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Roundtable on Advertising as a Cultural Form

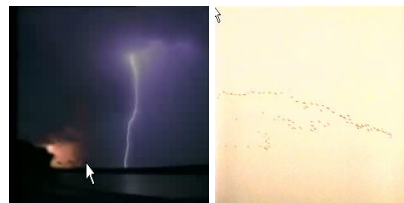
[Edward F. McQuarrie](#), [Linda M. Scott](#), [John F. Sherry, Jr.](#), [Melanie Wallendorf](#)

LS: Many scholars and industry experts have noted a marked formal transformation in advertising beginning about 1980. Some have noted that advertising became more ironic; others that it moved from being primarily verbal to being primarily imagistic.¹ I myself would also argue that advertising of the past twenty-five years has become more artful—that is, more of an art form—in the process of changing the look and means by which it communicates. And, of course, there is a general speculation that advertising led or exemplified the emergence of postmodern style—thus the irony, the images, the pastiche, and so on. So for our discussion today, I have chosen some ads that I hope will spark conversation on the overall topic of advertising an art form, as an indicator of the overall direction of culture, and even as a sign system.

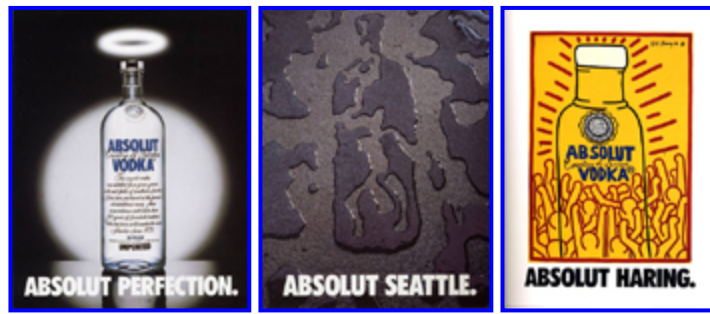
I'd like to begin with a set of ads that were seen as path-breaking in the 1980s and that have since become touchstones in conversations and writing about this 'postmodern turn' in advertising, whether you're engaged with academics or professionals. They include the Apple '1984' spot, the introductory Infiniti campaign, the Spike Lee campaign with Michael Jordan for Nike, the Absolut Vodka campaign, and Benetton. Let's get started by taking a look at some of these.



Apple "1984" commercial



Infiniti commercials



Absolut print ads²

LS: If people point to one ad that breaks open this moment in advertising history, they point to '1984.'

EM: Still one of the great ads.

LS: Yes. Perhaps less successful, but no less controversial at the time was the early campaign for the Infiniti. Much was made of the fact that the car is never shown; just as in '1984,' we never see the machine. Yet there is also a tone and look to the Infiniti ads that seems to foreshadow much of what was to come. The Absolut campaign has been important for many reasons, but I'm especially wanting to call attention to the conscious connection to art in several 'sub' campaigns. Finally, while many cultural critics have scorned advertising on the basis that it glamorizes and just generally cleans up reality, the purposeful courting of controversy and display of unpleasant global realities in the Benetton campaign caused quite an outcry. Indeed, in some ways, the way that 'reality' crossed the line into 'commerce' for Benetton exemplifies some of the most interesting ways in which the postmodern makes itself evident in advertising.



Benetton print ads³

LS: Parody, nostalgia, and self-referentiality, of course, are considered essential aspects of

postmodern style. The way Spike Lee keeps asking Michael Jordan to 'say it's the shoes' plays off decades of ads where some sports star implies that their ability is the result of having eaten the right cereal or used the right aftershave. Similarly, these Cheer spots play off years of laundry detergent demos. Both campaigns seem to rely on an assumption that consumers would not be persuaded by the old claims anymore—that the advertisers are sharing an in-joke between with viewers that this stuff has always been baloney.



Nike commercials



Cheer commercials

LS: Moving closer to the present, this spot for Pepsi played on the Superbowl a couple of years ago. There is also a full version of each of these clips. And, importantly, each of them is essentially a remake, this time starring Britney Spears, of all the major campaigns this brand has ever done for television. So we have nostalgia here, I guess, but also another typical postmodern genre, pastiche.⁴ The use of music, as well as imagery, in place of text or verbiage is another issue.



Pepsi "Nostalgia" commercial

EM: One of the things that I was reminded of, seeing these ads, is the changing relationship between publicity and advertising, and how that change really accelerated after Apple's '1984' ad. The textbook approach is that advertising is what you control, and publicity is what you cross your fingers and hope for, while doing what you can to influence or stimulate it. The great thing about advertising is that you spend your money and you get your audience and your effects, whatever they may be. What we see in '1984,' as well as the Infiniti and the Benetton case, is that total minutes or pages devoted to discussions of the ads in the media far exceeded any amount of paid space or time. And so I think we saw a lot of this in the 90s: for an ad campaign to really take off, it had to become an object of comment in the non-paid media. What that means is that managers don't have the control over advertising impact that textbooks would tell you. You don't get to spend your money on advertising and get your message delivered the way you want to the people you want, in sufficient quantity. Instead, you don't break through unless you get picked up in the mainstream media, and then it is out of your hands and it is not controlled anymore.

JS: Then, those events lead to marketers feeding the news media with releases about products that were about to come out, so we have seen them before they go to market. Marketers get word of mouth from the comedians and the news commentators and so forth, to create that buzz before the product comes out.

EM: People publish books on topics like 'guerilla marketing' and 'viral marketing.' These are based on the notion—partly it is a defensive reaction as well—that success in marketing communications is out of your control now. The message is, 'Buy my book and I will show you how to seed and control that publicity multiplier so that you have control over your communications again.' But there really are more uncontrollable elements in advertising than there used to be, because of this unpredictable media firestorm or 'love fest' effect. I think that change dates back to when these ads, like '1984' and the Infiniti, were being run in the 1980s.

LS: It is very clear in the history of the Macintosh that the publicity from the commercial was a big factor, since the commercial itself only ran once in a paid slot. I am wondering too how much this phenomenon contributes to what I see as a growing perception among my students, in the popular press, and among professionals that advertising has become more 'a part of the culture,' that ads themselves have become more of a 'stand-alone cultural item' like a film or a TV series or a book.

MW: Advertising is now in that arena of culture that is entertainment; it's no longer information or persuasive communication, but rather entertainment. This arena of culture includes the cross-referencing that pervades entertainment media: television shows featuring appearances by movie actors and actresses to apparently spontaneously talk about their soon-to-be-released movie and entertainers who discuss or comment on the ads that will be shown during the upcoming Super Bowl, almost like movie trailers released before a film to promote it. Viewers are prepped and eager and ready to watch because of what are essentially ads for the ads. Then there's the follow-up that permeates daily conversation with constant references to those media. People begin to explain their daily, lived experience with metaphors to what has happened in a movie or, 'Oh, it is like this ad.'

EM: Yes, as in the Wendy's ad, 'Where's the beef?'



Wendy's 'Where's the Beef' commercial⁵

EM: One of the traits of an object of culture is that people not only engage it directly, but then they discuss it. It becomes part of everyday socializing. 'Have you read *The Da Vinci Code*?' did you see that final episode of 'Survivor.' It is one of the characteristic traits of cultural objects that they become part of social discourse. I would predict that advertisements occupy a much bigger share of the cultural objects piece of social discourse now than ten years or twenty years or certainly forty years ago. I really don't think there were Marlboro ads that came out in *Time* in 1955, or that were on TV then, that people talked about in terms of, 'Boy, you know, didn't you just feel like that cowboy, out there in the mountains?' I don't think ads were such a big part of social discourse years ago.

MW: But then that raises the question of what topics of current culture do the ads replace? What elements of social discourse are less common now? Similar to what Putnam finds in terms of activities in *Bowling Alone*,⁶ I would speculate advertising references replace discussion of other elements of common culture that would be more literary-based or more community-based, that is, more related to what is going on in the lives of people around the speaker. I'm guessing that previously there was greater connectivity with the other humans in that person's experience rather than with this medium, this advertising vehicle.

JS: I would agree, probably until the time we started having advertising promoting consumption experience rather than just promoting a solution to a problem. In the 'solution to a problem' era, people probably talked about advertising to the same extent that they would talk about any other tangible object in the household as a discourse object. But once it became about the experience, and life became more mass mediated—we live primarily in a mediated environment rather than in a natural environment—people started to construe the world mainly through marketing and advertising, the way we used to construe it through religion, politics, education, and all of those other major social institutions. We have always done this with advertising, but it has ramped up since we have had this emphasis on experience.⁷

LS: In my 'Classic Campaigns' class at the University of Illinois, I teach that every time you get a media watershed, you get commercials of one sort or another—printed or filmed or whatever—that take advantage of the new technology itself. Those spots, in turn, have a magnified impact on the discourse as a whole, as well as on consumption of the product in question, largely because of the newness of the form or the newness of the approach. In the 1960s, I don't recall anybody actually *talking* about, like say, 'Foggy Morning,' which was the classic turning point for Marlboro. But I do very much remember people talking about Volkswagen and Avis, and Alka-Seltzer for sure: 'I can't believe I ate the whole thing!' I am wondering if there aren't maybe patches or moments when commercials are just more prominent than others?



Marlboro 'Foggy Morning' commercial⁸



Volkswagen 'Snow Plow' commercial⁹



Alka-Seltzer 'I Can't Believe I Ate the Whole Thing'¹⁰
Source: Archives Center, National Museum of American History



Avis print ads

EM: I think Melanie asked us two questions. At one level the question is, which other media objects did talk of ads replace, if that is a trend, and the second level is, which non-media objects did talk about ads replace? You could talk about what the preacher talked about last Sunday, or what Grandma told me when I visited her last night. Or, in the more straightforward media comparison, they used to talk about Joe DiMaggio in yesterday's game, and now they talk about 'Did you see that Lexus ad?' I am not sure if talk about literary books was ever that widespread within society to be replaced by talk about ads.

MW: Rather than straight reference to or discussion of literary material, I mean people's use of metaphors drawn from literary materials to explain aspects of their daily life to others. Today, I suspect more of those metaphoric references draw from the world of consumption and ads for that world.

LS: I would like to jump in on this discussion, if I may, because I do want literacy to be part of the conversation. I did some research on this for the American Antiquarian Society's 'History of the Book' project. Americans buy roughly five times as many books now than they did at the end of World War II. Literacy rates are much, much higher than they were before the war.

MW: Basic literacy rates.

LS: Right, basic literacy, and I know that there is the whole thing about *which* literacy....

MW: Yes, basic literacy has increased in prevalence, but the more important one, functional literacy has declined.¹¹

LS: Purchase of books is just a symptom. But purchase of magazines versus purchase of

books shifts a lot in that period. So, I am not sure I think that people read or talked about books more then than they do now simply because the data suggest they had access to fewer of them. Because really even the growth in public libraries is substantially greater in the postwar period. I just don't know. It did make sense to me that people would talk more about the preacher then and less now, and maybe less now about interpersonal stuff. And I do wonder about politics, whether discourse about government and policy is less.

EM: That is certainly a possibility. You know, do you want to talk about what President Bush is doing, or do you want to talk about what your favorite baseball star did, or do you want to talk about that crazy ad you saw? There are different stances we can take. John said, well no, the transition point is not that; it is when advertisers started to advertise the experience of the product, not the product. That is one possibility. Linda took another track and de-trended it. She said, no, it is something that crops up or flares up at certain transition points and then dies back down, depending on what is going on; it is not really a trend.

MW: Both of those can be going on.

JS: Take that Infiniti commercial as an example. In the 1980s, you had this wave of Japanese management techniques that swept through American industry. We Japanized our manufacturing system, and altered the way that we market. And then you take a Japanese form of advertising, and you translate it. You have the minimalist aesthetic, you have the allusion to haiku; it has the Japanese feel.¹² The Japanese ads of the era were subjective, emotional, ethereal kinds of appeals. It wasn't about a hard sell. It was about mood imagery, and in the last frame or so you got the product identified, and then brand. Sometimes it takes several viewings before you actually catch it. In this translation we get some literal Japanese symbolism, we get some culturally appropriate translations of Japanese imagery for an American audience and we get this massive response by the comedians of the era, who point out how effective this was in moving, say, trees and leaves and sticks, rather than the actual car. You can borrow something for apparently useful kinds of reasons and watch it tank, because the cultural frames are wrong.

LS: One of the reasons that I include the Infiniti is that people made fun of the fact that it did not show the product at the time. The campaign was roundly kicked around in the industry for that reason. Fast forward twenty years—it is pretty common now to have television commercials that don't show the product.

EM: Infiniti is a nice inflection point along with '1984'—I would argue that what is going on is that advertising used to be, in some meaningful sense, market information. You know, we have these products, we need to make you aware of them, we try to persuade you they are valuable, and that is what we spend our money for. Mr. Consumer, you know that this is a persuasive message, and we hope it worked. And that is what advertising was, once upon a time. In some meaningful sense, today, with all the armor consumers have built around themselves, nowadays market information is the easiest thing to tune out. 'I ain't in the market, I am just watching TV.' Well, if I am watching TV, then I like Spike, I like Mike, I like tales of girl leaving guy, and what does the guy have to do to get the girl back, to get back to the Mike and Spike ad. Substantially, or in some meaningful way, today the ad is not just market information. To succeed at all as market information, it has to be an aesthetic object in its own right. It has to give pleasure as an entertainment experience, if it is to have any hope of performing its marketing task.

MW: In some way, what the comedian comments on is not the product, but the experience that was delivered to the consumer watching the ad, as if it is supposed to be entertainment.

JS: But that is what is cool about that ad. The Apple '1984' commercial is fun to work with in class. I think Judith Williamson is one of the most interesting theorists of how advertising actually works. She has this notion of a hermeneutic quest. If you assume that human beings are basically seekers after meaning, and hungerers after meaning—that what we do that is unique from all of the other animals is to go on this hermeneutic quest—you present a commercial that allows people to project into it. You make possible as many dimensions of projectibility as you can, so that it can grab so many different people in so many different ways. When I work with '1984' in class, students pick up on the cinematic aspect, on both the Orwellian novel narrative and the historic significance of the actual 1984, the east-west Cold War split, on 'Big Blue,' on Apple, on all of these things. They read mythological significance into it, political significance. It is just layer after layer of facets for people to grab on to. I think that to the extent that advertising does that, it is a way to break through the clutter and to reach lots of different people simultaneously with different kinds of hooks.

LS: Can we circle back and talk about the parody spots in the context of what is expected in terms of 'market information,' in terms of what you have to do to get to the consumer in this moment?

EM: Incongruity, properly managed, is a powerful stimulus property. So the way you cut through clutter is to go with incongruity. You can't play it straight anymore. You can't really demonstrate detergent in a nice, clean, laboratory kitchen as if it were a scientific test. You know, the remote control will just click on that before you are halfway through. What does work is, 'Who is that funky kind of guy there, and what is he up to with the socks,' so watching someone play with the cliché of the product demo is entertaining, but watching an actual product demo just leads to a remote control click.

MW: And yet, what that Cheer spot *still delivers* is information about the product, so what it gets back to is a functional attribute about the product, along with the entertainment experience delivered to the viewer.

EM: But only with the sweetener. So to go back to John's hermeneutic point, the supplemental argument is that interpretation, given the properly guiding text, is fun. So one of the ways you entertain consumers—in order to get the functional message across (which is what you are in business to do) is by allowing them fun paths of interpretation. These are pleasurable and make people feel smart. One of Rajiv Batra's counterarguments to the whole line of work that David Mick and I have done¹³ ran as follows: 'True, true, but that trope stuff works best for brands that want to be positioned as smart, clever, and fun, and that is only one of several positions available in the marketplace. Metaphorical rhetoric might not be effective in those other positioning strategies.' That is a bit of a counterargument or a limiting argument to the stance that we are taking here in this conversation.

JS: If you assume that you have advertised to consumers so intensely over time that they are not only numb to the effect, but that they are actively tuning it out or counterarguing, then you pick up on parody and irony and cynicism as being their primary modes of experiencing the world, you feed that back to them. So the consumer knows they're being advertised to, but can feel they are really smarter than the ad is, and it is not really aimed at them, and so you get, 'Obey your thirst.' It is a way to advertise without apparently advertising.



Sprite "Obey Your Thirst" commercial

EM: So that is the universalistic argument, that the contemporary conditions of our culture are such that you can't play it straight. Then you do exactly what John said, and Rajiv Batra (or my straw man version of him) is wrong. It is not just a limiting case, it is not just smart, clever brands that do this, doing this is the ante to play the game.

LS: In this view, consumers are all smart and expect clever ads. Now take the Spike and Mike spots. Mars Blackmon keeps trying to attribute Michael Jordan's capabilities to his shoes, including his athletic capabilities, and the whole thing is playing off years of athlete commercials, in which the skill or strength was supposed to come from their shoes, or their *Wheaties* or whatever.

EM: The other thing that is happening is that ads are optimized for the mediated consumer. He knows who Spike is, who Mike is, who Britney Spears is, and it is simply fun to watch Britney Spears, regardless of what she is doing, she is good TV, and Spike is good TV. Linda, you have shown in your research that advertising has always been allusive, it has always drawn on the stock of cultural resources, including contemporary art styles.¹⁴ The argument would be that of late—with so many contemporary media consumers who have spent all this time in front of one or more forms of media—here the test would be to find consumers who just don't watch much TV but are otherwise identical. One argument would be that the heavily mediated ad would work just as it is supposed to with the heavily mediated consumer. Alternatively, for folks who don't watch TV, it just blows right over our heads, and fails.

MW: Not necessarily, because each of those types of consumers can interpret the ad in different ways. For instance, there is a way in which the basic story about boy-wants-to-get-girl, and short-boy-loses-girl-to-taller-boy still works for those who don't watch TV.

LS: It still works, although some would argue that you need not only to know Michael Jordan and Spike Lee to 'get' these ads, you need to know 'She's Gotta Have It,' you need to know Mars Blackmon, in short, you need to know the Spike Lee movies, too. And if you take a look at the most recent of these series—the one produced when Michael Jordan really retired—the consumer arguably has to know about Spike Lee, Mars Blackmon, and Michael Jordan, but

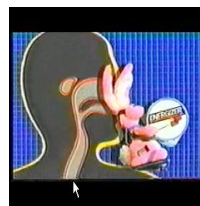
also be aware that Michael Jordan has retired *and* be familiar with an ad campaign that by this time has not run in nearly fifteen years.



Nike "Michael Jordan Tribute" commercial

JS: These ads are intertextual. They draw from different sources, but increasingly, they are intertextual with respect to other ads, with ads referring to other ads referring to other ads within the ads.

LS: And that is the perfect segue into my next example! We have theorized here that the reason we see all these parodies is that we have a consumer who will hit the clicker. Now this self-parody of the advertising genre is probably the most famous parody ad of the last 20 years. What would you make of it?



Energizer Bunny commercial

LS: And of course they just do that over and over again. You are led into thinking you are watching this same old product demo, or whatever it is. Because of course they have parodied every kind of ad there is.

EM: That particular campaign is no longer running, am I correct? I will argue that campaign stopped 5, 6, or 7 years ago, when the remote controls really got to clicking. Because it is too good a parody. I really do think it one of these silly kinds of allergy medicine ads. And I would have already clicked away before I have a chance to get the joke.¹⁵

LS: Maybe, that is interesting.

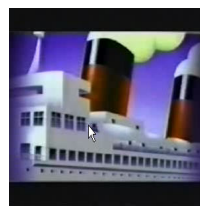
JS: And the response is to speed it up, as in the recent ads for E-Trade. You have this conventional commercial for a second, and then you get a sense that a pirate network is breaking into the broadcast, that a hacker has gotten in, and you get a message from E-trade, and it fades out. It is much quicker.

LS: Bob Garfield, who is a big critic at *Ad Age*, dislikes all these 'post-modern' ads. Energizer is the only one he really approves of.¹⁶ For some reason, he likes the joke, I guess.

EM: For its time, it captured the consumers' deepest urge to throw a hammer at that silly ad.

JS: It is a funny form of retro. It is reassuring and irritating at the same time. It is kind of retro without a purpose.

LS: I want to push ahead here for a moment, and talk about the move to the visual.



Smirnoff commercial

LS: No words. A very nice spot, I think. What do you make of it? It is one of my favorites.

MW: It is a classic structure of transformation. You know, that story doesn't need anything other than a slowly evolving picture. So, that is what they did.

EM: I didn't know till the end—and this may be an artifact of a small laptop screen—what was creating the vertical line. I was thinking, man, this is some very interesting and advanced cinematography. That is interesting, how did they do that with the camera. The transformation theme is comforting. And it keeps it from being totally out there. It is a very powerful use of camera technique. It assumes extreme levels of visual literacy. Is that a newer commercial?

LS: I think I have had it for maybe four or five years.

EM: I would argue that a commercial like that gets selected for, in a Darwinian sense, as 52-inch plasma screens and such spread. Because I bet it is an awesome visual experience on a big plasma screen.

LS: When I show this in the classroom, it is great! You know, because it is way up on the large wall screen in the lecture hall. And it is gorgeous. John, I saw you taking notes.

JS: I just went to the wrong address in long-term memory. I have been doing a lot of cruise ship consulting recently. I have to get a copy of this ad because it is useful to illustrate what another brand ought to be doing with its particular assets. It doesn't have anything to do with the Vodka category at all. It is a great story. It tells a story, it draws you in, you are making inferences all the way, and you are creating dialogue in your head. It also distorted my sense of time. I don't know how long this lasted, but to me it was 2 minutes long.

LS: It is a 60 second ad. One of the things I think is really interesting about the commercials that people pull out and talk about is that they are very often :60s. '1984,' for instance, is also a :60—in a world where no one does :60s anymore.

JS: This particular ad slows down time for me in a way that the classic cruise experience, the one that consumers actually experience, does. It takes them back in time, it slows the present moment down, and that is exactly what this vodka ad does. It is a really interesting metaphoric comparison between the two categories; I have never seen this ad before. So I am not actually discovering what the actual category is—like that Japanese Infiniti ad—until the last frame.

MW: It almost even appears as the glass rolls across the screen that it doesn't do so in a smooth way. It appears as if it pauses for a moment when the glass is in front of what is being transformed, and then it moves on, not in a way that is rapid, but just enough that you get a sense of time (actually the glass) moving slower in particular moments rather than moving smoothly.

LS: Can I posit a potentially critical reading here of this? This would not be my own reading, but the *Adbuster* reading, maybe. What happens here is that these people and these things are turned from safe, innocuous objects into dangerous objects, from a necklace to a snake for instance, by looking through an alcohol bottle. Is there a 'dark side of consumption' issue going on here?

MW: There is certainly the distortion by alcohol.

LS: When you drink, you see things differently, right?

MW: You sure do, and in the commercial...

JS: There is a Fiji ad—the woman that had that coral snake around her neck—a print ad for Fiji perfume. There were lots of other embeds like that. So, you could take the critical perspective, for sure, but I don't think you have to. I think that there are alternatives.

EM: Let me place the Smirnoff ad, not as opening a new chapter in our conversation, but as taking a different avenue on our temporary orthodoxy here, which is that ads have to be entertainment, that being hermeneutic makes ads more entertaining, that intertextuality becomes built into that entertaining. Now, we all know the term 'eye candy' in a different context. I propose that the Smirnoff ad was 'eye candy' from a pure satisfy-the-visual-perception-system sense, with truly aesthetic levels of complexity. Given 52-inch plasma screens, the 'eye candy' approach to advertising form will grow in frequency, I would predict.

LS: That would make sense.

JS: But does the term 'eye candy' diminish it? It is voluptuous, it is sensuous, and it is artistic.

EM: I am not using 'eye candy' in the dismissive, gendered, sense of the word; I am using it in the sense of 'that was real sweet and tasty to look at.'

JS: Yes, beautiful. In Armstrong's sense—Robert Plant Armstrong wrote quite eloquently about the evocative power of African art—that is, an 'affecting presence.' It wasn't like a sugar rush, or anything like that. I might look at that as an object of art unto itself. I think that it evokes the same kind of response that a work of art might. Here is the important stuff—. Every critic out there, at some point, has said that advertising is 'capitalist realism.' It is an art form that characterizes our commercial cultural ethos. And a lot of times it is a 'left-handed' recognition that the thing is art. Because primarily it is commercial, primarily it is intended to persuade. But art is intended to do that, primarily, as well. To me, this ad is a lot closer to art, the way I normally think of it, than to advertising, the way that I normally think of it.

EM: And now I am meditating on the dismissive component of my 'eye candy' choice. I certainly want to allow for the factor that an ad can be beautiful, sublime, use any high culture word that you want. On the other hand, given our thesis so far, 'eye candy,' provided that it is truly sweet candy, ought to be good enough in most cases. So the ad doesn't have to be a museum quality piece of film making to be extremely visually pleasurable. If it is sweet and tasty to look at, it will serve its marketing purpose.

JS: Why don't we just show puppies and naked women, and what, I forget what the third one is that supposedly arrests our attention.

MW: Babies, baby faces.

JS: OK, baby faces, OK so why be less efficient?

EM: OK, puppies, baby faces, these objects are conventional forms of visually satisfying stimuli. And of course puppies do appear in ads with relatively high frequency. But a puppy is a beautiful *object*. The Smirnoff ad is an example of beauty of *form*. And the problem with the beauty of the object is that the object gets routinized and kind of boring fairly quickly. 'Oh God, another puppy, ugh.' Only when the puppy gets up and bites somebody does the *form* become interesting again.

LS: Also, if I may follow up on this too, you mentioned this 'capitalist realism' thing...you are right, everybody and their third cousin has made that comment. If they will admit that advertising is art at all, they will make that 'capitalist realism' comment. But usually that call is based on the assumption that most ads are cute puppies and all the women are beautiful and all the baby faces are above average kind of thing. What we saw here was *not* capitalist realism by that definition. If anything, it is capitalist surrealism.

All: Right!

LS: So if anything, this ad—and I think there are others—has taken a jump that is not even accommodated by the old 'capitalist realism' cliché.

JS: But it created the experience of 'Smirnoffness' I guess. It had the effect of what the product is supposed to produce.

LS: True. Altered vision.

EM: The goal is the same: to promote the brand and achieve marketing goals. The means have changed. My model for this is that advertisers and consumers—since say World War II, maybe since the 1920s—have been in this *ecology* together. And they are just like predator and prey; they are co-evolving. So, first we have the 1940s and 1950s and this big boost to discretionary income. All you need is market information: buy this and here is why. I've got money and I will buy it if I receive relevant market information. And then first of all, that extra affluence quickly dies away. So now the consumer is, 'One, I've heard of that before, and two, I am not buying right now.' But under competition, ads become more and more pervasive. So now the analogy: How does it happen with dinosaurs? First, the Stegosaurus develops phony plates on his back, and next, the Tyrannosaurus Rex gets longer teeth that are stronger and harder, and around it goes. So let's say that by the 1980s, consumers have learned how to shut out all kinds of pure market information. And now the advertiser evolves to cope with that by saying, 'OK, I have to pay a price before I can get my marketing aims achieved. OK, if I can come up with a beautiful piece of cinematography that people will watch for its own sake, that is also, in all its interpretations and meanings, consistent with the brand that I have built over the years, well then I am home free.' Win, win, win. 'Consumers will watch my sweet tasty ad, I

build my brand image, and I get across my market information.'

MW: Although there is nothing in that ad that is about the brand. It is about the effects of vodka. And the experience of drinking vodka. It is a wonderful visual piece. But in terms of delivering brand meaning, I would say it falls short.

EM: I am pretty sure I disagree there. But that will make this ad a wonderful touchstone for further discussion. Because my understanding of brands—and I am not a vodka drinker, but I am old enough to have a pretty good brand image of Smirnoff—is that vodka is the ultimate parity category. And it is a category in which Smirnoff has been a leader as an upscale brand, and that position has been under threat ever since the Absolut Vodka days. So now we have in this ad all the high culture associated with cruises. This is a cruise ship, and these are people with evening dress. So, the transformation theme is generic to alcohol ads. But the upscaleness of the setting and the total portrayal reflects the Smirnoff brand and is consistent with the desired positioning. So I find it supportive of the brand meaning. But brand is one of those words that we don't all interpret the same way.

LS: And maybe the question is how many times consumers will watch it. I mean you want them to watch it multiple times, right? Not just get past the remote on the first go-round.

JS: If it is seductively beautiful enough and they talk about it, then they will, and they will say, 'That is a Smirnoff ad.'

MW: So they are watching it a second time when you know what is rolling across is Smirnoff. That it is a very different consumer experience than the process of discovering the first time through. A completely different reading.

EM: We can come back to that repetition question, too. Advertising is really distinctive among persuasion modes in our culture. It is the only persuasion mode which is, and which has to be, designed for high levels of repetition. Anywhere else, such as in a political campaign, I'd try to persuade you to my view, but it is all repetition with variation, multiple media and modes; it is different every time. Only in mass media advertising do we see the exact same artifact administered again, and again, and again. There are a lot of theories in the field about wear-in and wear-out, and the interesting question is, are hermeneutic ads more resistant to wear-out than straightforward market information? One possible argument would be that clever ads are more subject to wear-out, because once you get the joke, the joke wears out very quickly.

MW: Our previous discussion raises another question about wear-out. Because the repetition wear-out is about wear-out on just seeing that ad, but not the wear-out on hearing the comedian refer to it. That's not the same as social wear-out when you hear your friend use it yet again as a way of describing personal experience. This kind of all-visual ad is less amenable to inclusion in conversation by individuals than something that has a verbal joke or trope.

LS: I would agree with that. I think people may *try* to talk about it, but it does have the inherent disadvantage of pictures, and that is the same for music. It is hard to talk about because we are not used to talking about the pictures and the music. The properties of both are difficult for people to articulate.

JS: I think that would spark *greater* discussion because it seems ineffable.

MW: Not in the way that it can be used as a way of talking about everyday life, like the 'Where's the beef.'

LS: If it is purely visual or musical, maybe then it becomes very hard to get on the late night talk shows. People talk a lot how ads have become more visual. I think there is an equal move to the auditory, and industry observers are just not paying attention to it. I'd like to take a look at some examples so we can talk a little about that now.



Volkswagen "Rhythm on the Street" commercial

[The spot has to be shown twice for all the viewers to see the connection between the sound

and the images.]

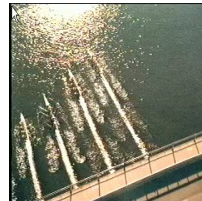
LS: The visuals go with the music. So in the context of commercial as an art form, and 'How do you talk about that when we can't even think of a word for it'—what do you think of this?

EM: I don't think I have ever seen an ad do that before. If you can do something in an ad that is pleasurable, and that has never been done before, you have to go for it. Because there is a chance that that is an ad that people will deliberately seek out. They may not succeed in capturing the ad in words. But they might very well bring it up in conversation. And now the brand has its registration leveraged as people struggle to talk about the ad.

MW: There is an experience there that is multi-sensory; it goes well beyond the visuals in the ad. The experience is one of synchronicity that at first is between the visuals and the beat of the music. The brain searches for pattern and either quickly or a bit later becomes aware of the synchronization of these two. The viewer does this along with the two people who take the role of the viewer in the ad. I got it the minute the windshield wipers flapped down the first time. It's probably because of my drumming interest. Then through the whole ad, I was with the beat and then flashed on the brand logo. Right when it came up. And so because it was invoking two senses in a simultaneous pattern, that ad delivered more as I looked at it, much more than the ads that were purely visual or were a verbal joke. This is a deeply embodied experience because the brain also begins to align the synchronization in the ad with the viewer's autonomic rhythmic system of heartbeat and breath. This ad experience, then, is no longer two-dimensional. It is multi-sensory and experienced as a rhythm within.

EM: To support what Melanie said, of all product categories, which one is pretty high on the multi-sensory aspect? Answer: sports cars and luxury cars are perfect for multi-sensory appeals. The look, the feel, the sounds, the whole thing.

JS: I agree with everything that was said. Right now there is an analog to this that doesn't work as well, because it is primarily visual. I believe it is the Cingular ad. It is the one that claims, 'We give you more bars when you need it.' So, as you move through this commercial, there are any number of visual images that resemble a histogram, showing different bar sizes. They come in different guises, in the architecture of the buildings, in the shape of the people walking by. You get this iconic histogram wherever you look. Over multiple viewings people are keeping count, tracking what they didn't see last time. And so it has a cumulative effect. But it is a cognitive game. It is a game that people play in their heads. Whereas with the Volkswagen (VW) spot, it is embodied. You are moving with it. You are taking it in, on all these sensory levels. It is more playful, more fun. It is not like a cognitive puzzle you gradually solve, where you are rewarded as you are looking for clues. It just beats *with* you.



Cingular 'Histogram' commercial

LS: I'm glad you brought up the 'cognitive game' aspect of this. Some of the 'folk theory' or 'received wisdom' is that you can't be challenging people too much cognitively with your ads. Because they won't go for it, they don't like to work. I hear and see this argument a lot in psychological research on response to advertising. And on the cultural studies side, the tendency is to argue that advertisements work either through lobotomizing people so that they don't know what is happening, or by going around their abilities to reason or resist. But I actually think at this point you could find many examples of ads that actively try to engage consumer cognition.

MW: With this VW ad, it is like the infinite regress of the old *Saturday Evening Post* magazine covers by Normal Rockwell. You just go infinitely go into it, seeing the girl on the magazine cover looking at the cover of a magazine that has on it a picture of the girl looking at the magazine, and so on. In this VW ad, you get into the car, in the opening you are pulled into the car with the couple, it's a dreary boring day in an area of town that is not really a sightseeing place. Then something starts to happen to them/us, and we are the next level of the magazine cover out. It starts to happen for us, to us. That is not work, that is a kind of—

LS: Cognitive play!

MW: —*embodied* play.

LS: John's example is more cognitive.

MW: John's example is just visual. It is not getting into the rhythm, dare I say, the heartbeat of the viewer.

EM: There are two examples on the table. There is the Cingular example John introduced and the VW ad. You could make the argument that music equals body. And if you want to create an embodied experience for the consumer, you can do that much better with music. Now, to go back to the theoretical argument, words like 'challenging' and 'ambiguous' are too uncertain in meaning. They have too many definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary. Because what one side means to say is that you can't ask consumers to work too hard. And what the other side responds is, all right, but it is OK to ask them to *play* hard. So, the Cingular ad works because it is play. The bars are also an icon of modern life. Those bars on the cell phone. They are wired in culturally. The VW is a very different 'battle move' in the struggle with the consumer. I do want to stick with Melanie's 'embodied' word. My takeaway from the discussion so far is 'Music is body.'

MW: Let's be careful what music is, because it has many components. Here, music is rhythm with very little melody. It is boom bah da, boom bah da. It is just rhythm using very few tones. And that is why it becomes body, the body's rhythm.

JS: What is typical with the category is that you shut all that stuff out. When you are in the car, it should be silent. And the only thing that you hear on the inside is music coming from your radio or CD player, whatever. Whereas here, this is letting the outside world into the car and letting you experience it.

LS: Another trend, one that Ed, along with Barbara Phillips, has documented in particular, is that advertising has been increasingly figurative.¹⁷ More tropes, fewer straightforward declarative propositions. I have a few examples. And they are just what I happen to have because the trope thing is, in fact, very pervasive. But the longest standing trope associated with advertising is hyperbole. It's Samuel Johnson's 18th century: 'Promise, large promise, is the soul of advertising,' and all that. But, in fact some people would argue that at this point you have to undersell, you know, almost, you have to not be selling. Yet, let's take a look at this one.



Tabasco Sauce commercial

EM: Now, *that* is true hyperbole. You see, the problem is, although hyperbole is an easy trope to associate with advertising, most of the advertising that might be linked to it on a first pass is simply hype, overstatement. It is not *figurative* overstatement. You have to portray the literally impossible, to get the truly figurative. And yes, if a mosquito explodes after imbibing my Tabasco infused blood, that is what I want from hot sauce, baby.

MW: In some ways that is what really makes the ad work, that there is also the hyperbole of hype. The viewer delights in the way the product benefit has been completely overstated; the viewer is simultaneously conscious of the absurdity of the overstatement and taken by its meaning. With this one, viewers know they are being taught about that product benefit, and find the experience fun.

EM: That is always the argument, that of course you do dismiss the hyperbole, but what is left is that slight shift in mental set: 'That is a really hot sauce!'

LS: It could also be that in this case, hyperbole is the counterbalancing strategy to the one that people have been talking about since at least Mountain Dew, of the un-sell, the un-hype, the understatement aesthetic—to hype by mocking hype.



Mountain Dew commercial

EM: Like John said, and it was formulated 2500 years ago: if you can figuratively overstate, then you can figuratively understate. However, I think it is a lot harder to figuratively (i.e., impossibly) understate. It is easier to get a good visual for figurative overstatement. And that is why you see true hyperbole, again, not as common as hype, but you see true hyperbole more often than true litotes (figurative understatement). Not that either one is either necessarily more or less persuasive than the other, but simply because I think that pulling off a real figurative litotes in visuals has not been done. But it would be a fascinating example if you can find one.

JS: My bet is that it would be British rather than American. It would come from a different cultural cliché. We are living in a hyperbolic culture. You have to be extreme to have it register. It is hyperbole in the first place.

LS: Let me show you two more that use essentially the same trope, but open up a more socially critical topic.



iMac commercial



Jeep commercial

JS: The iMac ad is Groucho and Harpo, Lucy, Dick Van Dyke. Comedians love this fake-mirror play.

EM: But they're not the same trope.

LS: Well, in the general sense of 'personification' they are, which is where I want to go.

MW: Except in the first one, the human is there. And the question comes up, is the computer imitating the person, is the person imitating the computer, or is the computer a person?

JS: They are both cyborgs.

MW: Or, is the person a computer? Unlike the first one, in the second one, the human figure is not present.

LS: Right, and you don't really know. There is another one that I think is the best. It is the one in which the Jeep drives up in front of the house, all full of mud, and then shakes itself like a dog. But what I am playing with is the human and nonhuman here.

MW: And I think having the human in the ads makes it both more humorous and engaging. And also more disturbing.

JS: My reaction to the Jeep spot is probably a typical Baby Boomer reaction. I just saw Bugs Bunny, tunneling under the ground. 'Which way to Albuquerque?' I went right to the cartoon.

LS: But you also went right to Harpo and Lucy on the other one.

EM: What do you mean by 'personification'?

LS: In the broad sense of animating the nonhuman, the poetic tactic of giving a thing human properties. A lot of the cultural criticism of advertising has to do with claiming ads are treating objects as if they were people and treating people as if they were objects. You can see that, especially with animation, the potential is there to animate the inanimate, but is this 'objectification'? Or personification? And do you think this is a trend, a concern?

JS: Are you saying objectification in a critical sense, as 'objectification of'?

LS: Yes, but I personally think that, in a figurative sense, personification and objectification are just opposite sides of the same metaphor. I try to teach it that way. What I think happens in cultural criticism is that people look at what is really a metaphor—and sometimes it is a personification and sometimes it is an objectification—but they come to the conclusion that we are objectifying people here. But what I think is that such critics are offering an overly literal translation of a metaphor.

JS: Anthropologically, we have always animated stuff. People have always infused stuff with life. That is what artifacts are all about. This is just the contemporary, modern, postmodern—however you want to describe it—version of animating any other artifact you would typically animate. Only we have ways to do it that are a little more magical than the magic ways of old.

MW: In terms of animating, there is another animate being involved here, the viewer. The ad is certainly not animating viewers. It is inanimating viewers to keep them from clicking the remote control, leaving the room, not watching. So, there is not only the personification/objectification issue within the ad, but outside of the ad.

EM: I can't go the social critique route on either of those. My response is that I resist putting those ads under the same node of the same reasonably shallow taxonomy. The earlier ad, Apple iMac, was a reminder to me. I've already learned this point the hard way in pictures. My position now is that there are figures, rhetorical figures, in every medium, but the differentiation of these figures, and the set of categories that applies is different, medium by medium. For example, originally, David Mick and I took the scheme and trope distinction from language and said there are scheme pictures and there are trope pictures. And Barbara Philips and others convinced me that, no, scheme is a *verbal* concept, there are no visual schemes, all visual figures are tropes. And since that isn't very helpful, we were forced to come up with a new classification system for figures in pictures.¹⁸ So that's one of the reasons why personification isn't working for me as a category here.

LS: I totally disagree but we can talk about that later.

EM: We can talk about it later. So again, I decided scheme and trope is a perfectly useful construct for language, but that pictures deserve a different categorization scheme. So I look at the Apple ad here, and the notion of echoing and mirroring we see here is, to me, entirely different when it occurs in three dimensions over time, four dimensions I guess, than it is on a two dimensional page. The difference is, with a visual contour echo, or an auditory syllable echo, we have a one-off pairing or matching. Here, we have a sequential dance of pairings. And I just don't want to give it the same name and call it rhyme, it is just different from echoing syllables, and it is specific to the TV medium. So I want a new category. 'Rhyme' doesn't help me understand it.

LS: We might speculate on that, and I would tend to go with you—in the direction I think you are going—that there are new forms of figuration and new formal genres that would evolve over time out of this trend.

EM: That is right. So a vocabulary of advertising form has to be different medium by medium, shaped in each case by the specifics of that medium's form.

LS: Over the last hour and a half of discussion, we have looked at several different, very meaningful ads that have communicated in very different ways—most using no words or few words. Ed has ended by proposing that there may even be new ways of figuration that come out of this. Now figuration is generally thought to be one of the most complex linguistic categories. So to me, our conversation now comes to the question, 'Are there new forms of literacy that are emerging out of this 'postmodern turn'?' And if so, do they have the same social values as traditional literacy?

MW: On the latter question no, and on the former question yes. Clearly there are other forms of competency that co-opt the term literacy, such as computer literacy, cultural literacy, media literacy, even emotional literacy. So there is a kind of competence that emerges from the postmodern turn in advertising, and it can certainly be described by co-opting the term literacy with some adjective, maybe advertising literacy. But that is clearly not what has conventionally been referred to as literacy, which is the ability to abstract meaning from written information in order to develop the skills of logical inference and critical thinking that are valued within a particular culture at a particular point in time.¹⁹ Yes, a form of decoding is emerging that is a competency enacted within a particular setting, but I don't see in the evidence that I have read any indication that it develops or contributes to the ability to draw logical inferences or to engage in critical thinking that is valued within a culture. It may develop a competency in deriving multi-layered and intertextual meanings from ads, and that competency certainly has some cultural cachet attached to it. But I think critical thinking is very different from, and some would argue even antithetical to, that competency.

JS: Which is why Plato wanted to ban poets from the Republic. Because they used the language to do things that you are saying language shouldn't do.

EM: As soon as you pose the question, 'Is this a new form of literacy?' I think that is inconsistent with what Melanie is arguing. Literacy is a word that means a certain thing. It has already been distinguished from numeracy. So now we really have to talk about 'sign-acy' or 'picture-acy' and so on. You have to ask, is there a decoding skill that is specific to the genre, and which can be distinguished in terms of levels of skill and ability, which is a parallel to a literacy, to a numeracy. I want to ask, is it useful to let 'literacy' have the imperialistic role, so that there is visual literacy, and rhythmical literacy, etc., or can we just let literacy be what it was, which is literacy-with-words, and have some other categories of sign-acy? This is the second part of the question. I do believe that today's media-immersed young person has some sign-acy skills that are new on the ground. Whether those will prove to have social value in the great USA, we don't know. At the moment these just help you to enjoy TV more, which doesn't have too much social value, but give us another century or two. It is hard to say how important sign-acy might become.

JS: Social value to me presumes only that it is creating sociality. These are all forms of communication, even if they are in different keys and registers. They may even be looked at as different languages, but I think they are—to the extent that they all facilitate communication and bring people into association—social.

MW: But going back to Putnam's findings in *Bowling Alone*, the amount of time that people spend truly socializing with others and being engaged within their community has declined over the past several decades. I think he's fairly convincing in linking that to increased amount of time spent in front of a screen. Of course, some of that time spent in front of a screen is spent with someone else on a screen elsewhere in communication with each other, and some of it is spent in the same room with someone else and both are viewing the screen. But, for the most part, he makes the empirical argument that screen time is not socializing time or civic engagement time.

LS: To echo John's first response, these were exactly the same criticisms that were made, first of writing, and then of print—that they separated people because they allowed you to send messages that had a certain permanency in time and could transcend geographic distances.²⁰ That you could mail a letter and so remove the occasion of communicating face-to-face.

JS: Notions of sociality change over time. That is the nature of human interaction. Some things stay the same but—

LS: —it is also the definition of space. I would argue that if you write, instead of talk, maybe in that one space, the technology reduces the social interaction by separating writer from reader. But writing technology also expands the social space by allowing a person to 'talk' to people at a distance—even people at a far remove in time—with whom you could not communicate otherwise.

MW: What gets left in the dust here is the notion of the impact on the ability to make logical inferences and engage in critical thinking.

JS: I don't accept those as premises for communication of any kind. I think those are only one set of uses that language has. I almost want to say I have to think about it longer, but my guess is this set would be in the minority of uses toward which language has been turned.

EM: That is one of the reasons that I want to let literacy be literacy. I agree with John about the small place of logic in language use. Historically, literacy has also meant that ability for logical, critical thinking. I want to just leave open the question of, once the new sign-acy is established or stabilized, will it lead to new forms of skilled, mental effort, as literacy did, or will it be simply

be a trap? Maybe as you get better at being a mediated consumer, all that equips you to do is to enjoy ever more hours of TV per day. I don't know.

Notes

¹[View chart](#). Source: McQuarrie, Edward, "Differentiating the Pictorial Element in Advertising: A Rhetorical Framework," paper presented at the Visual Marketing Conference, University of Michigan, June 2005.

²The earliest Absolut ads used a simple, consistent graphic. A dark, austere background behind a backlit bottle. A two-word headline below the image, always all-caps: Absolut Something. Originally, the plain bottle would be slightly altered or augmented in such a way as to reflect the 'Something.' So, a halo would appear over the bottle for 'Absolut Perfection,' while a gift-wrapped bottle would read 'Absolut Anticipation.' Roses were thrown at 'Absolut Bravo.' Readers learned a schema in which the basic elements could be understood as an invitation to solve a playful cognitive puzzle.

The challenge increased over time as the pictures became more complex. Though discerning the bottle shape continued to be the perceptual centerpiece, the image was itself no longer stark and simple. In the cities campaign, for instance, 'Absolut Seattle' required that readers find the bottle in droplets of rain; in 'Absolut LA,' the bottle was a swimming pool.

Absolut's contact with art began with an ad by Andy Warhol, was elaborated through the work of other artists like Keith Haring, was extended into other artistic fields such as architecture and fashion design, and finally reached its apotheosis as the advertiser became a sponsor of art shows and books of its own. —LMS

³The Benetton campaign began with upbeat, colorful images of people in bright clothing, clearly chosen to represent a variety of ethnic backgrounds. It was almost an 'It's a Small World, After All' statement in support of cultural diversity—hardly the kind of campaign that would invite controversy.

The imagistic arguments for racial tolerance developed into an interesting set of black, white, and color visual metaphors, in which, for instance, a parrot sat on the back of a zebra.

Some of these, like the one of a black man and a white man chained together or of a black woman nursing a white baby, ran into controversy, mostly because the advertiser seemed unaware of the historical specifics of racial strife in some parts of the world.

Eventually, the photographs depicted environmental and human disasters all over the world in a manner that, to some tastes, ran too far over the line between news reportage and advertising. —LMS

⁴Sherry, John F. (2003), Teaching Old Brands New Tricks: Retro Branding and the Revival of Brand Meaning (with Robert Kozinets and Stephen Brown), *Journal of Marketing*, 67 (3), 19-33.

⁵Wendy's 'Where's the Beef?' 1983.

Perhaps more than any other slogan, jingle, or image in late 20th century advertising, the 'Where's the Beef?' challenge originally made by actress Clara Peller in a Joe Sedelmaier commercial for Wendy's became part of the American vernacular. Late night talk show host Johnny Carson used it in his monologue and, perhaps most famously, Democratic candidate Walter Mondale used it to taunt his rival in the 1984 primaries, Gary Hart. Though the campaign's budget was only \$8 million—less than 10% of what the 'House of the Big Bun' was spending—the ad's message was magnified by the way the line was repeated by Americans in situations from national politics to Little League sports. —LMS

⁶Putnam, Robert D. (2000), *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, New York: Simon and Schuster.

⁷Sherry, John F. (1987), 'Advertising as a Cultural System,' In *Marketing and Semiotics: New Directions in the Study of Signs for Sale*, ed. Jean Umiker Sebeok, Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 441-461.

⁸Marlboro 'Foggy Morning' 1967.

Many commentators have attributed the success of the Marlboro campaign to the image of the cowboy. But in the 1950s and early 1960s, when this brand began to feature cowboys in a campaign aimed broadly at 'rugged masculinity,' cowboy images were not distinctive. Other cigarettes used them, as did alcoholic beverages, leather goods, and other products. Cowboys were all the rage on television—most of the top shows were Westerns (*Bonanza*, *Rawhide*, *Have Gun Will Travel*, *Wyatt Earp*, *Gunsmoke*, *The Rifleman*, *The Virginian*, and so on). So there is no reason to conclude that the use of a cowboy image was, by itself, the fuel for building one of the world's biggest brands. Instead, it has always seemed to me that this campaign is an excellent lesson in the importance of *how* a campaign is executed. The cinematography of 'Foggy Morning'—which was the breakthrough spot for the campaign—is so evocative of an outdoor morning in the West, you can practically feel the mist on your face. The setting, the lighting, and even the acting (by real cowboys), were of noticeably higher quality than other television commercials of the late 1960s. I have always felt, however, that it was the music, more than any other single element, that made this campaign. The rolling tones of the 'Theme from the Magnificent Seven' are still enough to make you want to saddle up and ride the range. —LMS

⁹Volkswagen 'Snow Plow' 1963.

Though popular memory would have it otherwise, the famous Volkswagen campaign of the 1960s had no hippies and no references to 'flower power.' It was almost entirely a print campaign: an elegant graphic design, a softly witty voice, and a penchant for understatement and irony contrasted starkly with the flashy, excessive auto campaigns of the day. There were only a handful of television commercials, and the most famous one, 'Snow Plow,' ran only eight months. Yet this one spot, with its bare-bones proposition and minimalist irony, has stood at the top of the 'best' lists for decades. Today, when irony and understatement are common in advertising, my students have a hard time understanding why this spot captured the audience the way that it did. The context of the spot—the exaggerated American car commercials provide an essential backdrop for the entire VW effort—makes all the difference in understanding how and why it worked. —LMS

¹⁰Alka-Seltzer 'I Can't Believe I Ate the Whole Thing' 1971.

Though the Alka-Seltzer commercials produced by Jack Tinker & Partners and Doyle Dane Bernbach are considered classic 'Creative Revolution' campaigns, the spots that were most completely assimilated into the vernacular, 'I Can't Believe I Ate the Whole Thing' and 'Try It, You'll Like It,' were made later. Mary Wells Lawrence, who was a key player in the early campaign ('No Matter What Shape Your Stomach's In'), reports in her autobiography, *A Big Life*, that she lured Miles Laboratories to Wells Rich Greene in the 1970s with a promise to produce a campaign comprised of 30 second commercials, rather than the :60s that were the norm at the time. So the move was based on media, not creative. Nevertheless, the first two spots to come out of Wells Rich Greene were not only brilliant little :30s that saved money and built sales, but had lines that quickly appeared in ordinary American conversations. And some not so ordinary: George McGovern, accepting the 1972 Democratic nomination, opened with 'I can't believe I won the whole thing.' —LMS



Alka-Seltzer "Try It, You'll Like It" commercial

Source: Archives Center, National Museum of American History

¹¹**Literacy** is defined as a continuous, multidimensional indicator of proficiency in using written language, with its higher levels reflecting an ability to draw logical inferences and think critically.

Basic Literacy is defined as the ability to read. It is often used to refer to a dichotomy that separates those who can read (called literates) from those who cannot (illiterates).

Less than 1% of U.S. adults are completely illiterate, that is, unable to read or write in any language.

Functional Literacy is defined as the level of ability to use the written information needed for full functioning in a society.

About 21% of U.S. adults operate at the lowest of 5 levels of functional literacy; they have rudimentary reading and writing skills. They can locate identical words of a key fact within a newspaper article, but they cannot draft a letter explaining an error on their credit card bill and cannot extract information from text that would allow them to determine the price difference between two items. The bottom half of people in Level 1 functional literacy can read at about a third-grade equivalent or below.

Level 3 (of the 5 levels) is the current benchmark for functional literacy in the U.S. Roughly 46% of U.S. adults are below this benchmark level for functional literacy.

For sources for these definitions and figures, and for additional information on literacy, see Wallendorf, Melanie (2001), 'Literally Literacy,' *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27 (March), 505-511.

¹²Sherry, John F. (2002), 'A Role for Poetry in Consumer Research' (with John Schouten), *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29 (1), 218-234.

¹³McQuarrie, Edward F. and David Glen Mick (1992), 'On Resonance: A Critical Pluralistic Inquiry into Advertising Rhetoric,' *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19 (September), 180-197.

_____ (1996), 'Figures of Rhetoric in Advertising Language,' *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (March), 424-437.

_____ (1999), 'Visual Rhetoric in Advertising: Text-Interpretive, Experimental, and Reader-Response Analyses,' *Journal of Consumer Research*, 26 (June), 37-54.

¹⁴Scott, Linda M. (1994), "Images in Advertising: The Need for a Theory of Visual Rhetoric," *Journal of Consumer Research*, September, 252-273.

_____ (1993), "Spectacular Vernacular: Literacy and Commercial Culture in the Postmodern Age," *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 10 (June), 251-275.

_____ (1991), "Playing with Pictures: Postmodernism, Poststructuralism, and Advertising Visuals," *Advances in Consumer Research*, ed. John F. Sherry and Brian Sternthal, 19, 596-612.

¹⁵The Energizer Bunny, which has been visible only as a silhouette in the advertising of the past three years, returned to commercials in January 2005. This time, the bunny is being positioned as an inspirational symbol for all those who "don't give up." Thus, even this erstwhile product-performance symbol has now been reoriented to reflect human experience, again suggesting a shift from product to person in the content of advertising. (Source: Howard, Theresa, 'Energizer salutes 'those who never quit,' *USA TODAY*, 1/9/2005.)

¹⁶Garfield, Bob (2003), *And Now A Few Words from Me: Advertising's Leading Critic Lays Down the Law, Once and For All*, Chicago: Crain.

¹⁷See reprint in this issue of *Advertising & Society Review*: Phillips, Barbara J. and Edward F. McQuarrie (2002), "The Development, Change, and Transformation of Rhetorical Style in Magazine Advertisements 1954-1999," *Journal of Advertising*, 31(4), 1-13.

¹⁸Phillips, Barbara J. and Edward F. McQuarrie (2004), 'Beyond Visual Metaphor: A New Typology of Visual Rhetoric in Advertising,' *Marketing Theory*, 4 (March/June), 113-136.

¹⁹See Wallendorf, Melanie (2001), 'Literally Literacy,' *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27 (March), 505-512.

²⁰See reprint in this issue of *Advertising & Society Review*: Scott, Linda M. (1993), "Spectacular Vernacular: Literacy and Commercial Culture in the Postmodern Age," *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 10 (June), 251-275.

Edward F. McQuarrie is a Professor of Marketing at the Leavey School of Business, Santa Clara University, in California's Silicon Valley. He received his Ph.D. in social psychology from

the University of Cincinnati in 1985. His research focuses on advertising, using concepts from rhetoric and semiotics. He also studies qualitative research techniques and market research appropriate to technology products. He has written two books, *Customer Visits: Building a Better Market Focus* and *The Market Research Toolbox: A Concise Guide for Beginners*, and published articles in a wide variety of marketing journals.

[Linda M. Scott](#) is Associate Professor of Advertising, of Art & Design, of Gender and Women's Studies, and of Communications Research at the University of Illinois. She has Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English (University of Texas 1974, 1976), an MBA (SMU 1978), and a Ph. D. in Communications (University of Texas 1991). Scott has published extensively on the formal properties of advertising, including music, images, and drama. She has edited a book on commercial imagery, called *Persuasive Imagery: A Consumer Response Perspective*, and has authored a book on fashion, imagery, and feminism, called *Fresh Lipstick: Redressing Fashion and Feminism*. She has recently become editor of *Advertising & Society Review* and is a member of the board of the Advertising Educational Foundation.

[John F. Sherry, Jr.](#) joined the Notre Dame Marketing faculty in 2005 as the Herrick Professor of Marketing and Chairman of the Department. For the two previous decades, he was a member of the Marketing Department at Northwestern University's Kellogg School. He is an anthropologist (Ph.D. Univ. Illinois, 1983) who studies the socio-cultural and symbolic dimensions of consumption. Sherry, a Fellow of the American Anthropological Association, has consulted, researched, taught and lectured around the globe and has won awards for his poetry as well as his scholarly work. His books include *Contemporary Marketing and Consumer Behavior: An Anthropological Sourcebook*, *Servicescapes: The Concept of Place in Contemporary Markets*, and *Time, Space and the Market: Retroscapes Rising*.

[Melanie Wallendorf](#) is Soldwedel Professor of Marketing in the Eller College of Management at The University of Arizona. She received an M.S. in Sociology in 1977 and a Ph.D. in Marketing in 1979, both from the University of Pittsburgh. Professor Wallendorf has published extensively on the socio-cultural aspects of consumption, including consumption as an expression of normative political ideology, the links between literacy and consumption, the role of possessions in constituting social classes and ethnic groups, the meanings of favorite possessions and collections, the processes that define particular possessions as sacred or profane, and the impact of social ties on the diffusion of innovations. Her research has been featured in a number of popular press articles in *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *American Demographics*, *Fortune*, and in interviews on *Voice of America* and on WABC National Radio in New York. Her research has been funded by the Marketing Science Institute, the Arizona Disease Control Research Commission of the State of Arizona, and the Office of Earth Science at NASA.

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