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Diplomová práce

Myth in American Advertising after 1945

Mýtus v americké reklamě po roce 1945

Vypracoval
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Agilvy

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Dědečkovi

Abstrakt

Tato práce je vystavěna jako komplexní analýza reklamního diskurzu v rámci jistých předem definovaných parametrů; konkrétně jde o americkou tištěnou reklamu po roce 1945. Reklama je zde chápána jako typ jazyka, jehož hlavní sémiotickou jednotkou je jistá forma Barthesovského mýtu, od reality odtržená superstruktura přesahující de Saussurovu teorii znaku. Jádrem této práce je diachronická analýza vývoje struktury těchto mýtů, jejich komunikační funkce a v neposlední řadě jejich role jednak jako odrazu, tak i strůjce celé škály stereotypů, přerodů, hodnotových žebříčků či axiomatických pravd zakořeněných v kolektivním vědomí americké společnosti. Primárním zdrojem pro tuto analýzu jsou pak jednotlivé reklamy, pečlivě vybrány buď jako primární reprezentativní vzorky, nebo jako vzorky mající vliv a význam na poli reklamního průmyslu.

Teoretická kostra práce spočívá především v Marxově chápání komodity jako jistého druhu fetiše, Barthesově popisu struktury a společenské funkce mýtu, Baudrillardových a Debordových teoriích týkajících se společnosti spektaklu, vlády simulaker či konceptu hyperreálna, Benjaminově rozboru jedinečnosti zobrazení a jeho aury, a konečně McLuhanově podrobném rozboru sémiotiky reklamy. Mimoto se práce dle potřeby opírá i o teorie nespádající striktně do oboru lingvistiky, literární teorie či kulturních studií, například o Maslowovu práci na poli motivace a behaviorální psychologie, moderní historii kapitalismu dle Naomi Klein či sociologické sondy Betty Friedan a Vance Packarda.

Závěrečná část této práce pak na základě získaných poznatků ukazuje vývoj reklamního diskurzu jako plynulý posun k vyšší míře abstrakce, odtržení od reality a vyprazdňování významu, které vrcholí tautologickým cyklem značky jako simulakra odkazujícího primárně samo na sebe. Na základě poznatků získaných výše zmíněnou analýzou jsou pak navrženy směry, kterými by se mohl ubírat další výzkum, především určitý kvazi novohistorický postup detailně mapující charakter této již zmiňované reciprocity vztahu mezi reklamním mýtem a celou škálou fenoménů, které jsou dnes běžně, a možná až příliš pohodlně vnímané jako neoddělitelné symptomy života v globalizovaném světě.

Abstract

This thesis is designed as a comprehensive analysis of the advertising discourse within some pre-set constraints. Specifically, the main area of interest is the realm of American print advertising after 1945. Within these limits, advertising is understood as a mode of language, the chief semantic unit of which is a form of Barthesian myth, a superstructure divorced from reality that supersedes de Saussure's semiotics of the sign. The bulk of this thesis is then a diachronic analysis of the development of these myths and their role as both mirrors and catalysts of a whole range of stereotypes, value hierarchies or fixed ideas firmly embedded within American collective consciousness. The primary material for this analysis are then various specimens of the advertisements themselves, carefully selected because of their representativeness, influence or significance within the advertising realm.

The main theoretical framework rests on Marx's understanding of the commodity as a certain type of fetish, Barthes's description of the structure and social function of the myth, Baudrillard's and Debord's theories on such notions as the society of spectacle, the reign of simulacra and hyperreality, Benjamin's understanding of the uniqueness of representation and its aura and finally McLuhan's detailed accounts of advertising semiotics. Furthermore, theoretical vantage points not strictly falling within the loosely defined areas of linguistics, literary theory and cultural studies are employed wherever necessary; for instance, this thesis draws on Maslow's work on human motivation and behavioural psychology, Klein's history of modern capitalism or the sociological studies of Betty Friedan and Vance Packard.

The core argument of this thesis, based on the findings of the various case studies presented in the analytical part, then shows the evolution of the advertising discourse as a gradual move towards abstraction, separation from reality and emptying of meaning. The final chapter then summarises all the findings and suggests interest areas for further research, specifically a quasi new historicist line of enquiry that would in detail explore this reciprocal relation between advertising discourse and a whole range of phenomena widely and perhaps a bit too harshly dismissed as indelible symptoms of life in a globalised society.

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1. The Discourse of advertising

1.1. Thesis focus and methodology

The primary focus of this thesis is advertising understood as a mode of discourse. More specifically, this thesis operates on the premise that advertising can be viewed as a type of language designed to convey certain messages to the consumer. This thesis' main aim is then to analyse the evolution of the advertising discourse in a limited space and over a certain time period, namely the advertising in America from 1945 up to the present, and examine the link between this development and the historical and demographical changes of American society over the given period and determine the nature of the mutual influence advertising exerts over these social changes and vice versa.

The primary source for this analysis are then the advertisements themselves, selected from period journals and magazines, advertising anthologies and occasionally monographs specially focused on advertising semiotics, such as Marshall McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride*. This thesis makes no effort, however, to produce statistically valuable data or to establish universally valid laws of advertising semiotics based on quantitative research, but rather to focus on selected trends and tendencies over the given period and provide an in depth analysis of the major directional changes within the space of advertising discourse. The bulk of the thesis will present some of these advertisements and outline a "close reading" of their semiotics and link the various myths they propound to specific social phenomena of the given time period; these analyses will then be founded on a selection of secondary materials, predominantly theoretical texts on advertising and popular culture in general, along with relevant studies from various interconnected fields, such as literary theory, linguistics, sociology and psychology.

1.2. Theoretical framework

The purpose of Chapter one is primarily to outline the various theoretical approaches that will serve as the basis for the analysis that constitutes the bulk of the thesis, i.e. the chapters dedicated to the “close readings” of individual advertisements. Specifically, this chapter will establish the departure point of all the following analyses that draws on Marx’s essay *Fetishism of the Commodity*, namely that all commodities are imbued with a certain irrational value. This irrational, or “intangible” value and its relation to the end user will then be explored through the concepts of “Myth” and the adjacent notion of second order language, tracing their evolution from the works of Roland Barthes, that is in *Mythologies* and “Rhetoric of the Image”, through the works of Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* and his notions of zero referentiality and the theses Jean Paul Baudrillard presented in his works *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures* and *Simulacrum and Simulacra*, in particular his concepts of hyperreality and self-referential metalanguage. Furthermore, some other works on advertising and popular culture will be briefly examined, especially *The Mechanical Bride* by Marshall MacLuhan and Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.” The work of Walter Benjamin will then provide an alternative vantage point, where the chief concern is not semiotics, but rather the differentiation of values of pre-mechanised art and popular culture, and finally the selection from Marshall McLuhan will give an example of how advertising can fulfil its above outlined function, i.e. propounding a myth. Finally, the work of Abram Maslow, in particular his theses on human motivation, will be briefly alluded to in connection to analyzing the relation of the perceived product benefit to human needs.

1.3. The product as a sign

The washing machine serves as an appliance and *acts* as an element of prestige, comfort, etc. It is strictly this latter field which is the field of consumption. All kinds of other objects may be substituted here for the washing machine as signifying element. In the logic of signs, as in that of symbols, objects are no longer linked in any sense to a *definite* function or need. Precisely because they are responding here to something quite different, which is either the social logic or the logic of desire, for which they function as a shifting and unconscious field of signification.¹ (emphasis Baudrillard's)

An earlier stage in the economy's domination of social life entailed an obvious downgrading of being into having that left its stamp on all human endeavor. The present stage, in which social life is completely taken over by the accumulated products of the economy, entails **a generalized shift from having to appearing: all effective "having" must now derive both its immediate prestige and its ultimate raison d'être from appearances.**² (emphasis mine)

These two quotes somehow outline what is understood to be a crucial departure point for all the following analyses, namely that whichever commodity we contemplate, one of its roles is that of a sign; it is this structuralist division between the signifier and the signified that allows us to speak of the language of the product and ultimately the language of advertising. As shall be demonstrated later on, a Marlboro cigarette is not just a cylinder filled with tobacco, it is also the sign of distilled "cowboyness" with all its connotations which the advertisement *promises* to transport on the audience. The first quote is taken from Jean Paul Baudrillard's *The Consumer Society; Myths and Structures* and the second

¹Jean Paul Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, (London: Sage, 1998) 77.

² Guy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb, (Oakland: AKPress, 2006) 3.

from Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, but a similar sentiment can be generally found in the work of almost any scholar who has seriously contemplated advertising as a mode of discourse and consumerist culture as a mode of human existence, no matter from what vantage point or academic perspective. All these statements are then heavily indebted not only to Marx (more on this in Section 1.7), but also to Roland Barthes and his analysis of the myth as second degree language, that is the "non-transformative" language that rather than operating with the Saussurean unit of the signifier and the signified uses as its semantic units whole chains of signification, thus divorcing language from reality.

1.4. Roland Barthes: *Mythologies* and tiers of signification

Barthes' work with advertising resembles in some aspects the sarcastic, almost Joycean commentaries of McLuhan in *The Mechanical Bride*,³ however, his analysis is more systematic and bears a clear imprint of his recent familiarisation with Saussurean semiotics. Unlike McLuhan, who predominantly tried to dissect individual images and highlight the semiotic means through which they radiated the "emotional promises" mentioned in Section 1.2, Barthes went one step further and tried to derive general rules of signification from his primary materials, which eventually crystallized in his theory of the "Myth" and what could be called "tiers" or "orders" of signification. Put in plain terms, if some critics argue that McLuhan was interested in "Semiotics beneath semiotics"⁴, Barthes could well be said to have been interested in "Semiotics above semiotics".

In his treatise on the way myth structures popular culture, Barthes defined it as a higher semiotic unit that supersedes the traditional structure of signification as described

³ "Jung and easily Freudened" springs to mind.

⁴ Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride : Folklore of Industrial Man*, ed. Philip Meggs, (Berkeley: Ginko Press, 2002) xiv.

by Saussure. In this triade, the signifier and the signified are united in the sign. Barthes used the example of a rose as a symbol of passion and devotion:

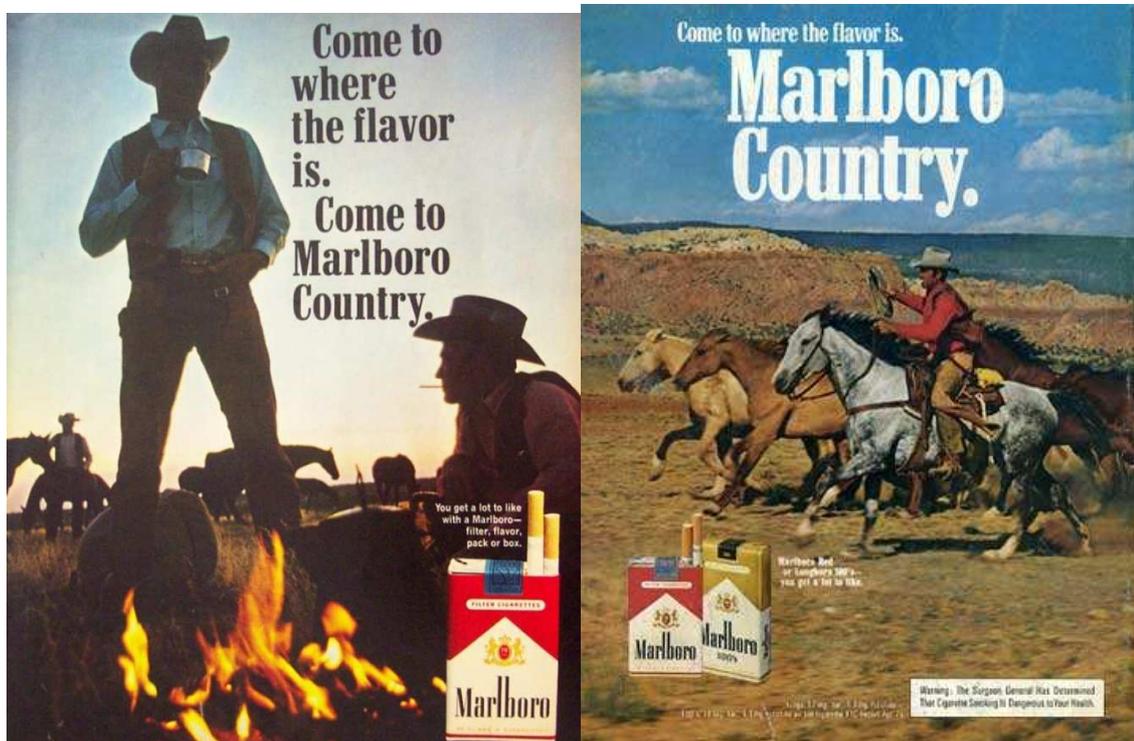
Take a bunch of roses: I use it to *signify* my passion. Do we have here, then, only a signifier and a signified, the roses and my passion? Not even that: to put it accurately, there are here only “passionified” roses. But on the plane of analysis, we do have three terms; for these roses weighted with passion perfectly and correctly allow themselves to be decomposed into roses and passion: the former and the latter existed before uniting and forming this third object, which is the sign.⁵

However, within the myth this whole structure is actually condensed into one element of another triad of a higher order, in one of Barthes’ examples into the colonial myth of the inherently positive value of the French empire, signified by a magazine cover depicting a black soldier saluting the flag, in itself a juxtaposition of many semantic structures. This idea of “semiotic” orders, which could theoretically constitute an infinite sequence of interdependent tiers, allows Barthes to analyse the chosen myths from an entirely new perspective; it can also be used for a deconstruction of advertisements and will be used extensively in the following chapter in order to analyse the way print advertisements propounded various myths based on emotions and brand values. Just to exemplify this technique, however, it may be useful to demonstrate it on what is universally considered to be one of the most ingenious and certainly one of the most efficient advertising concepts of the twentieth century: the Marlboro man.

The Marlboro man, an advertising concept launched in the fifties, is one of the most recognizable symbols of the age of advertising and its original template has spurred hundreds of variations. The essence of all these visualisations is their common goal; to revamp the manliness of the product. In order to do this, a sufficiently masculine set of

⁵ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Anette Lavers, (New York: The Noonday Press, 1991) 111.

signs was deployed to distil all the supposedly traditional attributes of “a man”, i.e. strength, decisiveness, earnestness, detachment, roughness etc. into the deliberately sketchy and idealised notion of the cowboy at the frontier.

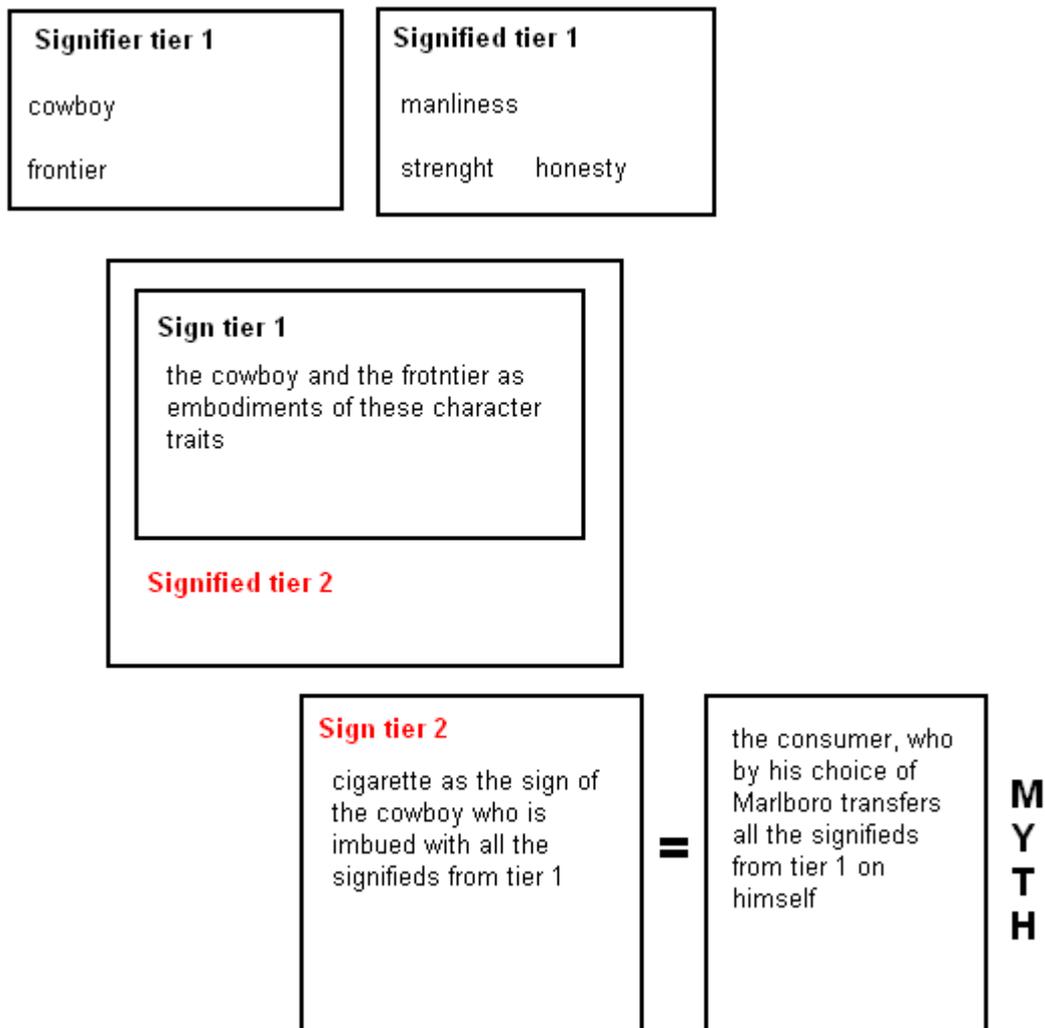


All these signs that signify the cowboy, such as the denim attire, cowboy hat, the lasso, the omnipresent herds of horses, the red sun rising above the prairie, the western-like font of the slogan and finally the slogans themselves, most notably “Come to where the flavour is” and “Marlboro Country” constitute a system where the cowboy with his broader frontier settings is yet another sign, uniting the signifier, that is the cowboy/country essence, with the signified, i.e. the distilled image of manliness. And one tier higher, the cigarette itself becomes merely a sign of the already semiotically loaded cowboy and frontier. The cigarette then offers to transfer all these meanings onto the consumer. Just as Barthes employed the word “*la Sinté*” or “Sinniness”⁷ for the naïve and synecdochical image of China imbedded in the petit bourgeois consciousness, we may call the distilled essence of

⁶ *VintageAds*, 11th Aug. 2012, <<http://www.vintageadbrowser.com/search?q=marlboro&page=10>>. Note: VintageAd browser is merely a search engine for old advertisements. It does not list article names, dates or contributors.

⁷ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 119.

Marlboro artificial “cowboyness” with all its above noted connotations. We may also transfer these relations into a scheme, which could look something like this:



The “primary” language of these advertisements tells us that cowboys use lassoes and smoke Marlboro, but the *myth* this advertisement propounds is that the Marlboro smoker is a direct, strong, honest and above all “manly” man, a partial tautology, but also an excellent advertising message; as a consequence of this, the campaign was a huge success for Marlboro.

1.5. “The Rhetoric of the Image” and the interplay between the words and image

“The Rhetoric of the Image”, an essay from 1967, is possibly the most accessible of Barthes’ works dealing specifically with myth and advertising. In this essay, he further deepens his analysis of the specific “myths” mediated by a single advertisement, in this case a readymade Panzani pasta sauce. Unlike in *Mythologies*, however, where we may say that he is interested in the verticality of representation in that he explores the various orders of signification in terms of their superiority/inferiority to each other, i.e. the myth as a higher order of language than a single sign, the analysis in “The Rhetoric of the Image” is predominantly horizontal and deals with various *channels* of signification which Barthes calls “linguistic”, “iconic non coded” and “iconic coded”.⁸ In spite of their interdependability, all these channels are essentially of the same order. It may therefore be said that whereas the analysis in *Mythologies* is syntagmatic, “The Rhetoric of the Image” focuses more on the paradigmatic relations.

⁸ Roland Barthes, “The Rhetoric of the Image”, *Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Nicolas Mirzoeff, (New York: Routledge, 2002) 136-137.



To mention just the salient points of Barthes' analysis before adjourning to their exemplification and the way they may serve as a theoretical background for the purposes of the thesis, he postulated the following information channels:

- 1) The linguistic, which simultaneously connotes and denotes: the name Panzani denotes the product name but connotes a notion of "Italianicity"
- 2) The iconic¹¹ coded, which connotes; this is the set of signs the understanding of which depends on more than what Barthes calls "common anthropologic knowledge". An example would be the tricolore the products form in the picture; red white and green again denote "italianicity" via an arbitrary symbol – the Italian flag.

⁹Traces of The Real, 14th Jun. 2012, <<http://hughitb.files.wordpress.com/2009/12/panzani-preview.jpg>>.

¹⁰ Rijksmuseum, 14th Jun. 2012, <<https://www.rijksmuseum.nl/images/aria/sk/z/sk-a-335.z?leftcoulisse>>.

¹¹The terms "icon" and "iconic" are used somewhat inconsistently throughout the essay. If we consider the Piercean division of signs into icons, indexes and symbols, it could well be argued that "the idea that we have in the scene represented is a return from the market" is mediated by the means of a cause-effect relationship embodied in the bag and therefore the sign is an index, not an icon; we have returned from the market, *thus* the bag and purchased produce, not "the shapes in the picture look *like* the things we would carry after returning from a market.

Another such message would be the notion of abundance and even luxury and desire denoted by the still-life aesthetic and composition of the image, which again presupposes some knowledge of our cultural canon.

- 3) Finally, there is the non-coded, purely denotational iconic layer; this mediates the obvious information contained in the pictorial representation, such as “this is a mushroom”, “this is an onion”.

It is of course possible to object that an analysis of a single image can hardly be taken as a substantial basis for the formulation of universally valid rules of representation, however, that does not diminish the clarity and usefulness of Barthes’ argument.

Apart from this basic distinction, he then elaborates on the possible nature of the link between the linguistic and iconic message. He identifies two chief types of this relationship, the already mentioned “anchoring” and “transition”. Anchoring serves more or less as a caption, it cements the semantic relations already postulated within the image. This notion will be further explored in Section 1.8 as part of an analysis of a Motorola TV advertisement; “where the picture in itself creates the impression of the TV set functioning as a bonding element for the whole family, almost like an old grandpa everybody likes listening to. This notion is then supported by the copy that amplifies this pride and interprets it as an element of family tradition. In other words, there is hardly any tension between the image and the copy.



¹²The transition function of the copy is the exact opposite; its purpose is to create a certain type of tension between the image and the text and put the semantics of the

¹² “I Can’t Cook. Who Cares?“, *Coloribus*, 16th Sept. 2012, <http://files.coloribus.com/files/adsarchive/part_157/1573155/file/wonderbra-i-cant-cook-who-cares-small-97267.jpg>.

image into a new perspective. An example of an advertisement where this function overpowers the anchoring, because it is arguably impossible to separate those two completely, is this advertisement for the new Wonderbra: While the image itself presents the common image of a woman as the object of desire, the copy seemingly addresses an unrelated issue; the lack of her practicality. A predominantly anchoring slogan would be for instance “Up the ante”, “Rise the stakes” or the utterly bland rendition of “More attractive”. “I can’t cook. Who cares?” ,on the other hand, temporarily diverts the attention from the women’s curves to emphasise the fact that she is rather impractical and even stupid and then “feeds back into the image” in suggesting that her curves are so sexy that they outweigh this obvious disadvantage of the woman as a potential partner.

Once again, the problem of the relation between the image and its textual, or as Barthes calls it “linguistic” accompaniment is a recurring issue in any advertising analysis and the theories of Barthes and some others will be repeatedly called upon in the following chapters; an interesting issue, for instance, is the gradual diminishing of the bulk of the copy, which traditionally provided the more “technical” details of the product as advertising gradually shifted from rational to emotional to image¹³ based argumentation.

1.6. Debord and Baudrillard; the Spectacle, loss of referentiality and the Hyperreal

The fetishism of the commodity – the domination of society by “tangible as well as intangible things” – attains its ultimate fulfilment in the spectacle, where the real world is replaced by a selection of images which are projected above it, yet which at the same time succeed in making themselves regarded as the epitome of reality¹⁴

¹³The word here is not synonymous with the word “picture”, but rather denotes the obsession with how others see us.

¹⁴Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 9.

The spectacle is a permanent opium war designed to force people to equate goods with commodities and to equate satisfaction with a survival that expands according to its own laws.¹⁵

These excerpts from Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* relate directly to the above mentioned notions of commodity "fetishism" and "Myth" as outlined by Marx and Barthes respectively. Whereas Marx formulated the basic equation between a commodity and its fetishistic value and Barthes provided a semiotic analysis of this "higher order of representation" linked to this value, Debord explored the social impact of this gradual decrease of direct referentiality, i.e. what Barthes would call the death of first order language, in popular culture. He called it "the spectacle" and defined it as a mode of existence where the signifier exists as a fully self-referential semantic unit and is completely divorced and alienated from the signified: "The spectacle is not a collection of images; it is a social relation between people that is mediated by images."¹⁶ In other words, the spectacle is the curse of the shadow pictures in the Platonic cave that gradually lose all their referentiality to the real world and become an enclosed "metalanguage" of their own.

Baudillard draws a similarly bleak image of this non-referential language and its alienating effects, this time with specific reference to advertising, when he claims in his *Simulacra and Simulation* that:

Today what we are experiencing is the absorption of all virtual modes of expression into that of advertising. All original cultural forms, all determined languages are absorbed in advertising because it has no depth, it is instantaneous and instantaneously forgotten. Triumph of superficial form, of the smallest common denominator of all signification, degree zero of meaning, triumph of entropy over all possible tropes. The lowest form of energy of the sign. This unarticulated,

¹⁵Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 11.

¹⁶Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 1.

instantaneous form, without a past, without a future, without the possibility of metamorphosis, has power over all the others.¹⁷

Baudrillard goes even further and at one point claims that advertising cannot be in itself understood as language¹⁸ because of its zero or cyclical referentiality; here we enter the realm of the hyperreal where “The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control-and it can be reproduced an indefinite number of times from these.”¹⁹ This rather nihilistic notion will be called upon in Chapter four in connection to the birth of the “superbrand” and the simulation of its image through advertising.

1.7. Abram Maslow and the theory of human motivation

It is now important to introduce a perspective very different from the various theoretical approaches to the evolution of advertising myth and its relation to society this thesis has been predominantly focused on so far; behavioural psychology and the psychology of human motivation, namely one of the seminal works on the subject, Abram Maslow’s “A Theory of Human Motivation”.²⁰

²¹The basic premise of Maslow’s theory is rather simple: Everything we do, from eating to having sex, buying a new shirt or going to church, is aimed at satisfying a certain need. In Maslow’s theory, these needs and the struggle to satisfy them constitute a cornerstone of human existence. The unique part of Maslow’s argument, however, lies in their

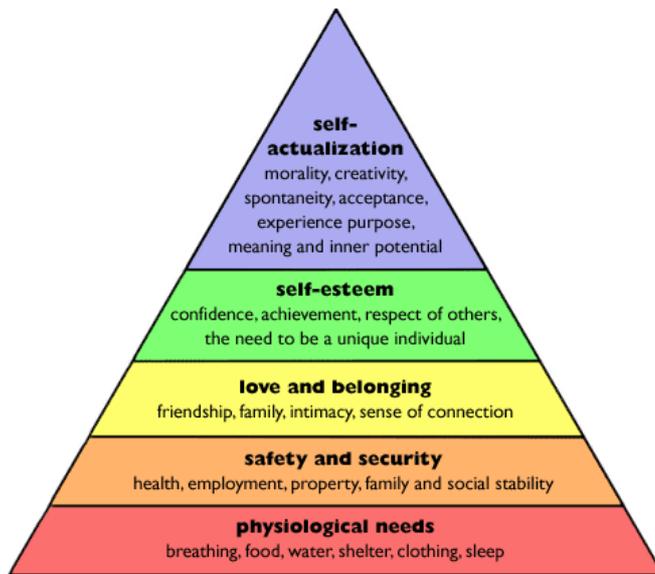
¹⁷Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 60.

¹⁸ At this juncture, this thesis stands in opposition to Baudrillard’s argument. It is not the language of advertising that would collapse because of its zero referentiality, but rather the myth this language fabricates, or, in other words, the supersemiotic structure one tier above language..

¹⁹ Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 3.

²⁰ Abraham Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation,” *Psychological Review*, 50, 2-4.

²¹ “Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs: “Since he lost his job, he doesn’t seem to care about our relationship,”” *So What It Really Meant*, 15th Nov. 2012. <<http://www.sowhatireallymeant.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/Screen-shot-2012-05-14-at-10.28.00-AM.png>>.



stratification; he created a hierarchy of these needs and claimed that generally, one first has to satisfy the more “primordial” needs before ascending higher in the needs hierarchy; biological needs take precedence before the need to feel safe, which again is more important

than the need for love and belonging, self esteem or self-actualisation. This approach will be called upon in the concluding chapter as an umbrella concept in relation to interpreting the evolution of advertising myth in connection to the irrational or “perceived” value of the advertised object. While it may be arguable whether smoking a Marlboro cigarette caters in any way to the first tier needs, for instance, that is whether the nicotine triggers some sort of biochemical reaction that make the smoker physically feel better, the perceived value of the product is that it may satisfy the need of self esteem via projecting the cowboy archetype on the smoker, or the need for love by making him more attractive to the opposite sex through imposing the same archetype.

1.8. The aura of a Motorola TV– Walter Benjamin redux

Just as the spread of advertising and its mass reception was enabled by the technological and social changes such as the advances in printing techniques, the spreading of literacy, the rise of photography, the invention of radio and finally the invention of TV and the Internet, some of these breakthroughs had a profound impact on the institution of art itself, and since advertising has always used visual art as one of its chief media, it is important to briefly elaborate on the nature of these changes and their impact. One of the seminal works

exploring these is Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

In his work, Benjamin examines what he sees as the two fundamentally opposed functions of visual art; its sacral, ritualistic, cultist value versus the inherent artistic value in itself. Before the rise of mechanisation and in particular the rise of photography, Benjamin asserts that the second function was virtually unknown. The creation of an object of art, be it a bust of Venus or a portrait of a Duchess, was a laborious, lengthy and costly process and the resulting artefact was imbued with a sacral, almost magical aura²². It was then placed in a very specific context or setting and functioned as a symbol of wealth, piety, a metonymy for a deity to be worshiped, an embodiment of a being sacred to that particular culture etc. This function was then highly dependent on the specific setting and surrounding of this object. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan quotes an interesting example of this given in the *Exploration in Communications* by Siegfried Giedion when he talks about the cave paintings of Lascaux. The current setting (halogen illumination, information points etc.) that enable large groups of people to view these simultaneously without any labour allegedly destroys and demeans the effect of the artefact:

These [the caves] were holy places in which, with the aid of magically potent pictures, the sacred rituals could be performed. [...] Nothing is more destructive of the true values of primeval art than the glare of electric light in this realm of eternal night. Flares of small stone lamps burning animal fat, of which examples have been found, permit one to obtain only fragmentary glimpses of the colors and lines of the objects depicted. In such soft, flickering light these take on an almost magical movement²³.

²² Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, trans. Edmund Jephcott et.al, eds. Michael W. Jennings et. al., (London: University of Harvard Press, 2008) 19-22.

²³ Marshall McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*, (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1962) 83.

Benjamin then continues his argument by claiming that along with the rise of photography, this function of the object of art gradually faded away as the object itself became reproducible at virtually no cost and, what is even more important, transferrable out of its original context. A photography of the bust of Venus or the Lascaux paintings may be viewed at will without any effort in the comfort of one's living-room and can hardly be said to produce any of the effects noted above. Benjamin then continued to explain that it is only in film or the photographic portrait, perhaps an image of a deceased loved one placed in a prominent setting among the family silver, that the mechanically reproduced object partially retains its sacral aura. It is at this point that we may return to advertising, specifically to the possible cult value a print advert for say a laundry detergent or a new Chevrolet can have; this is where Benjamin's analysis of the seemingly contradictory aspects of film as a product of the process of mechanical reproduction and an art form imbued with cult value and ritual provides a useful analogy. Logic would have it that film, as the ultimate result of the onset of mechanical reproduction, would hardly have any of the "cult value" indelibly linked with the concepts of adoration and ritual Benjamin outlines at the beginning of his analysis. However, Benjamin argues that film becomes an object of ritual and adoration because of its "proletariat" dimension; whereas art would have catered to the selected elite in the past, film is not only accessible to the masses, but directly *depicts* the masses as well. This universal accessibility of film is in sharp contrast with the works of art previously imbued with a cult value:

The elk depicted by Stone Age man on the walls of his cave is an instrument of magic and is exhibited to others only coincidentally; what matters is that the spirits see it. Cult value as such even tends to keep the artwork out of sight: certain statues of gods are accessible only to the priest in the cellar; certain images of the Madonna

remain covered nearly all year round; certain sculptures on medieval cathedrals are not visible to the viewer at ground level.²⁴

This genuine accessibility is twinned with the departure from elitist subject matter and a tendency to depict the “everyman”. It would not have been possible for a peasant to have a portrait made of himself, yet he, or at least a “representation” of a peasant, that is an actor pretending to be one, is frequently the subject matter of film, thus ideally fulfilling what Benjamin calls “the human being’s legitimate right of being reproduced.”²⁵ This is where the role of film overlaps with that of advertising; the advertising image is also widely accessible and provides a glimpse of possible improvement of the common man attainable through purchasing the product.

What Benjamin doesn’t address explicitly is the obvious schism between the work of art as a form and the object of representation, and since his whole argument deals only with figural art, the person it represents. The work of art, even before the age of mechanical reproduction, could have had no sacral aura *unless what it depicted was already imbued with one in its specific context*. In other words, a portrait of a lady or a victorious battle that hangs in the great hall of a castle is designed to evoke feelings of envy or respect for the lord and commissioner of the painting; a painting of a banana peel would have no such effect. Berger has an entire essay devoted to the way women were commodified on paintings and used merely as a symbol of the commissioner’s dominance, power, wealth etc. He further explores this affinity through his “pictorial essays” where he deliberately juxtaposes for instance an 18th century portrait of a mistress and a photograph of a long legged model that is in fact a pantyhose advertisement.

²⁴ Benjamin, 25.

²⁵ Benjamin, 34.

"You bet we bought Motorola TV...we've been a Motorola Family for 20 years!"

THE ANDERSON FAMILY STARTED WITH A MOTOROLA AUTO RADIO 20 YEARS AGO

"WE HAD ONE OF THE FIRST Motorola auto radios," says Albert Anderson, retired Chicago cabinet maker, "and we've been buying Motorola ever since!" Now that the Andersons have a beautiful new Motorola TV in their living room, they're more sold than ever on Motorola quality, value and spic notch performance.

The Andersons chose Model 17K1 because Mrs. Anderson liked the way its Fashion Award cabinet styling harmonized with the furnishings of their home... and because Mr. Anderson wanted a screen big enough for his whole family to see at once. Now they enjoy large-as-life snap-sharp pictures on the big 17 inch screen.

They're assured of long life, reliable performance, too, because every Motorola Dependable-Bilt chassis is factory tested before shipment. They like the Bilt-in-Antenna and quick, two simple control tuning... even "Scotty" can tune in his pet programs. The Anderson's enthusiasm has been passed along to their married children who have Motorola TV and radios in their own homes, and Motorola auto radios in their cars.

Your family will be just as thrilled with Motorola TV when you get acquainted with Motorola styling, quality and value! See your dealer today.

specifications subject to change without notice

Motorola TV
SEE the 4-STAR REVUE every week on NBC-TV

Motorola Television, 1951

²⁶If we transfer this notion back onto the advertising image and combine it with the aforementioned tendency to equate products with emotions and sometimes even with their *blatant personification*, the notion of a strict division between the sacral and the profane as outlined by Benjamin doesn't hold. When the product, a car, for instance, is positioned as a member of the family, an advertising approach

extensively employed in the fifties, the resultant effect is very similar to the portrait of a loved one on the mantelpiece; the sacral aura of the depicted product may be such that it overpowers the inevitably profane context of the ad in a magazine. The aura of what's on display prevails as the product is seen as something that inevitably has a life of its own. A good example of this may be an old advertisement for a Motorola TV.

In this case, the signs such as the seating of the whole family in front of the set, the proud recognition of the family being branded expressed by the phrase "you bet" and the overall tone of the copy²⁷, the phrase "Motorola Family" and the copy wording which develops the theme of Motorola as family heritage "anchor" the notion already

²⁶ Jim Heimann, *All American Ads, 50's*, (Berlin: Taschen, 2001) 425.

²⁷The word copy is used rather freely in this context in that it denotes all the textual elements of the advertisement. Where necessary, these are usually divided into "slogan", "copy", "claim" and other subcategories.

foreshadowed by the picture as such, that is the notion of the TV set being an indelible part of the family and its pastime, thus casting a sacral aura on the product itself.

1.9. McLuhan and The Mechanical Bride

One of the first systematic engagements with the semiotics of print advertising is to be found in the work of the already mentioned Marshall McLuhan, specifically in his publication *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*. His notion of advertising to some extent anticipates that of Barthes', though there are important differences in their perspectives (as discussed in Sections 1.5 and 1.6) and to a large extent foreshadows the thoughts of Guy Debord, who, despite his contempt for McLuhan (Debord called him "the spectacle's first apologist, who had seemed to be the most convinced imbecile of the century"²⁸), was clearly inspired by him. Both McLuhan and Debord saw the media culture as oppressive and contraproductive, but rather than resisting the onslaught of images, they both wanted to immerse themselves fully in this communicational channel in order to understand it more deeply and to be able to disrupt its effects; thus Debord formalised his technique of "Détournment", about which later, while McLuhan often described his engagement through the metaphor of the Maelstrom, taken from E.A. Poe's story "A Descent into the Maelstrom":

Poe's sailor saved himself by studying the action of the whirlpool and by cooperating with it. The present book likewise makes few attempts to attack the very considerable currents and pressures set up around us today by the mechanical agencies of the press, radio, movies and advertising. It does attempt to set the

²⁸Guy Debord, "Comments on the Society of the Spectacle", trans. Malcom Imrie, 15th Sept. 2012, <<http://libcom.org/files/Comments%20on%20the%20Society%20of%20the%20Spectacle.pdf>>14.

reader at the center of the revolving picture created by these affairs where he may observe the action that is in progress and in which everybody is involved.²⁹

McLuhan engaged with each advertisement on its own merits and often unearthed the various promises of traits and attributes used to sell products as mentioned by Baudrillard earlier in this work. Thus he for instance exemplified some of the most prevailing “myths” propounded by American advertising in the fifties, namely a) the categorical understanding of the family as one of the core American values, b) the notion that one’s mental and physical health is one’s duty to the nation and c) that the strive for success is not only one’s right, but a duty as well. In fact, if the advertising of the late forties and fifties were to be summarised by one concept, it would probably be “duty”; forty years later, Naomi Klein stated that

According to *Rocking the Ages*, a book produced in 1997 by leading U.S. consumer researchers Yankelovich Partners, “Diversity” was the “defining idea” for Gen-Xers, as opposed to “Individuality” for boomers and “Duty” for their parents.³⁰

Thus McLuhan for instance deconstructs the ad for a new, hi-tech ironing board that asks women “How to iron shirts without hating your husband!”³¹, to which McLuhan replies:

It is a **duty** for a woman to love her husband and also to love that soap that will make her husband love her. It is a **duty** to be glamorous, cheerful, efficient, and, so far as possible, to run home like an automatic factory. This ad also draws attention to the tendency of the modern housewife, after a premarital spell in the business world, **to embrace marriage and children but not housework.**³²(emphasis mine)

A similar sentiment was expressed by an anonymous adman in the fifties:

²⁹McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride*; v.

³⁰ Naomi Klein, *No Logo*, (London: Flamingo, 2000) 111.

³¹McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride*, 32.

³²McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride*, 32.

If you tell the housewife that by using your washing machine, drier, or dishwasher she can be free to play bridge, you are dead! The housewife today, to a certain extent, is disenfranchised; she is already feeling guilty about the fact that she is not working as hard as her mother. You are just rubbing her the wrong way when you offer her more freedom. Instead you should emphasise that the appliances free her to have more time with her children and to be a better mother.³³

In this particular case, McLuhan exemplifies the fact that the company manufacturing the iron board is not in fact selling an ironing board, but the concepts of love and family, and then elaborates on all the sexist stereotypes and artificial identities this advertisement imposes on women . His insights from *The Mechanical Bride* and later from *Understanding Media, The Medium is the Message* (or *Massage* or *Mess-age*) and finally from *Culture is our Business* will be referred to throughout this work, most notably in Chapter 2.

³³ Vance Packard, *The Hidden Persuaders*, (New York: IgPublishing, 2007) 78.

2. Individual conformity and the myths surrounding gender:

The Advertising of 1945-1959

2.1. They never had it so good

While the United States did not become a welfare state after the war like the UK did, MacMillian's famous assessment of the prosperity of the UK in the late forties and fifties could well have been applied to American economy of the period. Its industry and workforce sparked up by the material demands of World War II., it was at this point that the United States of America assumed the position of the world's most dominant superpower for the first time. As one account has it:

For most Americans, the 1950's were a decade of unprecedented prosperity, economic growth, high employment, and rapid if uneven spread of homesteads in suburbia. It was a decade marked not only by the mass production of consumer goods and services but also by the increasingly important role of advertising and mass communication in organising consumption.³⁴

Another source mentions a "consumer spree" the average American indulged in:

With money in their pockets, Americans rushed to new homes in suburbia, had children in record numbers, and went on a consumer buying spree, snapping up home appliances automobiles, televisions, and a plethora of other goods and services.³⁵

Consumption was the new creed of the nation and the uncanny 1959 "Kitchen debate" between Khrushchev and Nixon marks the peak of this new notion of prosperity and

³⁴ "The Consumer's Republic: The 1950s and the Emergence of a New Economy of Mass Consumption," *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*, eds. Robert Griffith, Paula Baker, Thomas G. Paterson, (Boston: Wadsworth, 2007) 81.

³⁵ "America at Home, 1953-1960", *Present Tense: The United States since 1945*, Michael Schaller, Robert D. Schulzinger, Karen Anderson, (Boston: Wadsworth, 2004) 84.

happiness attained through affluence. As Roland Marchand states in his essay “Visions of Classlessness”:

Wartime research, when applied to consumer products, would bring new power and comfort to the common man in a “thermoplastic, aerodynamic, supersonic, electronic, gadgetonic” postwar world.³⁶

2.2. Our duty to shop freely

It was not, however, solely this onset of consumer spending per se that marked this period; a whole new paradigm shift occurred in the minds of the average American consumer. Unlike the upper class, self-indulged spending that primarily stimulated the growth during the pre-1929, “Great Gatsby” era which in retrospect was often seen as nothing more than a symptom of moral decay and decadence of the financial elites, in the post-war period consumer spending across class boundaries was not only understood as a well deserved luxury, but also as a duty, an obligation through which each and every citizen realised his right to choose and thus strengthen the fabric of American society; and it was advertising, to a large extent, that was to be credited for this new way of thinking:

Encouraged by advertising to equate consuming with personal freedom and “the good life,” Americans used natural resources as though the supply was infinite and littered newly created landfills with tons of disposable goods. (Schaller, 95)

In other words, the strife for economic growth, accumulation of capital and prosperity that has always been a cornerstone of the idea of the American dream was now elevated to an entirely new level; it was inexorably linked with the idea of individual spending as an act of patriotism and good citizenship.

³⁶Roland Marchand, “Visions of Classlessness,” *Major Problems in American History Since 1945*, eds. Robert Griffith, Paula Baker, Thomas G. Paterson, (Boston: Wadsworth, 2007) 98.

2.3. Constraints of the advertising discourse

Despite the fact that freedom of choice was one of the defining concepts of the above mentioned period, it is crucial to note that this freedom was still constrained by a number of well established barriers that did not start disintegrating until the early sixties or later. Stereotypes surrounding race, gender, but also sexual orientation or political views were still firmly embedded in American society and nowhere was this more apparent than in advertising. The representation of the “fringe” areas of American society, such as blacks, homosexuals, lesbians, homeless people, prostitutes and others was virtually nill; the homosexual taboo, for instance, wasn’t explicitly broken until 1995 when Diesel showed two sailors kissing on one of its billboards. In terms of Barthes’ analysis of the nature of the myth, it means that the advertising of “the age of conformity” had a very limited choice of myths it could have been structured upon, if it wanted to be relevant to the mainstream



³⁷ audience, and the markets of the fifties hardly knew any other. This in consequence limited the variety of the advertising discourse, especially in comparison to the advertising of the sixties and seventies. Those few exceptions then usually supported the implicit myths of the discourse as a whole; i.e. women were rarely displayed in advertisements promoting office equipment or business clothes, and when they were, it was usually in

³⁷ *VintageAd*, 21st Oct. 2012. <<http://www.vintageadbrowser.com/search?q=smith+corona&page=3>>.

some rather subordinate role, such as a secretary. The myths surrounding genders and their unequal positions at the job market were occasionally acknowledged. This is what Barthes called “inoculation”, one of the established rhetorical figures of “myth on the right”:

The inoculation. I have already given examples of this very general figure, which consists in admitting the accidental evil of a class-bound institution the better to conceal its principal evil. One immunizes the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil; one thus protects it against the risk of a generalized subversion. This *liberal* treatment would not have been possible only a hundred years ago. Then, the bourgeois Good did not compromise with anything, it was quite stiff. It has become much more supple since: the bourgeoisie no longer hesitates to acknowledge some localized subversions: the avant-garde, the irrational in childhood, etc. It now lives in a balanced economy: as in any sound joint-stock company, the smaller shares-in law but not in fact compensate the big ones.³⁸

This Chapter then aims at exploring this relative uniformity of advertising and the chief stereotypes and fixed myths it was based on, in particular when regarding gender.

2.4. Stereotypes as the basis for advertising

Before adjourning to the analysis of specific cases of myths being the governing structure of print advertising, it is necessary to briefly outline the chief contours of a specific sub-branch of myth, namely a stereotype:

For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see.

In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our

³⁸Barthes, *Mythologies*, 152.

culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture.³⁹

This definition of the mechanics of stereotypes as some pattern seeking filters we channel our perception of reality through comes from Walter Lippmann, whose theses are often quoted in *Typecasting*, a thorough analysis of the development of the concept of “stereotypes” in relation to various areas such as gender, class, race, religion etc. If we understand a stereotype as a specific mode of myth, that is a type of language which is to a large degree divorced from reality, or, in Barthes’ terms, “second order language”, it is essential to trace the relationship between these stereotypes of the time and specific advertisements in order to determine the general mythical structures that serve as their communicational framework. Whether the advertisement conforms with the stereotype, or breaks away from it, there exists some sort of relationship between the two that has an indelible impact on the working of the advertisement. A famous example of this may be found in the documentary *The Century of the Self* on the influence of Freud and Bernays on the world of PR and advertising. In this particular case, a stereotype/myth disruption was utilised to fill a unique marketing niche within the minds of the target group, in this case women:

Bernays set out to experiment with the minds of the popular classes. His most dramatic experiment was to persuade women to smoke. At that time, there was a taboo against women smoking. [...] He [a psychiatrist] told Bernays that if he could find a way to link cigarettes with the idea of challenging the male power, then women would smoke, because they would have their own penises.⁴⁰

³⁹Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen, *Typecasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Inequality*, (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2008) xx.

⁴⁰*The Century Of The Self*, dir. Adam Curtis, BBC Four, 2002. 10:25.



⁴¹Bernays managed to position smoking as a rebellious act synonymous with the suffragette rebellion against hegemony. By suggesting to break the taboo of female smoking and to do it very publicly, during the New York Easter parade, Bernays managed to disrupt the traditional stereotypes and equated cigarettes, or “torches of freedom”, with the female struggle for freedom. Or, in Barthesian language, he disrupted the myth of “female non-smokers” through

tacitly demonstrating its zero reference to the signified; Bernays showed women smoking in front of the eyes of thousands, and, even more importantly, in front of most of the national press. He demoted the myth to simpler, first order language and then replaced with another one. He thus created a state-wide cultural movement that resulted in a radical growth of sales of cigarettes among women. The idea was later revived during the launch of the first “exclusively female” brand of cigarettes in the sixties, where, once again, a myth of the “self conscious, ambitious woman” was recreated in the wake of second wave feminism and the civil rights struggle, and consequently equated with the ability to make free choices, aka the choice to smoke.

⁴¹ “1972 Virginia Slims Mary Patrick 1913 Train,” AdPast, 11th Sept. 2012, Ad<<http://www.adspast.com/store/customer/product.php?productid=2523>>.

2.5. The myth of the housewife

Now that we have established the nature of a stereotype, we may have a look at how various stereotypes, above the ones surrounding gender, shaped the advertising discourse of the fifties, in particular with relation to gender roles within family. Lippman comments on gender stereotypes as follows:

The division between male and female is, perhaps, the most persistent and deeply rooted belief system that upholds the idea that human inequality is a natural and irrevocable phenomenon. Though challenged in modern times, the embedded stereotypes and assumptions that have supported it for millennia are indelible elements of “civilisation.”⁴²

It has already been mentioned that the predominant unit to which most of the advertising of the time catered, or this above mentioned “mainstream audience”, was the WASP middle class suburban family and was to remain so at least well until the sixties, and within the limits of this family, no member was depicted as stereotypically as the woman, the great sociological phenomenon of the fifties; the suburban housewife:

Millions of women lived their lives in the image of those pretty pictures of the American suburban housewife, kissing their husbands goodbye in front of the picture window, depositing their stationwagonsful of children at school, and smiling as they ran the new electric waxer over the spotless kitchen floor. [...] They changed the sheets on the beds twice a week instead of once, took the rug-hooking class in adult education and pitied their poor frustrated mothers, who had dreamed of having a career. Their only dream was to be perfect wives and mothers; their highest ambition to have five children and a beautiful house, their only fight to get and keep their husbands.⁴³

⁴² Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen, 6.

⁴³ Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique*, (New York: Dell, 1973) 14.

This statement is taken from the 1963 exposé of the myth of the suburban housewife *The Feminine Mystique* by Betty Friedan. *The Feminine Mystique* not only describes the plight and shallowness of the life of the average housewife in the fifties and early sixties, but, more importantly, links these issues to the myths about gender roles propounded by popular culture and in particular advertising. In the first chapter of her book, Friedan reconstructs the myth of the typical housewife as portrayed by popular culture and identifies this extremely skewed picture as the source of the common feeling of void and hollowness shared by her generation, “the problem without a name”:

The suburban housewife – she was the dream image of the young American women and the envy, it was said, of all the women over the world. The American housewife – freed by science and labor-saving appliances from the drudgery, the dangers of childbirth and the illnesses of her grandmother. She was healthy, beautiful, educated. Concerned only about her husband, her children, her home. She had found true feminine fulfilment. As a housewife and mother, she was respected as a full and equal partner to man in his world. She was free to choose automobiles, clothes, appliances, supermarkets; she had everything that women ever dreamed of.⁴⁴

In reality, however, Friedan found that most of her former female classmates were maniodepressive, in need of extensive psychoanalytic sessions, have issues with alcohol or antidepressants and generally do not fit the female archetype as outlined above. This circumscribing of the woman to a purely social being whose chief responsibilities and duties concerned the smooth running of the family and the local community without any concern for the woman’s personal needs for self-actualisation is then one of the

⁴⁴Friedan, 15.

cornerstone myths of the advertising in the fifties. As the headline of one car advertisement blatantly states: “She’s married - She’s happy - She drives a Mercury.”⁴⁵

2.6. Implicit family deterrents and promises in advertising

As mentioned above, the primary unit of American society as shown in advertising was the WASP family, a result of the babyboom, lowering the age of marriage for women, gradual suburbanisation of the population and a number of other demographic phenomena. This is not to say that the archetypal four-member family with two children, typically a boy and a girl, was explicitly depicted in every advertisement from car parts to home TV sets in a manner similar to that of the Motorola advertisement mentioned earlier, although this was frequently the case, but the *value* of the family or its cementing was one of the chief implicit “promises” of the majority of advertising output in that it was used to sell say pantyhose to women via the prospect of marriage or to sell power-tools to men by underscoring their masculinity via emphasising their role of the breadwinner and protector of the family. This myth of the happy American family as the ultimate life’s aim for women was so firmly rooted in the prospects’ minds that any product, no matter how technologically advanced or revolutionary, which was not seen as being in accord with this myth, was unanimously rejected by the consumers. Dichter talks about this problem when researching the possibilities of promoting all-in-one cake mixes:

Dichter’s breakthrough came with the work on the focus group he did for Betty Crocker Foods. Like many food manufacturers in the early fifties, they have invented a new range of instant convenience food. But although consumers told market researchers they would welcome the idea, in fact they were refusing to buy them. [...] He concluded that they [housewives] felt unconscious guilt about the

⁴⁵ *All American Ads, 50s* ed. Jim Heimann, 158.

image being promoted; ease and convenience. [...] Dichter told Betty Crocker to put on the packet an instruction that the housewife should add an egg. [...] Betty Crocker did it, and the sales soared.⁴⁶

Yet it was not only the removal of these subconscious barriers the advertisements of the age



⁴⁷were designed for. By simply linking the product with the myth of the family, marketers often achieved great success; a case in point may be the advertisements for Hamilton watches.

The Hamilton watch advertisement (first appeared in 1948, this version is from 1950) consists of two similar posters, each showing a young couple sat below the Christmas tree. In each of these posters, one person of the couple is unwrapping a present from the other one

and reading the “wishcard” attached while being watched adoringly by his or her partner. The wishcards are then the centre of our attention as they constitute the copy of the ad. We therefore have the traditional setup already mentioned above: A white, middle class⁴⁸ family with at least two children⁴⁹ sat under a Christmas tree unwrapping their presents. Both get a Hamilton watch from their partner with a loving note explaining *why the watch has been given*. It is almost as if the couple were rewarding each other for services

⁴⁶ *Century of the Self: The Engineering of Consent*, dir. Adam Curtis, BBC Four, 2002. 4:30.

⁴⁷ Heimann, *50's*, 364.

⁴⁸ The watch prices start at \$49.95.

⁴⁹ The copy includes the line “for bringing up my children, while I mostly sat back and gave advice.”

provided that keep the family running. Naturally, these reasons differ sharply and strictly conform to the gender stereotypes mentioned above:

TO PEGGY

For marrying me in the first place. *For* the 2008 pairs of socks you've darned. *For* finding my umbrella and my rubbers. Heaven knows how often! *For* planning a thousand meals a year...and having them taken for granted. *For* a constant tenderness I rarely notice but am sure I couldn't live without.

TO JIM

For holding my hand tight the day we were married. *For* the things you didn't say when I ripped off the fender. *For* balancing my checkbook without grumping or pitting. *For* being so eternally there for me to lean on.⁵⁰

The gender stereotypes surrounding Peggy and Jim as the representatives of the traditional American family are explicitly stated here: The *tender* woman is the one who takes care of the everyday family business, the one who has to lean on the rock solid husband. The man is the breadwinner, sombre and detached, the head of the family who is kind enough to treat her "women friends as though [he] liked them."⁵¹

The most interesting element, however, is the watch itself, a sign that serves a) as a reward, therefore as an affirmation of the positive value of these stereotypes and b) consequently as the symbol of these values, a symbol of the harmonious American family. Perceived through the lens of Barthes' analysis of the myth and second order language, the Hamilton watch represents the myth of the ideal family; just like the Marlboro smoker is a cowboy with all the connoted character traits, a Hamilton watch wearer has fulfilled his *duties* toward his family and the watch on his wrists signifies the ideal harmony this family

⁵⁰ *All-AmericanAds 50s*, ed. Jim Heimann, 364.

⁵¹ *All-AmericanAds 50s*, ed. Jim Heimann, 364.

lives in, including the then indelible categories of gender based roles within this family.

The copywriter from BBDO said that the agency received letters to this effect:

“I am copying it word to word to include with my Christmas present to my wife, changing only some petty details as applies to our lives.” [...] yet in now hundreds of letters that the Hamilton company has received, letter after letter ends with “my next watch will be a Hamilton.”⁵²

The ad itself does almost nothing in the traditional “hardsell” line in that it doesn’t list any of its technical advantages or benefits over the competing brands. The people who claimed that their next watch was going to be a Hamilton were charmed by the symbolic value of the watch and their desire to own one was inexorably linked to the emotional value of the product, in this case the verification of the traditional family values.

2.7. The golfer and the eye candy: The Gender stereotypes of 50’s advertising

Even if we now choose to focus on advertisements without any obvious family-life connotations and overlaps, we still encounter a rich variety of strictly gender based myths that are understood to be the basic framework for structuring the semiotic significance of the product for the potential consumer. These myths surrounding gender are not only manifested through the explicit informational channels of the advertisement, that is what Barthes would called “the linguistic” or “iconic-non coded” message, but dictate the overall structure of the advertising discourse in general. If we were to stay in the region of fashion, an examination of a small sample from both men and women oriented advertisements will disclose these patterns. Here we have eight clothes advertisements from the fifties (all taken from Heimann’s anthology).

⁵² Julian Lewis Watkins, *The 100 Greatest Advertisements 1852-1958: Who Wrote Them and What They Did*, (New York: Moore Publishing, 1949) 157.

If we have a look at the way underwear and swimsuits are marketed to women, for instance, it is immediately apparent that advertising was still a very male dominated area in the fifties. The female body is still commodified to a large extent; it is often the object of the male gaze, appreciation and judgement. In the Rogers advertisement, this tendency is at its most explicit as the literal placing of the woman on the pedestal carries a wide range of gender based connotations. Just as with the portrait or the bust in the section on Walter Benjamin, the woman, elevated to the position of an aesthetically pleasing object by her dress, is depicted as an object of adoration, devotion and perhaps even love and a certain “spoiling” from the side of her admirer, but always as an object. All the dynamics of the relation is one directional; the woman cannot choose to be loved, adored etc., and as the pedestal literally restricts her movements, she is reduced to a highly erotic object for the man to appreciate, and the fluffy gown serves as both the vehicle and the symbol of this then desirable relation. Another phenomenon connected to the notion of the woman as an object is the cropping of her image and/or the sole representation of the area of interest, in this case represented by the Cameo tights advertisement. It could be argued that this visual “objectification” is also employed in the Murphy advertisement for men’s shoes, however, we shall see that the connotations of this cropping are vastly different. In the case of the pantyhose advertisement and in many other adverts, especially from the undergarment area, this cropping focuses the gaze on the erogenous zones of the female body and the way their attractiveness is enhanced by the product while simultaneously reducing the notion of the woman as a person.

This tendency to crop and direct the gaze to the erogenous zones is then linked to the notion of archetypal beauty. Most of the advertisements present the woman as flawed or imperfect and it is only the product that helps her to attain perfection, as is the case with Janzen swimsuits and its “shapemakery”. Words like “flatter”, “flatten”, “slim down”, “shape”, “form” etc. are very prevalent in the copies in these adverts. When the woman is properly “shaped”, she then attracts the male gaze and again is positioned into the passive role of an object for appreciation. Furthermore, the dominance of the male is underscored by the eroticism of the angle of his gaze, just as in the Rogers ad; both these men can see up the ladies’ dresses, whereas the adverse situation is hardly ever depicted in the advertising of the era. The dominance of the stare is best seen within the Warner’s advertisement. We as spectators are clearly intruding on the woman’s privacy as she is absorbed in self admiration; the vanity and narcissistic symbolism of all the mirrors and her posing without being aware of another spectator is unmissable. She isn’t posing for the camera and its stare clearly violates her. On the other hand, whenever a man is stared at and adored, he is always perceived as a whole, a fully rounded individual, rather than reduced to erogenous areas of interest and is very often aware of the alien gaze, as seen in the Jockey advert; the appreciation of the male as a passive object and its consequent commodification appeared much later in advertising while it was already the norm for the female body in the fifties.

If we now turn to the male oriented adverts, we see an entirely different depiction of gender. First of all, the range of activities and poses depicted in these and many other images pose a stark difference to the mostly passive or relaxed posture of the woman. Whereas women are usually shown either indulging themselves in beautification rituals with a distinct narcissistic overtone, engaging in low effort leisure activities, just “being there and looking pretty”, or catering for the needs of their families, men are

creative
 ... LIKE THE MEN WHO WEAR THEM

GALEY AND LORD EXCLUSIVES BY TRUVAL! Men of imagination... blue-printing a dream. And creative in their own right are these Galey and Lord plaids, designed especially for Truval and meticulously tailored. All are completely washable. Left: bold pattern, contrasting satin weave. Next: forceful plaid with woven ombre corners. Then: muted weave with satin stripe. Lower right: self-colored ombre, flowing from soft to deep. Choose your colors! Each 4.95. At fine stores or write: Truval Shirt Company, Empire State Bldg., New York, N.Y.

Truval
 shirts • sportshirts • pajamas

When I wear the best, I feel I am the best.

Introducing a new style! The tangle-backed Suedetucker, about \$33. At fine stores or write: Jockey & Murphy, 100 N. 1st St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Jockey & Murphy

©1957 Jockey & Murphy, 45 South 5th Street, N.Y.C. A Division of General Mills Corporation

Whatever your sport...
 you'll play better
 feel freer
 look smarter
 in America's
 Jacket of Champions!

M'GREGOR DRIZZLEPROOF WINDPROOF JACKET \$10.95

It's an absolute necessity, an essential wardrobe item that...
 (Small text describing the jacket's features and availability)

Don't settle for less!

Feel like a million!

Jockey UNDERWEAR

You start this day "tired" to get "any way that way" all day... when you wear Jockey Brand Underwear. For all the miles you'll give your tired support... Jockey, come to... Jockey where it's important.

But to make sure you get the real thing, the unspliced comfort and health of Jockey's famous construction, its ergonomic and perfected by the House of Cooper... for the most "F-PROM" and the brand name, JOCKEY, on the garment. See your Jockey grocer... or "Big Store" for Jockey in every major Jockey brand store! Our Jockey Center Store is worth.

The Famous Brand of Men's Support Underwear
 made ONLY by
Cooper

Jockey Styles for Men and Children

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very often depicted in postures that immediately connote words like “achievement”, “ambition” or “aspiration” and in general are depicted as much more active and pragmatic.

⁵⁴ Heimann, 50's, 593 – 614.

This may be exemplified on the already contrasted “pair” of adverts, namely the Cameo thighs and the Murphy shoes. Superficially, these would seem to share some elements; both are advertisements for a fashion product, both crop the body to focus the attention on the product and a certain body part. However, the connoted or “iconic coded” information channels transmit starkly different meanings. In the case of the Cameo thighs, the emphasis is once again overtly sexual; the slender curves of the female legs, the position that would imply that the woman is lying on her back, the roses, in themselves loaded with passion symbolism, covering the more delicate regions of the female body, the effeminate pink that compliments the contrastive black and finally the copy and the words “seamless” and “beauty” once again radiate the notion of the woman as an object to be desired and admired.

The Johnston & Murphy shoes ad, on the other hand, functions on an entirely different principle. The cropping of the human body has no sexual connotations, but in combination with the position of the leg ascending the stone slab and the Wall Street-like backdrop connote ambition, success and even a certain sense of conquest; the man seems to be looming from above the page and the fact that the viewer is permitted only to see his shoe further emphasizes the man’s superiority to the viewer. The copy then only underscores the notion; the triple use of “I”, the active voice of the verb and the structure when the first sentence describes the man’s decision and the second its consequence all further reinforce the notion that the man is ambitious, successful and above all in control and that he and the product complement each other. All these elements are absent in the case of the Cameo ad, where the copy merely describes a certain aesthetic quality the product transfers on the passive user.

This tendency for displaying the man as a much more active, in control type of person than the woman, is prevalent in the bulk of fashion advertising of the age. Even if

we omit the white-collar, working clothes adverts that explicitly depict crisp, neatly groomed men in offices “dressed up for the job” and “ready for the career”, which is a sector virtually unrepresented in advertising aimed on women because of the already mentioned controversy of female white collar workers, men were still traditionally depicted as the more ambitious, aspiring and active gender, as seen in the Truval and McGregor ads.

Finally, the most explicit illustration of all the myths connected to the role of women in American society, but to a large extent also exemplifying the broader paradox of individualism being defined only as a subbranch of conformity, is an advert for Ivory Flakes. In the body copy, we see the imprint of some of the tendencies already mentioned in the previous section, in particular in relation to the Murphy shoes ad. The text reduces the girl to a passive object to whom things happen; she gets the best calls, she gets the dates, however, the only thing she is actively allowed to do within the copy is to treat her undies with Ivory Flakes, and then only return to getting the calls and dates. The intrusive connotations of the “X-Ray” vision and its contribution to the objectification of the female body in itself have been mentioned already. However, in this particular case the advertisement is not limited to the gender based myths mentioned in connection to the previous advertisements, but it is fundamentally based on the paradoxical concepts of individuality vs. conformity as outlined in section 2.2. McLuhan carefully dissects this problem in connection to this particular advertisement in *Mechanical Bride*:

Thus, one answer to the ad’s query “What makes a gal a good number?” is simply “Looking like a number of other gals”; to the query “What’s the trick that makes her tick?” the answer is being a replaceable part. [...] Perhaps the impulse behind this self-defeating process is the craving for a power thrill that comes from identity

with a huge, anonymous crowd. The cravings for intense individuality and attention merges with the opposite extreme of security through uniformity.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride*, 96.

What makes a gal a good number?

THE GIRLS who get the calls . . . the girls who get the rings . . . are the girls who are in the know when it comes to caring for their clothes. So we show you the inside story of one who has *a way* with all her clothes . . . both those that show and those that don't.

Daisy-Fresh :

Her undies are bright and right, of course! Ivory Flakes—gentle care—keep the colors radiant longer . . . guard against fraying straps . . . help keep undies so nice and dainty. There's *your* cue: Shun strong soaps, rough handling. Wash your undies in Ivory Flakes—the fast flake form of baby's pure, mild Ivory.

Smooth, Smooth Figure :

And so simple! Frequent washings in Ivory Flakes help her girdle keep its fit longer, wear longer. So her lines stay trim and slim. If that's for you, remember this: Pure, mild Ivory Flakes is one soap fashion designers and fabric experts recommend to pamper the style and fit of your clothes.

Head-turning legs :

Because gentle Ivory Flakes care helps safeguard sheerest nylons from embarrassing, eye-catching runs. Strain tests prove nightly rinsings with Ivory Flakes slow down stocking runs up to 50%!

The full impression :

Color, yes! Colors perk up—brighten up—when you suds your washables in Ivory Flakes. Take this dress of Foreman's Tubrite fabric. Ivory Flakes care helps *preserve* both its fit and color. There's no finer soap than Ivory Flakes—'cause Ivory Flakes are mild and pure—99⁴⁴/₁₀₀% pure!



If it's lovely to wear
it's worth Ivory Flakes care

While the advertisement lays particular stress on individual perfection and beauty, it implicitly stresses that these archetypes are only attainable within a preset area of accepted behavioural patterns; in other words, perfection goes hand in hand with absolute conformity. McLuhan's "What's the trick that makes her tick" mechanical sound then explicitly likens the conforming woman to a machine and brings forward a misogyny that already appeared in Huxley's *Jesting Pilate* some thirty years earlier, when he talks of Californian girls having "a promise of pneumatic bliss. But not much else, to judge by their faces, uniform, unindividual and blank."⁵⁷

2.8. Long live the mainstream

In conclusion, it is apparent that there is a strong correlation between what we could call "societal patterns", i.e. the limitations of the various myth the mainstream consumer accepts as a vehicle for conveying a desirable message, and the variety, or, in this case, uniformity of the advertisements themselves. Just as the myths surrounding concepts such as gender are relatively stable within the corpus of the fifties advertising, that is, all the adverts construe the man and woman as individuals linked with a rigid, unchangeable set of characteristics and with a fixed position within the family all "decent" people should eventually have, the internal structure of the advertising images, that is the interplay between the visual and the textual elements, the selling position of the product etc. remain extremely consistent across product categories and are in stark contrast to the advertising output of the sixties and seventies, sometimes referred to as the years of the "creative revolution". In other words, in a given product category, say automobiles, what would later become known as the "positioning" of the product, that is the specific market niche of values the product is supposed to occupy in contrast to other products, is virtually

⁵⁷Aldous Huxley, *Jesting Pilate*, (London: Chatto&Vindus, 1957) 280.

undistinguishable, just as indistinguishable as the bulk of American society was deemed to be in the fifties.

3. The age of positioning and the “me” era: The advertising of 1959 to 1990

3.1. Think Small

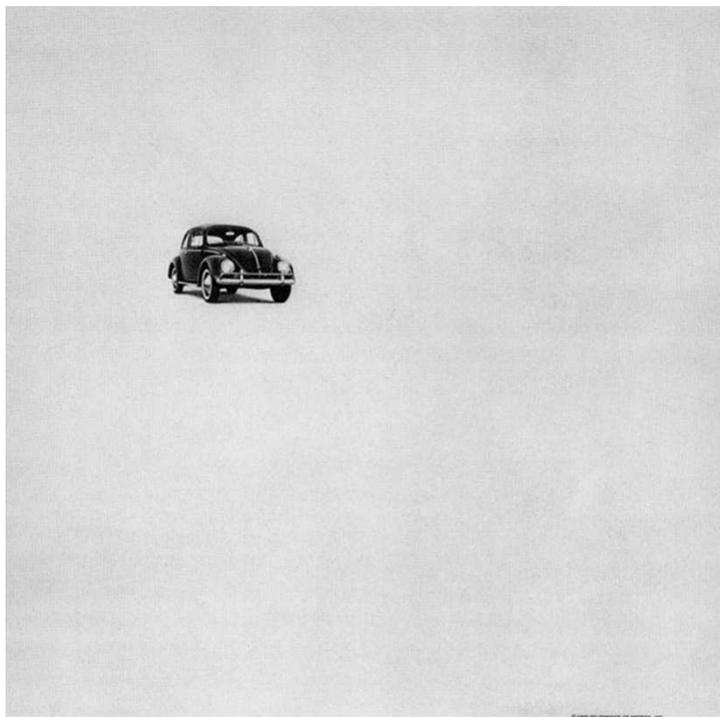
In 1959, a campaign that would forever change the nature of print advertising by challenging the petrified structures mentioned in Chapter Two appeared. Many experts agree on it being the most important and influential piece of advertising ever, *The Wasteland* and *Ulysses* of the persuading business: DDB’s *Think Small* for the Volkswagen Beetle.

The bland, universally unified state of the print advertising in the fifties, that is the semblance of the myths that were artificially woven around these products and both the visual and textual ways these myths were conveyed to the consumer, has already been elaborated upon. In the realm of car advertising in particular, the stress on splendour, refinement and opulence, all attributes of the product that the advertisements promised to transfer on the customer, were the norm. This was blended with hypertrophied copies for the “tech savvy, discerning customer” and a desperate effort to create an artificial air of uniqueness surrounding the product which was, in fact, rather average. In summary, the majority of these advertisements were pretentious, ridiculously hyperbolic, virtually undistinguishable from another and had very little to say.

The *Think Small* campaign could not have been more different. Instead of a big, coloured illustration of the gleaming product covering most of the space, a tiny, stark, raw, black and white image of a minute car in the upper left corner. Instead of an ornate typeface, the “brutally simple sans serif.”⁵⁸ Even before glancing at the copy, which in this case functions as what Barthes would call the “anchor” of the visual element, the layout of

⁵⁸ Mark Tungate, *Adland: A Global History of Advertising*, (London: KoganPage Ltd., 2008) 55.

the image and its connotations when considering its relation to the adverts of the fifties was nothing short of revolutionary.



Think small.

Our little car isn't so much of a novelty any more.
 A couple of dozen college kids don't try to squeeze inside it.
 The guy at the gas station doesn't ask where the gas goes.
 Nobody even stores at our shop.
 In fact, some people who drive our little

flivver don't even think 32 miles to the gallon is going any great guns.
 Or using five pints of oil instead of five quarts.
 Or never needing anti-freeze.
 Or racking up 40,000 miles on a set of tires.
 That's because once you get used to

some of our economies, you don't even think about them any more.
 Except when you squeeze into a small parking spot. Or renew your small insurance. Or pay a small repair bill.
 Or trade in your old VW for a new one.
 Think it over.



⁵⁹Instead of a wild construction of a myth along the lines of “they’ll see you arriving”, there is no explicit interaction with the product whatsoever, no forceful implication of the buyer showing his wealth and respectability through the act of purchase. The language of the copy is strikingly simple, stripped of any superficiality, any meaningless symbolism, any “hyperflow-dyn-oh-mite 225Hp

engine for a striking start for those aspiring few.” Instead, it says:

[...] Our little car isn't so much of a novelty any more. In fact, some people who run our little flivver don't even think 32 miles to the gallon is going any great guns. Or using five pints of oil instead of five quarts [...]. That's because when you get used to some of our economies, you don't even think about them any more. Except when you squeeze into a small parking spot. Or renew your small insurance. Or pay a small repair bill. Or trade in your old VW for a new one. Think it over.⁶⁰

This kind of message would naturally be impossible without the long line of predecessors that cemented the above mentioned myths and structures in print advertising; *Think Small*

⁵⁹ Tungate, 119.

⁶⁰ Tungate, 103.

could not exist without “now seventeen feet of beauty” or “The grandest machine on the roads” of the conventional advertisements of the fifties, just as Modernism would be impossible without the Victorian novel. This concept of redefining one’s product and its image through strongly differentiating it from the myths already implanted in the minds of the prospective consumers was later formalised in the advertising Bible of the era, Trout’s and Rice’s 1981 *Positioning: A Battle for Your Mind*: “The basic approach of positioning is not to create something new and different, but to manipulate what’s already up there in the mind, to retie the connections that already exist.”⁶¹ The contrast between the rhetorics of *Think Small* and the lumpy advertising images of the fifties could not have been stronger; *Think Small* can be understood as a threshold of the age of advertising conformity and as a cultural artefact that marks the onset of what eventually became the “Me” era.

3.2. Social unrests and the disintegration of the dutiful individual

It is by no means the purpose of this section to attempt to analyse or even map out the complex changes in the social fabric that took place in the US in between the late fifties and early seventies, but merely to point out some paradigm shifts that had a direct influence on the nature of the advertising myth and its development. The scope of these shifts that forever changed the structure of the American society is immense, but for our purposes, one particular transformation stands above all other changes; the replacing of the word “duty” as the central concept of the American dream.

We want to live a life that isn’t based on materialist values, and yet the whole system of government and the economy of America is based on profit, on personal greed and selfishness. So that in order to be human, in order to love each other and

⁶¹ Al Ries, Jack Trout, *Positioning: The Battle for your Mind*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2000) 5.

be equal to each other, and not place each others in roles, we have to destroy that kind of government that keeps us from asserting our positive values of life.⁶²

This statement, given by a member of the militant, new-left Weatherman movement to some extent manages to encapsulate the essence of this change, albeit in a very hyperbolic manner. The gradual disintegration of roles surrounding gender, race, religion, etc. and the rejection of the idea that trying to attain happiness through consumption and conforming to some behavioural norms is one's duty, a philosophy central to the advertising of the fifties, has at first crystalized among the many "fringe" sections and groups of society, be it first the beatniks, the hippies and later the Panthers, the Weathermen, the Yppie Party and the whole Human Potential Movement, and then slowly found its way into the mainstream society. The social unrests of the sixties gave way to the pursuit of individuality and unique forms of happiness in the seventies and eighties. Concepts such as "duty" and "conformity" were gradually replaced by "individuality", "fulfilment" and later "diversity". This Chapter will then analyse how the advertisements of the time reflected these paradigm changes through a series of case studies: The above outlined example of *Think Small* and the innumerable spin-offs of this campaign and its form in general may then serve as the earliest explicit transformation of these shifts into a marketing message that can be communicated through an image and word sequence. The VW Beetle was represented as the underdog, the challenger brand, the obnoxious bug other had to put up with, a sensible economy⁶³ and at the same time a tabula rasa for a free expression of one's identity. Schaller, Schulzinger and Anderson summarize this aspect of *Think Small* as follows:

⁶²*The Century of the Self: There is a Policeman Inside All Our Heads, He Must Be Destroyed*, dir. Adam Curtis, BBC Four, 2002 13:29.

⁶³It could well be argued that the stress on the low fuel and oil consumption within the original copy is one of the first examples of green marketing, a frenzy that still defines advertising now.

Nowhere did the rebellion of the young create a greater crisis of legitimacy and practice than in the advertising industry. Hostile to counterculture values and aesthetics, the industry's leaders vacillated between resisting and condemning change and seeking to co-opt it. Within the industry, the battle played out between the old guard and the "Young Turks," who themselves embraced many counterculture values. [...] They marketed the Volkswagen Beetle, already populated by the young, by touting its small size and its shortcomings as a status symbol. [...] The ad's use of humour to criticize consumerist excesses typified one successful strategy used by advertisers to accommodate change.⁶⁴



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It is not without interest that when Apple marketed its new computer in 1984, it used very much the same aesthetics, a slogan "Think different" and explicitly equalled a purchase of the new Macintosh with a revolutionary act in its famous "1984" TV Commercial, another landmark in 20th century advertising.

⁶⁴ *Present Tense*, 296-297.

⁶⁵ *All American Ads, 70s*, ed. Jim Heinman, (Berlin: Taschen, 2001), 102.

3.3. Self expression and its relation to consumerism.

The above mentioned paradigm shift of behavioural patterns and value hierarchies that could be summarily labelled as the onset of the “me” era soon had a serious impact on the till then relatively stable matrix of consumerist culture within the United States and the way advertising “lubricated” its smooth operation. One commentator sums up these changes as follows:

By the 1960s, the idea of self-exploration was spreading rapidly in America. Encounter groups became the centre of what was seen as radical, alternative culture based on the development of the self, free from the corrupt, capitalist culture. [...] And it was beginning to have a serious effect on corporate America, because these new “selves” were not behaving as predictable consumers. [...] Yankelovitch⁶⁶ began to track the growth and behaviour of these new, expressive selves. What he told the corporations was that these new beings were consumers, but they no longer wanted anything that would place them in the narrow strata of American society. Instead, what they wanted were products that would express their individuality, their difference in a conformist world.⁶⁷

In other words, the social and political unrests of the sixties, which went hand in hand with a rejection of the obsolete model of consumer spending (ref. Chapter Two) gradually gave way to a wholly new type of consumer that left the production and distribution means of America stifled. The same people who marched on Washington in 1963 and later went crazy at Woodstock in 1969 suddenly felt the need to realize themselves through consumption in the seventies, but in a completely different way than their parents did twenty years earlier. Whereas a watch used to be sold as a reassuring symbol of a harmonic family and therefore of a sign of conforming with what mainstream society deemed a

⁶⁶ A marketing consultant, founder of Yankelovitch and Partners

⁶⁷ *The Century of the Self: There is a Policeman Inside All Our Heads: He Must Be Destroyed*, dir. Adam Curtis, BBC Four, 2002, 26:00 – 29:00.

worthy life ambition, twenty or even ten years later, a watch could have only been sold if it expressed the uniqueness and individuality of the buyer. Yet how was this to be achieved, and how were the marketers of the age to know, what in particular would each and every individual the product to say about him? Or her? The answer was found by the Stanford Research Institute (SRI) and was to be called “lifestyle”.

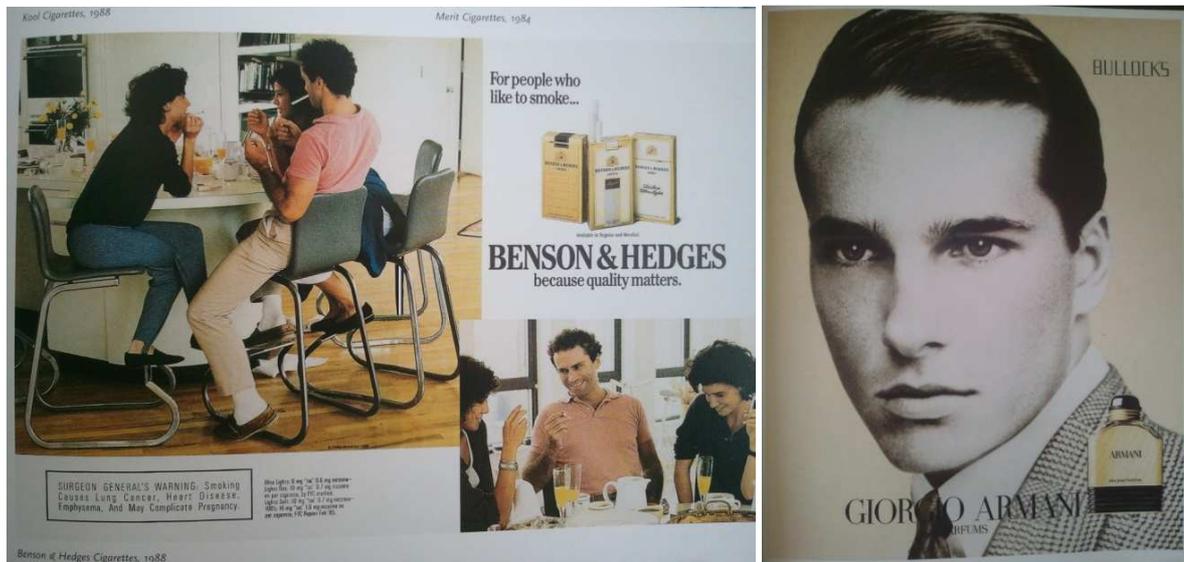
3.4. The birth of lifestyle advertising

“Lifestyle”: A style or way of living (associated with an individual person, a society, etc.); esp. the characteristic manner in which a person lives (or chooses to live) his or her life.[...] Chiefly Marketing. Of or relating to a publication, a product, advertising, etc., which is designed to appeal to consumers by association with a lifestyle regarded as desirable, glamorous, or attractive, as lifestyle advertising, lifestyle brand, lifestyle magazine, lifestyle marketing, etc.⁶⁸

Lifestyle was the new word coined by the workers of SRI to somehow order their findings from extensive market research studies. The marketing in the seventies and eighties was to a large degree based on this concept, that is on a set of preferences, morals and behaviour patterns of the target group the product supposedly resonated with. One may even say that to some extent, the advertising of the day was trying to imbue products with their own personalities to match the personality of the potential customer. One case in point has already been mentioned; the iconic Marlboro Man campaign. It has already been established that it was a certain aspect of “cowboyness”, a form of Barthesian myth, that the campaign successfully projected on the target consumer. Yet the advertising message of this particular campaign went in much more depth than simply saying “Cowboys smoke Marlboro, cowboys are manly, smoke it and you’ll be manly too,” but it actually *defined*

⁶⁸ “Lifestyle“, def. *Oxford English Dictionary*, 21th May. 2012, < <http://www.oed.com.ezproxy.is.cuni.cz/view/Entry/108129?redirectedFrom=lifestyle#eid>>.

what a particular concept of manliness was. It is very difficult, for instance, to picture the archetypal Marlboro man to drink a double iced latte or say own more than three pairs of trousers, something that would be perfectly justifiable for the man who smoked Benson & Hedges or used Armani cologne.



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In other words, unlike the adverts of the fifties, where the products were usually associated with one benefit, conveyed through a simple emotion, the advertising of the “positioning” era constructed whole lifestyles around its products. The Marlboro man defined manliness as a brutally simple and straightforward mixture of strength, honesty, an almost deliberate lack of sophistication etc. The smoker from the Benson & Hedges advert, on the other hand, while sitting comfortably on a cutting edge, designer chair in a trendy setting, surrounded by ladies, would look out of place with a lasso in his hand, not to mention the danger of getting horse dung on his expensive polo shirt. Tobacco products in general are an area where the concept of “lifestyle marketing” is of particular importance, as the products on the market, despite the myriad of existing brands, actually differ very little from one another. Finding a unique benefit, or a unique selling proposition, as many tobacco companies attempted in the fifties when trying to outdo each other in “mildness”

⁶⁹ *All American Ads, 80s*, ed. Jim Heinman, (Berlin: Taschen, 2001) 449.

and “smoothness”, is virtually impossible and so most of tobacco advertising of the era relied heavily on fabricating a series of myths that would together form the ideal lifestyle of the target audience. This may be well exemplified on another breaking point of the history of advertising, namely on the first launch of gender specific tobacco brands; Virginia Slims in 1968, followed by Eve in 1971.

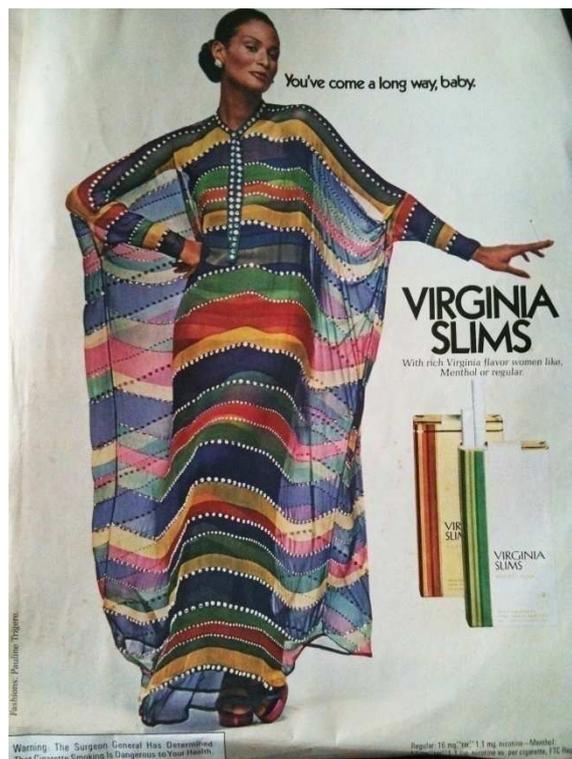
3.5. “You’ve come a long way, baby!”

One of the major successes of Virginia Slims in the female-oriented cigarette market is the brand’s acceptability to women in general. It appears that other female-oriented brands either positioned themselves too narrowly or have limited their potential market by utilizing unique characteristics that are now widely accepted by women in general such as Eves floral tipping.⁷⁰

This is a passage from a marketing study of some of the leading brands on the American market. Launched in 1968 as the first cigarette brand specifically aimed at women, Virginia Slims, by far the most successful brand, repeated to some extent the famous advertising triumph of 1928, which positioned cigarettes as a rebellion against the male hegemony and coined the famous slogan “light up a torch of freedom”. However, much unlike Edward Bernays, who merely created the link between the freedom to smoke and the suffragette, both Philip Morris and Liggett Group⁷¹ went further in that, as suggested above, they offered a completely fabricated lifestyle surrounding the product that should ideally match the one of the target group.

⁷⁰ “A historical perspective on female-oriented brands”, *Tobaccodocuments.org*, 25 Nov. 1980, 4th Jun 2011, 501867999- 501868027, <<http://tobaccodocuments.org/women/501867999-8027.html>>.

⁷¹The owner of Virginia Slims.



⁷²Virginia slims did not merely position the product as a simple symbol of revolt against the male hegemony, although this Bernaysian aspect of the campaign was very prominent. Yet the brand showed much more about its target group; it talked of its preferences in fashion, in free-time activities, it talked about its income, about its ambitions, her cheekiness, about the way it wanted to be perceived by others. An advertisement from the fifties, advertising

pantyhose or a home cooker, would either cater to the female desire to attract a suitable partner (“The gal that gets all the calls”, “Jansen shapemakery”) or to her “natural” desire

⁷² *VintageAd*, 21th Oct. 2012, < <http://www.vintageadbrowser.com/search?q=virginia+slims>>.

to be a perfect wife, mother and housekeeper (“The Hamilton Watch”); in other words, it would always somehow work with the woman’s position as a partner to the male.

Even in male focused advertising, there was always a very generic targeting of the WASP middle class suburbanite. Yet in here, we suddenly have a very specific image of a person, an *archetype of a lifestyle* the brand promises to convey.

3.6. The Pepsi Generation

Finally, possibly the most accomplished and impactful piece of lifestyle marketing of the “me” era was the famous campaign for Pepsi, spearheaded under the claims “Now it’s Pepsi for those who think young” and “Come Alive! You’re in the Pepsi Generation”: Thomas Frank, the author of *The Conquest of Cool*, an in-depth study analysing the role counterculture played in sixties advertising and onwards, summarises these campaigns as follows:

Pepsi’s strategy was obvious. It would imbue its model consumer, its Pepsi Generation, with characteristics that were at odds with, if not outright antagonistic to, the paradigmatic personality of the Coke order: nonconformity, daring, enthusiasm for the new, and a passion for individual liberation through product choice. Pepsi would identify itself with cultural dissent. As Volkswagen had just a few years before, Pepsi took up the cultural cudgels against mass society for hard-headed corporate reasons.⁷³

However, it must be stressed that what was on offer was certainly no solid, specific concept of biological youth, but merely an abstract idea, a myth. Another commentator notes that “What was being sold was an attitude, not an age.”⁷⁴

⁷³Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997) 172.

⁷⁴“The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism”. by Thomas

It is interesting to observe how these bold ideas were conveyed into specific print adverts. What follows are four examples of this new Pepsi communication line from the sixties.

Sunken pleasure.
Discovered by the Pepsi generation.

The lowdown?
Great taste: Bold and ocean-cold.

With the lift to pick you up
when you're feeling down.

You don't find refreshment like this just anywhere.
Take a Pepsi out to see.

COME ALIVE! You're in the Pepsi generation!

now it's Pepsi-for those who think young

People are in the mood for fun these days—and part of the fun is Pepsi. Light, bracing Pepsi-Cola matches your modern activities with a sparkling-clean taste that's never too sugary or sweet. And nothing drenches your thirst better than a cold, inviting Pepsi. Think young—say "Pepsi, please!"

come alive!
You're in the Pepsi generation!

Pepsi is the one that paces today's fun...drenches today's thirsts! Choose regular Pepsi-Cola, with energy to liven up your pace... or new Diet Pepsi-Cola, with honest-to-Pepsi taste! Either way, it's the official drink of today's generation!

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We see right away that the sterility of the fifties advertising is long gone. The imagery is free from any heavy family connotations; “Pepsi” generation were not a family with two

⁷⁵ Vintage Ad Browser, 17th Oct. 2012, <<http://www.vintageadbrowser.com/search?q=pepsi&page=24>>.

children and a station wagon; all these adverts have a distinctly hedonistic, *carpe diem* flavour. The body copies are shorter and “snappier”, they convey the brand’s essence in a much more sober and restrained manner. The images one to three are exactly in line with selling the new myth of the fictitious “Pepsi generation”; we see just the couple on its own, unencumbered by the dragging burden of a suburban house and a Chevrolet estate, enjoying trendy free-time activities such as skiing or diving without any need for social approval. The focal point of the copy is still the product, but only as an accompaniment to the dynamic lifestyles of the consumers; the ads are about them more than Pepsi. It was this subtle, soft sell approach that gave the target consumer a new, exciting profile, rather than the old, cumbersome “more bounce to the ounce” communication style that moulded Pepsi into a serious competitor and a challenger to the Coca Cola supremacy.

3.7. Summary

What is apparent from the examples outlined above is that a genuine paradigm shift occurred in the advertising space in between say 1959 and the late sixties, to a large degree a reflection of the landmark changes in American society. The most salient points can be summarised as follows:

1. A retreat from using the family as the core value and aspiration for the mainstream target group.
2. The gradual disintegration of many social taboos and stereotypes, mainly in the discourses of race and gender.
3. A return from ornate, superficial, rhetorics suffused language to a much more honest, straightforward and minimalistic approach and
4. Finally and most importantly, the shift from a straightforward, fact based hardsell technique to a much more subtle, refined, lifestyle based marketing approach.

These shifts would then structure the advertising discourse for twenty more years, until another milestone occurred in advertising history in the early nineties, a break I would not hesitate to call the Second Brand Revolution.

4. The Second Brand Revolution and the reign of simulacra: Advertising after 1990

4.1. The simulacrum of the brand

Up to this point, this thesis has been working with the premise that each product functions not only as a pragmatic, utilitarian object with use value, but also as a sign or as a myth signifier. This “perceived” value then often was what the advertisements for that particular product communicated. Marlboro is a case in point; the use value of a Marlboro cigarette is the nicotine that interacts with the nervous system of the smoker and gives him a mild rush. The perceived value, however, is the identification of the smoker as a particular archetype of man (ref. Chapter Three).

However, sometime around 1990, this principle of perceived value attached to a particular product suddenly shifted and was replaced by an entirely different, “next stage” semiotic structure that has already been alluded to, namely the simulacrum of the brand. Let’s recall Baudrillard’s definition of this concept:

Today abstraction is no longer that of the map, the double, the mirror, or the concept. Simulation is no longer that of a territory, a referential being, or a substance. It is the generation by models of a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal.⁷⁶

In all the advertising we have been dealing with so far, the product was central, either as the focus of a very blatant, straightforward hardsell campaign, or as the core of a myth or series of myths gradually woven around the product. At the beginning of the nineties, however, the most successful companies were those whose brand replaced the product in the advertising spotlight. The principle of myth construction remained virtually the same,

⁷⁶Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 3.

however, the brand was no longer merely a label attached to the product. After the Second Brand Revolution, the truly successful brands were those which managed to use the product the other way round, simply as a carrier for the brand. Sometime in the late eighties and early nineties, in short, the brand ceased to be crucially dependent on the product itself and the brand's visual representation and public image, its logo, a particular corporate "style" or "feel", celebrity endorsement etc. have become the primary governing process of the consumption of goods. Furthermore, many brands have managed to become more "personified" through their advertising techniques, i.e. the desired properties of the brand were transferred onto a fictitious character with whom the prospective consumers form a relationship, be it love, adoration, pure friendship or disgust. This character does not have to be embodied by a mascot or talisman, it is an entirely made-up, imaginary entity imbued with human-like traits. During the above mentioned documentary "The Corporation", people described these persons as follows: "General Electric is a kind, old man with lots of stories [...] NIKE – young, energetic [...] McDonald's – young, outgoing, enthusiastic [...] Monsanto – immaculately dressed."⁷⁷ Modern advertising tools are then created to articulate the opinions and features of these characters and stimulate interaction between the brand character and the consumer. Big IdeaL, Ogilvy's trademarked advertising tool, for instance, formulates the insight of the brand as an idealistic wish; Coca Cola "believes that the world would be a better place if we saw the glass as half full, not half empty"⁷⁸, whereas Dove's "world insight" is formulated as follows: "Dove believes the world would be a better place if women were allowed to feel good about themselves."⁷⁹ Saatchi & Saatchi uses a similar tool, Lovemarks™, literally to foster love between the consumer and the brand. The fourth chapter of this thesis is therefore focused on the creation of the brand as a specific, tangible concept in the minds of the consumers and the

⁷⁷ *The Corporation*, dir. Mark Achbar et. al., Zeitgeist Films, 2004, 13:10 – 14:00.

⁷⁸ *The big IdeaL™: A Small book on a Big Topic*, Ogilvy & Mather, (London: Ogilvy & Mather, 2009)17.

⁷⁹ *The big IdeaL™: A Small book on a Big Topic*, 17.

great product → brand paradigm shift as regards advertising. This will be demonstrated on a number of case studies, including adverts for Nike, Absolut Vodka, Benneton, Calvin Klein and Diesel.

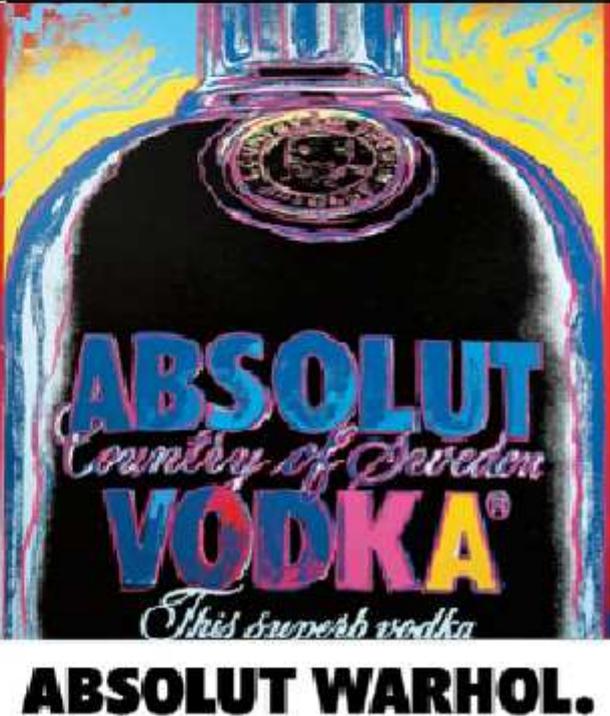
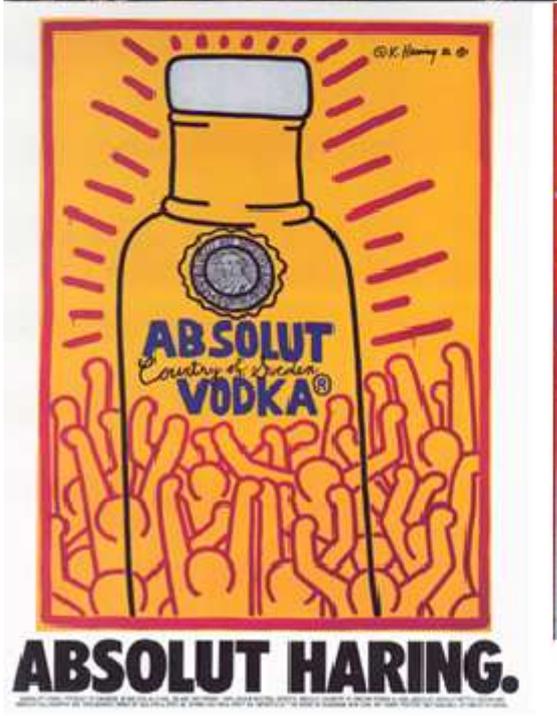
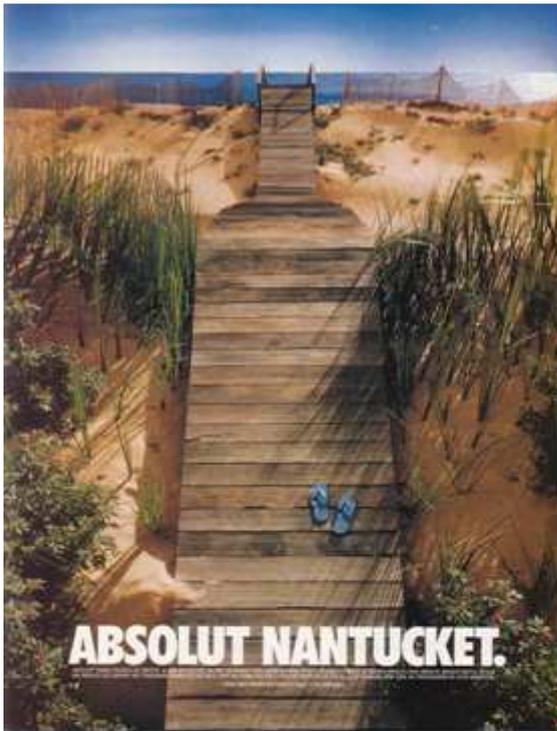
Before adjourning to these analyses themselves, however, one thing has to be pointed out. It has been noted at the beginning of this thesis that the grouping and chronological divisions of advertising as presented here are by no means absolute, but merely describe the prevalent trends of that period. This chapter, for instance, is focused predominantly on advertising with the product pushed aside in favour of the brand, i.e. advertising that created brand simulacras, but that does not mean that there was no simple, straightforward, product based advertising in this period. What is described here is merely a loose collection of cases that functioned as trailblazers for the others to follow and had a vast impact on the advertising discourse.

4.2. ABSOLUT anything

One of the most famous campaigns where the brand totally bypasses the product was created by TBWA/Paris for Absolut Vodka. Klein comments on it as follows:

Even more abstract was Absolut Vodka, which for some years now had been developing a marketing strategy in which its product disappeared and its brand was nothing but a blank bottle-shaped space that could be filled with whatever content a particular audience most wanted from its brands: intellectual in Harper's, futuristic in Wired, alternative in Spin, loud and proud in Out and "Absolut Centrefold" in Playboy. The brand reinvented itself as a cultural sponge, soaking up and morphing to its surroundings.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Klein, 29.



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This accurate analysis is very reminiscent of Baudrillard's assessment on the creation of reality from *Simulation and Simulacra*, which simply states that "The real is produced from miniaturized cells, matrices, and memory banks, models of control-and it can be

⁸¹ *AbsolutAd*, 3rd Nov 2012, <http://www.absolutad.com/absolut_gallery/singles/>.

reproduced an indefinite number of times from these.”⁸² This campaign, which holds the record for the longest running campaign in ad history, managed to lift Absolut Vodka from a marginal, niche market product to America’s favourite vodka brand, surpassing the sales of such established brands as Stolichnaya. Over the almost three decades of its existence, the campaign also managed to create an immediately recognizable visual style for the brand, so that its sponsoring can become much more subtle and yet still efficient. The Berlin MADE gallery, for instance, is sponsored by ABSOLUT in an effort to keep up the image of ABSOLUT as a trendy, yuppie “drink”, and yet the sponsoring is virtually invisible, without flashy logos, testimonial videos or lengthy letters of thanks to the generous benefactor; nonetheless, the brand presence is immediately established through its iconic font and the minimalistic execution of the gallery’s webpage. Klein’s metaphor of the brand as the “cultural sponge” seems rather apt here; the brand is set loose, thriving on its association with elements from all spheres of human existence it sees fit, and with no attachment to the product as such.



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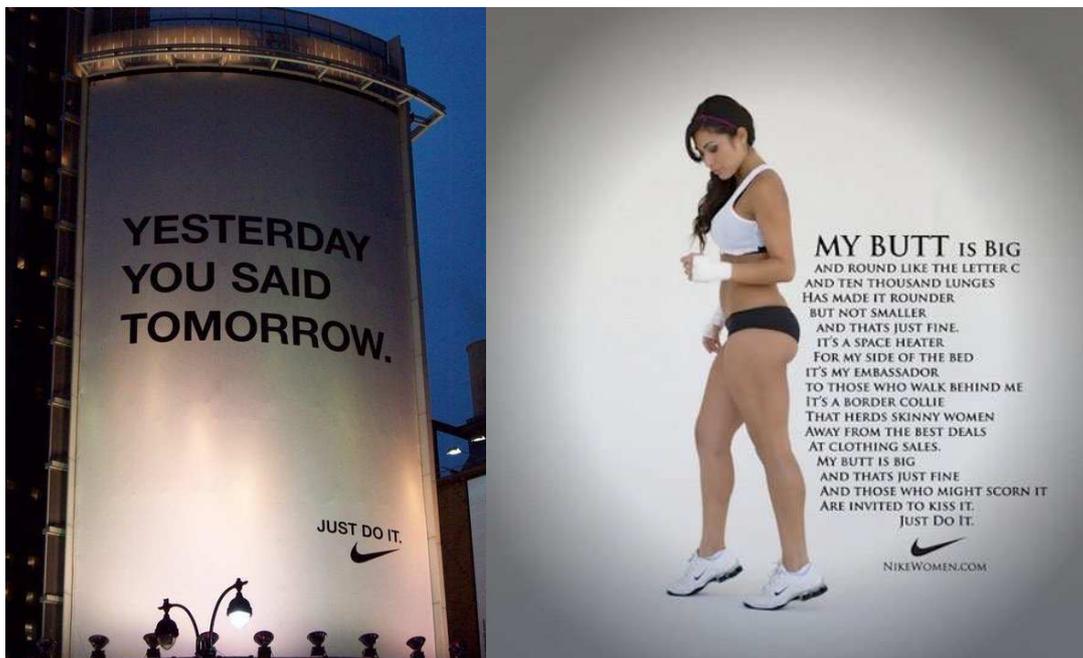
⁸² Baudrillard, *Simulation and Simulacra*, 4.

⁸³ MADE, 15th Oct. 2012, <<http://made-blog.com/>>.

4.3. Just do it™

In almost every advertising textbook, NIKE is portrayed as the quintessential example of how advertising, in all its forms including product placement, corporate sponsorship, traditional ATL⁸⁴ advertising etc. managed to transform an average company with an average product into one of the most adored institutions in the business world. Nowadays, NIKE is no longer perceived as a manufacturing company; its chief agenda lie in design, research, marketing and sales, while the actual manufacturing processes are outsourced to labour cheap areas mostly in Asia, Africa and South America. As for the abstract concept NIKE stands for, it is not sporting apparel or even sports per se, but rather the transcendence one can achieve through sports:

Nothing touches the heart of the traditional American ideologies of individual achievement more than sports conceptualized as a level playing field for



⁸⁴ “Above The Line” advertising includes traditional media, such as print, TV, outdoor and radio.

⁸⁵ Lucas Leftfoot, “New Nike Women Ad– “My Butt is Big,”” *NikeBlog.com*, 26th Jul. 2010, 18th Oct. 2012, <<http://www.nikeblog.com/2010/07/26/new-nike-women-ad-my-butt-is-big/>> .

⁸⁶ *Abaculus*, 12th Jan. 2011, 18th Oct. 2012, <<http://blogs.ubc.ca/lillienne/files/2011/01/nike-yesterday-you-said-tomorrow.jpg>>.

competition, because when the playing field is level, the individual may prevail.⁸⁷

Very crudely put, NIKE has endeavoured to sell processed, easy to acquire packets of the American dream, the tale of determination, perseverance, individualism, hard work and talent paving the road to success. The swoosh itself, not the sneaker, has become a symbol of these values. The power of the logo has grown into monstrous proportions; the Nike “swoosh” is now a popular tattoo pattern in America and cases have been reported in the inner cities of one teen murdering the other because he was envious of his friend’s NIKE apparel. Naturally, the creation of this cultish construct can be largely attributed to the marketing strategies of NIKE and above all its ground breaking advertising.

The tone of voice in which these adverts communicate is somewhat reminiscent to the “hunting of cool” of the sixties and seventies, however, as the customers have become much more media savvy, so has advertising. First of all, it was and still is deliberately much less coherent: On the one side, we have the ultimate spirit rousing, in your face type of advertising as in the “Yesterday you said tomorrow” billboard. This is the simulacra at its purest; the product has completely dissappeared, the brand is represented by the mighty swoosh, the famous claim “Just do it“ and the crisp, visually pure layout and typography. All together, the message is crystal clear; a call to arms, an uncompromising, almost violent scream to get the viewer on his feet and “Just do it”; transcendence through sports at its purest, sponsored by NIKE. On the other hand, NIKE also produces more subtle, gentle advertising focused on promoting brand values like individuality and inner beauty, advertisements such as the print with the “large butted“ lady. In both cases, nonetheless, NIKE serves as the agent to bring these values out in the wiever; not a product at all, but a hypercool, motivating brand that, once again, helps you achieve transcendence through sports. Another example of this would be a campaign from 1995, albeit a TV one. In this

⁸⁷ Robet Goldman, *Nike Culture: The Sign of the Swoosh*, (New York: Sage Publications, 1999) 31.

perfect example of the power of the brand, NIKE had basketball players entering a pitch to the notorious protest song “This revolution shall not be televised”, only with slightly changed lyrics.

You will not be able to change the channel. / You will not be able to catch the highlight on the evening news./ enjoy it on tape delay or adjust the contrast./ because the revolution shall not be televised. [...] This revolution will not give front row seats to celebrities./ This revolution is about basketball and basketball is the truth.⁸⁸

Once again, the product and its benefits are marginal; the advert is dominated by the swoosh, the demonic, no-nonsense voiceover loaded with counterculture spirit and above all the celebrity players themselves, enjoying a game in a huge, dark arena. The NIKE endorsing athletes are depicted as warriors, the carriers of the pure spirit of the game; and so is the brand.

To illustrate the power of these entirely fictitious myths woven around the brand, a brief analysis of a campaign recently launched by one of NIKE’s biggest competitors, PUMA, will show how profound an effect does the simulacrum of the brand as constructed by advertising have on the actual purchase behaviour of the target audience. Introduced in 2011 in a range of media including TV, printed media, outdoor and digital, the PUMA “After hours athlete” campaign, widely recognized as one of the most powerful campaigns of last year⁸⁹, was founded on a single premise: If NIKE promotes itself as the gateway to transcendence, the ultimate athlete’s tool, a means to embed one’s name in the history of sports and the ultimate weapon to fight against other athletes, and does so using a very harsh, in your face, self confident rhetorics that depicts the athlete as a warrior and a revolutionary, then why fight this undoubtedly strong proposition with a similar approach?

⁸⁸ Goldman, 45.

⁸⁹ Among numerous other awards, it got the Cannes Lions Grand Prix in the film category, possibly the single most coveted award in the world of TV advertising.

PUMA's advertising agency, Droga5, opted for a completely different angle; show the athlete as essentially human, with no vain ambitions of being the best or becoming best, but with the simple aim to live happily and socialize. The print executions then showed young people playing pool, waving down taxis at three a.m. or making out in front a kebab shop. The claim, "Here's to the after hour athlete" is in sharp contrast with NIKE's "Just do it" and completely repositions the image of the brand, previously as harsh and as ambitious as NIKE's. The aesthetics of the communication is then strictly subordinated to the main message, which is, in one word, "socialize"; the neon tube font, the instagram-like filters that make the pictures look like something made by an iPhone and posted on Facebook, the casting of the models, the very explicit sexual innuendo radiating from the headlines, i.e. "Scoring leads to scoring" etc. cement the core proposition: PUMA is a sports apparel company for young people who just want to have fun.

This campaign is a marvellous achievement if understood in its broader contexts: Here we have two similar global corporations selling shoes that are virtually indistinguishable when it comes to functionality and even look, shoes that are similarly priced and often made in the same Bangladeshi sweatshop with the prancing puma or the swoosh being sawn on the sneakers by the same group of workers, and yet simply by repositioning the brand, with no change to the product whatsoever and no real differentiator between a NIKE trainer and a trainer made by PUMA, PUMA was able to boost its profits by 10%.⁹⁰

⁹⁰"PumaSocials", *Droga5*, 20th Oct. 2012, <<http://www.droga5.com/#/casestudies/pumasocialcs>>.



4.4. cK, Diesel, Benetton and controversy advertising

Situated in a vortex of globally produced images and representations, consumer postmodernism produces meanings mediated through claims to truth represented in images that circulate in an electronic, informational hyperspace, which

disassociates itself from history, context, and struggle. Images that shocked people in the past have become “the most effective way of selling commodities today”⁹¹

In 2009, a fifty foot wide billboard appeared in downtown Manhattan. It immediately made the headlines due to its supposed sexualisation of teenagers and got covered by CBS and many other media channels. Numerous groups and associations quickly renounced it as sexist, inappropriate and dangerous to children, yet virtually no comment was made as to the way this unique piece of advertising communicated with the target audience and built the brand image.



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⁹¹ Henry A. Giroux, “Consuming Social Change: The “United Colors of Benetton””, *Cultural Critique*, No. 26 (Winter, 1993-1994) 5.

⁹² *ART vs. Advertising*, 11th Oct. 2012, <http://idsgn.org/images/now-and-then-sex-still-sells/ck_billboard__full.jpg>.

It has been said over and over again in the worlds of PR and advertising that bad publicity is better than no publicity, but in particular case, bad publicity was better than good publicity.

Calvin Klein is an upmarket brand primarily aiming at rich teenagers and yuppies, so it would seem logical to link the brand and its logo with a hinted promise of unusual sexual encounters in the same way Marlboro linked its product with the archetype of the real man. What Calvin Klein did, however, is much more sophisticated than blindly following one of the bluntest rules in advertising, i.e. “Sex sells.” It could even be argued that the billboard and the undoubtedly very explicit depiction of teenage sexuality was rather incidental and served merely as a trigger of the actual campaign; the message was delivered much more strongly by the ongoing debate than the billboard itself. What cK did could very well be called “metaadvertising”, that is it used a stormy and heated debate about advertising and its relation to ethics as the advertising medium itself. By putting up a “near pornographic”⁹³ image of four youngsters, cK managed to turn many a middle-aged person or conservative institution against itself. The strong negative feelings the advertisement stirred among these people and the reflection of these feelings in mainstream media naturally gave the company a strong aura of rebellion in the eyes of the teenagers, i.e. the primary target group. In other words, the billboard served merely as a nudge to stir up a heated debate, which then conveyed the core message to the audience.

A similar feat of controversial marketing has already been mentioned in Chapter One as being one of the first commercials that explicitly depicted homosexuals. In 1995, the Italian clothing brand Diesel launched an audacious campaign that cleverly conveyed its rebellious image to the target audience by subverting one of the most prized treasures in the collective consciousness of the American people: America’s triumph in World War II.

⁹³“Calvin Klein's Racy New Ad“, *Youtube.com*, 15th Nov. 2012, <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-n9bTswgCIc>>.



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David LaChapelle, the photographer responsible for the campaign, chose to use the visual cliché of a notorious photograph taken for the *Life* magazine in 1945 by Alfred Eisenstaed. This image shows a spontaneous outburst of joy on VJ day. LaChapelle copied the aesthetics of Eisenstaed’s famous picture, however, he put a homosexual couple in the forefront. This fusion of a great moment of national pride and a spontaneous outburst of positive emotions with a very explicit depiction of a then still rather clandestine issue created an advertisement with immense stopping power. The tension inherent to the image, the blend of America’s pride and hypocrisy, is then simply signed by the brand. Once again, except for the tiny caption “Jeans and workwear”⁹⁶ embedded in the logo, the product the company actually manufactures is marginalised in the advert; the main message is the supposed uniqueness of the brand’s rebellious image and its free spirit.

Finally, another clothing brand uses its advertising deliberately to stir controversy, however, this time a controversy imbued with a very specific humanistic undertone. Unlike the self serving, in your face controversy characteristic for the advertising of Calvin Klein, for instance, Benetton has always linked its communication to some “higher principle”.

There is virtually no big social issue that hasn’t been touched in Benetton’s advertising, be

⁹⁴ *GalleryM*, 13th Nov. 2012,

< http://www.gallerym.com/images/work/big/eisenstaedt_alfred_M2_vj_day_lasiter_16x20_L.jpg >.

⁹⁵ “Romance Analysis: Diesel Jeans”, 15th Nov. 2012,

< http://academic.reed.edu/anthro/adprojects/2011/greaves_mercado/Pictures/navy%20gay%20kiss.jpg >.

⁹⁶ It is interesting to note that even this tiny reminder of the product was later removed from the logo and replaced with the company's claim “For successful living”.

it racism, the animosities in Middle East, AIDS, religious intolerance, the problem of same sex marriage, poverty, organised crime etc. There is a strong idealist dimension in all of Benetton's communication that almost always copies the development of these issues in the real world.



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When the AIDS epidemic was at the centre of everyone's attention in the nineties, Benetton followed suit and focused its communication on this particular problem; now, twenty years later, it won the Cannes Grand Prix in print with its "Unhate" series, a volley of posters exploiting the well known animosity between the world's superpowers.

Giroux comments on this strategy as follows:

Benetton is important not only because of its marketing success but also because of its bold stance in attempting to use advertising as a forum to address highly charged social and political issues. Through its public statements and advertising

⁹⁷ Cannes Lions, 15th Nov. 2012, < http://www.canneslions.com/inspiration/past_grands_prix_advert.cfm?sub_channel_id=314&award_year=2012>.

campaigns, Benetton has brought a dangerously new dimension to corporate appropriation as a staple of postmodern aesthetics.⁹⁸



These advertisements are deliberately created to exploit some cultural tension within the mind of the audience and even to create a vague sense of guilt and uneasiness, which is then resolved by the universally positive, almost utopian claim “United Colours of Benetton.” The brand then positions itself as both a social crusader and the peacemaker, the resolver of differences. There is however never any explicit proposition in the posters themselves; the mechanics of brand personification is triggered purely by juxtaposition of the branding elements (logo, font, green stripe, claim) and the culturally loaded image the poster depicts.

4.5. The brand as the ultimate abstraction of commodity

The above given examples have shown the final development stage of American advertising discourse; from revolving around product based, lifestyle marketing into the final stage of advertising abstraction, the simulacrum of the brand. These act purely as arbitrary representatives of imaginary values and morals that advertising gradually

⁹⁸Giroux, 7.

⁹⁹ Audrey Felser, “10 powerful photographic ads from Benetton,” *PhotoGuides*, 26th May. 2012, 23th Nov. 2012, <<http://www.photoguides.net/10-powerful-photographic-ads-from-benetton>>.

implants into the collective consciousness. In this respect, they evoke the symbols inherent to western culture; the white dove of peace, the clover or horseshoe of luck or the female/male circles with a cross or arrow. An experiment conducted by BBC Three during the production of the series *Secrets of the Superbrands* shown a group of pre-school children being shown four identical paper figures. Each figure wore a black T-shirt, three of which had a sign on it; a tick, a star and the NIKE swoosh. The last one was plain. The children were then asked questions such as “Who do you think would be the best at sports?”, “Who do you think is the coolest?” or “Who would you most want to be friends with?” They always unanimously picked the figure in the NIKE T-shirt.¹⁰⁰

These signs are not the result of some anthropologic evolution, as say the combination of black and yellow for danger is, but mere cultural constructs. There is no iconic or indexical link between a half bitten apple and creativity and ingeniousness, or a abstract swoosh and transcendence, yet these symbols are universally acknowledged and recognized, solely because of the power the advertising discourse gained in the last twenty years. The NIKE swooshes and the Apple apples are the white doves of our time, the ultimate fetishistic realisation of the spectacle, and at the same time the ultimate tautology, an abstract, self referential myth:

The spectacle is the other side of money: it is the general abstract equivalent of all commodities. Money dominated society as the representation of general equivalence, namely, of the exchangeability of different goods whose uses could not be compared. The spectacle is the developed modern complement of money where the totality of the commodity world appears as a whole, as a general equivalence for what the entire society can be and can do.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Alex Riley, *Secrets of the Superbrands: Fashion*, BBC Three, 2011, 0:20.

¹⁰¹ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 12.

5. Summary and Conclusions

5.1. Evolution of the advertising myth – Individual conformity and the myths surrounding gender

The analysis of the advertisements themselves in this thesis was divided into three chronologically defined subsections. The first section was primarily focused on closely analysing the myths fabricated by mainstream print advertising between 1945 and 1959 and the way these myths were connected to the socioeconomic developments of American society. This economic boom and the simultaneous ascent of USA to the position of the world's most powerful nation had a dramatic impact on the mindset of the average American and above all his economical behaviour. The growth of consumer spending that occurred in the golden era of the late forties and the fifties was in turn fostered by an onslaught of advertising, which was still rooted in a very petrified myth structure of stereotypes and prejudices; in other words, while the shift of the economic behaviour of the nation occurred quickly after WWII, the seminal restructurings of these stereotypes did not fully start until the sixties.

Possibly the strongest, most rigid stereotype rooted in the collective consciousness of Americans were the unequal social roles assigned to men and women; this was both the reason for and the outcome of the way advertising aimed at men or women aimed at satisfying entirely different needs. If viewed from Maslow's perspective, gender based myth patterns in the advertising discourse of this period are unmissable. Women are denied any transcendence in the sense we understand the word today. Maslow's top tier group includes longings for "creativity", "morals", "meaning" or "inner potential", yet all these aspects of living a full, satisfying life, are completely absent from advertising aimed at women. In this sense, they are "dehumanized" because the advertising discourse insists that they should be happy and content with these spheres of their lives missing or re-forged

into something else; the need for creativity, for instance, was turned into the ambition to create a perfect family, which was then the supposedly ultimate form of self-realisation. Much the same happened to the need to be part of a collective, to be admired, respected and above all to be unique. Once again, the only socially acceptable way of gaining respect of her peers was to exceed in household skills, thriftiness, the consistence of one's soufflé or the softness of the Ivory flake treated dressing gown. The need for love, on the other hand, is ridiculously exaggerated and yet circumscribed at the same time. The advertisements inevitably aim at promising the woman to be more successful at attracting a suitable partner and consequently starting a family, yet this attraction is remarkably single-directional and the polarity of the man – woman relationship distorted. The man is the one in control, the one putting the woman on a pedestal, the one choosing to admire/ignore her, the one with the searching, unavoidable predatory gaze, the one actively voicing his intentions, while the woman is objectified as something static and non-responsive. These stereotypes then fix both the woman and man into very narrow slots, defining their morals and values in a remarkably narrow minded way.

In conclusion, the advertising of the fifties promoted an extremely idealistic utopia. Cars were to be long and gleaming, suburbs uniformly beautiful and everyone's work remarkably easy. It created myths of freedom and choice, but paradoxically only within the extremely narrow constraints it promoted and even actively helped to create. The need to be unique and different, above all, was submerged within a constrained paradigm of socially acceptable existence and any possible deviations or diversions were either politely kept in silence or explicitly discouraged, while conformity was actively encouraged¹⁰². By constructing these myths of the hypothetical, content individual, be it the ever happy, carefree, family focused suburban housewife, or the conscientious, middle class man who

¹⁰² "What's the trick that makes her tick?", p.45.

was artificially positioned as the sole breadwinner and protector of the family, it created an undercurrent of neurosis and dissatisfaction that would emerge only later as one of the many contributors to the huge social changes of the sixties and seventies.

5.2. Evolution of the advertising myth – The age of positioning and the “me” era

The advertisements between 1945 and 1959 were established as promoters of a fake utopia, a state of self liberalisation where the pre-war toil and crisis inflamed drudgery of the middle class would be over, thanks to technological progress and high national morale. Happiness would derive from indulgence and conformity towards a universally shared set of values and individual needs as seen from Maslow’s perspective would be reconstructed into circumscribed, stereotype based stumps; an almost Huxleyan, caste based, inertia soaked vision. Yet ten or fifteen years later, advertising was all about otherness, nonconformity, individuality and self expression. The advent of the baby boomer generation, for which “duty” ceased to be the central life-governing concept, and which strived to assert its individuality more than any generation before, triggered a systematic effort to alter the product and consequently its advertising to cater to this need; lifestyle advertising was born. This was not, however, a simple reflection of some social change; it was both a descriptive and a *prescriptive* type of discourse that was aiming at persuading people that individualism, just as conformity ten or fifteen years earlier, was attainable and expressible by the means of purchasing a product.

The mechanics of this discourse, however, had to be radically different from what worked on the consumers in the fifties. It would have been physically impossible to customize the communication to the exact image or self-projection of each and every individual. Paradoxically, while the advertising of the positioning era promised consumers to be different, lifestyle marketing personalised the consumers and then segmented them

into archetypes. It actively prefabricated ready-made images of the target consumer and then offered him this image, constructed from a bundle of products. Suddenly, advertising was implicitly about self esteem, uniqueness and transcendence, it lured the consumer with a promise of liberating him from the social constraints and limitations of the past. However, these preconceptions were not to be replaced by a “tabula rasa”, a clean slate for the consumer to reinvent himself however he liked, as did much of the advertising of the nineties¹⁰³; on the contrary, it was done by prescribing a new, seemingly empowering image that was imposed on the consumer. Just as the revolt led by second wave feminists, epitomised into the notorious bra-burning sessions, actually deprived women of the choice to be feminine, a Virginia Slims advert showing a female professional in Coco Chanel styled, masculine clothes and the line “You’ve come a long way, baby” helped to deteriorate an old sexist stereotype and simultaneously constructed a new one, equally binding.

5.3. Evolution of the advertising myth – The Second Brand Revolution

After 1990, advertising discourse has entered its final stage of abstraction on its move towards a pure simulacrum. The product and its value, intrinsic or perceived, does no longer stand in the centre of the discourse; it is the pure image of the product, its representation, that is now the object of fetishization, i.e. the brand. At this point, the advertising discourse reaches the peak of its autonomy from the product and its structure becomes intensely religious. If we were to substitute the word “product” or “commodity” for “brand”, Marx’s assessment of commodity fetishism would prove very applicable:

As against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical

¹⁰³ Absolut Vodka and Calvin Klein’s “just Be” slogan are the most obvious examples.

nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.¹⁰⁴

Debord is even more explicit in his assessment: "The spectacle is the material reconstruction of the religious illusion."¹⁰⁵ Just as with some religious beliefs, the value assigned to the simulacrum, i.e. the brand, is utterly arbitrary, in that it has an entirely symbolic value. In fact, MRI scans have shown that the neurological response patterns of a fashion lover suddenly exposed to say a Prada or Burberry logo is remarkably similar to that of a zealous Christian upon seeing a cross; their brain pleasure centres, i.e. the Amygdala brain regions one cannot control on his own volition, are activated upon any association with the brand.¹⁰⁶ Yet the brands in themselves have no inherent value, it is the advertising discourse that fabricates these values, which the consumer then reassembles into a unique mix, his brand choice. The purchase decision is no longer driven merely by longing for the pragmatic value of the product, nor the myth the product itself is associated with, but the fetishistic obsession by the brand itself.

¹⁰⁴ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, (London: Penguin Classics, 1992) 165.

¹⁰⁵ Debord, *Society of the Spectacle*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Secrets of the Superbrands: Fashion*, 18:50.

5.4. Where to next?

This thesis was set to map the evolution of the American print advertising discourse from 1945 up to the present. The core line of argument presented the following hypothesis: in order to drive the purchase decision, advertising has evolved from a simple, straightforward presentation of the products through a medium that fabricated myths rooted in ossified stereotypes and imbued these products with these myths to a communication channel that identified products as a form of expressing one's uniqueness and cultural dissent, yet paradoxically only within a limited stock of pre-set amount of lifestyle patterns and stereotypes and finally to the ultimate abstraction, where the brand replaces the product as the object of fetishistic adoration. The central communicational unit of this evolution is then the myth, a superstructure that transcends Saussurian semiotics, a structure that gradually empties itself of any referentiality and becomes a tautology, a self-sustaining simulacrum. With the onset of McLuhan's global village, the seeming democratization of media and the retribalization of society thanks to the Internet, this myth can be seen as the core of Debord's vision of the ultimate spectacle as the governing social relation of today.

Based on the arguments presented above, it must be apparent that any research of the advertising discourse is not simply a question of tracing its evolution and the way it is tailored to better reflect socioeconomic changes and thus remain efficient, but also the aforementioned matter of analysing the way in which the advertising discourse functions as a prescriptive agent in that it actively structures and even catalyses social change, moulds stereotypes, restructures value and need hierarchies or simply propounds its own vision of happiness. It is not, and never has been, the purpose of this thesis to exert a moral judgement over the data and the trends presented in its analytical part; firstly, it would necessarily lead to a certain skewing of the perspective and secondly, most of the

theoretical approaches employed in said analysis already present rather succinct, and, it has to be said, overtly sceptical value judgements. An interesting line of further research, however, could be based on a quasi “new historicist”¹⁰⁷ approach, i.e. an approach acknowledging the reciprocity of these relations and examining its mechanics more closely, especially in connection to the growing level of anxiety within the western collective consciousness, the mass onslaught of psychological disorders such as bulimia or anorexia, the growing disparity between social strata, the hollowing out of any clear meaning and even the occupation of language and the many other phenomena often described as accompanying symptoms of the western consumerist way of existence.

¹⁰⁷ The term is used quite liberally here. In this context, new historicism does not necessarily mean for instance a Whitean exploration of such elements as emplotment or historical tropes, but a broader, Foucaultean approach focused on the way a specific discourse (advertising) structures and changes its objects. In our case, this would be for instance various widely acknowledged notions of happiness or the already mentioned value hierarchies, morals and other myths of the collective consciousness.

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