Best Laid Plans

Cultural Entropy and the Unraveling of AIDS Media Campaigns

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Displacement and Decay:
Materiality, Space, and Interpretation

AIDS campaign designers work for months to design a campaign that reaches their target audience with a clear, consistent, and culturally relevant message. Designers believe that after following best practices, they have mitigated the possibility that audiences will interpret their campaigns incorrectly after the launch. Given the gospel of best practices, designers express confidence that they have made the best possible campaign for their target audience. Designers have faith that their campaign objects embody their message and will change behavior as long as the objects reach their target audience. With the objects "perfected," the AIDS organization releases its campaign into the public sphere. By and large, *this is where the organization's work ends*.

I bring to light the unexpected lives of these campaign objects after their release into public space. These unexpected lives determine whether messages reach the target audience and whether those audiences interpret campaign objects as intended by campaign designers. When people interpret and use campaign objects in unexpected ways, these alternative interactions often undermine a campaign's ability to persuade people to change their behavior. If you can't see a billboard's message, or if you miss the point, that billboard is unlikely to persuade you to put on a condom. When this happens, the months and monies of development are squandered.

These disruptions in the communication process happen because of a tendency toward cultural entropy. From the moment organizations begin to circulate their AIDS campaign, the objects become increasingly open to disruption and deterioration. The cause of these unexpected disruptions is often material in nature, and the disruptions lead to communication failures, unintended misreadings, and misappropriations. When campaign designers fixate on choosing the right symbol and message, they fail to account for

how the material qualities of their campaign objects will interact with the setting in which they are displayed. In particular, designers do not attend to such specific dimensions of the setting as the physical environment and the cultural practices people enact in the vicinity. I argue that the cultural entropy caused by the interactions between an object's materiality, its physical setting, and local cultural practice is patterned and systematic. In the cases I present, I identify three ways communication is disrupted: (1) certain settings prevent the intended message from being communicated, (2) campaign objects may decay or be obscured when exposed to the elements and local cultural practices, and (3) some campaign objects are more vulnerable to displacement, and moving the object to unintended sites may hinder intended interpretations.

By failing to adequately attend to how objects, settings, and audiences interact, practitioners of public-health communication have trouble explaining when and how communication breaks down. By focusing on material dimensions of these interactions, my data reveal three kinds of communication disruption. First, audiences may never see a campaign object, as when a tree or building obstructs the message from view. This kind of disruption is fundamentally about whether the campaign object is *perceptible*. Second, audiences may not interpret the campaign's message as the producers intended but often assume they have. On these occasions, the objects are not *legible*. Third, as in the case of the female condoms described in the introduction, audiences may find creative alternative meanings and uses for objects that they prefer over the intended use.

In Accra, as in any city, the arrangement of place and how citizens engage the city through their local cultural practices work in tandem to constrain people's "practices of looking" (Sturken and Cartwright 2001). Urban scholars have made similar observations through ethnographic attention to space and materiality (Jacobs 1961; Zukin 1995). By observing the conditions of interpretative interactions—how the physical and cultural constraints on people meet the material conditions of objects and the city—this chapter articulates how the materiality of AIDS campaigns shapes their meaning (Griswold 1987b).

AIDS Media Campaigns and Materiality

Within any setting, the interpretation of AIDS media depends on the interaction between the materiality of the object and the surrounding environmental conditions. Certain combinations of AIDS campaign objects and urban settings are *discordant*, rendering campaign objects less perceptible and legible. My specific focus is on *material discordance*—a mismatch between the

FIGURE 15. Ghana Social Marketing Foundation's Champion Condoms bus shelter advertisement, Accra Central neighborhood in downtown Accra

material qualities of an object and the physical setting where it appears. Public places rarely provide ideal conditions for reception, and more often than not, these conditions are outside of the control of AIDS media producers.

For instance, figure 15 features a bus shelter advertisement for Champion condoms in the Accra Central neighborhood of downtown Accra. In Accra, as in many developing cities, sales are not confined to semipublic settings such as stores. Rather, hawkers use every inch of public space to sell goods. This photograph shows how the market has overtaken the advertising space. In it, a hawker displays clothes for sale using the side of the bus shelter, blocking the poster from view.[1] This display of clothing reduces the visibility of the poster. The material qualities of the bus shelter make possible the obstruction of the poster. The bus shelter's height and capacity to bear weight allow hawkers to hang goods over the advertisement. In this sense, the activities of the hawkers compete with the qualities of the bus shelter that advertisers emphasize (i.e., the shelter as surface for advertising) to obscure the image.

In addition to the imposition of the market onto this image, bus shelters are innately bad sites for media. Because shelters shade passengers from the sun and protect them from rain—persistent weather conditions in tropical climates of places such as Ghana—people stand or sit in front of the media.[2] For pedestrians or cars traveling past the advertisement, these people seeking shelter obstruct the message from view. Those Ghanaians who are inside

the shelter waiting for transportation direct their attention out to the road rather than inward toward the shelter and its advertisements. The placement of the shelter's bench ensures that those seated will also face away from the ad. Placed directly against the advertisements, people must sit with their bodies facing out. This unique combination of clothing sales, advertisement orientation, material qualities of the shelter, and social convention hinders the producers' attempts to maximize visibility of their campaign.

The billboard at the University of Ghana, Legon (fig. 16) presents a similar example of a disruptive setting. This billboard depicts a man with his arm around a woman, with the associated text "Don't Rush into Pre-Marital Sex. You . . ." But the rest is obscured. At the bottom of the billboard, people have pasted pictures of political candidates, three announcements for the "Legon Beach Bash," six flyers for the Baptist Student Union's "Jehova Praiz '07" concert, and more. These various announcements cover the remaining text of the original billboard: "Risk Getting Infected By HIV/AIDS!"[3] Due to the limited space for advertising events on campus, just like limited market space for hawkers, students co-opt the built structure around them. In an act of creativity, local students use this billboard as free advertising space, effectively undermining the intended meaning of the billboard as a message about AIDS. This creative use is enabled by the eye-level height of the billboard: it is just short enough to paste a flyer along the bottom that will be readable by an adult passerby. Had producers built the billboard higher—just out of

FIGURE 16. "Don't Rush into Pre-marital Sex" billboard on the University of Ghana, Legon, campus

reach for potential flyer posters—the billboard would not have afforded this use, and the perceptibility of the AIDS prevention message would not have decreased.

Based on interviews with twenty-five students passing by the billboard, it became clear that the message is less perceptible and legible than on the day it was erected. Of the twenty-five people I interviewed about this billboard, only four recognized this advertisement as an HIV/AIDS message. About half the people said that no one pays the message any attention because of the condition of the billboard. A few of these people used the language of "messy"— that its messy condition distracts from the message and makes people not want to look at it. Most students felt strongly that the billboard should be taken down or replaced because its condition symbolized a disrespect of the university. Those students who took the time to look at the message walked away frustrated by the condition of the billboard, instead of being thoughtful about the HIV transmission risks of premarital sex.

Throughout Ghana, billboards serve as a central medium of communication about AIDS. As other advertisers do, many AIDS producers like billboards because the medium tends to yield high "impression rates" (Luke, Esmundo, and Bloom 2000). Billboards offer AIDS campaigns a routinized means of communication, increasing "effectiveness" through repeated viewing. Billboards also impose their messages on public audiences more than do television or radio, on which people can flip to another station (Hackbarth, Silvestri, and Cosper 1995). Because most AIDS campaign designers in Ghana discuss billboards as a core component of their communications strategy, and because billboards are often the sole media channel for many campaigns, most campaign objects I discuss are billboards. With multichannel campaigns that include radio and TV, one might claim that the low perceptibility of a single billboard does not preclude audiences from access to another billboard or a radio advertisement. However, because most residents move through the city in habitualized travel patterns, low perceptibility of even one billboard reduces access to knowledge for all the residents who pass it.

Through efforts made by the Ghana AIDS Commission, many media-barren rural villages have a billboard that marks village boundaries with a generic message like, "Welcome to [insert village name here]. Prevent AIDS. Use a Condom." For these villages, the AIDS prevention billboard is often the *only* billboard nearby and therefore a highly visible reminder to protect oneself against AIDS. In urban Accra, campaigns not only compete against one another but also with other media. While AIDS prevention and condom billboards pepper the streetscape, media of all sorts compete for people's attention, and urban activities encroach on the space of campaigns. AIDS

media producers want to maximize the visibility of their campaign but are constrained by their limited budgets. Since their funding cannot compete with corporate media budgets, they often place their campaigns in less saturated media environments (i.e., less commercially desired).

Consider the media environment of the Osu neighborhood. Osu is a hip neighborhood in Accra, with a vibrant commercial district of restaurants, shops, and nightclubs. AIDS organizations, along with corporate advertisers, target Osu because of its high traffic and the presence of commercial sex workers nearby. Osu has the highest density of AIDS images of any neighborhood in Accra. Figure 17 captures Oxford Street, the main thoroughfare in Osu, as it floods the senses with some of Accra's densest pedestrian traffic and visual culture. Areas with pedestrian traffic are well suited for media interactions because people walking by have more time with an image than people driving past in cars. None of the billboards along this street address HIV/AIDS. Multinational corporations including Western Union, Samsung, Unilever, Guinness, and Barclay's Bank dominate billboard space along Oxford Street's commercial sector, effectively pricing out AIDS nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

As such, the AIDS imagery in Osu tends to appear on the outskirts of the neighborhood and off the beaten path, along areas with high automobile traffic but low pedestrian traffic. Most AIDS images in Osu can be found at

FIGURE 17. View down Oxford Street, the main thoroughfare in the Osu neighborhood of Accra, Ghana

the northeastern boundary of the neighborhood, within a block of Danquah Circle, one of Accra's main traffic roundabouts. As of 2008, this area had seven HIV/AIDS billboards. This dense concentration remained essentially unchanged since observation began in 2003: one billboard was removed and two new billboards added.[4] There are more AIDS images around Danquah than all other major commercial advertising combined.

In an effort to maximize the visibility of their campaigns, AIDS campaign producers strategically place AIDS advertising along the heavily trafficked Danquah Circle.[5] The billboards around Danquah are positioned along the three arteries with light pedestrian traffic—the fourth artery is Osu's busy Oxford Street. Ring Road's high density, high-speed vehicular traffic and the lack of sidewalk or shoulder dramatically diminish the presence of pedestrians. But with the busy vehicular traffic, most AIDS campaign producers presume people in vehicles passing this intersection get an eyeful of AIDS information. Only one advertiser I spoke with recognized that this might not be the case:

ORIGIN8 STAFFER: Say you are looking at people who do not drive, people who sit in commercial vehicles, in buses or tro-tros, those people are less likely to see billboards because, I don't know if you've sat in one before, except the person beside the driver, the people inside the car cannot really see the billboard because they are high up.

TERENCE E. MCDONNELL: And because the windows are so low?

ORIGIN8 STAFFER: Yeah, the windows are low. They need to push their heads out the windows to be able to see anything at all along the road. So for people like that, when people like that are your target, billboards may not be the way to go. But if you are looking at the driver, the driver will see those things on the roads as they pass.

TEM: So people who own their own cars, people who can afford to hire a taxi, who can sit in the front seat . . .

ORIGIN8 STAFFER: Yeah. Those are the people who may see billboards.[6]

Consider the "Use a Condom" billboard just one hundred feet from Danquah Circle in figure 6 (see chapter 4). In this image you can see the billboard photographed from the median across the road. Alternatively, in figure 18 the same billboard is captured from a moving tro-tro (private minibus shared taxi)—looking at the image, behind and to the right of the vertical black-and-white pole that runs down the middle of the photograph, only the gray background of the very bottom of the billboard is visible.[7] The physical characteristics of tro-tros (i.e., low windows, high seats, and crowded interior),

FIGURE 18. Ghana Social Marketing Foundation's "Use a Condom" billboard, from figure 6, obscured as seen from the inside of a tro-tro (private minibus shared taxi)

and the conventional placement of billboards (i.e., elevated off the ground) decrease the perceptibility of this billboard for those who rely on tro-tros for transportation.[8]

This example opens for consideration how the corporeal nature of movement and vision, as obscured by a tro-tro, further disadvantages those people who lack access to health information. Typically, Ghanaians who cannot afford taxis or personal automobiles rely on tro-tros for transport. These are the same people who interact with a limited number of media sources (e.g., TV, radio, newspapers). Billboards are one of the few channels of mass communication that AIDS campaigns have used to address this population, but most campaigns have not realized that traveling by tro-tro impedes the reception of their messages.

Members of the middle class, who can afford the occasional taxi but do not own their own vehicles, also tend to miss these billboards, but for different reasons. Whereas tro-tro drivers are restricted to taking the same routes along the busiest streets, taxi drivers avoid the main traffic routes unless they lack an alternative path. Since organizations place their billboards on the thoroughfares with the most traffic, and most taxis avoid these routes, taxi drivers and their middle-income passengers miss the majority of the AIDS billboards.

Organizations that place billboards in areas with high vehicle traffic reach

more wealthy Ghanaians, often not the target audience. By failing to consider the material character of the interpretive interaction, billboards placed in areas of high vehicle traffic but low pedestrian traffic, such as the area around Danquah Circle, have decreased visibility for the low and middle-income passengers traveling in tro-tros and taxis. The placement of billboards too high for tro-tro passengers to see, and along high traffic routes that taxi drivers avoid, reduces the perceptibility of AIDS campaigns. Those middle-class people with the resources to avoid high traffic do so, and the poor, who have little choice in how they travel, are relegated to vehicles that inhibit their sight line.

How did AIDS organizations miss this important observation? One explanation might stem from designers' upper-class backgrounds. As such, they rarely travel in tro-tros and may never have noticed how the placement and orientation of billboards, in conjunction with patterns of movement through space, dramatically reduces the perceptibility of their AIDS media. Another explanation stems from campaign producers' practice of discussing campaigns in generalities, not in the specific language of place. Using market research data, AIDS campaign producers worked to determine which channels of media (e.g., print versus radio) and which sites maximize reach for their target audience. However, rarely did they discuss how different channels of media might function differently in situ. After campaign designers decide to place a billboard in Osu, other location-specific material considerations could arise: What billboard height maximizes visibility? What billboard orientation increases audience reach: facing westbound or eastbound traffic? What colors "pop" against this particular streetscape? These kinds of considerations never arose in my conversations with campaign producers. By thinking of place as a proxy for audience, rather than as a unique context with material qualities and attendant cultural practices, AIDS organizations failed to prevent discordant settings from disrupting communication.

DECAY OF CULTURAL OBJECTS

In Accra, AIDS materials often age to the point where the intended message is obscured. This material decay of campaign objects is made possible by the interaction of campaign materials and the environment. Less durable materials or materials placed in harsher environments decay more rapidly. This aging yields crucial material changes in the object that may alter interpretations. Ghanaian advertisements, and in particular AIDS media, remain in urban space for long periods. The vast majority of AIDS billboards in Accra documented in 2003 remained in public space through the end of 2006. By

2008, at least half of those billboards still remained. Whereas billboards in the United States tend to turn over every few months, the average life span for Ghanaian advertisements is calculable in years. Many of the AIDS media objects in Accra have visible wear and tear.

Interviews with AIDS media producers revealed two explanations for the conditions of decay. First, AIDS organizations in Ghana lack the resources to produce AIDS campaigns using high-quality materials, and most cannot afford short-term rented billboard space. Therefore, organizations construct their own permanent billboards using inadequate materials. If one of their billboards starts to deteriorate, they lack the monies necessary to replace the billboard. AIDS organizations cannot afford to replace decrepit billboards or develop new campaigns to replace old ads before they age, so producers try to maximize the value of each poster and billboard. Consequently, AIDS media remain in public space for years at a time.

Second, while some AIDS organizations are concerned with durability, the advertising firms they hire are not. When I asked producers about which aspects of design are most important when designing AIDS media, not one designer mentioned durability. Instead, these advertisers focus on maximizing campaign visibility for target audiences, using attractive images, and developing clear and catchy messages. These cosmopolitan Ghanaian advertisers mimic the design practices established in Western Europe and the United States.[9] Durability remains a low priority since most of the campaigns Ghanaian advertisers design are for corporate clients, such as Coca-Cola or Nestlé, that possess the resources to regularly produce new ads. Advertisers do not change these practices when designing materials for AIDS prevention organizations and so, often, produce campaign objects with a short life span.

The decay of the billboard adjacent to the Nima market in Accra (see fig. 1 in chapter 1) speaks to this lack of attention to durability. Nima is one of the poorest neighborhoods in Accra and has a high concentration of Muslim residents (Weeks et al. 2007). The AIDS billboard at the Nima market is the sole billboard aimed exclusively at a Muslim audience in the city.[10] The Nima billboard has some of the greatest disrepair in Accra: the photographic image is bent out of shape and covered in dirt, and the letters are peeling off the backing. Despite this considerable deterioration, the intended message is just as legible today as it was the day Family Health International (FHI) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) put up the billboard. Local Muslims can still read that being "faithful to your partner(s)" helps prevent AIDS.

The material decay of the billboard introduces a new set of possible interpretations that local audiences may generate. As a marker of *time*, the bill-

board's aged appearance may remind local Muslims how long it had been since health organizations had engaged in AIDS prevention activities in Nima. As a sign of *inattention*, locals may see the billboard as evidence of their position as a low priority for public-health officials. One man I interviewed said of the billboard: "If these organizations care about it, they will maintain it. They will clean it. They will straighten it out and then repaint it. But they don't care."[11] The decrepit condition of the billboard may inspire any number of alternative interpretations. The point here is not about *which* new meanings audiences fabricate. Rather, the point is that decay opens this object to increasing and varied alternative interpretations. Decay has uniformly negative effects for these producers who invest so heavily in communicating one intended message.

Another common form of material decay in Accra is the fading of red ink from billboards, stickers, and other media. The tropical sun fades the color red from advertising at a much faster rate than other colors. Ghanaian and international campaigns alike liberally use the color red in the design of their media. Evoking international design conventions, AIDS campaign designers in Ghana draw on the symbolic power of red, often printing the most important text and symbols in red. Considering the prevalence of red, the fading of red-colored symbolic content has a dramatic effect on the communication of prevention information.

For example, look at the billboard at the entrance to the University of Ghana, Legon campus (fig. 19). The billboard depicts a young man and woman leaning against a car holding hands and in a half-embrace. When this billboard first appeared, the text clearly read "Avoiding AIDS as easy as . . . Abstain, Be Faithful, Condomise." The word "AIDS" and all but the *ABC* of the words "Abstain, Be Faithful, Condomise," were printed in red. Over time the red text faded into a color similar to the background color. Now the image reads "Avoiding . . . as easy as . . . ABC." This "new" message, when taken with the image of the young couple, reads as gibberish, or it might display a warning to avoid romantic relationships that detract from their university studies. This image no longer permits a legible interpretation because the most *important* text on the billboard was printed in red. Students often line up in front of this billboard while waiting for the bus. When I asked these students to recall the message of the billboard behind them (without turning around), they felt compelled to turn to look at it. Only after squinting their eyes and scanning the billboard did they recognize it as being about AIDS.

The billboard outside of the Accra Girls School provides another instance of an AIDS prevention ad falling into disrepair. When originally produced, the billboard stated, "Don't Rush into Premarital Sex You Risk Getting

FIGURE 19. "Avoiding AIDS as Easy as ABC" billboard at the entrance to the University of Ghana, Legon, in which wording printed in red has faded to near illegibility

Infected with HIV/AIDS," exactly like the billboard discussed earlier. In this case, the red text of "HIV/AIDS" and the associated red ribbon have faded beyond perception for cars passing along the highway (figs. 20 and 21). With the decline in visibility of the red HIV-specific text, the more resilient text of "Don't Rush" takes visual precedence. This change in the image suggests an alternative interpretation for those audiences speeding down the adjacent highway. Their reduced capacity to interpret the billboard emphasizes their "rushing" down the road past innocent and vulnerable schoolchildren, as opposed to the "rushing" of school kids into sex. In this case, the billboard's unique pattern of decay interacts with the local environmental context of a major highway to potentially alter interpretations of the billboard.[12] Through these material conditions, the intended message of the Accra Girls School billboard undergoes a process of cultural entropy.[13]

The cultural memory of local audiences mediates the significance of decay, and therefore entropy. In a focus group interview with recent graduates of the University of Ghana, Legon, I asked if they recognized the phrase "Avoiding AIDS as easy as ABC." They all replied yes and identified it as the message at the entrance to the university. When these responses are placed in conversation with my interviews with current students in the physical presence of the billboard, the billboard's declining effectiveness is clear. But for these recent graduates, if they return to campus and interact with the faded

FIGURE 20. Close-up of "Don't Rush into Pre-marital Sex" billboard outside the entrance of the Accra Girls School

FIGURE 21. Accra Girls School "Don't Rush into Pre-marital Sex" billboard from figure 20, viewed from a distance of 30 feet

billboard through the lens of their memory, they will likely still see the message as about AIDS—although they may also make new meanings regarding what an unkempt billboard says about their alma mater. Similarly, those students who attended Accra Girls School when the billboard was first erected may still remember it as an AIDS message, regardless of the red text fading into the background. When looking at the billboard, they may not even "see" the disappearance of the text. But for sites such as Accra Girls School and the University of Ghana, Legon, every year brings new audiences into interaction with the images. With every passing year, the opportunities for "misreading" the text increase. In fact, when senior students of Accra Girls School were asked about the content of the billboard while away from campus, they could not recall the sign's message or the image it depicted. When in good condition, routine interactions with these billboards seem to have imprinted a strong memory. As I have shown here, these billboards' capacity to impress memorable content on an audience declines rapidly as their red content fades.

DISPLACEMENT ACROSS SETTINGS

Whereas the interactions of objects and environments cause variation in decay, the materiality of objects in interaction with cultural practices facilitates the movement of campaign materials from intended sites of reception. For instance, such organizations as the Ghana Social Marketing Foundation (GSMF) have employed "nontraditional media" to market condoms. GSMF distributed Champion Condoms–branded umbrellas to sellers of produce and aprons to pharmacists who also sold Champion condoms. GSMF staff used these umbrellas and aprons to identify sites of condom distribution for the public. By this thinking, if a Ghanaian sees a pharmacist wearing a yellow Champion apron, he or she will know that the pharmacy sells condoms and, more specifically, that it sells the Champion brand of condom. As I will show, what GSMF failed to recognize was how these objects could be displaced, leaving Ghanaians with the dilemma of deciding between risking unsafe sex and losing a potential sex partner amid the search for a condom.

The move to nontraditional media is in keeping with GSMF's attempts to extend condom distribution beyond such typical settings as pharmacies and clinics into markets and busy streets where people in need of a condom can find one quickly and conveniently. For instance, one GSMF staff member discussed attaching Champion Condoms stickers to the wood and glass display cases of informal "rock" cake sellers. Decorating display cases is a common practice among rock hawkers, so this medium suited the designers' purposes. According to GSMF staff, these hawkers hang around nightclubs and bars

selling rock cakes to hungry late-night patrons. These patrons may urgently need condoms for their anticipated sexual activity, and distributing condoms through the hawkers brings the sale of condoms closer in proximity to sexual activity.

GSMF also wished to bring its condoms to the market, but it needed a way to identify the point of sale. Umbrellas are valued commodities for traders who spend hours in the sun daily. By providing market traders with free Champion Condoms umbrellas (fig. 22), GSMF both shades these traders from the sun and recruits condom saleswomen. The material qualities of the umbrella enable dual functionality: its design elements mark it as a site of condom sales while its physical structure shades the seller.

The alternative uses afforded by these nontraditional media also enable their removal from intended sites of reception. Often, when I found someone wearing a GSMF Champion apron or sitting under the shade of a Champion Condoms umbrella, they did not also sell condoms. The woman pictured in figure 23 is a seamstress who finds the pockets of the apron quite valuable, as they allow her to keep scissors and other tools at her disposal. She claims she received the apron from a friend who no longer needed it. Similarly, the avocado trader under the umbrella in figure 22 had never sold condoms, nor did she have an explanation for why she had an umbrella advertising Champion

FIGURE 22. Ghana Social Marketing Foundation's Champion Condoms umbrella shading an avocado seller on Oxford Street in the Osu neighborhood of Accra, Ghana

FIGURE 23. Seamstress wearing Ghana Social Marketing Foundation's Champion Condoms apron in the Osu neighborhood of Accra, Ghana

Condoms. The same bundle of material qualities that made these objects so good for marking unexpected sites of condom sales also enabled their creative co-optation by friends or family who valued the material properties of aprons or umbrellas.

When I asked GSMF staff members about how these campaign objects move beyond producers' intended settings, they seemed untroubled by it. Producers contended that as long as people interact with images of the Champion brand, the objects still promote the product, even if they no longer mark sites for condom sale. But this nonchalance overlooks how the displacement of nontraditional campaign objects makes Ghanaians vulnerable to the temptation of unsafe sex. With the sale of condoms at accessible sites, people could now wait to purchase condoms until a sexual encounter presented itself, instead of needing to plan for safe sex by stopping for condoms in advance at a clinic (a stigmatized source for condoms). In unfamiliar environments such as a crosstown bar or a different city, these nontraditional media facilitate this practice. Despite the lack of concern by campaign producers, the movement of stickers, umbrellas, and aprons may result in a lack of access to condoms for those who rely on nontraditional media to indicate the availability of condoms.

As these objects are displaced, the odds increase that customers who

count on the opportunity to spontaneously pick up condoms will meet a market trader or rock seller who does not sell actually condoms. In that situation, the customer must weigh the risk of unsafe sex against the hassle of searching for condoms. The farther that campaign objects such as umbrellas, aprons, and stickers move from actual sites of condom distribution, the more often consumers confront situations in which they must balance their health risks against inconvenience. As they move, these objects undermine spontaneous condom purchases, and consequently sexual health, by diluting the power of these media to mark points of sale. The marketing logic of GSMF—that as long as the image is visible in public space, the advertisement is still "working"—diverts the organization's attention away from this unintended consequence.

In another example, a set of posters placed by FHI in hair salons seemed to disappear. FHI designed this campaign as a conversation starter in "third places" such as hair salons and seamstress shops where Ghanaian women chat about personal matters and local gossip (Oldenburg 1999). Ghanaian women have less access to media than men do. Also, women spend less time in public space than men do. In Accra, more women work in the market than any other occupation, so women split time between the market and the home.[14] Ghanaian AIDS organizations have found that homes are too private and markets are too public for such interventions as posters and peer education, and thus AIDS organizations preferred salons and seamstress shops for these AIDS interventions. FHI hoped that putting up an AIDS poster in a salon would cause patrons to inquire about its presence. Then the hairdressers, trained as peer educators, could converse about AIDS and sexual health in the context of the clients' personal experiences. The poster served as an icebreaker, enabling a conversation about AIDS between two people who had already developed a trusting relationship.

A staff member from FHI described what happened when staff returned to these targeted hair salons to evaluate the campaign:

> I wanted to find out what was happening to our posters, because we provided them with a lot of posters, but moving around and going to our project communities, I wasn't seeing our posters. I wanted to find out why. And there were interesting revelations. For instance I asked some hairdressers why they removed the posters and had placed them in their room. And they were saying that oh, for them, they think that the message was clear, and that sometimes you might be having sex . . . you may not insist on condom use, but if the picture is placed in her bedroom, any time she enters then her mind goes back to the message. So if she wants to have sex, it enables her to insist on condom use. Which we think was very good.[15]

The movement of the posters into the homes of the hairdressers defied the expectations of this staffer. The campaign leaked from the semipublic spaces intended by FHI into the very private spaces of hairdressers' bedrooms. This spatial shift dramatically reduced the perceptibility of that campaign because fewer people had the opportunity to interact with that message. This leakage reduced the AIDS knowledge available to local women—an audience that already lacks access to AIDS information.

As these hairdressers reduced the perceptibility of the campaign for the target audience by moving the poster out of the salon, they increased the posters' legibility and simultaneously improved their own sexual health. The poster became a tool to negotiate condom use when they moved it into their bedrooms. Cultural objects are "more likely to influence action" when they are "better situated at a point of action" (Schudson 1989, 171). People organize salon space to encourage particular kinds of behaviors (i.e., gossiping by including extra seating, hairstyling by introducing adjustable chairs). As a place, a salon is rather distant from sexual activity, especially with all the scissors and hot irons around. A woman seeing a poster about condom use is quite unlikely to actually use a condom right then and there. Alternatively, in the privacy of a bedroom, in the presence of a bed, and with the routines of intimacy, sleep, and sex practiced there, the poster becomes more legible, increasing the likelihood that the hairdressers will adopt the AIDS prevention behavior that FHI prescribes. The bedroom is a more powerful setting than the salon. Materiality plays an important role in increasing the legibility of this poster for these hairdressers. The poster's size and weight made it mobile, enabling the shift in interpretive context from salon to bedroom. Had the image been a two-story-tall billboard outside the salon, hairdressers could not roll it up, walk it through their front door, and hang it next to their bed.

According to FHI staff, the movement of the poster into the homes of hairdressers did not always increase safe sex:

> TEM: So it became less a public poster for everyone to see when they came into the shop, and more a personal thing for when she goes into her bedroom . . .
>
> FHI STAFFER: The initial idea was to put them up as public posters . . . then we realized that the posters were not allowed to be where we wanted them to be . . . people were moving them and putting them in their rooms. . . . Some people were saying that the pictures were very nice. They were appealing to them. So some people were not even associating the messages . . . they were just looking at the pictures and thought that they were nice, without necessarily knowing what the pictures wanted to them to do.[16]

For other hairdressers, the poster went up for decorative reasons—because it looked nice. For most Ghanaians, the decorating aesthetic is the aesthetic of availability. In Ghanaian homes, walls are covered with advertisements and objects purchased from street vendors or obtained from friends. The local culture of decorating with what is available elaborates material qualities of objects beyond their prescribed uses. In this case, the bright colors and "nice" pictures of these AIDS posters serve to accent a room. This example highlights the power in the "bundling of qualities" inherent in any object (Keane 2003). Since symbols are simultaneously and necessarily material, that embodiment in materiality "inescapably binds it to some other qualities . . . which can become contingent but real factors in its social life" (Keane 2003, 414). For hairdressers who find these posters attractive, the posters are more powerful as decoration than as health messages. Ironically, by working to design a more appealing poster with attractive and catchy images, campaign producers inadvertently undermined the reach of their campaign for more public audiences.

INTERSECTIONS OF DECAY AND DISPLACEMENT

Early research on HIV in Ghana and West Africa identified professional drivers and commercial sex workers as groups at high risk for infection and in a position to spread the disease. As male drivers travel from city to city, some have sex with commercial sex workers at transportation hubs, or with partners in cities along their routes (Agyei-Mensah 2001; Pellow 1994). Their sexual practices, coupled with their mobility, encouraged the spread of HIV along major transportation routes. In response to this "vector" of transmission, GSMF mobilized its institutional resources to develop the "Drive Protected" campaign (fig. 24). Beginning in November 2000 and launched nationally in May 2002, "Drive Protected" used TV advertisements and radio dramas alongside posters and car stickers to educate audiences about the dangers of HIV and encourage the use of condoms to protect oneself against contracting the disease. The campaign trained peer educators to serve as a resource for people with HIV/AIDS–related questions at major transportation hubs and to hand out "Drive Protected" stickers.[17] These stickers—aimed at "drivers, mates, porters, traders, commercial sex workers and passengers" (Ghana Social Marketing Foundational International 2003)—became one of the most visible sources of HIV/AIDS information in the country. By handing out free "Drive Protected" stickers, GSMF guaranteed quick diffusion of the campaign.

The visibility of "Drive Protected" stickers did not arise out of the taxi and tro-tro drivers' commitment to do something about AIDS. Rather, GSMF's

FIGURE 24. Ghana Social Marketing Foundation's "Drive Protected" campaign stickers on a "4 sale" tro-tro (private minibus shared taxi) in Accra, Ghana

rapid diffusion of the campaign capitalized on the drivers' preexisting cultural practice of decorating their automobiles. Ghanaian transportation workers cover their vehicles with stickers and decals: Ghanaian flags, portraits of Jesus and Bob Marley, pictures of a white baby in a straw hat called the "Golden Child," clenched fists symbolizing black power, and team logos from the local, English Premiere League, and World Cup football teams. When I asked taxi drivers about their choice of stickers (e.g., "Why white babies?"), more often than not I would hear the reply, "Because it is nice." Only when I asked about Jesus portraits or their favorite football teams would drivers energetically proclaim their affinity for the sticker, provoking long conversations about sports or religion.

As in the example of the salon posters taken by the hairdressers, these drivers have adopted a decorating aesthetic of availability. When I asked about the "Drive Protected" stickers, rarely did a driver have a cogent reason for putting the sticker on his car. Most simply explained that they "like to put stickers on [their] car." Other drivers liked the "Drive Protected" stickers because their large size shaded the back and side windows of the tro-tro, keeping the vehicles cool. On one occasion when I asked a driver why he had a sticker about AIDS on his taxi, he denied that the sticker existed until I asked him to take a look for himself. He had forgotten about the sticker until I reminded him about it. Most drivers liked the stickers because they were free,

available, and attractive rather than because the drivers had any commitment to preventing AIDS.

Despite the dominant presence of "Drive Protected" across Accra's urban streetscape early in its history, over time, the campaign experienced both displacement and decay. Passing through the streets of Accra during the summer of 2003, I found it difficult to avoid seeing the "Drive Protected" campaign. The stickers covered the back windows of taxicabs, freight trucks, and tro-tros throughout the city. I observed that about one third of the vehicles at taxi stands and transportation hubs had at least one "Drive Protected" sticker, and some drivers had plastered their cars with multiple "Drive Protected" decals. Three years later, during the summer of 2006, I returned to Accra to continue my research. Much to my surprise, the campaign had all but vanished. Whereas in 2003 I could spot a vehicle with a "Drive Protected" sticker after five minutes while standing at a busy intersection, it took three weeks of observation to find a single sticker in 2006.

What explains the disappearance of the campaign? Had the stickers become controversial? Had drivers repainted their vehicles or scraped off their windows? After speaking with a number of professional drivers, the answer became clear: high market turnover for used vehicles in Accra. The vehicles imported into Ghana typically have already had a lifetime of use in Europe or Asia, and most arrive with well over one hundred thousand miles on the odometer. Every time a "stickered" car breaks beyond repair, the "Drive Protected" campaign declines in perceptibility. A second analogous cause for the decline of the campaign in Accra is the pattern of used vehicle sales. Imported vehicles enter through the Tema port, a mere half-hour drive from Accra. The greater wealth of Accra and its proximity to Tema offer prospective taxi and tro-tro owners from Accra the first look at new vehicles coming off the boat. Professional drivers in the other major Ghanaian cities of Kumasi, Cape Coast, and Takoradi typically buy vehicles that were previously owned and operated in Accra. Therefore, after a second career in Accra, cars have a third career in a satellite Ghanaian city. The outflow of vehicles from Accra to neighboring cities, along with the short life span of cars after they enter Ghana (a material condition of the car and the unfriendly road conditions), explains, at least in part, the rapid decrease in perceptibility of the "Drive Protected" campaign in Accra and the saturation of the campaign in such other cities as Cape Coast and Kumasi.

The marriage of sticker to car made possible the movement of "Drive Protected" out of Accra. The point I would like to press here is that this marriage is an intimately *material* affair. From the moment a driver applies a "Drive

Protected" sticker to a car, the perceptibility of that campaign object depends on the material conditions of the car to which it is attached—the fate of the sticker is contingent on the fate of the car. The accelerated demise of poorly maintained cars, older cars, cars that travel over unpaved or potholed roads, and cars involved in accidents corresponds to an increase in the decline of the campaign. The movement of the campaign to locales outside of transportation hubs depends on the physical constraints placed on the cars carrying the stickers. Cars travel only on roads, so the physical arrangement of streets and highways determines the spaces where the campaign stickers are visible. The mobility of the cars enables the campaign to circulate through the urban streetscape. But this mobility also enables the campaign to concentrate in one city at the expense of another.

Exposure to the elements has also adversely affected the perceptibility of "Drive Protected." During the summer of 2003, only one year after the campaign went national, I found a number of vehicles with faded "Drive Protected" stickers in their windows. Much as had happened to the red of the billboards at the University of Ghana and the Accra Girls School, the tropical sunlight had bleached the sticker and rendered it unintelligible. Figure 25 highlights the stark difference in color between a faded sticker and new stickers. Granted, the driver of this vehicle added two fresh stickers to supplement

FIGURE 25. Ghana Social Marketing Foundation's faded "Drive Protected" sticker one year after debut of the campaign—in contrast to the new stickers below it and to the left—on a tro-tro (private minibus shared taxi) near Takoradi, Ghana

the faded one, but this was the exception, not the rule. Most faded stickers I found were not supplemented. Only one year after the "Drive Protected" campaign went national, many stickers had already faded.

The combination of effects from the vehicles' pattern of movement and their exposure to the sun disadvantages access to the campaign by rural communities. The "Drive Protected" campaign tended to distribute stickers in urban transportation hubs, which makes sense when trying to maximize the distribution of the campaign. From these hubs, "Drive Protected" stickers eventually migrate out toward more rural areas, despite an initial concentration in urban sites. But for the rural communities that inherit vehicles after their use in Accra and Ghana's other major cities, the stickers have often faded to the point of illegibility. It's possible that urban audiences may retain cultural memories of the sticker and the campaign and may still be reminded to use condoms when they perceive the pink oval that remains. But rural audiences who did not have access to the campaign in its prime state of perceptibility and legibility may see only a washed-out pink oval, which means nothing to them.

Reconsidering Materiality in AIDS Campaigns

AIDS campaign designers labor to maximize the reach and clarity of their media objects. This chapter has shown how material interactions between objects, settings, and cultural practices create variation in the perceptibility and legibility of campaign messages and lead to cultural entropy. The systematic inequalities in access to AIDS knowledge made possible by these material disruptions rarely capture the attention of AIDS organizations in Ghana—or, for that matter, around the globe. This blind spot stems from conventions of campaign design that focus on symbolic aspects of media production at the expense of materiality. Organizations do not consider the consequences of the material choices they make and how those choices might enable cultural entropy.

This is changing, though, as some designers have begun to consider issues of materiality. Strengthening HIV/AIDS Response Partnerships (SHARP), working with the Ghana Sustainable Change Project (GSCP) design team, saw the need to intervene into the community of Ghanaian men who have sex with men. Because homosexuality is illegal in Ghana, most AIDS organizations have not considered designing interventions for this community. In designing a campaign for men who have sex with men, SHARP believed that public media such as billboards or TV ads would meet public resistance. To better serve this community, it developed a campaign that *discreetly* promoted

safe sex. SHARP designed tiny pamphlets that could fit into the palm of one's hand, so that volunteers integrated into the community of men who have sex with men could pass on important health and HIV/AIDS information in public places without attracting attention to individuals' sexual practices. SHARP's campaign producers realized that they needed a pamphlet much smaller than the average health pamphlet because they kept the future context and interactions between the target audience and media object in mind while designing the campaign. Rather than rely on a conventional trifold health brochure format, SHARP broke with convention and made pivotal changes to the materiality of the media object. Regrettably, innovations like this are the exception and not the rule.

While I've addressed the material effects of objects and contexts on interpretation, it is crucial to note how these material conditions result from the choices of organizational actors under particular structural constraints and with particular worldviews. Economic factors partly determine the kinds and quality of media AIDS organizations use, as well as where those media are placed or distributed. Better resources would enable AIDS campaign producers to replace decaying billboards, flood the streetscape with fade-resistant bumper stickers, and bid for the best advertising locations.

However, money cannot fix everything. As I have shown, social factors also enable the displacement of campaign objects and the establishment of discordant object–setting interactions. Increasing the budgets for AIDS campaigns cannot change the pattern of the used car market, or of traffic flows through the city, or of how people use urban space to sell goods. Nor can it change the conventions of public-health campaign design universally adopted by AIDS campaigns in Ghana. These conventions privilege the design and testing of symbolic content over considerations of how the materiality of the media and the physical characteristics of place may enhance or discourage accurate interpretations.

The creative interpretation and use of AIDS campaign objects by local Ghanaians often frustrate AIDS organizations because of the substantial institutional energy mobilized around creating campaign materials that "work." Instead, organizations should rethink these unexpected moments. They are windows through which organizations may observe audiences applying local cultural schema. From there, organizations could make the proverbial "lemons" of creativity into "lemonade." Take the movement of AIDS advertisements into bedrooms as decorative safe-sex reminders as an example. The entropic behavior of these hairdressers might yield paradigm-shifting insights into AIDS campaign design: organizations could design future AIDS prevention posters specifically for sites of sexual activity such as bedrooms.

Drawing on de Certeau, people "enunciate" different meanings and uses afforded by objects through "established languages" (de Certeau 1984). These cases highlight how established languages of decoration and fashion mediate the use of AIDS prevention materials (AIDS posters and condom bracelets, respectively). No matter how much pretesting an organization does, the material effects of objects, contexts, and audiences will undoubtedly lead to cultural entropy. Next, I show how audiences continue to interpret campaigns through the established languages of AIDS that the earliest campaigns introduced, thus leaving new campaigns open to resistance and misinterpretation by Ghanaian audiences.