Political Advertisement VIII
1952-2012

Political Advertisement by Antoni Muntadas and Marshall Reese archives American presidential campaign advertisements and explores the image-making power of televisual images in political elections. The archive is updated every four years.

The Great Media Bailout

Carol Wilder

Before Joe McGinniss became known in 2010 for the creepy act of renting a house next door to Sarah Palin on Lake Lucille in Wasilla, Alaska, he shot to fame at the age of 26 for his 1968 insider campaign report *The Selling of the President.* 1968 was one of the most turbulent years in American history -- the North Vietnamese Tet Offensive decisively turned U.S. public opinion against the war, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were assassinated followed by widespread protests and riots, sex and drugs and rock 'n roll dominated youth culture, and Lyndon Johnson announced "I shall not seek, and I will not accept, the nomination of my party for another term as your president." And oh yes - Richard M. Nixon was elected President of the United States of America. McGinniss describes the how of Nixon's victory in a book that illustrates another often overlooked revolutionary facet of 1968 - the full-on implementation of visually savvy product merchandising techniques designed to sell a political candidate to an impressionable American electorate.

Marshall McLuhan's then-novel idea that "the medium is the message" is front and center in McGinniss' account as he relates the careful crafting of a not-very-attractive or likeable Richard Nixon ("grumpy, cold and aloof") into a saleable commodity. McGinniss stumbled into the Nixon campaign when his request to cover Hubert Humphry was denied. Perhaps because of his youth McGinniss was not taken seriously as a reporter by the Nixon operatives, especially Roger Ailes, and apparently they held little back. At one point Ailes famously commented on Nixon "You put him on television, you've got a problem right away. He's a funny-looking guy. He looks like somebody hung him in a closet overnight and he jumps out in the morning with his suit all bunched up and starts running around saying 'I want to be President'." But by taking media, in particular television, seriously in the transformational McLuhanesque sense, Ailes and colleagues imaged their rumpled hanging suit all the way to the White House.

One of the brightest spots in the quadrennial US election scene are the Muntadas/Reese Political Ads. Their long-running program of TV and online ads traces the evolution (devolution?) of the sale of the US presidency (and legislature) to the highest bidder via the lowest common denominator. Has anything really changed since socialist Upton Sinclair's campaign for Governor of California was de-railed in 1934 by history's first political consulting firm, Campaigns Inc.? Sinclair called it the "Lie Factory" but the lies are actually bigger today and the distinctions between the candidates smaller.

Robert Atkins, Art Historian and writer

With impeccable curating and sly editing, Antoni Muntadas and Marshall Reese show us how and why such a victory pivoted on television advertising in this latest version of their 24-year project on political ads. Muntadas and Reese condense thousands of TV ads into a seventy-five minute reel that will leave you

enlightened and exhausted. (At first you can't believe you can sit through seventy-five minutes of these ads, but by the end you will be begging for more.) Not only are we treated to classic ads from the 1950s, but also rare footage of family and friend surrogates: Jackie Kennedy speaking Spanish, Elizabeth Dole, Elizabeth Edwards in a heartbreaking plea, Caroline Kennedy for Obama, as well as also-ran politicos like Bill Bradley, Howard Dean, Pat Buchanan, Rudy Giuliani, Ralph Nader, and Gary Bauer. (Gary who?) Bob Kerrey's pitch for the presidency will produce some laughs from New School audiences, and Jerry Brown's brief appearance reminds us that not all successful American political figures can be tarred with the same brush.

Muntadas and Reese include three of the best fear-based campaign videos ever from the Nixon shop in the 1968 effort, featuring the tag line "THIS TIME VOTE LIKE YOUR WHOLE WORLD DEPENDED ON IT." One ad presents a montage of demonized international leaders like Castro and Mao, another is a law and order ad with brutal images of the Chicago riots at the Democratic National Convention, but perhaps the best is a brilliant noir piece of a woman walking alone down dark, deserted and rain-slicked East Eighty-Fifth Street in New York with only the sound of her own heels on the pavement. These ads were among the eighteen commercials made by Gene Jones that were all expertly edited using still images except the

walking woman, shot on film. The announcer intones in ominous baritone "A violent crime is committed in America every sixty seconds." McGinniss remarks "Watching it, you were sure the woman would not make it to the end of the street, or the end of the commercial, without being mugged. But she did." Gene Jones had a hard time finding an actress once he revealed the ad was for Nixon, and according to McGinniss had to shoot the film sixteen times to get the right look of "controlled anxiety" on the woman's face.

With these attention-grabbing mini-masterpieces of political theatre for a television audience, the

McLuhan Age of political media was officially born. Some argue that the shift to social media in the past decade has been transformational in a new key, but I would suggest the recent shift is more a difference in quantity than kind. Once the power of visual media and the exponential power of transmedia were understood, we became permanent residents of Baudrillard's hall of mirrors with "more and more information and less and less meaning." Participatory media, despite its surface sense of connectedness, only amplify the echo.

What has changed over the past decade is the scale and sophistication of distribution of political advertising and the lawless landscape brought about by the radical deregulation of campaign advertising. Now more than ever the driving force is money, money, money. Did I mention money? It didn't take the Citizens United decision of the U.S. Supreme Court to convince most Americans that political candidates are bought and sold like mayonnaise or

tulips or crack in the corporate oligarchic state. That phenomenon, as McGinniss documents, started over half a century go. The mystery is that some manage to retain a shred of integrity and vision.

The 2007-8 presidential campaign season broke all previous records with $2.6 to $2.8 billion spent on campaign advertising. Estimates indicate that in 2012 this might reach $4 billion, with about 60 percent spent on television. A study of 17,151 political commercials aired in Iowa during the 2011 primaries found that 10,600 featured negative messages. The Kantar Media Campaign Analysis Group calculated that $3.3 million was spent on negative ads to counter $1.7 spent on positive messages. Overall, the bloated campaign advertising PACS and Super PACS and Democratic and Republican National Committees have been a boon not as much for candidates or the American people as quite impressively for campaign consultants and media corporations. Call it the Great Media Bailout. In any case, it is not easy to spend this much money at all, let alone wisely.

Watching *Political Advertisement* in its entirety is a powerful but disorienting experience. Time hurtles forward with each Presidential election, but there is no clear progress on the fundamental issues… Tonally, the film is a perfect hybrid of its creators' sensibilities. It's funny and nostalgic, and has an innocent quality, while at the same time offering a bleak view of a specifically American form of propaganda… that has grown to shape our political process—not just the way we sell our politicians but the nature of the political discourse itself.

John Seabrook, *Couch Potato Politics*, ***The New Yorker,*** November 3, 2008.

In the early days of mass media research, it was thought that a single message could have an observable and traceable effect on the audience. (The "hypodermic needle model.") A more complex and accurate approach suggests that more often than not attitudes and opinions are influenced by an ever-changing constellation of messages and media of various sizes, shapes, and frequency. I see an Obama ad on TV, get a campaign email, hear a talk radio attack, listen to a friend who knows him slightly, discuss the election in class, catch the satire of Maher or Colbert, watch the first 2012 presidential debate.

Ouch!

While the first Obama-Romney debate illustrated, albeit painfully, how the medium can be the message, it also showed that there is a lot more to voter influence than political advertising in the electoral decision-making equation. And perhaps this is as good a time as any to mention the incredibly narrow bandwidth of American political discourse and debate. It is as if we have twenty-six letters of the alphabet to choose from in our conversation and some-

how cannot get beyond "D" for distracted, disgusted, and demoralized.

Several themes surface throughout the presidential campaign ads curated by Muntadas and Reese: the use of the "we" technique, fear appeals (illegal immigrants, drugs, Willie Horton, nuclear terrorism, crime), and last but not least credibility: Whom do you trust? Who provides evidence of competence, integrity, and concern about people? These are the very elements of what Aristotle called *ethos,* when he wrote with certainty 2500 years ago that impact of the speaker's personality comprised of character, intelligence, and good will toward the audience was the most powerful element in persuasion. It is a standard that holds to this day, if only we can listen with our better selves, the selves who don't always take the easy way and fall for the fool's gold.

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Political Advertisement 2004

Mark Crispin Miller

To our post-modern eyes, the TV spots used in the presidential race of 1952 appear as laughably uncomplicated weapons, like oaken clubs, or slings made out of hide. What could be more retro than those little gray promotions for Stevenson and Ike in their first contest (or in their second, four years later)? Surely this was the Dark Ages of such televisual propaganda, light-years from the crafty idylls and well-honed attack ads of today.

And yet, if we resist the impulse just to laugh them off, we might perceive that those two bits of superannuated propaganda—the two TV spots that begin this very useful retrospective—are not identical examples of crude work. For one of them is actually far more sophisticated than the other; and from that difference we might learn something about the way that winning propaganda *always* works—and how it works *especially* today.

Let's start with the Democratic spot. A pale young woman with bobbed hair and a sedated look (tired eyes, black sweater buttoned to the neck) sits facing us, immobile, from behind a large white placard advertising Adlai Stevenson for President of the United States. With the over-scrupulous articulation of an

alcoholic, or a nun, she says, without a flicker of excitement, "I am excited about voting for Gov. Stevenson for president." She then explains her choice:

> I think he is a new kind of man in American politics. He will be a president for *all* the people. Stevenson has told the Texans, and the people of Louisiana, and California, that tideland oil belongs not to them alone, but to all the people of the country.
>
> In the South, he has made a strong statement for civil liberties and full equality. For farmers, the businessman, the veterans and the working man, to each in turn he has said he will represent not their interests alone but the interests of all of us.
>
> That's why I am excited about Gov. Stevenson. He will be a president for *all* the people.

In its perfect ineffectuality this ad is something of a wonder, as it provides no reason why the viewer ought to vote for Stevenson, and otherwise augments the candidate's persona not at all. Indeed, the only thing that it conveys

about the brainy governor—and that it does obliquely—is his low opinion of TV. What exactly is the message here? That this "new kind of man" will not play ball with Texans, Californians or Louisianans, farmers, veterans, working men or businessmen! Rather, "he will be a president for *all* the people"—a campaign promise so high-minded and abstract as to ensure that few Americans would thrill to it, as there were not many of us then (and are not many of us now) who see themselves as mere vague particles of that grand, empty "all." Propaganda cannot be so platitudinous and inspecific, but must appear to *grab* you—

Political Advertisement confirms that, at bottom, campaign advertising speaks the language of advertising in general: an idiom of persuasive communication to which the public has been trained to respond.

Christopher Phillips, *Architectures of Information: The Video Work of Muntadas* in: **On Translation: The Games**, The Atlanta College of Art, Atlanta, 1996

you—with an appeal that resonates somewhere below your mere ideals. Although it may at first seem no less primitive, the ancient Eisenhower spot included here is, as propaganda, far superior to that blathery preachment for the Democrat. Where the latter rambles on and on in an unblinking monologue, the spot for "Ike" appears to be just as dynamic and concise as that fraternal nickname. A mini-dialogue and not a monologue, comprising two shots rather than just one (that cranky question from a Little Guy, and then the General's seeming-deft reply), this ad appears to pose a common problem, and then to hint, sort of, at a solution.

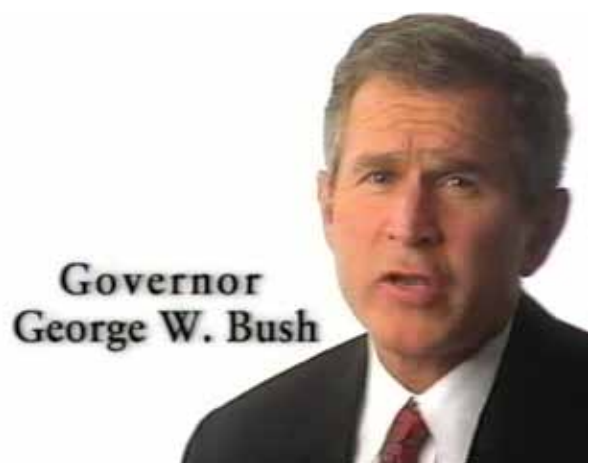
There's a black man in a sport coat and a flannel shirt, facing right and looking slightly upward. He asks this fretful question— more a litany of grievances than an answerable query:

> "Food prices, clothing prices, income taxes! Won't they *ever* go down?"

Cut to Ike, appearing friendly and authoritative in a smart dark suit. At first looking down and over toward the questioner (who does not share the frame with him), then turning genially to face the camera, Ike replies:

> "Not with an $85-billion budget eating away on [*sic*] your grocery bill, your clothing, your food [*sic*], your income. Yet the Democrats say, 'You never had it so good!'"

As an economic argument, Ike's comeback is not helpful. The ad's real point is not, however, to explain the impact of the federal budget. Indeed, its point is not to *explain* anything, but, on the contrary, to cast the general as a big wise Daddy who should be our president because he can take care of us. "Food prices,

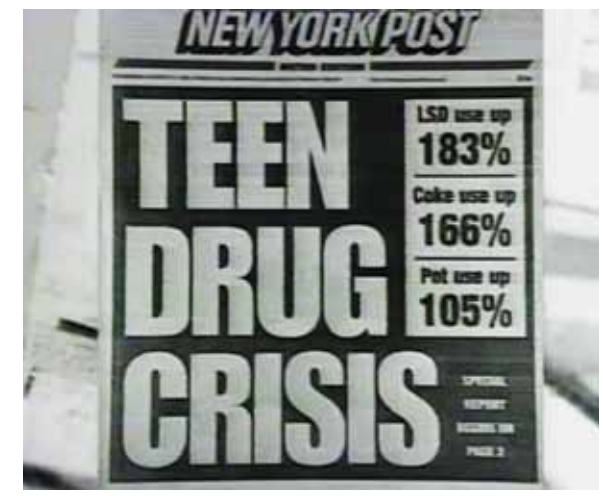


clothing prices, income taxes! Won't they *ever* go down?" This is less a question looking for an economic answer than a plaint of near-despair intended for the ears of God. As the only figure in the frame (and as the object of the black man's upward gaze), the all-knowing Ike acknowledges the problem—and swiftly pins the blame for it on those false gods, "the Democrats." As Eisenhower depicts them, "the Democrats" are rather like a plague of locusts, "eating away on your food," while Ike Himself will make things right in peace as he had lately done at war.

For all its seeming artlessness, then, this old ad for Eisenhower succeeds in doing what

Television news has become generic. Political candidates, architectures, slogans and credits, "media ecology", power itself, have all become generic, mere signs.…We, the audience, must be watchful.

Peggy Gale, *Muntadas' Eye,* 4e Semaine Internationale de Vidéo Geneva, Genève: Saint-Gervais mjc, 1991



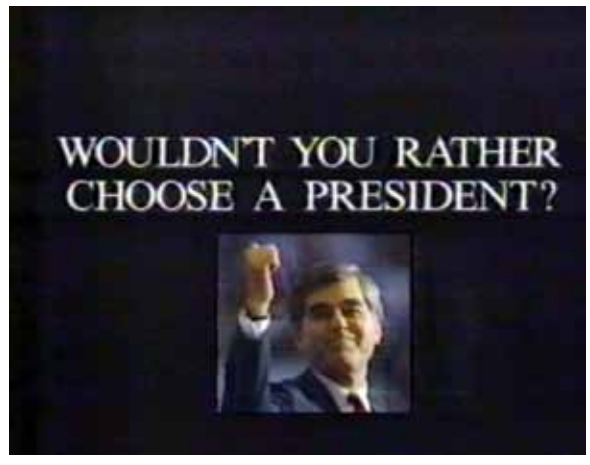
such ads generally do. They must present the candidate as godly (i.e., not just pious but *like God*), and his adversaries as *all wrong*: proud, deluded, wrathful, vain, destructive. By such deft propaganda we are ultimately urged to love Him and hate *them*, because… he is who he is. Eisenhower is Eisenhower, and that alone should make entirely clear why "I like Ike." By contrast with that Rock of Ages, the eloquent, ironic Adlai Stevenson appeared as naught—a mere passing cloud of pleasant gestures and seductive polysyllables; yet there is something not just frivolous, but radically askew about the subtle governor, who, for all his charm, is fundamentally an *evil* being, as Ike is fundamentally Good.

This Manichaean schema has loomed heavily throughout the post-war history of our presidential races—figuring especially in those contests that have played the most on fear. In 1960, Richard Nixon tried his hand at playing God before the camera, as is apparent in the ads included here. Perched heroically upon his desk, the reverent camera truckling toward him, Nixon listens with Olympian calm as the announcer puts some fretful question vis-a-vis the mortal threat posed by the Soviets or Democrats; and, like Ike before him, Nixon promises to keep us safe and whole: "We must never let the communists think we are weak." Or:

> I would like to talk to you for a moment about dollars and sense.
>
> Now my opponents want to increase federal expenditures by as much as $18 billion a year. How will they pay for it? There are only two ways.
>
> One is to raise your taxes. That hurts everyone.The other is increase our national debt, and that means raising your prices— robbing you of the value of your savings, cutting into the value of your insurance, hurting your pocketbook every day at the drugstore, the grocery store, the gas station.
>
> Is that what you want for America? I say no.

Nixon's posture as Jehovah failed that year, trumped (barely) by the potent glamour of the Kennedy machine, which focused the electorate on the advantages of youth and the possibilities of this world (as is apparent in the Kennedy/Johnson spots shown here). The appeal to fear was managed brilliantly in the 1964 campaign, as Lyndon Johnson's propagandists played on Barry Goldwater's extremist aura, and used prodigious cinematic skill, to float a chilling foreglimpse of apocalypse. Nixon then returned to play the Manichaean scene again, but now successfully. In 1968 he stood up as "the One" against the badly hobbled Hubert Humphrey (whose TV spots are classics of tepidity); and then again in 1972, he proposed to save the world ("Now more than ever") from the hapless ultra-liberal George McGovern, whom Nixon had maneuvered into place for just that purpose (and whose own ads were fierce and unforgettable indictments of the war in Vietnam—and therefore sure to help him lose).

In the campaign of 1976, there was no Manichaean posturing from either side, the nation having tired of Nixon's grandiosity and fatal yen for "the big play." And so Gerald Ford was advertised as but "a steady hand" (completely secular), while Jimmy Carter stood up in all modesty as just a farmin' fella, prudent and sincere—the earthy antidote to Tricky Dick's imperial psychotic. After that oddly understated race, the spectre of the godly Dad returned to haunt our presidential politics relentlessly. Twice Ronald Reagan postured winningly as Our True Father, glad and good, against not just "the evil empire" but the gloomy would-be taxaholic Walter Mondale (whose ads did nothing to dispel the



***Political Advertisement* demonstrates the evolution of political persuasion, from the beginning stages of television, when candidates relied on the verbal message and black and white image, to the sophistication of today, which unites modern marketing techniques with those of the entertainment industry. This material does not reveal the development of political ideas, which are never at issue here, far from it, but rather the steady perfection of a media language which, with ever growing precision and subtlety, taps directly into collective beliefs and prejudices.**

Nena Dimitrijevic, *Aviagem de Muntadas pelas estações do poder* published in **Muntadas: Intervenções: A propósito do público e do privado**, Porto: Fundação de Serralves, 1992

glare of "Morning in America"). In 1988, the ever-boyish Bush the Elder zealously reprised that patriarchal role, except without the Gipper's all-important sunny side. Desperate not to seem effete (although he was in fact effete) or too left-wing (although he was in fact no moderate), and ferociously assisted by the paranoid divisions of the Christian right, the long, tall Yankee Bush played National Dad against the short, dark Mike Dukakis, who appeared, throughout the Rev. Falwell's propaganda, as sly and false and "Jewish,"and with flies all over him. (Bush's crucial TV spots against Dukakis—Boston Harbor, Willie Horton, "the revolving door"—may well be the most effective smear ads in the history of US presidential politics.)

Although in 1992 Bush tried again to Dad his way to power— flaunting his enormous clan at every opportunity, and harping on his military service in the Big One—that pose could not defeat Bill Clinton, who won, in part, by virtue of his seeming spiritual link to Camelot; the can-do attitude, the infamous libido, that startling footage of the teen-aged politician shaking hands with JFK. (Clinton also owed that victory in part to the ornery persistence of H. Ross Perot, another vestige of "the Greatest Generation," and a deliberate drag on Bush's re-ascension.) In 1996 Bob Dole also tried, and failed, to beat the Comeback Kid by merely flexing his seniority, his campaign turning largely on his status as a wounded veteran/legislative elder.

In his race against Al Gore in 2000, George W. Bush posed likewise as the Better Father—i.e., not like Clinton—even though his own biography recalled the Sixties more distinctly, and less appetizingly, than Gore's. A draft-dodger (Gore served in Vietnam), a lifelong goof-off with, at least, a drinking problem (Gore was a straight arrow from the start), and evidently an indifferent parent (his own children, unlike Gore's—or Chelsea

Clinton—tending to delinquency in public), Bush, throughout that campaign, played the father with a vengeance, as if his anomalous paternal act would vindicate his own beloved Poppy, who had been so grossly humbled by Bill Clinton and his hippie gang. (The son's apparent effort to affirm his father's honor eerily recalled the elder Bush's over-long and over-heated case for Richard Nixon, who, throughout the Watergate ordeal, used Bush pére as his most visible apologist.)

And yet, as we have come to learn, this Bush is not the warm, devoted son that some have taken him to be. His filial feelings would appear to be ambivalent, if not just hostile, his dogged drive to break Saddam Hussein in two suggesting not a wish to realize his father's mission but a desire to cut that father down to size. This Bush has, in other words, been struggling to out-do his Dad, not honor him, so that he might, at last, become a Dad far bolder, braver, larger, greater

If we look at the parade of advertisements it is not a question of a change from sincerity for its own sake to all-stops removed covert persuasion, or the change from the sideways glance to the direct eye-to-eye intimacy of Reagan and Mondale's gaze. No, the stream of faces and emotional hooks tells us that the bottom line is that everyone wants their candidate to win and the winning candidate may just have the best ads and ad agency. To be good citizens (remember to vote) we will have to become finely honed TV critics.

Ann-Sargeant Wooster, *Tube Boobs*, **East Village Eye,** November 1984

than the Dad that married dear old Mom. This Bush, in fact, would be as great as God Himself. "Then he said something that really struck me," Bob Woodward recalled on "60 Minutes" in April of 2004, of a conversation he had had with Bush the Younger:

> He said of his father, "He is the wrong father to appeal to for advice. The wrong father to go to, to appeal to in terms of strength." And then he said, "There's a higher Father that I appeal to."

Bush routinely vents such grandiosity. "I trust God speaks through me. Without that, I couldn't do my job," he noted while campaigning in Lancaster in the summer of 2004. In that messianic fantasy George W. Bush is not alone (as Pres. Nixon was alone in his imperial self-regard). Not just a few of Bush's followers apparently believe that "God is in the White House"—a delusion that Bush/Cheney's propagandists seem to share, and one that they are always working hard to reconfirm, and spread as far as possible.

That Bush & Co. themselves believe in Bush this way—and that they want to make the rest of us believe it—would be distressing under any circumstances. Within the current culture of TV, such theocratic zeal has had disastrous consequences; and so, in order to survive this crisis, and overcome it, we must scrutinize not just these TV spots per se but study also their full institutional and cultural context. For the modern history of US political propaganda entails far more than the ever-changing tactics and techniques that have been used to sell our presidental candidates on television. That history also includes the gradual "deregulation" of the US corporate media in general. By enabling one gigantic media cartel to dominate TV and radio (as well as movies, magazines, music, newspapers and, increasingly, the Internet); and by abolishing the Fairness Doctrine, which once obliged the media's owners to permit the other side to have its say; and by preventing the construction of a genuinely public broadcast system, adequately funded and appropriately shielded from state pressures; and by rescinding nearly all the old requirements whereby broadcasters were once induced to serve the public interest with an edifying range of non-commercial programming—journalistic, educational, religious—so as to justify the mammoth profits earned through routine exploitation of the public airwaves; and by systematically depriving all dissenters of their First Amendment rights: through these and many other anti-democratic policies, the US corporate media machine has been transformed at last into a propaganda apparatus for the governing elite—the few huge players who own it, and the other giants that use it for their advertising, now colluding with the government to push a rightist program on the national audience, a/k/a "the people."

Aired within a culture that has thus been made to amplify the official line (and that alone), the suasive works devised by propagandists at the top can do—and by now surely have done—far more harm than would be possible in a society enlightened daily by the sort of free and independent press envisioned by the Constitution's framers. In so well-informed a nation, no human politician could play God; whereas, within the propaganda system now in place here, anything is possible.

Mark Crispin Miller is professor of media studies at NYU and author of the book *Cruel and Unusual: Bush/Cheney's New World Order*

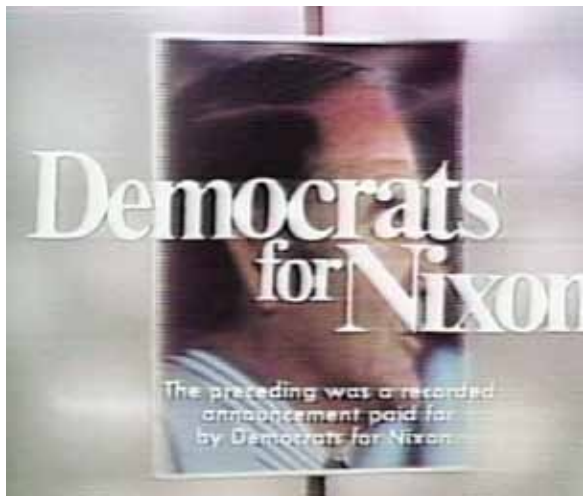
Political Advertisement 2000

Patricia Thomson

For better or worse, television has fundamentally altered the shape of American politics. Where once we had whistle-stop campaigns, powerful party allegiances, and conventions with contested nominations, now we have televised debates, the "news bite," instant polling, conventions-as-spectacles, and ad campaigns that have driven campaign expenses through the roof.

When television was in its infancy, politicians were quick to recognize one of its greatest potentials -- the ability to reach millions of voters in an instant. Glad to kiss the grueling whistle-stop campaign goodbye, candidates seized on this new mass medium but initially clung to their old ways, reiterating 30-minute stump speeches on the air.

Enter the ad man. In 1952 Rosser Reeves came to Thomas Dewey's campaign team armed with a portfolio of hard-sell commercials that had worked wonders for Anacin ("For fast, fast, FAST relief"), M&Ms ("Melts in your mouth, not in your hands"), and dozens of other clients of Madison Avenue. He proposed using 60-second ad techniques to



Political Advertisement **is a series on the cosmetics of the media …but, at the same time, it is an analysis of the procedures and methods which drive contemporary politics: promises, attacks, lies, superficialities, the goal of winning at any price, and destructive criticism. Over the time span that this project covers, it is only the candidates and the amounts of money invested in the campaigns that change, because, in every case, what guarantees an effective campaign is media presence. It doesn't matter how, or in what form, because what is important is to never leave the spotlight of public opinion vacant; to always maintain access to the position of privilege in the fourth estate."**

Rodrigo Alonso, *This is not an advertisement. An Essay on Muntadas' Work in Video and Internet* in **Anne Marie Duguet, Muntadas: Inter-ROM,** Paris: Lab Productions/Centre Georges Pompidou, 1998

sell the presidential candidate – and was flatly turned down. "Undignified," they sniffed, before being trounced on election day.

Four years later, Reeves knocked at the door of the man who defeated Dewey, President Dwight Eisenhower, and tried again. This time, after much resistance, he came away with a new client. Reeves winnowed Eisenhower's 30 campaign issues down to three, and with his series of spots called "Eisenhower Answers America," he unleashed a new, potent weapon that irrevocably altered the shape of political campaigns: the political ad.

Political Advertisement 2000 shows Reeves' legacy in a 60 minute parade of candidates, issues, and sales techniques seen by American television viewers since Eisenhower's day. This compilation not only is a concise compendium of the past 11 presidential elections, but it also offers insights into how politics and marketing have marched forward in lockstep over the past five decades.

Political Advertisement 2000 is the fifth edition of this project, initiated in 1984 by artists Antonio Muntadas and Marshall Reese. Every four years since Reagan ran for a second term, the two have updated and reedited this compilation, making this one of the longest collaboration between video artists. The idea began when Muntadas was a research fellow at CAVS/MIT and came to know Edward Diamond, a political scientist on faculty who at the time was researching his classic study of political advertising, *The Spot*.

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at CAVS/MIT and came to know Edwin Diamond, a political scientist on faculty who at the time was researching his classic study of political advertising, The Spot. Intrigued by the campaign ads Diamond had gathered, Muntadas showed them to Reese, a fellow video artist then working in Muntadas' native Spain. The two agreed: this material needed to be seen by the broader public.

The fact that they were visual artists, not political scientists, was not an obstacle. Muntadas and Reese began *Political Advertisement* when the artworld's vanguard was experimenting with appropriation and visual quotation as strategy. Their project grew out of Muntadas' concern with what he calls "media landscape" or "media ecology"-- that artificial world of images created by man -- and the appropriation tactics of the mid-eighties.

By lifting these images whole from the stream of political discourse and offering them without editing or manipulation, Muntadas and Reese allow viewers to examine these ads as cultural artifacts. Emptied of their original intent -- to influence the viewers' vote -- they

now stand as visual relics that can shine light on the symbiosis between marketing and politics and the tactics behind the power of persuasion.

There's much to be gleaned from this procession of spots. Muntadas and Reese have selected ads that are significant for their form or style, as well as those that encapsulate key political issues and viewpoints of the day.

Political Advertisement **(2000) is a compendium of the ideological, tactical, and stylistic transformations that have unerringly altered the electoral process.(…)The artists avoid commentary, allowing the prodigious stream of TV spots to reveal their own truths...**

Steve Seid, *Fifty years of Campaign Spots*, Pacific Film Archive, Berkeley, 2000

During the sixties, the direction of political advertising developed quickly. While Nixon tried to repeat Eisenhower's formula, directly addressing viewers from a dignified office setting, John F. Kennedy captured the spirit of a younger, forward-looking generation with ads that combined his youthful image with bouncy tunes, hip graphics, and a quick-cut editing style. Political advertising adopted the syntax and rhythms of television, by then in 90 percent of American households.

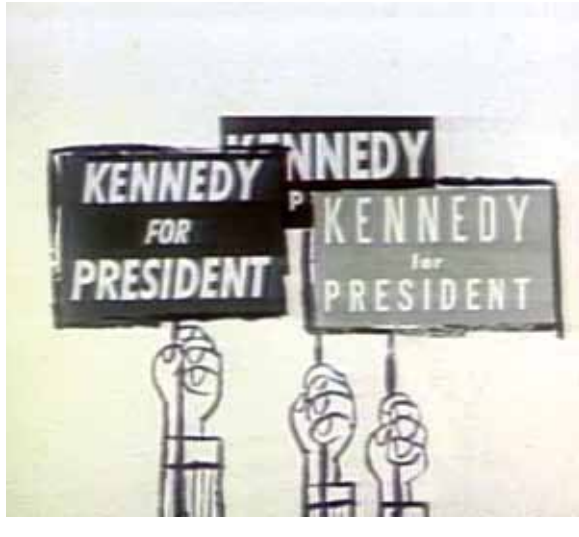
Soon the new breed of "media consultants" added a twist to the history of advertising: the negative spot. During the 1964 showdown between Barry Goldwater and Lyndon B. Johnson, image

crafters like Tony Schwartz abandoned Rosser Reeve's hard sell for a more emotional appeal -- and fear was the operative emotion. Schwartz's spot linking Goldwater to the KKK was nixed by LBJ, but the candidate okayed his now-infamous "Daisy" ad, which played on people's perceptions of Goldwater as a trigger-happy Hawk too willing to push the nuclear button. Goldwater cried libel, and the spot was pulled after one airing -- at least until newscasters made it a headline story and rebroadcast it repeatedly.

The candidates quickly learned from their mistakes. Wisened up from his defeat by the telegenic Kennedy, Nixon chose to minimize

his on-camera appearance in his 1968 campaign spots. Outside of newsreel footage of his vice presidential appearances, Nixon lay low. Instead, we see protestors rioting, and middle-aged women clutching their purses as they walk down dark empty streets, then Nixon intoning promises to restore law and order.

Among Nixon's favorite ads were his "Democrats for Nixon" spots in 1972, which attacked McGovern's planned cuts in the military and his flip-flopping on issues -- and didn't show the candidate at all. In retaliation, Tony Schwartz cut a series of attack ads, some of which McGovern couldn't stomach (like the Vietnamese woman fleeing with her lifeless baby) and kept off the air.



By the time 1976 rolled around, Watergate had drained Americans of anything resembling enthusiasm for government officials. Media consultants backed away from overt negative spots and tried a new tactic. Gerald Ford's "Feeling Good about America" ads introduced the Norman Rockwell world that has remained an enduring thread in Republican advertising, from Ronald Reagan's "Morning in America" odes to Bush's paeans to family and country.

Meanwhile, Jimmy Carter was introducing a second thread: the outsider candidate. Cast as a reform-minded peanut farmer, Carter appears in plaid shirt and dirty boots, with adding a hip populist vibe. It was a strategy that worked and has continued to be adopted by a wide variety of candidates, no matter how politically inbred their lineage.

The eighties and nineties have seen a continual refinement and updating of the strategies developed in the first three decades of political advertising. Plus we've gone on to see ads deconstructing ads, like Dukasis' spot "The Packaging of George Bush." We've seen Bill Clinton's 'war room' develop the art of the quick counterattack, rebutting opponents' negative spots as soon as they hit the air. And we've seen Ross Perot revert to the half-hour discourse, showing that what goes around comes around.

It's true that political ads are only part of a piece. A certain percentage of them work (though media consultants are fond of saying they're not sure just which percentage). But hard reality is a bigger player in the success of a candidate. After his defeat in 1980, Jimmy Carter's media consultant Gerald Rafshoon acknowledged, "If we had it to do all over again, we would take the $30 million we spent in the [media] campaign and get three more helicopters for the Iran rescue mission."

Whether or not they are effective on the political battlefield, each of these ads tells a story -- about how the political parties define the

burning social issues of the day, about the cynicism and sophistication of media campaigns, and about the evolution of marketing techniques. They show the revolving door of politicians, with the reappearance of candidates like Reagan ('80, '84), Bush ('80, '88, '92), and Gore ('84, '00). And they even occasionally have something to say about a candidate's positions. In all, there's quite a lot to unpack from these 30-second spots.

***Political Advertisement*, begun in 1984 in collaboration with Marshall Reese, is revised and updated during each election… for the presidency of the United States. Starting from that unique form of advertising that is political propaganda where what is on sale is a candidate and the fate of the nation… this compilation deepens with every viewing as the artists revise and reassess each new version in order to better reflect the conceptual, technical and formal evolution of this particular form of propaganda.**

Eugeni Bonet, *Television, Front and Side Views,*
La construcción del miedo y la pérdida de lo público,
Granada: Centro José Guerrero, 2008

It's no accident that Muntadas and Reese began their project when Ronald Reagan was in office. His skill in front of the camera was one of his greatest assets, and his success at crafting a presidential image became the subject of extensive analysis and commentary. But fortunately, Muntadas and Reese did not stop the Political Advertisement project after Reagan slipped off the scene. Rather, for the past 16 years they've continued to create a valuable edited archive that shows us how political image-making transcends the individual candidate and has become a pervasive part of our visual and political culture. That's a lesson that bears repeating—every four years at least.

Patricia Thomson has written about independent and mainstream film for over 30 years, with outlets ranging from *Variety* to *San Francisco Chronicle* to *The Independent Film & Video Monthly*, where she was editor in chief from 1991–2001. She is currently East Coast correspondent for *American Cinematographer*.

Political Advertisement VIII
is dedicated to
Edwin Diamond
author, teacher, and journalist
(1925-1997)

Special Thanks

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Natalia Zuluaga

Electronic Arts Intermix
PostworksNY
Video Data Bank

To Be Continued...

POLITICAL ADVERTISEMENT VIII

MUNTADAS & REESE 1952-2012

ASU Art Museum, Arizona State University • 7:30 pm — **10/29**
Neeb Hall 920 S. Forrest Mall, Tempe, Arizona

Cinema Zuid/M HKA • 8:00 pm — **10/31**
Lakenstraat 14,2000 Antwerp, Belgium

The Vera List Center for Art and Politics • 6:30 pm — **11/1**
The New School, Theresa Lang Community and Student Center
55 West 13th Street, 2nd fl. New York

The Sanctuary for Independent Media • 7:00 pm — **11/2**
3361 6th Avenue, North Troy, New York

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart • 7:00 pm — **11/2**
Schloßplatz 2, D -70173 Stuttgart, Germany

AFI Washington, D.C. • 6:30 pm — **11/3**
AFI Silver Theatre, 8633 Colesville Road, Silver Spring, Maryland

The Wolfsonian-FIU • 2:00 pm — **11/4**
1001 Washington Avenue, Miami Beach, Florida

CIFO @ Cosford Cinema,UM • 7:00 pm — **11/5**
University of Miami, 1111 Memorial Drive, Coral Gables, Florida

KiT/NTNU Trondheim, Norway • 6:00 pm — **11/5**
Norwegian University of Science and Technology / NTNU
Auditorium H1, Hovedbygningen Gløshaugen, Trondheim, Norway

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NTNU Institutt for billedkunst - Kunstakademiet i Trondheim
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