

Advertising as a Cultural System

John F. Sherry, Jr.

Abstract

Of all the major perspectives by which people construe the world, advertising is at once among the most influential and the least examined. The emergent dissatisfaction of international advertisers with linear-sequential models of persuasion and the renaissance of interest among marketers in qualitative paradigms of consumer behavior suggest that insights from cultural hermeneutics can improve our understanding of advertising. This paper describes advertising as a cultural system, and illustrates the ways in which advertising contributes to the organization of experience through the shaping and reflecting of our sense of reality. A conceptual framework of comparative, semiotic orientation is proposed.

Introduction

Almost twenty years ago, two ethnographers attempted to capture a native vision of a native world by training Navajo informants in the technique of film making (Worth and Adair 1972). Treated as ethnodocumentaries, these films afforded insight into the ways the Navajo structured reality. Similarly, advertising is a cultural document, a way of presenting and apprehending the world. Advertising ranges from the consciously apprehended affecting presence to the environmental gestalt to which we are selectively attentive, from perceptual prime time to perceptual downtime. More than merely communicative in itself, advertising provides the revenue underwriting our mass communication media and the incentive for much of our word-of-mouth communication. Like the Navajo films, advertising can be used as a vehicle for understanding the structures of reality within a culture.

Marketing is at once the most potent agent of cultural change and of cultural stability at work in the contemporary world, and the ways in which this dynamic tension is both fueled and harnessed comprises an intrinsically interesting field of inquiry. Because advertising is designed expressly to exploit this tension, does so with such variable results, and is attended by complications and sequelae both unanticipated and undetected by its publics (Pollay 1986), it is especially worthy of investigation. Whether the globalization of markets which we are currently witnessing is, on the one hand, a desirable, irreversible trend resulting in improved life chances for all participants, and which should be catalyzed and managed by standardized marketing interventions (Levitt 1983), or, on the other hand, is an undesirable, ethnocentric conception of progress which disrupts the ecological, social, and psychological balance of its unwilling conscripts (Barnet and Muller 1974; Bodley 1982), and which therefore should be arrested or redirected by enlightened social policy, it is in any case morally imperative that we investigate the advertising upon which it is predicated. Such investigation must proceed dispassionately and avoid being merely another insightful jeremiad on the symbolic underpinnings of an irrational economic system (*e.g.*, Henry 1956; Inglis 1972). Greyser (1972) has provided us with a catalyst for this kind of study by encouraging exploration of advertising's nature and content, its macroeconomic effects, and its influence on society's values and lifestyles.

A recent article (Lammon and Cooper 1983) reminds us once again that our relationship to advertising is both proactive and reactive—we 'do unto' advertising and advertising 'does unto' us—without articulating what it is that people *do* with advertising. I have adopted a hermeneutic perspective in this essay, treating advertising as a way of construing the world, in much the same way as religion, science, common sense, art, ideology, or play represent ways of knowing. I will treat advertising as equipment for living, a strategy for dealing with situations (Burke 1964).

In understanding advertising as a way of understanding, both a semiological and a semiotic approach is indicated. The former *abstracts from*, the latter *anchors in*, psychosocial context, the description and analysis of advertising as a cultural system (Singer 1984). I am concerned with cognitive systems embedded in action and emotion. My perspective draws from symbolist, structuralist, and semiotic traditions in social

science, and addresses the political dimensions of rhetoric. As an essay on the expressive domain of consumer research, this paper falls somewhere between the marcology of Levy (1976) and the an-trope-ology of Fernandez (1974).

While I have little doubt that a species of advertising exists in all societies—whether in passive form (as in the provision of sheer information, in word-of-mouth transmissions regarding quality or convenience, or in the linking of an exchanged good to the social identity of maker or trader) or in active form (as in any intentional investing of goods with symbolic meaning in an effort to increase their exchange value)—I will confine my remarks to the kind of advertising designed to remove goods from the realm of the undifferentiated commodity and to transform them into psychosocially significant branded products. McCracken (1986) has recently examined some of the cultural dimensions of this generation of meaning, and Scarry's (1985) discussion of the interior structure of the artifact should prompt further exploration of this process. The evolution of modern EuroAmerican advertising is succinctly documented by Williams (1981), and is given specific, local attention by Ewen (1976) and Fox (1984). The evolution of North American cultural frames for goods from which advertising draws and to which it contributes is persuasively sketched by Leiss, Kline, and Jhalley (1986).

Advertising Defined

McLuhan (1970) refers to advertising as the cave art of the twentieth century. Williams (1980) perceives it as the official art of modern capitalist society. Wright and Snow (1981) view advertising more operationally as a ritual geared to producing personal transformation, while McCracken and Pollay (1981), echoing the sentiments of many other researchers (*e.g.*, Leymore 1975), liken advertising to myth. Leiss, Kline, and Jhalley (1986) view advertising as the 'privileged discourse for the circulation of messages and social cues about the interplay between persons and objects'. My own preference is to describe advertising as a system of symbols synthesized from the entire range of culturally determined ways of knowing that is accessible through ritual and oriented toward both secular and sacred

dimensions of transcendental experience in hyperindustrial society. As a variant of rhetorical behavior, advertising is both expressive and programmatic (Crocker 1977).

In a recent, insightful analysis, Schudson (1984) describes advertising as capitalist realism, a set of aesthetic conventions promoting and celebrating a particular political economy. This description derives from his understanding of socialist realism, which presents a normative version of reality which is simplified, collective, optimistic, progressive, and socially integrative. Capitalist realism celebrates consumer choice in defense of individualism and materialism by portraying consumer satisfaction in idealized form. Schudson rejects the notion of advertising as a form of religion, because it is 'quint-essentially part of the profane, not sacred, world', and because advertising may be more powerful the *less* people believe in it—it produces dependence on, not acceptance of, its version of reality (1984). Compliance, rather than acceptance, may be the result of ritual behavior, in which case the rejection rather than the enactment of ritual may reveal 'truth' (Goody 1977). Further detracting from the religion analogy is the paucity of professed devotion to the faith. Yet Schudson concludes his case with a conception of advertising that is ultimately mythic—'Advertising is capitalism's way of saying "I love you" to itself'—(and, as we all know, love means never having to say you're sorry) and seems to forget his finding that a significant percentage of consumers find credible advertising for the brands it already uses. (This notion of myths speaking to themselves through themselves is evident in the reflective consciousness of ads that incorporate other ads to reinforce the authority of their message, as in Campbell's 'Soup is good food/Eat carefully' tableau between peace officer and adolescent, wherein a Campbell's print ad is adduced in behalf of the product. The same notion is present as well in the recent Hertz commercial that invokes the advertising of Miller Lite to create meaning; this association of driving and drinking might not be so curious, given popular perceptions of 'real beer' and 'serious driving'. It is especially visible in the Black and Decker ad evoking the Reagan campaign's Statue of Liberty theme and in the Prudential Bache lampoon of its major competitors' symbolism. The resurrection of personified trademarks such as 'Speedy' Alka-Seltzer, 'Bib' Bibendum, and the Dutch Boy to plead the case for retaining the mordant Big Boy symbol

also turns on this notion.) That socialist realism, secular humanism, and other contemporary '-isms' fulfill conventionally religious functions in the modern world cannot be disputed. I would like to revive the advertising-as-religion metaphor inherent in McLuhan's perception, and temper it according to Berry's (1977) view of religion as that which 'binds us back to the source of life'. I will mount this revival by invoking the literature on secular ritual and by employing Geertz's (1973) expansive definition of the religious. (St. Bernardino of Siena, patron saint of advertisers (Fox 1984), pray for me.)

Advertising is a system of symbols synthesized from among the range of culturally determined ways of knowing that seeks to establish 'powerful, pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in people by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic' (Geertz 1973). More than merely a system of *creating* meaning (Williamson 1978), it is a system of *discerning* or *discovering* meaning. As a cultural system governed by rhetorical and iconographic convention, it moves us, via the ritual enactment of correspondences between domains of relative degrees of obscurity, through the important realms of experience of a culture (Fernandez 1974). For example, by linking reference figure to product, it may provide us with both rationale and tactics for negotiating the uncertain contexts of consumer choice. Viewed as a strategy for organizing the experience of others through the manipulation of perceived availability of choice (Paine 1981), advertising exists along a continuum bounded by rhetoric at one pole and propaganda at the other, and employs tactics ranging from the merely persuasive to the nearly coercive.

It is essential to distinguish between levels of function in advertising (Beeman 1983). The manifest function of advertising is to prompt purchase of a particular 'good' regardless of whether the ultimate destination of the message is cognitive or behavioral. The latent function of advertising is to socialize individuals into a culture of consumption. By instrumental, affiliative, political, and mythopoetic aspects (Terpstra 1978) of our multidimensional education, we acquire a comprehensive philosophic system (Henry 1956) oriented toward acquisitiveness, and toward structuring social relations in terms of goods (Douglas and Isherwood 1979; Taussig 1980). Andren *et al.* (1981) term this socialization 'perspective

displacement'. Advertising promotes forms of materialism that are instrumental as well as terminal, the former being benign, the latter malignant (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981).

As a form of metacommunication on the order of myth and ritual, advertising works at the level of semiology to invest goods with meaning, and at the level of semiotics to integrate domestic and political economies into a culture whose dominant focus is consumption. By teaching us the meaning of goods as well as their use, advertising helps create intelligibility; it helps make the categories of culture stable and visible (Douglas and Isherwood 1979). By enshrining cultural sacra (and, often as tellingly, cultural trivia), it teaches the individual to adapt to change by adhering to traditional wisdom. It is a quintessentially conservative force which seeks to resolve contradiction *within* culture (Leymore 1975), but which can create tremendous dislocations and catalyze change *across* cultures. The fragmentation of needs and the disintegration of goods as determinate objects which characterize contemporary consumer culture (Leiss, Kline, and Jhally 1986) are at once antecedents to and consequences of advertising.

As a vessel or conduit for an idea-system, advertising contributes to our perception of that system as grounded in the essence of the universe (Wolf 1982); in the process, our *cultural* perceptions become *natural* perceptions. It is in such a fashion that commodity fetishism (Marx 1976 [1867]), product therapy (Henry 1956), and overconsumption (Bodley 1982) become institutionalized cultural defects. Ironically, natural expressions are 'commercials performed to sell a version of the world under conditions no less questionable and treacherous than the ones that advertisers face' (Goffman 1976). Over time, advertising has shifted from being merely a unique cultural form to becoming a pattern for the field of communication at large (Leiss, Kline, and Jhally 1986).

Following Geertz, upon whose conception of religion my definition of advertising is based, we can interpret advertising as a cultural system or pattern of significant symbol clusters that contributes to organizing our experience. These clusters are the material vehicles of thought, emotion, perception, and understanding. They are extrinsic sources of information in terms of which we organize our lives; they are templates for the organization of psychosocial processes. Symbols synthesize a culture's

worldview and ethos. A cultural system acts as both a model *of* and a model *for* reality. In the former case, physical relations are modelled so as to render them apprehensible; symbolic structures are manipulated to bring them parallel to nonsymbolic systems. In the latter case, a model is constructed under whose guidance physical relations are organized; nonsymbolic systems are manipulated via relationships expressed in symbolic structures. The contrast between a flowchart and a blueprint illustrates Geertz's distinction. Cultural patterns give meaning to psychosocial reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves (Geertz 1973). Advertising, then, can be seen to *shape* and *reflect* reality. Conversely, any advertisement might be apprehended in terms of its dramatic shape, metaphoric content, and social context, as an example of the cultural order.

To summarize, we can view advertising as a cultural system, and individual advertisements as a species of secular ritual, that is, an enactment or performance manifesting the larger system. It is further claimed that such symbolic activity not only expresses reality, but also structures experience. It provides the codification that makes intelligibility possible (Crocker 1977). Because ritual conveys meaning as if it were unquestionable, it is frequently used to communicate information which may be most in doubt (Moore and Myerhoff 1977). Thus, advertising has been called ingenuously prophetic, as it is able to tell us the truth about ourselves without being interested in the traditional truth (Henry 1956). The ad's meaning process is mystified by making its message the prize of a hermeneutic interpretation that invites us to discard its surface features in favor of a discovery of its apparently hidden meaning; our diversion from form in favor of content makes the transference of meaning occur outside our conscious awareness (Williamson 1978). Trends such as the emergence of 'internationalism' as a theme, or the influence of rock video format, may accelerate this hermeneutic quest in advertising. Because of its ubiquity and its assimilation to itself of all systems of understanding, advertising is often seen as inherently dangerous. The debate over the ontological status of subliminal persuasion and the phenomenon of spurious awareness serve to remind us of the power that inheres in the relationship between advertising and its publics. The increasing incidence of 'product placement' in genres of

experience outside of conventional advertising—in films, for instance—attests to the synergy between brand and social context.

As extrinsic sources of information, cultural patterns are most effective in situations of uncertainty, 'where institutionalized guides for behavior, thought, or feeling are weak or absent' (Geertz 1973). Advertising, like other cultural knowledge systems, seeks to render otherwise incomprehensible social situations meaningful, so as to make it possible to act purposively within them: It serves as a '[map] of problematic social reality and a [matrix] for the creation of collective conscience', despite the accuracy of the map or credibility of the conscience (Geertz 1973). Thus, 'truthful' ads (*e.g.*, the one for Hewlett-Packard's HP12 calculator implying a unique function button) may be viewed as misleading, and 'promercials' (*e.g.*, 'He Man and the Masters of the Universe' and, dare we hope, 'She-ra: Princess of Power' which are feature-length promotional vehicles) viewed as innocuous. For Geertz, the differentia of cultural systems reside in the symbolic strategies used for encompassing the situations they represent. I have described advertising as a fusion or synthesis of ways of knowing. It does not so much provide a 'counterweight' to scientific rationalism (Leiss, Kline, and Jhally 1986) as it does a nucleus (and here the analogy of the irritant used to seed an oyster in order to stimulate the growth of pearls is perhaps not overdrawn) around which ways of knowing may accrete. Consequently, an amalgam of validity tests, from appeals to revelation, naive realism, institutionalized skepticism, and moral passion, is perennially applied to advertising in an effort to verify its utility as a way of knowing. Being ultimately rhetorical in nature, however, and requiring complicity of both sender and receiver, our apprehension of advertising can be understood as a sociopolitical ritual in which shared values are dramatized. In seeking to reduce our perception of choices, it must encourage suspension of disbelief, inducement of collaborative expectancy, and achievement of complicity (Paine 1981). The formal properties of such a ritual include repetition, acting, 'special' behavior or stylization, order, evocative presentational style or staging, and a collective dimension. Such rituals are mounted with an explicit purpose, contain explicit symbols and messages, harbor implicit statements, affect social relationships, and affirm a particular cultural order against indeterminacy (Moore and Myerhoff 1977).

Goffman (1976) has characterized our apprehension of advertising as 'hyper-ritualization': The standardization, exaggeration, and simplification present in all ritual behavior is extended in advertising. He likens the job of an advertiser in dramatizing the value of a product to that of a society in infusing its social situations with the ceremonial and ritual which orient participants to one another. Society in general and advertising in particular employ intention displays, microecological mapping of social structure, approved typifications, and the gestural externalization of inner response (Goffman 1976). Advertising can be seen to display and reinforce versions of social life that are normative and ideal; culturally significant events, social units, and relationships, whose nature and frequency are not statistically representative of everyday life, but whose portrayal is not perceived as peculiar or unnatural, act as a 'passing exhortative guide to perception' (Bryant and Jordan 1978; Goffman 1976). Products, social relations, emotions, and behaviors *not* portrayed in advertising may provide significant clues to a culture's world view and ethos, since ritual may be used to obscure and mystify knowledge domains. While exegesis of anything and everything is the order of the day in university cultures, it is not in so-called traditional cultures (Fernandez n.d.). The 'average person' may be unqualified to interpret advertising reliably, or to account for the ways in which it achieves its effects (McCracken and Pollay 1981). Our ability to tolerate and manipulate ambiguity makes advertising an especially facile medium of understanding, capable of abetting liberation as well as oppression.

Some Suggestions for Apprehending Advertising as a Cultural System

Returning to our initial distinction between semiotic and semiological approaches to interpretation, I will describe how advertising might be evaluated in its social context to yield information about culture, and how it might be analyzed as a system of meaning unto itself.

A Semiotic Perspective

We can evaluate advertising at the semiotic level by addressing two of its principle aspects. On the one hand, advertising serves as an artifactual record, an archival document of sorts, which captures material cultural elements as well as mentalistic elements. On the other hand, advertising can be examined as a performance, at the level of ritual or ceremony, which encompasses both the seller's intent and the buyer's response.

While the verisimilitude of advertising must be gauged against a range of other behaviors and situations—staged authenticity (MacCannell 1976) may highlight the tension between positive and normative, or prescribed and proscribed values and behaviors—we can use ads to develop inventories of material artifacts, behavior patterns, and social institutions to assess very broadly cultural foci and value orientations, to investigate verbal and nonverbal languages in isolation and interaction, and to examine the social context of rhetoric. One conceptual tool for conducting inventories using advertisements is drawn from ethnography. The *Outline of Cultural Materials* (Murdock 1965) upon which the HRAF system is largely based provides the analyst with a multidimensional categorizing of many aspects of human culture under 710 headings, couched in terms of the concepts and language of pragmatic ethnographic practice. Using Murdock's classificatory scheme, an analyst could derive information from ads regarding *patterned activity* (e.g., travel); *circumstances* (e.g., menstruation); *subjects* (e.g., bilinear kin groups); *objects* (e.g., child care); *means* (e.g., mutual aid); *purposes* (e.g., mnemonic devices); and *results* (e.g., sanctions) common to the culture. Another conceptual tool for exploring advertising is the framework derived by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) to identify the basic value orientations of a particular culture. Using this approach, an analyst would interpret advertising as an attempt to resolve the five basic questions confronting every society: What is the character of innate human nature? What is the relation of people to nature? What is the temporal focus of human life? What is the mode of human activity? What is the mode of human relationships? In light of the work of Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981), as well as of the rhetorical nature of advertising in a capitalistic society, these orientations harbor a sixth essential question: What is the relationship of people to goods? Taken together, these

approaches help the analyst identify foci—issues of paramount importance—within a culture. From a 'practioner's' viewpoint, these approaches provide guidelines both for creating messages and interpreting messages.

While linguistic and paralinguistic features of advertising will be considered shortly, it is useful to evaluate the systems of meaning—the verbal and nonverbal 'languages' and their interaction—drawn from the cultural matrix and embedded into ads. For our present purposes, I will consider only the nonverbal dimensions. Two levels of analysis may be undertaken. The first is relatively straightforward and mechanical. Standard nonverbal languages (such as proxemics, kinesics, paralinguistics, haptics, chronemics, oculosics, olfaction, gustation, music, postures, orientations, etc.) are present in most ads, and are either reflected faithfully or altered strategically to impart meaning. Aesthetics is also a critically important 'language' employed in advertising, as it serves to organize our perception of the cultural document. Haley's (1984) exploratory work on nonverbal cues addresses these surface features, and has profoundly suggestive implications for message encoding. The second level of analysis necessarily unfolds on a deeper, more fundamental plane, and may be pursued using comprehensive semiotic frameworks. For example, Hall and Trager (Hall 1959) have suggested that culture is communication, and that culture is composed of primary message systems which include interaction, association, subsistence, bisexuality, territoriality, temporality, learning, play, defense, and exploitation. Each of these categories is enmeshed in every other. Each category can be used to understand every other, and ultimately to produce a comprehensive picture of the culture. Consequently, each category serves as a mode of entry into the analysis of advertising, as these systems are embedded in every ad; we can, for instance, make inferences regarding role structure between and within genders by examining a culture's advertising. Whether our observations reflect positive or normative conventions would have to be checked against other behaviors in the culture.

Two approaches generally applied to conversational analysis may be used to attain a semiotic perspective of advertising. These approaches attempt to relate sociocultural knowledge to grammar; since we are dealing with a rhetoric that transcends the merely linguistic, we will extend our notion of

grammar to cover extralinguistic features described earlier. The first approach has been labelled the ethnography of speaking (Bauman and Sherzer 1974; Hymes 1974), and the second, discourse analysis (Gumperz 1982). The former views sociocultural knowledge as revealed through performance of speech acts which are bounded in real time and space, and which are constrained in form and content by culturally specific norms and values. The latter posits abstract semantic constructs (frames, scripts, schemata, etc.) by which actors apply their knowledge of the world to the interpretation of an encounter (Gumperz 1982). The former approach examines the impact of social norms on communication, while the latter examines the cognitive functioning of contextual and other knowledge. Again, for brevity's sake, I will discuss the potential value of just one of these approaches: the ethnography of speaking. Analysts in this tradition work within a speech community to determine all speech codes and repertoires of its member; the norms, values, and strategies which govern speech production and interpretation, and the norms of interpretation employed by the receivers of the communication (Bauman and Sherzer 1974). Hymes (1974) has employed the acronym SPEAKING to this enterprise, as the analyst attends to the following elements of communication: situation, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms, and genres. Any advertisement might be analyzed according to the interrelationships between these components; the more ads thus analyzed, the closer we move to a descriptive theory of this cultural system.

A Semiological Perspective

At a more strictly cognitive level, we described advertising in terms of its rhetoric and iconography. This description can be expanded to explore some of the structural features of each of these components. Because I view particular ads as being composed of symbols which attain coherence by being made relational through both metaphor and metonymy, I will digress briefly on the nature of symbolism at the conclusion of this section.

Traditionally, rhetoric has encompassed both tropes and figures of thought. Tropes, or figures of speech, are words whose meanings undergo

change, while figures of thought are words which retain their literal meaning but which undergo a change in rhetorical pattern. Metaphor is a trope; apostrophe is a figure of thought. Such figurative language gains its power through intentional departure from conventional usage. Rhetorical figures abound in advertising in both word and picture, and in the interplay between copy and visual. (Consider the rhetorical and iconographical richness of the Tucks suppository-and-pad commercial that invites us to 'fight fire with fire when hemorrhoids flare up', as we witness a match slowly burst into flame before it is extinguished by the product.) Further, Bailey (1981) has argued that rhetoric—any persuasive tactic that uses symbols and is not bound by the rules of logical reasoning—can be analyzed along three dimensions. The first dimension depends upon the orator's objective, and ranges from deliberative, wherein a decision is reached, to hortatory, wherein a decision is conveyed to an audience in an effort to prompt action. ('I've tried other cold remedies...'/ 'If you read only one book this year....') The second dimension concerns the orator's style, and ranges from grandiloquent, which eliminates discussion, to the tempered, which allows discussion. ('What is hamburger?'/ 'Which do you prefer?') The third dimension focuses on the orator's target, or destination, and ranges from the cardiac, which arouses passion and excites emotion, to the pseudocerebral, which gives the appearance of using forms of logic and scientific reasoning. ('Hello Federal'/ 'They make money the old fashioned way...') Depending upon the context of uncertainty experienced by orator and audience, one rhetorical mode will be more effective than others. I would expand the concept of rhetoric to include any traditional folk locutions (e.g., proverbs or any other traditional genre of stylized speech). The construction of a rhetorical inventory by product category, brand, medium, and target segment would be a valuable contribution to our understanding of advertising. Dyer (1982) has demonstrated that such a systematic analysis of rhetorical tropes is possible, and that such analysis can be used both to interpret and create particular advertisements quite effectively. The kind of fundamental sociolinguistic analysis conducted in American courtrooms by O'Barr (1982), which not only enhances understanding of rhetoric but also has potential to profoundly affect performance, is desperately needed in our research into advertising.

Iconography refers to the way in which the intention displays, typifications, and other normatively significant phenomena described earlier

are visually portrayed. Clearly, symbolism is the bedrock of iconography. The polysemous nature of the symbol makes it ideally suited to the manipulating of ambiguity which is the hallmark of much advertising. I would like to expand the notion of iconography to include the archetypal patterns, those ancient themes which persist amid variation through the ages, described by Bodkin (1934), which advertising borrows from myth. Similarly, the type and motif formulae of traditional oral literature—the plots as well as the narrative elements (actions, settings, actors, objects, etc.) of folklore—frequently recur in advertising (Aarne and Thompson 1961; Thompson 1958). While the incidence of obvious allusions is high enough (*e.g.*, the Chivas Regal glass slipper, the Volvo folktale campaign, Penton/IPC's frog prince, etc.), the oral formulaic patterns of latent, implicit, projectable character (*e.g.*, transformation, tests, deceptive bargains, fortune reversal, supernatural adversaries or helpers, etc.)—are much more common and influential. As these patterns occur cross-culturally, they are of particular interest to proponents of the globalization of markets. They are prompting rethinking in such basic sciences as biology (Landau 1984). Morphology (Dundes 1961; Propp 1968) is another aspect of iconography; the structure of a message is often more profoundly affecting than its literal content. (Parallels between the consumer behavior that advertising seeks to promote and the monomyth of the hero who undertakes a perilous journey and returns, transfigured, with a boon (Campbell 1949) are lost neither on advertisers nor consumers.) An iconographic inventory of advertising would be every bit as welcome as the rhetorical inventory I just requested, from both 'analytic' and 'practical' perspectives. Again, Dyer (1982) has suggested the lines along which such an investigation might proceed.

Finally, a brief description of symbolism is in order. Following Turner (1967), the symbol is the smallest unit of ritual retaining specific properties of ritual behavior. Symbols are polysemous, their referents are linked by association, and their meanings are polarized. A denotational and connotational cluster surround a pole of gross physiological reference. This sensory pole arouses emotions, desires, and feelings. A similar cluster surrounds a pole of cognitive or ideological reference. This normative pole promotes moral and social norms and values. The juxtaposition of the grossly physical with the structurally normative produces a profound effect:

Norms and values become saturated with emotion while emotions are ennobled through contact with values. The monolithic (or rather, ithyphallic) print ad for Macho cologne run by Faberge several years ago, effectively condensing referents to male sexuality, aggression, wealth, and ethnic stereotyping in its rhetorical and iconographic symbolism, nicely illustrates this principle. Thus, symbols function as both storehouse and powerhouse, encoding information which is ultimately authoritative (Turner 1975). For Turner, symbols have ontological status, insofar as they precipitate social action (1974). As before, an inventory of symbols employed in advertising—and of the image pool (Leiss, Kline, and Jhally 1986) from which they are intentionally or unconsciously drawn—would be most welcome, and could be used to interpret such marketing communication in the way that a glossary of corporate takeover terms might illustrate intercorporate relationships.

For consumer researcher and social scientist, a semiological perspective is incomplete and ultimately unsatisfying. The semiotic perspective which inquires into the dynamics (both the production and interpretation) of rhetorical, iconographic, and symbolic communication—the nature of movement provoked in the interaction of consumer and ad—is the goal toward which we need to strive. (Researchers interested in an 'anti-semiological' perspective that examines symbolism as an autonomous cognitive mechanism, a feedback device linked to our conceptual mechanism, which processes 'defective representations' are urged to consult Sperber 1974.)

Conclusion: Acculturation and the Illiterati

It is customary for conclusions to present an interpretive summary and issue a call for additional research. I have advocated a semiotic, cultural systems perspective of advertising, suggesting that advertising is a way of knowing that contributes to the structuring of our experience. I have indicated several semiological approaches to understanding how advertising as a cultural document conveys meaning. Throughout, I have emphasized the ability of symbols to mobilize people; those symbols, if properly harnessed, can be

used to direct behavior. I will end with some thoughts on the acculturation of the illiterati, and on the mission of educators with respect to advertising.

Todorov (1984) has provided a fascinating account of the 'triumph' of logos over mythos in the European conquest of aboriginal America, illustrating the power inherent in the ability of one culture to manipulate symbol systems in its interaction with another. A similar point is made by Anderson (1984) in his study of the politics of transnational advertising. Applying Galtung's theory of structural imperialism to advertising, Anderson explores the 'disharmony of interest' created between Center and Periphery nations when an advertising structure, imposed upon a nation, becomes a 'bridgehead' for cultural, economic, and political 'spillover'. Advertising, as part of a larger marketing package, is seen to contribute to dependency rather than to development, and to exacerbate sociopolitical tension when it is imposed upon cultures for which it is not appropriately designed. A similar argument might be advanced for the case of internal imperialism, whether we speak of institutionalized inequality or of structural terrorism. Aspirations stimulated in childhood and reinforced over the lifecycle may become dysfunctional even if they are not systematically blocked. The relative and longterm innocuousness or triviality of most purchase behavior, including the contributions of advertising, remains to be gauged.

We need to become especially attentive to the vulnerable consumers, those populations most at risk in the process of culture contact. Following Schudson (1984) and Anderson (1984), these populations include children, marginal and peripheral persons (whether in the first, second, third, or fourth worlds), and competent consumers under duress. Physicians are interesting specimens of this last category, and ads directed toward physicians are often especially intriguing. When advertising, of all the cultural systems, becomes a dominant way of knowing and experiencing, when the suspension of disbelief shifts from willing to unwitting, we have shirked our responsibility as educators. By imparting a cultural perspective to our students, by challenging them to discover the social impact of advertising, by instilling in them a spirit of critical realism, we can not only enhance their understanding and enjoyment of advertising, but prompt them to produce a culturally appropriate prosocial advertising. Pollay (1986) has suggested the shape that a truly critical inquiry might take. In his

introduction to the delightful monograph by Lips (1966) on the image of the white man in aboriginal art, Malinowski observes that 'to see ourselves as others see us is but the reverse and the counterpart of the gift to see others as they really are and as they want to be.' This is the kind of insight we need to impart.

References

- Aarne, Antti and Thompson, Stith (1961). *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography*. Helsinki: Folklore Fellows Communications.
- Anderson, Michael (1984). *Madison Avenue in Asia: Politics and Transnational Advertising*. London: Associated University Presses.
- Andren, Gunnar, et al. (1978). *Rhetoric and Ideology in Advertising*. Vallingby, Sweden: Liberforlag.
- Bailey, F. G. (1981). Dimensions of rhetoric in conditions of uncertainty. In *Politically Speaking: Cross Cultural Studies of Rhetoric*, Robert Paine (ed.), 25-38. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Barnet, Richard and Muller, Ronald (1974). *Global Reach: The Power of the Multinational Corporations*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Bauman, Richard and Sherzer, Joel (eds.) (1974). *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Beeman, William (1983). Freedom to choose: Symbols and values in American advertising. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association.
- Berry, Wendell (1977). *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*. New York: Avon.
- Bodkin, Maud (1934). *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Bodley, John (1982). *Victims of Progress*. Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield.
- Bryant, Kathleen and Jordan, Brigitte (1978). The advertised couple: The portrayal of the couple and their relationship in popular magazine advertisements. Paper presented at the Sixth Annual Midwest Popular Culture Association Conference.
- Burke, Kenneth (1964). *Perspectives by Incongruity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

- Campbell, Joseph (1949). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Crocker, J. Christopher (1977). The social functions of rhetorical forms. In *The Social Use of Metaphor*. J. David Sapir and J. Christopher Crocker (eds.), 33-66. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly and Rochberg-Halton, Eugene (1981). *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols and the Self*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Douglas, Mary and Isherwood, Baron (1979). *The World of Goods*. New York: Basic Books.
- Dundes, Alan (1964). *The Morphology of North American Indian Folktales*. Helsinki: Folklore Fellows Communications.
- Dyer, Gillian (1982). *Advertising as Communication*. New York: Methuen.
- Ewen, Stuart (1976). *Captains of Consciousness*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Fernandez, James (1974). The mission of metaphor in expressive culture. *Current Anthropology* 15 (2), 119-145.
- (n.d.). Analysis of ritual: Metaphoric correspondences as the elementary forms. *Science* 182, 1366.
- Fox, Stephen (1984). *The Mirror Makers*. New York: William Morrow.
- Geertz, Clifford (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Goffman, Erving (1976). *Gender Advertisements*. New York: Harper Colophon Books.
- Goody, Jack (1977). Against ritual: Loosely structured thoughts on a loosely defined topic. In *Secular Ritual*, Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff (eds.), 25-35. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum Assen.
- Greyser, Stephen (1972). Advertising attacks and counters. *Harvard Business Review* 50, 1-9.
- Gumperz, John (1982). *Discourse Analysis*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Haley, Russell, Richardson, Jack, and Baldwin, Beth (1984). The effects of non-verbal communications in television advertising. Unpublished manuscript.
- Hall, Edward T. (1959). *The Silent Language*. Garden City, NY: Anchor-Doubleday.
- Henry, Jules (1956). *Culture Against Man*. New York: Vintage.
- Hymes, Dell (1974). *Foundations in Sociolinguistics*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press.
- Inglis, Fred (1972). *The Imagery of Power: A Critique of Advertising*. London: Heinemann.
- Kluckhohn, Florence and Strodtbeck, Fred (1961). *Variations in Value Orientations*. Evanston, IL: Row, Peterson, and Company.
- Lammon, Judie and Cooper, Peter (1983). Humanistic advertising: A holistic cultural perspective. *International Journal of Advertising* 2, 195-213.
- Landau, Misia (1984). Human evolution as narrative. *American Scientist* 72 (3), 262-268.
- Leiss, William, Kline, Stephen, and Jhally, Sut (1986). *Social Communication in Advertising Persons, Products and Images of Well-Being*. New York: Methuen.
- Levitt, Theodore (1983). The globalization of markets. *Harvard Business Review* 61 (3), 92-102.
- Levy, Sidney (1976). Marcolgy 101, or the domain of marketing. In *Marketing 1776-1976 and Beyond*, Kenneth Bernhardt (ed.), 577-581. Chicago: American Marketing Association.
- Leymore, Varda (1975). *Hidden Myth*. New York: Basic Books.
- Lips, Julius (1966). *The Savage Hits Back*. New Hyde Park, NY: University Books.
- MacCannell, Dean (1976). *The Tourist*. New York: Schocken.
- Marx, Karl (1976 [1867]). *Capital*, vol. 1, trans. by Ben Fowkes. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, Ltd.
- McCracken, Grant (1986). Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. *Journal of Consumer Research* 13 (1), 71-84.
- McCracken, Grant and Pollay, Richard (1981). Anthropological analyses of advertising. Working Paper No. 815. History of Advertising Archives, University of British Columbia.
- McLuhan, Marshall (1970). *Culture is Our Business*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

- Moore, Sally and Myerhoff, Barbara (eds.) (1977). *Secular Ritual*. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum Assen.
- Murdock, George (1965). *Outline of Cultural Materials*. New Haven: HRAF Press.
- O'Barr, William (1982). *Linguistic Evidence: Language, Power, and Strategy in the Courtroom*. New York: Academic Press.
- Paine, Robert, ed. (1981). *Politically Speaking. Cross Cultural Studies of Rhetoric*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Pollay, Richard (1986). The distorted mirror: Reflections on the unintended consequences of advertising. *Journal of Marketing* 50 (2), 18-36.
- Propp, Vladimir (1968). *Morphology of the Folktale*. Bloomington, IN: Research Center in the Language Sciences.
- Schudson, Michael (1984). *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion*. New York: Basic Books.
- Singer, Milton (1984). *Man's Glassy Essence: Explorations in Semiotic Anthropology*. Bloomington,: Indiana University Press.
- Sperber, Dan (1974). *Symbolism*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Taussig, Michael (1980). *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Terpstra, Vern (1978). *The Cultural Environment of International Business*. Cincinnati, OH: South-Western Publishing Company.
- Thompson, Stith (1958). *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Todorov, Tzvetan (1984). *The Conquest of America*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Turner, Victor (1967). *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- (1974). *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- (1977). Variations on a theme of liminality. In *Secular Ritual*, Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff (eds.), 36-52. Amsterdam: Van Gorcum Assen.
- Williams, Raymond (1981). *Problems in Materialism and Culture*. London: NCB.
- Williamson, Judith (1978). *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning*. London: Marion Boyars.
- Wolf, Eric (1982). *Europe and the People Without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Worth, Sol and Adair, John (1972). *Through Navajo Eyes*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Wright, David and Snow, Robert (1981). Consumption as ritual in the high technology society. In *Ritual and Ceremonies in Popular Culture*, Ray Browne (ed.) 326-337. Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Press.

Approaches to Semiotics

77

Editorial Committee

Thomas A. Sebeok

Roland Posner

Alain Rey

Mouton de Gruyter
Berlin · New York · Amsterdam

Marketing and Semiotics

New Directions in the Study of Signs for Sale

Edited by

Jean Umiker-Sebeok

Mouton de Gruyter
Berlin · New York · Amsterdam 1987