

Jason Rothery

15 December 2011

The Product As Plot: Product Placement in the Post-*E.T.* Era

Adjusted for inflation, *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* is the fourth highest-grossing film of all time.¹ First released in 1982, Steven Spielberg's paean to the worry and wonder of childhood is renowned not only for its hefty box office haul, but its pioneering use of product placement.

Product placement is nothing new. From 1st century Roman billboards to 18th century Japanese literature to Dickens' *The Pickwick Papers*, art and commerce have been tightly intertwined. From the very inception of the medium, filmmakers set recognizable branded objects within the *mise-en-scène*. The Lumière brothers featured their brewery-owning father-in-law dispensing beer for patrons (*The Card Game*, 1896), and hired a Swiss intermediary to facilitate a deal with Lever Brothers, manufacturers of Sunlight Soap. Thomas Edison shot shorts for scotch (*Dewar's — It's Scotch!*, 1897), cigarettes (*Admiral Cigarette*, 1897), clean-burning coal (*A Romance of the Rail*, 1903), and his own products (*Streetcar Chivalry* (1905) displayed posters plugging the phonograph). Edison produced fifty-two films featuring trains, the railway, and the purchase of train tickets, "providing promotional services for customers of his industrial business," and reducing production costs in the bargain. These "efforts to influence audience attitude and behavior became a specialty of Edison's" (Newell, Salmon, and Chang 589-81).

American artists were quick to adopt and develop the practice (Newell, Salmon, and Chang 581; Lehu 18). One of the earliest campaigns was undertaken by Harry Culver, who "donated parcels of land for the construction of film studios, correctly predicting that the on-

¹ Box Office Mojo, All Time Box Office; <http://boxofficemojo.com/alltime/adjusted>; behind (in ascending order): *Star Wars*, *The Sound of Music*, and *Gone With the Wind*.

screen exposure of southern California's pleasures...would make his remaining holdings more valuable" (Newell, Salmon, and Chang 582). Thus, the catalyst for product placement in Hollywood was the placement of Hollywood itself.

The 1920s saw the emergence of reciprocal promotional arrangements whereby manufacturers tied their products to celebrities and studios buoyed ad and ticket revenue (Newell, Salmon, and Chang 582). In the 1930s, MGM opened its own in-house office through which to barter (Karrh, McKee, and Pardun 139). Films grew rife with placements: Coca-Cola in *Dinner at Eight* (1934); Fred Astaire (starring alongside Rita Hayworth) simultaneously smoked and tap-danced in *You'll Never Get Rich* (1941); Buick secured placements in ten Warner Brothers releases (Newell, Salmon, and Chang 582-3). In one infamous example, the Marx Brothers, hard up for financing, concocted a climactic chase sequence for *Love Happy* in which Harpo is pursued across a scrolling series of billboards atop Times Square. Harpo "rides the Mobil Oil mascot Pegasus, swings from a gigantic Bulova clock pendulum, and is thrown into mouth of a smoking Kool penguin" (Newell, Salmon, and Chang 588). Placement was so entrenched by the 1950s that the majority of studios were represented by public relations firms.

This is not to say, however, that the practice was particularly lucrative or well-organized. From the 1930s onward, product placement was sporadic and haphazardly arranged though *quid pro quo* barter deals between agents and props-masters. "(T)he brand owner would provide free props to the production set and often lend advertising support" (Hudson and Hudson 490), and in return, the studio would furnish "publicity stills for use in the manufacturer's advertising" — an exchange referred to as "props-for-plugs" (Newell, Salmon, and Chang 584). And placement was not without its detractors. Foreign distributors and critics fulminated while some European

theatre owners reportedly obscured the projection of American products. *Harrison's Reports*, a weekly trade journal (1919-1962), stated that “the act of a person who steals your screen is no different than the act of a person who steals your watch” (quoted in Newell, Salmon, and Chang 588).² There was even dissent within Hollywood’s upper echelons: Carl Laemmle, co-founder of Universal Studios, proclaimed the practice “prostitution of the screen” (quoted in Lehu 20). The Hays Office, a regulatory agency whose purview included films, “routinely advised producers to avoid the use of trade names in motion pictures” (Newell, Salmon, and Chang 587).

Product placement remained a steady if quiet (and relatively peripheral) business until the early 1980s. Then the alien landed: the eponymous entity from Steven Spielberg’s *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* (1982). Hershey’s Reese’s Pieces placement is the stuff of advertising legend: sales of the nascent confection spiked 65-85%, with some estimates of sales briefly *tripling* (Lehu 78; Karrh, McKee, and Pardun 138; Russel and Belch 74; Calvert 209; Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 274; Johnstone and Dodd 142; Newell, Salmon, and Chang 589). The deal was struck after the studio was left hanging by Mars, manufacturer of M&M’s (the candy called for in the script).³ Scrambling for a replacement, Hershey’s agreed to allow Reese’s Pieces — which had been on the market only two years — to stand in for their market rival. When shooting wrapped, Spielberg proposed a one-million dollar promotional campaign to trumpet the film’s launch. In exchange, Hershey’s would be allowed to use imagery from the film in their advertising (Lehu 246; Newell, Salmon, and Chang 589). The results are considered “legendary”

² *Harrison's Reports* was none too pleased with *Love Happy*’s rooftop product parade, devoting a front page editorial and a review to condemning the film (October 8, 1949).

³ In a synergy *faux pas*, M&M’s were retained in the movie’s novelization (Newell, Salmon, and Chang 589)

(Russel and Belch 74), a “breakthrough success” (Newell, Salmon, and Chang 575), a “home-run,” and “the great classic among the classics” (Lehu 245). Hershey’s Vice President for New Business Development considered the placement “the biggest marketing coup in history. We got immediate recognition for our product, the kind of recognition we would normally have to pay 15 or 20 million bucks for” (quoted in Newell, Salmon, and Chang 590). This “unstructured part of Hollywood operations” definitively demonstrated how art and commerce could be “successfully intermixed” (Newell, Salmon, and Chang 576). Product placement became a star in its own right.

Such success does not slide by unnoticed, and the 1980s saw an “environment conducive to creativity and boldness” (Balasubramanian 35). The praxis rapidly “rationalized” as a proliferation of specialist agencies arose to broker deals between producers and marketers, streamline and standardize contracting, and maximize corporate control (Balasubramanian 31; Miller 4; Hudson and Hudson 490). Product placement grew “so common in the eighties that now it sustains a veritable industry” (Miller 4).

How did *E.T.* make product placement history? Reese’s Pieces were not the only commodity present in the film. There are placements of, among others: Coors, Skippy, Pizza Hut, and Fresca. At one point, Eliot asks *E.T.*: “Want a Coke?” Russel and Belch note that “Coors beer...reported no significant impact/success” (74). There was something special about the Reese’s Pieces placement in particular.

Firstly, the product itself is never obtrusively “featured,” it is simply *there* — a seemingly innate and organic extension of the action and environment. The bag is seen only in profile; no

text or logo is shown. Though the distinct orange hue is now a familiar characteristic, the brand was, at the time, relatively new.

Secondly, the product is seamlessly integrated into the story, but not just any part of the story. This is the build-up to an intense and consequential moment: the *big reveal* of the movie's centerpiece. Even as an adult, and having seen *E.T.* several times, I still find it a riveting scene: the creature, manifesting in a *chiaroscuro* silhouette, shrouded in fog, approaching a terrified Eliot, reaching out a spindly, sinister arm, only to...return the proverbial breadcrumbs! This is powerful and evocative storytelling; in a single potent sequence Spielberg sets up the film's entire thematic framework: being a kid can be scary, but those things that frighten us can turn out friendly after all. It's the kind of scene you want to talk about with others. *Share* with others.

Thirdly, the movie was a massive hit; a *bona fide* blockbuster. And when such a crown is conferred, the coronation entails a certain degree of chatter; a divining of the constituents of its success (even if reverse-engineering chemistry can be a fruitless exercise). That this product, this *new* product, was so casually (coquettishly?) integrated in both the build and execution of a pivotal plot point draws attention, but also rewards the audience for discovering the product for themselves (all attendant marketing notwithstanding). It's a very fine balance, but as deployed in *E.T.*, is the sort of serendipitous, almost-accidental confluence of factors that become stories unto themselves, sewn into the larger tapestry of the film's near-mythological success.

The sense of discovery extended beyond the film to the practice itself. Though the conventions were not new, they were rendered novel by virtue of their collective unmasking. Product placement may have been there before, we — the moviegoing public — may have noticed it in the crowd, but this was the first time we put a name to the face. Product placement

entered the lexicon and, now visible, could never revert to its prior conspicuousness. “It took a movie about a child-sized alien lost on Earth to place the advertising practice...into the public consciousness...and to some extent the product placement industry was born” (Newell, Salmon, and Chang 574). What was, in 1974, a “casual, haphazard” 190 million dollar (per annum) business, ballooned into a “trenchant, sophisticated” 3.5-to-4.5 billion dollar global behemoth⁴ with major expenditures from agriculture, beverage, technology, health and beauty, and fast food sectors, as well as sizable investments from “vast majority of Fortune 500 companies” (Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 272; Lehu 35).

The practice and its nomenclature evolved apace. Though, historically, defining product placement was no less nebulous an enterprise. Early presentations were called “the cinema of attractions” — limited in length, films were more of a sideshow attraction than a feature — and the act of product insertion was called “exploitation” (“any sort of publicity that might generate attendance”); products and services were “tie-ups,” or “tie-ins.” Terminology morphed into the relatively more elegant-sounding “publicity by motion picture,” “moving picture advertising,” and “co-operative advertising” (Newell, Salmon, and Chang 576-7), as well as the less elegant “Turkish rug market” (Karrh, McKee, and Pardun 139). Post-*E.T.*, product placement branched off into myriad protean forms; as many, seemingly, as there are researchers: “hybrid messages” (Balasubramanian 30); “blurred communications” (Bhatnagar, Aksoy, and Malkoc 100); “hybrid (advertising)” (Russel and Belch 74); “branded entertainment” (Hudson and Hudson 492); “entertainment marketing” (Lehu 1); and “integrated marketing strategies”

⁴ Figures cited are from 2007.

(Calvert 210).⁵ Newell, Salmon, and Chang contend that “the term product placement did not come into scholarly or trade use until the 1980s” (576).

Why is the practice (and its offshoots) so thoroughly embraced? Simply put: movies are expensive to make and market — *especially* to market — and studios are always seeking means to defray costs.⁶ Movies can “provide a platform for public relations campaigns, sales promotions, and even new-product introductions” (Russel and Belch 86). Tie-ins, merchandising, and cross-promotional campaigns can serve as parallel marketing apparatuses, selling the movie “in many ads, in thousands of bright aisles, on millions of clean boxes” (Miller 4). Any “communication” for a product that incorporates imagery from the film implicitly promotes that film; and such advertising can even sell products that might not appear in the film proper, or have anything to do with content or characters (Lehu 85; Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 277). Sponsors might supply transportation, locations, and/or necessary goods and services, and occasionally the means to upkeep those goods, as GM did for *Days of Thunder* (Scott 1990), furnishing on-set mechanics to maintain cars during the shoot (Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 273). Products can generate goodwill on set, or within studio HQ (Russel and Belch 76). Lehu posits that certain placements have creative value: “the car is a powerful evoker of the character’s status and role, of the environment...” (44). Russel and Belch quote a director musing on a character’s potential consumption habits: “What kind of soda does he drink? Is he a root beer guy or a Pepsi guy or a Dr. Pepper type of person? Does he drink foreign beer?” (76).

⁵ There are professed distinctions between these terms, mostly regarding the degree to, and means by, which the commercial nature of the “brand” is integrated into, converged with, or hidden within the entertainment content.

⁶ Lehu puts average production costs (2004) just shy of 100 million dollars per film, with marketing costs to match.

What's in it for the corporation? The core concern is *the brand*; developing and enhancing the awareness, reputation and image of, building buzz about, and reaching new audiences for said brand (Lehu 92-93; Russel and Belch 90). By generating favourable conceptions of the brand, sponsors seek to create a positive framework of meaning which will, ideally, lead to a purchase (Johnstone and Dodd 143).

Film offers several advantages over competing mediums. One is life-cycle: movies tend to stick around.⁷ Lehu refers to this as the “extraordinary exponential multiplication of potential impact” (76); i.e. the greater the success of a film in theatres, the more expansive its dissemination through time and space: a lifespan extended through DVD and BluRay; VoD, Pay-Per-View, and streaming services, illegal downloads, television broadcasts and repeats, etc. (Lehu 77; Balasubramanian 34). Many Hollywood movies are distributed internationally, offering access to a global market “well (exceeding) the reach of an average advertisement” (Bhatnagar, Aksoy, and Malkoc 103; Balasubramanian 34). Movies also connect advertisers to one of the last captive audiences (Miller 4; Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 278). “Cinema is a captive medium,” writes Lehu, with a “massive and attentive audience (20, 150). For Miller, the theatre is “a perfectly closed-off setting,” wherein “viewers can’t flip the page or turn their chairs away” (4). Perhaps most importantly, films provide a “rich emotional context for brand building” (Russel and Belch 86). Watching movies entails a degree of vulnerability, an emotional opening up and exposing of our self to the power of story and spectacle; identifying and empathizing with characters that share common crises. Our “anti-advertising ‘defenses’ are lowered at the cinema” (Lehu 63) allowing “the development of the brand’s likability by establishing a trust

⁷ Johnstone and Dodd estimate the lifespan of the average film at 3.5 years (143).

relationship with the viewer...who feels close to the theme and the actors” (Emond, quoted in Lehu 97).

With a heightened profile came closer scrutiny, though the bulk of academic attention focuses on the *effectiveness* of integration; i.e. how to evaluate and maximize impact. Little has been written regarding how the practice could be influencing the narrative and aesthetic content of films themselves, and the filmmaking process as a whole. In order to grapple with issues of content, we must begin with efficacy research in order to chart the trajectory and aspirations of the practice and, thereby, the fronts on which creative forces may fall under siege.

First, it’s worth noting that at the heart of the practice lies a paradox: “if you notice it, it is bad. But if you don’t notice it, it is worthless” (Hudson and Hudson 501). Lehu reports that “by entering a film, a brand can contribute to its entertainment. By hijacking the film or the scene...it breaks the possible emotional link that natural integration might have offered” (247). Agents believe that “advertising is most effective when consumers do not recognize it as advertising...if (their) ‘guards’ are down, they will be more open to persuasive arguments about the product” (Calvert 208). Thus, advantages conferred by cinema’s presumably non-commercial character are squandered when viewers grow suspicious of or notice “paid placements where they were not expected” (Bhatnagar, Aksoy, and Malkoc 107). Marketers most fear the “skeptical” viewer whose mental hackles bristle as he or she begins “carefully scrutinizing brand claims,” and questioning “motive purity,” potentially leaving them feeling manipulated and betrayed (Bhatnagar, Aksoy, and Malkoc 100, 112). As the barricades go up, the efficacy of persuasion dissipates. It’s an advertising high-wire act; tilt to far one way or the other, and the whole display comes crashing down.

The challenge is particularly daunting when one considers research into the ideal prominence of placements. Having broken down the screen into nine quadrants, Bressoud, Lehu, and Russel found that brands placed in the center get the most attention (374). Other virtues include the amount of time the brand is on screen and the number of appearances (with more preferable to less in both cases). Verbal cues have more impact than visual cues, but “dual mode placements” — a combination of verbal *and* visual cues — rate higher than either cue alone (Karrh, McKee, and Pardun 141; Lehu 5; Bhatnagar, Aksoy, and Malkoc 108). The brain processes these (and other) stimuli differently; the more stimuli engaged by the placement, the better retained in the memory (Bressoud, Lehu, and Russel 376; Johnstone and Dodd 154).⁸ Placement potency decreases as the film unspools, so better to pop up early on. Size matters too: the bigger the screen, the larger the logo, and the higher the “brand salience”⁹ (Bressoud, Lehu, and Russel 377). The product should be clearly situated (i.e. foregrounded), and the placement (and its accompanying verbal mention) should be visually unique — that is, with no other products *in situ*. Not only does “divided attention at encoding (create) interference and (hinder) memory,” but the advantages of other mentions and integrations are similarly negated by “multiple simultaneous placements” (Bressoud, Lehu, and Russel 376).¹⁰ Certain brands are seen as more suitable for placement than others (recognizable versus obscure brands; ethically-charged products such as alcohol, tobacco, and firearms) (Hudson 496). “Contextual priming” —

⁸ For more on “deeper processing”— how the brain processes stimuli, and the transfer of brand entry from short term memory to long term memory — see Bressoud, Lehu, and Russel; Johnstone and Dodd.

⁹ Johnstone and Dodd define “brand salience” as “the prominence and level of activation of brand in the memory” (145).

¹⁰ There is a dual advantage to reduced “interference”: a visually unique placement increases recall, and simultaneously “hinder(s) recall of competing brands...as new brands enter memory, compensatory brands may drop out” (Johnstone and Dodd 145).

exposure to the brand as placed before seeing the film (e.g. in trailers) — has also been shown to be a boon to recall (Karrh, McKee, and Pardun 141).

One benefit on which audience and advertisers seem to agree is that a filmic landscape littered with logos *enhances its reality* by making it look more like our own. Placement evokes our own product-saturated world, undergirding the credibility of its fictional counterpart (Lehu 47; Karrh, McKee, and Pardun 146; Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 277; Lee, Sung and Choi 499). Hollywood tends to tout brand ubiquity a sort of sweeping naturalism (Miller 6; Lehu 99), the lack of which would “(give) rise to more questions” (Lehu 101). This holds especially true for films set in the future: “In order to be accepted by the audience, the fiction needs points of reference with reality” (Flande, quoted in Lehu 149). In *Minority Report* (Spielberg 2002), set in 2054, Spielberg scattered dozens of brands throughout to (in Lehu’s words) “ensure that...the consumer understood that the action was supposed to take place on Earth...the familiarity that consumers have with these brands would enable them to believe that this future is not as distant as they might have thought” (51-52). On the commentary track for *The Island* (2004), director Michael Bay irately defends placements to the haters:

“Now let’s face it guys, the world is focused on products. Products surround us. And for us to think, in the year 2019, that we’re not gonna still be focused and have products, and labels and...flying at us from every different...different vantage point...is just unreal. It’s just...it’s not a true world.”

Having drowned our world in advertising, film, it seems, must reflect that selfsame saturation in order to be believable. “Art imitates life” (Karrh, McKee, and Pardun 146).

Another integration asset is having the product handled by the actors, preferably the star, the bigger their status the better. The celebrity/character can “demonstrate the product in natural usage context and associate it with a lifestyle” thereby facilitating “observational learning.” (Russel and Belch 86; Newell, Salmon, and Chang 581; Johnstone and Dodd 143). These “character endorsements” generate better brand “buzz” than a typical pitch due to the “everyday life”-ness of the setting, and tacitly imply the actor’s recommendation (whose commitment not to disparage the brand in public should be contractually secured beforehand) (Lehu 124). “People may use products that they see fictional characters use because they identify with, and want to be like, those characters” (Balasubramanian 38). Of paramount importance is the relationship between performer and product; the actor’s attitude should be cordial, affectionate, enthusiastic. Their use of the brand, and the outcome of that use, should always be presented as *positive* — a positivity thereby transferred to the audience; a glow passed from their world to ours (Johnstone and Dodd 144; Bhatnagar, Aksoy, and Malkoc 107). Witness Will Smith in *I, Robot* (Proyas, 2004) who, in the film’s opening minutes, unwraps and laces-up a pair of Converse sneakers to the strains of Stevie Wonder’s *Superstitious*. The camera pans up to a grinning Smith who declares “Thing of beauty.” Later, when his mother asks about the shoes, Smith lifts up a sneakered foot and extols “Converse All-Stars, vintage 2004.¹¹ Don’t turn your face up, I know you want some, all you have to do is ask.”

Positivity is essential. The product should always be placed in “favourable conditions” to “constantly ensure their positive presence in the mind of consumers” (Lehu 224). Such conditions should ideally extend to the movie as a whole: “the more positive viewers are toward

¹¹ The film is set in 2035, but released in 2004.

a movie,” the more attention they’re likely to pay, and “the more they will remember placements” (Bressoud, Lehu, and Russel 378).

The paramount strategy, however, is injecting the brand into the story itself. “In its most effective form, (the product) is so integrated into the storyline that its presence seems logical, even indispensable,” symbiotic and “organic,” (Lehu 5, 68); making the brand an “intrinsic element” that contributes in “a positive and evocative way to the progression of the plot” (Hudson and Hudson 492). The product should be invited “to participate” by receiving “a genuine role” which “must be natural, logical, and even, in some cases, vital... (A) role that adds value both the brand and the film.” In fact, the brand should enjoy “such a close relationship with the film’s story...that its presence will seem natural” (Lehu 209). Like any invasive surgery, it takes practiced precision to suture the wound so that it leaves no discernible scar. Consider *Cast Away* (Zemeckis, 200) in which Chuck Noland (Tom Hanks) is stranded on an island with but one companion: Wilson (-brand volleyball). Near the end, the two are tragically separated when Noland’s raft collapses, and a waterlogged Hanks is left screaming: “*Wilson! Wilson! Wilson!*”

Why is story integration so essential? Narrative represents a rich semiotic matrix; intersections of information, symbols and meaning through which the audience navigates. If the brand is an inseparable strand of DNA woven into the story’s molecular structure, the creature must be digested whole. “Semantic processing,” write Bressoud, Lehu, and Russel “is viewed as deeper than non-semantic processing, and produces better memory” (376). The more meaningful the integration, the deeper the processing, the better the brand retention in memory. “Integration into the screenplay,” writes Lehu, “is the necessary connection for passing from perception to persuasion” (118).

If we were to construct an ideal integration, it would entail a recognizable, ethically-neutral brand, already noticed in trailers, set front and center in frame, no competitors present, talked-up early and often, and seen on the largest possible screen. The product should stand apart from, but also blend into, a familiar real-world mosaic of brand ubiquity; be cherished by the lead celebrity/character (whom we idolize / empathize with), will prove helpful, be demonstrated and deployed in cheerful contexts, and serve as vital narrative lynchpin subtly shuffled into the action and propelling the plot forward. And it will be a movie that, overall, we really love.¹²

Sounds like a tall order. How do the moguls presume to put this master plan into action? One such intermediary already exists: the screenplay screener. Agency employees, screeners are sent scripts by studios “weeks even months before filming starts” (Miller 6); then analyze them, scene by scene, attempting to identify “placement opportunities,”¹³ and “(match) existing clients to these opportunities, and/or (seek) new participants” (Russel and Belch 2005). Even as far back as 1994, screeners were reviewing upwards of 500 screenplays per year, and at least one company used computer software to scan for insertion options (Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 271-2). “We choose projects where we have maximum control,” says one such screener, “break a film down and tell the producers exactly where we want to see our clients’ brands” (Miller 7).

The *modus operandi* is control — as much as possible — of which the screener is only one apparatus. Lehu contends that “logically, the nature of the placement should derive first and foremost from the advertiser’s objectives” and advises more stringent contracts and oversight to ensure that contractual obligations are met: ensuring “a positive presence” involves “the drawing

¹² Placements are stratified with higher prices for type/combo of cues, scale and profile of the release, and filmmakers involved. For more see Lehu 73-75.

¹³ “(D)esirable story contexts for placing specific products” (Balasubramanian 31).

up of the most detailed placement contract possible”.¹⁴ Other researchers recommend “imposing stringent guidelines on movie producers” (Balasubramanian 38) and warn that practitioners “have to be increasingly cautious about the conditions and details of placement...following up to ensure the respect of contractual obligations, not only during the filming but during editing phases” (Bressoud, Lehu, and Russel 382). Agents aspire to interpose themselves as early in the process as possible, with deals made and products woven in during and “alongside creative development” (Hudson and Hudson 494). Lehu concedes, however, that “(a)uteurs will always demand, above all else, complete freedom to express their artistic creation. This freedom, however, does not always mesh perfectly with the marketing ambitions of the advertiser” (136).

Such rigid oversight might sound extreme, but corporations have been burned before. Oft-cited product placement backfires such as *Jerry Maguire* (Crowe, 1996), *Die Hard 2: Die Harder* (Harlin, 1990) (lawsuits filed over placements cut during editing), *Fight Club* (Fincher 1999) and *Natural Born Killers* (Stone, 1994) — wherein “a Coke advertisement was interspersed with a bloody murder scene” — have soured relationships in the past (Karrh, McKee, and Pardun 139; Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 275). Some automobile manufacturers add clauses to contracts stipulating that their “cars shall not be given to the bad guys in the story” (Lehu 109). In a recent case of what was dubbed “product displacement,” director Danny Boyle (*Slumdog Millionaire*, 2008) was forced to digitally scrub logos off of cars (to the tune of twenty-thousand pounds) when Mercedes objected to their vehicles appearing in a Mumbai slum (Hoyle and Malvern).

¹⁴ For more on contractual considerations see Lehu 103-105.

Legalistic posturing bespeaks a desire to right a perceived imbalance. Karrh, McKee, and Pardun state that the “balance of power is generally tilted away from marketers” and that “creative professionals...often hold ‘veto power’ over placements, thus (squelching) marketers best-laid plans (147). Marketers think, due to the creative imperatives of filmmakers, that they “have far less control...(than) with traditional advertising.” Control, they believe, “is not something Hollywood will surrender lightly” (Hudson and Hudson 499).

Are artists truly the last bulwark against the flood? Russel and Belch heard that while certain actors and directors won’t participate in plugging, overall, actors and directors “may compromise their values if (placements) bring significant promotional support.” One studio exec concurs that though “(l)ots of deals get killed...if they think (it)...is also going to deliver a very good promotion which will give them additional millions of dollars worth of media, they most certainly will sometimes set aside their creativity” (79). Russel and Belch found that placements are often instigated from the creative end, with requests for a certain brand coming from artists themselves (80). “(F)ew arguments can stand up to money!” Lehu exults. All that’s left is the negotiating, allowing partnerships to “proceed with a few small adjustments in the mutual interest of the producers of the film and the product champions” (Lehu 136).

In Morgan Spurlock’s product placement meta-documentary *POM Wonderful Presents: The Greatest Story Ever Sold* (2011) — financed entirely through placement, the securing of which constitutes the engine of the story — Spurlock interviews prominent Hollywood directors about creative infringements. While Peter Berg (*The Kingdom, Hancock*) believes that “there are still very, very powerful and very talented artists...who are clearly not interested in this,” Brett

Ratner (the *Rush Hour* trilogy) asserts that “it’s the movie *business*. The game now is how cheap can you make that movie, and how much profit can you make?” Ratner continues:

“Artistic integrity...whatever. I mean...how do you tell the story that you intended to tell without compromising, yes, there is a bit of compromise. But like I said, if there’s a car in a movie, why not be a car that...that a brand is helping...y’know, reach your budget?”

Berg grows more candid: “(General Electric) is my boss...they build jet engines, and weapons systems, and all kinds of crazy electronic appliances, and they don’t give a flying fuck about art.” Spielberg protégé J.J. Abrams (*Star Trek*, *Super 8*) testifies that his “concern is story-telling, not story-selling”; a quote that sounds suspiciously like a slogan.

Lax or resigned attitudes among artists may have something to do with the porous nature of these increasingly interconnected and cross-pollinating spheres. Many top-tier directors cut their teeth on, and/or supplement(ed) their income with, advertisements: Altman, Scorsese, Fellini, Godard, Coppola, Lynch; documentarian Errol Morris; modern auteurs like Spike Jonze, Spike Lee, and Wes Anderson to name a few (Miller 7; Gurevitch 152). Ridley Scott famously directed a spot for Apple Computers; a one-shot broadcast aired during the Superbowl half-time commercial break in 1984, and based on George Orwell’s novel of that title. The spot “relied on viewers’ familiarity with the aesthetics of past dystopian science fiction films,” of which Scott had directed his share,¹⁵ “to anchor the advert and provide narrative meaning” (153).

In 2006, director Baz Luhrmann was recruited by Chanel No. 5 to shoot a “mini-movie” (complete with closing credits) wherein Nicole Kidman swoons and sashays as a celebrity swept into a short-lived rooftop romance. The proceedings proudly cull from a prior

¹⁵ *Alien* (1979), *Blade Runner* (1982).

Luhrmann/Kidman collaboration: *Moulin Rouge* (2001). The ad “condenses a feature film’s worth of romantic narrative signifiers into one minute”¹⁶ and, as visual text, “could not fully function without its filmic predecessors. What emerges...is a picture of a complex and two-way relationship between narrative and spectacle across (Scott and Luhrmann’s) films and advertisements” (Gurevitch 153-4). In situating film and advert along the same continuum, Luhrmann opens a portal from one to another, through which the audience may freely pass.

Miller, in particular, takes umbrage at the blurring of, and interplay between, the aesthetic principles of film and advertising. “Like ads,” he writes, “movies now tend to have a perfectly coordinated total look, as if they’d been designed rather than directed” (7), leading to a drastically reduced palette. “(D)eep focus,” “depth and latitude,” “panoramic composition,” and “moving tableaux,” are supplanted by “close-ups, two-shots, and other setups whereby the action is...repetitiously foregrounded”; cross-dissolves and fade-outs are eschewed for “the simple cut” (9). And gone are the days of “exhilarating fullness” when the audience was required to pay “interpretive attention” (9). Instead of fixing our gaze on one prominently-placed object, the frame once offered an array of details and spacing; an enclosed but lively celestial sphere of texts from which the audience drew their own constellations. Less declaration, more proposition. Now, however, “(e)ach shot presents a content closed and unified, like a fist, and makes the point right in your face” (9). Miller believes that this reductionist, propagandistic technique has dire narrative implications: “this general drift...(has) drastically reduced the movies’ narrative potential, for cinematic narrative works through a range of visual conventions or devices,” an “earlier diversity” which he sees as “all but wiped out” (9).

¹⁶ There are several versions of varying length.

Has there been an equally corrosive effect on the screenplay? Has the writer's "intimate sanctuary" been infiltrated (Russel and Belch 86)? Children's television watchdog Peggy Charren believes that "(i)t has gotten to the point where (product placement) influences the story, where they'll say 'Let's do this instead of that, so we can make 20 deals'. It affects the content of editorial speech" (quoted in Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 275). Script screeners are known to "warn their clients of possible negative consequences" for their brands so that the corporation can lobby the producer for changes, and one plugger boasts that one of his "major functions is to 'be a nuisance and try to kill unfavourable references' to his clients' products" (276).

Is this all so much chest-thumping, or are creators caving to corporate coercion? *North Dallas Forty* (Kotcheff 1979) had a scene added to feature Bertolli salad oil. Sandra Locke, the director of *Impulse* (1990) sought to change the angle of a shot, excising a television on which commercial was playing — a paid placement. She was told that if she proceeded "we don't get the money" (Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 274). Stallone rewrote a scene in *Rocky III* (1982) so that Rocky could proclaim Wheaties "the breakfast of champions" to his son (Lehu 112). In *Cocoon: The Return* a scene "was re-shot so that Quaker Instant Oatmeal could be displayed more prominently" (Balasubramanian 33). Even titles have been tweaked at a sponsor's behest: *You Have Mail* became *You've Got Mail* (1998), a much clearer echo of producer AOL's erstwhile e-mail notification language (Lehu 136). Others simply bowed to the inevitable. *Transformers* (Bay, 2007) producer Lorenzo di Bonaventura claimed that "(t)he script was designed to incorporate some of these things... Hopefully smart filmmakers will start [talking to promotional partners] earlier. The earlier the dialogue begins, the sooner they can integrate you in ways that are legitimate" (Lehu 119).

In Spurlock's documentary, Ratner recalls that "until I started directing movies I didn't realize how it worked, and then a bunch of guys in suits come down to the set with a product and like (sic) 'Oh yeah, you need to use this in the scene.'" Product placement pioneer Norm Marshall told Spurlock about a difficult director who tried to use a sponsor's product negatively. Marshall placed a few calls and pulled the trucks, hobbling the film (the scene was cut). Does Marshall ever recommend script changes? "Absolutely. Doesn't always happen, but..." Some agents feel so involved on the artistic end that they see themselves *as writers*. "I'm part screenwriter," claims a prominent agent. "I'm a creative artist" (Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 276). Here too, the trend is towards more control, not less. In 1990, Miller portended "those authorial prerogatives once held by" artists giving ground to "bankers and MBAs" (6). Writing in 1993, Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie allowed that "it seems reasonable to assume that...advertisers (will) intrude further into the creative process" (274). "Compared to the results from eight years prior," write Karrh, McKee, and Pardun in 2004, "placements can force some trade-offs between creative and financial concerns in movie making" (143). Speaking in 2011, John Wells, president of the Writers Guild of America (West) predicted that "overall, there is going to be a moment, and I don't think it's very far off, where the larger brands, meaning the larger advertisers, can dictate...the conditions under which they're prepared to advertise" (Spurlock).

Another means of gauging the influence of integration is to examine how placement is depicted in films themselves. While the Post-*E.T.* boom reflects an industry epiphany, so too does it entail, as I wrote earlier, recognition *by the audience*. Integration is no longer a force of commerce only, but of culture. As placement has evolved and multiplied in form, moviemakers

can't help but concede our awareness. We canny masses are rewarded for our perspicacity through frequent nudges and winks in a sort of dialogical mutual-recognition feedback loop.

In *Wayne's World* (Spheeris, 1992), slick music industry agent (Rob Lowe) notifies Wayne and Garth (Mike Myers and Dana Carvey) of their contractual obligations to sponsors. Wayne and Garth refuse to “sell-out” whilst concurrently pitching products to the camera. The scene is clearly intended as irony, and yet the products they plug are real: Doritos, Reebok, Pepsi, etc. “I, for one, will not bow to any sponsor,” says Wayne, lifting a slice of pizza from a clearly emblazoned Pizza Hut box, and mugging at the audience. The creators of *Josie and the Pussycats* (Elphont, Kaplan 2001) take a “wall of sound” approach, plastering every square inch of screen space with a dizzying display of brands and logos. Here too, the intentions are satirical: the Pussycats have been signed by greedy record producers as a coffer-filling *flavour-of-the-week* outfit. Corporate villainess Fiona (Parker Posey) tours a group of global elites through a secret underground *New York Stock Exchange*-esque hive, brimful and buzzing with fad-makers. “This is where it starts,” she declaims, “the fads, the fashions, the product placement... We turn your world into one giant TV commercial.”¹⁷ But the lines that once delineated mockery, once so blatant, are seemingly bound to blur. Witness 2007's popular *Juno*, wherein the eponymous teenager (Ellen Page) accuses Mark (the prospective adoptive father of her unborn child, played by Jason Bateman) of having “sold out.” Once a promising musician, Mark now devotes his energies to writing commercial jingles. The friendly “confrontation” occurs over a prominently-placed bottle of *Sobe*-brand beverage. This would seem sardonic, and yet characters have, from the opening of the film, been affiliated with brands — Juno with Sunny Delight, and Paulie (a

¹⁷ *Josie's* uplifting ending sees all characters shed the trappings of appearance and accept themselves for who they truly are, warts and all.

central character played by Michael Cera) with Tic-Tacs — integrated through multiple visual and verbal placements.

Is ironical product placement still placement? In “The Discourse of Advertising,” Richard Ohmann contends that “as analysts have been saying for decades, an ad for any product tends to promote *all* products” (212). Is a plug done with a wink any less of a plug?¹⁸ (Am I inadvertently promoting products — films and foodstuffs alike — by naming them in this essay?)

While we’re on the subject, Gurevitch argues that, ironically, it was narrative that originally displaced commerce, and not vice versa:

The arrival of narrative in cinema marked the beginning of a slow but seismic shift in its status as a cultural form...(propelling) cinema into a more complex set of discursive relations with the culture it shaped (as well as reflected) at the same time as it propelled advertisers into a more complex set of relations with their audiences” (145).

Is all the sweat and toil devoted to divining the most potent and productive means of normalizing and naturalizing product placement simply sponsors reaffirming their original rights?

It doesn’t matter. Narrative changed us; changed our perception of feature films, perforating the line by which film — film’s *purpose* — was torn in half. Advertising was rendered an “other,” and companies had to defer to the “increasingly conventional wisdom that...movies should tell a story and only sell indirectly” (Segrave, quoted in Gurevitch 145). Placement became narrative’s ugly step-sibling; its “culturally degrading” status implicitly reinforced through film studies that “privileged” analysis of narrative elements over non-narrative ones. The reintegration of integration only served to undergird the “discursive

¹⁸ In the case of *Josie*, the day after I watched the film I could only remember a single brand, the first in the deluge, featured in one of the film’s funniest scenes.

separation of film narrative from advertising spectacle,” leaving placement perceived not as “a facet of narrative form but an imposition on it” (Gurevitch 146).

And here we stand: on one side of the battlefield — the corporate interests determined to (re-)conquer the narrative realm; on the other — the audience, defending our right to unblemished, unadulterated narrative. Which brings us back to the paradox: tactics. If the charge is too obvious, we barricade the fortress. If too weakly mounted, the attack falters.

There are, however, sympathizers in our midst. Our strength supposedly rests on our acumen; as soon as we perceive intent, our mental drawbridge pulls up. But this “defense mechanism” is rooted in the assumption that we don’t *like* advertising in movies, and that doesn’t hold true for everyone. The more positively predisposed a person is towards advertising in general, the greater the likelihood that they will accept placement as a practice (often on “enhanced realism” grounds) (Lee, Sung and Choi 481-2, 489; Bressoud, Lehu, and Russel 378; Hudson and Hudson 497). Comparing attitudes of American and South Korean audiences (residents of North America and Asia-Pacific are generally more generously inclined toward placement than their European counterparts (Hudson and Hudson 497)) Lee, Sung and Choi found that sunny, brand-positive temperaments are “a threshold progression that leads to higher-level effects such as purchase intentions and brand loyalty” (488). In other words, the more we like advertising, the more we’re cool with placement, the more we’re cool with placement, the more all attendant benefits/outcomes apply. The signature trait of the consumer most cool with placement? Lee, Sung and Choi report that the “independent variable with the most predictive

power form brand attention was materialism” (495).¹⁹ Materialistic individuals are all the more likely to view brands as “vehicles that allow them to bridge the perceived gap between their actual and ideal selves” (489). Materialism is the inclination to lower the drawbridge and see what’s for sale.

Individualistic cultures prioritizing “personal goals over collective concerns” are all the more likely to instill materialistic values. Culture is an “environmental characteristic” — the invisible “ambience” in which we swim — and exerts significant influence on “consumer attitude and behavior” (482). “Cultural orientation,” in turn, “is directly reflected in the persuasion process and in variations of marketing practices” (483). The more materialistic the culture, the more materialistic its movies.

Karrh, McKee, and Pardun found Americans “less concerned with the ethics of placement” and “more accepting of and more likely to purchase products shown in feature films” (140). The 15-34 age demographic is especially aware, *and* more tolerant, of brand integration (Hudson and Hudson 497), a synthesis much to the marketers’ benefit. And modern-day consumers aren’t simply buying *things*, but the *symbolic value* of those things. “Dramatic portrayals of materialistic themes and consumption desires fused into entertainment media (lead) consumers to view the conspicuous consumption of a certain product or service as a culturally accepted means of seeking success, happiness and a good life” (Lee, Sung and Choi 498). The long-term success of placement may have less to do with tactics and control than engendering

¹⁹ Materialism is defined as “the importance a person places on possessions and their acquisition as a necessary or desirable form of conduct to reach desired end states, including happiness” (Richins and Dawson, quoted in Lee, Sung and Choi 307)

and encouraging attentive, enthusiastic, “happy” shoppers; less “imagined community” than “imagined commodity.”

No surprise then that children are the primary target. Up until the age of eight, a child lacks the necessary critical faculties to infer the persuasive intent behind advertising, making them uniquely susceptible game.²⁰ Then, from age “twelve and upward, adolescents can reason abstractly and understand the motives of advertisers even to the point of growing cynical” (Calvert 206, 215). The very stylistic degradation over which Miller despairs — “action, movement, rapid pacing, sound effects, loud music” — are all hallmarks of youth entertainment; “attention-getting production features” that secure children’s full concentration, facilitate recall and retention, and drive purchasing (208-9, 217).²¹

Over time, this “endless barrage of material messages” figures prominently in the formation of identity; a self formed “predominantly defined by its capacity to consume” (Hill 347-8). Hill believes that commercialized/materialist attitudes can become ingrained “to such an extent that images sold through advertising (become) the symbols of childhood” (349), infiltrating “deep into the psyche” (357). “(C)hildren learn at an early age that conformity, defining self-worth by what you own, and seeking happiness through the acquisition of material goods are traits towards which to aspire” (352). An altar forged in the crucible of consumption, at

²⁰ Based on studies using Piaget’s theory of cognitive development (Calvert 214).

²¹ Their purchase power has grown formidable. “In 2002,” Calvert relays, “U.S. four-to-twelve-year-olds spent \$30 billion...(and) twelve-to-seventeen year olds spent \$112.5 billion in 2003.” And not just their own money, but they wield impressive sway over the family finances as well, to the tune of \$500 billion per year. “To influence youth is to influence the entire family’s buying decisions” (207).

which children are set to worship; prostration through purchase. “Marketing to children and adolescents,” Calvert concludes, “is a way of life in the United States” (224).²²

There are a slew of possible deleterious side-effects — physical, emotional, social and psychological — associated with zealous consumerism: increased cynicism, conflicts in parent/child relationships, and spiking obesity rates have all been linked to commercial exposure. The more invested in consumer culture, the more depressed and anxious, the lower the self-esteem, and the more likely to suffer psychosomatic complaints (Hill 347, 350, 359; Calvert 218).²³

American entertainment has long been considered a major stimulator of the economy through a “multiplier effect” greater than that of any other industry, and American films reach far beyond an American market. Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie state that it is considered axiomatic that Hollywood movies “stimulate demand” for American products (288). Lee, Sung and Choi’s study suggests that “product placement in films (is) an effective means to market brands on a global basis” (499). And not just products, but the practice of placing itself. Integration “has spread rapidly from the US to other countries and has become an important addition to the international marketing and promotion mix” (497). Lee, Sung and Choi claim that “young adult audiences around the world...are believed to increasingly converge of terms of lifestyle and taste...(appearing) to be very similar regardless of the part of the world in which they live” (480);

²² A potentially massive secondary market is that of the child’s future adult self. If a corporation can forge a “permanent, positive association with the product,” then the consumer may remain loyal to for life. “Establishing brand loyalty at such an early age has powerful implications,” writes Hill, as “more than half of the brands used in childhood continue to be used in adulthood” (356).

²³ Another key benefit of integration, especially for ethically-charged industries, is the circumvention of government oversight (Russel and Belch 82). In children’s television, for example, commercial and program must be clearly separated. For films, however, a 1952 court ruling affirmed the medium’s “First Amendment protection...and (prohibited) their censorship by the state, except in cases of obscenity” Thus, Federal Communications Commission “sponsorship identification rules on films may threaten artistic freedom of expression” and should not be applied to product placements (Balasubramanian 36).

an advantageous world-wide flattening of youth culture. As advertising one product may advertise them all, does one American movie promote *all* American movies, and, by virtue, American consumerism?

Product placement works, at least anecdotally: sales of Pinot Noir rose 15-30% after the release of *Sideways* (Payne, 2004); Etch-A-Sketch sales catapulted 4000% (yes: *thousand*) with the success of *Toy Story* (Lasseter, 1995), and Audi was pleased as punch after *I, Robot*. As obligations and oversight are refined and legally codified, and Hollywood's cultural prerogatives go global, where does the practice go from here? Perhaps a product or two in the opening credits (Lehu 194)? Maybe a brand name in the title, *à la Harold and Kumar Go to White Castle* (Leiner 2004) (a *de facto* verbal plug every time the movie is mentioned)? Interested in a roving festival in the mould of the Stella Artois Screen Tour (203)? Digital insertion — products inserted *post facto* via the magic of CGI — holds promise. *Demolition Man* (Brambilla, 1993) squandered precious resources on reshoots to replace Taco Bell with Pizza Hut for domestic and international releases respectively (Balasubramanian 34).²⁴ Digital insertion averts duplicate expenses by enabling market-, culture-, or country-specific “à la carte” post-production placements, potentially “(multiplying) contracts from one geographical zone to another” (Lehu 235).

“(I)t is possible to imagine, in the near future, the opportunity of integrating into a film certain placements that will differ according to the viewers at whom they are aimed: these placements would then be ‘adapted’ to the spectator’s identified characteristics (demographic, social, economic, geographic and so on)” (Lehu 237).

²⁴ Though Taco Bell and Pizza Hut are both properties of Yum! Brands, Inc., Taco Bell was, at the time, less well known outside of the U.S.

Gurevitch describes “‘cinemas of transaction’...(constituting) a complex and multiply interrelated system of textual, technological, aesthetic and economic developments whereby digitally distributed attractions and promotional practices span many media and textual forms” (156). The future may portend more than a further blurring of the boundaries between spheres and, rather, a full blown collapse (convergence?) of one into the other. Consider, in *The Island*, the clone Jordan Two Delta (Scarlett Johansson) who escapes the secret, holographically-enclosed, underground facility where her like are harvested, and comes face-to-“face” with the woman on whom she was modeled. This “reveal” occurs via a huge billboard: Johansson’s sultry mug splashed across a Calvin Klein ad. Johansson had recently — in real life — become a CK spokesmodel. How to parse where film ends and ad begins?

There is, however, one big fat wild card in the thick of the deck: no one can will a movie into a hit. Novelist and screenwriter William Goldman (*Marathon Man*, *The Princess Bride*) famously wrote that “nobody knows anything in the movie business because no one can predict popular taste...nobody really knows which films will be big” (Goldman 39). *The Island* was considered a flop. Luhrman’s “mini-film” elicited “hostility and claims of failure” (Gurevitch 156). *Harold and Kumar* spawned two sequels, but no film in the series has done bragging-rights-sized business. How many “legendary” successes against how many ineffectual efforts?²⁵ Even if the alchemy were perfected, the substance must still be mixed into unstable compounds.

Which leads us to perhaps the most unsettling of of integration’s insidious influences: in order to limit the risk of a flop, filmmakers are rewarded for playing it safe. Formula is key and encourages...not censorship exactly, but a sort of cultural chilling effect which, unfortunately,

²⁵ We won’t even get into *E.T.* rip-off *Mac & Me* (Raffill, 1988)

works to the same end: limiting the kinds of movies that get made. X- and R-rated films are *cinema non grata* (Russel and Belch 88). Proven track records equal safer bets, so firms tilt towards perpetuating “the status quo,” sticking with celebrities with finely-honed credibility (Wasko, Phillips, and Purdie 289). This results in a “repetition of themes, images and characters...severely (limiting) the expression of ideas values” (289). Hollywood fare often carries a patina of *deja vu*, the faint whine of familiarity: the way the music prods and tugs, the exalting lead actor lighting, the utilitarian editing, the placement, front and center, of not just *the* product, but *every* product: brand, star, and sentimental moment; each rotated onto the pedestal, exerting centrifugal pseudo-significance on every other element present. Miller dismisses the whole notion of “reality enhancement.” “(P)roduct placement does not seem natural at all but is deliberately anti-realistic,” set “within the sort of idealized display that occurs nowhere in real life but everywhere in advertising” (6). In an ever-more perilous industry in an economically unsound world, the more the prerogatives of pluggers force filmmakers to stick with the tried and true, the more they may bleed film of its most intoxicating elixir: the element of surprise. Spectacle may suffice in the short run, but it can only be trumped by cranking the volume, by perpetually upping the stimulus ante. The only antidote to this loud and stultifying sameness may be the same medicine that stifled the pathogen in the first place: novel and surprising stories.

Just as Spielberg ushered in a new era of product placement, so too did he usher it out. In 2002, twenty years post-*E.T.*, Spielberg directed (and, through the studio he co-founded, Dreamworks SKG, produced and released) *Minority Report*. Tom Cruise starred as John Anderton in this loose adaptation of a Philip K. Dick short story about a not-so-distant future (2054) where telepathic “Pre-Cogs” expose criminals before they commit their crimes. The film

is expensive-looking, unsurprisingly slick, rife with Oedipal overtones (the inevitability of fate, a plucking out (and replacing) of eyes), and thematically treats in sight and seeing (Rountree 78). The denizens of this future are constantly having their eyes scanned to a twofold advantage: maintaining order and selling people stuff. Billboards beckon and beseech Anderton (and by implication, all of us) by name. The plot kicks into gear when Anderton is accused of a crime he has yet to commit, and must go on the lam while being pursued by another cop, Danny Witwer (Colin Farrell). Anderton (gruesomely) swaps eyeballs to evade the omnipotent machines, and Danny deduces the move, musing that now the scanners “can’t ID him [Anderton] to pick his pockets.” The line is delivered with no particular gravitas or conviction; a throwaway. Irony? Wink? Whose pockets are being picked, right? *Minority Report* is branded to the hilt: dozens of placements/mentions; a centerpiece action sequence culminating in fisticuffs in a quasi-futuristic car factory (later deduced as Toyota’s); a sort of funny scene in set in The Gap, and — a Spielberg special — a big reveal involving a Revo billboard. The mysterious “third man” from a Pre-Cog’s vision turns out to be a sunglasses model. “That’s the man,” says Anderton. “The man in the window,” as we are treated to yet another glimpse of the signage. *Minority Report* doesn’t set any placement records,²⁶ but it does indulge in an impressive array of strategies, as if ticking off an agency wish list; even paying homage to personal targeting. The result isn’t outrage or overt persuasion, but a rather mundane *meh*. The film was moderately successful, but as a showcase for story on the one hand, and commerce on the other, it can’t seem to muster much enthusiasm for either. Here is a perfectly serviceable, mildly entertaining, big-budget Hollywood action film assembled by a slew of successful celebrities, just bland enough to be

²⁶ This seems to have been set by the Stallone vehicle *Driven* (Harlin, 2001) with 102 placements (Lehu 140).

palatable but not spicy enough to recommend seconds. If this is the plugger's dream project, then the practice will likely undo itself. *E.T.* may have opened our collective eyes to the power of the product, but, as evinced by *Minority Report*, we may as well turn our gaze elsewhere. The star has aged and lost its sheen, a victim of its own success. *Minority Report* throws every trick in the product placement playbook at the screen, but nothing especially sticks. The ultimate irony may be that, at the close of the era he brought into being, one of the carnival's best barkers tried to dazzle us with a spectacle about seeing, but gave us nothing of interest to look at. "Do you see?" asks an emaciated, emancipated Pre-Cog: "Do you see?" Yes. Yes, we see all too well.

Works Cited

- Balasubramanian, Silva K. "Beyond Advertising and Publicity: Hybrid Messages and Public Policy Issues" *Journal of Advertising* 23:4 (1994): 29-46. *JSTOR*. Web. Nov. 5 2011
- Bhatnagar, Namita, Lerzan Aksoy and Selin A. Malkoc. "Embedding Brands Within Media Content: The Impact of Message, Media, and Consumer Characteristics on Placement Efficacy" *The Psychology of Entertainment Media*. Ed. L.J. Shrum. NY: Routledge Academic, 2004. 99-116. Print.
- Bressoud, Etienne, Jean-Marc Lehu, and Christel Antonia Russel. "The Product Well Placed: The Relative Impact of Placement and Audience Characteristics on Placement Recall." *Journal of Advertising Research* 50:4 (2010). *EBSCOhost*. Web. Nov. 5 2011.
- Calvert, Sandra L. "Children as Consumers: Advertising and Marketing." *Children and Electronic Media* 18:1 (2008): 205-234. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 Nov. 2011
- Cast Away*. Dir. Robert Zemeckis. Perf. Tom Hanks, and Helen Hunt. Dreamworks SKG, 2000. DVD.

Goldman, William. *Adventures in the Screen Trade*. New York: Grand Central Publishing, 1989.
Print.

Gurevitch, Leon. "Problematic dichotomies: narrative and spectacle in advertising and media scholarship." *Popular Narrative Media* 2:2 (2009): 143-158. *Academic OneFile*. Web.
Nov. 8 2011.

Harold & Kumar go to White Castle. Dir. Danny Leiner. Perf. John Cho, Kal Penn, and Ethan Embry. Kingsgate Films, 2004. DVD.

Hill, Jennifer Ann. "Endangered childhoods: how consumerism is impacting child and youth identity." *Media, Culture & Society* 33:3 (2011): 347-362. *Scholars Portal Journals*.
Web. Nov. 5 2011.

Hoyle, Ben, and Jack Malvern. "Film-makers driven to spend a mint removing car brand from slum shots." *The Times*. Oct. 21 2008. Web.

Hudson, Simon, and David Hudson. "Branded Entertainment: A New Advertising Technique or Product Placement in Disguise?" *Journal of Marketing Management* 22:5-6 (2006)
489-504. *Taylor & Francis Online*. Web. Nov. 5 2011.

I, Robot. Dir. Alex Proyas. Perf. Will Smith, Bridget Moynahan, and Bruce Greenwood. 20th Century Fox, 2004. DVD.

Johnstone, Emma, and Christopher A. Dodd. "Placements as Mediators of Brand Salience within a UK Cinema Audience." *Journal of Marketing Communications* 6:3 (2000): 141-158.
EBSCOhost. Web. Nov. 8 2011.

Jerry Maguire. Dir. Cameron Crowe. Perf. Tom Cruise, Cuba Gooding Jr., and Renee Zellweger. TriStar Pictures, 1996. DVD.

Josie and the Pussycats. Dir. Harry Elfont, and Deborah Kaplan. Perf. Rachael Leigh Cook, Tara Reid, and Rosario Dawson. Universal Pictures, MGM, 2001. DVD.

Juno. Dir. Jason Reitman. Perf. Ellen Page, Michael Cera, and Jennifer Garner. 20th Century Fox, 2007. DVD.

Karrh, James A., Kathy Brittain McKee, and Carol J. Pardun. "Practitioners' Evolving Views on Product Placement Effectiveness." *Journal of Advertising Research* 43:2 (2003): 138-149. *EBSCOhost*. Web. Nov. 8 2011.

Lee, Taejun, Yongjun Sung and Sejung Marina Choi. "Young adults' responses to product placement in movies and television shows: A comparative study of the United States and South Korea." *International Journal of Advertising* 30:3 (2011): 479-507. *EBSCOhost*. Web. 5 Nov. 2011

Lehu, Jean, Marc. *Branded Entertainment: Product Placement & Brand Strategy in the Entertainment Business*. Philadelphia: Kogan Page Limited, 2007. Print.

Miller, Mark Crispin. "Hollywood: The Ad — The Techniques and the Cartoon-Like Moral Vision of Television Advertising Are Exerting More and More Influence over American Moviemaking." *The Atlantic*. Apr. 1990. Web. Nov. 11 2011.

Minority Report. Dir. Steven Spielberg. Perf. Tom Cruise, Colin Farrell, and Samantha Morton. 20th Century Fox, and Dreamworks SKG, 2002. DVD.

Newell, Jay, Charles T. Salmon, and Susan Chang. "The Hidden History of Product Placement." *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* 50:4 (2006): 575-594. *EBSCOhost*. Web. Nov. 8 2011.

POM Wonderful Presents: The Greatest Movie Ever Sold. Dir. Morgan Spurlock. Snoot Entertainment, 2011. DVD.

Reijmersdal, Eva van. "Brand Placement Prominence: Good for Memory! Bad for Attitudes?"

Journal of Advertising Research 49:2 (2009): 151-153. *EBSCOhost*. Web. Nov. 8 2011.

Rountree, Cathleen. "Myth, Shadow Politics, and Perennial Philosophy in Minority Report." *The*

San Francisco Jung Institute Library Journal 23:2 (2004): 77-88. *JSTOR*. Web. 5 Nov.

2011.

Rocky III. Dir. Sylvester Stallone. Perf. Sylvester Stallone, Talia Shire, and Mr. T. United Artists,

1982. DVD.

Russel, Cristel Antonia, and Michael Belch. "A Managerial Investigation into the Product

Placement Industry." *Journal of Advertising Research* 45:1 (2005): 73-92. *EBSCOhost*.

Web. Nov. 8 2011.

Slumdog Millionaire. Dir. Danny Boyle. Perf. Dev Patel, Freida Pinto, and Saurabh Shukla.

Film4, Pathe Pictures International, 2008. DVD.

The Island. Dir. Michael Bay. Perf. Scarlett Johansson, Ewan McGregor, and Djimon Hounsou.

Dreamworks, 2005. DVD.

Wasko, Janet, Mark Phillips and Chris Purdie. "Hollywood meets Madison Avenue: the

commercialization of US films." *Media, Culture & Society* 15:2 (1993): 271-293. *Scholars*

Portal Journals. Web. Nov. 5 2011.

Wayne's World. Dir. Penelope Spheeris. Perf. Mike Myers, Dana Carvey, and Rob Lowe.

Paramount Pictures, 1992. DVD.