

Class 5b ~Aerial Signs

The Attraction of Flying-Machines

Ever since creation man was fascinated by the flight of birds and longed to do the same. This longing became part of his genes and in today's technological age most people still have a special affinity for all man-made things that are able to defy gravity – an airship moving graciously through the air, the gay colour of a mass of hot air balloons at dawn or a kitesurfer tumbling through the air in total surrender.

The Contribution of Outdoor Advertising

Taking popular sentiment into account one may be fully able to comprehend any concern regarding the use of such aircraft for the purpose of advertising. However, making use of any form of aircraft as an advertising medium may not necessarily be seen as degrading or marring its appeal. If treated correctly it may rather make an important contribution to the appeal of these crafts and to the scenic environment in general. Displaying advertising messages by means of aircraft such as hot-air balloons and airships has already become ingrained in our culture - the Goodyear blimp has been used for this purpose since 1925. Airships and hot-air balloons have all the potential to be turned into airborne objects of art through outdoor advertising while advertisements on sails used for kitesurfing and parasailing may add to the festive atmosphere of any beach scene.

Control Measures

Aesthetics

It is needless to say that the necessary artistic talent is required to unlock the aesthetic potential of aerial advertising. Some aircraft types such as captured or radio-controlled balloons and inflatables used for promotions and events need to be approached with caution since they may contribute to visual clutter and information overload especially if used in large numbers. Compared to the more sophisticated and stylish appeal of airships, hot-air balloons and crafts used for paragliding, parasailing, hang-gliding or kitesurfing these balloons and inflatables often appear shiny and artificial thereby contributing to the deterioration of the visual environment even further. Banners towed by airplanes may also not be seen as visual assets in most cases although more appealing banners have become available which may not be all that detrimental to the visual environment.

The above-mentioned problems related to captured and radio-controlled balloons and inflatables may be solved by limiting such advertising devices to trade exhibitions, carnivals and parades and to sporting and similar events - thereby finding affinity with [Class 2q\(iii\) ~ Signs for sporting events, festivals and exhibitions.](#) Due to visual considerations banner towing and skywriting should not be allowed in rural and natural areas. Such a limitation should not be problematic since sparsely populated rural and natural environments will not be beneficial to the viability of any

banner towing operation in any case. Another issue to be raised is whether aircraft such as hot-air balloons and airships carrying colourful advertisements may be allowed in natural environments such as game reserves without spoiling the wilderness character of these areas. Although no large audiences may be found in game reserves sponsoring conservation efforts might still be an attractive option to corporate advertisers in exchange for media coverage obtained from a corporate branded airship visiting such an area.

Road safety

Control measures for safeguarding road users from distractive low-flying aircraft should also be taken into consideration.

Air safety

All airplanes, hot-air balloons and manned airships are regulated by most aviation authorities while other 'high-altitude' craft such as hang-gliders may also be partly regulated. Limitations need to be set on the height at which captured and radio controlled craft may be flown, both with regard to visual impacts as well as air safety. Special permission is also needed from Civil Aviation for larger aircraft to operate beyond a certain height.

The Future Role of Airships

The attraction of the flagship of aerial advertising, the airship, lies mainly in its novelty value since only a limited number of helium-filled airships are currently in operation worldwide due to the high cost involved in constructing and operating these craft. This may soon end with the development of a new type of thermal airship by *Skyacht*. Thermal airships, using hot air as lifting medium, are much cheaper to build and operate than their helium-filled counterparts and can be deflated and transported by road to whichever destination. However, thermal airships have certain limitations such as lack of pitch control, lower airspeeds and difficulty to steer, particular at low airspeeds, which have limited the demand for thermal airships as an advertising medium up till now. Recent trail-runs with *Skyacht's* prototype, *Alberto*, have indicated a strong probability of solving all these problems within the foreseeable future thereby increasing the potential of this thermal airship for outdoor advertising. If this becomes a reality a large increase in the numbers of advertising airships may be expected in urban environments – wherever there may be a potential audience. The possibility of larger numbers of airships operating in rural and natural environments should also not be excluded.

Lowering the cost of constructing and operating airships will result in lower advertising fees. Such a possibility will open up the market to advertising clients who might not really be interested in spending money on appealing and artistic advertisements by making use of reputable advertising agencies. This may mean a large number of unattractive advertisements for events, sales and specials instead of stylish corporate branding carried by airships which was the case up till now. Such

advertisements will impact negatively on scenic and visual environments. It may even result in a large number of airships displaying such less-appealing messages in electronic format. The implications of the above-mentioned scenario, resulting in large numbers of airships carrying less-attractive and more distracting advertisements, should be considered carefully when finalising control measures for aerial signs. Something else to be kept in mind for the immediate future is the possible role airships might play as advertising and broadcasting medium during the coming 2010 World Soccer Cup.

Helium-Filled Airships

Since this type of airship is very expensive to manufacture and operate there are currently only a limited number of these airships in commission in all countries of the world. They are mainly used for corporate advertising and for advertising and broadcasting at important events such as the World Soccer Cup. Helium-filled airships are also used for scientific purposes, exploration and tourism.



Art in the sky. Designs by Airborne Grafix for a Lightship (top) and two Zeppelin NT airships (centre & bottom). These foil banners are directly attached to the envelope of the Zeppelin. Exchangeable fabric banners may also be used, but do not have the same artistic potential. The Zeppelin NT has a length of 75 m, a max width of 19,5 m, a height of 17,4 m and a envelope volume of 8 425 m³ which provide a advertising space of more or less 1 000 m² on each side. This airship has a semi-rigid structure.

<http://www.zeppelinflug.com>

<http://www.airbornegrifix.com/>



Art in the sky at night. As the name indicates *Lightships*, manufactured by the *American Blimp Corporation (ABC)*, can be illuminated internally to provide spectacular effects especially if such craft move through the sky at night.

<http://www.lightship.com>

<http://www.americanblimp.com>



One of the *Goodyear* blimps (left) - an icon of corporate advertising. These blimps have been displaying illuminated signs since 1930. A LED message being generated (below).

<http://www.goodyearblimp.com>



The latest technology – a 55- metre long *A-170 Video Lightsign Airship* with a 600m² high-resolution computer screen. Such signs can be read from a distance of 3 kilometres while video images are clear from up to about 800 metres.

Electronic signs on airships should be approached with caution since such signs might distract the attention of road users especially if changed within short intervals. They may also impact on the visual environment and the elegance of airships by displaying unattractive adverts on bargains and events. Limitations need to be set on the size of such screens.



Lightships have non-rigid structures. Such airships are commonly known as blimps.



<http://www.americanblimp.com>
<http://www.lightship.com>



The *Zeppelin NT* can accommodate 12 passengers with a maximum range of 900km and flight duration of up to 24 hours. This makes helium-filled airships suitable for tourism and recreational flights, with both tourists and local inhabitants on the ground being exposed to advertising messages.

In comparison to other powered aircraft, airships are a silent mode of transport and are perfect for use in environments where silence and tranquillity is a prerequisite such as watching game from the air. The only question is whether airships carrying advertisements should be allowed in natural areas such as game reserves. Such advertisements may be more acceptable in natural areas when displaying appropriate wildlife themes in subdued colours.



A *Zeppelin NT* at Cape Town. One can assume that such airships will play an important role during the coming Soccer World Cup in South Africa by both broadcasting soccer games and carrying advertising messages.



Thermal Airships

Thermal airships make use of hot air instead of helium to obtain lift and may therefore be seen as modified hot-air balloons. Most of these airships have a non-rigid structure and may therefore be called 'blimps'. The only exception is *Skyacht's* prototype which has a folding rigid structure. Thermal airships have certain advantages over helium-filled airships – construction and operating costs are only a fraction of that of helium-filled airships and they can be dismantled and packed which means that they need no large storage space and can be transported by road to wherever these airships are needed. They can therefore provide a more focused advertising campaign. Thermal airships also have a number of disadvantages such as lower airspeeds, poor pitch control and difficulty to steer, especially at low airspeeds. They are also difficult to inflate and handle on the ground if ground winds exceed 5 knots, which means that thermal airships can be flown only during early mornings and late afternoons.



Although thermal airships may not have the same grace as their cigar-shaped, helium-filled counterparts and while their fins may have a more synthetic appearance they may still be able to produce *art in the sky* by focussing on branding and product awareness as these AS 105 GDs from GEFA-FLUG prove. <http://www.gefa-flug.com>

An AS 105 GD in Serengeti (down, right). Carrying only 3 passengers (depending on weather conditions) a thermal airship like this does not have much value for the tourism industry. However, it has an important role to play in wildlife research while the sponsor of such a research project may be compensated through media coverage of the airship carrying a corporate advert. The question to be asked is if any airship (thermal or helium-filled) should be allowed to display any advertisements in 'wilderness' areas like this. On the other hand there might be quite a difference between the visual and psychological impact of a red Coke or pink Adler advert and a wildlife theme in natural colours which may be more acceptable.

<http://www.gefa-flug.com>



Alberto, a prototype thermal airship from *Skyacht*, looks almost comical compared to the cigar-shape of helium-filled airships, but it seems as if this funny-looking airship is about to revolutionise airship design by overcoming most problems associated with thermal airships. It will have good manoeuvrability at low speed and low heights while being able to maintain a static position like a helicopter – ideal for displaying advertisements at places like shopping centres. *Alberto* and his successors may therefore revolutionise airship advertising by lowering tariffs and carrying adverts for special offers and events. This will mean less sophisticated and less attractive advertisements which may be changed within short intervals – almost like pinning messages onto a notice board – thereby destroying the novelty and lowering the efficiency of airship advertising.

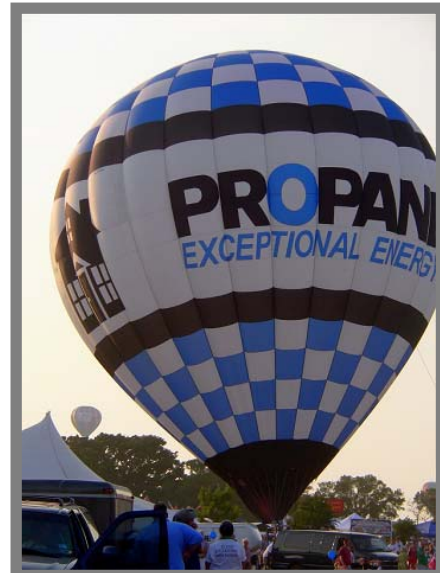
<http://www.personalblimp.com>

Hot-Air Balloons

There is something majestic and gracious about a hot-air balloon floating silently through the air, especially during balloon festivals, when concentrated in numbers and displaying a multitude of colours, such balloons tend to take hold of the attention of each and every passer-by. With regard to outdoor advertising hot-air balloons provide excellent opportunities for building brand and product awareness. Nowadays special shape balloons can be built increasing the efficiency of balloons as an outdoor advertising medium. Media coverage of festivals or special-shape balloons increases the advertising value of hot-air balloons even further. On the negative side hot-air balloons cannot be steered, but are pushed along by the wind while flights are mostly limited to early mornings and late afternoons due to thermal conditions.



A festival of colour at first light (top) with a hot-air balloon being used for corporate advertising (top right). Internally illuminated advertisements (right). Burners create a colourful display by lighting up these balloons from the inside.



Special-shape balloons depicting specific products in an attractive and eye-catching manner.



The ultimate traffic safety hazard (left). Just imagine this shapely young lady floating around at low altitude next to a busy highway – the end result may be a pile-up of major proportions.

Airplanes – Skywriting & Banner Towing

Both fixed-wing planes and helicopters can be used for banner towing.

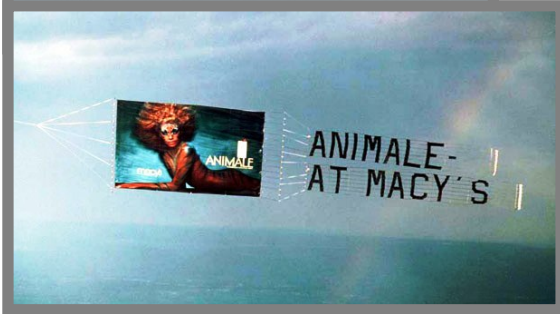


Skywriting

Banners of up to 10 000m² are currently being towed while sizes are still increasing. Mega banners such as these have quite an aesthetic impact. Banners of this size coming loose may also have safety implications.



The visual appeal of aerial banners varies to a large extent. In the past most banners and especially those consisting of worded messages were quite unattractive. Today some banners have become quite artistic, including 3-dimensional product replicas, but most banners will still be intrusive to rural & natural environments.



Free Manned Kites

Free manned kites consist of kites which are not towed or anchored such as hang-gliders, paragliders and parachutes. Hang-gliders and paragliders are flown at great heights. Advertisements displayed on such craft will therefore not be visible to observers on the ground except when they land or take off or when hang-gliding or paragliding events are covered by the media. The only exception is powered paragliders that have a low and slow flying capability. Some paragliders and hang-gliders have bright colours and do attract attention. It seems as if free manned kites do not have much value as an advertising medium at this stage and are not often used for advertising purposes. However, somebody may still come up with an idea of using such craft more effectively in this regard.

A hang-glider taking off (below) and one flying at a great height (right).



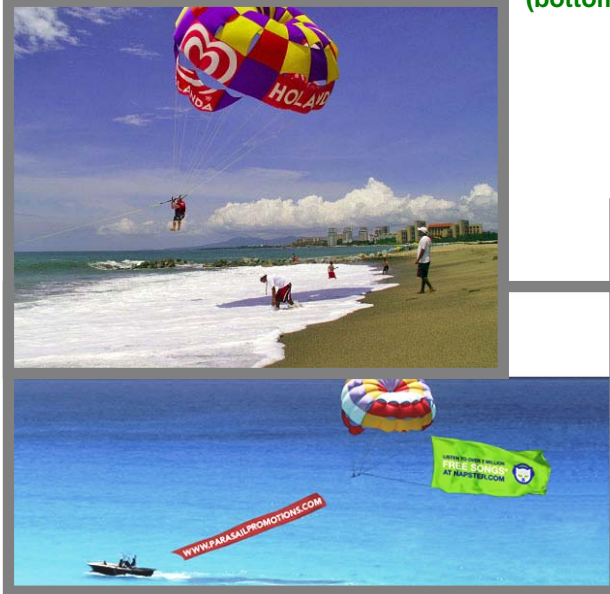


Paragliders may be very colourful (left and far left).

Being low and slow flying powered paragliders present better advertising opportunities (top left & centre). Since it will mostly be the undersides of gliders which will be visible from below it may imply that adverts will have to be imprinted onto the undersides of such gliders.

Manned Kites Towed Behind Vehicles

Various advertising enterprises are already making use of parasails towed behind boats as an advertising medium along beaches. From a visual point of view it seems as if such advertisements should be limited to branding and product promotion on parasails since supplementary banners are not all that appealing. (bottom, left).



Kites Used for Towing

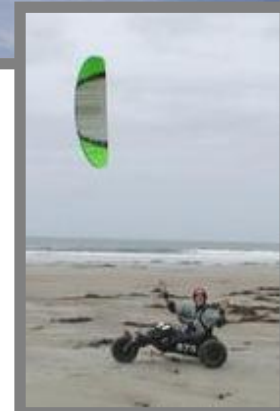
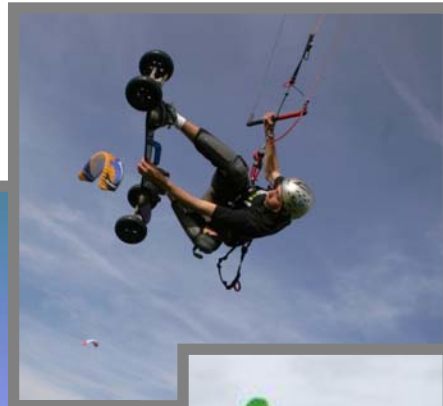
These kites are used for various recreational activities such as kitesurfing, kite landboarding and kite bugging. Of these kitesurfing presents the best opportunities for advertising.



Surfkites often fly at low angles which make any message on such kites quite visible to spectators on a beach. Surfaces which may be used for advertising vary from 8m² to 28m².



In contrast to kitesurfing kite landboarding & bugging are not associated with large numbers of spectators and have no significant potential as advertising mediums.



Radio-Controlled Aircraft

This type of aerial advertising includes model airplanes as well as radio-controlled balloons or mini-blimps. Mini-blimps are helium-filled and may vary from 4m – 10m in length.

Radio-controlled blimps may contribute to the visual clutter of shopping centres and similar urban functions while some may also appear a bit artificial and shiny (top right). Lengthy written messages (middle right) may distract the attention of road-users while the visual impact of illuminated mini-blimps at night should also be considered. Mini-blimps should therefore be limited to events, shows and exhibitions. Supplementary banners appear untidy and mar the visual lines of mini-blimps (top & middle left). It should therefore be avoided.

<http://www.airship.com.au>



Branding against a white background may result in quite pleasant images (right and above centre).

Captive Balloons, Inflatables & Kites

As is the case with radio-controlled blimps and balloons captive balloons, inflatables and kites should be limited to events, shows and exhibitions with one or two exceptions.



A captive hot-air balloon on a winch lifting tourists into the air which should not necessarily be limited to shows and events (left). Advertising graphics in subdued colours depicting a tourism theme will make a better contribution to the local sense of place than the bright red & yellow colours used on this balloon.



A captured helium-filled mini-blimp at a shopping centre with an untidy exchangeable fabric banner contributing to the existing advertising clutter (left).



Something special – a helium-filled balloon suspended above a fountain (left). Balloons and inflatables come in all shapes and sizes and may also be used during processions and at carnivals (right).



A cold-air inflated kite (right).



A kite festival (bottom left) presents an ideal opportunity for kite advertising. Corporate kites are sometimes handed out for free to serve as an advertisement where and whenever they are flown (top right).



Helikites (left) – a good example of a kytoon. A helikite is a combination between a helium balloon and a kite, forming a single, aerodynamically sound captured aircraft. It exploits both wind and helium for its lift, can fly much higher and in worst weather than normal captured aircraft and can also fly without wind.

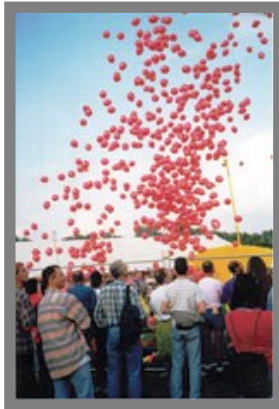


It may serve as an advertising medium by carrying banners of which some may have more appeal than others.

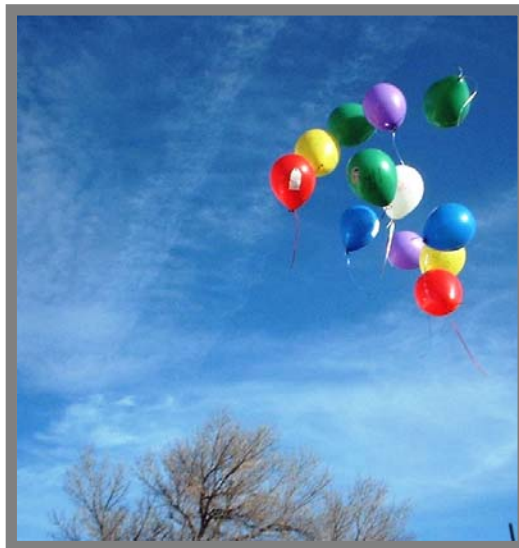
<http://www.helikites.com>

Free Balloons

Free balloons used for advertising consist mostly of balloons inflated with gas lighter than air and which are released en-masse by charities and for corporate advertising.



The mass release of balloons contributes to the litter problem and has a negative influence on wildlife. Balloon litter at sea may be fatal to certain wildlife species such as marine turtles, dolphins and certain seabirds which mistake floating balloons for natural prey such as jellyfish or squid or which may become entangled in the balloon litter. Various states in the US have already banned the mass release of balloons. For legislation in this regard go to <http://www.longwood.edu/cleanva/balloonlaws.htm> Section 146E of the *Protection of the Environment Operations Act 1997 No 156* of New South Wales also regulates the release of balloons <http://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/maintop/scanact/inforce/NONE/0> Various local authorities in the UK are also considering banning the mass release of balloons.



For more information on the negative environmental impact of the mass release of balloons go to:

<http://www.mcsuk.org/mcsaction/pollution/balloons>

http://www.ukrivers.net/balloon_fact.html

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