

# The orderliness of flow

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## *Abstract*

This paper follows Sharrock and Anderson's recommendation (derived from their comparison of the practice of general ethnographic enquiry to ethnomethodological studies) in order to consider what 'can be found from a small amount of data.' Our data comprises 60 seconds of audio-video materials contained in an advertisement, materials that are publicly available. The advertisement employs a range of commonplace idioms and understandings from everyday life that are simultaneously embellished and manifest a strong element of fantasy to fashion an entertaining and amusing advertisement, a component within what Schutz has termed 'multiple realities'. The advertisement comprises a collection of behavioural episodes that are located in a range of common place everyday settings, that display real people working with real items of material culture, what Goffman has termed 'commercial realism.' The episodes within the advertisement draw upon the viewers' knowledge of how scenes within everyday life exhibit an orderliness and are made sense of in context. As viewers of an advertisement, we however recognise that the depicted behavioural episodes are contrived choreographed scenes in which real people work with 'real world' objects (Garfinkel). Following these analytic directions, we explore aspects of how the advertisement is assembled and of how it operates to market the advertised product.

## INTRODUCTION: ETHNOMETHODOLOGY AND ADVERTISEMENTS

The ethnomethodology of advertising imagery seems still in its infancy. Few studies take in advertisements as their topic. For example, Jalbert's (1999) fine collection of ethnomethodological approaches to media studies includes studies of newspaper stories, Congressional hearings, documentary film radio talk shows and television news but not advertisements. Radio and TV broadcasts have attracted the attention of many conversation analytic researchers. As ten Have (2007: 81) noted, from that perspective broadcasts are 'a real data goldmine'.

However, the analysis of how individual advertisements work seems still to be dominated by semiotic approaches (Williamson 1978; Beasley and Danesi 2002). Yet EM's characteristic analytic interest the recognition and production of ordinary activities suggests that the practices through which advertisements make sense to their viewers and readers is an avenue worth exploring, not least because of the ubiquity of advertising and the many debates in academic and wider circles about advertising's consequences. In this article we suggest some directions for analysis of advertisements informed by ethnomethodological thinking. We draw upon ideas advanced by Wes Sharrock's work in order to analyse a sixty-second advertisement shown on British television and other video outlets in 2015. Through this analysis we hope to indicate the potential of EM to illuminate how screen-mediated advertising imagery works.

## INTRODUCING THE DATA

Our data are found in a single video advertisement for Lucozade Energy drink. At first sight it is an amusing and entertaining television advertisement that presents a series of brief scenes depicting everyday actions performed with extraordinary physical skill, all apparently facilitated through consumption of the advertised product, Lucozade Energy drink. It was produced by the advertising agency Grey London for a campaign launched in 2015 entitled 'Find Your Flow' (Anon., 2015). Conveniently, the advertisement can be viewed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR7jL4EnCE>.

Our transcription and initial description of the ad is set out below. Adapting Twer's (1972: 339) notion of 'behavioural episodes' (originally devised to analyse cartoons but apt also for present purposes), we identify eight episodes in the advertisement. The voiced-over talk is transcribed in the narration column. A brief description of each of the eight episodes occupying the first 53 seconds and the advertising pitch made at the end is provided in the episode description column.

Ep. no.	Timing	Narration	Episode description
1	0:00	Flow::::::::: (1 second)	Camera zooms into man cleaning windows using both hands in coordination
	0:04	The unmistakable feeling of unstoppable::	((continues)) 0:06 close-up of same scene
2	0:08	Of no problem that can't be solved.	Young man on bus dexterously spinning the pen he uses to write answers to a puzzle in his newspaper
3	0:13	Of no one <u>else</u> can do it better.	Librarian at desk accurately throwing books onto shelves.

4	0:18	At whatever the da:y thro:ws at you:	Barber expertly cutting the hair of customer, which happens to be a dog
5	0:24	You simply take it in your stri:de. (6 secs)	Man on gym treadmill distracted by passing woman, falls and recovers.
6	0:33	Because <u>you:::'ve</u> found your rhythm::: (5 secs)	At a mobile kebab cabin a server expertly tosses onions and implements in the air.
7	0:42	You are on top form::: (6 secs)	Woman replaces the wheel of a car while it is driven on two wheels.
8	0:48		Woman catches bottle of Lucozade Energy thrown from behind her by a co-worker.
	0:51	Hmm ((softly)) Nice:::	She lip-syncs the voiced-over 'Nice'.
8 (ctd)	1:00	((Percussion music through to the advertisement's end. A flashing drawn image of a Lucozade Energy bottle is shown for one second, followed by 'FIND YOUR FLOW' in red text against a yellow background. Finally, the figure from episode 8 reappears.))	She drinks a bottle of Lucozade Energy, her long hair flowing in the breeze that miraculously has appeared in her office.

Our data present an example of what has been called a 'sophisticated advertisement' (Dyer 1982). It appears that, as consumers have become more adept at avoiding advertising materials, advertisers have devised more subtle ways of attracting the consumer's attention, often using puzzles, jokes and ambiguities that encourage a 'look again' response, to entice a reluctant consumer to attend to the advertisement and thereby give consideration to the advertiser's claims.

In this advertisement, sound and vision are not coordinated, as in everyday life. Instead, there are distinct audio and visual tracks. The audio track features a single narrator who provides a 'voice-over' ('a narration spoken by an unseen narrator in a film or television programme; the unseen person providing the voice' *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, 1993: 3596). The narration is animated by a well-known male actor (Bill Paterson) who speaks slowly and deliberately in a

‘cultivated’ Scottish accent. Certain words and syllables are accentuated, elongated, or emphasised and stressed, producing a definite cadence to the narration. It is almost as if he was reading a poem. The spoken narration is set within a background of accompanying drum and percussive music with occasional shouts and cries from the players. The swelling and diminishing of the volume of the music dovetails with the voice-over so as not to swamp it. The voice-over includes pauses and ends after 53 seconds. The remaining seconds of the ad includes a ‘simple advertisement’ (Dyer 1982) featuring an image of the product, a print poster urging viewers to ‘Find your flow’, before finally reverting to a stylized image of the figure from Episode 8, who drinks from a bottle of Lucozade Energy.

For the most part the ad is not a piece of documentary. Real scenes are depicted but they include extraordinary effects, resulting an advertising version of the literary genre, magical realism (Bowers 2004). As we shall show, the voice-over is a figurative rather than literal commentary on the action. However, the drums and percussion form a consistent aural backbone extending through the entire duration of the advertisement. These audio features of the advertisement help to establish the advertising frame. While certain shops, shopping malls, restaurants, parts of airports and even factories may have music playing, it is notable that in the naturally occurring situations of daily life, musical backgrounds are rare. The audio track clearly belongs to the viewers’ world, not that of the figures in the episodes.

Our data comprise the advertiser’s presentation of a series of recognisable scenes from daily life, such as cleaning a window, replacing books on a library shelf, or working out in a gym, each scene featuring imaginary and frequently extraordinary but entertaining extensions to routine ‘normal’ behaviour. The figures in the advertisement are people working with everyday objects in everyday settings, but frequently in absurd and extraordinary ways. They are collected together to suggest that consumption of the advertised product will aid and enhance ‘flow’, a concept first introduced by Mihályi Csikszentmihályi in 1975 and popularised by many studies and books in the decades since then. Csikszentmihályi (1975, 1990) used the concept to describe a state of complete involvement in an activity that is undertaken for its own sake, as in rock climbing, or playing chess or tennis. It is, in the popular phrase, about getting ‘in the zone’ for an activity. Flow is an optimal state of experience in the terrain between boredom and anxiety. The resonances of the term are such that the notion of flow extends well beyond the tradition of work initiated by Csikszentmihályi (see Rockefeller [2011] for a genealogy). However, it is Csikszentmihályi’s psychological conception that become widely known, especially in sports and other activities requiring optimal performance in challenging circumstances (Cashmore 2002; Hardie-Bick and Bonner 2016). The advertisement draws upon the concept of flow and provides some amusingly implausible examples of flow in action in everyday settings.

We shall follow Sharrock and Anderson's (1979) recommendation (derived from their comparison of the practice of general ethnographic enquiry to ethno-methodological studies) to explore an 'just "how much" can be found from a small amount of data' (Sharrock and Anderson 1979: 27), in our case, the 60 seconds of audio-video data contained in the advertisement. Through this analysis we hope to indicate how the advertisement works as an advertisement that we and any viewer might see as designed to be persuasive indirectly, through its depiction of amusing events planned to engage our attention. Following Sharrock and Anderson (1979) we seek to show how the advertisement is orderly in its own terms, although aspects of that orderliness are largely taken for granted and only evident on repeated viewing. In this article we adopt the method of 'self-reflection' (Francis and Hester 2004) in order to consider the methods that make possible our sense of what is going on in this advertisement. What might seem on first viewing to be a random, perhaps even chaotic, succession of improbable events can upon further analysis be shown to be manifestly an orderly phenomenon.

#### NARRATION, REALISM AND IMAGINATION IN AN ADVERTISEMENT

In this section we discuss aspects of the mixture of reality and unreality found in advertisements such as the one we are examining. The voice-over is a form of talk that involves speaking from a carefully-prepared script. There is significant similarity to the scripted lines of a theatrical play, and like a play there is some room for interpretation in the presentation of the scripted text. It is thus no surprise to find that trained actors are overwhelmingly recruited to provide voice-overs for advertising or documentary films and television.

The advertisement's narration serves to link together a series of behavioural episodes set in a diverse range of commonplace settings. It provides the often ironic and humorous linguistic glue connecting the diverse episodes and a gloss guiding viewers towards a specific interpretation of the episodes as flow in various kinds of exaggeratedly ludicrous situations.

As outlined above, in a comedic and ironic if oblique manner the narration, rather than attempting close description of the episode, focuses on introducing a range of aspects of a 'flow' state of consciousness. These absurd episodes show that when in a 'flow' state of consciousness you are unstoppable, a problem solver, that no one can do it better, that whatever occurs you can manage, that you have found your rhythm and are on top form. To this extent, the absurd visual behavioural episodes serve illustrate diverse impossibilities achievable in Lucozade-assisted states of flow. We laugh at their ridiculousness but in their absurdity a link between an energy drink and a desirable cognitive state may be made. Perhaps the background drumming, present throughout the entire advertisement, is also suggestive of the brisk achievement of goals in real settings.

In several episodes, such as the car in the underpass (7) and the hair salon (4), it seems probable that computer-generated imagery (CGI) has been used to achieve the depiction of extraordinary actions. Yet many episodes are set in a range of everyday settings, showing real people working with real items of material culture, offering an example of what Goffman has termed ‘commercial realism’ (Goffman 1979: 15). Viewers of advertisements are like a theatre audience in that both ‘engage knowingly in a kind of make-believe, treating the depicted world as if it were real-like but of course not actually real’. But the commercial realism of advertisements offers us something fuller and richer than the world we glimpse in daily life: advertisements are contrived to be unambiguous, their subjects are given an unobstructed viewing, and we need no ‘social warrant’ to justify our looking in on the advertisement’s action (Goffman 1979: 23).

Thus advertisements, and the eight episodes we consider here, draw upon the idioms and understandings of daily life while they also manifest a strong element of fantasy (Schutz 1945). For Schutz, members of our species experience an existence that facilitates ‘multiple realities’, including science, dreams, and fictional worlds, etc. Steven Vaitkus qualifies Schutz’s notion, suggesting that for Schutz, ‘it would be more correct to say that one has “modified realities”, realities “as if”’ (Vaitkus 2000: 51). This notion of ‘modified realities’, realities ‘as if’ serves as a useful analytic tool for studying our Lucozade advertisement data.

The episodes are grounded in recognizable everyday contexts, yet these are transformed by the protagonists’ actions into a reality ‘as if’ in which extraordinary deeds are accomplished. The episodes mix the familiar and the extraordinary and indeed rely on the familiar as the ground on which the extraordinary can be recognized as such. As Garfinkel reminds us, ‘every reference to the “real world”, even where the reference is to physical or biological events, is a reference to the organized activities of everyday life’ (Garfinkel 1967: vii). The episodes draw upon viewers’ knowledge of the ‘organized activities of everyday life’ yet we recognize that behavioural episodes are plainly choreographed and contrived scenes in which real people use ‘real world’ objects for purposes of ‘commercial realism’ in the making of an amusing advertisement.

## THE SYNCHRONISATION OF THE VISUAL BEHAVIOURAL EPISODES WITH THE NARRATION

In this section we describe the visual behavioural episodes that the narration contextualises within the advertisement. We consider how voice-over and video elaborate each other to provide a sense of what it is that is transpiring in each episode. We introduce some of the analytic notions informing our analysis.

*Episode 1: Flow:.....*

In the first visual behavioural episode out of which this advertisement is fashioned, the word flow is voiced by a male in a modulated Scottish accent in which certain phonemes and syllables are accentuated for effect. The narration thus commences with the slow, languid and extended voicing of the advertisement's key word and concept, flow. After a one second pause, the voice-over adds, 'the unmistakable feeling of unstoppable'.

This voice-over narrates a video showing window cleaner cleaning a large plate glass outside window of a ground floor public building through which people are moving with luggage. The camera focus is initially wide angle, incorporating a lot of activity by people in transit, and at first it is not easy to see what is the focus of the episode. The camera focus then zooms into the window cleaner in the background and in close-up focuses on his practical work actions. He is shown carrying out his work in a speedy, energetic, manner, 'as if' he was an athlete, dancer or gymnast fully engrossed in the task at hand. He coordinates the squeegees in each of his hands to clean the windows more quickly, making the effortful (window cleaning is hard physical work) look effortless. The skill and energy he brings to the task suggest that he may indeed be 'unstoppable', a notion further promoted by the insistent drum beats of the sound track. We are shown not simply a person carrying out a task of work but a person lost or engrossed in the skilled execution of that task: a practical illustration of flow.

If we are observant, we might notice the bottle of Lucozade sticking out from the window cleaner's waist band, alongside his window cleaning equipment. This subtle example of product placement is present in most but not all of the depicted episodes (we cannot find evidence of product placement in episodes 5 and 7). The inference is that Lucozade is consequential for the window cleaner achieving his task of work as a course of practical action that 'flows'. Window cleaning, a mundane activity in daily life is transformed into a highly skilled, almost balletic practice. We cannot quite believe what we see. It seems incongruous with our ordinary understanding of how windows are cleaned, an absurd extension into the comedic realm. The viewer is lured into what initially appears to be the taken for granted normal appearances of a setting from everyday life, until the exaggerated competence comes to be regarded as an absurd extension of normal expectations about how the task can be accomplished.

*Episode 2: Of no problem that can't be solved. (Audio)*

In the second behavioural episode, a young man, dressed in either office clothes or school uniform, is travelling on a crowded bus with a bottle of Lucozade protruding out of his pocket. He stands leaning against a pole in the bus, intently reading his newspaper and presumably solving a puzzle in its pages. The pen he uses to

solve the puzzle is dexterously flipped and spun around by his right hand. All the time his eyes and focus of attention remains fixed on the puzzle, not the remarkable feat of dexterity his hand is carrying out. In the actions of solving a clue in the puzzle we are presented with a reality ‘as if’—as if the puzzle-solving and the astonishing manipulation of the pen could be achieved without visual and cognitive attention being given to each act. But as the narration reminds us, there is no problem that can’t be solved. The narration contextualises the visual images in a playful manner, encouraging us to believe solutions can always be found to problems. If it can be claimed that Lucozade enhances a flow state for physical work such as window cleaning, then it evidently also promotes a flow state for problem solving, mental work. The first two contrasting examples draw us into the advertiser’s diegesis that subsequent episodes build and reaffirm.

*Episode 3: Of no one else can do it better. (Audio)*

The third episode shows a librarian carrying out her routine work of returning books to appropriate library locations. But books are not ‘placed’ on the appropriate shelf, they are thrown there! She has a bottle of Lucozade on a work surface next to her as she scans books into the library’s computer system. In this case however, after scanning the books she throws them into place both behind her, over her head, and out of her view on a book trolley, and also to her side directly into presumably correct stack positions ‘as if’ that were possible. Almost miraculously, the books seem to land upright with the title spine facing outwards in a relevant location. A fellow librarian user ducks as a book flies over his head.

Flow here is represented by a librarian lost in the work of returning books to relevant locations by means we recognise to be impossible. The message seems to be that by consuming Lucozade, routine work tasks and courses of practical action can be made to ‘flow’, indeed impossibly so. We mobilize an incongruity procedure where the implicit contrast is between what we know to be the tolerances and affordances of shelves, books and the accuracy of human throwing with what we see on screen. Once again, we have an absurd extension of the work of librarians in a preposterous but entertaining representation.

*Episode 4: At whatever the day throws at you. (Audio)*

The narration of episode 4, ‘At whatever the day throws at you:’ contains a backward allusion to episode 3, which featured books being thrown on to shelves. This makes for a continuity between the two episodes.

An extraordinary library gives way to an astonishing men’s hairdressing salon, in which there are three hairdressers at work. Two are cutting the hair of male customers while the third, in the centre of the shot and closest to camera is cutting the hair on the head of a poodle that is sitting still in the hairdressing chair, draped



in a hairdressing gown and adopting the position and demeanour ‘as if’ it was a human. This seems more improbable than the previous episodes, indeed there seems to be an increasing improbability to the actions and situations as we proceed through the episodes. The hairdresser attending to the dog is working fast, in a flow state and handling his hairdressing implements with a juggler’s fluidity. He has a bottle of Lucozade within reach. Is there a causal relationship between the energy drink, Lucozade and the hairdresser’s fluid ability to carry out the courses of practical action involved in performing his work tasks? Evidently, the hairdresser is absorbed in his current occupational task, coping with what his day has thrown at him.

By this point the viewer of the advertisement is likely sensing or learning how this advertisement works through images that depict absurd extensions to everyday settings. This absurd extension of the work of hairdressers, librarians, window cleaners, etc., is noticed through the incongruity in which they stand relative to our settled sense of ‘normal appearances’ (Goffman 1971; Sacks 1972).

*Episode 5: You simply take it in your stride. (Audio)*

Just as we saw with episodes 3 and 4, episode 5’s narration, ‘you simply take it in your stride’, also has a substantive overlap with episode 4, where the hairdresser is clearly doing just that in treating the dog like any other customer. What we can see is a cumulation of features of flow told through the narration and illustrated through the visual depictions of each episode.

Episode 5 is set in a gym. A man is running on a treadmill walking machine. Whilst striding on the machine, he turns to notice an attractive woman walking along a central isle. He loses balance, falls backwards off the treadmill apparatus that then catapults him into the central isle. Instantly, he recovers his composure and immediately starts to do press up exercises, ‘as if’ that were possible. The press ups commence at the very instant that the walking woman and other people in the gym turn around to look at the disturbance caused by his fall. The woman and other gym users then seem to treat a person doing press ups in the central isle ‘as if’ that form of behaviour was ‘normal’ or routine. Once more we have an amusing absurd extension—a fall converted into an opportunity to do the kind of exercises persons undertake in gyms—facilitated by an incongruity procedure, our sense of the unlikelihood of such a possibility in our daily life.

The narration, ‘You simply take it in your stri:de’, works well as a caption for both the hairdresser cutting the poodle’s hair and the gym user seamlessly recovering from his fall. By this stage in the advertisement it seems that anything is possible in familiar everyday settings. If the man had been drinking Lucozade, perhaps the momentary loss of concentration would not have occurred? Alternatively, he may have consumed Lucozade before he went into the gym and that enabled him to rapidly regain his composure?

*Episode 6: Because you:::’ve found your rhythm::: (Audio)*

The visual behavioural episode then changes to a person serving a customer from a mobile kebab vending vehicle. There is a queue of waiting customers. The person serving the customer who is first in line juggles his serving implements in the air as he tosses and mixes the salad soon to be served to that customer. Again, we suspend disbelief—‘as if’ such a thing were really possible? The dexterity displayed is intended to provide an illustration of a person engrossed in their work and its flow. The narration emphasises ‘you:::’ve’ and extends the pronunciation of the word ‘rhythm’, which ironically, the vendor exhibits in his juggling actions, ‘as if’. In this humorous absurd extension the rhythm for performing a task of work has been found!

*Episode 7: You are on top form:: (Audio)*

This visual behavioural episode shows preposterous image of a woman effecting a repair to a moving car. She is changing a wheel on a four-wheel car as it travels along a highway through an underpass whilst only on two wheels, ‘as if’ that were possible. The car has a canoe on the roof indicating sports activities, and the woman is outside the car on the passenger side with a large four socket wheel brace, presumably tightening up the wheel nuts thereby minimising any time lost as a consequence of effecting the necessary repair, ‘as if’.

For this instance of absurd extension, the humour functions through incongruity. The narration for this behavioural episode is ‘You are on top form’. Indeed, to carry out the displayed course of ‘practical action’ you would certainly require at least ‘top form’. The narrator emphasises and elongates the syllables in the word form in an amusing and playful manner, implying training, potential and competence. In addition, the woman is precariously balanced on the top of the car. By this stage of the entertaining advertisement, the audience is primed to expect any level of incongruity to occur within what are otherwise the normal appearances of everyday settings.

*Episode 8: Hmm ((softly)) Nice::: (Audio)*

In a spacious office, a woman worker throws a bottle of Lucozade towards another woman worker at her work station across the office. Initially, the worker to whom the Lucozade is thrown is facing the other way but she then turns and catches the bottle perfectly, ‘as if’ such synchrony was possible. She then opens the bottle to a gassy fizzing sound and, synchronised with the voice-over, mouths the word *Nice:::* Indeed, this synchronisation of the male voice-over and the woman’s facial expression as she mouths the word *Nice:::* is part of this episode’s comedy.

The incongruity creates the amusement. What this moment underlines is that this is the only instance where the audio narration has a clear unambiguous relationship to the unfolding behavioural episode. The narration for this behavioural episode is minimal and the *Nice:::* serves as the last word on the advertisement's audio track. The ending of the narration uses a similar device to how it opened: a single word, languidly delivered (*'Flow:::.....'/'Nice:::'*).

The remaining 7 seconds of the advertisement revert to conventional advertising formulas. There are flashing images in silhouette of Lucozade bottle followed by the slogan 'Find your flow'. The brief closing moving image is of the woman office worker from episode 8 drinking the Lucozade that was thrown to her while her hair billows behind her in the breeze that has magically manifested itself in the office. The final 'as if' is that Lucozade has re-invigorated her to better complete her work tasks.

## FINDING ORDER IN AN ABSURD SERIES

We have suggested that the narration is synchronized with the visual behavioural episodes making up the advertisement. The eight episodes each contain comedic elements produced through an absurd extension to what is taken for granted in the situations depicted. The episodes are presented as a series. They do not make up a sequence. To make sense of each episode does not require a knowledge of what occurred in the previous episode. Yet, there is a rationale for the presentation of the episodes in that order. We do not have access to the practical decision making of those in the advertising agency involved in assembling the series, but as we indicated in the previous section, the series is not random, rather there are overlaps and echoes in the order in which the episodes are presented and narrated. The episodes are concatenated, linked together by the voiced-over narration. Here we consider how the narration works to build a cumulated understanding of the concept of flow.

As Cashmore points out, the concept of flow has Germanic linguistic roots, referring to a fluid process (Cashmore 2002). In a sports context, the athlete carries out their course of practical action with a high level of concentration. The mannered, languid style of the narration, especially in episodes 1 and 8, can be regarded as mirroring some of the felt characteristics of flow. The phonetics of the voice-over seem designed to produce dramaturgical effects consistent with the relaxed yet controlled capabilities of performing in the zone.

Accentuating and theatrically elongating the pronouncement of the word 'flow' at the start of the voice-over serves to underline its conceptual significance within this advertisement. The voiced word flow establishes and sets up the theme that the narration obliquely explores and is elaborated through each of the behavioural episodes. Later, the advertisement concludes with an equally theatrical employment of the everyday word 'nice' to close the series of episodes. In many contexts

the word 'nice' functions not as a compliment but as acknowledgement token (Schegloff 1982). Here it relates to the consumption of Lucozade Energy and its role in achieving a flow state of consciousness. Indeed, it can be argued that the narration often in an oblique and ironic manner directs the audience's attention to descriptions of aspects of flow states of consciousness and to being completely focused on carrying out a practical activity, being fully in the moment. In this sense, the narration is not attempting to describe the absurd visual behavioural episode that it is synchronised with, but to indicate something of the cognitive flow state 'experienced' by the central character within the fictitious setting of each episode. Flow comes to work as a membership categorization device (Sacks 1992) for viewers of the advertisement. As the advertisement unfolds, each of the eight episodes are meant to be understood as instances of flow in action. The point may become clearer through a brief revisit of the voice-over set alongside the visual behavioural episode:

1. *FLOW:::~::~:* The unmistakable feeling of unstoppable. (Audio). Within this absurd behavioural episode, the window cleaner does indeed appear fully engrossed in his physical work task and seems unstoppable.
2. *Of no problem that can't be solved.* (Audio). The central character solves a problem in a focused flowing cognitive state.
3. *Of no one else can do it better.* (Audio). Within this absurd behavioural episode, a librarian carries out her work in a trance like 'flow' cognitive state and plainly, no one else could do it better.
4. *At whatever the day throws at you.* (Audio). In this fantasy of a behavioural episode when in a 'flow' like cognitive state, a hairdresser treats a dog as a 'normal' customer in what presumably is a work situation that was thrown at them.
5. *You simply take it in your stride.* (Audio). This absurd behavioural episode shows a male in a gym exercising on a treadmill. He loses his balance, is catapulted backwards off the machine, but instantly regains his composure, as a consequence of his mental flow state. He takes the situation in his stride.
6. *Because you've found your rhythm:::~::~:* (Audio). In this absurd behavioural episode, the food vendor has plainly found his rhythm and he is in a cognitive flow state.
7. *You are on top form::~::~:* (Audio). This ludicrous episode show a woman repairing a moving vehicle on two wheels. She is on top of the vehicle and evidently on top form in a state of flow.
8. *NICE::~::~:* (Audio). In this absurd behavioural episode, an office worker catches a bottle of Lucozade that is hurled at her, and consuming it establishes a cognitive state of 'flow'.

In each episode the narrator's words guide us to see flow at work in the episodes depicted. Our task as viewers is to find in the episodes further examples of flow, albeit in situations that are evidently absurd.

#### THE NARRATION'S RELATIONSHIP TO ABSURD ELEMENTS IN THE EPISODES

The soundtrack thus consists of spoken and musical components, each relatively independent of the other but each also standing in an oblique, sometimes ironic or comic, relationship to the visual scenes the viewer witnesses. For example, it is very different from the direct commentating relationship found in sports commentary with its explicit mentions of persons, actions and situations.

The brevity of the narration relative to the duration of the eight episodes (only 46 words are spoken in the 53 seconds devoted to the episodes) is doubtless testimony to the ingenuity of the creative team who devised the advertisement. The depicted actions have a density that suggests that the narration was sufficient in length. The narration's task is to introduce and articulate dimensions of the flow concept that the episodes will illustrate. Flow serves as the membership categorization device that brings together the disparate episodes under a single theme.

From our inspection of the data, we argue that the fashioning of absurd extensions to normal or routine behaviour in everyday contexts is carried out to illustrate the concept of flow. For most of the advertisement's duration, Lucozade's potential to promote that cognitive state and the actions it potentiates is heavily understated. Only in episode 8 does a bottle of the product come to the fore (although there is product placement in earlier episodes, though you have to look hard to notice it). Instead, the viewer's attention is directed to the impossible or extraordinary activities possible in a state of flow. The final seven seconds revert to a very direct and blunt product sales pitch. The narrator's work is done and at this point we are reminded that this is, after all, an advertisement.

The advertisers presume that their viewers are capable of recognising and sharing a joke when it is presented, even when it is somewhat surreal. A concatenation of eight episodes, with an escalation of the 'impossibility' of the actions achieved in a state of flow, is the device that the advertisers use to drive home the unreality of their claims. We might think that Lucozade might help us clean windows more efficiently ... but repair moving cars? The episodes become increasingly cartoon like, more entertaining perhaps but also more unreal.

The episodes, we have suggested, employ absurd extensions in the context of certain presumed common understandings, shared about routine situations in daily life. These absurd extensions give the viewer a psychological jolt and shake up their sense of what is taken for granted, analogous to the jolt achieved by Garfinkel's breaching experiments (Garfinkel 1964, 1967). In the breaching experiments, Garfinkel makes aspects of everyday life problematic, throwing into relief

common understandings of how everyday life is routinely organised and structured as an accomplishment. Indeed, it is these very cognitive processes that advertisers employ as a resource to facilitate the humour within their advertisement that we are in part attempting to explore as a topic of investigation. For members of our society, the behavioural episodes 1-8 are more or less recognisable scenes from daily life, but then to each episode is added an absurd extension that jolts the viewers comprehension and comprises the joke that is shared between advertiser and viewer.

We suggest that Sacks' notion of incongruity procedures (Sacks 1972) is central to understanding the capacity of episodes 1-8 to engage our attention and provide a source of amusement. Sacks drew attention to the notion of normal appearances as the backdrop against which incongruities could be noticed. He noted that 'persons within society are trained to naively present and naively employ presented appearances as the grounds of treatment of the persons they encounter in public places' (Sacks 1972: 283). We have argued that the humour of the episodes is occasioned by providing absurd extensions to everyday situations and activities and that these function by invoking an 'incongruity procedure' that leads us to question the capabilities of persons as portrayed. In the behavioural episodes 1-8, the absurd extensions that are presented to the viewers as part of the advertisement range from the almost believable to the preposterous, but in each case a routine everyday setting is transformed by the inclusion of an absurd extension, noticeable through the operation of the incongruity procedure. Indeed, it is this juxtaposition that facilitates the joke.

By orderliness of flow we have addressed how the advertisement works as an advertisement that engages us by drawing upon a series of displays of the extraordinary accomplishment of ordinary behaviour. As Goffman (1979: 84) noted, advertisements hyper-ritualise that which is already ritualised, they draw upon a ritual idiom that society members already use to undertake their everyday activities. That ritual idiom, those taken for granted cultural assumptions and social competences, are drawn upon liberally by advertisers and provide the basis on which their work is done.

## CONCLUSION: MAKING HUMOROUS SENSE IN AN 'AS IF' CONTEXT

We have argued that the amusing dimension of our episode arises from the introduction of entertaining absurd extensions to the common place visual behavioural episodes. Alongside these extensions is a spoken narration that implies a shared joke between the advertiser and viewing audience, can see and hear a humorous reading. Of course, such incongruities, if encountered in daily life, can generate very different readings. Recall Garfinkel's breaching experiments, which took place in fully interactional contexts where people when confronted with absurd extensions would typically formulate a complaint. For example, when students

behaved as strangers in their own homes, Garfinkel (1964: 232) noted that ‘Reports were filled with accounts of astonishment, bewilderment, shock, anxiety, embarrassment. ... Family members demanded explanations: what’s the matter? What’s gotten into you?’ As breaching occurred in interpersonal interactional contexts, the recipient of the incongruous conduct had the potential to comment on it and to complain about it. In the case of our data however, a media product, the recipient is an audience member viewing a brief item on a television, computer, phone, or cinema screen, whose response to the absurd extension is attenuated by a medium that is commonly used to inform, persuade and entertain. Absurd extensions to everyday conduct are treated as an entertaining part an advertisement that are intended to be a ‘bit of fun’. There is no possibility of an interactional complaint, perhaps only to complain to another viewer that it is not a very good advertisement. This leads us to address again the question of how fun operates in the context of this advertisement?

When we inspect our transcription of the narration on a page, it is evident that it is not in the least amusing when, that is, it is read as text on a page. However, as part of an advertising video, the narration has a different, distinctly performative character, it comes to life so to speak. It is no longer words and sentences on a page, but speech that is performed for effect, to encourage the viewer to see each of the scenes as examples of flow in action—flow that will be enhanced by the presumed consumption of the advertised product. A prepared text read out by an actor in a stylised manner is, in its speaking, transformed into a narration for the advertisement. When the narration is carefully synchronised to the video track we are allowed to see video’s absurd extensions as part of a humorous formulation. In this way we are able construct a ‘proper’ seeing, a normative seeing of what transpires in the ad, and thereby to share in the fun.

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