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Theory in Culture: Toward a Psychoanalytic Criticism of Advertising

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THEORY IN CULTURE:
TOWARD A PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM OF ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT

The role of advertising in postmodern culture is far more than an impetus to capitalist economy; from its first full flowering in the 1920s, it has addressed its human subjects in ways that exceed considerations of monetary exchange. Advertising has come not only to sell people what they desire – it has also materially changed their desire, and thus the people themselves in the process. Certainly 'individuals' have become 'consumers' – but the problem is greater than this. Advertising, with its undeniable aspects of fantasy, often stands in complete opposition to critical thinking. This examination explores advertising's effects on the individual through the critical lenses of ideology and psychoanalysis, concluding that although ideology is a relevant methodology, it remains incomplete. Psychoanalytic theory, on the other hand, provides multiple avenues of interpreting how advertising addresses both the conscious and the unconscious mind, and offers a potential methodology for personal resistance and social change.

INDEX WORDS: Advertising, critical theory, psychoanalytic theory, Marxist theory, ideology, Master's thesis, Georgia State University, Robin L. Bellinson

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I dedicate this work to Bert Bellinson, my lifetime partner and best friend,

and to my son Michael Tonne Bellinson;

my success would not have been possible without the one,

nor as sweet without the other.

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CHAPTER 1:   INTRODUCTION

> *To consume in America is not to buy, it is to dream.*
>
> --Don DeLillo, *Americana*

This work is about advertising and the pursuit of a certain kind of truth (although there is very rarely such a thing as "truth in advertising"). This truth I seek is more like a Nietzschean *unconditional will to truth* in both the senses he explains – "the will not to allow oneself to be deceived" as well as "the will not to deceive" (Nietzsche 344). For advertising is, above all, a great deceiver as well as a great communicator – and like all deceivers will edit, eclipse, and enshadow as it explicates, reveals, and enlightens. In seeking to focus a critical light on advertising, it is indeed possible both to be deceived and to deceive – and even noted scholars of advertising fall prey to this possibility even as they attempt to lay its meanings bare.

Advertising has become so much a part of the American landscape people barely notice its ubiquity; although ads sometimes succeed in grabbing attention, they are more often consciously ignored. As of the recent turn of the century, twelve billion display ads, three million radio commercials, and 200,000 television commercials reached American consumers *per day* (Flood 20). Further, when taking into account the co-opting of private spaces by advertising – the stitched and screen-printed brand logos on clothing, the gleaming chrome marques on automobiles, and the innumerable informal posters that litter the urban environment, for example – most Americans are exposed to 3,000 individual ad messages per day (Twitchell 2). Elaine Scarry notes, "…advertisements have a complexity and density of

texture that results from the pressure to accomplish so much so quickly… as a result, they contain themes and counterthemes, overlays of imagistic connotations, subterranean narratives, and excavatable surprises" (Scarry 19). Given the proliferation both of messages and meanings, there is little possibility of anyone actively registering and processing all the information, representations, and discourses advertising contains.

It would be more pleasant to believe that the system wasn't designed this way; that the twin terrors of sheer ad volume and polyvalence are simply a result of unbridled capitalist growth. In truth, though, it *was* a matter of design. The flowering of the advertising industry in the 1920s was rife with manufacturing and advertising executives colluding with each other to convert individuals into voracious consumers; the focus of a significant amount of such work went specifically toward a scientific analysis of consumer behavior to foster advertising effectiveness.[1] Although much of the work done then and in the following decades focused on cognitive behavior, the ads of the period also began to foreshadow the image-laden messages of today. Stuart Ewen notes, "…many corporations simultaneously employed a social scientific apparatus; for monitoring and analyzing mass psychology; for studying – among other things – the impact of images on the mind of the consumer" (Ewen All Consuming Images 47).

Certainly individual behavior has changed within the advertising audience over the intervening decades. A few examples are in order: consider that attention spans have decreased as quick-cut editing and 15-second messages pack a full meal into a fast-food

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[1] One of the most influential practitioners of psychological analysis was Edward Bernays, Sigmund Freud's nephew; by applying some of his uncle's theories to commercial communications he earned the sobriquet "father of public relations." His collected papers are available for research, and were the basis for his own memoir, *Autobiography of an Idea* (1965).

sound bite[2]; that the desirability of a particular logo often ultimately displaces the desire for actual material product attributes; and that everywhere, Americans appear to believe ever more strongly in advertising's promises of freedom and individuality – in spite of the fact that they purport to gain access to such individuality via their purchases of mass-market products produced by wage-slaves and sold by the millions. At the same time, most people will insist that advertising has little or no influence over them – that they make their product selections based on need and product attributes – yet their refrigerators, pantries, medicine cabinets, closets, and garages are filled with brand-named evidence to the contrary. As feminist ad critic Jean Kilbourne notes, advertising is most profoundly about self deception… "When [Victoria's Secret] paraded bra-and-panty-clad models across the TV screen for a mere thirty seconds, one million people turned away from the game [the Super Bowl] to log on to the Website promoted in the ad. No influence?" (Kilbourne 32-34).

Our advertising environment has become a seductive sea of sound and fury. Regardless of how many consumers insist that these messages are 'signifying nothing' to them, the billions of dollars spent on advertising each year would certainly dry up if there were no significant return – in other words, the ads do indeed influence us, and significantly enough to justify the staggering corporate investment they represent.[3]

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[2] Often erroneously called the "MTV effect," quick-cut edits in music videos may have been used to create a new art form – but it was one that was pioneered by commercial advertising directors working against the strictures of the brevity (and rising expense) of advertising time; the standard media purchase has fallen progressively from ninety seconds to one minute to thirty seconds over the past forty years; today the fifteen-second spot is rapidly becoming the norm.

[3] According to TNS Media Intelligence, a leading provider of data to the advertising industry, total U.S. ad spending is projected to reach $152.3 billion in 2006, an increase of 5.4% over 2005 expenditures.

In his authoritative *Advertising the American Dream*, Roland Marchand discusses how early advertising operated like a language:[4] it needed to be learned in order to participate in the new society of mass consumption, and advertisers wasted no time schooling their audiences. Although these audiences may have believed they were making their purchasing decisions based on logic (such as the historical moment in which advertising often took a form such as "four out of five dentists recommend Crest" – which, at least on some level, appealed to a sense of *logos*) – Marchand asserts that from the beginning, to learn such a language "was to experience a transformation – to acquire new perspectives, accept new assumptions, and undergo an initiation into new modes of thinking" (Marchand 335). Although he frames this "language of advertising" as a learned language of modern urban consumption, Marchand clearly indicates there is more at stake than the mere acquisition of a vocabulary of consumption.

In the 1960s, advertising giant Leo Burnett moved the industry irrevocably beyond the idea of cognitive-based advertising. His insistence on focusing on images, rather than ad copy, changed advertising forever. According to a TIME Magazine profile of the pioneer as one of the top 100 people of the twentieth century, "Burnett was obsessed with finding visual triggers that could effectively *circumvent consumers' critical thought*." Though an advertising message might be rejected consciously, he maintained that it was accepted subliminally. Through the "thought force" of symbols, he said, "we absorb it through our pores, without knowing we do so. By osmosis" (Ewen "Builders and Titans: Leo Burnett", emphasis added).

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[4] This bears no relation to Lacan's concept that "the unconscious is structured like a language."

Further evidence is plentiful from the side of advertising theorists and practitioners. One of the most explicit examples comes from perhaps the most influential text ever produced on creating successful advertising, written in the 1980s: <u>Positioning: the Battle for Your Mind</u>. This short treatise exhorts advertisers to appeal to the mind of the consumer: "Positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect… The good old advertising days are gone forever and so are the words". Their emphasis on the function of words in advertising speaks directly to the slipping of the signified under the signifier:[5] "The meanings are not in the words. They are in the people using the words… a word has no meaning until someone uses it and fills it with meanings… You must select the words which trigger the meanings you want to establish. Language is the currency of the mind. To think conceptually, you manipulate words. With the right choice of words, you can influence the thinking process itself" (Ries and Trout 201-03). This is not a cognitive strategy: it speaks directly to Lacan's Symbolic order. It is also now firmly and permanently entrenched, a *de rigueur* practice in the creation of advertising.[6]

Although positioning as espoused by Ries and Trout continues to play a major role in advertising today, there are newer (and troubling) strategies in market research. Take, for example, the web site copy from successful marketing agency "Semiotic Solutions:"

Semiotics is unlike almost all other forms of market research. Its findings are based on state-of-the-art cultural and communication theory, not on consumer

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[5] See page 41 on Lacan's use of the Saussurean concepts of signifier/signified; also see Appendix.

[6] This does not mean that advertising creatives sit around thinking about how to address the unconscious mind, regardless of any actual result. They see positioning only as a business strategy, like target marketing: just another tool in the everyday toolbox of advertising. As Haineault and Roy note, "we interviewed a number of advertisers. In general, they told us very little, saying almost without exception that they were simply following their "intuitions" (4).

opinion. In cultural theory, consumers are not independent spirits, articulating

their own original opinions and each one making individual buying decisions.

Instead, consumers are products of the popular culture in which they live. They

are 'constructed' by the communications of that culture (the discourse of TV,

films, newspapers, books, magazines, advertising, etc). Consumers are thus not

prime causes; they are cultural effects. So to find out what's really going on in

the marketplace, the semiotician begins by looking beyond consumers into the

cultural context that surrounds and informs them, in order to evaluate all the

forces at work. (Semiotic Solutions)

Although this marketing company never specifically mentions psychoanalytic theories, their

day to day work involves appropriating cultural metaphor and metonymy in the service of

advertising, a practice underpinned by Saussurean theory – the same theory that allowed

Jacques Lacan to reinterpret Freud so productively. When it comes to the battle for the mind,

the barbarians are not at the gate – they are in our heads, manipulating us at a level below

conscious thought.

There is more than theoretical direct evidence that Burnett's vision of "circumventing

critical thought" and appealing to the psyche has been fully realized. Consider the following

excerpts from recent literature:[7]

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[7] Most of these works contain elements of science fiction; I find it no coincidence that advertising arises in this context. I might also note how very often (see Orwell's *1984*, Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, Gibson's *Neuromancer*) science fiction has proved prescient in matters concerning the social implications of capitalist economies.

From Don DeLillo's <u>Americana</u>:

The perfect example of the anti-image in advertising is the slice-of-life

commercial… But the anti-image is being presented much too literally. The old

themes. The stereotyped dialogue. It needs a touch of horror, some mad laughter

from the graveyard. One of these days some smart copywriter will perceive the

true inner mystery of America and develop an offshoot to the slice-of-life. The

slice-of-death." (DeLillo 337)

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From William Gibson's <u>Pattern Recognition</u>*:*

"The heart is a muscle," Bigend corrects. "You 'know' in your limbic brain.

The seat of instinct. The mammalian brain. Deeper, wider, beyond logic. That

is where advertising works, not in the upstart cortex. What we think of as 'mind'

is only a sort of jumped-up gland, piggybacking on the reptilian brainstem and

the older, mammalian mind, but our culture tricks us into recognizing it as all of

consciousness. The mammalian spreads continent-wide beneath it, mute and

muscular, attending its ancient agenda. And makes us buy things…. [A]ll truly

viable advertising addresses that older, deeper mind, beyond language and

logic." (Gibson 69)

  **

From Margaret Atwood's <u>Oryx and Crake</u>*:*

His hair was getting sparser around the temples, despite the six-week AnooYoo

follicle-regrowth course he'd done. He ought to have known it was a scam – he'd

put together the ads for it – but they were such good ads he'd convinced even

himself. (Atwood 252)

      **

From Don DeLillo's <u>White Noise</u>:

"You have to learn how to look. You have to open yourself to the data. TV offers

incredible amounts of psychic data. It opens ancient memories of world birth, it

welcomes us into the grid, the network of little buzzing dots that make up the

picture pattern. There is light, there is sound. I ask my students, 'What more do

you want?' Look at the wealth of data concealed in the grid, in the bright

packaging, the jingles, the slice-of-life commercials, the products hurtling out of

darkness, the coded messages and endless repetitions, like chants, like mantras.

'Coke is it. Coke is it. Coke is it.' *The medium practically overflows with sacred*

formulas…" (DeLillo 51)

To these postmodern works of fiction, I add one from a work of creative nonfiction.

Caroline Knapp's <u>Appetites</u>, on feminine identity and anorexia, offers an incisive summary

of the current onslaught of advertising:

      …in the early eighties, the visual image had begun to supplant text as culture's

      primary mode of communication, a radical change because images work so

      differently than words: They're immediate, they hit you at levels way beneath

      intellect, they come fast and furious… Today, the image on the average TV

      commercial can change as quickly as once every 1.5 seconds, an assaulting

      speed, one that's impossible to thoroughly process or integrate. When images

strike you at that rate, there's no time to register the split-second reactions they

generate, no time to analyze them or put them in their proper place; they get

wedged inside, insidious little kernels that come to feel like truth. (Knapp 97)

Perhaps this last is a direct result of Burnett's legacy to postmodern advertising. His

advocacy of the image helped create these insidious kernels of truth. As Williamson states,

"there is no way of getting at [advertising's] use of images and symbols. And it is precisely

these that do the work of the ad anyway" (Williamson 175). Although ads appear in ways

that are typically clever, humorous, informative, carefree, or cynical, they have a motive

force of operation that exceeds a straightforward "information-evaluation-purchase decision"

line.

Society treats these images as clutter, as background, as unimportant: just an ad, just a

commercial, just a billboard. Individuals don't engage ads critically, because they don't view

them as having much rational value – in fact, they tend to devalue them at best as a fad, at

worst as cultural rubbish.[8] Yet Americans also *love* their advertising – Super Bowl

commercials get substantial airtime before, during, and after the event; each year a new

highlight reel of America's favorite commercials is shown in prime time; and a substantial

number of books on advertising are histories of the field.[9] This clearly indicates a deeply

ambivalent relationship.

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[8] This notion of advertising's perceived valuelessness is an important concept that provides a direct relationship between advertising and Freudian dream theory; see Chapter 5.

[9] Many histories of advertising are available, both comprehensive and related to a specific time period or field of study (sociology, economics, culture, image, persuasion, automobiles, billboards, and more). For a detailed bibliography, see Richard W. Pollay, Information Sources in Advertising History (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979).

Over the last four decades, Americans have become hyper literate in advertising's idioms (Marchand's advertising 'language'); the ad industry has responded by further condensing and accelerating its messages, in large part leaving rational and critical faculties far behind. Of even greater concern is the now prevalent "silencing" of advertising. Words today play a far lesser role in advertising than do images, motion, and music (although the part they do play continues to be very significant, in that their force of action is no longer focused on reason). My hypothesis is that advertising, and particularly postmodern advertising, rarely bothers to aim its appeals to the *cognitive* mind – its target is the unthinking, uncritical, always-aware *unconscious* mind. Further, I believe advertising as practiced today actually stands in opposition to thinking itself, that it appeals as much to unconscious psychic organization, to the roots of individual subjectivity, as any process of reason.

It is common knowledge that advertising intentionally seduces and cajoles, tickles and teases, winks and nudges; by its very *unseriousness* it represents a place where critical thought is considered, well, *unthinkable*. This unthinkable position is occupied, not by a faceless "millions of Americans," but by almost everyone I have ever met. Being bombarded by thousands of commercial messages a day is numbing – who has time to criticize, or even think about them at all? Most of us have been reared uncritically in a sea of advertising that enveloped us before we could say "Trix are for kids."

With advertising so omnipresent as to feel as invisible as wallpaper, and so tied to images rather than words, our inattention may be understandable. Yet are we are actually listening, all the same? Are these images indeed circumventing our critical awareness to perform some unseen operation of persuasion? Are we affected or changed by messages we

consciously refuse to entertain? In short, is advertising masking a social problem of unbridled consumption – or creating one of its own?

In 2000, Richard Pollay explored this topic in a survey study entitled "The Distorted Mirror: Reflections on the Unintended Consequences of Advertising." His discussion gathers and organizes the thoughts and theories of a range of scholars to outline the shape of advertising's consequences and demonstrate a need (and a moral imperative) for critical research. His study examines what advertising may be doing to us as individuals or as a community; wonders if it aids or impedes rational thought, asks how it redirects our aspirations, or channels or prompts our emotions, and assesses how it may alter our values and morality. He states that "to question these is to cast doubt on the social value of advertising," and then proceeds to prove that such doubt is well founded, noting that "what may be shocking… is the veritable absence of any perceived positive influence" (Pollay "The Distorted Mirror" 9). The strength of his argument is buttressed by the quality of his sources, many of whom are well-recognized authorities in their fields: Marshall McLuhan, Erich Fromm, John Kenneth Galbraith, Margaret Mead, and Daniel Boorstin, to name but a few. His findings are fascinating. With few exceptions, even advocates of advertising acknowledge that advertising presents a range of serious social problems: that because it is professionally executed, pervasive, and relentless, its unintended effects have profound social, political, cultural, moral, and spiritual implications (Pollay "The Distorted Mirror"). Clearly, advertising's power extends far beyond economic exchange value.

Taking the idea of advertising as a problem a step further, Pollay's assertions affirm my own belief that advertising has come not only to sell people what they desire – it has also materially changed their desire, and thus the people themselves in the process. Certainly

'individuals' have become 'consumers' – but the problem is greater than this. Not unlike taking the family to Disneyland, advertising requires a certain suspension of disbelief. After all, doughboys do not really giggle; elves do not bake cookies in a hollow tree. On the other hand, now that the sheer flow of advertising messages has far exceeded saturation level, our suspension of disbelief is in danger of becoming permanent. Clearly, no one has the ability to be critical of every ad they see.

Might it be possible, however, for individuals to focus less on the ephemeral work of advertising, and address instead what *effects* they may experience, and why? Drawing on what I believe are the most relevant critical tools available, I will attempt a limited and theoretical spotlight that may, in the future, offer a means to realize and critique the pervasive power that lies beneath advertising; further, it may set the stage for a possibility of a future praxis that offers a meaningful resistance to advertising.

This proves easier said than done: the theoretical literature that casts a critical eye on advertising is relatively thin (particularly in relation to the ever-rising tide of market research on how to create advertising and increase its effectiveness). Indeed, although many critical texts attack advertising messages as case-by-case examples, and some major theorists have addressed the issue, few have dwelt upon it for longer than an essay; most of the several major works that productively critique advertising's cultural role were copyrighted a decade or more ago, and few full-length works have been produced in this century.[10] Even textbooks that feature assignments on a critical reading and interpretation of ads typically serve this

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[10] Only twenty-nine full length scholarly books have been published since 1996 on cultural, psychological, and social aspects of advertising (as listed in the Library of Congress); of these, only eighteen appeared after the year 2000. Of these, only *one* addresses advertising via psychoanalytic principles. It is also interesting to note that British, French, and Canadian authors, not Americans, wrote some of the most foundational critiques of advertising (the psychoanalytic work's authors are Canadian).

only as an appetizer to the main dish of teaching students to critique the (ostensibly more significant) television program or film. Because advertising is ephemeral, literally disappearing in seconds, any critical analysis of it tends also to be relatively short; having once performed such a critique, most scholars apparently consider repeating the exercise to be of little value.

This gives rise to an astonishingly simple question: If we are each subjected to thousands of advertising symbols and messages each day, if we can remember the commercials as readily as the programming surrounding them, if we can place or define moments of our lives through ad slogans and jingles, if advertising can bring us back to childhood, bolster our feelings of self-autonomy, make us feel young or powerful or independent or free – then why has advertising not become a far more substantial site for sustained critical study? Thousands of scholars toil in the service of other projects of social critique: feminist theory, queer theory, and post-colonial theory, for example. These are unquestionably matters of critical scope – but for the average American, the pervasiveness of advertising and its effects on subjectivity may have similar implications.[11] For these reasons, I have undertaken to examine some particular forms of critical theory that engage the underlying functions of advertising as a cultural production, and to explore those particular

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[11] Compare the number of critical works on advertising (above in note 10) to the full-length books published on feminist theory in the same period: 700 since 1996, 374 since 2000. I have no argument against the theoretical feminist project. My comparison here is intended only to highlight the lack of scholarship on advertising, both focused and sustained, and particularly in feminist theories, because it plays a direct role in the formation of feminine identities/subjectivities (arguably even more so than for men and children). Of course feminist theorists do address advertising; see, for example, Susan Bordo's work on women's body image and self-esteem (Susan Bordo, Unbearable Weight : Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). Also see: Jean Kilbourne, Can't Buy My Love : How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1999).

critical constructs that may offer the greatest traction for a future understanding, resistance,

and productive social intervention.[12]

     A review of the literature on advertising's social impact reveals that a number of

theoretical methodologies are commonly called into service: Marxist-based theories are

prevalent, peppered with various mélanges of sociology and anthropology. As an extension

of Marxist critiques of capitalism, various formulations of Althusserian ideology also are

often used to scrutinize advertising. These choices of theoretical methodology are both

significant and problematic. First, they are relevant, methodologically sound, and offer both

descriptive and explanatory power. Advertising is without question a commercial production,

a razor-edged weapon in the arsenal of capitalism; nothing could be more implicated or

imbricated in Marx's delineation of the base/superstructure model and the fetishism of

commodities. History bears out that advertising grows as capitalism grows, and that it

invades national and personal borders as efficiently as capital itself. As for its true purpose,

advertising's masquerade as the comedy and drama of culture is a perfect demonstration of

masking the material conditions of its existence: making profits for capitalists. Marx states:

> The forms which stamp products as commodities and which are therefore the
>
> preliminary requirements for the circulation of commodities, already possess the
>
> fixed quality of natural forms of social life before man seeks to give an account,

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12 An initial caveat: Advertising is dependent upon the business strategies inherent in the greater practice of marketing. For example, demographic and psychographic market research has become so sophisticated that it defines audiences in minute detail (a veritable Althusserian nightmare of hailing); further, multimillion dollar budgets and complex marketing strategies turn even the most banal advertising messages into highly recognized catchphrases by virtue (or vice) of sheer repetition over time and across media types. For the purposes of this study, however, I will limit discussion to the ephemeral creative product: advertising's discourses and representations.

not of their historical character, for in his eyes they are immutable, but of their

content and meaning. (Marx 168)

It is this Marxist *meaning* of commodities that implicates in fetishism both the commodity

and the advertising that purveys it as a reified meaning.

Similarly, theories of ideology are unquestionably relevant to advertising. Every

person in American society is undeniably hailed and interpellated by commercial messages,

in ways that range from subtle to blatant: "Is it in you?" (Gatorade), "What's in your wallet?"

(Capital One), "Can you hear me now?" (Verizon Wireless).

It is here, though, that a methodological problem arises. Marxist and ideological

frameworks often examine advertising as a product in and of itself, addressing its discourses

and texts and how they affectively act upon and change *consumer* behavior in a capitalist

frame. Because advertising can be so well-explained by theories of commodity fetishism and

ideology, the answers may seem self-evident (or always-already) – such as in some of the

examples set forth in Judith Williamson's The Ideology of Advertising. Might it not be

because the explication of advertising's ideology works so very well indeed that it has short-

circuited a greater body of critical work? I believe it may be the very fact that the

explanations seem so convincing that keeps advertising from being a desirable field of

inquiry for a greater number of scholars of mass culture.

Given that advertising not only facilitates commodity fetishism and interpellates its

audiences, but also appeals directly to human desire, however, I believe these theories do not

go far enough. In my view, advertising and its increasing focus on image, speed, and fantasy

does far more than hail and interpellate; it encodes its meanings in ways that directly address

the unconscious – appealing to individual repressed psychic formations that imbue the overt

message with far more deep-seated meaning than ideology reveals. Dissecting a single ad both cracks open the ideology and completely misses the boat. What is needed is some way to get at how advertising addresses the unconscious. I have also begun to believe some kind of psychoanalytic "working through," a therapeutic intervention of sorts, may be possible – this is the trajectory for my larger project of the future.

In the chapters that follow, I will focus on a few key texts of capitalism and ideology that can be related to advertising, to demonstrate both the possibilities and limitations they present. Following this, I will look toward the psychoanalytic unconscious, to see if and how psychoanalysis may open a door that ideological critique leaves closed, to examine what these theories may miss: the individual subject's unconscious reception and subsequent association and enactments related to this reception in some specific advertising examples.

CHAPTER 2:   FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS OF MASS CULTURE

Fredric Jameson commands us to "always historicize."[13] As with any examination

related to capitalism, this is of utmost importance. While a general history of advertising and

a comprehensive overview of Marxism are beyond the scope of this study[14], the work of

scholars working within Marxist and ideological spheres can provide an introduction that

lends both a historical and capitalist framework to an examination of advertising.

A good place to begin is the 1940s, when the practice of advertising had already taken

hold of mass culture in significant fashion. During this period, the Frankfurt School theorists

published a number of key works that continue to resonate today. In one of these, a 1941

essay on popular music, Theodor Adorno laments modern social commodification, framing

an argument that demonizes capitalism's effects on cultural productions. Although his target

is popular music, his argument is uncannily relevant to postmodern advertising. For example,

in a passage subtitled "The Social Cement," if you replace the words "popular music" with

"advertising," his argument holds with equal veracity:

> It is safe to assume that music listened to with a general inattention which is only
>
> interrupted by sudden flashes of recognition is not followed as a sequence of
>
> experiences that have a clear-cut meaning of their own, grasped in each instant
>
> and related to all the precedent and subsequent moments. One may go so far as

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[13] See Fredric Jameson, The Political Unconscious : Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981).

[14] Two significant works can serve to provide such a comprehensive overview: Karl Marx, Capital : A Critique of Political Economy, trans. Ben Fowkes, vol. 1, 2 vols. (New York: Vintage Books, 1977). and Stuart Ewen, Captains of Consciousness : Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).

to suggest that most listeners of popular music do not understand music as a language in itself. If they did it would be vastly difficult to explain how they could tolerate the incessant supply of largely undifferentiated material. What, then, does music mean to them? The answer is that the language that is music is transformed by objective processes into a language which they think is their own – into a language which serves as a receptacle for their institutionalized wants… The autonomy of music is replaced by a mere socio-psychological function. Music today is largely a social cement. And the meaning listeners attribute to a material, the inherent logic of which is inaccessible to them, is above all a means by which they achieve some psychical adjustment to the mechanisms of present-day life. (Adorno 36)

In a culture where ad jingles are memorized as much as the latest pop music, it is no stretch to see advertising as "social cement." More important is Adorno's reference to productions of pop culture as a *receptacle* – a structure which the individual subject fills with his own meaning. Consider, for example, the 1950s ad campaign for "the man in the Hathaway shirt" – in which an image of a dashing gentleman with an eye patch gave way to ads featuring an image of an *outlined* man – a placeholder that invited the viewer to imagine himself as "the man." It is not difficult to draw a parallel here with Adorno's concept of using cultural products to make some psychical adjustment to modern urban life.

Adorno and Max Horkheimer were the first theorists to pursue a rigorous critical study of mass culture. In their noted essay, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," they describe mass culture as an insidious system – a monolithic culture

machine. Within its ravenous maw, the individual revels in unprecedented consumption of commodity goods – but, in exchange, is literally consumed by commodification. What is remarkable about this work is its prescience: its foundations were no doubt firm when written, yet today their ideas are so frighteningly *realized* they can be read as fulfilled prophecy – particularly with regard to advertising. The authors' specific theory lies in the negation that results from standardization: how the individual is made to become a fungible cog in the machine, retaining only a "pseudo-individuality" as a result. It makes no whit of difference that the deception of this system is knowable and known: as they say, "the enslavement to nature of people today cannot be separated from social progress" (Horkheimer and Adorno xvii) – and capitalist society progresses ever onward. The deception of mass culture is stronger today than at the time of the writing, and continues to tighten its grip.

Using Marx's theoretical framework, Horkheimer and Adorno trace the path of economic enslavement of the individual to a point that results in the nullification of the individual. In fact, they assert that the greater the quantity of material goods – the greater the "improvements of life" – available to the individual, the greater will be the nullification. In their words, "In the unjust state of society the powerlessness and pliability of the masses increase with the quantity of goods allocated to them." This is because "intellect's true concern is a negation of reification. It must perish when it is solidified into a cultural asset and handed out for consumption purposes" (Horkheimer and Adorno xvii). Advertising is implicated here as well: "The flood of precise information and brand-new amusements make people smarter and more stupid at once" (Horkheimer and Adorno xvii). There is plentiful evidence that American commodity culture has made people "smarter and more stupid at

once." But this statement warrants some unpacking. What is reification? Why must it be negated to reclaim the potentiality of humanity?

I will begin with a definition: *reification is "the mental conversion of a person or abstract concept into a thing. Also, depersonalization, esp. such as Marx thought was due to capitalist industrialization in which the worker is considered as the quantifiable labour factor in production or as a commodity"* (OED). Reification converts people into objects, annihilating their individuality as it pacifies them with a manufactured "pseudo-individuality." In Adorno's essay "On Popular Music," he defines pseudo-individuality as "endowing cultural mass production with the halo of free choice or open market on the basis of standardization itself" (Adorno 23). While the individual believes he has the freedom to pursue any course in his life, this is an illusion; he cannot achieve a realization of his "essential being" if he is interchangeable with any other individual in his societal role of producer/consumer of the cultural commodity.

In this theory, "Culture today is infecting everything with sameness" (Horkheimer and Adorno 94). Through the process of reification, the *particular* as the concretization of an abstract becomes unimportant to the *universal*; the *detail* becomes unimportant to the *whole*; the *individual* becomes unimportant to the *society*. In this way, the specific is replaced by the representative, and a manufactured reality is "installed." As the authors define it, "All mass culture under monopoly is identical" (Horkheimer and Adorno 95). The inherent disease of this continuous negating cycle is that it creates an illusion of diversity while masking how ever-more standard we become. *What is* becomes perceived as *what must be* – a parallel to the pre-Enlightenment concept of invincible "Fate." The domination of the system is thus

masked to the standardized individuals, who perform their interfungible roles without understanding them – and therefore, without complaint.

Where is the rebellion against such a system? Why does the individual submit? Again, in "On Popular Music," Adorno writes:

> Concentration and control in our culture hide themselves in their very manifestation. Unhidden they would provoke resistance. Therefore the illusion and, to a certain extent, even the reality of individual achievement must be maintained. The maintenance of it is grounded in material reality itself, for while administrative control over life processes is concentrated, ownership is still diffuse (Adorno 21).

In addition, Adorno notes that "The standardized forms, it is claimed, were originally derived from the needs of the consumers: that is why they are accepted with so little resistance" (Adorno 95). Further, who is one to rebel against? Technology is not the culprit; it is only a means to the end. Although it enables the production of mass quantities of standardized goods to satisfy millions of (thereby) standardized individuals, technology is under the control of those who own the monopoly, in "a cycle of manipulation and retroactive need" that is "unifying the system ever more tightly" (Horkheimer and Adorno 95). The manipulation of the system occurs in what is today termed *target marketing*: "the classification, organization, and identification of consumers. Something is provided for everyone so that no one can escape" (Horkheimer and Adorno 97). The authors would hardly be surprised to learn of the sophisticated level of current marketing technique.

This leads us back to the "pseudo-individual," ostensibly free within society to use all his powers of perception and imagination – but who has become instead incapable of

imaginative thought. Horkheimer and Adorno single out cultural productions (mostly cinematic) as being so completely overdetermined in plot, language, scene, and detail – in management of *effect* – as to "positively debar the spectator from thinking" (Horkheimer and Adorno 100). Any cultural product that is scripted down to the most arcane detail can hardly be termed *creative*. There is simply no place remaining for individuality, when the creators and the consumers collude to agree as to what the product *must* be, based on the dictation of styles that already exist. Again we run up against the concept of *what is* as the authority of *what must be*: the results are taken as immutable.

The forms of advertising provide an excellent illustration. Regardless of the latest production techniques and cynical worldview of today's advertising, the genres (or "parables," as Marchand terms them) established decades ago remain. These include the slice-of-life story (Kodak's "Celebrate the moments of your life"), the scare tactic (Karl Malden for American Express saying "*What will you do"* if your money is stolen), the product-solution narrative (Alka Seltzer's "Plop-plop, fizz-fizz, oh what a relief it is"), and many others – only the superficial elements have changed.

In the Frankfurt School culture machine, the individual becomes a representation – a mere caricature of his supposed potentiality. He can no longer have an effect on the whole of society, now as unchangeable as mythological Fate. Worse, even in their own inner lives, "the most intimate reactions of human beings have become so entirely reified, even to themselves, that the idea of anything peculiar to them survives only in extreme abstraction… that is the triumph of advertising in the culture industry: the compulsive imitation by consumers of cultural commodities which, at the same time, they recognize as false" (Horkheimer and Adorno 136). Today, Horkheimer and Adorno might be both gratified with

their predictive powers and horrified at the level of stricture modern culture has reached. And while other theorists have argued that the Frankfurt School framework is far too rigid and erroneously unassailable, one has only to look at the latest round of ads for consumer products – with rock icons The Who shilling for Saab, Bob Seger singing for Chevrolet, and Iron Butterfly's drug anthem *Inna-Gadda-Da-Vida* providing the soundtrack for Fidelity's mutual fund investment account pitch – to recognize the continuing viability of the theory.

French philosopher Louis Althusser's theory of ideology adds another critical facet to the behavior of individuals in mass culture. Building on Marx's model of the repressive State, in which the ruling class maintains power over the public by force, Althusser posited a multiple set of ideological apparatuses that hold sway over the private aspects of life: religion, education, family, trade, communication, and culture (the 'Ideological State Apparatuses' or ISAs). These structures do so, not through repressive force or violence, but primarily by function of ideology, which "interpellates individuals as subjects," catching every human being up in an invisible net of identity that begins even before birth:

> "…the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects… you and I are always already subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects… " (Althusser 1503).

The paradox here is that while Althusser finds "individuals 'abstract' with respect to the subjects which they always-already are" (Althusser 1505), as subjects we are actually *concrete* in our social practice: we participate materially in our own interpellation. As

Althusser states, the individual subject "shall make the gestures and actions of his subjection 'all by himself.' There are no subjects except by and for their subjection" (Althusser 1508). As such, then, the individual as subject performs his identity perfectly within the framework of an inherited ideology that is so always-already there that it remains largely invisible to those caught within it.

Further, since advertising holds power in two of Althusser's ISAs (communication and culture), this double presence goes some way toward explaining its influence. In fact, advertising and ideology are two sides of a counterfeit coin; both promise a comfortable, secure place to be oneself – as long as being oneself involves performing a role prepared in advance. From the 1950s "Look Ma, no cavities!" of Crest toothpaste, to the 1980s "Reach out and touch someone" of AT&T, to the 1990s "Got milk?" campaign, and today's continuation of Nike's iconic "Just do it," advertising is unquestionably complicit in the always-already process of hailing and interpellation. As such, I will look more specifically at ideology in a particular advertising production in Chapter 4.

As an ideological construction, advertising can also be equated with the social construction of *myth* as a form of self-deception. Just as Ferdinand de Saussure determined that there is nothing "natural" about language – that language is an arbitrary human construction – so too do Barthes and Althusser posit that there is nothing "natural" about the individual's relation to society. As explicated in <u>Mythologies</u>, Barthesian myth, (like Althusserian ideology) is concerned with how human society constructs meaning artificially, yet at the same time works to allow us to deceive ourselves regarding that artifice.

For Barthes, myth is a particular type of speech: it is a mode of signification, a means of making *meaning* (Barthes <u>Mythologies</u> 109). Rather than myth as *content*, Barthesian

myth is a *function*, defined more by its intention than its literal sense. This intention, building on the Marxist idea of how history converts nature into society, is about how history converts reality into speech. More specifically, myth allows historic materialistic conditions to "speak us" – to appear to be natural, inevitable, and unquestionable. Because mythical speech is signification, a *message*, it is not limited to oral or written discourse. It can include any kind of representation that carries *cultural meaning* (Barthes Mythologies 110).

Mythical speech borrows Saussurean semiology in its use of the sign, the signifier and the signified, in which the tripartite structure combines to create a single meaning.[15] It differs from Saussure in that, as Barthes says, it is turned "sideways" (Barthes Mythologies 115); the sign from the original system becomes the signifier in mythical speech. The process imbues each original sign with additional meanings that are *naturalized* (and therefore artificially constructed) historical relations.

For example, in the advertising headline, "Choosy mothers choose Jif," the phrase sets forth as a given that a good mother must make the best choice among peanut butters. Why? Because it is her naturalized role to provide nutrition (the breast and its later substitutes). Selecting a different brand of peanut butter – not Jif – thus would render her "unchoosy" – i.e., a bad mother. By purchasing Jif, the "choosy mother" naturalizes her purchase of peanut butter into a performance of the role of the good mother. In objective, material terms, there is nothing even remotely "mother-like" about a jar of peanut butter. This is the essential function of mythical speech: it transforms history into nature. The once "unsigned" practice of making a peanut butter sandwich for a child is now a seemingly

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[15] See the Appendix for a brief overview of Saussurean structural linguistics.

natural and inevitable way to be a good mother. Since this ad campaign began more than thirty years ago,[16] it has become a *lingua franca*: most middle-class mothers are fully aware that choosy mothers choose Jif – to the point that mothers who choose Peter Pan peanut butter (perhaps because it tastes better) may experience some inner sense of guilt.

Why do individuals find this naturalization so seductive? Why do they so willingly fall into the inevitability of mythical speech? The answer lies in the idea of knowledge as truth, of stability, of reassurance. Those things an individual knows incontrovertibly cause no fear or anxiety; he is secure in his knowledge. Mythical speech gives everyone in society structures and boundaries and forms they can take for granted – if they know what it means, they do not have to work to understand, nor have to suffer from the uncertainties that come with the potential for misinterpretation. When a commercial voiceover intones "You're in good hands with AllState," there appears to be reassurance and stability – and whether or not there is *truth* is relatively unimportant: as Barthes states, "However paradoxical it may seem, myth hides nothing: its function is to distort, not to make disappear" (Barthes <u>Mythologies</u> 121).

Human reality may be a fabrication, a horrifically complex product of human labor – but the function of myth works in the other direction, to simplify, to organize, to essentialize. It eliminates the fear and anxiety of desire, offering instead what Barthes calls a "blissful clarity," in which the slippery semiotic chain of meaning appears to end and things (falsely) seem to have a secure meaning in and of themselves.

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[16] The slogan has recently been modified slightly; from "Choosy *Mothers* Choose Jif" to "Choosy *Moms* Choose Jif" – a change that strengthens its interpellative power as well as its function as mythical speech.

The final step in my review of theories of mass culture focuses on Fredric Jameson, a Marxist critic who insists that the postmodern age is now characterized by commodification rather than culture. In his essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," he offers important insights for a critique of postmodern advertising.

The project of modernity was the elevation of the concept of universal reason, the idealization of the possibility of social and moral betterment; postmodernism takes a different turn. As a Marxist, Jameson discusses postmodernism not as a style, but in terms of space and time (history), locating it specifically in "late" capitalism: he believes that the class struggles of the early and middle periods of capitalism (the machine age) have now been superseded (with advanced technologies) by the complete triumph of commodification over culture.

With the technologies of increased power come the capabilities of increased velocity: capital can now be moved in an instant, and society has sped up reciprocally. As an example, in this historical moment we invest less attention on moving physical bodies through space via transportation, and more on moving *images* of bodies via the screens of film, television, and computer. One gets the impression that it may be from this very speed, perhaps, that Jameson comes to his concept of postmodernism: a conclusion that the postmodern actually marks the severance of our connection with history.

Although some of its defining characteristics appear in previous times, the onset of Jameson's postmodern moment is the 1960s, and is marked by two imbricated features: the loss of reality into representation, and the shattering of historical time into a never-ending "now." He defines the term *postmodern* as:

…a periodizing concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new

formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of life and a new

economic order – what is often euphemistically called modernization,

postindustrial or consumer society, the society of the media or the spectacle, or

multinational capitalism. (Jameson "Postmodernism" 1962)

This new period causes Jameson to lament a loss of historicity through nostalgic (re)productions of history. While the modern period is characterized as reactionary, resistant, and subversive (toward repressive Victorian norms, to give one example), it was so in the service of resisting previous ideals. Today, Jameson asserts there are no longer any "high" ideas to resist: the boundaries between what was considered to be "high" art and what was considered popular or mass culture have been destroyed. This removal of definable structures occurs as a result of *incorporation*: the low culture assimilates characteristics of the high, diluting and thus eroding even the possibility of a new high culture.

Another characterization of postmodernism for Jameson is the supercession of *pastiche* over *parody*. While both are forms of satiric imitation, he believes parody was an effective and ironic comment on a particular style; pastiche is the postmodern form without such possibility. To understand why requires a look at the nature of the individual and the concept of subjectivity. During the modernist period of the 20th century, artists (in the broadest sense) were distinctly *individual* subjects, and created highly individual styles that were immediately recognizable. Parody of such work was easy: the Faulknerian sentence, the Picasso painting, for example, were completely unique *as related to some societal standard or norm*. After the greater part of a century had passed, however, so many individual styles were present that the result was a bewildering fragmentation, and there was no longer any

such delineated norm. It is at this point, Jameson says, that parody becomes pastiche – any empty, non-ironic form of parody without its previous resistance or bite, "blank parody, parody that has lost its sense of humor" (Jameson "Postmodernism" 1963). Concurrently the individual *subject* was now only an ideological construction – or worse, had never existed at all, but was always a myth of ideology. Without the possibility of the unique individual or a unique individual style, Jameson notes, resistant creation becomes impossible and can be replaced only by repetition: historicity is lost.

Jameson has much to add to this notion of the loss of history, specifically in his discussion of what he terms the *nostalgia film*. This type of film purports to portray a moment of our historical past; however, it is characterized by a metonymic attempt to convey the idea of the past. The result is not a portrayal of history, but a stereotype, a romantic and idealized notion. Even in films set in the present, the attempt to call forth some idealized past blurs the idea of history as lived experience; instead, we lose our connection to actual time and history, to the point that it seems we prefer to live only in the present while cherishing false notions of a past we can no longer truly access.

Although Jameson is a theorist who has much to say about image and representation, he applies his postmodernist concept to the full range of aesthetic forms. His critique of architecture, for example, notes that the loss of individuality and historicity can also be found in postmodern buildings, which he labels as *hyperspace*. In his view, such structures are no longer oriented toward the (lost) individual; instead, they have become self-referential in the same manner that postmodern art has become reflexive and self-referential. The building no longer exists to serve but has become an entity of its own, yet somehow without its own identity. His conclusion is that hyperspace creates a cognitive disorientation between the

individual body and the building that dovetails with the disorientation and technological alienation that the individual mind experiences within the framework of the high speed networks of modern communications.

These concepts of the postmodern are easy to find in current advertising. As I've already discussed, advertising is now a high-velocity practice, with layers of image and music and text hurtling by at speeds impossible to process cognitively. Further, advertising is filled with cynicism – a commodification of the social vernacular that directly reflects Jameson's argument of pastiche over parody. Today's advertisers use repetition and replication as their tools; new ads are merely updated technical and vernacular reproductions of the old, leaving audiences with a sense of suspension in a realm of perpetual change. As for false nostalgia, as Leslie Savan points out, "[black and white] ads are whispering to us about – what else? The past. The past as (1) warm and funny: by intercutting old *Dragnet* clips with current material, Tostitos just got munchier. (2) Classy and classic. They used to know how to make things, anything, back then… B&W is artier because it tells more lies. It can make trends seem timeless, silly characters seem archetypal" (Savan 25). And as for the loss of history, although Coca-Cola is revered as a "historic" beverage[17] and cultural icon, its advertising has moved from actual messages like "The pause that refreshes" and "I'd like to buy the world a Coke," to a postmodern stream of slogans without any such core meanings: "The Real Thing," "Coke is it," "Always Coca-Cola." In fact, this last slogan is an advertising embodiment of Jameson's argument: Coca-Cola calls on its historicity even as it

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[17] If any evidence is required to support this statement, one needs only refer to the introduction of "New Coke" in the 1980s: the new product, in spite of clear taste superiority, was reviled. Customers began stockpiling the older product, and the company was eventually forced to withdraw it from the market and reintroduce "Coke Classic" (with, of course, a totally 'new' advertising campaign).

loses its history in an advertising that merely repeats and reproduces itself. In mourning such losses of history, Jameson notes:

> If there is any realism left here, it is a 'realism' which springs from the shock of grasping that confinement [to a "Plato's cave" in which we cannot see directly, but rather only reflections]… we seem condemned to seek the historical past through our own pop images and stereotypes about that past, which itself remains forever out of reach. (Jameson "Postmodernism" 1967)

Any sampling of advertising will certainly include a liberal dose of pop images and stereotypes that recall the past: as Tony the Tiger might say, "They're Grrrreat!" The theories of mass culture clearly speak directly to the state of advertising today. Toward the Frankfurt School assertion that commodified society is now filled with pseudo-individuals incapable of independent thought, we can hold up the unflagging domination of the Marlboro Man as the idealized man. Where Althusser advances the thought that ideology turns individuals into subjects, we can follow Microsoft's "Where do you want to go today?" As Barthes says myth transforms history into nature, we can look to the continuing Virginia Slims assertion that "You've come a long way, baby." And as Jameson's postmodern is filled with lost history, we can answer with DeBeer's perpetual advertising slogan: "A diamond is forever."

These are arguments often used to explicate and challenge advertising, and they are indeed invaluable. What they may miss, however, is advertising's appeals to the unconscious; thus psychoanalytic concepts will be the focus of my next chapter.

CHAPTER 3: FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS OF PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORY

In working toward a psychoanalytic criticism of advertising, the concept of the unconscious is fundamental. But what is the unconscious? Here I will draw both from Freud and Lacan's rereading of Freud.

Freud established the field of psychoanalysis as the field of the unconscious mind. This notion of the unconscious is not simply "what is not, at the moment, conscious," but what has been forcefully excluded from consciousness (repressed) and is thus inaccessible to purposeful consciousness. Although barred from conscious perception, the contents of the unconscious are always active, and make their way into ordinary life in a variety of ways, but always distorted in some way: these include slips of the tongue (or pen), jokes, dreams, and symptoms. The unconscious originates in the primary processes, the pleasure principle and the reality principle, which work together to create repression. Before examining these in more detail, I will start with a definition from Freud:

> The nucleus of the unconscious consists of instinctual representatives which seek to discharge their cathexis [psychic energy]; that is to say, it consists of wishful impulses… There are in this system no negation, no doubt, no degrees of certainty: all this is only introduced by the work of the censorship between the unconscious and the preconscious… The processes of the system *Unc.* are timeless; i.e. they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all… The unconscious processes pay just a little regard to reality. They are subject to the pleasure principle; their fate

depends only on how strong they are and on whether they fulfil the demands of

the pleasure-unpleasure regulation. (Freud "The Unconscious" 582)

In Freud's first formulations (the topographic model), this system included the unconscious,

the preconscious, and the conscious. Later, he reformulated this model into the more well-

known divisions of id, ego, and superego (the structural model), in which the id is the

unconscious free play of desire in which nothing is prohibited (the pleasure principle), the

ego is the "I" or the individual that represses unacceptable wishes to gain love and

acceptance (the reality principle), and the superego is the ongoing force of self-censorship.

To understand more about the unconscious, then, requires a look at the role of the primary

and secondary processes that are instantiated at birth.

From its first feeble cry upon entering the world, the human animal appears to seek

pleasure and to avoid unpleasurable tension. The neonate knows only this: sensual contact

with the mother provides pleasure; suckling milk from the breast provides pleasure; satiation

of hunger provides pleasure; being touched and soothed and rocked and bathed provide

pleasure. Any experience of *lack* of such sensual pleasures causes an immediate and

unbearable increase in *unpleasure*. The infant demonstrates his unhappiness with unpleasure

in the only manner available, by crying and flailing his limbs, for the purpose of obtaining

immediate pleasure and/or reduction of unpleasure. As soon as a desired pleasure-state

returns, he subsides into his original undifferentiated state of bliss.

Freud called this primal activity the *primary processes* – which he defined in

"Formulations on Two Principles of Mental Functioning" as "residues of a phase of

development in which they were the only kind of mental process" (Freud "Two Principles"

301). His operant *pleasure principle* develops from this primary process, in that internal

psychic disturbance (experiential lack of pleasure, or unpleasure) must be immediately and satisfactorily relieved: "These processes strive towards gaining pleasure; psychical activity draws back from any event which might arouse unpleasure. (Here we have repression)" (Freud "Two Principles" 302).

Alas, the appearance of the word *repression* in this definition signals that the undifferentiated state of bliss cannot last; the infant will be unable to command indefinite instant gratification. At some point he is provided, not with the object he desires, but a substitute for it – a caregiver instead of the mother, a pacifier instead of the breast. He may cry or scream or wave small angry fists – and yet be forced regardless to endure the unpleasure without immediate relief.

His first learned defense is visual representation: that "whatever was thought of (wished for) was simply presented in a hallucinatory manner" (Freud "Two Principles" 302). This first substitute satisfaction quickly proves disappointing and is abandoned; the hallucinations may soothe momentarily, but do not sensually quell the unpleasure.

Only the rise of the *reality principle* (and its concomitant initiation of the subject into language) will serve: "…what was presented to the mind was no longer what was agreeable but what was real, even if it happened to be disagreeable" (Freud "Two Principles" 302). The infant begins to take note that his mother exhibits displeasure when he cries – and shows pleasure when he accepts delay and/or a surrogate satisfaction. He quickly learns that the measure of unpleasurable tension experienced in delay is *less* than the portion of pleasure he receives from the positive recognition his mother bestows upon him for his perseverance. The opposing pleasure and reality principles thus work to govern the psychic life of every human.

Learning to accept the substitute – the ability to wait, to defer gratification in order to gain recognition from another – is the constitutive element of humanness. Indeed, this need for recognition far *surpasses* the libidinal requirement for immediate gratification of pleasure. In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," Freud describes the operation of the reality principle as "…the postponement of satisfaction, the abandonment of a number of possibilities of gaining satisfaction and the temporary toleration of unpleasure as a step on the long indirect road to pleasure" (Freud "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" 596). This process is also visible in language, in which meaning requires a narrative with a beginning, a middle, and an end – a period of temporal pleasure, of waiting, with a final period awaiting at an end we hope will not arrive too soon. Yet as the individual travels this road, the substitution of the reality principle for the pleasure principle does not negate the latter – it actually generates pleasure as it serves to protect the coherence of the fledgling ego.

To explain why, I must return to the concept of repression. The positive recognition individuals desire from others comes at a price: not all pleasures and desires will garner approval or even acceptance. Yet these desires cannot simply be forgotten or renounced. In fact, Freud states that "Actually, we never give anything up; we only exchange one thing for another" (Freud "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 438).

In other words, individuals will accept the substitute (externally) – yet will not (psychically) give up the original desire. Instead, those desires that are incompatible with the sense of self-respect – outside of what is acceptable to the individual ego-ideal – are pushed into the unconscious. On the surface, ego coherence is protected; the individual can view himself as whole and good. Underneath, the desire that is publicly prohibited will find other

means of expression or manifestation: in dreams or parapraxes for the normal, in symptoms for the neurotic, in art or literature for the creative.

Put simply, *all* of the individual's desires remain always in effect. The libidinal cathexis of the id will always continue to seek immediate discharge; the ego's reality principle will always continue to attempt to reduce unpleasurable tension by deferring or repressing the id's less acceptable desires.

Freud's later work on *drive theory* substantially raises the stakes of libido/pleasure principle vs. ego/reality principle, coming to include the concepts of aggression and a carefully articulated aim toward death.

The aggressive concept of the death drive was precipitated through Freud's observation of his nephew's "*fort-da*" game. The game, in which the toddler repeatedly tossed away and retrieved an object while repeating the German words for "gone" and "here" led Freud to a number of conclusions.

First, he believed the child was acting out aggression toward his mother, who would be gone (*fort*) and then come home (*da*); the hostility lay in the child's clear satisfaction in the act of casting away the mother-object and his ability to make her return at his whim. This act of play revealed a repressed aggressive wish as well as a sadistic repudiation of previous instinctual satisfaction found in the mother.

Second, the child's incessant repetition of the game with ever-increasing pleasure led Freud to define *the compulsion to repeat*. He states, "This is convincing proof that, even under the dominance of the pleasure principle, there are ways and means enough of making *what is in itself unpleasurable* into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind" (Freud "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" 601, emphasis added). In other words, the repetition

of an unpleasant experience nevertheless yields up some portion of pleasure by creating a feeling of mastery (rather than, for example, by finding secondary expression later as a compromise formation).

In attempting to square the (unpleasurable) concept of repetition compulsion with the pleasure/reality conflict, Freud comes to reexamine the instincts themselves. He begins by recognizing that the compulsion to repeat appears to bypass the process of the reality principle (Freud "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" 612). Next, he posits that the very instincts themselves have a compulsion to repeat:

> Every modification [e.g. psychic disturbance] which is thus imposed upon the course of the organism's life is accepted by the conservative organic instincts and stored up for further repetition. Those instincts are therefore bound to give a deceptive appearance of being forces tending towards change and progress, whilst in fact they are merely seeking to reach an ancient goal by paths alike old and new… we shall be compelled to say that the aim of all life is death. (Freud "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" 613)

Thus the new formulation of the ego instinct is drawn not only from the importance of maintaining ego coherence, but is overlaid with aspects of aggression and mastery as well: it has become a death drive in a duality with the erotic/life drive.

Both drives are the pulsion of libidinal energies, and are situated squarely between the psychic and somatic. They are always representations, not actions. The erotic/life drive is the freely mobile cathexis of libidinal energy, moving toward the fastest obtainable discharge – immediate satisfaction – even to the point of being sadistic. The death drive is the bound

cathexis, moving slowly toward a delayed gratification; moreover, it serves a necrotic function that deadens the ego to inure it from pain. Together, they create a balance of tension that supports the ego in a tenuous continuity that seeks to find that which it does not have, to attain the object of desire – and by attaining, thereby end it.

Yet this tendency toward the total reduction of tension can never be a simple return to an original quiescent state – or a return to the pleasure principle. The original primary process/pleasure principle is a state in which freely mobile libidinal energy has never been bound – never tied up, fused in language, and obligated to signify within a social order. This binding by the dual instincts leaves no speaking human free or mobile to return to the undifferentiated realm.

This emphasis on language, speech, and signification is the key link between Freud and Jacques Lacan. Lacan's foundational work is a re-reading of Freud through a lens of Saussurean structural linguistics – through the symbolic structures of language.[18]

Lacan's inescapable tenet of psychoanalysis is not only founded on the concept of the unconscious, but insists that y*ou are not identical with who you think you are*. By virtue (or vice) of the operation of the unconscious, psychoanalysis opposes the Cartesian *cogito ergo sum*. The self the individual is aware of is thus not the whole self, nor is conscious thought the only process of meaning-making he possesses. Instead, an unconscious system of meaning-making divides self-ness in a way that stands both in excess of, and alien to, the (seemingly stable) consciously-identified self. As Dylan Evans summarizes, "Lacan argues

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[18] See the Appendix for a brief overview of Saussurean structural linguistics.

that the unconscious is neither primordial nor instinctual; it is primarily linguistic"… and "the laws of the [Lacanian] unconscious… are those of repetition and desire" (Evans 218).

Lacan's three registers – the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic – are thus in essence a linguistic refiguring of Freudian concepts; they also map on to the Lacanian concepts of need, demand, and desire. A short summary to begin: infants are born into the nonverbal Real, the primordial state in which they live the experience of "being everything." At the moment of the Mirror Stage, however, they lose the Real as they are introduced to the Imaginary: a new experience of self that is displayed and performed as a seemingly unified mirror image that conflicts with actual lived experience (in which they *feel* decidedly less unified than they *appear*). In this moment, as the infant is told "look – there *you* are," he both gains a new sense of self as a performer on the world's stage, and becomes alienated from the self of lived experience. He is now finite, demarcated from everything else: articulated, *so to speak*. This is the Symbolic order.

Although this is a neat summary, it warrants a fuller explanation. The neonate has no "self" to know – it experiences only sensation, in the forms of pleasure and unpleasure – it not only does not know its own mind, it does not know its own body, its own form – it is unaware that its body forms a cohesive unit (existing in what Lacan calls the "fragmented body"); further, it has no possibility of fending for itself due to its "specific prematurity of birth" (Lacan Ecrits 97). This state of non-differentiation in which the infant bobs about in a sea of non-meaning comprised only of perception – a place in which symbolization and Lack

are both impossible – is, for Freud, the place of the blissful "oceanic feeling;"[19] for Lacan, it is the birthplace of the register of the Real.

The Real is also the hypothesized realm of *need* – where the wordless cries of the edacious infant can be satisfied with the basics of animal subsistence. However, the delivery of nutrition and physical satisfactions are always structurally conflated with the concept of human contact and affection. The milk may satisfy the hunger (the need), but is insufficient to provide comfort; the enfolding arms are devoured as greedily as the sustenance. Freud's "primary narcissism" is, at this moment, not yet a full-blown libidinal narcissism, but represents for Lacan the place of *demand*. The cries of the infant remain wordless, yet the structure of signification is always already present in its demand. Yet even the provision of sustenance, warmth, and human contact are never enough to fulfill the totality of demand, leaving an excess of demand that precipitates a third term, *desire*, which becomes the essential locus of Lacan's theory.

Moving both forward and laterally, my next thread takes us to the birthplace of the Imaginary register, the Mirror Stage: the looking glass itself. At some point in its young life, the neonate is introduced, as upon a stage, to its own image. In this instant, often accompanied by the parental encouragement of "look, there you are," the neonate's "self" – the ego – is instantly (re)organized. Yet the exultant moment of inaugural self-recognition is uncannily also the inaugural moment of horrifying alienation: How can "that" also be "me?" "That" in the mirror is so complete and unified – whereas "I" feel inadequate, messy, and distinctly less unified than "I" look. As Lacan puts it, "…the mirror stage is a drama whose internal pressure pushes precipitously from insufficiency to anticipation… and to the finally

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[19] From Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents*, 1930.

donned armor of an alienating identity that will mark his entire mental development with its rigid structure" (Lacan Ecrits 97). From this moment, in other words, the infant has become a subject, forever ensnared in an imaginary, alienating relationship with his own specular image – "*Je est un autre*."[20]

Once there is a structure of self, Freud's Oedipal organization begins. The child, living under the tenets of the pleasure principle, demands and desires the mother – as well as desiring to be the object of the mother's desire. Yet this blissful dyad is not to come to fruition: the father intervenes. Further, the child comes to recognize that the father will always bar him from possessing the mother, because it is he who already has the object she desires: the phallus. The incest prohibition thus inscribed serves to move the child away from a position of hatred and aggression toward the father and his intervention, and toward the direction of an identification that will determine his place on the continuum of sexual difference.

By reading this theory of Freud with an overlay of structural theory, Lacan maps the structure of the signifier/signified onto the Oedipal triangle so that through the "passion of the signifier" … "[man's] nature becomes woven by effects in which the structure of the language of which he becomes the material can be refound and in that the relation of speech thus resonates in him…" (Lacan Ecrits 689). This passion of the signifier for Lacan is a sacrifice as opposed to a desire – a sacrificed of immediate lived experience that is required to install oneself in what Lacan terms the Symbolic register.

Within this move to the reality principle, Lacan stresses the completely enmeshing effects of the Symbolic: "No signification can be sustained except by reference to another

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[20] Translation: "I is an other" - from French poet Arthur Rimbaud, "Lettres du Voyant."

signification" (Lacan <u>Ecrits</u> 498). The result is an endless signifying chain, where meaning must always be sought in the next word, and the next, because each word holds meaning only in relation to other words – there is no nodal point, no final word that *means*. This becomes the Symbolic register's distillation of the concept of desire. It remains an excess of demand, but it goes on without possibility of fulfillment.

Further, the Symbolic re-graphs the Oedipal order in language, as a command to symbolize, as a No to the Real, as the Law of the Father. By turning the Oedipal diagram on its ear, the incest prohibition becomes the bar forever separating signifier from signified – forever preventing the merger of the word with the thing, the subject with the mother. This move is also conflated with the Freudian delineation of sexual difference – the bar divides the ladies from the gentlemen, and language literally tells us "where to go" regarding gender.[21]

Although the route from the Imaginary to the Symbolic is one of alienation – feeling not intimate with oneself – Lacan also uses the term *extimate* – to specify that language precedes the individual, comes before the moment of entry into the symbolic order: "… language, with its structure, exists prior to each subject's entry into it at a certain moment in his mental development" (Lacan <u>Ecrits</u> 139).

Although these moments may seem to form a developmental chronology, Lacan warns against this topological notion. Indeed, the Oedipalized adult retains access, at some points, to all three of the Real/Symbolic/Imaginary registers. Although individuals live primarily in the Symbolic, the imaginary relation to one's own image – the Imaginary –

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[21] See "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious," in Jacques Lacan, <u>Ecrits : A Selection</u>, trans. Bruce Fink, ed. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002).

remains indeed the very fabric of human existence – with the symbolic constantly thwarting the needle's efforts to pierce the surface and gain access to the underside where the Real lies.

Lacan's division of self in language, in which the word is never the thing it refers to, is a metonymic, horizontal movement along an eternal signifying chain without positive terms that represents, for Lacan, more than contiguity and continuity: it represents the very concept of Desire. Desire for Lacan is always Lack – always what is missing.

Symbolically, desire moves along the syntagmatic axis, always seeking satisfaction. Yet the bar of prohibition cannot be breached. There can never be a point at which the signifier can merge with the signified, a point at which the *I* that speaks can merge with the *I* that is spoken of, no possibility that the individual could ever be identical with himself. The bar itself has a constitutive effect, creating a subject of endless desire. Language and desire are thus forever conflated. Subjects will ultimately not be recognized for what they are, or what they have – but for what they speak, indeed, even specifically *that* they speak.

The signifiers that advertising uses take the viewer on a dizzying slide through metaphor and metonymy, a traversal of the ever-slipping chain of signification through Lack on a hopeless quest of desire. He is held fast to the bar of prohibition as he attempts to get to the bottom of (impossible) meaning, to circumvent the bar that is the Name of the Father. He holds desperately on to anything, just to hold onto himself. But he can never truly be identical with himself, and must constantly recognize his Lack.

The experience of advertising thus can become a destabilizing limit experience of misrecognition. In some instances, it leads us to a more ecstatic experience, by opening seeming doors of possibility. Yet the verso to this recto is that of horror – that what the individual already is, is in fact *unacceptable*. Both the pleasure and the horror are indivisible

aspects of much advertising: Clairol exhorts that its hair colors are "You, only better" (because without Clairol "you" isn't good enough); the U.S. Army insists "Be all that you can be" (as if only the rigors of military experience – or death in battle – will allow one to reach a full state of self-actualization). It is this *"as if"* feature of advertising that gives it psychoanalytic resonance: more than mythological speech or ideology's denial of material conditions, it speaks directly to the uncertainty and misrecognition of the self, with palpable consequences.

The psychoanalytic concept of desire also offers strong critical possibility with regard to advertising. In daily life, commercial messages may couch their meanings in terms of needs, or even demands – but what they really call to is desire. However, the endless signifying chain means that desire cannot be fulfilled, even by the purchase of the product. Desire goes on, without possibility of fulfillment. Meaning in consumer society must always be sought in the next ad or product – there must always be another desire, and therefore always another product. As with language, there is no nodal point, no final product that will deliver the results that truly *mean*.

Lacan's version of Freud's unconscious also includes the concept of the "compulsion to repeat," a potentially potent critique with regard to advertising. In Seminar XI, Lacan begins his examination of the unconscious with a definition that highlights its structural nature: "…it is this linguistic structure that gives its status to the unconscious… that assures us that there is, beneath the term unconscious, something definable, accessible and objectifiable" (Lacan S XI 21).

Further, Freud's unconscious is not primitive or stunted, but a full-fledged structure that stands in opposition to the conscious. Lacan specifically discusses what the unconscious

is *not*: not romantic creativity, not supernatural, not the irregular of the conscious, not a primordial preconscious will, not an extrasensory or spiritual perception (Lacan S XI 23, 30). Instead, Lacan notes that "there is something at all points homologous with what occurs at the level of the subject – this thing speaks and functions in a way quite as elaborate as at the level of the conscious, which thus loses what seemed to be its privilege" (Lacan S XI 24).

Freud's discovery of the unconscious rested on its manifestation as a brief temporal gap, an absence, a moment that always begins to vanish as soon as it starts. Lacan calls this:

> Impediment, failure, split. In a spoken or written sentence something stumbles. Freud is attracted by these phenomena, and it is there that he seeks the unconscious. There, something other demands to be realized – which appears as intentional, of course, but of a strange temporality. What occurs, what is *produced* in this gap, is presented as *the discovery*. It is in this way the Freudian exploration first encounters what occurs in the unconscious. (Lacan S XI 25)

Lacan's own elaboration of Freud's concept begins here, with his conflation of the concept of *Lack* in the unconscious, in which forgetfulness effaces the signifier, so that "as soon as it is presented, this discovery becomes a rediscovery and furthermore, it is always ready to steal away again, thus establishing the dimension of loss (Lacan S XI 25). This is not to be confused with repression, which is not effacement or blurring, but an efficient excision from conscious access.

As always with Lacan, the concept of loss is inseparable from the concept of desire, yet he specifies that the unconscious desire has limits; in addition, these limits operate "inaccessible to contradiction, to spatio-temporal location and to the function of time" (Lacan S XI 31). Just as importantly, deception and doubt figure prominently, as Lacan reads the

unconscious back through the Cartesian cogito (which, for him, is a clear alienated deception). In fact, Lacan uses the concept of the cogito as a jumping off point for his mathemic set theory, which forms the basis for his elaboration of the Lacanian algebra.

Regarding the self-deceiving cogito, Lacan views as productive the subject's concern regarding such deception, in that "the slightest indication that something is entering the field should make us regard it as of equal value as a trace in relation to the subject" (Lacan S XI 37). And, while dreams are disguised, the unconscious (which is not the dream) is deceptive in its very operation; Lacan notes that for an alienated subject, "indeed, how could there not be truth about lying" (Lacan S XI 38).

But according to Lacan, Freud failed to take this concept to its limit, to use the operation to accurately discern the nature of the desire (specifically regarding the female hysteric and the female homosexual). Lacan's take on the matter was to state these desires ("to sustain the desire of the father" for the former, and "to defy the desire of the father" for the latter) in his now well-known pronouncement that "*man's desire is the desire of the Other*" (Lacan S XI 38).

Paired with the operation of the unconscious is the function of repetition, which, like the unconscious, "always involves a limit" (Lacan S XI 40) that may manifest as doubt or resistance. In Freud's explication, this is expressed as the "*Woe es war, soll Ich werden*" – where It was, there I shall be (Lacan S XI 44).[22] The concept of uncertainty again is expressed in opposition to Descartes' cogito for Freud; Lacan adds a third term to form the

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[22] This is Lacan's translation. In the field of ego psychology, it is more typically translated "Where the id was, there the ego shall be." Lacan's version moves away from the structural and toward the subjective, and thus has greater plasticity.

construction I think/I am/I doubt – in which doubt is always part of the discourse itself and serves the same structure and function.

Recollection (as opposed to repetition) is "something that comes to us from the structural necessities… born at the level of the lowest encounters and of all the talking crowd that precedes us, at the level of the structure of the signifier…" (Lacan S XI 47); this is Lacan's delineation of Freud's subversion of the subject. The repetition function is related but different; in fact, it is the intersection with the Real: "The whole history of Freud's discovery of repetition as function becomes clear only by pointing out in this way the relation between thought and the real" (Lacan S XI 49).

This relation can be grasped in what Lacan defines as an act (that is, an occurrence in the analytic field). Specifically, he states that "an act, a true act, always has an element of structure, by the fact of concerning a real that is not self-evidently caught up in it" (Lacan S XI 50). In this state of being "caught-up-in" the act, Lacan adds a unique gloss to the Freudian compulsion to repeat, using Freud's nephew's game of *fort-da*.

Rather than viewing this famed act as a simple, tedious attempt at mastery, Lacan explicates that the symbolization is not simply the child's aggressive expulsion and retrieval of an object that stands in for the mother, nor even that the articulation of the *fort* and *da* are the limit of meaning in symbolic language. Instead, he equates the spool of the game with the subject himself – and demonstrates the game as an act of splitting that allows the introjected mother in the ego to be split off. As Lacan puts it, there is no possibility of a unified psyche: "We see here a point that the subject can approach only by dividing himself into a certain number of agencies" (Lacan S XI 51).

This brings me to a final definition of the meaning of the repetition compulsion: "…remembering is gradually substituted for itself and approaches ever nearer to a sort of focus, or centre, in which every event seems to be under an obligation to yield itself – precisely at this moment, we see manifest itself what I will also call … the *resistance of the subject*, which becomes at that moment repetition in act" (Lacan S XI 51). With these re-mapped concepts of the unconscious and the repetition compulsion in hand, Lacan's structural overlay of Freud becomes complete.

Like the misrecognition of "self," the compulsion to repeat holds much possibility for a study of advertising – not simply because it is, in and of itself, so highly repetitive (although perhaps that could be glossed as psychoanalytic in its own right). Specifically, the nature of the unconscious is that of a lack, or gap. Something is always missing. What is produced in that moment of recognition of lack, however, is presented as a discovery; yet as soon as it is discovered it is effaced – and thus always becomes a rediscovery. This appears to bear a strong relation to the consumer experience of advertising: regardless of how many ads or products have offered satisfaction to desire, none of these satisfactions has ever proved to be *the* satisfaction. Yet consumers seem to efface that (re)discovery with each new advertising experience, repressing the disappointments of the past in favor of the new discovery that may, this time, hold out a possibility of fulfillment. In advertising, desire is the coin of the realm – not simply a counterfeit currency that results in some loss in every exchange, but a series of repeat performances attempting to fill an unfillable gap.

I believe these concepts of the psychoanalytic unconscious provide a strong foundation to look at the perceptions and misrecognitions of advertising, yet there are many more. For example, dream theory, transference, fetishism, object relations, and others may

play a significant role in a critique of advertising, and thus will merit further scrutiny in my future work. Dream theory is the methodology of Chapter 5; first, however, I will present a case study that uses both ideological and psychoanalytic concepts in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: IDEOLOGY AND PSYCHOANALYTIC THEORIES

IN AUTOMOBILE ADVERTISING

The American love affair with the automobile is the stuff of (Barthesian) myth: so much a part of the American Dream that it is hard to separate the *idea(l)* of our cars – what they mean to the individual – from their functional purpose. These ideals that Americans cherish are not chiefly manifested through the practice of owning, or to some extent, even driving, a car – in other words, they have nothing to do with the unambiguous concept of transportation. If the only thing people required was a ride, the modern equivalent of the Model-T might be the only model on the road today. Instead, the choice of cars is demonstrably caught up in concepts of power, ideology, and fantasy, at every level of which advertising works to seduce the individual toward performing his consumption as a desire for individuality and meaning.

With today's advanced automotive technology, cars certainly cannot be seen as products with a short shelf-life; why then do so many people feel the need not only to replace an older car with a newer one, but also to trade up somewhat regularly to a "better" car? Why did Americans spend more than $714 billion in 2004 to purchase nearly 17 million new cars?[23] Is it merely the influence of a barrage of cleverly manipulative advertising, or is there something deeper at work?

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[23] Source: NADA National Automobile Dealers Association, "Auto Retail Industry Builds Strength in 2004," NADA Online, vol.

There is no question that automotive advertising is a ubiquitous feature of the American landscape. Even in the early years of the U.S. "automotive age," the 1920s, the automobile industry became "one of the heaviest users of magazine space as well as of newspaper space and of other types of mediums;" where "expenditures for automobile advertising in magazines alone climbed from $3.5 million in 1921 to $6.2 million in 1923 and to $9.269 million in 1927" (Flink 191 and n7).

Fast-forward to the present day and it becomes readily apparent how ubiquitous auto advertising has become. Annual expenditures in 2004 reached nearly $18 billion, representing an increase of 4% over 2003 (Neilsen Monitor-Plus); hundreds of car commercials air every single evening on televisions (and computers), and thousands of automobile print ads, billboards, and other out-of-home messages claim individual subjective brainspace. This encroachment sometimes requires only a small advertising investment: the cars themselves act as billboards, from the most luxurious Lexus or Mercedes down to the most economical Kia or Scion, all prominently featuring a sculpted logo, typically in gleaming chrome.

Yet it is not likely the quantity (or even the manipulative creativity) of the advertising that results in automobile advertising having such a fierce grip on the American conception of identity. To throw light on this question requires looking further than the history of the automobile to the history of the capitalist economy. As I have discussed previously, Marx's history "shows that circumstances make men just as much as men make circumstances" (Marx and Engels 165). The base of a capitalist economy – the economic framework of production and consumption in which Americans live – determines what the societal

superstructure – or cultural productions – will be. In the capitalist mode, then, what humans must become are *consumers* – something Americans have done perhaps all too well.

The problematic role of advertising in a consumer society has been the subject of exhaustive cognitive and social research. As Sut Jhally summarizes a widely-believed argument in The Codes of Advertising, "The many critics of advertising claim that it is a tool whereby consumers are controlled and manipulated by the producers of goods (on whose behalf advertising is waged) to desire things for which they have no real need… Advertising is the main weapon that manufacturers use in their attempt to 'produce' an adequate consuming market for their products. To this end advertising works to create false needs in people…" (Jhally 3). Yet, as Jhally does, I propose that its nature is not to appeal to the cognitive (conscious), rational mind, but to activate the fantasies harbored at the level of the unconscious. To examine the driving power of advertising requires a look at how its messages target, not individuals with the power of free will, but *subjects* – both in ideology and in psychic structure.

The Althusserian ideology presented in Chapter 2 provides a first step; the work of Judith Williamson, in Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising, advances the argument much further. Williamson's focused work provides key principles that regulate the advertising/interpellation frame. Particularly useful is her structural conception that takes Barthes' mythical speech into account: "…advertising does have a mythic structure of its own, to which… it can refer, while (as with all referent systems) denying its content. The advertising myth in our society is not a naïve one, nor is it an ideological brainwashing forced upon us from above… Whatever effect advertising has on people, it is true that their "conscious" attitude to it will usually be sceptical" (Williamson 173-74). Note

carefully the use of the word *conscious*: it is here that I posit that for advertising to function, it must do so beyond the questioning, skeptical conscious mind.

This move toward the unconscious mind, then, brings us to the realm of the psychoanalytic, where fantasy plays a concrete role in the creation of the subject. It is within fantasy that objects (both human and material) are invested with significations that are not necessarily inherent in the object itself. This realm is, however, not outside the reaches of Althusserian ideology; fantasy life is as 'always-already' as the material conditions of life.

Williamson situates this fantasy relationship in regard to advertising in structuralist and Lacanian terminology: "…the major corollary of the fact that advertising's social image is one of dishonesty, is that advertisements must function not at the overt level of 'what is said' … because this is not believed – they function on the level of the signifier. The advertising myth ('a lie') makes it necessary for the selling to be located in the mythology of the signifier, directing attention to other myth systems, and away from the system of the ad " (Williamson 175). Here are the beginnings of how advertising might be said to 'hail' the unconscious mind.

Williamson's emphasis on the signifier is of critical importance, particularly as she goes on to delineate the visual nature of advertising: "It is the images we see in ads which give them significance, which transfer their significance to the product. This is why advertising is so uncontrollable, because whatever restrictions are made in terms of their verbal content or 'false claims,' there is no way of getting at their use of images and symbols" (Williamson 175). Bracher concurs with Williamson regarding the image: "production of desire can be found in many responses to images of the human form represented by films, paintings, sculptures, advertisements… the most notorious examples of

which involve the use of images of the female body to sell everything from cars to cigars" (Bracher 39).

This focus on the image is deeply rooted in the Marxist/ideological and psychoanalytic frames, making the significations of advertising particularly slippery and difficult to contravene. As Williamson notes, "… advertisements will always escape any criticism of them which bases its argument on their deceitfulness or even their harm in being 'capitalist,' 'sexist,' etc. Not that these criticisms are invalid, but they by-pass the ideology of the way in which ads work" (Williamson 175). The way ads 'work,' in essence, is by activating the unconscious fantasies of the individual subject, creating an imaginary relation to everyday objects – the consumer goods of advertising.

Further, there is a difficulty in using the skepticism or rationality of the conscious mind to evaluate advertising, in the fact that the material ad itself is but a *signifying structure*, not an object. As Williamson puts it, "We can never dismantle ideologies because one of their basic qualities is that of adaptability. Their tenacity and elasticity arise precisely from their lack of real content: a framework can be filled with anything, and structures of social myths are re-used and re-used. Similarly, *real* things are rearranged in false positions while their reality seems to validate those positions" (Williamson 178). Advertisements address always-already ideological positions, not the material conditions of individual lives or rational thought processes; they also address the unconscious to create significations personal to the individual viewer.

The power of advertising to mediate meaning may seem completely bound up in ideology; however, this is not a straightforward relationship. As Jhally states:

[A]dvertising's power "derives not from the ingenuity of advertising but from the need for meaning…advertising, and the meaning it provides, is indispensable for the stability of capitalism. Its real ideological role is not to create demand, to affect market share or even to dispense ideology – it is to give us meaning. That is why it is so powerful. If it is manipulative, it is manipulative with respect to a real need: our need to know the world and to make sense of it, our need to know ourselves. (Jhally 197)

Fantasy itself thus becomes the medium of advertising. "We re-create ourselves every day, in accordance with an ideology based on property – where we are defined by our relationship to things, possessions, rather than to each other" (Williamson 179), as Williamson puts it. The objects we purchase become our performance of our own identity. That this identity is but a fantasy is irrelevant; it is always-already who we need to be seen as being; more importantly, perhaps, it is psychically *necessary* to believe it.

As James Flink notes in The Automobile Age, targeting the fantasy has been around from the early days of advertising:

Since the 1920s the bulk of automobile advertising has attempted to appeal to women, who generally have the final say in the selection of the family car. One of the major pioneers of this strategy was Edward S. "Ned" Jordan, who eschewed engineering language to focus on the emotional richness of the car for women drivers. His classic 1923 ad for his Playboy car began: "Somewhere west of Laramie there's a bronco-busting, steer-roping girl who knows what I'm talking about. She can tell what a sassy pony, that's a cross between greased lightning and the place where it hits, can do with eleven hundred pounds of steel

and action when he's going high, wide and handsome. The truth is – the Playboy was built for her. (Flink 163)[24]

This example is a clear demonstration of using a signifying fantasy – of independence, freedom, individuality, and power – to hail and interpellate a particular audience of women drivers. Or, as Diana Fuss more recently stated the case in "Fashion and the Homospectatorial Look," "the desire to be like can itself be motivated and sustained by the desire to possess; being can be the most radical form of having" (Fuss 737).

How do these concepts play out in postmodern advertising? For the purposes of illuminating possible answers to this question, I have chosen to examine a television commercial created by Lowe New York for Saab, taken from a multi-ad campaign entitled "Maintain Your Identity."

The rational message of this campaign, its narrative, is this: *Obviously no one wants to be a cliché, but in today's world it can sometimes feel inevitable. When everything seems more and more the same, from the clothes we wear to the houses we live in, it's hard to feel original. Yet many people long to break free and express themselves -- to escape from the mainstream.* Saab USA taps into this urge by offering its allegedly distinctive convertible as an "antidote to sameness."

My focus is one of the television spots in this campaign. Entitled "Lost," it appears to depict the numbing sameness of everyday life in a world that seems eerily uniform and uninspiring. In the opening scenes (Figure 4.1), a woman appears in her (unidentifiable) car,

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[24] This ad campaign was not only considered groundbreaking at the time of its debut, but also has earned a place on *Advertising Age*'s Top 100 ad campaigns of all time.

driving through a housing development maze of cookie cutter "McMansions." The

ubiquitous homes are presented as an undulating yet unrelieved landscape, familiar yet

somehow slightly sinister.[25]

FIGURE 4.1: Saab Commercial "Lost," McMansionville

Obviously perplexed, the woman in the car is literally lost in "sameness." In keeping with the

ideology of advertising I have previously discussed, the focus here is placed first on

the individual, placing the woman in the signifying position of the subject. More importantly,

the subject is placed as "caught up" in the landscape of sameness, negating the possibility of

individual power or agency. She is always-already a "nobody" in this environment.

The second set of scenes (Figure 4.2) focuses on a gray-suited "off the rack"

businessman in a large corporate "cubicle farm" environment. The expression on the man's

face is slack-jawed and helpless; he appears sadly confused by his surroundings. Logically, it

would make sense to be skeptical of his confusion: his own workplace, after all, should be a

highly familiar environment. Yet he gazes over the aspect of soft gray walls awash in

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[25] It is interesting to contemplate how this same landscape would be more than likely be invested with overtones of home, family, and self-fulfillment were this to be an advertisement by a residential developer.

fluorescent light as if it were as foreign as the surface of the moon. The man himself is

framed against a gray background, emphasizing his non-identity; the cubicles and fluorescent

light fixtures that loom above them are inexorably geometric, extending to an invisible

horizon. These juxtapositions serve to semiotically "cage" the man, trapped like a rat in a

maze in which the cheese is lamentably absent. He is not an agent of his labor, but a

meaningless cog within its machine.

FIGURE 4.2: Saab Commercial "Lost," Cubicle Farm

The third set of scenes (Figure 4.3) takes place in a large airport's baggage claim area. A

male traveler watches mesmerized as a parade of identical black suitcases revolves around

the baggage claim platform. The parallel of this visual to that of a manufacturing assembly

line are striking: human subjects, rather than having the power to produce, appear at the

mercy of the identical objects we know they should control. Once again we are lost in a sea

of sameness, confronted with an undifferentiated subject who appears helpless and confused,

his capability of agency shut down.

FIGURE 4.3: Saab Commercial "Lost," Baggage Claim

The fourth set of scenes (Figure 4.4) features three pretty women. The first is shown trying on a dress in what is obviously a large department store's dressing room. As she gazes at her reflection in the mirror, she turns to see another woman emerging from a cubicled dressing room wearing exactly the same dress. As the two of them eye each other, the camera pans to a third woman, holding yet another copy of the dress on a hanger. The emotion of the third woman comes through clearly: she is not only confused by the doubling effect of identically dressed and multiply reflected women, but disgusted at the idea of joining them in their interest for this particular dress; she immediately throws the dress back on its garment rack in a clear renunciation of the idea of sameness.

FIGURE 4.4: Saab Commercial "Lost," Fashion

As in the first two scenarios, the message is readily apparent: the possibility for expressing one's own individuality is restricted, despite the visual fact of 'abundance' in these scenes. However, these moments introduce more clearly the element of fantasy: the women are actively engaged not only in the pursuit of fashion, but in viewing themselves as reflected in mirrors and each other.

In all of these scenes, the motion of the subjects themselves appears slowed; life around them happens in real time, but their own movements are sluggish and confused. This reinforces the concept of a lack of agency; circumstances are out of their control. The next set of scenes (Figure 4.5), although interspersed with cuts back to the previous scenarios, returns to the businessman, now facing a sea of identical, nondescript black cars on the rooftop of a commercial building parking deck.
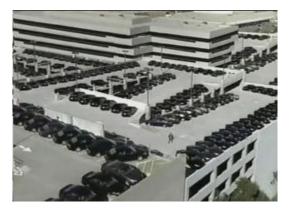
FIGURE 4.5: Saab Commercial "Lost," Parking Deck

The payoff comes in the final set of scenes (Figure 4.6). As the man tentatively clicks his remote key fob as a means of finding his own car amidst the masses, we hear the roar of a Saab engine. The man turns to take in an iconic bright silver Saab 9-3 convertible coming around the corner, as The Who's seminal recording "I'm Free" plays in the background.

FIGURE 4.6: Saab Commercial "Lost," I'm Free

As the Saab cruises by, the voiceover states, "Individuality may be a bit harder to find these days. But it's not impossible. Saab. Distinctively Designed. Independently Inspired." A super[26] appears at the end with the tagline, "The State of Independence."

A critical reading of this denouement reveals the clear operation of an ideology that speaks to personal identity and power. The lost subject wanders in an imprisoning frame of concrete and steel, trapped by the conventions of a power structure outside his control. In direct contrast, the driver of the silver Saab has transcended these limitations, literally becoming "free." The anthemic song both reiterates and mirrors the point; in addition, it works semiotically to address the target audience of baby boomers by metonymic reference to a rebellious period of youth. The Saab thus acts as the signifier of personal individuality: the unique person behind its wheel moves directly, quickly, and powerfully, demonstrating complete control over the confusion of the environment.

Ironically, the creative team that produced the campaign appears to be as caught up as their target audience in the ideological fantasy they have wrought. "We're zeroing in on people who are independent thinkers," said Gary Goldsmith, chairman and chief creative officer of Lowe New York. "Buying a Saab is a form of expression for them" (General Motors Corporation). Even as they seem to recognize that the choice of a car can include some performance of identity, the creators nevertheless reproduce the ideology that the purchase of a single car (out of thousands that will be produced and sold) is linked to actual 'independent thinking.'

Exploring such economic and ideological foundations inherent in automobile advertising can produce significant meaning. More importantly, they provide a solid

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[26] A superimposition of words over the images shown on the screen.

foundation for the second half of my project, which I believe to be even more critical than the first: to examine what possibilities may exist for societal intervention in advertising's production of meaning. This brings me back to the inescapable realm of the psychoanalytic.

Antony Easthope provides an introduction here, noting that:

> …Althusser's notion of ideology simply cannot go wrong, it cannot fail to interpellate a subject into a perfect and invisible fit with the role society has ready for it. That is not how the unconscious works, however, since any effect of unified identity is fragile, provisional, and unstable. Society does in a general sense interpellate subjects but they always feel resentment or resistance to the process. If they did not there might be no possibility of social change at all.
>
> (Easthope 145)

Resentment and resistance to ideology are the cracks in the capitalist machine. However, the use of desire and fantasy in advertising speaks to the unconscious, to the fragile, provisional, unstable identity. Here, the recognition of what "I" means to the individual is always assailable – and because the unassimilable that is inherent in the unconscious cannot become manifest, the possibilities for resistance are perhaps even more complex than those of ideology.

This necessitates a returning to Lacan, and a focus on what he calls the *objet petit a*, which can be described as the object-cause of desire. In Lacan's theory, there is a void or hole at the intersection of the Symbolic order of language and the inaccessible realm of the prelingual province of the Real – a gap that must be filled by the object-cause of desire.

Originally Lacan saw the letter as a pure signifier, but over nearly two decades he changed his view. As Dany Nobus notes, Lacan's former "signifier par excellence" has

turned on its creator and acts as a "radical antisignifier" (Nobus 29). In other words, the letter is always already contaminated in meaning; for Lacan, discourse thus always means there will be semblance.

Lacan also discusses that the letter is related to the "hole" in knowledge, that it marks off the edges of a field of knowledge and produces erasure; further, Nobus cites that "any artificial stuffing of the hole in the Symbolic coincides with the production of jouissance" (Nobus 31). Over time, this concept was expanded and revised, until in the later work Lacan calls knowledge and jouissance/truth no longer a dividing line, but "incommensurable" (Nobus 33).

With respect to advertising, this hole, gap, or radical antisignifier is analogous to Williamson's assertion of a "lack of real content: a framework can be filled with anything, and structures of social myths are re-used and re-used" (Williamson 178). It also mirrors Jhally's assertion that "the system of capitalist production empties commodities of their real meaning and the role of advertising is to insert meaning into this hollow shell" (Jhally 173). Further, theorist Filip Kovacevic argues that the very purpose of ideology itself is to fill this Lacanian gap with the appropriate *objet petit a* for its particular purpose (Kovacevic 122).

With respect to advertising, it can be argued that the consuming subject's need for meaning will produce a Lacanian *jouissance* (pleasure, or a command to Enjoy!)*,* using advertising's ability to fill the gap with whatever need for meaning is present in the subject's fantasy. Adrian Johnston neatly summarizes Lacan's conception of fantasy:

> In Lacan's view, fantasy is precisely that which veils from the subject the loss embodied by *objet petit a*. A fantasy is a scenario concealing from the fantasizing subject the fact that the object of desire is always-already lost due to

the intrinsic structuration of the subject itself. (The matheme of fantasy,

$/diamond/*a*, expresses the idea that fantasy is the attempt by the subject bereft

of *das Ding* [$] to conjoin itself [diamond] to the representative of this absence

[*a*].)[27] Fantasy is thus a defensive device, a means of concealing the failure of

desire to ever reach its object. (Johnston 360).

By working with these concepts in tandem, we can find a cohesive picture of how the

repressed unconscious desire of the *objet petit a* ties our individual fantasies to the

ideological always-already framework in which they fit so invisibly that we no longer notice

at all.

In this analysis, I will work mainly with Filip Kovacevic's interpretations of Lacan.

His thesis focuses on a praxis that presents substantive potential: to move beyond articulating

theoretical possibility for social critique and toward using Lacanian psychoanalytic thought

as a means of cultural intervention. Kovacevic specifically states that limiting such

intervention to a particular, rather than a universal, field dooms the effort: only "the

universalization of the particular and the particularization of the universal can bring about the

widespread recognition of the void in the structure of the capitalist Other" (Kovacevic 122).

This is a potential methodology that addresses Williamson's statement that "the point is not

to change ads, but to change society" (Williamson preface).

Kovacevic begins from Žižek's work on ideology and fetishism and concludes that

"complete and harmonious" ideology (vs. something which masks or distorts

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[27] Johnston's footnote: from Lacan's *Seminar XIV*, 16 November 1966.

completeness/harmony) can be equated with the "$/diamond/*a*" structure of Lacanian fantasy (Kovacevic 110). Ideology, he believes, works to appropriately fill the void that marks the intersection between the Symbolic and Real registers in the divided subject with the perfect object-cause of desire (*petit a*). The result is that "our social reality has the nature of fantasy;" that "what is false about it is not that it stands in the place of something else, but that it is consistent enough to be the only true reality" (Kovacevic 111). Once again there is a gap, an ideological void that can be filled with a fantasy that solidifies into a seamless reality through advertising's production of meaning for the commodified subject.

Kovacevic also uses Žižek's call to "historicize historicism" as a means of moving toward a "radical praxis" (Kovacevic 113) via Lacan's discourse of the hysteric. He argues that *jouissance* can engender social change; he demonstrates (using both political Plato and feminist Ellie Ragland-Sullivan) the operation of the super-ego's phallic *jouissance*, noting that "what seems a necessity in order to motivate the processes of social change is to disturb the harmonious ways in which this type of *jouissance* has accumulated in the structures of an existing society" (Kovacevic 117). Thus, while advertising can serve to fill the very interstices of daily life with manufactured meaning, access to some power might nevertheless exist to intervene in this false process.

Kovacevic notes that Lacanian thought requires a void in every symbolic: "a point which it cannot integrate and which, in essence, represents its downfall" (Kovacevic 126); he points to the implications he has demonstrated for the realms of ideology, sexuation, and truth as possibility for using Lacan as a means for "bringing into existence something entirely new" (Kovacevic 125). How this "something new" might become manifest with respect to

advertising is regrettably beyond the scope of my current analysis. However, I can relate it to a key point of Jhally's argument: the operation of advertising is remarkably akin to *religion*.

Jhally, adhering closely to Marxist doctrine, states that advertising's role "is the double subsumption of use-value to exchange value that helps us understand the *meaning* of commodities… the world of use value in advertising resembles ancient religions in its portrayal of the relation between persons and things" (Jhally 204). If advertising's social role operates as religion operates, it becomes apparent that Kovacevic's possibility for praxis has some Marxist foundation as well as a psychoanalytic one; obviously, as a review of history reveals, it is possible for belief systems to change.

In my examination of the Saab commercial, the consuming subject was placed in a position of Lacanian 'lack' – isolated, non-individuated, powerless. The appearance of the Saab convertible, operating in the position of the *objet petit a*, fills this gap, offering an instant "antidote to sameness." This fulfillment neatly cements the gap between the powerless consuming subject and the fantasy wish in that subject to not only appear as, but to become, different from all others – not in material reality at all, but psychically, in a way that mirrors his own always-already notion of himself as unique, independent, and powerful.

This demonstration shows that cars, *via the advertising messages that delineate, position, and promote them*, clearly represent more to Americans than a purchase of transportation and mobility: they are an expensive investment in the individual, the "who we are, who we wish to be (or be seen as), or to become." This traps the individual in a polysemous web of meaning, trapped between the ideological framework and the even more invisible ideology of advertising. Notions of individual power and agency have become entangled with the images of power and freedom offered up by the images, messages, and

music of automobile advertising. Unlike Althusser, however, who believes that the always-already ideology allows little room for revolution, I believe further study may reveal a possibility of a praxis that favors hegemony over ideology; perhaps one that leads to a cultural intervention that can put a different set of wheels in motion, altering by degrees the prevailing belief system in favor of a less restrictive (and less commodified) structure.

CHAPTER 5: FREUDIAN DREAM THEORY IN A PRINT

ADVERTISING CAMPAIGN

The Freudian concept of the unconscious as discussed in Chapter 3 is foundational to psychoanalytic theory, yet its very discovery came about via Freud's analysis of his own and his patients' dreams, and his analysis of the implication of dreams for waking life. More than a century has passed since Freud published his initial dream-theory, <u>Interpretation of Dreams</u>; although its ideas and subsequent revisions have suffered their own vicissitudes of acceptance and rejection, at base they remain vigorous and resilient enough to enlighten some aspects of a postmodern world. Indeed, contemporary psychoanalytic literature continues to engage with dream-theory in both clinical and cultural spheres, just as Freud himself did.

Freud's own non-clinical observations tended toward the aesthetic, with some fruitful results.[28] The scope of this chapter is to explore what possibilities dream theory might offer for illuminating postmodern advertising. As I explained in Chapter 1, a decisive reason for turning toward a psychoanalytic methodology lies in the changing nature of advertising, from primarily *textual* to primarily *visual*. With this in mind, the questions I will examine are these: Can psychoanalytic dream theory be used to illuminate the postmodern practice and artifacts of advertising? Can Freud's interpretive processes for dream imagery in some fashion translate, elucidate, clarify, decode, or gloss some operation or activation of purchase motivation by advertising? Might there be a productive Freudian "interpretation of advertising?"

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[28] See, for example, Freud's essays *Medusa's Head* (1922)*, The Uncanny* (1919)*,* and *The Theme of the Three Caskets* (1913).

The hypothesis appears to have a logical premise. Before examining the questions, however, I will need to discuss the operant dream theory itself: What is dream? What are its characteristic features and mechanisms? An understanding of these is required to determine if the theory is relevant to my aims.

To begin with a definition: a dream can be defined in general terms as a train of thoughts, images, or fancies passing through the mind during sleep (OED). I would add the incidence of emotions and sensations, as well as the important notion that this passing psychic parade is an involuntary one. Freud's own definitions (in addition to his "royal road to the unconscious") include three further aspects: the *nature* of dreams, the *structure* of dreams, and the *meaning* of dreams.[29]

On the nature of dreams, he notes that "[M]aterial employed in dream representation consists principally, though not exclusively, of situations and of sensory images, mostly of a visual character" (Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 39) that are also "strange and obscure"(Freud <u>Interpretation</u> 35). On their construction he elaborates: "Every dream reveals itself as a psychical structure which has a meaning and which can be inserted at an assignable point in the mental activities of waking life"(Freud <u>Interpretation</u> 35). Finally, as to the meaning of dream, Freud extends the definition in a significant direction: "At the point which I have now reached, I am led to regard the dream as a sort of substitute for the thought processes, full of meaning and emotion…" (Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 26).

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[29] Although Freud's <u>Interpretation of Dreams</u> was his original and most comprehensive exploration and explication of dream theory, his later publication of <u>On Dreams</u> contains the same concepts and methodologies; I have mainly used the more succinct text for its brevity and clarity.

If dreams can substitute for the thought processes, it is reasonable to infer that they are also *purposeful* – but how to determine that purpose? Freud's answer is this: "The dream provides a kind of psychical consummation for the *wish* that has been suppressed… by representing it as fulfilled"(Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 101). Why, however, is the fulfillment of a *wish* the motive power behind dream?

The answer grows out of Freud's metapsychology – the primary and secondary processes; the lockstep concepts of the unconscious and repression, the pleasure and reality principles, as described in Chapter 3, pages 32-35.

This is why dreams are necessary: they literally provide (prohibited) libidinal satisfaction by fulfilling an individual's unacceptable wishes and fantasies in the unconscious mind – and without disturbing his rest, as Freud notes: "it also satisfies the other agency by allowing sleep to continue" (Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 101). This simply means that the wish finds an outlet in dreams because the repressive forces, so strict in waking life, relax somewhat in sleep – although, as Freud notes, "the censorship is never completely eliminated but merely reduced… The repressed material must submit to certain alterations which mitigate its offensive features" (Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 93-94).

Thus I arrive at the concept of a "dream distortion," a deliberate unconscious scrambling of dream information that leads to my next avenue of exploration. These are the two types of dream-content – the manifest and the latent dream – and the mechanisms known as "the dream-work."

I will begin with the "manifest content" of a dream: those night-images the dreamer can remember and attempt to report (although the censorship process may result either in a

repression of content or simply forgetting it altogether). This is the distorted version of the dream; the content requires analysis to throw light on its true meaning.

Contrast this with the "latent dream-content" – as Freud puts it, the "relevant material discovered by analyzing [the manifest dream]" (Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 27). This is the actual expression of the fulfilled wish. However, nothing is as it appears in these two versions of the dream. In fact, they typically have different material altogether; further, what appears prominently in the manifest dream is likely to be of little or no importance in the latent dream (Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 51-52).

Why two such differing versions from the same night's dream? Once again, the answer lies in the operation of repression. The wish fulfillment made manifest in the dream is unacceptable to the conscious ego. Although the censorship is loosened in sleep, it is never absent. An undisguised wish fulfillment cannot be allowed to shock the conscious psyche or to cause the dreamer to wake. The whole purpose of the dream work is that of artful disguise.

Such disguise is what allows us to 'eat our cake and dream it too.' This is the 'dream-work' itself: the mechanisms that create the bewilderment in dream-life, the jumbled confusion of dream-products that result. Its four operant processes are complex: visual representation, condensation, displacement, and secondary revision.

Visual representation (which Freud also called 'picture writing') is the dreamer's process of transforming the dream thoughts into visual images. These concrete images prevent the dreamer from working with conceptual ideas or connecting words; it is a regressive and clumsy process that typically results in a confusing and contradictory visual dream text that may have little or no apparent meaning (Freud "Lecture XI").

The mechanisms of condensation and displacement are the main agents of the dream-work, as well as the reason most dreams are little more than a juxtaposition of obscure, seemingly unrelated images. The following short descriptions offer a look at the *operations*; I will take up the resultant *meanings* under the topic of dream interpretation.

The term condensation is descriptive: the process literally condenses and compresses multiple ideas into each single dream image. In fact, Freud's explication shows that individual dream elements and situations are always put together from two or more impressions, often complexly superimposed. The dream-thoughts are also *overdetermined* – meaning that all of the various condensed elements are likely to represent a single disguised dream idea (Freud On Dreams 41-42).

Displacement is also a disguising agent; it works through metonymy to attach meaning, by association, onto the most unlikely of dream elements. As Freud tells us, "it is the process of displacement which is chiefly responsible for our being unable to discover or recognize the dream thoughts in the dream content, unless we understand the reason for their distortion"(Freud On Dreams 60).

The final mechanism of the dream-work is that of secondary revision; a dreamer's attempt to create a "dream composition" by consciously rearranging or ordering the various dream-thoughts for reporting. Not every dreamer attempts a revision – a good thing, as Freud notes that "a hopelessly confused" dream is easier to analyze than a well-constructed one, saving the analyst "the trouble of demolishing what has been superimposed upon the dream content"(Freud On Dreams 74-75).

The work of interpretation is the *analysis* of the dream-work: Freud states, "I have laid it down as the task of dream interpretation to replace the dream by the latent dream

thoughts, that is, to unravel what the dream work has woven"(Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 114). He accomplishes this by having the dreamer engage in free association, starting from any point in the dream content. "[O]ne is soon brought back to another of its elements.... bringing to light connections which were not visible in the dream itself" (Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 22).

This method thus undoes the dream-work to tease out both the instigator of the dream and its (multiple) connections to waking life. In the first instance, the dream's source is typically founded upon some trivial impression from the day immediately preceding the dream. Dreams, however, do not concern themselves with trivia; the choice of such an indifferent idea is merely the operation of displacement, creating an obscure link to more meaningful thoughts (Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 54-56).

Although the full process of dream analysis exceeds our present scope and needs, we will profit by adding a few additional examples of interpretation and symbol in dream. A few specific examples regarding interpretation of condensed/displaced elements deserve particular mention:

A *causal relation* between two thoughts is "either left unrepresented or is replaced by a sequence of two pieces of dream of different lengths," typically with the conclusion preceding the beginning of the dream;

Cause and effect relations are represented by "an immediate transformation of one thing into another;"

An "*either-or*" relationship must be interpreted as a case of "both-and;"

Contraries are expressed in dreams by one and the same element;

A direct 'No' "seems not to exist;"

Reversal, the opposition between two thoughts, may result in an unrelated element of the dream being turned into its opposite;

Inhibition of movement serves to express a contradiction between two impulses, *a conflict of will*"(Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 64-66).

It is also important to note that, although much of the dream work involves constructed *situations*, these are not privileged in dream; even the smallest and most disconnected of visual or spoken fragments or ideas may represent a critical element of the latent dream. In addition, Freud makes a case for even greater complexity:

> the dream thoughts… reveal themselves as a psychical complex of the most intricate possible structure. Its portions stand in the most manifold logical relations to one another: they represent foreground and background, conditions, digressions and illustrations, chains of evidence and counterarguments. Each train of thought is almost invariably accompanied by its *contradictory* counterpart. (Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 62-63)

Such complexity is also an inherent part of Freud's body of work with symbol in dream. For the purposes of this inquiry, I will limit the scope of symbol to a few key examples, while noting that the typical dream symbol represents ideas of a sexual nature. Freud points out a number of common dream symbols, including these that are relevant to the present purpose:

Water can represent semen or urine;

Entering or leaving water is associated with giving birth or being born;

The male organ can be equated with objects that contain or transport water;

The female genitals are represented by bottles, vessels, and other containers;

Blinding or blindness is related to Oedipal castration;

Departure in dreams is the equivalent of dying. (Freud "Lecture X")

With these basic concepts of dream I could begin my examination; however, because advertising so often clearly exhibits the element of *fantasy*, I will also consider Freud's work on *day-dream* as well. In his essay "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming," he writes: "The motive forces of phantasies are unsatisfied wishes, and every single phantasy is the fulfillment of a wish, a correction of unsatisfying reality." Further, "the wish makes use of an occasion in the present to construct, on the pattern of the past, a picture of the future." In other words, fantasy (daydream) has the same aims as night dream. The key difference between the two lies once again in repression. Most adults are ashamed of their fanciful daydreams and would be loathe to admit or to discuss the ideas. Yet they are able to admit the ideas to themselves; the thoughts are not so unacceptable as to require repression to the unconscious (Freud "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" 439-40).

I will now turn my attentions to the productive possibilities of dream-theory to explore the cultural product of advertising. The object of this study is a print advertising campaign introducing a designer perfume; the entire campaign consists of four enigmatic images, six enigmatic words of ad copy, and a perfume bottle (Figures 5.1 – 5.4). [30]

As Freud instructs in On Dreams (145), "it is advisable… to divide a dream into its elements and to find the associations attaching to … fragments separately." Therefore, let us take each image in turn and record our brief "manifest dream thoughts." To begin:

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[30] Source: Giorgio Armani Corporation, Print Advertisement Campaign: Acqua Di Gio, rec November 2004.

Ad #1-- A desire (Figure 5.1)*:* The image is an extreme close-up of a beautiful young woman; her hair and body have been cropped from the frame. The ad copy tells you that her gaze, aimed slightly upward toward you, is about *A desire*. These words are located *under* her eye; they are also tiny in relation to the woman.

A desire

FIGURE 5.1: Acqua di Gio Ad #1, "A Desire"
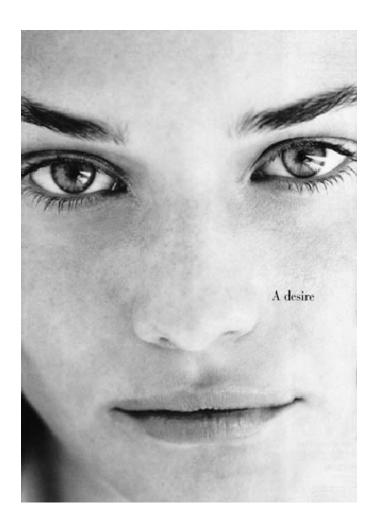
Ad #2 -- A feeling (Figure 5.2)*:* Once again the young woman appears cut and cropped. Only one eye is visible. She is naked, and posed like a child, hugging her knees to her chest. The two small words of ad copy – *A feeling* – are placed just above her breast, on her bicep. Her expression could indicate fear, or sadness, or longing.

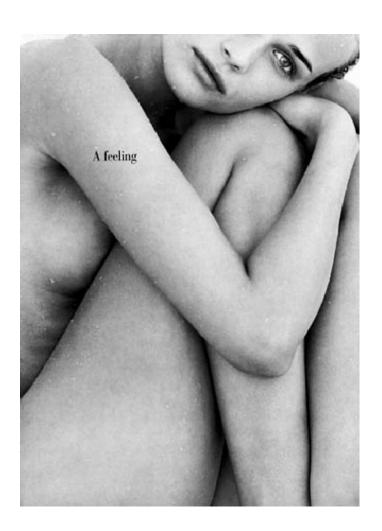FIGURE 5.2: Acqua di Gio Ad #2, "A Feeling"

Ad #3 – A provocation (Figure 5.3)*:* The young, naked woman now walks away from us into an undulating sea. Her arms hang loose at her sides; the water level just reaches her buttocks. The ad copy tells us this is *A provocation;* it presents the product package and name, Acqua di Gio, for the first time.

FIGURE 5.3: Acqua di Gio Ad #3, "A Provocation"

Ad #4 - *Acqua di Gio* (Figure 5.4): In the final image, the young woman's face in close-up is presented in full. Her heavy-lidded eyes and wet, sand-stained skin and hair express an aura of satiety. She appears to lie in a reclining position; her hands embrace her own face. The ad copy is inexplicably multilingual: the product name in Italian, *A tender provocation of Giorgio Armani* in German.
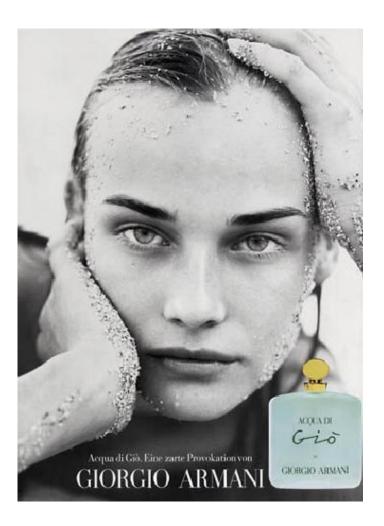

FIGURE 5.4: Acqua di Gio Ad #3, "Acqua di Gio"

A non-analytic reading of this campaign might focus on ideas of female sexuality and pleasure; an insightful reading might bring in ideas of "becoming a woman." Will dream theory support these ostensible meanings, and if not, will it offer more productive insight?

In the first ad (Figure 5.1), the visual representation shows us only part of the woman's face: she is *unwhole* – a word that might lead to the associated word *unwholesome* – which might lead further to the associated idea that the woman is *undesirable*. This lies in direct opposition to the other elements of the ad, which are concerned with nothing but desire, condensed into both a written word and the woman's desirous gaze. Is this her desire, or that of another? Is the desire as overt as the gaze, or is it pushed down (repressed, unconscious) and insignificant, as the word itself appears pushed down and insignificant (from its typical position at the top of the page)? Does this *subordinated* position of the word hold further meaning regarding issues of *power*? As Freud instructs, a condensation representing an either-or situation must be interpreted inclusively as "both-and;" I must conclude all of these possibilities are meaningful: both a conscious desire and an unconscious desire, both her desire and that of another, both subordinated and dominant.

Next, the word of desire is located on her cheek; advancing an association of *cheeky* – layering the concept of *naughtiness* or *disobedience* over that of desire and thereby giving some possible justification for why the woman might be desirable – or undesirable. The overdetermination of the concept of desire in all of these associations finally leads to the possibility that this is *not* a small, insignificant desire, but rather an overwhelming one.

In the second ad (Figure 5.2), the again cropped and *unwhole* woman is even more *unwhole-some*: one eye is missing from the frame. Although she is naked, neither her pose nor her gaze appear erotic. This *lack of sexuality* is supported by the loss of the eye; a

representation of blindness that Freud tells us symbolizes Oedipal *castration*. Her unclad body is womanly, in direct opposition to her childlike pose; this advances two associative meanings: *woman-child* and *child-woman*. Her posture might indicate a feeling of *fear*, but also involves some element of *holding* or *self-soothing*, as if she were feeling *sad* or *abandoned*. According to the Freudian framework, the assumption must be that all of these emotions are present.

Further, the location of the ad copy – *A feeling* – on her bicep associates the feeling with a *muscle*, indicating that these must be *strong* feelings. Yet while our attention is on this muscle we notice it is slender and undeveloped in appearance; we must now add the opposing association of *weakness* as well. The self-holding pose presents a further association of *inhibition*, which leads us in still further directions: *sexual inhibition*, and (self) inhibition of movement, a dream-symbol representing a *conflict of will*. What forces of will are in opposition here? Two ideas are called into mind: *inhibition vs. sexuality*, and the *woman vs. the child*.

The third ad (Figure 5.3) is rich with sexual dream symbolism. The young woman walks away from the viewer into an undulating sea, arms hanging loosely at her sides, fingertips brushing the water's surface, which is at an optimal level to penetrate her sexually. Recalling that water in dream is often representative of male semen, and that the perfume bottle can stand as a symbol of the female genitals, the key association here is that of *sexual intercourse*. This can be further supported by the name of the product: Acqua di Gio – "the water of Gio" – literally the water of a man, or semen. The water of the sea fills the woman as the water of Gio fills the symbol of the woman. Further, the diminutive name of Gio, in juxtaposition with the designer's full name, Giorgio, raises the notion of a nickname – or

more specifically, the not uncommon occurrence of men jokingly referring to their own penises by dimunitives of their own names. This gives the perfume bottle a second signification – that of *the penis* itself.

Next, the ad copy also names *A provocation* – which would literally "stir things up." There is literal evidence for this, as the water is visibly agitated around the woman's buttocks. The association is clearly that of *orgasm* – yet the woman's loose-limbed passivity is a visual opposition. Finally, I must consider the other dream symbols. The water holds an additional meaning of life and birth – but the idea of *departure* is a dream symbol for death, and the phrase "walk into the sea" raises associations of *suicide*. The associations of a strong conflict between *sex* and *life/death* are strong.

The final ad (Figure 5.4) replays the symbolism of water as semen, but in a different manner. The perfume bottle remains as a symbol of both the female genitals and the penis, but the sea of desire is gone. Wet sand coats the woman's hands, face, and hair – she has become a *dirty girl*. This notion is reinforced by implication: rather than the semen penetrating the woman, it is now in evidence as the *ejaculate product* of the sensual sea. Sex that is procreative has no visual residue; such displays are more associated with *masturbation* and *pornography*, making the woman *dirty* or *naughty*. The masturbatory association is further reinforced by the woman's sand-coated self-caress of her face. The association of *desire* that accompanied the woman's gaze in the first ad has been replaced by one of apparent *satiety* or *satisfaction*.

The new ad copy is confusing; the product name is in Italian, the copy line "*A Tender Provocation of Giorgio Armani*" in German (employing the feminine article – it is *the woman* who provokes). The thoughts that arise from the word "tender" are varied and

contradictory: *easily crushed*, *young and vulnerable*, *painful and sore*, and even *legal tender*. Yet they do not contradict the overall impression of the other associations, which point in only one direction, toward a debased form of satisfaction.

Now that I have elicited a set of associations, it is time to try to find their true organization and meaning: What wish fulfillment is represented in this work?

The first set of associations presents a case of overwhelming and repressed desire, overlaid with issues of power and disobedience. The second grouping also focuses on issues of power – or more correctly, of sexual powerlessness, including castration and inhibition. The third set presents the conflict of sexual intercourse and passivity, overlaid by notions of life and death. The last grouping focuses solely on satisfaction – but it is satisfaction derived from disobedience, debasement, and a suggestion of pain, including the thought that the woman offers her body as a commodity for exchange, an act of self-prostitution.

What wish is fulfilled by such conditions, in which the woman speaks, "My desire (is your desire), my strong feeling (is to feel weak and helpless), to provoke you by disobedient behavior to have sexual intercourse with me as I remain passive, to drown me in an ocean of your orgasmic pleasure, and to debase me that I might find my own satisfaction?" This is a wish of sexual masochism.

If we look at Freud's *Economic Problem of Masochism*, we find just such a possibility: "…the performances [of masochism] are, after all, only a carrying-out of the phantasies in play – the manifest content is of being… in some way maltreated, forced into unconditional obedience, dirtied and debased;" further, "they place the subject in a characteristically female situation; they signify, that is, being castrated, or copulated with…" (Freud "The Economic Problem of Masochism" 162).

To this point, I have demonstrated only that dream-theory can offer an interpretation of an advertising text. Now I must come to the crux of my exploration: Is there any meaningful association between this dream-informed reading and the way the advertisement appeals to its audience – or even its effectiveness at inducing purchase? Remember that Freud in <u>Interpretation of Dreams</u> stated "Every dream reveals itself as a *psychical structure* which has a *meaning* and which *can be inserted at an assignable point* in the *mental activities of waking life*" (Freud <u>Interpretation</u> 35). Can fantasy-based advertising operate like dream, and be inserted at an assignable point in the mental activities of waking life?

Potential progress toward an answer lies in one of Freud's works on creative writing: "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva." In his discussion of the main character's repressed erotic feelings for a girl in his childhood, Freud describes a case in which an object or artifact aroused repressed wishes and *provided motive for psychic action*:

> So that it was Norbert Hanold's erotic feelings that were repressed; and since his erotism knew and had known no other object than Zoe Bertgang in his childhood, his memories of her were forgotten. The ancient relief [a marble sculpture that bore a resemblance to the young woman] aroused the slumbering erotism in him, and *made his childhood memories active*. On account of a resistance to erotism that was present in him, these memories could only become operative as unconscious ones. What now took place in him was a struggle between the power of erotism and that of the forces that were repressing it; the manifestation of this struggle was a delusion. (Freud "Delusions and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva" 44-45)

In this case, a psychic action resulted from the man's exposure to repressed childhood memory. True, the action involved was a delusion – a distinctly undesirable result. Yet the action was undesirable specifically because the struggle between his erotism and the forces of repression was so severe. What if the activation of the unconscious thought met with milder forces of repression?

One last insight from Freud's <u>On Dreams</u> leads to my final step. He writes,

"If the dream I analyze is not my own, but someone else's, the conclusion will be the same, though the grounds for believing it will be different. If the dreamer is a healthy person, there is no other means open to me of obliging him to recognize the repressed ideas that have been discovered than by pointing out the context of the dream thoughts; and I cannot help it if he refuses to recognize them.

If, however, I am dealing with a neurotic patient, with a hysteric, for instance, he will find the acceptance of the repressed thought forced upon him, owing to its connection with the symptoms of his illness, and owing to the improvement he experiences when he exchanges those symptoms for the repressed ideas. (Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 87-88).*

In other words, the therapeutic value of dream interpretation can only work if the dreamer is capable of recognizing his own repressed symptoms – and the relief he obtains is the result of *exchanging those symptoms* for what was repressed.

Now I may finally arrive at a limited conclusion. If the viewer of an ad is seen as acting in the role of a dreamer, will the wish fulfillment embedded in the ad's disguised

dream thoughts have a psychically activating effect? There are three possible trajectories: If the viewer is "healthy," i.e., has no repressed wishes regarding the matter, the answer is no. If the viewer does have repressed wishes about material, but they are so severely repressed as to be inadmissible to consciousness, the ad will again is likely to have no effect. However, for the viewer who possesses the repressed wish at the level of *fantasy* – here we have a possibility that the dream-material will awaken the dormant wish and produce an action; specifically, the possibility of product purchase as an exchange of the symptom for the repressed ideas.

I will close by returning to my sample dream analysis, noting that this ad/dream would be unlikely to move a true masochist to purchase this perfume – but a person with *masochistic fantasies* might find that the ad/dream excites the fantasy enough to result in a purchase. The same would hold true for ad/dreams that disguised wish fulfillments relating to other common neuroses, such as obsession, fetishism, and depression.

In Unconscious for Sale, the authors note that the advertisement, "like a dream image, is in a way sacred, to the extent that it touches within us a whole range of repressed feelings and emotions… Around this foothold is woven the dialectic of transgression, desire, and the forbidden – levels that advertising, without a doubt, intends to bring together in each of us" (Haineault and Roy 11). They also note that "by contrasting with the gray sameness of everyday life, advertisements offer themselves as an invitation to dream" (Haineault and Roy 29).

Like dreams, the typical fantasy-type ad is confusing, short-lived, and quickly forgotten. Both are equally likely, as Freud once said, to be "dismissed by our critical faculty as worthless rubbish" (Freud On Dreams 10). Yet his comment on dreams was not intended

as humorous: it marks the fact that it is *specifically* the throwaway nature of dream images that marks them as being of critical importance in psychic organization. The fruitful comparison just completed appears to validate this fact in relation to advertising and psychic organization, and to offer rich avenues for further exploration. For now, let me simply say that, for at least a portion of the billions of the dollars expended on advertising each year, they are spent precisely because advertising *works – like a dream.*

CHAPTER 6: TOWARD A PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITICISM OF ADVERTISING

The analysis of advertising for its own sake may be an interesting exercise (as many an undergraduate composition student has come to learn). However, I see little point in analyzing the practice of advertising without some potential of intervening in its effects on individuals and societies. There are many who have preceded me in this belief, of course, so it makes sense to look at a few of their recommended strategies.

Jean Kilbourne, a veteran of the tobacco advertising wars, recommends a social systems approach similar to that used against smoking – combined efforts by government, interest groups, and educators: "We are rebels with a cause when we take on these industries and their destructive advertising messages. We can and must unhook ourselves from the lure, the bait of advertising" (Kilbourne 311). Juliet Schor, an activist for protecting children from consumerism, concurs that change must involve the "legislative, cultural, and social… reversing corporate-constructed childhood is a good first step" (Schor 210-11). So does Alissa Quart, who additionally urges that "subtler lessons are now necessary" for teaching teenagers to evaluate ad messages, many of which are disguised as editorial or entertainment (Quart 231). These are all important ideas, of course, but their focus on "fixing advertising" is problematic. While it may be a possibility, through regulation and education, to effect some change in the ads themselves, or to ask people to become "more aware" of the way they naturalize commodification, this leaves to one side the nature of the way advertising works within the *psychic* economy.

Naomi Klein in <u>No Logo</u> espouses global activism against what she calls "the branded life." Toward advertising in particular, she points to the effectiveness of "adbusting" or "culture-jamming," [31] commenting that "for some jammers, parody is perceived in rather grandiose fashion, as a powerful end in itself. But for many more… it is simply a new tool for packaging anticorporate salvos, one that is more effective than most at breaking through the media barrage" (Klein 309). Suzanna Danuta Walters, a feminist theorist, focuses on image production: "there has also been an examination of the relationship between the male hegemony of the "consciousness industries" and the sexist content of the images produced, thus making an argument not only for more "positive" images, but also for more women media producers" (Walters 36). Anthony Cortese, focusing on images of women and minorities in advertising, believes his work:

> …contributes to the development of critical media literacy. Such cognitive capacity can counter the way that advertising works to obscure our awareness, impeding our movement toward liberating social change. Critical reflection on mass media images empowers consumers to become more independent people, able to free themselves from patterns of domination and become more dynamic constituents, eager to undertake positive social transformation, and capable of doing so. (Cortese 140)

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[31] "Adbusting" and "culture jamming" denote the practice of subverting existing ad messages by altering their physical characteristics or ad copy. One excellent example is an added copy line on a Marlboro billboard featuring two cowboys on horseback, making it appear that one says to the other, "Bob, I've got emphysema." Although the term "adbusting" is a relatively recent invention of Kalle Lasn, the practice was first recorded during the Great Depression, in which people (calling themselves "Toucher-Uppers") spontaneously attacked the billboards of "the good life" that mocked the reality of their daily lives. Lasn's call to action appears in Kalle Lasn, <u>Culture Jam : The Uncooling of America</u>, 1st ed. (New York: Eagle Brook, 1999). He also publishes *Adbusters : Journal of the Mental Environment.*.

Again, all of these strategies hold some merit (although Cortese's seems perhaps to reproduce the ideology it purports to address) – but again, all ignore the psychic aspects of advertising's effects.

I do not mean to suggest that psychoanalytic principles should completely eclipse Marxist considerations. Just as advertising's call to desire is unquestionably a function of the psychoanalytic, so too is the product of advertising itself unquestionably based in capitalism. Here, perhaps, I could call on Antonio Gramsci, whose theory of hegemony is a relatively optimistic theory of effecting (slow and gradual) change in a capitalist system. Regarding social change, he offers a strategy that begins as self-reflexive: "The starting-point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is 'knowing thyself' as a product of the historical process to date which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory. Such an inventory must therefore be made at the outset." As for taking social action, he states:

> Specific necessities can be deduced from this for any cultural movement which
>
> aimed to replace common sense and old conceptions of the world in general:
>
> 1. Never to tire of repeating its own arguments (though offering literary variation
>
> of form): repetition is the best didactic means for working on the popular
>
> mentality.[32]
>
> 2. To work incessantly to raise the intellectual level of ever-growing strata of the
>
> populace, in other words, to give a personality to the amorphous mass element.
>
> This means working to produce elites of intellectuals of a new type which arise

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[32] This strategy is particularly interesting to my argument, given that it is one of the key features of effective advertising.

directly out of the masses, but remain in contact with them to become, as it were,

the whalebone in the corset. (Gramsci)

This suggests that a societal critique of advertising needs to be performed by more than a few voices working alone, and for an audience much wider than scholars and academicians.

Leslie Savan, former advertising critic for the *Village Voice*, offers a recommendation that includes the possibility of advertising's psychic power: "Perhaps [it] lies in allowing yourself to feel the pleasure or inspiration of these ads, if they so grab you, but in *not* making the connection you're supposed to. If you are stirred, *sublimate* – discharge those feelings onto something else – not sneakers, not bras, not anything you can buy. Work out barefoot, meditate, read a book, overthrow the PTA, mow the lawn, do good deeds, wash that man right of your hair" (Savan 227).[33] This approach, at least, recognizes that advertising might cause the psyche to be "stirred" in some fashion.

Although Sut Jhally resists making any definitive recommendation, his specifically Marxist conclusion nevertheless leaves open the door for more than a change to the capitalist system: "Advertising not only reflects, but is itself a part of the extraction of surplus-value (in addition to realising it). Capital invades the process of meaning construction – it valorizes consciousness itself" (Jhally 205). Yet even though he views advertising as constructed *meaning*, he nevertheless returns to advertising as playing only to consciousness.

Advertising as it is practiced today is far from a strictly commercial or capitalist exercise. Although Marxist and ideological theories provide a significant methodology that

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[33] It is interesting to note here that Savan's final clause is not only the title of an old popular song, but was also used as a headline in an advertisement. Within her very statement of resistance, advertising has made an appropriation. Whether or not this was intentional (and I have no reason to believe it wasn't), this is a good example of how advertising can circumvent even a critic's Nietzschean *will not to deceive*.

reveals advertising's ability to mask conditions of reality and place the consumer in an always-already ideological role, I believe I have made a case that these explanations are not a final answer. Advertising's siren songs, focusing on individual desire, are more than an interpellative device – their call goes beyond hailing to activate our deepest unconscious wishes.

Fredric Jameson also weighs in against the idea that capitalism is a conscious affair, arguing against "…the conception of mass culture as sheer manipulation, sheer commercial brainwashing and empty distraction by the multinational corporations who obviously control every feature of the production and distribution of mass culture today. If this were the case, then it is clear that the study of mass culture would at best be assimilated to the anatomy of the techniques of ideological marketing and be subsumed under the analysis of advertising texts and materials" (Jameson <u>Signatures of the Visible</u> 21). As I noted in my introduction, this has unquestionably not come to pass: although significant critical work on advertising does exist, it is certainly not enough to subsume anything.

Freud himself commented on Marxism and provides a statement that supports my position:

> But it cannot be assumed that economic motives are the only ones that determine the behaviour of human beings in society. The undoubted fact that different individuals, races and nations behave differently under the same economic conditions is alone enough to show that economic motives are not the sole dominating factors. It is altogether incomprehensible how psychological factors can be overlooked where what is in question are the reactions of living human beings; for not only were these reactions concerned in establishing the economic

conditions, but even under the domination of those conditions men can only
bring their original instinctual impulses into play – their self-preservative
instinct, their aggressiveness, their need to be loved, their drive towards
obtaining pleasure and avoiding unpleasure. (Freud New Introductory Lectures
on Psychoanalysis 157)

What I find essential in this statement is Freud's focus on the unconscious impulses that are
active in every human being. Certainly these impulses can be called into the service of
ideology, but such a co-optation will always be incomplete. The drives and desires of the
unconscious specifically include the *repressed*, that which is unacceptable to the conscious
ego: these cannot be directly performed, but only sublimated (as ideology demands) or acted
out (as dreams, wishes, and symptoms). This speaks directly to the importance of the
unconscious for advertising: it has an ability to *wish* that exceeds even Madison Avenue's
wildest hopes.

However, although I have demonstrated psychoanalytic concepts as directly relevant
in the analysis and criticism of advertising, such work is only the first step toward a
resistance. As Easthope notes, "There are, however, two main problems with trying to
illustrate the analysis of an aesthetic text as fantasy. The first is that texts are different and the
particular mechanisms of fantasy put to work are almost as different. Once the general point
has been made that you can read art as expression of an unconscious wish, there is not much
more to say" (Easthope 118). His assertion speaks to my previous statements (pages 12-13
and 15) about the reasons for a lack of a deep and sustained criticism of advertising. If all
that can be done is to dissect individual advertising presentations (which forecloses the

possibility of a comprehensive project, both in terms of the number of ads and the frequency at which they appear and disappear), there truly would *not* be much more to say. For example, case studies of the type I have presented, although theoretically demonstrative and evidential, might not by themselves, as a method of intervention, offer an effective common resistance to advertising.

Psychoanalytic concepts of advertising are specifically espoused by the authors of Unconscious for Sale. In their words, "The frequency with which fantasy and reality, the imaginary and the informative, are contrasted is by no means the result of chance. On the contrary, the sacred and the profane, the desired and the unobtainable and the forbidden, are all so omnipresent in advertising rhetoric that it must be concluded that this polarity is a desired effect" (Haineault and Roy 39). Further, "Instead of calling [consumers] to order with self-awareness, advertising offers them a message whose structure is modeled on such mental habits as projection, displacement, identification, or repression, if not denial or condensation" (Haineault and Roy 41). These mental habits are specifically of the psychoanalytic realm of the unconscious, and their purpose is to gain pleasure and avoid unpleasure. As a result, "An impression of ease finally authorized, or at least one of 'unconscious permitted,' emerges. It is possibly for this reason that some advertisements seem to elicit a feeling of well-being" (Haineault and Roy 41). Advertisements allow individuals to flirt with the risks of unpleasure (AXE Body Spray's "When she sweats, she glistens. When you sweat, you stink"), or to activate their desires (Calvin Klein Jeans' "Nothing comes between me and my Calvins"), but in a safety zone that ultimately allows them to be defused in a safe and socially acceptable fashion – by purchasing a product and performing the role of the good consumer.

I believe that, like a neurotic individual, American society is filled with Freudian symptoms or "compromise formations:" such desires as are not permitted overt expression will find some indirect means of manifestation. And in a consumer culture, advertising has become an important stage for such displays. In fact, television advertising in particular has become an everyman's cinema, with every image and sound layered in nuance and overdetermination, a very public (although staged) 'acting out' that gives rise to as many unconscious wishes as there are individuals in the audience. Moreover, in true psychoanalytic fashion, these instances of acting out are acted out again and again, and reinterpreted by individuals again and again – a demonstration of a psychoanalytic compulsion to repeat.

In Unconscious for Sale, the authors note that "Whenever a representation is presented to the mind, the psyche runs up against the problem of *giving* the representation a meaning. The advertising message… counts on the fact that we are going to retain from all of its rhetoric only the least troubling aspects – that we are ourselves going to collaborate in the repression of what is problematic – and in this sense *we are ourselves the authors of our own perversion*" (Haineault and Roy 108, emphasis added). If we are responsible for giving all of advertising's images their meaning, this is not something we do in logical fashion: the only place we have to draw meaning from is our own experience, which includes the unconscious as well as the conscious.[34]

Does this fact, however, thus throw into question the analyses I have produced in Chapters 4 and 5? There are two answers here. The first is *yes*, at least to some extent:

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[34] I could also call here on Barthes: "In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed, 'run' (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning." See "Death of the Author" in Roland Barthes, Image, Music, Text, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

because I am the one who performed the close reading, there is no question that I have

unconsciously chosen signifiers from my own psychic organization. The second is a decided

no that comes from Freud's own instruction, which I will repeat here:

> "If the dream I analyze is not my own, but someone else's, the conclusion will
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> be the same, though the grounds for believing it will be different. If the
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> dreamer is a healthy person, there is no other means open to me of obliging
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> him to recognize the repressed ideas that have been discovered than by
>
> pointing out the context of the dream thoughts; and I cannot help it if he
>
> refuses to recognize them.
>
> *If, however, I am dealing with a neurotic patient, with a hysteric, for instance,*
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> *he will find the acceptance of the repressed thought forced upon him, owing to*
>
> *its connection with the symptoms of his illness, and owing to the improvement*
>
> *he experiences when he exchanges those symptoms for the repressed ideas.*
>
> (Freud <u>On Dreams</u> 87-88).

In Freud's view, "pointing out the context of the dream thoughts" leads to some possibility of

change in the individual. This brings me to a discussion of the possibility of praxis: in what

ways might psychoanalytic theory be placed into service as a means of resisting the power of

advertising?

Antony Easthope notes that "Freud has no difficulty with the materialist assertion that

social life is ultimately determined by the economic base. His doubt is whether changing the

economic base is sufficient to transform culture and ideology" (Easthope 142). Freud, then,

would look toward psychoanalytic concepts, then, as some means of resistance.

In <u>Time Driven</u>, Adrian Johnston offers such an opening. His theory recognizes Freud's drives as being opposed both to reality and to each other – but he also posits each of Freud's drives as containing its own conflict, as imperfect and split. This offers a glimpse of hope:

> Despite the apparent bleakness and antiutopianism of an assessment of human nature as being perturbed by an irreducible inner antagonism, there is, surprisingly, what might be described as a liberating aspect to this splitting of the drives. Since drives are essentially dysfunctional, *subjects are able to act otherwise than as would be dictated by instinctually compelled pursuits of gratification, satisfaction, and pleasure*. In fact, subjects are forced to be free, since, for such beings, the mandate of nature is forever missing… The contradictions arising from the conflicts internal to the libidinal economy mark the precise places where a freedom transcending mundane materiality has a chance to briefly flash into effective existence; such points of breakdown in the deterministic nexus of the drives clear the space for the sudden emergence of something other than the smooth continuation of the default physical and sociopsychical "run of things." (Johnston 340, emphasis added)

Finding some means of locating these "precise places" that "flash into effective existence" for purposes of an advertising intervention seems a project worth pursuing.

The difficulty, however, with "psychoanalyzing advertising" as an artifact is similar to the difficulty of "psychoanalyzing literature:" there are no living human beings involved in its representations and discourses – only actors playing a role (even if that role is "as

himself").[35] Psychoanalysis was originally conceived as a dyadic therapeutic intervention; it continues to be practiced as an intensely personal and individual, not generalized or collective, discourse. The process demands the participation of an individual subject, who comes to recognize his fantasies and desires and to move toward greater psychic strength and freedom through the therapeutic operations of *transference* and *working through*.

These concepts merit definition. *Transference*, according to Freud, is an intersubjective phenomenon, a psychic force: "… new editions or facsimiles of the tendencies and phantasies which are aroused and made conscious during the progress of the analysis… have this peculiarity… that they replace some earlier person by the person of the physician" (Freud Dora 106). Put simply, the subject comes to *transfer* his desires and actions onto the person of the analyst, repeating the patterns of past relationships in ways that can be observed, interpreted, and introduced to the subject to induce new insights. *Working through* is the process of "wrestl[ing] with these insights, going over them again and again with the analyst and experiencing them in daily life, in fantasies, and in dreams. Patient and analyst join in efforts not only to modify crippling life patterns and remove incapacitating symptoms, but also to expand the freedom to work and to love. Eventually the patient's life - his or her behavior, relationships, sense of self - changes in deep and abiding ways" (American Psychoanalytic Association).

I believe that both of these processes are possible (although not without significant obstacles) in a psychoanalytic criticism of advertising. Regarding the use of transference, Lacan states, "As soon as the subject who is supposed to know exists somewhere… there is

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[35] Applying psychoanalytic principles to non-flesh-and-blood characters in works of fiction has a long and embattled history; in spite of many productive instances, substantial ongoing resistance by many eminent scholars (as well as outright disdain and dismissal) remains toward such practice.

transference;" further, "the transference is an essential phenomenon, bound up with desire as the nodal phenomenon of the human being" (Lacan S XI 231-32). Because advertising is not only bound up with desire but also "has all the answers" and can solve any problem (particularly the ones it works to create), it is conceivable that individuals may hold it in light of a "subject supposed to know." The operation of this transference phenomenon with regard to advertising is not, I think, a simple one-to-one relation, some configuration of dyad between viewer and advertising-as-entity. Rather, it lies in *the subjectivity of the viewer within the field of the advertisement itself*, as the subject-supposed-to-know.

Another potential critical use of the transference phenomenon concerns *the trust of the subject*. Lacan notes that the subject must believe the analyst knows "what it is around which the movement [of the treatment] turns. He must know, to him must be transmitted, through actual experience, what it is all about. This pivotal point is what I designate… the desire of the *psycho-analyst*" (Lacan S XI 231). While this statement is in some respect but a reiteration of the subject-supposed-to-know, it underlines a further and important complication: it is not only the desire of the subject that is called into question in this transference – it is the desire of the subject *in relation to the unknown or enigmatic desire of the subject-supposed-to-know*. In other words, the transference phenomenon here can be understood as installing the subject-supposed-to-know within the field of the Other, thus requiring the subject to attempt to divine the desire of the Other in order to fulfill the Other's desire.

To interpret this in terms of a critique of advertising, consider that the ad itself does not interpret its own discourse – it simply collects the material of cultural discourse and

presents it as image, embellished with language that moves fantasy toward the possibility of fulfilled desire. It is the work of the individual as subject to pursue the elusive *object petit a*, thereby revealing, not the truth of the interpretation (the ad), but the truth of the subject's own desire. A particular advertising example may serve as illustration here. In a 1980s television spot for Calvin Klein's Obsession perfume, the image is a pair of interwined naked bodies; the voiceover states "I don't know where you end and I begin…" This is clearly a representation that not only aims toward opening a desire, but, by extension, conflates this desire in two bodies, evoking both *desire* and *being desired* – the latter being the desire of the Other. While this is an obviously oversimplified distillation of a dense and complex artifact, it illustrates at least a possibility of the operation of transference in advertising.

Although I view the concept of *working through* as both possible and viable as a resistance to advertising, it presupposes an individual willing to address personal unconscious structures. Thus, some aspects of education and pedagogy will need to be called into service to bring these structures into consciousness, to perform Freud's "pointing out the context" of thoughts about and responses to advertising.[36]

Lacanian scholar Mark Bracher presents a similar argument for using psychoanalytic concepts to study culture. In his Lacan, Discourse, and Social Change: A Psychoanalytic Cultural Criticism, I find substantive support for both the theory and praxis of my future project. He states: "helping subjects analyze their response to cultural artifacts and discourses can provide an opportunity for them to begin to work through some of their more debilitating

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[36] This need not be confined to a classroom; indeed, a public forum such as a blog or newspaper column might deliver added power by co-opting the pop culture against itself. Leslie Savan's former *Village Voice* column on advertising provided such a stage and was popular for thirteen years (Savan stopped writing it to become a full-time author of books on popular culture).

and destructive conflicts of identification and desire, and that such working through can open

the way not only to greater jouissance for these subjects but also, through the resulting

changes in their attitudes and behavior, to beneficial social change" (Bracher 191-92).

If each ad can be said to be uniquely individual for each viewer, to speak to us

subjectively, to entice us to perform our own psychic dance with its texts and representations,

then clearly ideology and economic theories alone can never suffice to subvert its power.

Overall, psychoanalysis offers many ways of looking at how advertising speaks to the

unconscious: Lacanian jouissance, Freudian drives, fetishism, sadomasochism, narcissism,

the voice and gaze as objects, subjectivity and the mirror stage, transference, and more. In

any case, by looking at how ads perform in and by the subjects who experience them, and by

bringing some of the unconscious conflicts toward the light, any subject informed of his

complicity in the process could use each new advertising experience as part of a bringing to

awareness that could lead to a psychoanalytic working through, thus loosening advertising's

unconscious grip.

I will close as I began, by calling on Nietzsche's will to truth. I have shown how a

psychoanalytic criticism can satisfy the will not to be deceived, and perhaps enhance the

possibility of fulfilling the will not to deceive. Because the problem is large, and any

intervention in it is likely to be slow and complex, I am particularly drawn to echo

Nietzsche's own epilogue in The Gay Science:

> But as I slowly, slowly paint this gloomy question mark at the end and am still
>
> willing to remind my readers of the virtues of the right reader – what forgotten
>
> and unknown virtues they are! – it happens that I hear all around me the most
>
> malicious, cheerful, and koboldish laughter: the spirits of my own book are

attacking me, pull my ears, and call me back to order. "We can no longer stand it," they shout at me; "away, away with this raven-black music! Are we not surrounded by bright morning? … Let us strike up more agreeable, more joyous tones! (Nietzsche 383).

Advertising itself, with its cheerful inanities, its lively music, its unabashed humor, its complicit cynicism, its tendency to paint the world in colors, mocks me and my efforts. It laughs at my seriousness, my intimation of its consequences – the elves (who are perhaps the cookie-baking denizens of that aforementioned hollow tree) find my sincerity foolish – for how can frogs that croak out the name of a beer, or pedestrians that walk while their shadows manically dance, or cars that zoom through the world in a performance of independence and freedom, ever need to be taken seriously?

I believe advertising does need to be approached with seriousness. Although it pacifies us into performing as consumers and slips through the critical cracks, it prevails simply because it offers us an escape into (or from) the gap of desire. It is difficult indeed, even for one looking for its siren song, not to feel the pull, the promise, the power of the ways in which advertising promises us that we too, can become perpetually "New!" and "Improved!" I can only hope, like Nietzsche, that the singer in this case will not be misunderstood – that others can come to see the possibility of a psychoanalytic criticism of advertising's address of the unconscious as something worth thinking, interpreting, and working through.

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APPENDIX: FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE AND STRUCTURAL LINGUISTICS[37]

The immutability of language was forever altered by Ferdinand de Saussure's introduction of a structural linguistic theory in the early 1900s. The implications of Saussure's Course on General Linguistics have been taken up and expanded by theorists of all stripes ever since, and continue to reverberate in every field of humanist studies. (Interestingly, Saussure himself was not responsible for pinning down the exact words of his own theory. Instead, the content of his academic lectures on the topic, preserved by a handful of meticulous note-taking students, were published only after his death.)

In spite of the fact that language was considered constitutive of human existence and therefore "natural," Saussure's leap of theory determined there is nothing organic or natural about it. It is, instead, a completely *arbitrary* system, in which a word has no natural connection either to the physical object or idea it refers to, or to our mental representation of that object or idea. Any object can easily illustrate this concept: if an *apple* inherently contained its own word, how could it be *pomme* in French and *manzana* in Spanish? (To those who point to the phenomenon of onomatopoeia, Saussure would note that even those words that imitate the sound of their objects are arbitrary: the distinctive sound of a buzzing bee, for instance, is not considered *buzz* in any language but English.) Further, the actual object or idea is only a *referent*. If we were in possession of the actual object/idea, there

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[37] Source: Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Bally, Albert Sechehaye and Albert Riedlinger, Course in General Linguistics, Revised ed. (London: Fontana, 1974).

would be no need for the word – we would have the thing. Only the *absence* of the thing requires that we have the word at all.

Saussure's theory introduced a number of unique terms, most notably the sign, the signified, and the signifier. The *signified* is the mental concept that springs to mind when presented with the acoustic (or written) image that is the *signifier*. These two terms taken together constitute the *sign*: If I say the word dog (signifier), you will recall some particular dog, such as "cocker spaniel" (signified) as a representation of the idea.

Within the sign, the signified and the signifier are considered inseparable, as two sides of the same coin. This does not, however, assure a fixed mental meaning. The signified is mutable; there will be as many versions of it as there are people who encounter the sign. For example, if I write the word *tree*, you may conjure a mental picture of an elm, while I immediately picture a palm. Both are valid, and both fulfill the concept of the tree as a sign.

What makes the word a sign is the very fact that it differs from all other signs. Specifically, it is the very gap between the word and the thing that gives us difference. It is difference itself that creates the possibility of structure, and therefore the possibility of meaning. This is why Saussurean linguistics has come to be known as structuralist: language is not simply a lexicon, a collection of words or speech acts (*la parole*). It is a fully structural system, *la lange*, and it constitutes our very existence in the world. The structure tells us what range of meanings may be possible: the specific position of words within a sentence tell us what part they will play, which will be nouns and which will be verbs, and how this particular sentence will *mean*. Further, the structure allows for any noun to hold the position of the noun in a sentence, any verb to substitute for any other. The very structure encodes

meaning. The implication, then, is that because any word can at any time substitute for any other word, there can be no word that simply *means*.

All of these placeholder possibilities create a never-ending chain of signifiers. If I look up the meaning of one word, I find only meanings of other words, which I must then determine the meanings of as well. There is no possibility that I will ever reach the "one" true meaning, or find The Word That Means. Saussure thus concludes that language is a structure in which *there are only differences without positive terms*.

Within this structural theory of linguistics lies a dual axis of meaning and possibility. Saussure labels the horizontal axis as *syntagmatic*. The structure of the sentence is linear: it requires a noun, a verb, and a formal structure that we call syntax. It runs from left to right, creating meaning in literal fashion until it comes to a periodic end. As in any structure, it requires both spatial and temporal difference to operate. First, the word must be physically separate from all other words, or it cannot be recognized as a unique sign. Second, and for the same reason, it must also have a beginning, a middle, and an end that occur over a space of time. Because any noun can be inserted in the noun placeholder, any verb in the verb placeholder, there is a vertical axis as well. This second axis is *paradigmatic*, allowing substitution, association, and condensation of meaning.

While these axes cannot deliver any positive terms to language, what they can deliver is the possibility of different types of meaning, from shopping lists to prose to poetry. The continuity and displacement of the syntagmatic axis gives us *metonymy* – what relates by virtue of continuity and combination. The paradigmatic axis flavors the structure of language with tonal choices – the flexibility to mean in nuanced, *metaphorical* ways.

Saussure's theory has proved to be both broad enough and supple enough to support structural theorizing beyond linguistics. For example, in his "Linguistic Foundation," Jonathan Culler uses Saussure's work as a structuralist foundation for recognizing that *any* system – not just nomenclatures – can be read as a "language." He recognizes that because language has no fixed bonds, it can have no essence of its own: it is only a construction, a collection of signs circulating within a structural framework.[38]

Culler's so-called "linguistic turn" for the human sciences (as well as Barthes' concept of "mythical speech") allows cultural systems and events to be read as meaning-making structures that operate as language operates, and to be analyzed across disciplinary and cultural boundaries.

As an example, we could analyze the circulation of signs within the framework of the modern American wedding ritual. As members of this culture, we expect the bride and groom to occupy specific positions and perform in specific ways, using signs such as white wedding gowns, bridesmaids and best men, gold bands, spoken vows and a concluding kiss. Yet to anyone unfamiliar with these signs, as to anyone trying to navigate an alien culture and language, it would be possible only to observe the ritual, not to comprehend it.

This holds true for any language or meaning-making system. Structurally speaking, the infinite chains of signification cannot have a fixed value regardless of whether the structure is a language system or a cultural system. In all such cases, positive terms are an impossibility.

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[38] Jonathan Culler, "The Linguistic Foundation," Literary Theory, An Anthology. Eds. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1998.