A Family Affair

cinema calls home

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How Some Things Never Change: Britney, the Joy of Pepsi and the Familial Gaze

STEVEN ALAN CARR

As the process of globalization extends towards and encompasses upon more territory, more institutions and more cultures, scholars would do well to remember that the most important unit of consumption in many developed economies is not the individual, but the family. Families serve as the target market for everything from groceries to durable goods such as major appliances and automobiles. However, what constitutes a family is not fixed, but is an ever-expanding product of the globalised institutional forces that seek to colonise individuals and target groups into lucrative markets and commodities. At the same time, institutions do not unilaterally determine what a family is or who gets to belong to one. The US Census Report of 2000, for example, claims that for the first time in the history of the Census, the number of traditional nuclear families in the nation dropped below the plateau mark to 73.5 percent of all households of 55 million, while the number of people living alone grew, and the number of unmarried couples nearly doubled over the past decade to 6.5 million households. From the standpoint of manufacturing, mainstream media and advertisers, the most efficient unit of the audience — the nuclear family that consists of a married heterosexual couple with one or two children — is becoming a depleted national resource.

Nevertheless, attempts to restrict and place the principles of family and individual identity to the right template of the heterosexual and monogamous nuclear arrangement are on the rise, at least within a North American context. The perceived threat of gay marriage has prompted a number of states to pass legislation outlawing the practice. The landmark 1973 Supreme Court decision Lawrence v. Texas, a woman's constitutional right to choose whether to carry a fetus to term appears at risk of being overturned, as recent Court appointments indicate an appeasement to religious fundamentalists within the Republican Party. But these family values have also become a rallying cry for conservatives throughout the 1990s, with the right to marry single mothers, African American children, or anyone else an additional feature of the situation comedy, characterized by the sitcoms like Friends (1994–2004) and The Office (2005–2013).
first century the craze for family values seems to have subsided, the notion of faith initiatives seems to have taken many of the core concepts of family values to a logical development, attempting to impose upon the rest of society a narrow, dogmatic and more explicit brand of Protestant conservatism as the ‘natural’ and ‘normal’ set of default values. According to this view, women are subservient to men, bear children, tend the home and repress their sexuality. Children are an expendable natural resource, bred either for cheap labour or for military excursions. Men in this schema are the breadwinners, performing and acting decisively in public life in making important and seemingly rational determinations. Unlike their women, these men are to be forgiven if they freely and aggressively express their heterosexuality.

How is it, then, that as the number of traditional nuclear families within the US appears to be on the wane, regressive ideologies centred upon the concept of the nuclear family appear more resolute and more widespread than ever? People often subscribe to ideas and beliefs that are clearly not in their best interest, and ever since Karl Marx, critics and intellectuals have grappled with the question of why this is so. Popular media, in fact, have served as a focal point for this critique. Rather than argue that popular culture simply conveys false consciousness through capitalist, materialistic consumer culture, however, much recent media scholarship has considered popular culture as a sophisticated apparatus of appropriation, in which a wide spectrum of concepts concerning family and sexuality are negotiated through complex visual and rhetorical strategies. At the same time, the complexity and negotiation involved in cultural appropriation has inspired some media scholars to view popular culture as a potentially liberating rather than repressive force, presenting a range of arguably subversive alternatives to the nuclear family. But this popular view of ideology, while acknowledging what is indeed a complex process, misses what one might deem a deep structure of illusions. That is, while the notion of false consciousness might be overly simplistic (and thus itself false), the mere evidence of cultural appropriation and complexity does not automatically guarantee a moment of cultural liberation or resistance.

In considering how a deep structure of illusions might figure within media analysis, this essay performs a close reading of the second of two Pepsi-Cola commercials featuring Britney Spears that premiered during the 2001 Academy Awards broadcast. The first advert, two minutes long, features Spears singing and dancing in a Pepsi bottling facility. Running one and half minutes, the second intercuts much of the performance material from the first with shots of various media audiences encountering Spears’s routine. In addition to airing the commercials during the Academy Awards, Pepsi also promoted both versions of the advertisement on their website and arranged to have the second commercial screened in multiplex movie theatres across the United States along with previews for coming attractions. This advertisement appears, at least on the surface, to be somewhat at odds with conservative ideologies. It promotes a highly sexualised image of the pop star, and does so at a moment when she was trying to break away from her earlier image as a wholesome icon for a nine-to-twelve-year-old ‘tween’ audience. At the same time, it also features former Senate Majority Leader and 1996 Republican presidential nominee Bob Dole who, after a failed bid for the presidency, was in the process of remaking his own image as spokesperson for the male impotence drug, Viagra. The commercial ends with Dole, sitting in a darkened room watching Spears’ performance on television, saying ‘Easy, boy’ as his dog barks at the set. While one ultimately must read both commercials as part of Pepsi’s larger and subsequent campaign featuring Spears, or as part of an even larger text about post-Cold War consumerism, this essay considers a deep structure of illusions present only within the second Pepsi commercial. In just a mere minute and a half, this text privileges and subordinates a complex array of ideologies.

Although they are advertisements – especially expensive ones such as the Pepsi commercials I am invoking here – these productions are really micro-movies. In dollars per screen second, they rival the most elaborate widescreen extravaganzas. They contain implicit ideologies. They are shot on 35mm film stock and then transferred to video. They are edited as miniature narratives that are centred on complex visual strategies and organisation. In privileging and subordinating a complex array of ideologies, this particular Pepsi ad furthermore functions in hegemonic fashion. The notion that the vast majority of popular media operates as a contested and negotiated ideological terrain is not new, of course. Antonio Gramsci’s conceptualisation of hegemony – which theorises how socially subordinate groups could both influence and be co-opted by a superstructure – offers a much-needed refinement to overly rigid and deterministic models of ideological influence. In ‘Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: Notes Toward an Investigation’ (1977), Louis Althusser further differentiated between repressive state apparatuses (RSAs) relying upon physical force to maintain social order; and ideological state apparatuses (ISAs) relying upon imposing an imagined but highly persuasive set of social relations to maintain this order. Althusser further theorises a process of ideological interpellation, whereby ideologies must call out to, or hail, individuals on the basis of their identification within a particular social group or subculture. The concepts of hegemony and interpellation have been particularly salient to media and cultural studies. For example, John Fiske has defined what he calls the ‘clawback’ structure of mainstream media, which ‘works to claw back potentially deviant or disruptive events into the dominant value system’ (1993: 288). Thus, while the dominant value system always exists in relation to both material and symbolic threats, the clawback function of the media works to contain and domesticate these threats within a hierarchy of conformity.

Within media studies, explorations of hegemony and clawback have considered ideologies as distinct interpellations of race, class, gender, and the like. Less attention has been focused upon the deep embedding of emotion and feeling within a structure of illusions. In attempting to analyse to a fuller extent how illusion works within the Pepsi commercial I am studying, I return primarily to Raymond
Williams' notion of a deep 'structure of feeling'. Like the work of Gramsci, Althusser and others, Williams' concept marks a much needed shift away from the more literalist and deterministic Marxist notions of culture as the primary conveyance for false consciousness. Although it has sparked much discussion and many potential interpretations, three significant themes have emerged from Williams' 'structure of feeling': first, that when interpreting culture through cultural products, one must take into account not just explicit meanings but implicit meanings read between the lines as well; secondly, that one cannot discount how an audience experiences popular culture through emotion, a dimension that Marxist determinist critiques frequently dismiss as another iteration of false consciousness; and finally, that when considering implicit meanings and the role of emotion within popular culture, one must locate the cultural text within 'material life, the social organisation, and, to a large extent, the dominant ideas' (2001: 33).

The value of reconsidering a structure of feeling in light of some of the more recent refinements to ideological theory goes beyond simply pointing out the existence of a complex ideological process at work, or noting that this process functions like a well-oiled machine (which it certainly does). Williams reminds us of the deeply felt and emotional dimension of ideology. Ideological analysis perpetually runs the risk of performing its own clawback function, acknowledging the complexity of the process while dismissing emotion and feeling as cheap ploys meant to distract, delude or lull the masses into a complacent false consciousness. Furthermore, in imagining ideology as a complex process of discrete stages, we run the risk of replacing an imagined and ahistorical audience with an actual audience that makes sense and responds emotionally to cultural products given a specific historical context bounded by actual events. Through a 'structure of illusions' a commercial works not because it dupes an audience into something fake or false. A serious analysis of the 'structure of illusions' engages notions of complexity, audience awareness and even the authenticity of the illusion itself. The deep structure of illusions within the 2001 Pepsi commercial works precisely because this structure draws upon both audience awareness of the illusion and an audience capable of distinguishing illusion from authentic lived conditions. At the same time, the commercial depends upon its audience entering into an authentic relationship with mediated illusion, though in ways that hardly operate in either simplistic or linear fashion.

In the commercial, Spears appears in a blue Pepsi jumpsuit between two delivery trucks. As she tears off her uniform to begin dancing and singing, fellow performers suddenly leap from the two trucks. The ensemble moves into what appears to be a bottling facility. The rest of the commercial intercuts Spears' performance with various audiences, all of whom express varying degrees of appreciation and/or arousal.

A deep structure of illusions here engages a series of relationships that are subordinate to one dominant ideological relationship: an actual audience entering into an imaginary affiliation with mediated representation. That imagined primary relationship positions a subsequent set of imagined relationships, both explicit and implicit, that further interpellate the audience. For example, the intercutting between Spears' performance and the mediated representation of various audiences encountering her performance offers a range of possible meanings. A literal interpretation might focus on the graphical difference between the different aspect ratios employed within the commercial. Shots of Spears performing appear letterboxed, while shots depicting the various audiences watching this performance appear in a full-frame 4:3 aspect ratio. Even if a casual viewing might miss how these screen shapes alternate, an interpretation focusing on implicit meaning might consider the dynamic tension between a performative widescreen space, and the more domesticated audience space of the 4:3 frame associated with television. Should the material differences between these frame variations elude a casual viewing, the dynamic tension can still affect the audience emotionally, creating a structure of illusion that draws upon an imagined thrill of attending a live performance, the excitement of watching a movie in a movie theatre, the comparative calm or regularity of the spaces in which audiences watch Spears' performance on television, and the like.

The deep structure of illusions both encodes and organises different possibilities for family, gender, sexuality and politics. Like much of mainstream popular culture, the commercial organises these different possibilities, yet not simply by conveying false consciousness through a literal and stock set of images and sounds. Rather, it is through the subordination of different possibilities that this commercial promotes an opportunity, however illusory, for individual expression. Viewed in terms of individual expression, choosing a cola can have as much consequence as choosing a president. In A Logic of Expressive Choice (2000), Alexander A. Schuessler makes an intriguing connection between soft drinks and presidential elections. In asking why people vote, when an individual ballot virtually has no chance of influencing a national election, Schuessler turns to a 1960s Pepsi advertising campaign. People choose presidents like colas, he suggests, not because they believe their choice matters but because they believe the opportunity to make a choice matters. In terms of personal choice theory, the opportunity to express one's identity through a personal preference is more compelling than the expectation that making a choice will be rewarded with a specific outcome. Both Schuessler and Thomas Frank (1997) have noted how the 'Pepsi Generation' was born in the 1960s with the emergence of lifestyle advertising techniques. These techniques sought to identify audiences demographically, though the particular demographic would ideally be construed as broadly as possible. In the case of the Pepsi marketing campaign, advertising sought to align its product with an emergent youth culture. Consumers thus did not have to identify with youth culture per se, but with the idea of a youth culture; they did not have to believe that drinking Pepsi would make them young as long as they believed that drinking Pepsi would provide an opportunity for youthfulness. By imagining a product as aligned with youth cul-
ture and against the more traditional and staid brand of Coca-Cola, consumers could make the expressive choice to drink Pepsi.

The close outcomes of recent presidential elections may provide one indicator of a culture suffused not so much by materialism as by expressive choice, in which the rapid convergence between presidential campaigns and product advertisements reflects not the political aspirations of a nation but the supremacy of a consumer-driven paradigm. Within this frame, politicians, like product brands, provide opportunities for citizens to express a lifestyle habitus. For example, one could address how modern political rhetoric has become defined by the rhetoric of consumerism and expressive choice. Republican candidate Walter Mondale made reference to Wendy's 'Where's the Beef' commercial in dismissing Democratic rival Gary Hart during the 1984 primaries. Ronald Reagan purportedly sang the virtues of Pepsi as the metonym for Western-style democracy, which in turn could serve as the metonym for Western-style capitalism. Meanwhile, the Reagan-Bush advertising campaign of 1984 relied on what the New York Times called a 'Pepsi-like advertising strategy', putting together a group of advertising executives known as the Tuesday Team to create the so-called 'Morning in America' campaign. 'That is what we have done in the past with Pepsi, to elicit a sense of feeling,' Phil Dusenberry, executive creative director of Batten, Barton, Durstine and Osborn (BBDO) told the New York Times. 'It is a sense of optimism, a sense of patriotism' (in Clendinnen 1994: A18).

Such examples evidence a correspondence, and perhaps a convergence, between politics and consumerism, but in and of themselves they do not explain how consumerism invokes feeling and emotion. How does expressive choice, working within the schema of consumerism, invoke a sense of deep feeling and commitment to product brands? To answer this question, one must view expressive choice as a set of opportunities for individuals to perform individual identity within a context of a deep structure of illusions.

This is not to suggest that the structure is fleeting, false or a by-product of consumerism. Because it invokes a relationship between real people, and the imagined perception of the very real conditions of our existence, the deep structure activates powerful and consequential ideologies. For example, as Marianne Hirsch notes, these illusions can invoke powerful schematics for family and belonging. She uses family snapshots to show the powerful role they play in both shaping familial identity and mediating historical trauma, describing the familial gaze, not as

the look of a subject looking at an object, but a mutual look of a subject looking at an object who is a subject looking (back) at an object. Within the family, as I look I am always also looked at, seen, scrutinized, surveyed, monitored. Familial subjectivity is constructed relationally, and in these relations I am always both self and othered, both speaking and looking subject and spoken and looked at object: I am subjected and objectified. (1997: 7)

While Hirsch finds this familial gaze operating within the relatively decentered universe of lived family relations, popular culture can appropriate such relations to produce its familial subjects and objects on a grander, more centralised and impersonal scale. To this end, one can read advertising such as the Pepsi commercial as constructing its own relational set of subject and object looks. These looks comprise their own familial gaze in ways that allow the viewer to engage emotionally with a deep structure of illusions. This engagement allows the viewer to make an 'expressive choice', not just in terms of the product advertised but also in terms that subordinate some definitions of 'family' over others.

Whatever so-called family values might advocate superficially, and in whatever kinder and gentler iteration family values might speak, the assertion of traditional family values in cinema and advertising within the past decade seeks to rehabilitate regressive notions of gender, heterosexism and racism to mainstream acceptability within American life. While the deep structure of illusions inherent within the Pepsi commercial may not propel family identity or memory as forcefully and immediately as the familial gaze of the family snapshot does, the Pepsi commercial does turn its viewers into one massive family, and the familial gaze it produces powerfully makes us both look and be looked at in relation to the ideology of so-called family values. In addition to being intimate, this gaze always operates within a broader context of shifting and contested ideological terrain. When the George W. Bush administration came to power in 2000, the battle lines to define what constitutes family had never been drawn so starkly, or in so lopsided a fashion. On the first day after taking office, Bush reversed Clinton Administration policy and restored the ban, put in place under his father's administration, on international US aid to any organisation even advocating a woman's right to choose. At the time the Pepsi ad aired, a little-known provision in Bush's much-touted No Child Left Behind Act began requiring all public schools receiving federal funds to provide to military recruiters the names and telephone numbers of all students attending those institutions. The Act empowers military recruiters to contact minors without first gaining parental consent, and requires public schools to furnish the student information on demand -- even if a telephone number is unlisted -- or risk losing their federal funding. The familial gaze of the Pepsi commercial anchors us within a product-based notion of family amid political and ideological shifts redefining the meaning of family. As the audience dances happily along with the commercial in our spectatorial imaginations, we become exactly the kind of ideal family the No Child Left Behind Act would presume.

At the same time, the identification with family values isn't a matter of conscious rationale but is only as compelling as the emotions and feelings it can evoke. Those emotions and feelings work relationally, appealing to desires for an ideal family as well as managing threats to the family as is. Under the guise of promoting a newfound transgressive sexuality for its young spokesperson, 'The Joy of Pepsi' commercial seeks to situate the viewer familial within an ethos of pleasure, liberality and freedom from constraint. Rather than literally espouse a
right-wing agenda, the commercial establishes a set of contrasting relationships between Spears’ sexual and transgressive performative space and the domestic spaces within which her performance is consumed. Thus, the advertisement mini-film invokes the emotion of family life in a way that feature-length films exhibited publicly in a theatre cannot. The domestic space in the commercial is not regressive in and of itself, nor, necessarily, is the one in the viewer’s home; but the relationships between these spaces— that the former penetrates and subsumes the latter— and how these relationships position the viewer in passivity are what conform to regressive conservative ideologies. While these commercials belong to part of a larger, subsequent Pepsi campaign featuring Spears, and can be understood as part of an even larger text about post-Cold War consumerism, a closer analysis of ‘The Joy of Pepsi’ will complete this essay. Through a series of subject and object looks, the Spears Pepsi ad rehabilitates traditional family values and the mutual familial gaze through three central subject/object oxymoronic vectors: conformist individualism, horny abstinence and segregated inclusivity.

**Conformist Individualism**

In ‘The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction’, Walter Benjamin warns that if the masses do not seize the means of interpretation and criticism of texts for themselves, fascism will seize these means for them, and in a way that gives ‘these masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves’ (1985: 693). The goal of fascism, then, is to create seemingly endless opportunities for expressing ‘individualism’, while ensuring that the brand of individualism expressed reinforces and ultimately conforms to a highly regulated social order. The commercial appears to reinforce this worldview with such lyrics as ‘The world turns round and round, but some things never change’. While a consumerist society is not in and of itself fascist, it nevertheless shares some important characteristics with fascism. Both fascism and consumerism bear the primary ideological challenge of organising what Benjamin calls ‘property relations’ so that individuals have opportunities, rather than a right, to express themselves without interfering with the existing social structure. Thus, one can read the Pepsi commercial as deploying symptomatic configurations of space, performance and gender reinforcing the paradox of conformist individualism so that the world can turn ‘round and round’ without disrupting the status quo.

A dialectical paradox between individual expression and regulated social order governs the commercial. The ad begins with a shot of a retro Pepsi-Cola marquee on the roof of the warehouse, before a crane shot descends into a loading station to reveal a lone figure with back turned towards the camera and dressed in a blue cap and jumpsuit uniform prominently displaying the Pepsi logo. The transition from Spears’ initial asexual anonymity to a situation in which her gendered performance provides an opportunity for individual expression ultimately organises the logic of the rest of the commercial. In a quick, jump-cut montage, Spears turns towards the camera, rips off her uniform and tosses her cap, revealing a short tube top and bare midriff. This gendered, individualist wardrobe offers an opportunity to differentiate Spears from the other performers who, remaining in uniform, perform synchronised dance movements with her. At the same time, Spears’ clothing and performance conform to a gendered objectification, reinforcing a heterosexist way of looking that becomes codified within the commercial’s subject/object glances.

Central to this paradox is the recurring motif of Spears gazing directly into the camera. While the exchange of subject/object glances in which we watch Spears looking directly at us has the potential, in Benjamin’s terms, to alienate the viewer from the cult value of the Pepsi product and from the visual strategies of this particular text, such moments actually become what he refers to as mere opportunities to express individuality, and then only in terms of heterosexist conformity. No mere object, Spears returns the viewer’s gaze in the opening montage as she turns towards the camera. The commercial thus begins to construct a familial gaze; in Hirsch’s words, a mutual look of an object becoming a subject looking—a gaze of direct address— at a subject who, in the course of the commercial will become object. In establishing the permutations of who looks where, Spears’ gaze of direct address retains almost exclusive prominence. In breaking the fourth wall, this familial gaze does not transgress heterosexist attitudes, but reinforces them. As a subsequent shot reveals, the gaze of direct address in the commercial is distinctly female. One notable shot features another female performer drinking from a Pepsi can before turning to directly face the camera. It is the only one to feature anyone other than Britney Spears in as direct a familial gaze. Distinctly feminine, this familial gaze carries decidedly non-feminist connotations of submission, gendered care-giving and the pretext of looking so as to be looked at.

The commercial further undermines the potential alienation effect of this gaze exchange through its sexually-charged depictions of Spears’ performance. One brief, low-angle shot has her thrusting her chest towards the camera before stepping back. Visually, the shot uses point of view to mimic the act of intercourse, in which Spears appears to be on top. One could argue that such depictions of a sexually aggressive young woman might serve a potentially liberating purpose. However, as other aspects of the commercial reveal, the shot offers an opportunity for sexual expression that is bounded by heterosexist and even racist norms.

Just as the familial gaze turns Spears from object to subject, it can also turn the audience as subject into object. When men and women in the commercial look at Spears, they look offscreen and at ubiquitous television monitors. Yet even as this commercial objectifies the audience, it carefully differentiates between various kinds of objectifications. In a number of shots, masculine looking clearly establishes arousal through a number of signifiers: a fire on a grill behind a short-order cook, two elderly men sharing an oxygen mask in a nursing home, the barking of Bob Dole’s dog. Feminine looking, on the other hand, appears less clearly delineated.
For example, as a female bowling team, dressed in blue uniforms, presumably watches Spears on an off-screen monitor in a bowling alley, a heavier, older woman emulates one of Spears’ pumping arm movements. A subsequent close-up shows Spears smiling and looking directly into the camera, before averting her gaze downward. This permutation of shots suggests what Sander Gilman (1986) has called the double-bind. Unlike horny male desire, female desire for Spears’ performance seems limited to a poor counterfeit emulation of her performance. As if to emphasize that this counterfeit attempt at individualism is comical, Spears’ smiling familial gaze engages the viewer as a confederate in mocking this sham version of her gendered performance.

Horny Abstinence

The Pepsi commercial asserts a male subject position through a paradoxical vector of horny abstinence. At the time the commercial aired, the popular press was quick to point out the numerous image-substitutes for ejaculation and oral sex. Many also noted how Bob Dole’s appearance invoked his other role as spokesperson for Viagra. Fewer, however, recalled Dole’s 1996 attack on Hollywood as part of his failed bid for the presidency. At that time, Dole attempted to capitalise upon the so-called family-values rhetoric by criticising rap music and Oliver Stone’s Natural Born Killers (1994) for ‘mainstreaming deviancy’. At the same time, Dole’s rhetoric carefully avoided criticising popular films that also garnered controversy, but were closer to the ‘family values’ rendition of mainstream America. For example, his speech never mentioned the anti-Arab racism of a summer blockbuster, the Arnold Schwarzenegger vehicle True Lies (1994). He even praised the military thriller Independence Day (1996) as family-values-friendly, perhaps since some of the victims in this science fiction alien invasion film include a gay man, a maternally deficient First Lady and a Vietnam veteran who believes he was analyzably raped.

Just as Dole’s uttering ‘Easy, boy’ in the commercial demands an intertextual reading connecting him to his role as Viagra spokesperson, his very presence within the commercial recalls the ‘mainstreaming deviancy’ ploy to help shore up a flagging political campaign in its waning days. His appearance both distances the articulation of family values from the earlier sanctimony of the Republican Party and reasserts the primacy of the male heterosexual subject position in its newfound embrace for popular culture. Dole’s sexually-charged gaze upon the mediated image of Spears is not so much a concession to the mainstreamed deviancy against which he once rallied as a blunt assertion of a leaner, meaner and more concentrated conformity to the ideology of family values.

As Dole now watches his television within the world of the advertisement, gendered performance and sexuality become mainstreamed, provided they operate within a narrow range of whiteness, heterosexuality and abstinence horribleness. The interplay of gazes – the gaze of Spears who invites being looked at, the gaze of an unseen Dole looking at her, the gaze of a slack-jawed fry chef watching Spears and the gaze of the audience – insists upon displaced sexual desire. The visual logic of Pepsi ejaculate seen throughout the commercial – images of caps exploding off of Pepsi bottles and the white pyrotechnics that appear atop the retro Pepsi bottle sign for the commercial’s finale – operate as part of a grander logic of a consumerism seeking to instill both desire and abstinence as a means of transformation from personal horniness to horny commerce. Just as fascism alters the right of expression into an opportunity for expression, the consumerist logic of the Pepsi commercial transforms the right of sexual expression into an opportunity for product consumption.

Segregated Inclusiveness

In addition to showing the compatibility of horny abstinence with both family values and consumerism, the Pepsi commercial also asserts a paradoxical logic of segregated inclusiveness. The familial gaze of this commercial includes faces of colour, yet makes sure to keep these faces separate within the contexts depicted. Although darker-skinned performers frequently appear in the shot, they just as quickly move out of the frame. The scene in which the only white female performer other than Spears returns the gaze, for example, is preceded by a tracking shot that insulates the gaze of two dark-skinned performers. The shot crowds out these figures from the lateral foreground. As a black male moving from screen right to screen left averts his gaze, another dark-skinned performer moves from screen left to screen right, holding out a Pepsi can before retreating offscreen. Although these darker-skinned performers are seen within the visual space, their subjectivities get laterally crowded out of the foreground as the shot remains anchored upon Spears in the background who maintains her look directly at the camera.

This visual logic of segregated inclusiveness extends to the way in which the commercial objectifies the diegetic audience. The whiter gazes of the slack-jawed fry chef and the firefighter how close to the camera axis, as the shot dollys in to exclude an African American patron from the margins of the frame. In another shot, a lone African American male, his back to the camera, steps before Spears’ mediated image. A cut to a closer shot of men at a rival Coca-Cola facility edits out the one black gaze that appears in the preceding wide shot. Tracking from left to right, the shot of elderly viewers either frames black gazes out of the shot, or leaves them darkened, shadowed and in the background.

As part of the familial gaze, these shots both include African Americans and at the same time push them out of the frame. Segregated inclusiveness thus works in concert with horny abstinence and conformist individualism. These paradoxical motifs work to create a deep structure of illusions that at once offers different possibilities for family, gender, sexuality and politics; while at the same time limiting these possibilities. By limiting the presence of African Americans, the commercial
appears to create opportunities for expression. Yet the opportunities appear marginal, organised beneath the governing motif of Spears’ direct and dominating gaze into the camera.

The deep structure of illusions also organises opportunities for expression in terms of performance and domesticated spaces. Visually, the alternation between the two is represented by masking shots of Spears’ performance using the Pepsi red and blue colours to achieve a letterbox effect. The shots of domesticated spaces, such as the diner, the bowling alley, the hallway of a hospital, a nursing home, and others are all shown in full-frame 1.33:1 screen ratio. By depicting groups of people viewing Spears’ “commercial” on television, the advert organises the emotional response to her performance in terms of ad hoc families engaged as ‘viewers’. Rather than explore divergent definitions of family, however, the deep structure of illusions inherent within this commercial invites the viewer into a set of relationships with Spears and the familial gaze, but at the same time denies the possibilities of what these relationships and the gaze might bring about. It is through both the offering of opportunity as well as the limiting of possibilities that conformist individualism, horned abstinence and segregated inclusiveness ultimately propel the narrow conservative agenda of family values into the American mainstream.