

# Imagine Paradise in Ads

## *Imagination and Visual Matrices in Tourism and Consumer Culture*

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### **Abstract**

Paradise has been a significant concept in tourism as well in consumer culture. The present article demonstrates how paradise is presented as visual, spatial and ideal concepts in ads, and how they illustrate imagination as a central communicative effect in marketing and consumer culture. Through an analysis of selected consumer and tourism ads for TV and cinema presented in Denmark, the author points out different ways of reflecting viewers' imagination of paradise as a place and condition. The author outlines a theoretical framework for understanding imagination from a media-specific perspective as involving cognitive, emotional and sensuous processes, respectively, and looks at how paradise, as an active and present visual matrix in tourism and consumer communication, has a specific appeal to viewers' imagination.

**Keywords:** ads, visual culture, imagination, paradise, tourism, consumer culture

### **Introduction**

The concept of paradise is a well-known metaphor and image in tourism marketing and literature. The *touristic* image of exotic sites, landscapes and experiences is not limited to tourism marketing and tourism literature. Along with the expansion of tourism as an industry and a cultural praxis, tourist images, tourist destinations and tourist experiences are used as aesthetic strategies in, for instance, literature, television series, marketing and locations in films and computer games. In an overall view, one can argue that paradise as a visual and imaginative concept used to be central to religion and art history, but is now rather to be found in tourism and consumer culture. Paradise as a cultural and historical concept has some specific visual features and reflects ideas of a perfect way of living, including the essence of a good life.

My main argument is that paradise, as visual, spatial and ideal concepts, is significant in tourism and consumer ads and illustrates imagination as a central communicative effect in consumer culture. Through my analytical examples (collected tourism and consumer ads for TV and cinema presented in Denmark 1970-2005: Star Tour, Tjæreborg, Turkish Tourist Office, Bacardi Rum and Danish National Lottery), I will point out different ways of staging viewers' imagination of paradise as a place and condition. In the tourist ads, the paradise matrix is used to illustrate the destination and the tourist experience. In the lottery and alcohol ads, paradise is associated with goods in the form

of specific moods and bodily conditions the viewer will achieve when buying the good or just enjoying the ad. As my examples of tourism ads will show, they represent metaphorical and metonymical images of paradise that include different appeals to viewers' imagination and bodily affects, respectively.

First, I will introduce my theoretical starting point on imagination as part of consumer culture and marketing communication, and next I will present paradise as a visual matrix in tourism culture and relate to ideas on paradise in religion and art history, respectively. In the following part, I will use analytical examples of tourism and consumer ads to illustrate how paradise is performed and presented in different ways. In the end, I will return to my theoretical ideas of imagination in consumer culture and elaborate on the relation between paradise as a visual matrix and on how imagination is reflected in media theoretical and media aesthetical contexts, respectively. My general interest is in outlining a theoretical framework for understanding imagination from a media-specific perspective as involving cognitive, emotional and sensuous processes, respectively, and in looking at how paradise, as an active and present visual matrix in tourism and consumer communication, has a specific appeal to viewers' imagination.

## **Imagination in Marketing and Consumer Culture**

Imagination is key to understanding ads and their aesthetic function in general, and viewers' imagination is not only an effect of a specific ad, but rather is incorporated into and reflected in ads' communicative intention and aesthetics. Imaginative consumption differs from physical, concrete consumption (e.g. buying a pair of shoes) and mediated consumption (e.g. seeing a person buying a pair of shoes in a TV ad). Imaginative consumption includes all kinds of consumption that take place in a person's mind, all his/her fantasies, daydreams and plans about, for instance, buying a pair of shoes, including how s/he might look wearing the shoes, how they feel to put on, to walk in, to show off and so on.

Imagination is one of several communication functions in ads and marketing; others could be a didactic function (how to use the Swifter or the car cleaner), price (cheap cucumbers!) or an emotive function that identifies the addresser's ethos (e.g. financing and security firms). In Roman Jakobsson's communication model (Fiske 2000, p. 35), the imagination is related to the *conative* function: the effect of the message on the addressee. Imagination is a specific communicative effect that the commercial pursues, and this effect has its particular relevance in relation to products and services that help the consumer build his or her own lifestyle and identity, e.g. branded products, luxury goods, lifestyle products and experiences like fashion, jewellery, lipstick, cars, kitchens, houses, shoes, design, gastronomy, holidays and trips, as well as products and services that make it possible to achieve these branded goods and experiences, such as bank loans, credit and lotteries.

There is an ongoing fusion between media culture and consumer culture. In his book *Image Culture* (2002), André Jansson discusses the relation between media and consumer culture, and he points out different modes of consumption in which the media play different roles.<sup>1</sup> In this connection, the concept of hedonistic consumption is relevant, and especially the *imaginative hedonistic* mode of consumption. Inspired by the work of Colin Campbell, Jansson differentiates between *realistic* and *imagina-*

*tive* hedonistic consumption, in which the first concerns pleasure seeking and sensory stimulation without the aim of trying something new but rather of minimizing the risk of failure, while the latter concerns the symbolic dimensions of commodity and pleasure sought via emotional and spiritual stimulation. Jansson argues that “the typical imaginative hedonist is a day-dreamer, hoping to experience the kind of higher spiritual joy promised by the image of certain goods – rather than by its material properties” (Jansson 2002: 52f).

The emergence of imaginative hedonism is caused by the mediatization of consumption in contemporary culture as well as by the intensification of the symbolic aspects of commodities, and advertisement has become “the principal forum for romantic image creation” (Jansson 2002, p. 53). Consumption is clearly not only about consuming goods, but an important aspect of it is also the individual’s creation of images and production of fantasies related to consumption. And to help create these images, marketing objects become important through such media as commercials, posters and advertisements as well as lifestyle television series, travel magazines, literature, lotteries and computer games. There is an aesthetic relation between the reader/viewer and the texts that is similar to how we used to think about the relation between an artwork and a museum visitor. A certain contemplative receptive mode is in play in which the consumer projects his or her own feelings and memories, creates images, produces fantasies and dreams and evokes reflections related to the sensuous experience of the object (e.g., media text, picture, advertisement) (Kaare Nielsen, 2002: 57ff). This contemplative mode, which has been related to art and literature reception, characterizes the reader’s reception of fashion and lifestyle magazines.

### **Imagining Paradise and the Tropical Dream in Tourism Culture**

Within tourism theory and media geography, the concept of a certain tourist gaze and the visual culture of tourism has been the object of comprehensive research interests and theoretical reflections (e.g., Crouch et al. 2005; Urry 2002; Strain 2003; Falkheimer & Jansson 2006; Larsen 2001; Osborne 2000; Waade 2006). Several visual and metaphorical matrices dominate tourism culture: the explorer, the adventurer or the image of the family as “connected bodies” (Larsen 2004: 137; see also Sørensen 1999). Tourist images circulate in a global, visual and mediated culture, and the visual matrices structure tourists’ imaginations and experiences. The tourist gaze in itself comprises a visual matrix that structures the commercial image production of specific tourist sites, landscapes and events in, for instance, postcards and travel books; it also shapes the tourist’s perception, understanding and experience of specific places and cultures and his/her private photos and holiday videos, which reproduce the same images (Urry 2002).

As a part of this focus on visual images reproduced and circulated within tourism culture, the concept of paradise has also been reflected, e.g., how paradise is used as a metaphor when marketing the British Virgin Island (Cohen 1995), or how paradise as a specific nature value is represented within eco tourism (Dann 1996). The concept of paradise in modern tourism relies on the romance of the South Pacific and the tropical beach. Orvar Löfgren describes the tropical dream and its history, and how the power of the Hawaiian imagery above all had to do with the fact that this was the first truly

mass-mediated paradise (Löfgren 1999). Tropical paradise as a visual concept was circulated in popular culture and music. Hawaii and the South Pacific were no longer only a fantasy-land; the image of the tropical beach with palm trees and hula girls with flowers in their hair turned up everywhere. During the 1950s, “active mass-media marketing furthered the fantasyland of the Pacific beach as an appetizingly exotic Eden of sensual woman with inviting smiles” (Löfgren 1999: 217). At the same time as the tropical paradise became popularized as a music and media image as well as a tourist destination, the European beach underwent a “polynesianization”, in which palm trees and tropical plants were necessary ingredients. Moreover, surfing and tropical events became popular activities. The tropical dream has to be understood in light of not only modern mass tourism and mass media, but also modernization, globalization and the Second World War. Löfgren points out essential aspects of the concept of paradise in modern tourism: *the poetics of virginity* and the *familiarity of the exotic*. A Robinsonian rhetoric or specific narrative structure in travel literature and tourist marketing is evident: the discovery of virgin coasts, villages and regions, the first footprints in the sand and the heroic conquest. The rhetoric of virginity creates new definitions of spoiled and unspoiled (Löfgren 1999: 183). The poetics of virginity also fit the dynamics of modern tourism as a commodity: we seek new places and new experiences. Paradise as something virginal that can be discovered and experienced is constituted both in time (nostalgic) and place (exotic): “There is a constant nostalgia for an earlier “then”, which tends to move around in time, as virginity is made and remade in different generational and social experiences of “the local”” (Löfgren 1999: 184).

As a visual matrix, paradise typically includes the beach, palm trees, sunshine, blue sky, the nude or young woman (or a couple), flowers and fruits. The beach as an iconographic element symbolizes the end of the world, the border between land and sea, and suggests the infinity of life (similar to the horizon line). The beach has also become a global tourist icon familiar from postcards, travel books, posters and films. Löfgren explains how the beach postcard “is a good example of the universalization of the beach experience, the making of a truly global iconography and choreography of beach life (...) without any hint of the “local”, just sand, sea, and carefully arranged groups of beach visitors” (Löfgren 1999: 213). The beach has also become an icon of modern tourism, in which sunbathing, swimming and surfing have become popular tourist activities that take place at the beach, and at the same time beaches have become popular tourist destinations in a global experience economy. As an element of paradise as visual matrix, the beach represents the tropical dream and marks the threshold between land and sea, life and death, the corporeal and the spiritual world. The palms, fruits and flowers belong to the tropical dream, but also symbolize fertility, nature (authenticity) and beauty. The nude stands for sexuality and the voyeuristic spectacle: the pleasure of bodily performance as well as voyeuristic desire. Nudism and sunbathing were hedonist activities that became popular in the late nineteenth century, and they were “an utopia of modern life and natural living” (Löfgren 1999: 222). The sunshine and the blue sky as elements of paradise image schemata illustrate sunbathing as a tourist activity, but also symbolize happiness and pleasure as well as divinity. The exotic image of specific landscapes, flowers and hula girls also represents an anthropological point of view and works in itself as an image matrix dealing with “the other” as well as spatial representation.

## Imagining Paradise in Religion and Art History

Paradise as an imaginative idea can be recognized in one form or another in all cultures and historical epochs. It is not possible in this context to describe paradise in religion and art history in any depth, but it is important to have an idea of how paradise has been understood and expressed throughout history and how these ideas and visual elements are linked to the paradise concept in tourism culture. As a mythical concept, paradise deals with an ideal world that mirrors our own world. Paradise is a timeless world, where only peace, prosperity and happiness exist. What is important in this context is that paradise is a multiple and dynamic matrix that not is restricted to Christianity, but may be seen as an existential condition and general expression that exists in all cultures. In its religious use, there are different versions of paradise as place and myth in Christianity, Islam, Native American beliefs, old Egyptian beliefs, classical Greek beliefs and Celtic mythology, among other belief systems. In the sociological, secular use of the word, the concept of paradise is linked to its Persian root, which means a beautiful garden enclosed within walls, in other words a place on earth<sup>2</sup>. In this sense, paradise is a human condition in which happiness, harmony and joyfulness are related to a beautiful garden and view of nature.

In his comprehensive work on landscape painting as world images, Danish art historian Jacob Wamberg (2006) demonstrated how paradise has been presented in literature, arts and crafts across cultures and centuries. He describes the typical paradise-topos as: *the tree of life on the rock of life by the spring of life* (Wamberg 2006: 237). The general iconographic elements of paradise are, in other words, tree, mountain and water. Wamberg shows how the different elements have been emphasized and expressed in different contexts of art history, and one of his ideas is that the mountain in paradise images was replaced by a plane landscape and cultivated plains in landscape paintings during the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The tree has been representing wilderness, and so has also flowers, vines and forests. Related to wilderness, animals such as birds and deer are also used. The water may be a spring, a fountain, a cascade or a sea, and the mountain may be a visible rock or just a hill on which trees and plants are growing. The horizon line plays a certain role in landscape paintings as in paradise images, it reflects the border between heaven and earth and symbolizes infinity. Wamberg argues that, in early paradise matrices, the cosmos included both, but later the relation between heaven and earth has been polarized in landscape paintings, literature as well as philosophy (Wamberg 2006: 238).

In art history as well as religion, the different visual elements of the paradise matrix have had specific meanings. In this connection, this kind of iconographic dictionary cannot explain why paradise is still an active matrix within consumer culture and market communication. Rather, I will argue that it is paradise as a multiple sign and an open mythical matrix that is important as well as how it offers dynamic processes for consumers' interpretation, projections and affective reactions. The tropical beach and paradise as a mythic image and the exotic and the erotic are already being fused. Paradise as a Christian mythic and spatial phantasmagoria is also to be seen as an ambiguous image: it is both earth (beautiful garden) and heaven, it represents both purity and a divine condition somewhere beyond our world, and at the same time the snake and nudity as evil, erotic and tempting subjects. Paradise as a complex modern tourist matrix in consumer and tourist media texts stimulates viewers' emotional and sensuous experience as well as reflection on physical, mediated and imaginative tourism (Waade 2006). The visual

matrix of paradise, like the global beach, includes a bodily performance and choreographic experience (Löfgren 1999: 224ff). These corporeal and sensuous elements are significant with respect to the commercials I will look at below.

## **Selection of Analytical Examples**

My analytical method and starting point is reception aesthetic analysis, in which my focus is on how the viewer is addressed and staged within the specific media texts. In this way, I can examine how ads communicate paradise as an audiovisual concept and how they stage the viewers' gaze for and imagination of paradise. My empirical study is based on the Danish digital archive of screen advertisements for TV and cinema, *Danske reklamefilm*, at the Danish National Library. From this archive, I have looked at tourist ads and consumer ads in which paradise played a distinct role either visually or conceptually. I have selected three tourism ads series and two consumer ads series presented in Denmark 1970-2005: Star Tour, Tjæreborg, Turkish Tourist Agency, Bacardi Rum and the Danish National Lottery. The former three were chosen to show typical tourism ads dealing with paradise matrices, but, as I later will argue, staging viewers' tourist gaze and imagination in quite different ways. The latter examples were chosen to elucidate how modern touristic images of paradise are also to be found in other consumer contexts and how consumers' imaginary is staged and stimulated through media aesthetics and dream-stimulating goods (exemplified by alcohol and the lottery). In my analytical presentation, I will focus on specific ads from the series that were selected to be representative and exemplary. My analytical examples include ads from different times (1970-2005) and production and distribution contexts (both national and international productions, products and markets) as well as consumption contexts (presented both from cinema and TV). The material is too small to allow any final and general conclusions, but rather it can emphasize and illustrate how paradise is a general and active visual and cultural matrix in tourism as well as consumer mass communication.

In my reception aesthetic point of view, the distinction between the substance and the form of the ads, respectively, is crucial to understanding how the ad addresses and stages the viewer. In other words, I will be focusing on what the ad is showing (e.g., the paradise image), on the one hand, and how this is communicated to the viewer and what kind of media-specific and aesthetic features are used (e.g., use of the camera: close ups, slow motion, stills, repetitions, addressing the viewer through direct speech or absence of interfering speech and text), on the other. By varying the analytical focus between what is shown and told in the ad and its communicative and cinematographic characteristics, it is possible to show how viewers' imagination is staged and reflected in the ad itself. "Paradise" has become an often-used everyday word to express a beautiful place and a nice holiday experience, but is it not so much the word paradise I am looking for in the ads, as the visual representations of paradise. My idea is that the visual representations together with the music and poetic expressions in the ads stimulate and activate viewers' imagination and emotional engagement in the text. Inspired by Andersen and Jantzen's (2004) understanding of sophisticated commercials, I have focused on ads in which the image itself rather than information about price, quality, products etc. plays the dominant role and constitutes the general aesthetic strategy. These kinds of sophisticated ads as image- and music-based media texts use an aestheti-



cal and poetic way of communicating and addressing the viewer's imagination through emotional and bodily reactions, memories and associations. In the ads I have selected, the text, instructive explanations, demonstrations, voice over and, for the most part, even the storyline are subordinate to the images and the music. It is these elements that serve an overall aesthetic function and also secure the receiver's imagination, fantasy and emotional investments in the texts.

### **Paradise in Tourist Ads: Tjæreborg, Star Tour and Turkish Tourist Agency**

The three tourism ads I have selected all represent major travel agencies on the Danish tourism market. They represent contemporary tourism ads (2001-2005) and they all deal with charter tours to the Mediterranean and other sunny beach destinations. Families are one of their main target groups, and in the examples I will use, paradise is shown as a beach landscape in which parents and children play together. There are several similarities in the ads regarding how they present paradise as a touristic matrix (e.g., beach, trees, water, playing people, sunshine, colours, etc.), but in this connection I will emphasize the aesthetical difference between the three ads and how they stage viewers' gazing position and bodily relation in different ways.

The ad produced for Tjæreborg Rejser<sup>3</sup> (2001) represents a typical tropical paradise image with green palms, white beaches, blue sky and turquoise water in which smiling and nice looking bodies are playing and having fun. The aesthetical characteristic is one we know from postcard and commercial images: colourful, glossy and with contrasts, well composed and balanced without disturbing or difficult elements, a beautiful and scenic landscape one can gaze at. The ad stages viewers' touristic gaze on the scenery, a contemplative gaze admiring landscape at a distance. The camera is stable and paradise is shown as a picturesque landscape painting. This distanced, romantic touristic view is reflected in tourism theories. Urry's idea of the tourist gaze (2002) contains a power relation, and the gaze objectifies the landscape, the place or the persons he/she is looking at. Jansson (2002) makes a distinction between tourists' symbiotic versus antagonistic spatial appropriation<sup>4</sup>, in which the latter covers the distanced and powerful gaze we see in the paradise ad campaign of Tjæreborg. This antagonistic gaze is also what we see in postcard landscapes, travel series as well as typical romantic landscape paintings (Waade 2009). In the Tjæreborg example, paradise is also shown as an island, in which there are no other people except the tourist family/couple, just beautiful nature and sunshine. The music is a popular hit from the 50s song by Louis Armstrong: *And I think to myself, what a wonderful world*. The nature, the people, the music and the colours are so much an ideal and a cliché that the ad's image remains as a dream landscape and thereby reflects the imagination itself. The voice-over does not suggest specific destinations or travel offers, but rather it is the catalogue she is promoting: "Believe in a nice and warm Danish summer", she says, "or order our catalogue".

The next example deals with the paradise matrix in quite another way, where the landscape and bodies are shown in close ups and grainy images. This ad was produced for Star Tour in 2000, and the image represents the symbiotic gaze in which the tourist's spatial appropriation is characterized by an intimate and bodily experience. The camera is used to illustrate the close relationship between the family members, and the paradise

**Figure 1.** *Tjæreborg Rejser ad (2001, Winther's)*



*Note:* Paradise is shown as a visual image by staging viewers' antagonistic gaze and a metaphoric relation to the place

*Source:* Danish National Library. Published with permission from Spies A/S, Copenhagen.

**Figure 2.** *Star Tour (2000, Initiative Universal Media A/S)*



*Note:* Paradise is shown as a visual image by staging viewers' symbiotic gaze and metonymic relation to the place

*Source:* Danish National Library. Published with permission from Star Tour A/S, Copenhagen.

landscape is shown in short glimpses to frame their sensuous travel experiences. The camera stages viewers' close and intimate relation to the people and places shown. The use of grainy images, an unstable camera, water drops on the lenses, unfocused as well as fast zooming images represent a visual style we recognize from private holiday videos and snapshot photos. This kind of *metonymic image* made by the camcorder points at the people that are gazing and making the video. In other words, The Star Tour ad emphasizes paradise as the bodily and sensuous experiences of close, intimate relations and moving bodies in touristic landscapes. The ad is part of a campaign, in which this symbiotic, metonymic gaze is established as a general visual style. In this case, paradise is not a scenic view one can gaze at from a distance, but rather bodily emotions and relations within the place (Waade 2006).

Star Tour shows how paradise is expressed as a mainly bodily and emotional condition in which intimate relations and landscape are related. The water, the palms, the blue sky, the sunshine and the playing kids are all represented in this paradise matrix, but as a media text it emphasizes viewers' bodily and intimate relation to the place. The music is quite similar to the music in the Tjæreborg ad, with a soft male voice singing about "the wonderful world when you are here". The lyrics – similar to the image – emphasize the intimate and emotional relation between the two people, the one who is singing/gazing and the child/lover. In the Tjæreborg ad, the world is a wonderful paradise because of the amazing, colourful scenery, but in Star Tour it is because "you are here". In other words, the lyrics follow the ads' respective antagonistic, metaphorical and symbiotic, metonymic imagery.



The Turkish Tourist Office ad uses the paradise matrix as one among other touristic matrices (heritage, cityscapes, adventure, sport), and what is interesting in this context, is how the ad emphasizes the Christian paradise myth and icons mixed with ancient and Islamic signs, illustrating the multicultural nature of the destination. The visual style is characterized by montage of different short cuts that overlap each other, as in a fast slide show. The camera shifts positions and images rapidly, and the ad is composed as a dreamlike visual dance, shifting and fading images to the rhythm of the music. The imagery refers to the camera itself, by showing unfamiliar perspectives, high angle and panoramic images, slow motion, fading images, dreamlike and unrealistic images (e.g., flying fishes). The postmodern montage style of the ad might be used to stress the multicultural, modern as well as historical qualities of the destination. In this ad, paradise is shown from a sovereign, divine viewing position. It is a different extreme and playfully distanced antagonistic viewing position from that in the typical landscape painting paradise matrix we just have seen in the Tjæreborg ad. It is a visual matrix based on media-specific imagery (in fact similar to the Star Tour ad, but with quite another visual aesthetic). At the same time, paradise as a tourist consumer matrix is rooted in Christian mythology and Western heritage. The music underlines the playfulness of the visual image – no lyrics, just rhythm and instruments.

**Figure 3.** Turkish Tourist Office (2001, Bygraves Bushell Valladares & Sheld)



*Note:* Paradise is shown as a visual image by staging viewers' antagonistic gaze and a playful attitude towards cultural signs, destination iconographies and the imagery itself.

*Source:* Turkish Tourist Office. Published with permission from The Turkish Ambassade for Culture and Tourism, Copenhagen.

The paradise matrix that takes place in the Turkish ad is a typical tropical paradise landscape with a white, sandy beach island, palms, blue sky and turquoise water accompanied with playing families. The Christian reference is presented already in one of the first images: a woman with an apple in her hand ready to eat it, while images of clouds, ancient buildings and sandy beaches are swirling around her, as in a dream. But at the same time, paradise is not so much about the place or intimate relations, but rather the imagination itself. The playfulness and the imagination are shown in the ad's visual style and in the way it addresses the viewer. It is viewers' excessive gaze for mediated tourist sites that is displayed. It is not mediated intimate authenticity, as in the Star Tour ad, nor a contemplative touristic gaze for amazing landscapes, as in the Tjæreborg ad, rather it is a media competent consumer gaze in which imagination and playfulness are part of the communicative mode. The tourist gaze staged in the Turkish ad refers to a playful subject whose paradise is not so much beautiful places or bodily experiences, but instead cultural signs, destination iconographies and the imagery itself.

By using the distinction between metaphorical and metonymical, it is possible to identify how viewers' imaginations are expressed and staged in different ways through the visual aesthetics of the ads. The different gazes are related to certain touristic views and in different ways represent and activate viewers' imaginations. The antagonistic mode is seen in, e.g., postcard images and commercials with vivid colours, contrasts, high angle, maps and montages, and it includes viewers' distanced and metaphoric gaze as well as symbolic and iconic signs representing destinations and travel modes. The symbiotic mode, on the other hand, represents viewers' metonymic relation to the place and the image, where the image may be seen as an extension of the eye and the body. This image has another bodily affect; it represents the moving body and indicates corporeal memories and imaginations. The Tjæreborg ad represents a typically secularized, touristic paradise image based on a romantic, contemplative landscape view, while the Star Tour ad represents a touristic camcorder view on intimate bodies in paradise. The Turkish ad represents a meta-communicative mode, in which the paradise dream is related to the mediation and imagination itself.

In the next two examples, I will show how the touristic paradise has been and still is an active matrix in not only tourist commercials, but also other consumer contexts. Both examples deal with imagination in specific ways, as a specific bodily condition and as a consumer-specific condition.

### **Bacardi ads Displaying the Tropical Dream**

Bacardi has always used their original place of production to brand their products: Santiago de Cuba. Even though the company no longer produces rum on Cuba, they have decided to re-emphasize their Cuban heritage as a branding strategy.<sup>5</sup> In the '70s and '80s, several Bacardi screen advertisements were presented in Danish cinemas. In my empirical study, I have found three subcategories in which the product (Bacardi Rum) is presented through different aesthetic strategies: some focus on the *facts about the product* (origin, Bacardi products, drink receptions<sup>6</sup>), others use *paradise island*, and finally some advertisements show the product as a *sculptural, sensuous object* (both the bottle and the liquid)<sup>7</sup>. The latter two categories use intoxication as the aesthetic concept – the spiritual experience of spirits, so to speak. In the paradise advertisements, intoxication is related to the spatial experience of the Caribbean paradise, while in the sculptural ones, intoxication is illustrated as a particular sensitive state in which the drink's fluidity and sensuous qualities are intensified through cinematic visual techniques such as slow motion, close ups, repetition, lighting and hyper-realistic textures.<sup>8</sup>

Looking more specifically at Bacardi's paradise commercials, there are different variations on the beach-palm trees-sun-woman scenery. Nearly all of the paradise ads use the beach as a location, and they show the tourist's relaxing life on the beach sunbathing, sleeping in a hammock, playing in the sand or having drinks with friends. To give an example, there is one ad in which the scenery takes place on a small raft slowly floating around on the calm sea. The opening scene shows a couple on the raft. The camera zooms in from a high angle and we see the couple from different points of view as they look at each other. The woman is sunbathing and the man is caressing her legs while splashing refreshing water on her skin. The camera dwells on the body of the woman, following its lines and getting close to the surface. The images are repeated twice.

The end shot is a typical tropical paradise image: the camera zooms out and we see the bright beach, the coastline, the turquoise sea, the horizon and the blue sky from above.

**Figure 4.** *Bacardi & Coke (1976, Gutenberghus Reklame Film)*



*Note:* The ads reflect the imagination in consumer culture itself, and how intoxication, imagination and the tropical dream are related in the paradise matrix.

*Source:* Danish National Library.

The visual image illustrates the male's as well as the spectator's attention, gaze and desire. The viewer sees glimpses of a (Bacardi) bottle behind the woman's leg. Visually speaking, almost nothing happens: we only see the two of them relaxing in the sun, and we have plenty of time to take in the image and dream. Once, in a close up of the woman's leg glistening with drops of water, the image blends with a bottle of rum. The bottle and the body contain the same colours, lines and shimmering drops, and the image of the bottle disappears immediately afterward. It is as though we enter the man's imagination, or perhaps a kind of alcoholic hallucination: the desire for the body blends with the desire for the liquid. This happens once more at the end of the film; this time it is a bottle of Coca Cola. The couple has just climbed into a ship that is as dark brown as the drink, and while the camera zooms out and we see the silhouettes of the young people in the sunset, their bodies have almost the same form as the cola bottle.

Besides the absorbing, slow visual images, the sound is important in the Bacardi ads, not only the Caribbean music and the sound of the waves, but also the lyrics. The images follow the smooth rhythm of the music, and the song text as well as the easy melody, underline the simple message in the image: *Why don't you take it cool, Bacardi and Rum, Bacardi and Rum.* According to the paradise image matrix in this example, there are actually no palm trees, flowers or fruits, but rather it emphasizes sexuality and bodily desire. The bottle becomes the snake hiding behind the leg, like an antagonistic character in the mythic narrative that makes things happen through temptation and magic, awakening erotic feelings and showing the "smooth, cool way" to hedonistic pleasure.

In another of Bacardi's paradisiacal ads (1975), the concept of imagination becomes an explicit communicative element. The opening shot shows the face of a woman in close up. She is standing still and her eyes are open, but she isn't looking at anything specific. She is concentrating on her own dreams and thoughts. A male voice, half singing, half talking, proclaims:

*Ahhhh, have a stretch,  
Look around you, what do you see  
Blue skies, beaches  
Let your imagination get wild,  
Take a meta trip to the Caribbean  
'Cuz any place you go over there  
You wanna see people all the time with a glass in their hand  
Under the sun, drinking Bacardi Rum*

The voice is commenting on the woman, but is also directed towards the spectator. The voice makes a direct, immediate connection between the image and the spectator, and it gives instructions to the spectator about what to do and how to react: “let your imagination get wild”. Just as the woman looks around and sees blue skies and beaches, the spectator looks at the woman and imagines blue skies and beaches. There are no logos or company signs, no narrative presentations or introductory explanations that establish an interpretative framework and communicative distancing attitude between the viewer and the voice, and the spectator is present in the image through the camera and gazes at the woman with his/her own eyes.

What is relevant to note regarding the Bacardi Rum ads in this context is, first, how they illustrate how the tropical paradise matrix has been used in consumer ads at the same time as the modern tourism industry has expanded and the tropical beach scenery has developed as an icon of modern mass tourism. Second, the ads reflect the imagination in consumer culture itself, and especially how intoxication, imagination and the tropical dream are related in the paradise matrix. Third, the ads show how imagination as communicative strategy is staged and reflected. The music and the visual images represent dreamlike sequences: short glimpses of water, waves, beach, palm leaves, a bottle twinkling like sunshine while the image is blended with the water. In the end shot, once again we see silhouettes in the sunset in which the bodies, glasses and three branches intertwine in an abstract pattern. This is a poetic image that includes clichés we know from, e.g., romantic films, covers and love songs. As a media text, with regard to Umberto Eco’s understanding of an open text<sup>9</sup>, the clichés and paradise matrices represent an open story and an open image that invites the reader not only to interpret, but also get involved emotionally and imaginative. The image, as well as the music and the words, starts *in media res*, the ad has no introductory words or frames and the spectator just jumps into the mediated world. This is a dramaturgic way of establishing the metonymic relation between the viewer and the staged scenery.

In the Bacardi ad series, the concept of paradise is related to the product’s origin and its certain tourist rhetoric and image, as well as to alcoholic intoxication and a “trip” to a liminal, sublime, heavenly condition.

### **Lottery Commercials: A Daydreamer’s Paradise**

Advertisements for the National Lottery use exotic places for two reasons: they are fascinating and tempting images in themselves that can cause the viewer to dream about holidays in the future or perhaps recall nice memories, and at the same time the lottery makes it possible – for the lucky winner – to realize these dreams. Not only do

the Lottery advertisements cause the viewer to dream about travelling, there is also a series with a “quit your job” theme, as well as glamour and fame. The Lottery screen advertisements that I have examined (produced in the period 1990-1994) are all typically short narratives with a surprising and humorous end point, and all of them illustrate the transformation of an ordinary (working class) man into a person living in endless luxury, freedom (off duty) or an exotic paradise. For example, the truck driver who crashes into another man’s expensive red Ferrari because he no longer has to worry about money or his job; or the secretary, the fisherman and the painter who can quit their jobs by marching out the door, leaving their boss behind and shouting with joy. One spot shows a fashion show from Chanel with models who present their catwalk in the limelight. Suddenly a woman enters the stage from behind, the scene changes to slow motion and we see that she is slowly running towards the audience and screaming. The sound also changes and almost disappears, as though time were standing still. The woman is happy, and she throws herself onto the floor as people embrace her, shouting with joy. In the end shot, we see the Lotto coupon in her hand. This short story is not only about a person who wins and can quit her ordinary job and life, but also a person who enters the celebrity world of fashion and makes a breakthrough on the screen. The lottery makes it possible to become a star. The Lottery uses the idea of daydream as a communicative strategy.

Paradise as an image matrix is used explicitly in the Lotto ad campaigns that use holiday dreams as a concept. In one example, a couple is paddling in a small canoe in a rainstorm: the woman sees the Lotto coupon under their wet backpack, and she starts imagining a sunny beach where she is being taken care of by several strong, half-naked exotic men. As in all the other Lottery ads, this one is told in a humoristic way with a narrative surprise plot like in jokes, and it has a general undertone of parody and excess.

**Figure 5.** *Lotto, Tænk hvis du vandt (1990-1994, Dansk Reklame Film)*



*Note:* The tropical paradise as dreamscape in lottery ads.

*Source:* Danish National Library.

Again, this is a tropical paradise matrix with palm trees, fruits, flowers, sunshine, beautiful half-naked bodies, happy playing people and soft drinks shown in a picturesque and colourful way. And again, it is not so much the specific destination but rather the



imagination and the pleasant daydream itself that the ad is communicating. Paradise is an imaginative concept in which modern consumers can project themselves to another beautiful sunny beach landscape, another happy and playful context and another desirable and emotional bodily condition. The camera does not follow a male's gaze and his imagination and erotic desire; rather the spectator follows the woman's gaze. This is not at all a critique of the female body as an object of the male gaze; rather, the image illustrates that it is mainly the woman in a couple or a family who plans and dreams about holidays and travelling. And perhaps she is also the one who plays Lotto hoping to get a chance to realize her holiday dreams.

### **Paradise as Beachscape and Bodily State: Transformation and Transportation**

To sum up on the ads I have analysed and how they use the paradise matrix as a communicative strategy, there are some general views. According to Löfgren's description of the half-naked hula girls in tourist images of paradise, there are no such hula girls, but instead tan blond tourists. The only exotic elements in these ads are the landscape, plants and fruits, while the persons (both male and female) are white, rich and nice-looking young people from the West. In other words, the ads show the tourists and not the locals, and paradise is used as a visual frame to tell about and show an ideal holiday experience. What, then, does paradise symbolize in secularized culture? First, it is a spatial concept with some specific visual compositional and iconographic elements, and second, it is a mythological concept with multiple means and possibilities. Third, is it a temporal concept; the good life is something that can be achieved here and now (in contrast to religion: there and then), eventually as a pleasant daydream. Regarding the social and relational concept, the paradise matrix includes certain ideals of family, couple, parenting and friends (in contrast to, e.g., animals in art history), and as a symbolic concept it represents a re-enchantment of culture in which mythologies, religious experience and transformative magic are part of a consumer culture and one's consumer identity.

Following Jacob Wamberg's macro-historic point of view on the display of paradise in art and culture history, one might argue that Paradise as a concept in tourism culture is a revival of the early understanding of the cosmos as uniting earth and heaven, because its main objective is to show heavenly conditions on earth. And these conditions may be achieved through spatial imagination and consumerism. It is a secular understanding of paradise that takes place in which happiness, harmony and joyfulness are related not exactly to a beautiful garden, but rather to a view of (tropical) nature with a blue sky, water, plants and people. There are no animals in the touristic paradise matrix, as in the art history and mythological paradise matrices, instead there are families, children and intimate relationships. Instead of drinking the water, the water in the touristic paradise matrix is used for bathing, play and fun. And the beaches, the palms, the sky and the horizon are presented as a picturesque and visual framing of the tourist experience. Paradise has become a preferred set design for the performing tourist.

In the tourist and consumer ads, the imagination includes elements of both transportation (to an exotic place) and transformations (of everyday life/social position). In the Bacardi examples, a transition takes place both on an outer, site-specific and physical level and on an inner level of intoxication and eroticism. The paradisiacal condition



becomes the combination of a certain spatial and sensuous appropriation and an inner bodily state. In both Bacardi examples, alcoholic intoxication is connected with the power of imagination. The trip signifies an imaginative journey to the other place, but also an alcoholic trip. The commercial was produced in the mid-‘70s, and at this time, the romantic attitude towards both drugs and exotic places was increasing. The alcoholic trip becomes the incarnation of the good life and glorifies the way of life in exotic places. The commercial says, let’s do what the people over there do: they have a glass in their hand all the time and drink alcohol under the sun. In this way, the paradise matrix also includes – besides certain landscapes, narrative structures and figures – the freedom to explore and experience drugs and places. The imaginative hedonist is conceptualized in this commercial, and the spectators are supposed to imagine how rum will enable them to fancy and imagine the good life. Regarding the lottery ads, the daydream includes the potentiality of transformation of oneself. In this case, imagining paradise is not about the place, but the imagination itself. In contrast to the Bacardi commercials, where the product is branded through the tropical dream of paradise, the lottery ads are about the daydreamer himself. First, it is rather important to be able to dream to realize the value of a lottery coupon, while we can easily achieve and consume Bacardi Rum without worrying about the tropical dream. Second, the lottery ads establish an ironic and self-reflective attitude in which the dreamer him- or herself is staged as a comic cliché (e.g., the secretary, the truck driver, the woman who almost drowns in the rain). In this context, the paradise image matrix is about imagining the good life.

### **Theoretical Views on Image Matrices and Affective Participation in Moving Pictures**

I will now follow up on my initial question concerning how the concept of imagination can be understood in consumer culture, and what the media specific approaches are to imagination. In my analytical examples, I have illustrated how viewers’ imagination may be activated through certain communicative and aesthetical features. These examples of the paradise matrix represent moving pictures. But how can the relation between moving pictures as a specific aesthetic, mediated communication and the viewers’ imagination be seen and how is this relation reflected in media theory? The concept of imagination as a communicative approach has been considered from several different theoretical perspectives, e.g. cultural, aesthetic and psychological. As already mentioned, imagination is an issue in relation to consumer culture (e.g., Colin Campbell 1987; Michel Maffesoli 1997), and the concept has also been developed in the field of media and film studies (e.g., Edgar Morin 1956/2005). Imagination is a theoretical issue in the field of art philosophy and art reception (e.g., Immanuel Kant 1790), as well as psychology and cognition (e.g., Mark Thompson 1987). In my analyses, I have used the term image matrix as a communicative concept, and in the way I understand the term imaginative, interpretative, emotional as well as performative processes are included. This term needs to be further explained and reflected on theoretically.

Mark Johnson’s book *The Body in the Mind* (1987) offers some relevant ideas on the concept of imagination, particularly the cognitive and performative aspects of the phenomenon. Johnson works in the context of cognition and structuralism and deals with cognitive processes of understanding, meaning and reasoning and how the schemata

structure these processes. Inspired by Immanuel Kant's philosophy, he develops a theory on imagination and image schemata that reflects the relation between bodily experience and cognitive processes. Kant understood imagination as a capacity for organizing mental representations into meaningful units, and suggested four different functions of the imagination: *reproductive* (imagination as representations), *productive* (imagination as structuring experiences over time), *schematizing* (imagination as mediating between abstract concepts and sensuous, bodily experiences) and *creative* (imagination as free and generating novel meaning and new structures in our experience) (Johnson 1987:165). Johnson criticizes the traditional dualisms in Western philosophy (body/spirit, reason/imagination, cognition/emotion, science/art) and argues that imagination is related to corporeal experiences and sensations. In relation to Kant's four functions, Johnson suggests the concept of *imaginative structures* as a way to develop his ideas. These structures include *image schemata* and *metaphorical projections*. The first is a "recurring, dynamic pattern of our perceptual interactions and motor programs that gives coherence and structure to our experience" (p. xiv), and he uses the expression "*more is up*" to exemplify image schemata, to explain how this basic vertical structure works (e.g., in relation to prices, numbers, earnings), and to indicate that these schemata are related to the basic up/down bodily experience. Regarding the process of metaphorical projection, it is "not merely a linguistic mode of expressions, rather, it is one of the chief cognitive structures by which we are able to have coherent ordered experiences that we can reason about and make sense of" (p. xv). Imagination is closely connected to Johnson's understanding of metaphor, and it grows out of bodily experience as it contributes to our understanding and guides our reasoning.

Kirsten Drotner (2002) uses the term *matrix* to explain media-specific schemata (e.g. genres) and how they structure not only understanding and meaning, but also feelings, sensuous experiences and even performative actions. Image matrices structure, for instance, the way the tourist gazes at a place or a nude, not only when seeing an ad but also when being and performing the tourist; they also structure the tourist's feelings and emotional reactions (e.g., when to cry and to laugh). In my own use of the term image matrix, I have followed both Johnson's and Drotner's ideas, and I see the image matrix as cognitive schemata that include emotional and aesthetic-reflexive functions as well as performative functions.

To elaborate the emotional and projection aspect of the concept of image matrices, I will mention the work of Edgar Morin (1956/2005) and his psychoanalytic perspective on imagination and affective participation in moving pictures. Morin works with the relation between fiction/dream and reality in cinematographic perception, and his main argument concerns the polymorphous projection-identification process and how cinema is a symbiosis, "a system that tends to integrate the spectator into the flow of the film" and at the same time "a system that tends to integrate the flow of the film into the psychic flow of the spectator" (Morin, 2005:102). Morin describes the spectator's projection-identification process (or, as I have already suggested, aesthetic relation) as *affective participation*, and he stresses the sensuous and emotional aspects of the process. The different cinematic techniques, such as camera movements, tempo, close-ups, slow motion, lighting, high angle or low angle shots and so on, intensify the projection-identification process as well as the spectator's affective participation.<sup>10</sup> The consumer's imagination is a mental landscape of self-presentation, a kind of inverted psychological

projection in which the consumer imagines how the product, the service or the experience could enter his/her own world or relate to his or her own body. Even though, for instance, imagination involves how it might feel to lie in a hammock far away from home on a sunny beach drinking soft drinks served by young, strong, erotic men, the projection is inverted because the experience is transferred into the consumer's own bodily experience. Edgar Morin's term *projection identification process* (Morin, 2005: 85ff) describes how the viewer relates him- or herself to the media text in a complex process involving the viewer's understanding, emotions and imagination. Another relevant film theory in this context is found in Christian Metz's (1982) ideas on the cinematic gaze and how moving pictures as signs are confused with the real world. Metz combines film semiotics and psychoanalysis. Ellen Strain (2003) refers to the work of Metz in her book on how the tourist gaze has become a general matrix in visual media and particularly film, as an established visual and cultural codex: "the short-circuit signifier collapses the traditional distance between signifier and signified, producing the illusion of a return to the presymbolic imaginary" (Strain 2003: 6). Regarding the idea of the image matrix, paradise may be one of these presymbolic matrices and imaginaries.

Image matrices are open frameworks for individuals' emotional, cognitive and imaginative processes and participation. Commercials rely on these popular matrices and clichés to secure immediate attention and responses. Intertextual references, genre parody, satire and caricatures are media-specific matrices that are well-known strategies in commercials. Paradise and tourist images, as I have argued, are manifested as compound mythical and visual matrices in commercials and consumer culture, and they are dynamic matrices that are constantly being mixed, developed and changed.

Both Johnson and Morin underline the complex process of meaning and imagination, and with respect to my analysis of specific ads, I will argue that images of *paradise* and concepts of *the good life* are much more than empty clichés and simple representations, but correspond to the spectator's needs and self-reflection as well as to an extensive cultural circulation of images and meanings. Paradise is an image matrix in tourism and consumer culture, and in its secularized version it does not illustrate a reunion with the good in a metaphysical state, but rather an imaginative reunion with oneself to achieve good moods, pleasure and inner satisfaction. Paradise has become – or has perhaps always been – the daydreamer's pleasant scenery. As a visual matrix, paradise is not only what we imagine and dream about, but it also structures the way we act and see ourselves as tourists and media consumers. Peter Osborn describes how tourists, tourism marketing managers as well as mass media photographers and journalists are taking part in a *visual reproduction* of certain images and matrices within tourism culture (Osborne 2000). Within the idea of the tourist gaze, and the visual reproduction within the tourism and consumer culture, there may be a certain gaze for paradise. For instance, when we tell people about our latest holiday, we use words we know from the advertisements ("It was a paradise for the kids", "it looks like a paradise"), just as the photos we take look like the ones we have seen in advertisements and magazines. In other words, the image matrix of paradise structures our experience as tourists and as armchair travellers watching screen ads.

## Notes

1. Jansson differentiates between *instrumental* consumption, which is anti-consumerist and gratifies certain physical and material needs in efficient ways, and *hedonistic* consumption, which is about pleasure seeking, and describes how individuals try to maximize the bodily pleasure that may be achieved through consumption; *reproductive* consumption covers an expressive component in which consumption is used to mark social distinctions, and *pretentious* consumption is about shaping identity and social roles through consumption (Jansson 2002: 51f).
2. Wikipedia: Paradise (09.06.2009)
3. Tjæreborg has now become a partner in the Danish Travel Agency Spies, [www.spies.dk](http://www.spies.dk).
4. Jansson (2002) differentiates between an antagonistic mode in tourists' spatial appropriation (e.g., safaris, city sightseeing, folklore, organized bus trip), a symbiotic mode (e.g., farm holiday, train hiking) and a contextual mode, in which the tourist experience is secondary to another activity (e.g., golf trips, skiing, sun-and-beach-package).
5. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bacardi>
6. This first category is not the type of sophisticated ads I am focusing on, and they are therefore not relevant in this context.
7. These three aesthetic strategies are used in parallel and in different combinations during the period studied (1970-1993), and they illustrate different communicative ideals in advertisement and market communication: from facts about the product as serious and truthful information to branding strategies in which the product plays an indirect role and instead brand values and experiences are communicated through the screen advertisements.
8. The imagination has two different functions in these two categories: while the paradise advertisements illustrate a spatial phantasmagoria, the sculptural ones represent a tactile phantasmagoria. In both, the relation between imagination and intoxication is illustrated; the liquor is supposed to put us in a certain emotional and sensitive state that intensifies our experiences and enables us to imagine and fancy places and objects.
9. See Umberto Eco (1976/1996) on the role of the reader.
10. See Waade (2006) for an analysis of the travel series *Pilot Guides* and the relation between visual images and the spectator's affective participation.

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## Acknowledgement

This article has been developed and transformed in several stages. An early version was published in *P.O.V.*, Aarhus University in 2006 in connection with a Danish research project on historical cinema and TV ads funded and supported by the National Library. In that connection, I wish to thank Richard Raskin and the other members of the research group for their support and inspiration. I also wish to thank Szilvia Gyimothy and my other colleagues in the Scandinavian Network of Emotional Geography for their helpful comments on my paper. I am also grateful for the engaged and supportive comments of participants in the Visual Culture workshop that took place at the Nordic Media Research Conference in Helsinki 2007. I also wish to thank Nordicom and the referees for their relevant and insightful comments.

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