an essential addition of national road systems. This again boosted the outdoor advertising industry creating miles and miles of new billboard opportunities. All sorts of products were promoted to passing drivers including the essentials of extended road trips—batteries, tires and food. In 1925, the first instances of conglomeration occurred as the General Outdoor Advertising Company (GOA) became a giant of the East with the best in-house artists. In addition, the Outdoor Advertising Association of America (OAAA) formed and remains to this day, a standard in leadership and service to protect, unite and advance a responsible outdoor advertising industry that is committed to serving the needs of advertisers, consumers, and the public. These alliances created a more efficient network linking merchandisers, advertisers and specialized information. Growth in tourism experienced by restaurants and hotels also resulted from the merge. These facilities encouraged road travel by accommodating drivers and passengers on their journeys and luring them to various tourist attractions that were designed as milestone destinations along the road.

This ambiance of the roaring twenties was short lived, however, as the next decade left America in a deep depression with a president whose desires for normalcy recoiled society back into a tradition of home and family. The home became a symbol of cultural success as homeowners were respected within communities. At a 1931 Home Building Conference, Herbert Hoover described the home as a “castle in all that exquisite sentiment which it surrounds with the sweetness of family life.” As a result, the roadside merchants adopted domestic imagery of the home in advertisements. Businesses embraced a homey atmosphere with green lawns and white fences that welcomed customers from the road. Construction of new bungalows and more billboard frames helped to stimulate the lumber industries and create jobs as well.

During World War II, the billboard content shifted to reflect propaganda by addressing every citizen as a combatant in a war of production that sold the idea of the factory and home as arenas of war. Popular imagery included Uncle Sam and a prominent American flag as the government publicity campaigns created a base of national solidarity and support. The advertising industry helped encourage these national...
icons by linking them to consumable products. War billboards represent the earliest forms of artist billboards and established a precedent for public service addressing political and social issues.

Coinciding with a shift in demographics following the Depression and World War II, suburban masses began growing as GI Bills allowed more people to buy houses. The government reacted to the necessity of fueling industry after the war by stimulating production through consumption. The image of the home resurfaced to encourage sales to housewives who maintain the home environment by embracing this domestic image. In addition to this introduction of numerous new products, the marketplace experienced another influx of automobiles that were necessary for allowing the transport of goods from shopping centers to home.

The existing roadways of downtowns and country routes suffered from "autoclerosous." These crowded conditions, not uncommon from the congested cities became a major concern during the Cold War as fears of nuclear war loomed over American culture. In 1947, the government passed the National Interstate Defense Act that called for 37,000 miles of new road to provide a substantial route for evacuation, if need be. Of course, with these new roads came new opportunities for billboards—this time soothing and reassuring the American public during the threats of an atomic age.

An overview of the first half of the twentieth century displays the integration of societal beliefs with authoritative action around issues of public space. The symbolic representation that appears in vernacular design, particularly billboards, became more refined as the creative energies of the second half of the century surfaced. An emerging counterculture opened a realm of alternative approaches to life. The advancement in goals of freedom, moral excellence and liberty were agitated and polarized towards a progressive American ideology. At the same time, advancements in aesthetics and use of new technology amplified the effectiveness of symbolic language, which I will examine in the next section. This not only increased competition in the spectacular presentations that were created for billboards, but also complicated the rhetorical discourse around the medium.

Aesthetics of Billboards

In an essay by Kenneth Burke entitled "The Philosophy of Literary Form," he argues that effects of art and its appeal are always historically contextualized because "aesthetic values are intermingled with ethical values—and the ethical is the basis of the practical." Billboards present a manifestation of this aesthetic sphere as they have served as an evolutionary medium that has allowed various phases of this aesthetic value to be displayed. Although billboards are ephemeral, documentation of their imagery has been cataloged by certain organizations, most thoroughly by OAAA in an online database. The sequences of billboards during the later half of the twentieth century display the upheaval of social structures that occurred. As an artifact, the billboard demonstrated the progress of art and technology in its refinements of style and design. Of course, these shifts in social and aesthetic structure towards a modern culture are most notably reflected in the actual advertisement styles. The cultural resonance in these billboards contributes to their rhetorical significance as they help to meditate conditions of acceptance and response. As Burke further states;

"Art is the strategic naming of a situation. It singles out a pattern of experience that is sufficiently representative of our social structure, that recurs...for people to need a word for it and to adopt an attitude towards it."

The portrayal of these attitudes through the aesthetic qualities of billboards maps evolution of style, culture, technology and the media literacy of America.

The cutout image, which extended outside the standard billboard frame, emerged as one of the most far-reaching trends of the 1950s. In addition, innovations such as reflective tape, mechanical parts and back lighting were "surprise elements"
when viewed at night. These additions later developed into the “full bleed” board that allowed printing on the blanking paper as well as the poster thereby displaying an image without a frame at all.2

Despite economic concerns, the creative revolution on billboards continued as technology provided new techniques and cultures of art produced new imagery. In fact, the relationships between these developments left their own trademark style through each consecutive decade. For example, during the Great Depression the teardrop shape was a favorite motif that was duplicated in automobiles, appliances and furniture.9 This streamline identity put an emphasis of photorealism in billboard illustration and though photographs were dominating the magazine industry, they did not appear on billboards until years later.5 Eventually graphic design became prevalent and with the introduction of silkscreen and plastics. This ultimately led to computer painting on vinyl which was advanced by Metromedia Technologies and Computer Image Systems.

Of course, technological advancements did not always work in favor of the billboards. With radio and television opening new arenas for an advertising market, the competition grew. In most cities and towns, there were often a couple outdoor advertising plants. These plants controlled the majority of public space by selling units or “showings,” in different packages of any national, regional or individual markets. Similar to how broadcast would sell minutes or hours of airtime, outdoor advertisers would sell showings of relative numbers that included an amount of prints installed within the market. A market is divided into poster zones of approximate percentages of principal streets with 80 to 90 percent of traffic leading to business areas. Of course, these packages are mere outlines, as many showings are often tailored to suite the specific needs of a particular client. Showings also varied in value as determined by the creative features any billboards included. A popular variation was the “tri-vision” or “multi-vision” that divided the face of a billboard into individual vertical strips of triangle panels that rotated allowing more than one message to be shown on the same panel.2

The automobile was an essential element for billboard expansion as it coincided with the postwar production and rapidly expanding economy. The automobile allowed the suburban families to feel strong and content because of what could be provided through this high standard of American lifestyle. In 1954, another expansion of the national highways network was issued by the governments Federal Interstate Highway Act except this time, the plan included restrictions for billboard sites. This was met by extensive lobbying from the billboard industry over their concern for existing structures that were adjacent to the proposed interstates. Controversy around the aesthetics of community and scenic interests heightened through the sixties as more and more funds were diverted towards these debates which were more aptly described as “public education.”3

With the emergence of a counterculture during the 1960s, many advertisers shifted their focus to a new, youthful market of easy persuasion. A surprisingly effective merge of the copywriting and art direction into one “creative department” reorganized the principles of campaigns to “simplify…dramatize…make crystal clear and memorable.” Television had radically changed American’s attention span and as a result, the constant stimulation from such technology and freedom of mobility through vehicles pushed the pace of society to grow faster and faster. This was beneficial to billboard literacy as there exists a short period of time as a viewer approaches a sign to be able to read it. The effects of minimalist ideology are seen in billboards that use few words and instead rely on imagery of concepts alone. For many, a shift from the nuclear family to value of oneself also opened a new approach in advertising as products were targeted to individuals seen especially in food advertisements. Great emphasis was put on the human body encouraging love and pleasure for oneself and as a result, iconic human models proved successful gimmicks for product presentation. Humor and directness contributed to a phenomenon of designs that were distancing themselves from the banality and fantasy of the 1950s and intentionally blurring lines between advertising and graphic entertainment—all of this, a stimulus to pop artists.

Emergence of Road Culture

The development of a political and class consciousness reached a forte during the 1960s. An urgent reexamination targeted many ideas and expectations that were previously held at high national standard. Political and social revolts of the sixties were revolts against values that began questionable consideration during the Cold War atmosphere of the 1950s, long before Kennedy’s assassination, political scandals and the Vietnam War erupted into the consciousness of the American people. After 1969, Americans entered a new world of expansive government that agitated the cultural divide throughout the 1970s.9

Though the conservative traditions were eventually reaffirmed by Reagan’s era, subcultures of alternative perception peeled away from popular consensus during this period and began to practice new approaches, rejecting a culture of suspicion and control. A focus on personal freedom and individual liberation introduced new symbols and ideologies of American lifestyle such as escapism. As beatnik author Jack Kerouac simply states; “the road is life” and presents the metaphysical significance of the road as culture during this period in history.1 People used their cars as extensions of themselves and enjoyed the liberation that driving an open road offered in contrast to the spiritual poverty of traditional American life. The road becomes a symbol of mobility that reminds Americans of their true wealth and potential. As Kerouac’s 1955 novel, On the Road presents, the road is a path of transcendent experience,

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Figure 7: 1975’s Miss America recipient, Shirley Cothran, featured in a billboard campaign becomes nationally recognized. Reprinted in American Billboard: 100 Years, 152.

Shirley Cothran
Miss America 1975
taking travelers away to a fantastic “landscape and mindscape seen from terminal velocity.”

Revisiting the excessive signage of Main Street that existed prior to the dawn of the auto age, the success of a business often depended solely on the presentation a sign or billboard that would stand out most to passing eyes. The introduction of the automobile simply amplified the vitality of roadside signage and created an overwhelming influence on the evolution of vernacular space. Competition increased and roadside retailers were forced to create a union between sign and building. Contractors and architects adjusted their designs for drivers and passengers in automobiles as the fast-moving eyes required a different presentation of signage. Downtown became a dense space of traffic movements including vehicles and pedestrians alike. As more and more people began using cars to commute to the downtown area of work or shopping, commercial visuals began to cater to an audience in transit, on the road.

This new perception of landscape and life has drastically influenced and amplified the communication through public vernacular space. Similar to the screen of a television set, the windows of a car framed perceptions of the world at high speeds influencing a faster pace and stressing efficiency. Even though the road provided an escape from suburban boredom, the car soon became a substitute for this domestic space and the whole highway system, in a way, became an entire domestic world in and of itself. People began to eat in their cars, listen to the news or music and even sleep. Hybrid vehicles were designed to merge the comfort of a home with the freedom of mobility—these were the first mobile homes.

There are many conflicting opinions on the topic of automobiles and their effect on our culture’s development. Though the outdoor advertising industry has equally contributed to the development of structures that complement roadside architecture, the extent to which these structures have molded new perception and reinforced ideals of fantasy is largely due to the personal freedom's experienced by driving an automobile. The widespread mobility that personal vehicles allowed, has transformed concepts of freedom and self-perception, therefore pushing aesthetics of public space towards a refined language of symbolic communication that was seemingly limitless.

Reform Establishes New Consciousness

The competition and bold progressions of billboards during the 1960s further agitated the debate for regulation and beautification of public space along the road. President Johnson 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 the enjoyment of nature and beauty we can greatly 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 natural and social integrity and unity of the landscape and the communities through which they pass. With his wife, "Lady Bird," leading the effort to secure these ideals, President Johnson made such issues a priority, and through much delegation, the Highway Beautification Act was passed in 1965. The legislation called for states to control outdoor advertising and junkyards adjacent to Interstate and primary highways. Local sectors were encouraged to authorize landscaping and scenic enhancement within the highway corridor. The junkyard control was the most effective aspects of the act as states took the opportunity to erect fences that would screen rusting cars from sight of the roads and give compensation to junkyard owners for removal, relocation or proper disposal.

The billboard industry felt directly attacked by the regulations imposed under the act, however, most of the concerns regarding limitation were a simple misunderstanding of what the act really proposed. The only signs that were not subject to control under the act were on-premise structures that were located on the property where the advertised business was conducted. Other roadside structures were required to be 660 feet from the edge of the right-of-way in addition to lighting, size and spacing requirements. Such improvements under this...
act, however, did not receive federal funding unless the state could pass legislation first—an overlooked detail that made the effort appear ineffective. Most noticeably, changes in standardized tourist signs provided information on food, gas and attractions without overwhelming presentations of brands and images. Highway rest areas were constructed as well as landscape designs that enhanced the natural scenery that roads cut through. These improvements began to bring concepts of a public consciousness to shared spaces along the road. Though it is difficult to override the business agendas of these spaces, some states have been successful in limiting outdoor advertising quite a bit. In fact, Alaska, Hawaii, Vermont and Maine have banned billboards entirely.

In 1971, the Institute of Outdoor Advertising (IOA) was established to develop research, creative ideas, promotion and effective use of the medium, which later merged with OAAA to streamline communication. The same year, tobacco advertising was banned from television and radio, which displaced an enormous amount of this marketing on the billboard industry. According to a 1969 article, the super trade organization of OAAA consisted of plant owners from 90 percent of the medium’s facilities. In addition to maintaining liaison with agencies and advertisers, the OAAA published trade journals and quarterly publications that provided reports of the national market as well as new developments for the medium and an occasional design contest. Some of these titles include *The Poster* and *Outdoors Buyer Guide*.

The conglomeration of the industry has continued in addition to acquisitions of computer technology allowing more modern campaigns to be designed. The record industry’s use of billboards along Sunset Strip in Los Angeles became famous icons for glamour and the emphasis of logo branding and exploitation of the pun during the eighties have left memorable campaigns. In 1975 the IOA launched a campaign to test the effectiveness of billboard advertising, using the image of newly crowned Miss America, Shirley Cothran. Her name recognition soared after the campaign proving the value of billboard medium in presenting ideas through public space to mass culture. The widespread impact of this structure, however, made it very difficult for agreements to be reached on authority over this space.

**Embracing Opposition**

Put most simply, the problem lies in the gap that exists between what one thinks ought to be and what is; it is the discrepancy between the ideal and the real. Due to the diversity of perceptions, a problem for one person may not be a problem for another. Issues regarding use of public space have been of debate from the earliest inception of the concepts’ use. Not everyone has the same beliefs in aesthetic value, and therefore different levels of tolerance are directed at the presentation billboards create.

There have been many instances of opposition to the spread of billboards looming over roadside landscape. Some argue that drivers can become distracted as they drive. Studies indicate that a substantial percentage of this distraction can be classed as ‘external-to-vehicle’. Billboards and signs at junctions and on long monotonous roads (such as highways) can function as distractions and constitute a major threat to road safety. It is also likely that lights or billboards on long ‘boring’ stretches of road can surprise drivers when advertisements suddenly appear, or cause fixation and failure to concentrate on driving. This is because these signs create visual ‘clutter’ thus making it harder for the driver to perceive traffic lights and other safety signs/devices.

There are many examples of the billboard used as space for public service, which tend to favor less radical imagery and encompass more universal appeal. Ranging from issues of homelessness or domestic violence to AIDS awareness, the billboard can serve a very useful purpose in raising awareness of crucial societal problems. Similar to these messages of public advocacy, independent artists have adopted the medium to send their own messages of persuasion to viewers. Sometimes this takes the form of graffiti but has also been executed through larger projects of collective organization between artist foundations and the advertising industry.

During 1998 in North Adams, the MASS MoCA
commissioned six artists including Leon Golub and Lothar Baumgarten to create new billboards for its community. Most of the artists acquainted themselves with the area and met residents of who shared their interests of discontent with issues ranging from workers rights to vegetarianism. The project directly addressed to extensive abuse of public space and vernacular landscape that was presented at all entrances to the town. Eyesores include factory buildings, tightly packed worker housing, asphalt steeples, smokestacks and, most of all, billboards. This commercial reality in contrast to the beauty of the Berkshire Valley was examined through the project which embraced these very billboards as spaces to reflect the community's disgruntled voice in addition to a retrospective show that exhibited the work as well as other historic examples of such efforts. The exhibition was funded in part by OAAA and private sponsorship that produced twenty-five works of roadside art scattered across Western Massachusetts. Joseph Thompson, the director at MASS MoCa explained in the accompanying catalog:

[Artists] were not only utilizing the vernacular space of billboards, they were also appropriating the visual language and rhetoric of commercial advertising in their work and vice versa. The fluidity and richness of this interchange could only manifest itself in an exhibition of large scale.12

More radical artists or “culture jammers” put their own spin on billboards by repainting imagery that often subverts the intended message. Culture jamming is a form of activism that often adopts the qualities and medium of its target and translates the original message into an alternative meaning. Originally demonstrated in forms of vandalism, culture jamming is a clever approach to protest and civic engagement. Adbusters Media Foundation encourages new social activist movements of the information age, aiming to topple existing power structures and forge a major shift in the way we will live in the 21st century. They publish the magazine Adbusters that considers itself dedicated to examining the relationship between human beings and their physical and mental environment. The foundation has also launched numerous campaigns such as the black spot that “rethinks the cool” on sneaker corporations like Nike who employ sweatshop labor. Large black spots are scribbled over the logos of corporate billboards, such as Nike’s trademark “swoosh.”

Similar to black spot, the graffit artist, English’s M. O., has been pirating billboard space since the eighties by posting his own hand-painted designs over the existing ads. He has created anti-ad campaigns in Texas, New York and New Jersey. For example, Camel’s “Old Joe” has often found himself replaced with “The Cancer Kids.” Defacing corporate mascots from their top dollar billboards is of course punishable under law. Many artists accept this risk; in fact, the Billboard Liberation Front is a group of activists who actually provide tactics for illegal defacement of billboards on their website. Though these groups have had many impacting actions, not all successful challenges are demonstrated through such radical means.

Many groups, such as Scenic America have taken stands against billboards, describing them as distractions for drivers and reasoning them as causes for too much clearing of trees.
and intrusions on natural landscape. The organization provides local activists with resources for defending the scenic conservation ethic. Some projects work to protect forest or hillsides from cell towers while others encourage efficient land use and protect community character from modern corporate architecture.

Conclusion
The use of vernacular architecture in public space continues to be prevalent in our culture as the billboard medium proves its effectiveness and permanency in the American landscape. Billboards are rhetorical when you consider their potential in the act of influencing others. Through this perspective, billboards are examples of persuasion that examine social truths addressed to others, justified by reasons that reflect cultural values.

Any stroll down a Main Street or cruise along the highway will present a vast range of vernacular objects that contribute to our modern environment. Outdoor advertising—a medium that is available in more markets and exposed to more people than any other major advertising media—comprises only about one percent of all commercial signs, displays, and devices visible to the public eye. It is no wonder that immersion in such a dense landscape of symbols and structured messages such as billboards, that our society has recycled its values through this inescapable system of persuasive communication. Presented through imagery and designs, these values perpetuate themselves within a paradox; billboards are both ephemeral displays of public social values and reinforcements of the very values that the public is encouraged to live by.

Many factors have amplified this communicative medium to the extent that we experience it today. The automobile has transformed our society in so many ways; particularly the physical design of public space and ideals of mobility and independence that driving provides. The expansion of road systems during the thirties and fifties, certainly amplified road culture and the outdoor advertising industry's potential for market. Along with television and other technologies, the American literacy has quickened, demanding massive stimulation in efforts to escape boredom. This evolution has substituted domestic spaces and reinvented consciousness of communication. Billboard aesthetics have demonstrated this evolution of cultural values in the symbolism and designs they embrace, serving as artifacts of our past.

A keener understanding of the relationship between rhetorical perspective and the objects articulated and reified through discourse may help generate enlightenment of our consciousness in the present, and ultimately the future. In other words, one studies historical artifact not to re-create or re-view the past but in order to better understand the present and more directly impact the future. By learning to approach historical documents and popular cultural artifacts from this perspective, perhaps some consensus can reached on the most suitable outlines for future development. Similar to the ideology of New Urbanism, vernacular structure needs to be carefully considered, as it is obvious how much impact it has on social perception within a public space. Of course, the inevitable interests of corporate tradition and commercial profits will likely always complicate the purity of such intentions.

References
7. Kenneth Burke has written many books framed through this concept of rhetoric. In Rhetoric of Motives, (New York: Princeton-Hall, 1950) he explains: “For rhetoric is not rooted in any past condition of human society. It is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (Burke 43).