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The urban landscape and fashion advertising: the case of the DKNY brand

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Resumo

Investment in strategic communication, and especially in advertising, in the fashion design industry remains a prerequisite for promoting the brand value. The effectiveness of brand visibility and awareness depends mostly on advertising, both in the context of fashion magazines and the new media, and in the context of the outdoors medium, which is simultaneously one of the most traditional and modern means of mass communication. This paper aims to analyse and discuss both dimensions. Firstly, it aims to provide an understanding of how the urban landscape is built into fashion advertising, and especially to investigate the extent to which the collective imagination contributes to that process. This research therefore seeks to identify the main landscape referents represented and search for the respective association with various cultural and artistic universes, such as literature, photography or cinema. Underlying this critical reflection is an understanding that landscape is not just a simple decor, but conversely an extremely important visual and discursive resource for the advertising message. Secondly, this paper attempts to challenge the implications of fashion brands outdoor advertising specifically in relation to the urban landscape and to the everyday life experience. Therefore, it is also an important aim of this article to discuss outdoor advertising within the scope of the more recent cultural and aesthetic trends. In order to achieve the stated objectives and engage in a scientific discussion of the topic, the case of the fashion brand Donna Karan New York – DKNY was selected, as it is considered to be paradigmatic of the main operational principles and hypotheses researched.

Palavras-chave

Fashion brands; urban landscape; outdoor advertising

Introduction

As fashion design is an industry that is part of urban culture and even creative industries (Wenting, 2008), it is above all associated with the major centres of artistic and cultural production, thus contributing to the symbolic value of cities like Paris, Milan, London and New York. Indeed, these cities are often considered to be more or less immediate referents by the visual communication of fashion brands, thus contributing to their identity. The Channel brand, which is associated with the city of Paris, and Burberrys, which is associated with London, are just two examples.

The urban landscape is that which immediately enables us to recognise the symbolic and distinctive value of a particular city. By taking into account the possibility of transferring that value to the brand, it can be stated that the respective landscape plays an often crucial role in the context of a certain communication strategy. In particular,

fashion communication interacts with the landscape in two possible ways: either via the representation of landscape in advertising, or by outdoor advertising.

City, modernity and imagination

In *The Painter of Modern Life* of Charles Baudelaire, the celebration of "the beautiful, fashion and happiness" is accompanied by a particular notion of modernity. The poet argues that it is the historical continuity, which runs against the paradigm according to which modernity represents a departure from the past, that accounts for the on-going desire for aesthetic expression reflected particularly in clothing throughout the different seasons. Consider the following excerpt:

> "If an impartial man leafed through all French fashions one by one from the origin of France until the present day, he would not find in them anything shocking or even surprising. The transitions would be as abundantly present as they are in the scale of the animal world. Therefore, no gaps, no surprises (...) the immortal appetite for the beautiful has always found its satisfaction" (Baudelaire, 2006: 280--281).

And if modernity is characterised by the marked obsolescence, by the accelerated overtaking of lived time, this does not mean, according to Baudelaire, the inability to "extract from fashion the poetry that resides in its historical envelope, to distil the eternal from the transitory" (Baudelaire, 2006: 289). In other words: "Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable" *(Ibid:* 290). Thus, it can be added, fashion and modernity merge, and the nature of both is compromised by a given time experience: a time that flees forward, that advances by turning its back on the past, and simultaneously a time that opens up to eternal duration; an extended, circular time that, albeit not denying the permanent transformation, welcomes the ceaseless becoming of a past that is updated every moment.

Walter Benjamin, too, in his book *The Arcades Project (Das Passagen-Werk) (Paris -- Capital of the Nineteenth Century),* wanders through the intoxicating contingent nature of an urban landscape that constantly catches the eye: the shop windows, the signs and advertisements, the crowd frenzy, the universal exhibitions... The commodity reification is that which everywhere in major cities, in the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century, astonishes passers-by, leaving no doubt about the landscape transformations operated by modernity. Suddenly, like a 'shock', the urban landscape itself becomes a spectacle or a product to be consumed by the look. As he specifically discusses fashion, Benjamin argues:

> 'Fashion prescribes the ritual according to which the commodity fetish demands to be worshipped; Grandville extends the authority of fashion to objects of everyday use, as well as to the cosmos. In pushing it to an extreme, it reveals its nature. It couples the living body to the inorganic world. To the

> living, it defends the rights of the corpse. Fetishism, succumbing to the sex appeal of the non-organic, is fashion's vital nerve' (Benjamin, 2006: 23).

Once again, modernity seems to be characterised especially by a certain paradoxical duplicity, fashion being one of its privileged modes of expression. On the one hand, it features the inanimate and inorganic matter that is pervaded by life and freshly sublimated under the status of a commodity *(*the *sex appeal* of the non-organic). On the other hand, it is the widespread objectification – whether this means converting the body into pose, or waiving one's own subjectivity – that contributes to a modern lifestyle, which is marked by rampant *novelty* (the ceaseless exchange and circulation of constantly renewed goods) and simultaneously by the dominant *stunned rigidity.*

Numerous film excerpts can be found in early twentieth century cinema that account for the relevance of urban landscape as an unambiguous way of perceiving modernity, built in the splendour of consumption and widespread aestheticisation. That is particularly the case of the films of Whalter Ruttmann (*Berlin: Symphony of a Metropolis,* 1927) and Dziga Vertov *(Man with a Movie Camera,* 1929). From the display of manikins in shop windows to outdoor advertising, including the clothing worn by passers-by themselves, all stimuli are combined to arrange an intensely appealing and even stunning visual composition.

Inspired by a kind of new sensology, which is rooted especially in Eastern philosophies, Mario Perniola later resumed the concept of *sex appeal* of the inorganic to describe the obliteration of feeling, i.e. the movement from feeling as an intrinsic quality of an autonomous and knowing subject to the "already felt", thus approaching the material content (Sachgehalt), by diluting an impersonal flow that is common to all beings. In particular, the inexpressive pose of the punk culture and fashion of the 1980s is presented by the author as a metaphor of that new kind of sensology.

The city being taken to be a catwalk of the most visible changes operated by modernity in the landscape, it is worth questioning their various representations, i.e. how Paris, London, Naples and New York become places so often revisited by our imagination.

At the origin of the afore-mentioned documentaries that Ruttmann and Vertov, among others, extraordinarily made is the desire to shoot modern life, which further to Flores (2007: 97) can be defined as "the attitude of the cameraman": "to explore life itself in its movement; real people pursuing their activities... to find that which has never been seen. The modern condition is the one that enables and encourages the emergence of the new." The author also argues that "cinema can be understood as a modern form of representation and experience, which is related to the characteristics of experience mobilisation, technisation and virtualisation that came into operation after the Industrial Revolution" (*Ibid:* 17).

The various forms of modern experience, of which the *rural-urban* dichotomy has long prevailed, as they brought social and cultural changes deriving from absolutely different lifestyles, were somehow conveyed in the cinema, often by means of landscapes that act as "background" to the narrative. Especially in the American cinema, this theme is immediately apparent in films like *Sunrise* (1927), *The Crowd* (1928), *The Barkeleys of*

Broadway (1949), *Coogan's Bluff* (1968) and *Lonely Are the Brave* (1962), among others. As he discusses King Vidor's *The Crowd,* McArthur (2002: 25) states:

> "The Crowd sends out conflicting signals about the city. On the central protagonist's entry to the city, a montage of urban scenes – milling crowds, bumper to bumper automobiles and aerial views of houses packed together – culminates in a series of vertiginous shots up the face of skyscrapers and into a massive open-plan insurance office where hundreds of workers, including the central protagonist (with his own assigned number), sit in serried ranks of identical desks. Alongside this powerful statement of the city's impersonality, the urban milieu is represented as a site of romance, excitement and enjoyment, as in the ride through the New York streets in an open-topped bus and the visit to Coney Island."

In parallel with the experience of the 'crowd', a kind of modernity indicators that are apparent in big cities – in the so-called reality as in the imaginary universe – can be compiled into a diverse and long list: speed; constant flow of people and vehicles; large concentration of visual stimuli (such as advertising and shop windows), among others; modern architecture (tall buildings, innovative shapes and materials, ...); planning and urban infrastructure (wide boulevards, department stores, ...); simultaneously tedious and unpredictable nature of everyday life; often refreshed character of the landscape, etc. ...

Fashion advertising: the DKNY case

> 'That I'm a woman makes me want to nurture others, fulfill needs and solve problems. At the same time, the artist within me strives for beauty, both sensually and visually. So design is a constant challenge to balance comfort with luxe, the practical with the desirable.' (Donna Karan)[1].

Genesis

Donna Karan is the fashion design creative director of the international company DK, which is named after herself. She founded the company in 1984 with Stephan Weiss. In 2001, the company was bought by the French luxury group LVMH – Moet Hennessy Louis Vuitton.

The designer was born to a tailor, Gabby Faske, and a model, Helen, and was stepdaughter to Harold Flaxman, who worked himself in the fashion business. She was born in Long Island and studied in New York (at the Parson's School of Design), where she worked for some time for the fashion company and brand Anne Klein. Thus, as DK states, *it literally and creatively began in New York.* She designed her first collection and experienced her first fashion show while she was in high school.

[1] http://www.donnakaran.com/collections/ Date accessed 21/05/2012.

She states that it was her desire to dress her daughter, Gabby, that led her into creating DKNY, in 1989. In the meantime, several brands were launched under the DKNY umbrella: DKNY Jeans, D, KNY Active, DKNY Underwear, DKNY JEANS Juniors and DKNY Kids. In addition, DKNY also produces shoes and accessories collections, designed "tounderscore its New York City street-smart look."

Between 1992 and 1993, the first menswear collection and the brand DKNY MEN were launched, which included sports and casual, as well as more sophisticated clothing. In 2001, the Donna Karan Home collection was launched.

DK won several prizes:

> 'The Council of Fashion Designers of America has saluted her six times; and most recently in 2010 she was nominated for their Womenswear Designer of the Year Award. In 2003, Karan was the first American designer to receive Fashion Group International's "Superstar Award." A year later, Karan's alma mater Parson's gave her an Honorary Doctorate to commemorate her contribution to the school and fashion industry, and in 2007, Glamour magazine named Karan one of their Women of the Year.'[2]

Currently, Donna Karan International has about 100 Donna Karan Collection, DKNY and DKNY JEANS shops worldwide.

Mission and values

> "Everything I do is a matter of heart, body and soul," (Donna Karan)[3].

DKNY collections are marked by a "modern clothing style", i.e. by the "luxury", "creative expression", "comfort" and "sensuality". Femininity is an assertively highlighted value: "For me, designing is an expression of who I am as a woman, with all the complications, feelings and emotions"[4].

In their website, DKNY introduce their mission as follows:

> 'The mission of the Donna Karan Company, as a design driven company, is to represent the international pulse of New York in the design, marketing and delivery of a complete lifestyle system to a global customer. We will apply the highest standards of creativity, integrity, quality and innovation to our products and concepts.'[5]

The main aim of the DKNY brand is to create a complete wardrobe that is suitable for both night and day, for weekdays and weekends, every season, and ultimately to

[2] http://www.donnakaran.com/collections/ Date accessed 21/05/2012.

[3] http://www.donnakaran.com/collections/ Date accessed 21/05/2012.

[4] http://www.donnakaran.com/collections/ Date accessed 21/05/2012.

[5] http://www.donnakaran.com/collections/ Date accessed 21/05/2012.

please a target audience whose urban and modern lifestyle, the New York way, especially requires the versatility demanded by rapidly changing circumstances, space and timing. As DK states: "I'm designing for an international man and woman. A creative person who never knows where a day is going to take them."[6] And she adds: "That's why New York is on the label. It sets the pace, the attitude."[7]

New York in DKNY advertising (from the supporting to the leading role)

> 'During the day. New York is too severe, colourless, and, if the weather is greyish, it is a city of lead.
> Why not colour the houses? Why this gap in the country where everything is invented?
> Fifth Avenue, Red; Madison, Blue; Park Avenue, Yellow. Why not? And the lack of green? New York has no trees. Research into medicine has long established that the green colour, in particular, is indispensable to life; one should live amidst colour: it is as necessary as water and fire.
> Clothing shops could be compelled to massively sell green dresses, green suits...
> Every month, a fashion dictator would establish the monthly or quarterly colours – the blue quarter, the pink fortnight! Trees would be carried through the streets for those who cannot go to the countryside. Mobile landscapes decorated with tropical flowers would be slowly carried by plumed horses.' (Fernand Léger) [8]

It is a known fact that fashion photography greatly dismisses all attention to the smallest details, whether these are related to the models, clothing or accessories displayed, or to decor and / or the landscape that serve as background for the main subject of the representation. Although its relevance may not be immediately realised, the scenario that frames the core target of the gaze is essential as its significance is extended and impacts, more or less subtly, the advertising message as a whole. Designing a brand communication strategy implies a concern for coherence between the discourse and the associated values over time. Thus, its corresponding visual communication, in particular – and especially the one employed by advertising – is the most immediate way of conveying a particular mission and identity.

The investment made by fashion brands in strategic communication does show a preference for certain cities that are understood as global culture and creativity centres. By establishing a connection between fashion design and creative industries, Wenting (2008) emphasises the current fashion capitals concentration phenomenon:

[6] http://www.donnakaran.com/collections/ Date accessed 21/05/2012.

[7] http://www.donnakaran.com/collections/ Date accessed 21/05/2012.

[8] Text published when Léger first visited New York. The text was originally published in "Cahiers d'Art" (Paris), in 1931, and was reprinted in Fonctions de la Peinture (Éditions Gonthier, Paris, 1965). It was translated from the Portuguese translation of António Rodrigues. Cf. Rodrigues, António (1999). Cinema e Arquitectura. Cinemateca Portuguesa/Museu do Cinema.

> 'The fashion design industry is an interesting case that represents several key elements of creative industries, in particular the cyclical (seasonal) processes of continuous innovation, the evasion of product standardization, and the importance of symbolic knowledge, individual skill and talent in the production process. The industry structure is characterised by a high number of firms and small firm sizes, and represents many creative industries in terms of industrial dynamics and extreme spatial concentration in four major fashion capitals that serve the global market: Paris, New York, London and Milan.' (Wenting, 2008: 14)

In the case of Donna Karan, the very New York landscape frames the different advertising images very peculiarly. As the city name was adopted as part of the DKNY brand name itself (Donna Karan *New York),* the strategic use of the New York landscape in the background is evident, as the most iconic visual referents of the city are highlighted in the various fashion brand campaigns and collections. These referents are recurrent, as the analysis of the DKNY advertising images shows: yellow cabs; the city's architecture and the skyscrapers of Manhattan -- in particular the Empire State Building; the Avenues and car traffic; the crowds of passers-by; the Statue of Liberty; the Brooklyn Bridge; the outdoors advertising and commercial signage; Times Square ...

As it is a particularly iconic city, New York was an early case of visual representation, including in photography and postcards, but especially in the cinema. The city of New York -- which was constructed in our imaginary from films like *The Crowd* (1928), *King Kong* (1933), *The Fountainhead* (1948) and *Taxi Driver* (1976), among others -- has established itself as a cosmopolitan city par excellence, as well as a benchmark in culture and arts, not to mention music, literature and fashion. The director Woody Allen, in particular, made an important contribution to the eternal celebration of New York, especially in his well-known film *Manhattan* (1979).

DKNY advertising images are precisely an invitation to revisit the places of our imaginary. The city that hosts DK's collections, built especially upon George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* or Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy*, seems to derive a striking contradiction: NY as an icon of *modernity and simulacrum*, on the one hand, and of *romance*, on the other.

Romance

Let us start with romance. Romance, which is indexed by the kiss, is a key theme of DKNY advertising. There are several outdoor decors in New York that stage kissing in DKNY advertising images:

> a couple seen kissing through the window of a passing taxi;
> a couple kissing as they stand on a taxi roof, in an Avenue taxi line;
> a couple kissing in the taxi (doubly decorated with advertising to DKNY eau de toilette, where a couple kissing is represented);
> a couple kissing on a taxi roof (the couple are standing), against the background of Times Square;

> a couple kissing under the Brooklyn Bridge -- *Love from New York* DKNY fragrance ("travel exclusive fragrances for women and men"); and a couple wearing sophisticated evening clothing, kissing against the background of the Empire State Building (advertising the DKNY fragrance, *Love from New York)*.

More explicitly (as is the case of the couple kissing in Times Square) or less explicitly, an immediate association in our imagination is inevitable with the famous picture of Alfred Eisenstaedt, dated August 2, 1945. This picture, which has since been widely reproduced, shows a close-up of a soldier and a nurse kissing in Times Square [9]. The couple is surrounded by a smiling crowd that seems to participate in a spontaneous celebration of the end of World War II at the very time when President Trumann announced the victory over Japan. In one of his books, the photographer states: "I saw a sailor running along the street grabbing any and every girl in sight. Whether she was a grandmother, stout, thin, old, didn't make a difference."

This picture, which was produced as a postcard and transformed into a commonly recognised icon of the end of World War II, is one of the most well known pictures in the world, thus remaining a vivid, living myth of our collective memory.

The spontaneity of the event represented by the picture which was called *V-J Day in Times Square* is imitated by and staged in DKNY advertising pictures. In the DKNY images, both the models' poses and the circumstances of the encounter suggest an accidental event. This is especially the case of the aforementioned images that show the couple kissing "offhand" on the taxi roof, or the couple kissing, seen from the window of the passing taxi. In parallel with the reference to the Eisenstaedt picture, this scene is an invitation to revisit multiple romantic, more or less similar scenes of Hollywood films. As a result of cinema, as well as of pictures being transformed into postcards, the association of New York City with romance not only became common, but it also became a sort of "brand image" of the city.

Modernity and simulacrum

> '...Nothing could be more intense, electrifying, turbulent, and vital than the streets of New York. They are filled with crowds, bustle, and advertisements, each by turns aggressive or casual.' (Baudrillard, 1986: 39-40)

Let us now address the theme of modernity. It can be stated, in this respect, that in addition to the novel, the city of New York is a "frozen metaphor" of the modern American metropolis paradigm, and even avant-garde in the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century (especially during the first decades of the latter). The skyscrapers and the wide avenues are perhaps the most visible indicators of this very modernity. Although

[9] Regardless of the debate about the veracity or possible manipulation of the picture, it is nonetheless relevant to regard it as the referent of the collective imaginary.

they are not unique to New York City, but common to major American cities, the tall New York buildings have, however, unique architectural features.

Besides the vertical architecture, the most apparent index of modernity in New York is the "crowd". Even if the pedestrian circulation or car traffic are taken into account – and in particular the traffic of famous New York yellow cabs (that *Taxi Driver* notably transformed into a myth), what mostly defines the New York ambience is the intoxicating crowds of people, the city's on-going agitation and movement. This is because, unlike other large American metropolises (such as Los Angeles, which were designed with car traffic in mind), in New York in general, and in Manhattan in particular, routes still accommodate footpaths and crowded pavements. In respect of these crowds, Baudrillard (1986: 35) states:

> 'Why do people live in New York? There is no relationship between them. Except for an inner electricity which results from the simple fact of their being crowded together. A magical sensation of contiguity and attraction for an artificial centrality. This is what makes it a self-attracting universe, which there is no reason to leave. There is no human reason to be here, except for the sheer ecstasy of being crowded together.'

Immersing in the "crowd" in New York does not necessarily mean closeness; it is taken to mean an intoxicating experience of impersonal, but intense involvement with landscape and with the constant movement that transforms the city, at every moment, thus producing a renewed and unpredictable spectacle. From street activities to outdoor advertising, not to mention the continuous parade of passers-by, New York seems to challenge the boundaries between reality and fiction. By doing so, it does justice to the following (once again) Jean Baudrillard's statement *(Ibid:* 111):

> 'Ghost towns, ghost people. Tout ça respire la même désuétude que Sunset ou Hollywood Boulevard, on en sort avec le sentiment d'avoir subi un test de simulation infantile. Où est le cinema? Il est partout dehors, partout dans la ville, film et scenario incessant et merveilleux'.

In DKNY advertising images, the simulated movement and the uninterrupted flow of people and cars (especially taxis) are a constant. Models often pose as if they were moving, "naturally" parading along the wide New York pavements or zebra crossings, surrounded by occasional passers-by that compose the "scene". The photographic representation of one of these from an angle that captures a profile view of a group of models, in one of the cases studied, is a paradigmatic example of simulated accidental event. Contrary to the static pose usually expected from photographic representations, in this case a closeness is suggested both to the referential reality – namely to a big city like New York – and to the language of cinema.

By resorting to a strategy of blurring the distinction between referential reality and simulation, DKNY apparently attempts both to bring the world of fashion closer to modern / urban daily life (of which New York City is a metaphor) and the common people of

that same universe to the fashion brand. This is evident in their selection as figurants of a representation that, in turn, transports us into a web of endless imaginary associations. One particular case should be highlighted where an advertising image is reproduced within that very image: a DKNY advertisement is doubly reproduced in one New York taxi, which in turn is represented in an advertising brand image. This clearly teases the possibility of separating the referential territorial space from the representational space.

Times Square, the favourite stage of DKNY campaigns, is in itself the most expressive allegory of loss of territorial sense, once perceived as a "system of hyper signification" (Ockman, 2005) that gives symbolic shape to the late consumerist capitalism:

> 'what draws the attention of bystanders are brand names, signs of signs. Players that that do not belong to the same specialised market nudge each other: Nike competes with McDonald's, DKNY with Samsung'. (Ockman, 2005: 122-123)

The consumerist *phantasmagoria of desire* finds on the very brand name a commonly recognised cultural referent. Such an urban semiology asserts itself as an asset that is simultaneously distinct from the place – Times Square – and extended to the deterritorialised flow of the global market. By being a global brand that gives its name to an international company with worldwide distribution, DKNY cannot fail to include in its communication strategy both dimensions – one of specific identity association, and another that participates in a universal consumerist culture. Consider the following excerpt:

> 'Initially these high fashion brands were exclusively for the rich and famous who could afford the couture and ready-to-wear creations of the fashion designers. Now the agent of growth is the diffusion lines targeted at the mass market and branded under distinct brand names, for example, Emporio Armani, DKNY and Kenzo Jeans.' (Moore , Fernie & Burt, 2000: 934).

More recently, the democratisation of consumption has been marked by the affordability of products whose design is signed by well-known fashion designers. This, however, does not mean the end of haute couture, which often translates into unique items and restricted access. A good example of this is the paradigmatic case of Karl Lagarfeld, who despite being associated with the fashion collections of the H&M brand, is also a haute couture designer:

> 'In November 2004, Chanel's renowned designer Karl Lagerfeld took a qualitative leap by offering his creations to a wider audience via H&M shops throughout the world. His collection sold out in a few hours. A collective hysteria seemed to take over the maddened masses that wanted to buy a luxury item for an affordable price. The launch of Lagerfeld's collection for H&M represented the realisation of a continuing flirt between haute couture and the general public.' (Tungate, 2005: 2).

Syncopated rhythms

In DKNY advertising images, the representation of people and car circulation alternates with more static scenes and poses, usually on high points, such as balconies or terraces on the top of skyscrapers. Alongside this alternation of movement and static pose, another alternation marks the landscapes that frame the models: night and day. On the one hand, as part of its commercial strategy, the brand is marked by its versatility, by asserting itself as a brand of clothing that is at times more casual and suitable for the daily life of a big city, or more sophisticated and appropriate to the social life of New York evenings. On the other hand, it is a reference to a city that never sleeps, and which is lived 24 hours a day, that is called upon as an asset in itself associated with New York – and that, once transferred to the brand value, gives it signification in a particularly effective way. The plural rhythms of the city are also the plural rhythms of the brand, which tries to adapt itself to different spaces, times, circumstances and durations. Rather than build on and from the city, the ambition of DKNY is to go around the city, following the astounding lifestyle of its inhabitants. In respect of the concept of the city as a "dynamic and experienced entity", Highmore (2005: 9) argues:

> '...So rhythm overcomes the separation of time and space – rhythm is on the side of spacing, on the side of the durational aspects of place and the spatial arrangements of tempo. Rhythmic terms such as 'circulation' overcome the sort of fixidity that comes from studying productions and consumption in isolation from each other. Circulation is the articulation of their relationship. Rhythm isn't simply speed; it is the measure of dynamic relationships and it insists on the plural rhythmicity of the city.'

If speed is a key feature of modernity, certainly the different circulation speeds, the different orientations, the diversity of flows, in one word the *multiplicity of rhythms* that articulate sometimes faster, and sometimes slower movements cannot be ignored in the big cities. Highmore (*Idem*: 12) also claims that:

> '...slower rhythms always exist side by side with faster ones. In this it becomes a useful antidote to modernism's overprivileging of the acceleration of urban culture. It is of course true that cars move more quickly now than they did a 100 years ago, but is also true that nowadays you are more likely to spend large amounts of time stuck in a traffic jam.'

In DKNY advertising images, the *stasis* of the buildings, which is one of the most prominent referents of the city, exists side by side with another prominent referent: the circulation movement – both circulation of cars, mostly taxis, and people. Paradoxically, however, in those images traffic jams are represented, showing taxis stopped or suggesting conditioned circulation – to such an extent that fortuitous romantic encounters are allowed during circulation (that is the case of the couple kissing on the taxi roof, or while traveling in the same taxi or in different taxis passing by each other). Moreover, as previously mentioned, the hype suggested in ground level scenes, on the streets or Avenues,

contrasts with the suspended time indicated by the scenes set on balconies or terraces on top of buildings, with models in more static poses.

Fashion advertising in the urban landscape... what trends?

Rather than simply transposing the New York landscape into DKNY advertising, the fashion brand produces a landscape, by showing itself in the city walls, decorating circulating taxis and buses, or simply existing in its luxurious flagship store in Madison Avenue. Therefore, we cannot help but wonder whether both the brand's outdoor advertising and the window displays should not be necessarily equated above all (and more than ever) with its potential aesthetic value, alongside its ultimately primarily commercial aim. It is a fact that outdoor advertising has always contributed to the composition of the urban landscape as a spectacle, which has been considered an intoxicating experience common to big American and European cities since the turn from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. But as we are now familiar with these settings, which have in the meantime become trivial, we currently expect advertising to be more than an image aimed at promoting a brand or product. Our expectation is that outdoor advertising contributes, above all, to the daily aesthetic pleasure, to the delight of our eyes and to the encouragement of our senses, along with the more or less distracted paths that we daily follow throughout the city.

As it is firstly consumed as a final product in itself, outdoor advertising (including window displays) is, in this regard, similar to temporary forms of public art in general, alongside the so-called truly artistic exhibitions that make streets a privileged stage of communication with the public. In fact, the contrary – the approximation of arts to advertising – is not new, whether this is a pretext for an ironic subversion (as is the case of some of Jenny Holzer's critical interventions in the public space, among which the famous slogan "Protect me from what I want"), or consists of using the physical structures and exposure common in outdoor advertising to open the art gallery to the public, and thus extend the artistic experience to anonymous passers-by by following the principle of democratisation of art.

This is the case, in particular, of the recent project entitled "Cartographies of Memory and Everyday". This project, which was publicly exhibited open air between January and April, 2012, in Guimarães, Portugal, in the scope of Guimarães Capital of Culture, seized the structures commonly used in outdoor advertising to show the works of invited national and international illustrators. The exhibition catalogue reads:

> '... A city is made up of many things. Of streets, buildings, factories, green spaces and monuments, but also of people and their memories. Of legends and traditions, of shared living experiences, of the senses of belonging to a community, to a common history. All elements that are not easily perceptible to outsiders, particularly when they take from Guimarães only the tourist image of the beautiful historic centre classified by UNESCO as a World Heritage site. *Cartographies of Memory and the Everyday*, the project

> coordinated by ESAP-Guimarães, College of Arts for the Guimarães 2012 European Capital of Culture within the scope of the *New Languages and Public Space cycle*, played with these limitations in order to create a dual challenge: a challenge to the illustrators invited to visit Guimarães who sought to condense different aspects of a complex reality that they had just discovered into images, and also a challenge to the public, which is confronted with eighteen large-scale illustrations treated like autonomous objects and thus, as the presentation text for the project states, "deprived of the distance and comfort of the body and of the gaze" and of the context of a text that might identify and explain them. (...) Six illustrators were invited in order to create these images which, given the impossibility of directly intervening on the façades of the buildings ... occupied eighteen outdoor advertising hoardings (three per author) placed strategically throughout the city and the borough of Guimarães ... as if they were advertising panels.' (p. 25-26).

Outdoor advertising is not to be confused, strictly speaking, with the so-called public art, not the least because public art claims, to a certain extent, to be the heir of situationism, and, consequently, to demand a society that is idealised as a counterpoint to capitalist systems. Outdoor advertising is understood in the context of the urban aesthetic experience, which means that it is integrated simultaneously in the context of art, consumption and culture. In the case of the DKNY fashion brand discussed, using the outdoor medium means both an opportunity (for visibility and symbolic value) and a risk, as well as a responsibility. On the one hand, as it benefits already from a relative long life and from a noticeable reputation, the DKNY brand has become a kind of New York City icon (which by itself does not mean a loss of semiotic value, especially global, of the brand). On the other hand, precisely because of its awareness, the brand cannot fail to invest in the constantly renewed creativity of its advertising communication, and especially in outdoor advertising. It thus seeks to contribute, if possible, to creating aesthetic value, in the landscape sense, in order to avoid the risk of suffering from the indifference of the passers-by or even generating reactions of resistance and, in extreme cases, rejection.

Short conclusion: cultural and aesthetic commitment

To conclude, it can be stated that advertising communication is nowadays increasingly understood as playing a highly responsible role in the sphere of visual culture and urban aesthetics. The mere presence in the various media no longer meets, neither the commercial aims and the communication strategy of the brands, nor the common interests of consumers, citizens and the public. The reference to the corporate "social responsibility" discourse has become trivial as a means to establish the credibility and add brand value. Conversely, a critical approach has been less common whereby cultural and aesthetic advertising implications are discussed – that is, a discussion of the respective *cultural and aesthetic responsibility* in its relationship with the contemporary universe of the arts and creative industries.

Very peculiarly, fashion design is part of a history where consumption and culture, *high culture* and *mass culture,* are merged from the outset. The fashion universe holds in itself multiple contradictions, particularly as far as the coexistence of haute couture with prêt-a-porter, within a given fashion industry, is concerned. It presents, however, particular advantages in the sense of an approximation to popular culture and urban aesthetics. The refreshed dialogue with cities and consumers, as well as the establishment of creative and balanced strategies of integration in public spaces – if possible representing an added value in regards to a commonly recognised and shared aesthetic experience, in respect for the values of democracy, individual freedom and social well-being – seems to open up as a possibility still apparently insufficiently explored...

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