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ADVERTISING, NEEDS, AND "COMMODITY FETISHISM"

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After reviewing the literature on consumer behaviour one is tempted to conclude that in no other domain has so much research yielded so little insight. Market researchers are everywhere, noting our responses to the latest inspiration from the product designer's imagination. Sometimes it seems that in the vortex of momentary consumer preferences all structured aspects of human needs have dissolved, and have been replaced by the mere succession of discrete and perfectly interchangeable wants. Most social scientists who do empirical research refrain from venturing critical comments on this situation. On the other hand, the familiar concepts used in the radical critique of market society — especially the notion of commodity fetishism — have had a purely rhetorical function, because so little attempt has been made to give them some empirical content. This article represents our first tentative steps toward an analytical approach that differs from both of these.[1]

The study was based upon a hypothesis about contemporary consumer behaviour developed in a recent book written by one of us.[2] This hypothesis suggests that we should expect to find increasing ambiguity and confusion in the sense of "satisfaction" that is experienced in the consumption process. We decided to look at the way advertisements are composed in order to determine whether we could refine and elaborate the hypothesis.[3] (Since our methodology is "diagnostic", it does not constitute a test of the hypothesis; we sought to clarify and elaborate the hypothesis through empirical investigations.) It is important to note at the outset that we do not view advertising as the *cause* of this presumed ambiguity and confusion. Rather, we were attempting to see whether advertisements present or reflect ambiguous "messages" to consumers.

Our study of advertising is intended to lay the basis, in part, for new approaches to a theory of social change. In the social science models that celebrate the "consumer society", general increases in consumption levels — understood as increased access to commodities — are regarded as *prima facie* evidence of social progress. Needless to say, we do not accept this view; and it is interesting to note (as discussed later) that this view is now being challenged from a variety

of standpoints. But we also reject the outlook that is found almost universally in the "radical" critique of capitalist society. This outlook has two principal features: (1) the sphere of consumption is "subordinate" to that of production; (2) "commodity fetishism" results in the manipulation of consciousness, and this false consciousness (and the false needs arising from it) inhibits the development of popular demands for realizing traditional socialist goals in industrially-advanced societies.

The final section outlines two ideas which we suggest as guidelines for further work. The first is that social tensions arising from efforts to define different structures of needs and need-satisfaction will constitute the main source of social change options in the coming years. The second is that whatever resolution emerges will be quite different from the expectations of both the apologists for the consumer society and the proponents of the traditional socialist visions.

I: Consumer Behaviour and Commodity Fetishism

In Section II below the notion of a "consumer culture" is outlined in rough fashion, in order to specify the objectives of our advertising study. This notion has been assembled from bits and pieces of several theories; it represents our understanding and reformulation of theories of marketplace behaviour that criticize the dominant paradigms found in conventional economics. First we shall present and comment on two recent studies, Tibor Scitovsky's *The Joyless Economy* and Fred Hirsch's *Social Limits to Growth*, and then we shall turn to the theory of commodity fetishism handed down in the Marxist tradition.

Scitovsky set out to undermine the economic theory of rational behaviour and consumer sovereignty. This is made up of the following propositions: (1) what the consumer chooses to do is an accurate reflection of his tastes, i.e., his behaviour is revealed by his preferences and *vice versa*; (2) the consumer develops his own tastes and preferences independently of those of other consumers; (3) without sufficient means to satisfy all of his desires, the consumer must "keep unsatisfied margins on all his needs and desires", in order to insure that "any extra dollar he spends on one thing yields him as much satisfaction as that extra dollar would if he spent it on any other thing."[4]

Scitovsky challenges his fellow economists by turning against them their most cherished value: he claims that the theory is *unscientific* in its portrayal of human psychology. He points out that the accepted theory simply cannot account at all for the obvious fact that the individual's preferences change over time — or, more precisely, that it cannot show *why* or *how* preferences change, as they obviously do. These changes are understandable only in relation to a social process of interpersonal relationships. Moreover, there is a reciprocal rela-

tion between changing preferences and changes in the sense of satisfaction derived from any particular activity; in Scitovsky's words, the dominant paradigm "overlooks the possibility that the same influences that modify our tastes might also modify our ability to derive satisfaction from the things that cater to our tastes."

Expressed in its simplest terms, Scitovsky's analysis attempts to explain why the expected correlation between greater happiness and rises in real income does not occur. He refers to empirical studies done in the U.S. between 1946 and 1970: "Over this period, almost twenty-five years, per capita real income rose by 62 per cent, yet the proportion of people who consider themselves very happy, fairly happy, and not too happy has hardly changed at all. Our economic welfare is forever rising, but we are no happier as a result."[5] He claims that the conventional economic paradigms cannot account for this, and he attempts to construct a theory that will do so.

There are four dimensions. First, there is empirical evidence that people derive satisfaction from status itself, that is, from relative social ranking or interpersonal comparisons that occur at *any* income level. Second, satisfaction is derived from work, but again largely as a function of the *relative* income and "prestige" attributes of a particular job in the social hierarchy. Third, satisfaction correlates positively with novelty in one's experiences, but our own culture tends to standardize experience and progressively reduce novelty. Fourth, material progress is translated primarily into increasing comfort. Comfort, however, is like addiction: we become accustomed to it and soon take it for granted; the presence of new comforts cease to give pleasure in themselves, and only being deprived of them makes us feel the pleasure of having them (central heating, indoor toilets, adequate quantities of food, for example). "Taken together", Scitovsky concludes, "they well explain why happiness should depend so much on one's ranking in society and so little on the absolute level of one's income."

The background context that makes sense of this "rank-happiness" is, of course, the market or commodity-oriented society. Most individual activity is directed at increasing income that serves as the access to purchasing goods and services. This context steadily depreciates the value of activities that do not serve this objective, including the intrinsic satisfactions that might otherwise be derived from work creativity or informal interpersonal relationships. No stable or permanent sense of satisfaction is achieved simply by virtue of the fact that most individuals have a higher "standard of living" than preceding generations had.

There are many other interesting aspects of Scitovsky's analysis that we shall not comment on here. What has been presented above is complemented, from a slightly different angle, by Hirsch's *Social Limits to Growth*. The basic similarity in the two books rests on the impact of changes in individual

preferences on the *social* consequences of economic growth. Hirsch argues that, once "basic material necessities" are met for the majority of the population in a market-exchange economy, there is intensified competition for what he calls "positional" goods. Since these goods are scarce by their very nature, the intensified competition for them yields no net benefits for individuals (the proportion of individuals in the population who get them remains roughly constant), and at the same time there is a high social cost incurred.

What are positional goods? These are goods which define social status differences among individuals; their value lies chiefly in the fact that some persons possess them and others do not. For example, to be able to move to a suburban community to escape a decaying urban environment can be such a good; those who can do so enjoy access both to city and countryside. But when and if many people become suburbanites the advantages are largely negated: the urban culture has declined so much that it no longer is worth visiting, and the nearby countryside has been swallowed up by the newer suburban developments. All that remains for most is the well-known emptiness of suburbia itself. Another example is access to scenic beauty or foreign cultures. When only a few persons have the means of access, the advantages to them are enormous, as is the social "distance" between them and those who cannot afford the costs. An increasing general level of affluence opens the gates, but at the price of sharply devaluing the experience, due to overcrowding and the resultant deterioration in the quality of the sites.

The deterioration of overcrowded sites is an example of the social costs resulting from positional competition. A better example can be drawn from the relationship between jobs and educational qualifications. It is a well-known fact that the level of educational requirements for jobs has been steadily increasing, and that in most cases this bears little or no relation to the requisite job skills. The flaw lies in individual assumptions about the correlation between formal education and high-paying jobs. The proportion of "top" positions in society remains approximately the same, but larger numbers of individuals now compete for them. Stiffer educational qualifications are one of the screening mechanisms used to sort out the competitors. The same proportion succeed now as in the past; but society pays the enormous cost of larger facilities for formal education for all the competitors.

In different ways both Scitovsky and Hirsch are concerned with one of the key aspects of a competitive, market-oriented society which has reached a certain general level of material affluence: the importance of the symbolic attributes of goods, and the ways in which rank and status are attached to them. This is by its very nature an intractable problem — within the self-imposed limits of that society. When *relative position* is at stake, then the society will and must create new scarcities at every turn — that is, new *symbols of success* to

be striven for. It matters little what is chosen to signify status differences. The important point is that there is no limit to the process.

Hirsch understands what he calls positional competition as intrinsically related to a commodity-oriented economy: one of his chapters is entitled "The New Commodity Fetishism". The positional economy is in fact largely an expression of a "bias to material commodities":

> The concept of a commodity bias, therefore, implies that an excessive proportion of individual activity is channeled through the market so that the commercialized sector of our lives is unduly large. A related concept which is suggested by this approach is a "commercialization effect" — meaning the effect on satisfaction from any activity or transaction being undertaken on a commercial basis through market exchange or its equivalent, as compared with its being undertaken in some other way.[6]

Hirsch uses the phrase "commodity fetishism" in a book which, while it is highly critical of our present society, is not "Marxist" in the usual sense. Yet of course this concept is one of the great hallmarks in the Marxist critique of capitalism. Most authors who write in the Marxist tradition continue to use it as a concept which accurately depicts key aspects of capitalist society down to the present day. On further examination, however, there appear to be serious difficulties in this approach. Marx used it in a very restrictive sense, and used in this sense it does not have very wide relevance for a critical assessment of contemporary society. Moreover, there is a basic flaw in Marx's conception that has gone largely unnoticed since his time.

Marx developed the concept of commodity fetishism from his prior discussion of use-value and exchange-value. The former constitutes the "matter" of the commodity, the latter its "form". The crucial aspect of this analysis is that the fetishism of which he speaks *arises only with respect to the form of the product*. The relevant passages are well-known:

> The mystical character of the commodity does not therefore arise from its use-value . . . Whence, then, arises the enigmatic character of the product of labour, as soon as it assumes the form of a commodity? Clearly it arises from this form itself . . . The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that

> the commodity reflects the social characteristics of man's own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things . . . the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social.[7]

These passages are so familiar, so much taken for granted after repeated citation, that we rarely ask the obvious questions: What exactly is the "mystery" that is alluded to here? The division of labour has stamped the products of human activity with a social character as far back as our anthropological researches permit us to go. Was not the dual character of objects — as sensuous things and as objects whose significance is established by cultural forms — always quite obvious? Further: is Marx claiming that people actually are mystified by this duality? Or that people do not recognize the characteristics of their labour in the properties of produced objects?

Let us recall the subsequent passages to see whether further light is shed on these questions:

> . . . the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things. In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men's hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced as commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.[8]

The analogy with religion makes clear what is the essential point about the commodity: it is a physical object that *appears* to have a "life of its own". This is consistent with the understanding of fetishes in "primitive" religion: a fetish

is an object which itself is thought to possess certain powers, thus differing from an idol, which only symbolizes the power of, say, a deity.

Three points are worthy of note. First, Marx states that the commodity form has "*absolutely* no connection with the physical nature of the commodity" (our italics). Thus it is not something arising out of the interplay of form and matter in the commodity — that is, the inherent duality of the commodity itself — that produces the mystery; its mysterious character is solely a function of the form alone. Second, the passage suggests that *all* systems of goods-exchange which are sufficiently extensive to require a separate commodity as a medium of exchange have this result: the fetishism of commodities bears no intrinsic relation to the capitalist mode of production. Third, Marx gives no indication *how* the fetishism occurs under capitalist relations. In other words, if the commodity *form* is the generalized fetish, what specific kinds of fetishistic activities occur?

In order to develop his point, Marx contrasts the medieval and modern periods. Economic relations in the former are largely "services in kind and payments in kind", and "the social relations between individuals in the performance of their labour appear at all events as their own personal relations, and are not disguised as social relations between things, between the products of labour". One might ask whether this is an accurate picture of medieval social relations, i.e., whether labour did "appear" as a form of *personal* relation, or whether the fundamental distinction between noble and non-noble (which may have been a kind of fetishism also) was not in fact the different disguise of that period.

There may be little disagreement with the suggestion that there are different forms of reification in social relations. The question remains: What exactly is the reification in capitalist commodity production? What exactly is "the whole mystery of commodities, all the magic and necromancy that surrounds the products of labour on the basis of commodity production?"[9] At the end of the chapter on commodity fetishism, Marx refers to what he regards as a series of conceptual errors by earlier economic theorists; and these are apparently the source of the fetishism. It seems somewhat of an exaggeration to speak of these as "magic" and "necromancy", but this may be merely quibbling. The important point is that the kinds of notions Marx refers to were gradually rejected in the further development of "bourgeois" economic theory — in other words, they reflect the immature phase of a discipline which was attempting to represent in conceptual terms the complex mechanisms of a generalized market exchange economy.

We would like to conclude only with a series of questions: (1) Did Marx's concept of commodity fetishism refer only (or chiefly) to "ideological" elements in economic theories up to his day? (2) Are there specific concepts in

contemporary non-Marxist economic theories that are expressions of commodity fetishism? (If so, what are they?) (3) Did Marx mean that "ordinary individuals" in the capitalist society of his day, as opposed to economists, were mystified —i.e., made mistakes in their choices or opinions — because of the way the system of commodity production operated? If so, what specific kinds of mistakes did they make? (4) Is it the case that individuals today make the same (or different) mistakes for the same reasons?

Our tentative conclusion is that one can give a clear affirmative answer only to the first of these questions. If this is the case, then the concept of commodity fetishism has a narrow range of application. Moreover, as Marshall Sahlins has argued, there is a crucial flaw in Marx's approach that weakens its critical thrust. Marx assumed that both needs and utilities are "objective" conditions that can be specified without ambiguity. Sahlins notes that for Marx the commodity as a use-value "is perfectly intelligible: it satisfies human needs". He refers to the passages in which Marx states that there is nothing mysterious in the properties of objects in so far as they are use-values, and he comments:

> But notice that to achieve this transparency of signification by comparison with commodity fetishism, Marx was forced to trade away the social determination of use-values for the biological fact that they satisfy "human wants". This in contrast to his own best understanding that production is not simply the reproduction of human life, but a definite way of life. From such (cultural) understanding it would follow that all utilities are symbolic. Insofar as "utility" is the concept of "need" appropriate to a certain cultural order, it must include a representation, by way of concrete properties of the object, of the differential relations between persons — as contrasts of color, line, or fabric between women's clothes and men's signify the cultural valuation of the sexes. The "system of needs" must always be relative, not accountable as such by physical necessity, hence symbolic by definition.[10]

The idea of the *symbolic constitution of utility* is indispensable for a critique of consumer behaviour in an industrially-advanced society.[11]

If the commodity *qua* commodity has an enigmatic character, i.e., if it has such a character solely by virtue of its form, then one of two conclusions must follow. Either there is no problem here, as the apologists for market society

claim; or, if there is a problem (as its critics say), there is no solution to it. For no industrial society, however dedicated to the ideals of communism, could abolish the commodity form entirely, at least not without running the risk of erecting a dictatorship of tastes in its place. If there is only direct production for use in small community groups, then each group can suit its peculiar tastes; but this restricts the assortment of goods to what handicrafts can produce. Industrial production depends on extensive exchanges; the expression of individual preferences and a pricing mechanism — which may be limited in its scope by express policies on the basis of welfare considerations — has a place in facilitating those exchanges.

But we cannot begin to understand how to design such policies — that is, how to limit the destructive effects of commodity-oriented consumption patterns — if we do not recognize the symbolic constitution of utility. It is the key to Scitovsky's dilemmas of rank-happiness, to Hirsch's dilemmas of the positional economy — and to the fetish of the commodity (*not* the commodity-form) as *the embodiment of psychologically-grounded attributes.* (For example, the association of automobiles with animals and the qualities conventionally ascribed to them.)

We agree with Sahlins that all utilities in all cultures are symbolic. In a society like ours, where large numbers of people participate daily in extensive market exchanges, there is a *double* symbolic process at work. One facet of it is the symbolism consciously employed in the manufacture and sale of the product, including the imagery employed in the advertising designs. The second facet is the symbolic associations selectively employed by consumers in "constructing" lifestyle models; the whole marketplace is divided into semi-autonomous sectors which respond to different cues or to the same cues in different ways.

We do not pretend to have developed adequately this concept of the double symbolic constitution of utility at this time. We hope to do so in the context of refining our advertising research design, a preliminary version of which is presented later in this paper. It is introduced by an overview statement on the consumer culture as a whole.

II: The Consumer Culture

The phrase "consumer culture" is used as a designation for the network of expectations and aspirations that form the broader context of specific consumption activities. Until recently the development of the consumer culture had been regarded as a "private" matter, i.e., one which involved only the individual citizen's judgments and preferences. This is no longer the case; in

Canada and elsewhere, governments claim that inflation is in part a function of accelerating expectations and they try to combat this acceleration of expectations with both rhetoric and policies.

The nature of the popular expectations associated with consumption activity is now seen as a major social problem, indeed as a problem which must be confronted by explicit social policies. In its crudest form this problem stems from the fact that market-based expectations — demands for goods and services — apparently had begun to rise much faster than the rate of growth in GNP. In the context of a remarkably stable configuration in income distribution in industrialized nations, this increase in expectations leads to social pressures requiring some form of government intervention.

The real difficulty posed by this development is that this "take-off" of expectations occurred after an exceptionally long period of real growth in GNP and in personal incomes. In other words, increasing affluence seems to lead not to a higher level of contentment, but rather to its opposite — a sense of *relative* deprivation that is no less "painful" than the visible poverty of earlier epochs. If market-based expectations rise at a rate faster than real growth in GNP, then there will be increasing social tensions at any rate of economic growth that can be reasonably expected to occur.

It has become customary to explain the main features of consumer behaviour on the basis of a postulate or axiom known as "the insatiability of human wants". This has been formulated in various ways, and perhaps the most common runs as follows: the satisfaction of a want simultaneously occasions the formation of other wants. This syndrome is supposedly rooted in the peculiarities of human psychology, and it is assumed that there is no natural limits to this process. Human wants, if left unchecked, will expand indefinitely. In order to improve our understanding of the consumer culture, we must take a closer look at the experience labelled "the satisfaction of wants", which is the key element in the axiom of insatiability.

When we say that the satisfaction of a want triggers new wants, we are assuming that what we call "the satisfaction of a want" is an identifiable experience with known properties. Is this indeed the case? For all practical purposes in today's society we can regard the marketplace as the context for want-satisfactions; that is, the objectives of wants normally are purchasable goods and services. To comprehend the experience of want-satisfaction, therefore, we must appreciate the specific features of its contextual setting.

Today's consumption process takes place in what may be called a "high-intensity market setting". This is a social setting wherein large numbers of individuals have access to a very extensive array of goods, and where the characteristics of goods are complex and are subject to frequent changes. The individual's wants are themselves complex states of feeling, encompassing both physiological maintenance and psychological well-being (self-esteem, ego-

enhancement, interpersonal comparisons, and so forth). In the marketplace, goods that he or she encounters combine what may be called "objective" characteristics — such as physical dimensions and performance capabilities — and "imputed" characteristics (symbolic associations with success, happiness, etc.)

In a market economy stocked with mass-produced goods there cannot be, for obvious reasons, a direct correlation for all individuals and all goods between the properties of an individual's wants and the properties of goods. Individuals continually shift their preference orderings in different ways, and producers are regularly shuffling the characteristics and the assortment of goods. In this fluid situation the common denominator is the individual's attempt to "match" the qualities of his wants with the characteristics of goods. When the matching is relatively "successful", we could take this as an instance of "the satisfaction of a want".

In a situation where both wants and goods are multifaceted phenomena, however, will there ordinarily be clear evidence of successful matching? This is a difficult question to answer. We think it is safe to assume at least that the outcome of attempts at want-satisfaction will be problematical. There is likely to be some feeling of satisfaction or success and simultaneously some feeling of dissatisfaction, the latter arising from the fact that *so many other untried options for possibly improving the degree of satisfaction* still beckon.

Given the fluidity of the contextual setting, individuals may become progressively more confused both about the nature of their own wants and about what are the best ways of attempting to satisfy them. The steadily increasing complexity in the makeup of wants and goods may result in, among other things, an increasing degree of ambiguity in the attempted satisfaction of wants. The outcome of the consumption act may be an ensemble of satisfactions and dissatisfactions, whose components are not clearly identifiable, rather than a determinate experience of either satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Our conclusion is that we require a much clearer understanding of the individual's striving for the satisfaction of his or her wants. There are two reasons why improving our understanding in this regard is essential. One is that the problem of rising market-based expectations is certainly (at least in part) a function of distortions in the present patterns of want-satisfaction. The other is that the degrees of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and not merely the former alone, may rise with the individual's access to higher levels of consumption. When these are taken into account we have a much better picture of the implications of the insatiability axiom. We also have a way of analyzing the problem of expectations.

III: Advertising and Imagery

We do not yet have an adequate understanding of this "problem of expectations", nor do we presume to give an explanation here; however, we would like to offer a hypothesis that may help to clarify the nature of the problem. We suggest that today market-based expectations are a function of the symbolic properties of goods, and that these symbolic properties can best be understood through the examination of imagery in marketing, as it is conveyed through product design, packaging, store displays, fashion trends, peer-group influences, and media-based advertising. Although in this paper our conclusions are formulated from an examination of magazine and television advertising trends, we by no means assert that these other agencies of socialization are not also significant. The symbolic associations used in the circulation of goods permeate the marketplace, but they are more readily observable in media advertising than in other areas.

The research design that we have adopted in this study has grown directly out of the theoretical questions previously outlined. It attempts an alternative interpretation of the problem of rising consumer expectations within the specific context of the consumer culture. By focussing upon expectations, and hence upon advertising as the significant sign system, this approach departs from traditional lines of economic analysis. It starts from the readily observable common central theme of all contemporary advertising which fuses the field of human aspirations and desires with a means of satisfying them through material consumption. The analysis is deductive in nature. We broke down advertisements into constituent parts and attempted to determine whether there are any significant patterns in how they use images to present goods. We did not attempt to ascertain how individuals are affected (or how they think they are affected) by them, either in their attitudes or behaviour, although we hope to extend the research in this direction after further refining our analytic approach.

Even the most cursory glance at the world depicted in contemporary advertising would lead one to the conclusion that goods are much more than the sum of their physical properties. They are presented as capable of producing feelings of happiness and satisfaction in their users. Moreover, in an historical survey of advertising we have noted that there is an intensification of this process over the last fifty years.[12] The clarification of this observation was our central concern in deciding to focus our study on psychologically grounded associations. These expressions —such as family happiness, career success, youth or freedom — are instances of what we have called the symbolic properties of goods, and they are crucial to our understanding of the appearance of the commodity in the consumer culture.

In the backgrounds, settings, and user-representations of advertising imagery are incorporated lifestyle models and values. We suggest, without being able to develop the point here, that the lifestyle models are an important part of the dominant socialization patterns of contemporary society; the declining influences of family and religion have opened the way for the market-based lifestyle models to shape behaviour patterns. The specific values associated with them are difficult to identify, and in any case they change within short time cycles — and this is probably what is most significant about them.

Ewen's work[13] shows that in earlier periods, for example in the nineteen twenties, statements of values were commonly incorporated into the textual material in advertisements; today, it is not uncommon to encounter advertisements with merely a short slogan or indeed with no text at all. Thus, there are two parallel developments. One is the shift from explicit statements of value (business success, familial love) to the incorporation of implicit values and ambiguous lifestyle images; the second is the correlative decline of textual material and the shift to visualized images of well-being.

Although the process of the "symbolification" of commodities is a social process and not a media-based one, changes in the media play a crucial role in amplifying the forces within the marketplace and transforming the nature of the appearance of the commodity. Much contemporary advertising, especially on television, works almost exclusively through the use of imagery (as opposed to textual information); this development has emerged gradually in the history of advertising. The gradual pace of the transformation, the growing ambiguity and implicit nature of the associated values, and the difficult task of pinning down the significance of visualized communication may have all contributed to underestimating the import of this aspect of the "consciousness industry" — the growing domination of imagistic modes of communication. To be sure, the advertising industry itself is only now fully recognizing the importance of imagery in advertising technique.[14] Yet it is within this trend that we have located crucial features in the changing dynamics of want satisfaction in the consumption process. This communication-based interpretation places a greater emphasis upon what Stuart Hall has called the "effectivity of the superstructures".[15] The emphasis of most advertising until the early 1920's stresses the physical characteristics of the product, the price per quantity, and the practical utility (what the product does). Today this tends to be typical only of a very limited category of advertising for products which we call "Technological Equipment" (radios, stereos, garden equipment, power tools). However, in general, a transition beginning in the twenties and progressing from there transposes the emphasis from material characteristics and pragmatic utility into "psychological utility": the commodity appears designed for personalized use by fulfilling a *psychological* role. Commodities appear as personified expressions of human characteristics and relationships. Moreover, with the increasing

implicitness and ambiguity in advertising imagery, the commodity seems to become a "projective field" in which the human states of feeling achievable in consumption are fluidly superimposed upon the non-human, physical-sensory aspects of the commodity. Stretching the metaphor for a moment, the mask of the fetishized commodity, having incorporated the abstract qualities of promised human satisfaction, has more recently still become mirror-like, reflecting back the vague and distorted images of well-being to be achieved in consumption.[16]

Nor do we have to look very far to establish the motivations behind this trend. As modern marketing theorists state, the task of marketing was very quickly perceived to be that of making "modern goods recognized as psychological things symbolic of personal attributes and goals, as symbolic of social patterns and strivings".[17] The product was fortified by an image designed to be the basis of consumer choice, and destined also (we infer) to become characteristic of the redefinition of satisfaction derived in the consumption process.

However, the design of the product image did not occur in a vacuum. A considerable amount of consumer research had established the importance of these symbolic attributes of goods in the everyday thinking of the consumer, and had pointed out the relationship they bear to both the "personality" and "positional" frames of reference that the consumer brings to bear in purchase and consumption. Through careful design, the brands' image could be based upon the analysis of the "decoding" or "interpretive" predilections of the consumer. It is the dimensions of interpretation that are controlled by the advertiser through this process of market research, in which he attempts to refine the symbolic dimensions of his products to suit various segments of the market. Here then is the origin of the dual symbolic process. Depending upon marketing strategies, the brands' image can be developed either for mass markets by the use of open codes of interpretation, or for specific markets by the use of more restrictive codes.

To some degree, the trend towards implicit and visual product imagery can be identified with the need for increasingly open codes of interpretation for mass market selling. The task of the advertiser is to design the "package of stimuli so that it resonates with information already stored within an individual, and thereby induces the desired learning or behavioural effects".[18] What happens as a result of more than one-half century of this intense advertising activity? The result is a situation where the individual is surrounded with *things* that "resonate" with stored information. It is not that the world of true needs has been subordinated by the world of false needs, but that the realm of needing has become a function of the field of communication. Here perhaps is the chief fetishism in the consumer marketplace. The product of human labour is not hidden by the distorted yet seemingly objective qualities of a material-

sensuous product, but by the individualized and subjective images of well being projected into the commodity.

As a consequence the commodity takes on a role in the human dialogue, becoming a message in itself. Considered as information it is a means by which the consumer may communicate to others his relationship to a complex set of abstract social attributes — it identifies him or her within the social structure. The use of the commodity with particular symbolic qualities merges with the identity of the user. In this sense, *product images were never designed merely to increase purchases, but to transform the personal significance of the products' everyday use.*

From a communications perspective, this symbolification entailed reorganization on a number of levels of abstraction upon which the appearance and experience of the commodity is organized. The first level on which we notice this change is the sensible and immediate presentation of the product. Here, through packaging and product styling, the physical-utilitarian aspects of the product and its sensuous qualities as an object are de-emphasized, in order to harmonize its immediate experience with the image projected upon it and to facilitate the differentiation of brands. Where packaging is inappropriate, the visible dimensions of the product itself, through the elements of design and styling, become the means of conveying symbolic qualities (e.g., clothes, food colouring). For example, even the automobile, the original designs of which emphasized mechanical and physical properties (power, bulk, speed through streamlining), has more recently come to reflect the personified qualities typical of advertising images (comfort, sophistication, practicality).

The second major level, and the one upon which we have focussed our attention, is the *"product image"*. Here, through the processes of metaphorical association, the advertiser generates an equation between the particular brand and its symbolic attributes as a commodity. In the image advertising of the early twenties, this was usually accomplished by means of a verbal association between the brand and an explicit quality, usually encapsulated in a slogan (the sportsman's cigarette, the sophisticated perfume). However, as we have pointed out, the more recent trends in advertising reflect the accelerated use of visual modes of communication; the linkage is generated by means of the association of the brand name and package (the visual market for the product) with a background image designed to elicit a specific set of projected associations. As visual communications, these associations are developed in terms of the "grammar of representation" utilized by advertising, which includes the presentation of a) *abstract qualities* (frosty, sparkling, light) depicted through a background or setting, b) *personalized qualities* depicted by identifiable user groups (famous persons, beautiful, sophisticated, rich), c) *situational associations* (frequently role related) through the depiction of identifiable settings (natural scenes, kitchens, restaurants) and d) *lifestyle associations*, depicting a

particular type of person engaged in specific activities in particular settings (young/recreation/outdoor).

A third level of commodity imagery that we have noted in the current market setting is that of the *corporate image*. Here, the self proclaimed qualities of the corporate entity are the major associations of the range of products or services offered by the corporation (Eaton's "attitude" campaign, Texaco's "responsibility in progress"). An increase in the frequency of corporate image advertising, as suggested in our historical study, may indicate that our analysis — based on the predominance of the product image over the sensible appearance of the commodity — may already be in need of modification due to significant changes in the processes of product symbolification.

Before discussing some of our data and its implications from our study of current advertising imagery, we shall explain the basis for our assertion of the importance of "iconic" modes of communication in the process of communicating product imagery. The relative costs of advertising time and space reflect not only the "reach" of the media into the marketplace (in terms of the size and demographic features of the particular audience captured as potential customers), but also the potential effectiveness of media communication for changing consumption patterns. Amongst the various possible media, magazines and television emerge as prestige advertising vehicles because of their suitability for the transmission of both lexical and imagistic information. The inductive awareness by advertisers of the relative effectiveness of these media is corroborated by findings in the psychological literature on information processing.

In the first place, given the highly selective way in which persons are known to survey their environment, it becomes the task of the advertisement to break through the "attentional barriers" to insure acceptance by the audience. Design, layout, contrast, colour, striking and unusual imagery have all been shown to act as effective means of increasing the likelihood and duration of visual scanning. In addition, television affords the conjunction of sound and image, camera movement and various editing styles to secure and enhance attention. Furthermore, there is evidence which indicates that "iconic" information has a greater impact on the "affective-opinion" components of attitude[19]. A parallel processing model offers an alternative to the theories of subliminal perception. Iconic information has its effects upon opinions without being transliterated into "verbal" codes, and hence without full conscious awareness.

Beyond these attentional factors, the advertiser's intention is to increase the effectiveness of the differentiation of his product's image from other similar products, by enhancing the associational links between the brand and its image. The effectiveness of the ad, therefore, will be dependent upon the audience's retention of these associations. Some recent research in paired associates learning has illustrated the increasing latency in memory of iconic

over lexical information.[20] When an image is used as a "memory peg", the retention of the concepts hung on this peg is increased. For years, the catchy tune or jingle has been employed as a memory hook; now, these processes seem to be further enhanced when visual memory is invoked.

Several other factors are also worth noting here. First, unusual or absurd images seem to enhance retention. Secondly, the conjoining of separate elements of an image seems to be additive: a complex of attributes is more easily recognized and remembered than are single attributes. Thirdly, pictures seem to be more ambiguous than words or noun phrases in that they elicit a greater number of free associations.

The implications of such findings are obvious. Not only does the use of visual imagery increase the attention paid to the ad, possibly without awareness, but it also provides the basis for the efficient building of strong associational links to a greater number of qualities while retaining a high degree of ambiguity. The ambiguity of the imagery is significant not only for the facility with which symbolic qualities become infused within a wide variety of product categories and types, but in the resultant indeterminacy of the association. If we are asked to name the quality associated with Coke, we are likely to respond with "life", yet if we are asked to name a "lively product" we are likely to think of a wide variety of commodities. The fact that the product image is so open to varying associations and interpretations means that both advertisers and consumers can experiment freely to determine which combinations are most successful at any time. But there are so many possible combinations that one wonders whether a complete and lasting sense of satisfaction can ever be achieved under these circumstances.

IV: Results and Discussion

Our study first required a detailed analysis of the symbolic field of contemporary advertising which included the various "typified" presentations of persons, settings, and backgrounds, as well as the rhetorical forms employed in advertising. We shall only present here some general findings relevant to the argument presented above. A combined content analysis and structuralist technique was used to develop a "quantified semiological" analysis in our attempts to uncover the patterns of style and content in 313 Canadian magazine advertisements and 85 television commercials.

Our results indicated that the "textual" information composed less than a quarter of the display in magazine advertising and less than 10% of television commercials. Of the text that did occur, the slogan was the most prominant element (33%). Utility information (product use, product characteristics, use consequences) therefore composed a very minor portion of the total field of

advertising display. Of the utility information that did occur, the greatest portion describes the product's characteristics (tasty, blue, 442 horsepower). The specifications and modes of use, or the consequences-effects of its use, comprised an even smaller portion of the information, and tended to be specific to particular categories of products (medicines and technology). Textual information describing the lifestyle attributes associated with products (user characteristics and settings) is infrequent: the tendency is to transmit this information through imagery. This finding in itself lends credence to our emphasis upon the visual dimensions of advertising messages. Moreover, it underscores the poverty of the claim made by some defenders of advertising, with their assertion that advertising provides information to consumers which promotes "rational" product choice. How it accomplishes this task without providing any information about the qualities, reasons for use, performance or consequences of the commodities' utilization is a mystery to us.

The imagistic information is the crucial feature of the advertising field. In terms of prominence, it is divided approximately equally into four elements: persons, products, settings, and backgrounds. Of these elements, the product, depicted most frequently in terms of its package, appeared in 96% of all ads. We found that we could further distinguish the formats of these advertisements in terms of the relationships between the elements — that is, the way in which symbolic associations are created. We discerned three format styles: Product Qualities, Presenter and Lifestyle Formats.

The *Product Qualities* format generates an association between the product and a background that conveys these abstract qualitative associations. Although the images vary in their concreteness or abstractness, they usually retain a high degree of ambiguity and a corresponding lack of detail. We depict this format as follows:

Product = Background Associations

The *Presenter* format utilizes the primacy of the product-person relationship for defining the qualities of the product. Here a recognizable "persona" is depicted as standing in some positive relationship to the product (depicted visually as pleasure, the predominant emotion expressed in advertising). The equation is as follows:

Product = Presenter Qualities

The remarkable feature of these personae is that they appear as both easily recognizable and highly typical characterizations which embody abstract human qualities (youth, beauty, masculinity, sophistication) and yet at the same time, retain an ambiguity that allows multiple "identifications" (i.e., they are classless, jobless, etc.) The nature of the stereotyping seems to vary between two categories of personae; Ideal Types occur more frequently in magazine advertising with its well specified markets, whereas the John Doe Types are more characteristic of television.

The *Lifestyle* format is characterized by the explicit combination of a product, a person and a setting. This usually entails the use of the product by a persona in a specific setting, thus depicting an activity or way of living. We model this format as follows:

Product = Persona Qualities
\\ // = Lifestyle
Setting Qualities

Our data indicates that whereas magazines tend to use the Product Qualities and Presenter Formats, television favours Presenter and Lifestyle imagery. Furthermore, television commercials can be seen to have syntagmic as well as paradigmatic elements in their rhetorical form.[21] In the grammar of the static image based upon layout, relationships between the component elements are created by superimposition or juxtaposition. In television advertising, the images are also likely to be sequenced together in terms of a theme, story or "psychologic", and hence the basic formats had to be extended.

For television we found the Presenter format was pre-eminent; the world of television commodities is directly associated with personalized qualities (36%). These are composed of John Doe's (25%), known personalities (6%) and Ideal types (5%). The Lifestyle format composes about 30% of T.V. advertising, and tends to depict a limited range of recognizable lifestyle options — an image pool — consisting mainly of active recreation, familial and sexual love, personal maintenance, the good life, and the natural-historical (nostalgic) existence. Work plays a very minor role in the world of advertising: when it does appear it is usually as a source of stress or anxiety to be relieved. Product Qualities formats composed about 14% of T.V. ads, Problem-Solution appeals 14%, and other forms of "Rational" argument 6%. This contrasted with our magazine sample in which 40% were Presenter, 59% were Product Qualities, and 18% were Lifestyle formats.[22] Developing this understanding of the code by which associations are generated in advertising was important in enabling us to aggregate and compare the variety of advertisements that occurred in our sample. They revealed what we believe to be an integral feature of the advertising system, that is, a high degree of regularity and repetition in the "images of well being" with a corresponding lack of specificity in those images.

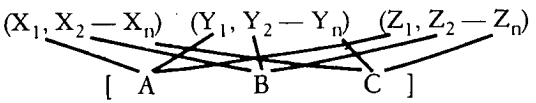
Having explored the processes by which the symbolic attributes come to be associated with commodities, and having detailed some of the regularity and ambiguity inherent in the rhetorical forms of presentation, we then examined the systemic implications of these features. As a working premise of this study we adopted the view that through an examination of the advertising system as a total information system, we might uncover the features of advertising relevant to the sense of satisfaction derived in consumption. We had been convinced by Leymore's argument, at the conclusion of a similar study of advertising, that

"it is the message of the system in toto, which is different from the private messages of each isolated representation which is truly significant in such studies".[23] It is to the interplay of these messages then, that we turn in order to provide a further interpretation of the system of advertising messages.

It is in this interplay that Leymore finds the structured myths common to past generations (e.g., life against death). Certainly it is necessary for the advertiser to enhance his product with qualities or images that are in fact easily recognizable and valued within the existing cultural system. However, in reducing the common denominators (six binary oppositions) in the "dialogue of signs" to such an elementary level, Leymore may have missed the specific cultural uses of mythology, in constructing abstractions of personified attributes of goods in the consumer culture. We would prefer to argue merely that there are cultural limitations placed on the "pool" of imagery and lifestyles depicted in advertising.

The need to use images from a common pool is in opposition to another force that is at work in the marketing process as we have described it, namely the need of the advertiser[24] to identify his product with a clearly recognizable and easily remembered image which differentiates his brand from other products of the same use type. This process would be expected to produce increasingly refined and differentiated brand images as new products establish themselves in the market. Shampoos will be differentiated from conditioners, and Shampoo X_1 will be associated with "beauty", X_2 with "youth", and X_3 with "sensuality". The effect then is to produce a broad range of divergent qualities associated with the product-type Shampoo. Uncertainty, defined as the range of possible alternative associations for a single product type, becomes a defining feature of the "product image" (as opposed to the brand image). The consumer is confronted by a wide range of symbolic attributes attached to a single product category.

In combination these twin tendencies characterize advertising strategy. Symbolic associations used to differentiate brand images are drawn from a common pool of images that convey or evoke valued lifestyles. Products can be characterized as brands (X_1) belonging to use-type (X) in a range of products (X,Y,Z) which are associated with a set of images (A,B,C). The overall effect of this system can be depicted as follows:



Such a model predicts a number of occasions where confusion and fluidity typify the consumption process. Not only does any one product type have a variety of desirable qualities associated with it, but the lifestyle images that

emerge as complexes of associated product images (sophisticated clothes, sophisticated drinks, sophisticated cars) are also presented in a system of opposition on a different level of abstraction. Advertising depicts a confusing array of lifestyle options as well as product qualities. In fact, in the fluid context of the current marketplace the major appeal of some advertisements now seems to be designed to span these lifestyle options: the successful businessman is depicted in settings that are natural and pastoral, the new improved product is linked to an image of a traditional society. In either case it seems that the advertising system as a whole is characterized by ambiguity in the products' symbolic attributes and confusion over the kinds of product matches that bring satisfaction.

Our study has suggested that there is more to the advertising system than the mere association of symbolic attributes with products. Advertising emphasizes the primacy of the world of commodities and transforms this world into symbols of both personalized qualities and contextualized attributes. Ultimately commodities become integral, if not defining, features of modes of human interaction as well as satisfaction. Three processes related to the appearance of the commodity in the consumer culture are at work. The first is the obfuscation, not only of the social labour "hidden" in the product, but of the material resources used as well. We can no longer overlook this in addressing the problems of rising material expectations and resource depletion. The second is ambiguity. Ambiguity arises from the shift from textual information to imagistic information, the carefully worked indeterminacy of the advertisement with its open codes of interpretation, and the abstractness of the symbolic product qualities. Finally, fluidity in the messages of the marketplace provides no straightforward and simple paradigms of commodity-satisfaction matches beyond the constant associations of satisfaction with material consumption.

V: Conclusions

The consumer marketplace confronts individuals each day with an enormous number of messages about their needs. The construction or design of these messages becomes more and more subtle. Department store window displays, for example, now are planned so as to illustrate current lifestyles, to tell a "story", or to comment on current events while presenting the goods for sale. In Montreal one day noontime news stories reported a possible bread shortage resulting from a strike, and a few hours later one clothing shop had stacks of bread arranged around its window mannequins. What *was* the message?

Individuals must strive to interpret both their needs and the appropriate modes of need-satisfaction in the context of this elaborate and subtle message system. Obviously the pressures are intense, but there are also many options;

we know that there are many frustrations, but we also know that individuals find enjoyment in the stimulation of their desires by marketing techniques. The high-intensity market setting is unconscionably wasteful of resources — both material resources and personal energies. It also gives individuals a sense of freedom and autonomy in the shaping of their own lives.

Viewing the consumer culture from this perspective does not permit us to accept either the liberal apologetic or the radical critique. Individuals do not develop their preferences autonomously; the intensified competition for positional goods brings inevitable frustration and discontent no matter how much real incomes rise. On the other hand, the theory of false needs and the manipulation of consciousness is based on the untenable premise that an objective set of "true" needs subsists beneath the manipulations. Moreover, the consumer marketplace is in our opinion the most influential socialization agency in our society today. If we regard the consumer experience as only an obstacle to the emergence of a liberated consciousness (the possibility of this free consciousness resting always and only in the "sphere of production"), then we will not be able to understand the social change possibilities in our society.

The consumer culture is no paradise of freedom, justice, and reason — but it is also no mere den of deception. For the first time in history large numbers of people have had an opportunity to explore their understanding of their own needs. There are definite risks involved, and one ought to expect that all of us will make many mistakes in the process. The great task for social theory now is to grasp, as precisely as possible, the process of need-interpretation and need-satisfaction in the consumer culture. When we have achieved some clarification of this process, we can then decide how policies for modifying its regressive features can be presented for public debate.

In our view, changes in capitalist societies in the last twenty-five years have created a gap between this and preceding periods which is likely to be permanent. One of its main features is that work is viewed almost exclusively as a means of securing income, and personal objectives for life-satisfaction are rooted more and more in private consumption activities. We expect that labour organizations and policies will be directed primarily at securing economic benefits, particularly employment security and gains in real income. We do not expect that the labour process will or can be the great socialization experience that is set out in socialist theory, or that a commitment by many persons to traditional socialist goals will be forged there. We expect that the officers of labour organizations will participate increasingly in new bureaucratic decision-making forums with government and big business.

Tensions originating in the consumer culture will therefore be the focus of social conflict and debates over appropriate public policies. If Scitovsky, Hirsch, Heilbroner, and other recent commentators are correct, the realization that (in

Heilbroner's words) "economic success does not guarantee social harmony" must sink in at some point. As public management of the economy grows, more attention will have to be paid to modifying the commodity-oriented structure of expectations. How this can be done while also promoting social justice policies is not yet clear. If the acceleration of expectations can at least be slowed, so that we do not test the resource limits and regenerative capacities of our habitat too severely, we may win the necessary breathing space for considering our next moves. It is not an especially dramatic social vision; but we may be much better off if we satisfy our appetite for drama outside the theory of social change.

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Notes

1. The paper incorporates some materials from a report prepared by the authors for the Department of Consumer and Corporate Affairs, Ottawa, in September 1976. Arlin Hackman and Judy Wright worked with us as research associates in developing and executing the research design for the analysis of advertisements. We would like to express our thanks to them.

2. William Leiss, *The Limits to Satisfaction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976).

3. In a forthcoming study Judith Williamson uses an approach derived from structuralist theory to analyze advertisements and their messages, which may be compared with the one developed for our study. Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978)

4. Tibor Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), pp. vii, 7, 64-65.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 134-135.

6. Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 84. Robert Heilbroner's *Business Civilization in Decline* (New York: Norton, 1976) is a superb essay which incorporates some of the points made by Scitovsky and Hirsch into a broad perspective on the future of capitalism.

7. *Capital*, vol. I, tr. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 164-165.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

10. Marshall Sahlins, *Culture and Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 149-150. An illustration of Marx's own "best understanding" is his remark (*Capital, op. cit.*, p. 275) that man's necessary requirements "depend therefore to a great extent on the level of civilization attained by a country; in particular they depend on the conditions in which, and consequently on the habits *and expectations* with which, the class of free workers has been formed" (our italics).

11. Jean Baudrillard's writings are relevant on this point, but they tend to be rather chaotic. Works by Roland Barthes are the best starting-point for the semiotic approach. A clear and useful summary of it is given in Judith Williamson's book (*supra* note 3).

12. This study is in progress.

13. Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).

14. See article by Edward Clifford in the *Globe and Mail*, Report on Business, September 21, 1977, p. B5.

15. Stuart Hall, "Re-thinking the 'Base-and-Superstructure' Metaphor," in J. Bloomfield (ed.), *Class, Hegemony and Party* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1977).

16. As this passage indicates, we believe that it is preferable to distinguish between *fetishized and non-fetishized* commodities, rather than to use the phrase "fetishism of commodities" as a blanket description for a market exchange economy. In future work we hope to give a more fully developed exposition of this distinction.

    We also have serious difficulties in attempting to fit our observations into another conceptual mould employed in the radical tradition, namely the concept of reification. To illustrate our problem we will cite the definition by Berger and Luckmann (*The Social Construction of Reality* [N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1967], p. 89): "Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to consciousness. The reified world is by definition a dehumanized world."

    Given the way in which the consumer culture systematically binds human emotions to products, is it possible to say of this culture and its products that its authorship is forgotten, or that the dialectic of producer and product is lost to consciousness? In what sense is it a dehumanized world, since human emotions are its currency?

    We expected to be reminded (politely, we hope) that these emotions are false and manipulated, not *truly* human. We believe that it is only with a greater understanding of the mechanisms of manipulation that this debate should be rekindled.

17. Sidney Levy, "Symbols by Which We Buy", in Lynn H. Stockman (ed.), *Advancing Marketing Efficiency* (Chicago: American Marketing Assoc., 1959), pp. 409-416. See also J. Densenberry, "A Theory of Consumption", in S. Ottesar *et al.* (eds.), *Marketing: The Firm's Point of View* (N.Y.: The MacMillan Co., 1964), pp. 125-132.

18. Tony Swartz, *The Responsive Chord* (N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1974).

19. For a more complete treatment see Stephen Kline, *The Characteristics and Structure of Television News Broadcasting: their effects upon opinion change*, Ph.D. Thesis, L.S.E. 1977.

20. For example see Sydney Segall, *Imagery: Current Cognitive Approaches* (N.Y.: Academic Press, 1971) or Peter Sheehan, *The Function and Nature of Imagery* (N.Y.: Academic Press, 1972).

21. For television advertising we added two syntagmic categories: Problem Solution ads created an association between the reduction of anxiety caused by a problem situation and the use of a commodity, and Rational Argument ads presented statistics or "Brand X" experimental demonstrations of the efficacy of the product. In this study, we limited the development of the categories for television's rhetorical form in order to facilitate cross-media comparisons. This area of research, we believe, will provide fertile ground for the examination of the manipulative techniques used in advertising.

22. These categories add up to more than 100% because many magazine advertisements use split photographic imagery.

23. V.L. Leymore, *Hidden Myth: Structure of Symbolism in Advertising* (London: Heinemann, 1975).

24. We are implying here a segmentation of the functions in the production-marketing process. 'The advertiser' refers here to the control of the communication dimensions in marketing. This division of roles is crucial in explaining the arbitrariness in the relationship between product and image.