Visual Culture of Urban Modernity
Modernity

- A phase of history?
- A body of opinion?
- Faith in
  - Progress, novelty, newness
  - Grand narratives, made claims of truth
  - Scientific rationality
  - The visual was hegemonic
• Modernity and the Visual
• Arguments about the role of the visual in modernity
• Important changes taking place in the urban visual environment
The Early C20th

- Urban people become mass-consumers of visual images
  - In movies
  - In newspapers, magazines
  - In outdoor advertising

- Urban people become producers of images
  - Kodak snapshot photography widely adopted by ordinary folks
Technological Change

• Various technological changes in printing, photography:
  – New printing technologies allow cheap graphic printing.
  – Celluloid roll films crucial to Kodaks and movies
  – Developments in electric lighting
Social Change

• Compulsory elementary education creates a literate urban community
  – Able and willing to read popular newspapers, magazines

• Growing complexity of urban society requires news media
  – For information
  – For shaping identity, consciousness
Changes in Visual Culture

• Rise of the popular urban newspaper
  – Tells stories about ordinary people
  – Full of pictures

• Emergence of mass movie audiences

• Proliferation of billboards and outdoor advertising

• People become mass-consumers of images
Rise of Newspaper Advertising

• 1900s: 8 page Toronto Star has
  – 2 pages of Simpson’s Ads
  – 2 pages of Eaton’s Ads
  – Plus patent medicine ads in winter

• Advertising mass-consumption was vital to the success of the urban newspaper

• Visual content increases in big city newspapers
Simpson's

Half Price! 1,031 Women's and Misses' High Grade Silk Frocks $7.50 to $50

HALF PRICE

117 Frocks Now $15.00, Wed. $7.50
139 Frocks Now $25.00, Wed. $12.50
293 Frocks Now $35.00, Wed. $17.50
237 Frocks Now $45.00, Wed. $22.50
45 Frocks Now $49.75, Wed. $24.83

100 Individual Models from the French Salons now $50.00 to $100.00, Wednesday $25.00 to $50.00

To-Many is the Second Day in the Sale of
“Worner” Brand Corsets Half Price

The New Men's Store

Smart Suits Half Price and Less $19.75
Newspaper Circulation

- Generally grows in the cities 1900-1930
  - Grows faster than population
- Seasonally uneven
  - Circulation highest in fall-winter
  - Falls in summer
Victorian Era

- Outdoor advertising was primitive
  - Small-time bill-posting companies
  - Few legal sites for bill-posting
  - Advertising was text-heavy, aimed at pedestrians
Credit Outfitters

LADIES' AND MEN'S CUSTOM TAILORING, READY TO WEAR CLOTHING, FURS ETC
You can get what you want just when you want it—and on

280 QUEEN ST. W.

THE SALVATION ARMY
MASSEY HALL
SUNDAY, OCTOBER 24TH, 1909
AFTERNOON
MAMMOTH PRAISE FESTIVAL
PLUS GIBSON BAND
GREAT SUNDAY ASSEMBLY
N.W. BOWELL

HIGHEST QUALITY LATEST DESIGNS
WRITE FOR OUR CATALOGUE
ELECTORS OF
WARD 6
VOTE FOR
J. A. MCCAUSSLAND
AS
ALDERMAN
Business Methods in Civic Affairs

ELECTORS OF
WARD 6
VOTE FOR
J. A. MCCAUSSLAND
AS
ALDERMAN
Business Methods in Civic Affairs

WARD 6
TORONTO THE BANNER CITY
VOTE FOR
J. O. McCARTHY
FOR
ALDERMAN
1910
CLEAN, BUSINESSLIKE ADMINISTRATION OF CITY AFFAIRS
VOTE GEARY
Endorsed by the People for Seven
Years. First as School Trustee, then
Alderman, then Controller, and Now
FOR
MAYOR
AND A
17 MILLS
TAX RATE

VOTE GEARY
Endorsed by the People for Seven
Years. First as School Trustee, then
Alderman, then Controller, and Now
FOR
MAYOR
AND A
17 MILLS
TAX RATE
• E L Ruddy, the billboard king of Canada
E L Ruddy & Co Ltd

- E L Ruddy: American newspaper advertising sales guy
- Sets up high-quality billboard business in Toronto & Montreal 1900-1904 (Connor-Ruddy)
  - Standard billboard sizes
  - Secures the best locations
  - Offers easy, standardised advertising for national brands
  - Close linkage to national advertisers
- Buys-up small-time billboard operators
E L Ruddy

• Expands
  – to Winnipeg & prairies 1909
  – to Maritimes 1913, Hamilton, Eastern Ontario

• 1914-1918 given charge of advertising the war effort
  – But abandons Quebec after 1916 conscription crisis

• 1920s:
  – Expands to BC, gets control of the Prairies
Ruddy

- Offers national brands a national billboard system, before there were national newspapers, radio stations
  - 60% of Ruddy’s billboard content was non-local advertising
- In Toronto, Ruddy dominated downtown billboard sites
  - Left the suburbs to the competition
MAKING MONEY IN THE MARKET?
READ "PUTS AND CALLS" IN THE
MINING WORLD
5¢
ON SALE AT ALL NEWS STANDS
SAFE FROM CONTAMINATION!

VITA-MILK
DAIRY LIMITED

ensures complete protection with
the New Exclusive Aluminium SANIFOIL CAP

Foiled at Last!
DURANT

"Just a Real Good Car"
"Makes A Ford Eat Out of Your Hand"

Grant A. Edwards

Edwards Garage. 10 Terauley St.

All Work Guaranteed

Phone: AD. 6148-6149

Other Jobs at Same Low Rates.
Mary Pickford Offers the World's Premier Presentation of Dorothy Vernon of Haddon Hall

GRAND OPERA HOUSE

Twice Daily 2:30 and 8:30 p.m.
Merchandising

• The literature on the Department Store sees the stores aiming for the female customer
• Billboard advertising went after the male consumer
  – 70% of billboard Ads featured ‘male’ goods such as cars, pipe tobacco
  – Persuaded men to buy for their wives
Cyclo Gas

No Knock

SPEED

POWER

McCULL. FROM ZENAC PRODUCT
SINES GARAGE & LIVERY
EXPERT REPAIRS ON ALL CARS
RED INDIAN AUTO OIL
HI-TEST
MARATHON AERO GASOLINE
DUNLOP AUTO TIRES
GARAGE
AUTO LIVERY
Visual Clutter

- 5000 illegal tin signs on Toronto utility poles in 1910
- 200 utility poles painted (illegally) in stripes by the city’s barbers
- Progressive Reformers detested advertising signs, billboards
A GOOD MOTTO

"PLANT THE TREES; TEAR DOWN THE BILLBOARDS!"

CARTOON IN THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL
A Conflict Resolved

• Guild of Civic Art campaigns against billboards in Toronto 1907-1909
• Ruddy counters by stressing high-quality of his service
  – Well-maintained
  – Claimed his billboards were high in moral tone and truthful
  – He posted on private property
• City regulates, but does not ban billboards
Billboard Locations

• Ruddy favours
  – Tops of buildings
  – Important intersections
  – Vacant lots on major streets
  – Attractive leasing terms
  – Well-maintained billboard sites
Overkill

• Some locations getting very cluttered with signs by mid 1920s
• Some billboards hundreds of feet long
  – Oakwood & Vaughan: 200 ft long
  – Bloor & Indian Rd: 500 ft long
• Suburbs being cluttered
  – York Township regulates
  – Forest Hill Village bans most billboards
Visual Culture

• Billboards embodied many of the characteristics of modernity
  – Made spectacles out of novelty
  – Promoted mass-consumption of national and global brands
  – Success derived from visual dominance
  – Changed consumption patterns?
  – Changed the landscape