

MAGIC IN THE MARKETPLACE: AN EMPIRICAL TEST FOR COMMODITY FETISHISM*

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I. Prologue

There is a television advertisement for the Oldsmobile "Cutlass Ciera" in which a modestly dressed young couple stands before the automobile showroom window. As the narrator says, "Imagine yourself in an Oldsmobile Cutlass Ciera," the couple's reflected images, appearing on the metallic paint of the car, undergo magical transformations: in a series of scenes they are shown playing tennis at a club, getting into the car after the game, travelling through a neon-lighted city, being greeted and escorted by a doorman into a fancy hotel, dining by candlelight in an elegant restaurant. During the latter scenes the narrator comments: "No other car is a better reflection on you. Can you think of a better way to spend a night on the town?"

In a more recent television advertisement for a new brand of Goodyear automobile tire — the "Vector" — the product is shown in a series of interactions with human agents. The tire rolls by pedestrians and into a barbershop where it is greeted by name and its tread is examined; it continues down a snow-covered landscape and is saluted by passing skiers; it overtakes a cyclist in a sunny climate; and finally it rolls into an expensive house and is introduced by name by the butler to the master of the house.

II. Introduction

With typical acuity Marx noticed that there was something *peculiar* about an economy founded on commodity production. He remarked upon an odd propensity among social commentators of his day to regard the domain of material production as somehow being detached from direct human control, subsisting autonomously as it were, almost as if the economy possessed a "life of its own."

Marx thought he saw in this propensity a secular variant of religious thought. "There," he claims, "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." According to Marx there is an analogy between this age-old characteristic of religion and the way of thinking about the economy that had

* The issues explored in this paper are treated in greater detail in a forthcoming book: W. Leiss, S. Kline, S. Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising* (Methuen, 1986).

been developing since the eighteenth century. Just as it is in religion with "the products of the human brain ... (s)o 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."¹

This apparently innocuous observation went largely unnoticed for some time, because its own author made so little of it. Half a century later Lukács recognized its potential significance and by superimposing some Weberian themes onto Marx's text turned the undeveloped notion of commodity fetishism into the concept of reification, which became subsequently — through its adoption by the Frankfurt School — one of the mainstays of social criticism in the twentieth century.²

In fact in his notion of commodity fetishism Marx had identified nothing less than the single most important and persistent ideological form in capitalist society — namely, the representation of "the economy" as a quasi-autonomous realm of occurrences. This general representation evolved through a series of stages, usually as a defense mounted by vested interests against those who were protesting against degraded working conditions or gross inequities in the distribution of wealth. Typical were the contentions that there is a "natural" level for wages or that society should not "interfere" with the "law" of supply and demand or the roller-coaster ride of the business cycle.

More refined conceptions were introduced after government management of the economy received wide public support at the time of the Great Depression and the Second World War: Among Western democracies only the U.S.A. still has quixotic urges of more than passing moment to "get the government out of the economy." For the rest — including Canada — the quasi-autonomous status of the economy now is revealed by the sheer predominance of economic management issues in the sphere of public life. Nothing attracts greater attention on the political stage; and in addition most other concerns, for example environmental pollution or education, can be spoken of seriously only in the language of fiscal circumstances. It is almost as if society is held hostage by its economic structure.

Marx's great insight, although it remained undeveloped in his own writings, calls attention to this persistent theme and its importance for the evolution of "collective consciousness" in capitalist societies. It is the starting-point for both the social theory and the research projects outlined in this paper.

We interpret Marx's notion of commodity fetishism in its broadest sense as referring to any representation of economic activity, in any economy where commodity production predominates, that contains direct or indirect references to its allegedly "autonomous" character. Such representations commonly are found in statements about the relations between government, society, and the economy made by politicians, economists, writers and journalists, newspaper or electronic media commentators, business and corporation leaders, educators, and members of the public. Since we follow Marx, who says that this fetishism is "inseparable from the production of commodities," we would expect to discover its traces not only in capitalist societies but also in commodity-based socialist societies.

We have sought to track it not in public discourse about society and economy,

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however, but in another realm: marketing and advertising, or more specifically, their portrayals of the relations between persons and products.

In this domain we pass over from the commodity-based economy considered as a mode of production to the type of consumption that it institutes. In so doing we part company with Marx; or rather — as we prefer to say — we seek to extend his conception, while remaining faithful to its logical structure. This is required because the significance of consumption has grown enormously in social life since the nineteenth century. Fetishism as an aspect of the commodity-based production process persists, albeit in forms quite different from those prevalent in Marx's day; to these have been added other representations of economic activity, rooted in the commodity-based consumption process, that have (as we shall try to show) a fetishistic cast.

If the production and consumption aspects of commodity fetishism turn out to have similar features, there are good reasons for the coincidence. For marketing and advertising strategies, beginning in the late-nineteenth century, had as their objective not only selling products, but also "selling the system:" What they usually refer to as "free enterprise" or the "business system". Marketing messages in every period, considered as a whole, have always carried explicit and implicit references to the larger context of the product pitch itself, and in any case they were based consciously on general conceptions about human behaviour and motivation. In addition, marketers at certain times had explicit political strategies of a general nature, for example, the absorption of the working classes into the consumer marketplace as a way of blocking the appeal of socialist rhetoric.³

As it entered the era of generalized mass production and consumption, towards the end of the nineteenth century, marketing faced the task of "binding" products to culturally-approved formats for the satisfaction of wants. To employ technical terminology, marketing seeks to construct a field of mediations between persons (as consumers) and things (as commodities). It does so by selecting persuasive or motivational elements from the available stock of acceptable cultural representations. A straightforward case is an illustration of a product being used by a person. Even the simplest illustration can be full of social cues: If the product is tobacco and the date is 1910, then the user must be a white Caucasian male; if the date is 1930 and the product is a pill promising to women relief from menstrual cramps, then the ad can only allude cautiously to both the problem and its "solution."

During the course of the twentieth century the cultural barriers surrounding the modes of representation that marketing uses to depict the relations between persons and things gradually were eroded. The highly restrictive (indeed repressive) formats imposed on marketing and advertising in earlier times were supplanted by an increasingly freer play with both message formats and media technologies.

Our summary chart, "Four Phases of Marketing-Advertising Strategy," offers a brief overview of these developments.⁴ In Phase I (approx. 1900-1925) marketing seeks to sell goods by reinforcing traditional cultural values (the family structure, roles of father and mother) and by linking the useful qualities of goods to judgements and choices that uphold such values and roles. In Phase II (approx. 1925-1945) advertising messages replace rational discourse about uses increasingly

with "symbolic" attributes (e.g., status) and abstract qualities (freshness, goodness); the rhetorical forms of the messages themselves depend strongly on arbitrary inferences and irrational appeals. In Phase III (approx. 1945-1965) consumers as persons emerge at centre stage, and products work magical transformations in their lives; the portrayal of these themes is aided by television's ability to show the relations between persons and products "in action." In Phase IV (1965-present), which we call the "lifestyle" phase, background settings are the key elements, and as they change quickly in reaction to social events they provide ever-shifting, fluid contextual settings for representations of the relations between persons and things that are highly ambiguous in terms of message content.

Anyone acquainted with contemporary advertising knows that in its creations "the products of men's hands . . . appear as autonomous figures with a life of their own, which enter into relations both with each other and with the human race." Marx's words do not refer to such creations, which were unknown in his day; but they are a "logical" extension of the fetishism he identified, for they are an outcome of further developmental stages in the commodity-based economic system that links his era to ours.

Our working hypothesis, therefore, is that commodity fetishism is still present

Four Phases of Marketing-Advertising Strategy

Marketing Strategy (M. Curti) (5)	<i>Rational</i>		<i>Non-rational</i>		<i>Behavioural Science</i>		<i>Segmentation</i>	
Inferred from Advertising	<i>Utility</i>		<i>Product Symbols</i>		<i>Personification</i>		<i>Lifestyle</i>	
Period	1900	10 20	1930	40	1950	60	1970	80
Elements in Ads	product price use		product qualities symbolic attributes		product qualities person prototype		product activity Person-Context	
Metaphoric- Emotive Structure	quality, useful, informative		status, family, health, white magic social authority		glamour, romance, sensuality black magic self-trans- formation		leisure, health, groups friendship	
Cultural Processes	<i>Reinforcement of Traditional Values:</i> product is abstracted from process of production, presented as pure use-value.		<i>Emergence of mass Consumption:</i> products are embodiments of attributes, configured in social judge- ment.		<i>Repressive Desublimation:</i> products are personified, satisfaction is judged in interpersonal terms.		<i>Totemism:</i> product is emblem of group-related consumption practice.	

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in our society, and that it is grounded in both production and consumption aspects of commodity-based economies.

In the light of this hypothesis we have devised an empirical test for commodity fetishism in one aspect of society's consumption practices, namely advertising. The methodology, data sample, and results are given later. At this point we wish to mention briefly an issue to which we will return in our conclusions. For us — as, we believe, for Marx — "the fetishism of commodities" is a descriptive-analytic phrase that pinpoints accurately and comprehensively a key feature of societies that have commodity-based economies. Without a doubt the phrase itself immediately conjures up the suggestion that some aspects of such societies are *systematically misrepresented in social consciousness*; in other words, that some essential, "real," or "true" aspect of economic activity appears in a "disguise" or in a mysterious form. It is easy — perhaps too easy — to jump to the conclusion that we have here a full-blown theory of false consciousness.

Some caution is advised. In the first place, Marx himself provided little guidance on this point. His clearest statement runs as follows: "It (the commodity-form) is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things." He does not say who (precisely) is affected by this misperception, nor to what degree, or exactly what form it takes; neither does he explain to what extent, if any, such misperceptions are counterbalanced by insight, gained in other life-experiences, into the "true" nature of commodity production. Thus even if Marx intended to provide here a theory of false (class) consciousness, it is a quite rudimentary theory indeed.

In the second place, extending the notion of commodity fetishism to the economy's consumption aspect, as we have done, does not automatically license it as such a theory. An observation that, in marketing, representations of the relations between persons and objects take on "fantastic forms" (to use Marx's phrase) is not itself evidence for the existence of false consciousness in a social group. We wish to state at the outset that we do not claim to have provided any evidence of this sort. We have conclusions of a different kind to draw at the end of this paper.

III. Background

In 1978 two of the present authors ventured the opinion that "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."⁶ We and our co-author finally are ready to essay it.

The advertising research project reported on in 1978 — for the first time, so far as we are aware — the three recurring, compositional elements in twentieth century advertising: product, person, and setting. In a sample of contemporary Canadian magazine and television advertisements some significant features were revealed, especially types of imagery (user, product, and corporate image) and presentational styles or formats (product qualities, presenter, and lifestyle).

Thereafter a decision was taken to broaden the time dimension of the sample,

while also confining it to magazine ads alone, with the result that one of the first samples covering long historical periods was assembled.⁷ S. Kline gave a synopsis of the results from a preliminary analysis of that data in 1983 (footnote 4), including the chart presented above. Much more remains to be done with this data.

When the final version of the protocol to be used in analyzing the sample was designed in late 1980, a decision was made to "operationalize" the concept of commodity fetishism; so far as we know, this had not been attempted before. In this paper we are reporting the results. In the meantime S. Jhally developed a revised version of the protocol for use on a different sample, namely contemporary television advertising; although the categories differ somewhat, there is enough similarity to provide a fruitful comparison between the resulting sets of data.⁸

IV. Commodity Fetishism: Operationalization

In modern thought the concept of fetishism has been employed by modern anthropology and psychoanalysis as well as by Marxian theory. Nineteenth century anthropological literature described the religious practices of early societies (primarily in Africa) in these terms. Here material objects could capture natural forces, heal and cure sickness, bring happiness to their possessor, be used for defensive purposes to ward off evil consequences, induce romantic/erotic affection; and in addition they could be viewed as possessing animate life in and of themselves. Then in the twentieth century Freudian psychoanalytic theory used fetishism as a clinical term to describe those situations where the sexual act is impossible to complete except in the presence of a particular, non-sexual object. Here the function of the fetish is the capacity to change social relations, to make social relations possible, or to create the conditions for the possible consummation of social (sexual) relations.

In the last-mentioned function the object is transposed from being merely an adjunct of social relations to playing a central role, so that it defines the essence of the social relations of which it is a part. In the psychoanalytic model the fetish does not take the place of the love object; rather, it is a substitute for the mother's lost phallus, which eases the castration anxiety of the male and makes it possible for him to accept the (non-phallic) reality of the female sex partner. The object itself does not *do* anything: Its vital function is constituted solely by its *meaning*.⁹

In operationalizing the concept of fetishism we have created analytical categories that portray the different relationships of people and products, presented in advertising, in terms of the connotations of fetishism to be found in the anthropological and psychoanalytic literature.

OPERATIONALIZATION 1: Magazine Advertising

The operationalization of fetishism is part of a broader study of advertising messages. The coding protocol devised by S. Kline and W. Leiss for the content analysis of magazine advertisements also includes the following domains: proportions of the ad devoted to text, product, persons, and settings; themes in the text; identifying the users of the products; describing the settings used and the activities shown; specifying interpersonal relations, social structure, and lifestyle; kinds of

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persuasive appeal, in terms of both rhetorical form and style; predominant values; and domains of satisfaction. The operationalization of fetishism, however, is a part of the measurement of *textual themes* only.

Categories of Fetishism: Group A

1. Personification of product: analogy of product with human qualities, description of product in human terms ('the sexy young fragrance').
2. Job done efficiently, quickly, effortlessly, rationally, scientifically; long-lasting effectiveness (user's relation to the completed task, results of use).
3. Describes the finished state, results, characteristics of end-state (shining, clean, smooth ride, radiant).
4. White Magic: control exerted by product's power over natural forces or elements; captures, channels, makes available natural forces for use (brings back the sunlight, leaves it smelling of lemon, world belongs to Charlie, suddenly it's Spring-time).
5. Black Magic: control exerted by product's power over other people: allurements, influence, social standing, liking, social judgement.
6. Self-transformation: product has power to change self, reduce anxiety, change personal effectiveness, become like ideal other, become member of group or class.
7. Description of an emotional satisfaction or personal relationship to the product *directly* (you'll love the new Corvair, a good friend).
8. Description of an emotional reaction or satisfaction or product based upon *use* (never disappoints, always satisfies, you'll love the reliability).

Each of these was treated as a separate category that could be marked either present or absent. An historical sampling strategy was developed; in addition, the procedure derived a quota-based sample that attempted to control for a number of factors, particularly product type and magazine type, as well as the year and season of publication. The sample was selected from the Canadian magazines *Maclean's* and *Chatelaine* (the former male-oriented and the latter female-oriented) over the period 1911-1970, and it consisted of 1800 ads.

OPERATIONALIZATION 2: Television Advertising

The protocol devised for magazine advertising was used as the starting point for a revised coding protocol for the content analysis of television advertising. Once again, the operationalization of fetishism was part of a broader study of advertising messages that deals with many of the issues addressed in the earlier study. However, because the TV ad is a dynamic message that usually lasts and changes during a period of only 30 seconds, the later protocol was substantially different.

For the operationalization of fetishism in particular a number of alterations had to be made to the categories. For instance, the Job efficient/Finished state categories were slightly modified, and the Black Magic variable was expanded into two different categories (6 and 8). The most significant modification, however, was the creation of a category to measure the role of the product in the "lifestyle imagery" ads (9). It was necessary to add this category for the television ad because in it the product is presented "symbolically," or visually, rather than textually.

Categories of Fetishism: Group B

1. Personification of product: human qualities attributed to product.
2. Describes finished state/job done efficiently: the object performs a task without effect on human emotions or relations.
3. Emotional response based on product *directly*: emotional reaction is the effect of mere possession or sighting of the object, irrespective of its use.
4. Emotional response based on product *use*: use of the product elicits emotional reaction.
5. Self-transformation: the product changes the physical constitution of people, e.g., either making them more attractive or curing them of sickness.
6. Black Magic: Consequences not of use/consequences of use — changes relations: use of the product changes social relations, such that before its use relations were incomplete and with its use they are complete.
7. Job done efficiently: Consequences not of use/consequences of use — difference between products where social relations are *not* involved: the product performs better than another without effect on social relations.
8. Black Magic: effects of product *use* mediate relations; while the product may not be present in the social scene depicted directly, it is only its use that makes the scene possible. If the product had not been used, the relations depicted would not be possible or would be incomplete.
9. Product mediates relations with others: the product does not *do* anything — its mere presence defines the scene as such. Without it the scene would still be possible, but it would be incomplete, less satisfying, and less meaningful.
10. White Magic: Product captures natural forces.

Each of these is treated as a separate variable and is either present or absent. These categories were coded in relation to the different mediums of audio voice-over, text, music, and audio-visual, and the results were collapsed into one category. The data was gathered by a random sample, stratified by product type, of 1000 ads drawn from two different time periods. 500 were drawn from sports programming

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(male-oriented) and 500 were drawn from prime-time programming (female-oriented). The sampling time frame was October 1980 to September 1981.

V. Analysis of Data and Results

The examination of fetishism in advertising, as described in the preceding section, takes place along four dimensions: first, the concept of fetishism is treated historically; second, fetishism is examined in relation to audience segmentation, i.e., the nature of the person/object relationship as it is presented to different audiences; third, fetishism is examined according to use-type, in order to see how the type of product affects the person/object relationship; last, we examine the informational basis on which the different relationships presented are justified.

(A) Historical

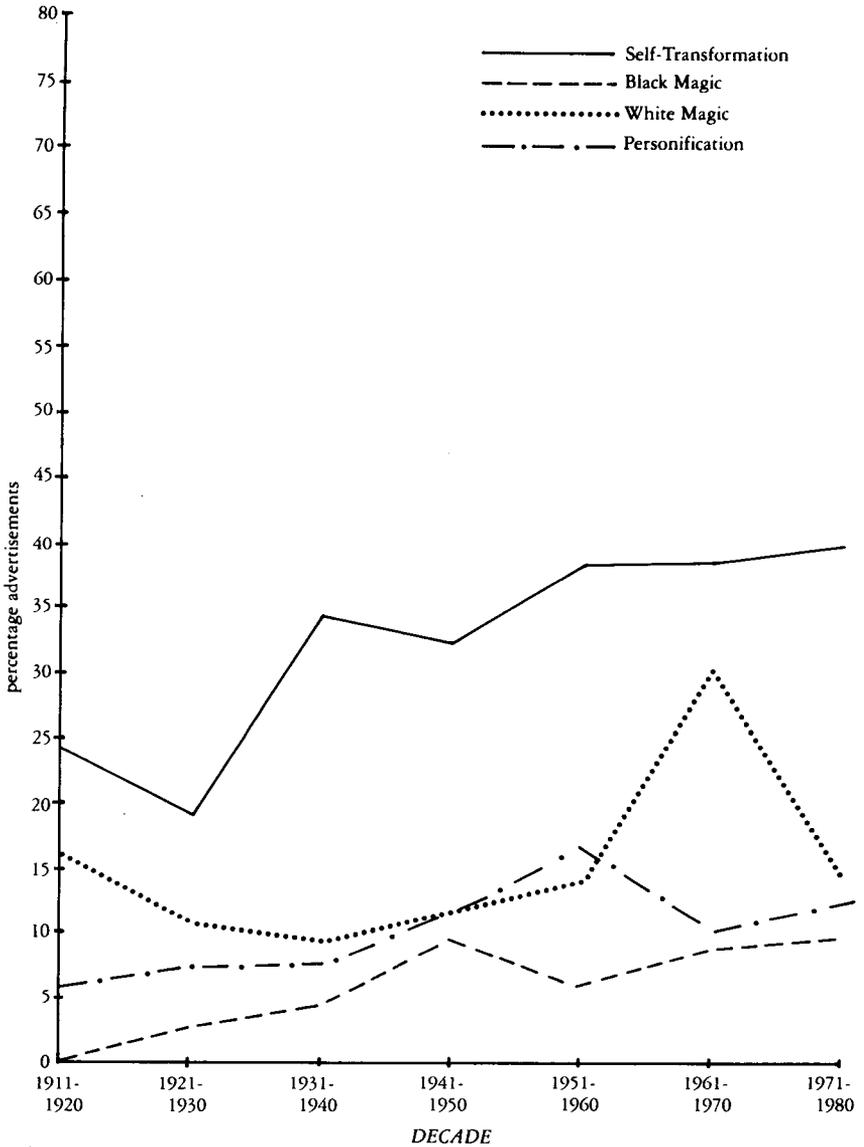
The historical examination only deals with the magazine data since the TV sample is not historically based. In Graphs 1 and 2 the fetish categories are divided into two groups to clarify the presentation of historical developments. These groups correspond *roughly* to a "magical/rational" distinction. Four of the eight variables developed for the magazine study are grouped under the designation "magical fetishism": personification, black magic, white magic, self-transformation. Advertising content was coded in these categories for those instances where the product itself is shown as exerting or representing some kind of autonomous power vis-a-vis human agents, or as embodying such powers. In most instances of this type the nature and origins of these powers are mysterious. The remaining four variables are together called "rational fetishism." For although the ad content also shows here the effects of owning or using the product on human actions and emotions, these effects either are explained in the text, show familiar events, or are otherwise unambiguous so far as their source is concerned. Graph 1 includes the "magical" categories (personification, black magic, white magic, self-transformation), while Graph 2 deals with the "rational" categories (emotion direct, emotion indirect, job efficient, finished state). The data shows that there has been much change during this century in how the relations of persons and things have been portrayed by advertising.

At a general level the data shows that there has been an overall decline in the rational categories and an increase in the magical categories. The movement of the two groups is in opposite directions. The most significant rise has been for the category of self-transformation.

(B) Audience Segmentation

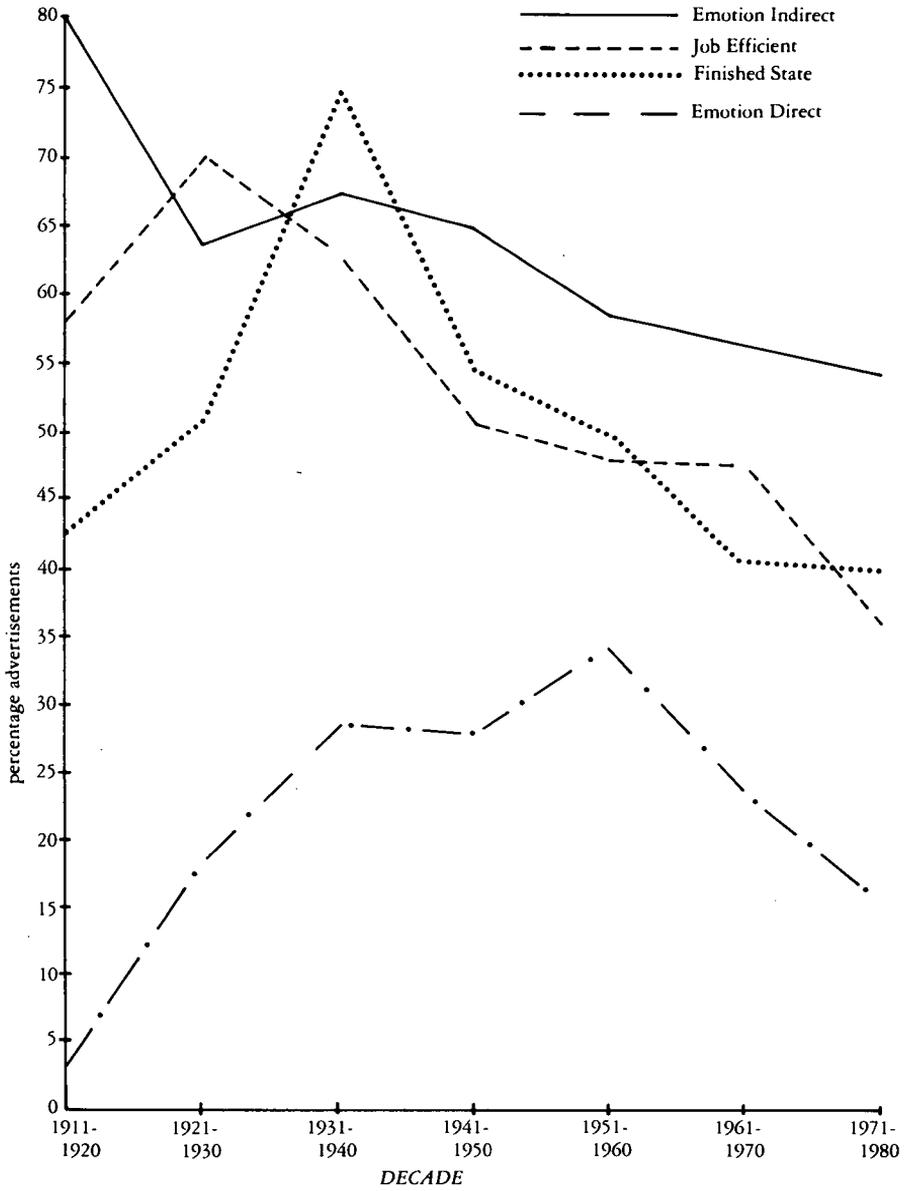
Graphs 1 and 2, however, are slightly misleading with respect to the categories of white magic, black magic, and self-transformation, because the data for *Maclean's* and *Chatelaine* is aggregated. The matter of market and audience segmentation is a crucial one in the study of advertising, and it has been seriously overlooked by many writers interested in the social role of advertising. Daniel Pope summarizes its importance well:

GRAPH 1
'Magical' Fetishism By Decade



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GRAPH 2
'Rational' Fetishism By Decade



The advent and ascendancy of market segmentation as a principle of national advertisers may well be the most far reaching development in national advertising in recent decades. In the last generation it has affected the structure and conduct of the advertising agency business, the standards and principles of the advertising professionals and the form and content of the advertisements themselves.

The relationship between the products advertised and the audience composition of a magazine is a crucial factor in modern advertising. The advertiser attempts to appropriate a *market* segment (social relations of product use by brand and type) through an *audience* segment (social composition of readership). Michael Ray describes the role of advertising within the marketing mix as producing "communication campaigns in marketing that get to the right people with the right message at the right time."¹⁰

When audience segmentation is brought into the historical analysis as a significant variable, then some interesting differences emerge (Graph 3). There are noteworthy differences between the two magazines for all three fetish categories presented. The messages aimed at the female audience (*Chatelaine*) stress the three themes much more than those directed at the male audience (*Maclean's*). For many periods the categories move in opposite directions.

The non-historical cross-tabulation of fetishism by audience segmentation for the magazine data is presented in Table 1.

The vital importance of audience segmentation for an understanding of commercial messages is reflected also in the data analysis of contemporary TV advertising (Table 2).

For television, taking the total data set as a composite, the most frequent categories are emotional response based on product use (32.4%) and product mediating relations with others (21%). The next two most important categories are the product producing physical changes in people (16.8%) and showing a job efficiently accomplished (15%). All other categories appear in under 10% of ads.

Table 1: Fetish by Magazine (Audience) Column Percent

Fetish	Magazine	
	<i>Chatelaine</i>	<i>Maclean's</i>
Personification	10.8	9.8
Job Efficiency	44.1	59.7
Finished State	54.1	50.8
White Magic	19.9	8.6
Black Magic	12.7	1.0
Self-Transformation	38.6	27.5
Emotion — Direct	16.7	25.5
Emotion — Indirect	61.5	61.6
TOTALS (<i>number</i>)	(433)	(633)

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GRAPH 3
'Magical' Fetishism By Magazine By Decade

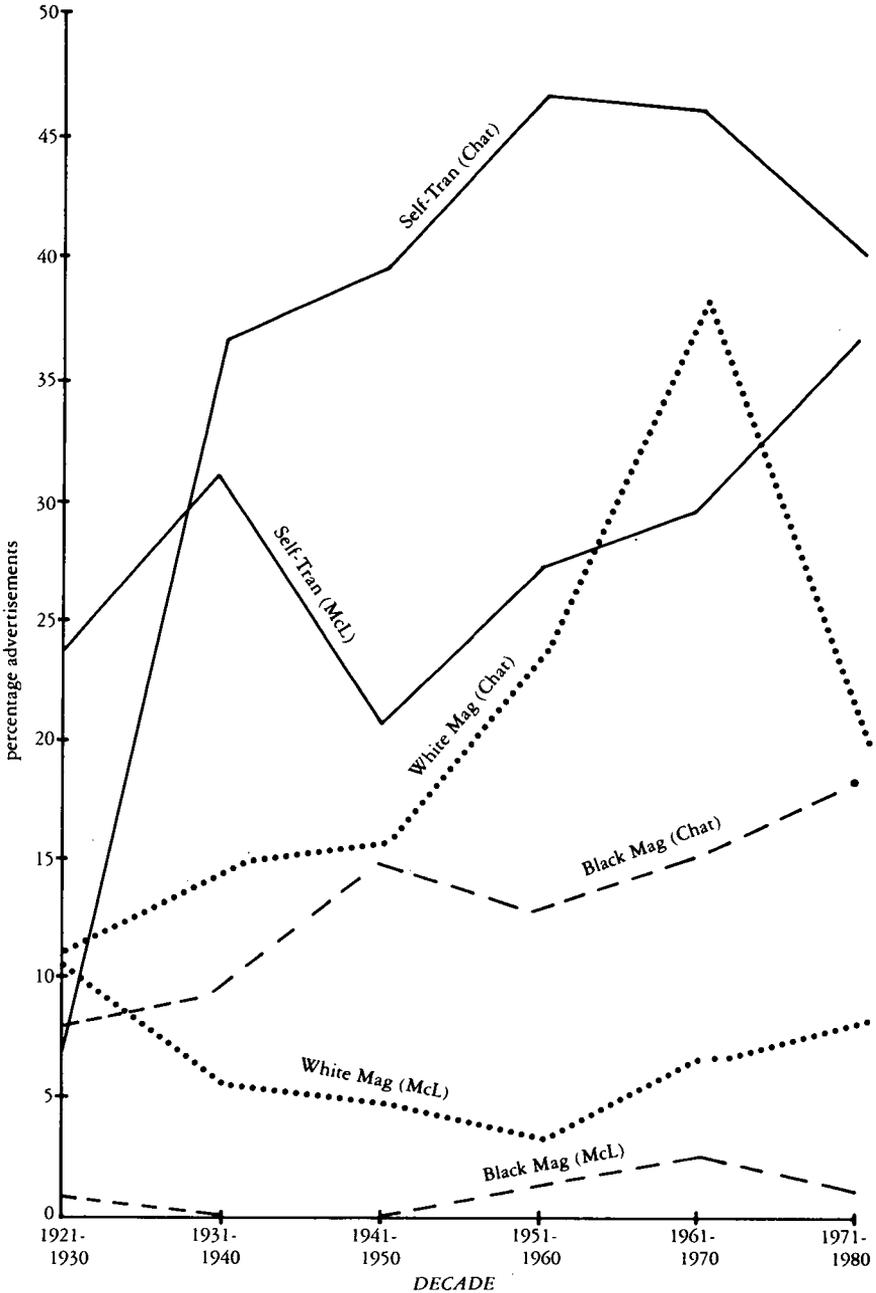


Table 2: Fetishism by Period

	%	PT	ST
1. Personification	5.7	6.0	5.4
2. Job Efficient	15.0	8.9	21.2
3. Emotion — Direct	6.9	8.3	5.6
4. Emotion — Indirect	32.4	39.3	25.9
5. Self-Transformation	16.8	24.8	9.0
6. Black Magic	4.6	4.0	5.2
7. Job Efficient	7.3	10.7	4.0
8. Effects Mediate Relations	8.4	10.3	6.4
9. Mediates Relations	21.0	13.3	28.9
10. White Magic	7.4	9.3	5.6
TOTALS (<i>number</i>) (1000)		(500)	(500)

Once period (audience) is introduced, significant differences emerge between the two groups. For a female audience the two most important categories are the elicitation of an emotional response based upon product use (39%) and product as producing physical changes in persons (24%). For a male audience the three most important categories are product mediating relations with others (28.9%), emotional response to product use (25.9%), and job being efficiently performed (21.2%).

The data shows that the relation of people to things is presented in different ways to different types of audiences. In prime-time advertising the commodity is used in a more "magical" way to affect humans directly, while in sports-time advertising it plays a role which is rational, magical, and indicative of images of desired lifestyles. The codes that advertisers use to present in stylized form the relations between persons and things are differentiated sharply according to audience type.

(C) Product Type

There is already some evidence that various product types construe differently the relationship between persons and commodities.¹¹ Tables 3 and 4 present the cross-tabulation of fetishism with use-type for magazine and television advertising respectively.

For contemporary TV advertising, alcohol is primarily associated with the product-mediating relations (lifestyle advertising). Food, clothing, pets, and leisure technology bring emotional gratification. Transportation focusses on the utility of the product as well as on emotional gratification. Household is concerned with utility, while personal care and drugs deal with physical changes induced by the product.

Our discussion of fetishism in advertising must recognize that there is more than one relationship of persons to products. Psychological, physical, and social dimensions are all present and vary in importance between audiences and use-types.

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Table 3: Fetish by Use-Type (Column %)

Fetish	Use-Type							
	#1 <i>Smoking</i>	#2 <i>Alcohol</i>	#3 <i>Food</i>	#4 <i>Clothing</i>	#5 <i>Trans- portation</i>	#6 <i>Personal Care</i>	#7 <i>Corporate</i>	
Personification	11.0	20.0	10.6	6.0	12.7	7.9	11.1	
Job Efficiency	17.1	13.9	56.2	35.6	67.1	73.9	66.4	
Finished State	42.8	32.2	48.1	60.6	53.6	66.7	34.6	
White Magic	10.5	6.3	11.5	8.7	5.6	22.1	22.0	
Black Magic	9.7	12.6	1.9	6.4	3.9	7.9	4.0	
Self-Transformation	33.3	28.0	24.8	40.2	15.0	54.1	15.4	
Emotion — Direct	27.0	33.3	26.5	23.4	30.0	13.3	6.1	
Emotion — Indirect	59.4	35.2	69.2	54.2	64.4	77.2	36.7	
TOTALS %	10.2	5.2	21.2	15.8	15.4	21.4	10.8	100.8
No.	(109)	(55)	(226)	(168)	(164)	(229)	(115)	(1066)

Table 4: Use-Type by Fetishism (Raw Numbers)

	Fetishism									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Alcohol	1	0	5	35	0	11	2	1	111	9
2. Food	7	1	7	79	8	8	10	4	48	12
3. Clothing	3	1	4	17	1	2	5	4	6	2
4. Transportation	19	50	23	37	0	1	11	2	13	8
5. Personal Care	15	29	14	61	102	19	22	60	7	18
6. Household	6	40	4	35	1	3	23	2	7	9
7. Drugs	1	3	8	6	46	0	0	6	4	0
8. Pets	0	0	2	8	0	0	0	0	1	2
9. Leisure Tech	0	21	1	30	0	1	0	4	12	11
10. Other	0	5	1	16	0	1	0	1	1	3

Indeed there are often multiple relations of people and products in a single advertisement: For instance, in the television sample 392 ads had more than one coding for the fetish categories. Our studies show that particular forms of fetishism that arise at a particular time do not disappear, but rather are then segregated as a mode of representation for particular products or audience segments: The self-transformation ad is used predominantly in cosmetic ads aimed at a female audience, while the lifestyle ads are particularly noticeable in alcohol and cigarette advertising. The point here is that it is difficult to speak of a single relationship to objects, at least as depicted in advertising. In the contemporary marketplace the product/person relation is articulated psychologically, physically, and socially. Some goods seem to serve primarily for display and social judgement, some for personal enhancement, some for locating us in the nexus of group relations, and some just for simple utility in everyday routines.

(D) Origins and Production

As we know, the central idea in Marx's conception of commodity fetishism is that commodities appear as "autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own" which interact with each other and the human world. The "direct" measurement of this autonomy seems to indicate that it is present in, but not a significant feature of, contemporary advertising: For the magazine data, "personification" occurs in 10.3% of ads while in TV advertising the figure is 5.7%. However, this is a narrow way of measuring autonomy; a more important issue is whether the process and relations of production appear as part of the *meaning* of commodities in the marketplace. Other variables in both protocols were designed to measure this aspect of advertising messages. For the magazine study two categories were developed to identify this at the textual level only:

1. Description/Account of process of production of product (craftsmanship, care, efficiency, by robots, etc.).
2. Account of social relations of production, depiction of producer or institution of particular type, allusion to ownership or management, support for the "climate" of enterprise, free market, free enterprise, competition.

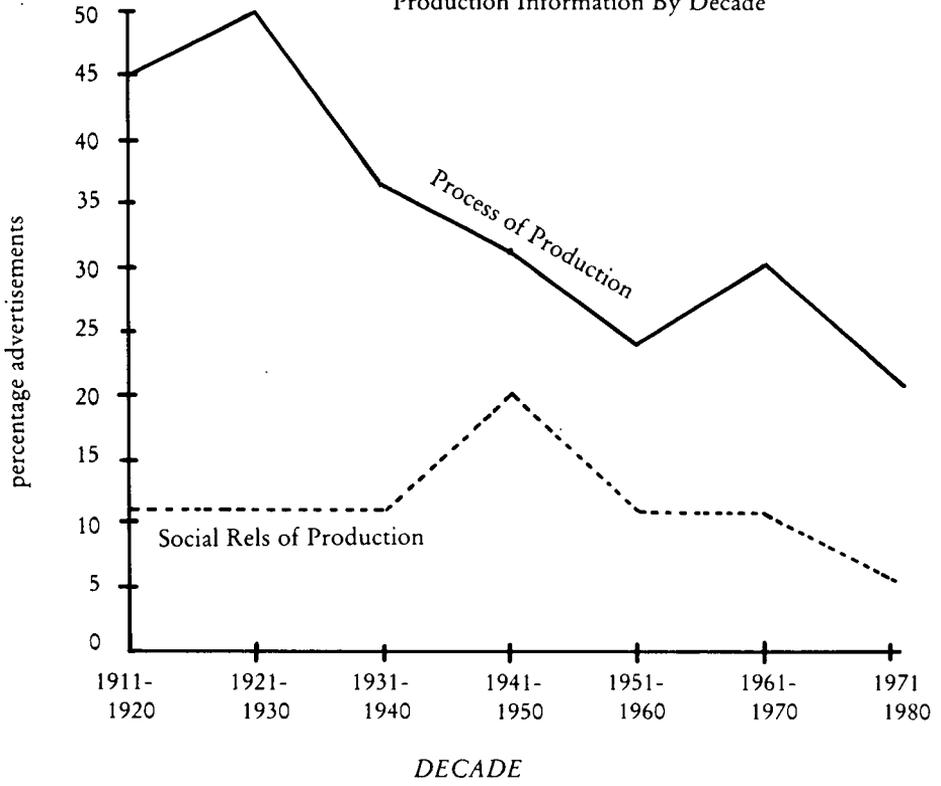
Table 5 is the cross-tabulation of fetishism with these two variables.

	Row %	
	<i>Process</i>	<i>Social Relations</i>
1. Personification	29.0	15.6
2. Job Efficient	41.3	15.5
3. Finished State	36.9	8.5
4. White Magic	26.6	13.5
5. Black Magic	10.6	7.3
6. Self-Transformation	19.6	5.9
7. Emotional — Direct	38.5	7.8
8. Emotional — Indirect	34.5	9.9

Advertising does not give much information about the social relations of producing commodities. The process of production category is more ambiguous. It is marked present in 35.2% of the sample. However, 24.1% of the codings for this category fall into the high-priced product type "Transportation," while another 18% fall into the product type "Corporate," which not surprisingly stresses this aspect in the ideological legitimation of its productive role. Furthermore, the historical analysis shows its declining importance in the development of advertising messages (Graph 4). For the last decade measured, 1971-80, "process of production" is reduced to 22.2% of ads and is largely concentrated in the use-types of transportation and corporate.

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GRAPH 4
Production Information By Decade



There is no such ambiguity in the TV data for this point. One category was constructed to measure *any* indication of the history and production of the product. Table 6 is the cross-tabulation of this category with fetishism.

Table 6

	<i>Raw Numbers</i> <i>Production/History</i>
1. Personification	6
2. Job Efficient	8
3. Emotion — Direct	7
4. Emotion — Indirect	13
5. Self-Transformation	0
6. Black Magic	0
7. Job Efficient	0
8. Effects Mediate Relations	0
9. Mediates Relations	0
10. White Magic	0

Only 5.3% of the total sample mentioned anything at all about the product or the history of the product. The coding here was extremely generous and even the skimpiest information (e.g., "America's king of beers since 1883") justified its inclusion within this category. TV advertising tells us very little about how products are produced.

If, following Marx, we say that commodity fetishism is present when goods are seen as autonomous, as entering into relations with each other, and as appearing in "fantastic forms" in their relations with humans, then we can conclude from the data analysis that fetishism is an aspect of *both* production and consumption. Commodities appear in the marketplace as miraculous products of an invisible process of production and then enter into competing relations with each other, jostling for position to satisfy the unique and changing needs of the consumer. In some instances, products explicitly take on animate features. In addition, the object world interacts with the human world at the most fundamental of levels: It performs magical feats of transformation and bewitchment, brings instant happiness and gratification, captures the forces of nature, and holds within itself the essence of important social relationships (in fact, it substitutes for those relations). In the interaction of humans and products as portrayed in advertising we can identify not only the fetishism described by Marx, but also the fetishism described in anthropology and psychoanalysis.

CONCLUSIONS: FETISHISM

According to Marx commodity fetishism is a "disguise": Relations among persons appear as relations among things. But Marx was referring to the abstract representations in the economic ideology of his day, such as the concepts of capital

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and labour, which concealed the fact that the engines of material progress were simultaneously the perpetrators of degradation and social disruption on a massive scale. Today the world of commodity production has become a true magic show. How wonderfully apt Adam Smith's "invisible hand" metaphor seems now — albeit in a sense radically different from what its originator had in mind. The modern sense of this phrase is portrayed well in the series of television ads by Coca-Cola, which show multi-racial, multi-cultural groups singing sweetly together: Totemism, or the *magical representation of the social collectivity*.

How was the stage for this show erected? First the ground had to be cleared, so to speak, ground that had been occupied by traditional forms of social collectivity rooted in premodern economic conditions. In all such forms social groupings were constituted in the unity of production and consumption activities: production for direct use, for the most part, with limited local and extended market exchanges, in family, village, manor, or urban district settings. The groupings themselves were affected most strongly by regional, religious, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, and other such determinations. And the objects that served these production and consumption forms were rooted in, and in turn reflected, these determinations: the distinctive dress and cuisine of ethnic groups, the tightly-controlled associations of skilled craftsmen, the special kinds of things provided for feasts and celebrations.

The market-industrial system undermined these traditional forms of social collectivity without replacing them, in its early phases, with anything except the abstract rhetoric of material and technological "progress." Towards the end of the nineteenth century a more gripping, but also more dangerous and mutually destructive, rhetoric of collective identity came to the fore: national patriotism. At the same time, however, the foundations were laid for a far more stable form of social harmony: mass production and consumption, facilitated in the twentieth century by a rapidly-evolving marketing and advertising system.

Where the division of labour, mass migrations from rural to urban settings, technological change, and the erosion of traditional cultures had rent the fabric of social collectivities, there mass marketing began to feel its way, gradually stitching together an entirely different kind of human association. The objects that had constituted the older forms of production and consumption, and that were embedded in social relations, were replaced by others that for some time were recommended purely by virtue of their "abstract" qualities: their utility, incorporation of technological progress, efficiency, and low cost.

Gradually over the course of the twentieth century marketing and advertising strategies have sought, more and more explicitly, to fill the void left by the destruction of traditional collectivities, by creating a sense of social solidarity oriented around messages about things, or more precisely, messages about the relations between persons and things. Whereas the new system of commodity production had emptied the social world of the elements that formerly had bound together the activities of social groups, the new system of mass marketing and mass consumption based on it has sought to refill that domain with its own form and content.

The distinctive social form it embodies is the notion that individuals are free to situate themselves in a fluid set of temporary associations that are distinguished

from each other by "styles" of appearance, behaviour, and types of activities. The distinctive content is the notion that these associations, based purely on the "elective affinity" of their members, are oriented strongly around products and messages about products.

The developed form of commodity fetishism in its consumption aspect, therefore, is the magical representation of the social collectivity. It is magical because the product stands in a quite indeterminate relation to the personal activities, interactions, and self-transformations that are portrayed in the advertising message. In much national television advertising there is no sensible, "causal" relation at all; rather, the product is simply associated with a highly-stylized set of visual images. The product, in other words, simply *represents* a social collectivity as such, which is defined by its style and activities as a distinct social grouping vis-a-vis others: the devotees of punk music and rock video, the beer-drinking sports fan, the fitness and healthy living crowd. These groupings are constituted as a social series by the different products with which they are associated.

CONCLUSIONS: FALSE CONSCIOUSNESS

We have suggested that the newer consumption aspect of commodity fetishism arises on the foundation of the production aspect first identified by Marx. They share the following characteristics: (1) economic activities appear as if they were autonomous, having a "life of their own"; (2) and there is a tendency towards a systematic misrepresentation of collective goods, so that general needs can be recognized as legitimate only if they are expressed in such a way that they can be satisfied through marketed products.

Do the "fantastic forms" through which social relations appear as market-oriented relations, however, actually *cause* individuals to misrepresent to themselves the nature of their own needs? We said earlier that our study was not designed to answer such a question. In other words, our study of the way in which commodity fetishism in its consumption aspect actually appears in advertisements cannot determine by itself the effects of fetishism, if any, on attitudes and behaviour.

The two aspects (production and consumption) do not exist in isolation from each other, and therefore a more complete study would be required in order to address the question posed above. It is possible, however, that no direct evidence of attitudinal or behavioural influence could be assembled in a convincing manner, given the inherent complexity of human motivation. On the other hand, direct evidence may not even be required, depending on the type of inquiry that is proposed. For there may be a way of determining through indirect evidence, at least in approximate form, the impact of commodity fetishism on social consciousness. We will essay only a brief sketch of this approach here.

Indirect evidence for the significance of commodity fetishism may be correlated with the degree to which some basic human needs, and the social policies designed to address them, are constrained within the limits of market-oriented or "economic" categories. Our hypothesis is that, if such a constraint operates strongly with reference to one or more highly-significant human needs, then there is

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indirect evidence that commodity fetishism has a significant impact on social consciousness.

Health care provides a good test case. Health concerns always rank very high in statements by persons about priority in needs; and it is generally conceded that no person, regardless of ability to pay, should be denied access to certain minimum provisions of medical facilities. But beyond this point debate arises, with respect to levels of entitlement, individual responsibility, and sources of revenue for providing care; on the other side, about types of care and facilities, determination of treatment costs, and incomes of medical professionals in relation to other occupations. In many countries, in Canada for example, the cost of health care and appropriate ways of allocating it have become major issues in social policy and political debate.

For the most part the debate has been cast quite narrowly, and the constraints on debate and policy are largely those fashioned by a market-oriented understanding of health care needs. The nature of these constraints are that health care is viewed predominantly as the repair of damage to individuals, rather than — first and foremost — as the promotion of health-enhancing styles and conditions of life. In the former approach, provision of services (doctors) and goods (drugs) is made under market or quasi-market conditions, for doctors have been able to render meaningless the ostensible social control over their fee schedules. And the social debate is confined almost exclusively to the purely financial aspects of the problem, namely how to allocate additional revenues to the health care system, how much individuals can be made to pay, and so forth. Meanwhile the predominance of health concerns in public sector funding generally has tended to reduce the relative shares formerly devoted to other concerns such as education and welfare.

On the other hand, the other approach — the promotion of health-enhancing styles and conditions of life — would require public debate to address directly the issue of collective responsibility for important needs, and thus to address directly the nature of the social collectivity itself. Only in the most superficial sense is the individual's attitude towards health issues a private matter, for all of the activities that result in enormous fiscal consequences for the health care system — such as abuse of tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs; automobile casualties; poor diet — have a very large "lifestyle" component, i.e., they are influenced strongly by social group behaviour. In addition, environmental hazards — air and water pollution, unsafe workplaces — cannot be addressed satisfactorily because society cannot find adequate ways of dealing with such problems at their source, but rather must rest content with attempting to repair the resulting damages to health. Finally, the fiscal burdens of health care result in part directly from the income demands made by doctors; but only an incomes policy, seeking explicitly to forge a general social consensus on an appropriate range of remuneration for various skills, can deal adequately with escalating fee demands.

To be sure, the "social" as well as the market-oriented approach to health care would be required to address the matter of allocating resources among competing needs. In reality the two approaches do not represent an "either-or" situation, for of course a market approach is simply one way of allocating resources. What is at

issue here is the nature of public debate: whether the "human" and the "fiscal" aspects of the debate, to use crude labels, exist in productive tension, so that society makes progress towards more enlightened practices; or whether, as at present, our discussion of vital needs is yoked too tightly to a product-centered discourse.

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Notes

1. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. I, tr. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), p. 165.
2. For a fuller discussion of this transformation see W. Leiss, "Things Come Alive: Economy and Technology as Modes of Social Representation in Modern Society," in *Representations*, ed. C. Belisle and B. Schiele (Paris: Editions du C.N.R.S., 1984), pp. 40-65.
3. Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).
4. S. Kline, "Images of Well-Being: Market Segments in a Study of Canadian Magazine Ads, 1910-1980", paper presented at the annual meetings of the CCA/ACC, Vancouver, B.C., June 1983, Chart #1 (with modifications) and commentary.
5. Merle Curti, "The Changing Concept of 'Human Nature' in the Literature of American Advertising," *Business History Review*, XLI (1967), pp. 336-355.
6. S. Kline and W. Leiss, "Advertising, Needs, and 'Commodity Fetishism,'" *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 2 (1978), pp. 5-30.
7. Approximately 1800 randomly-selected ads from *Maclean's* (1910-1980) and *Chatelaine* (1928-1980). At the same time, and completely independently, Prof. Richard Pollay and his collaborators at the Faculty of Commerce, University of British Columbia, were assembling an historically-oriented database from U.S. magazine advertisements. Pollay and his collaborators have published many articles and reports analyzing this data, and many more are in progress. We have benefitted greatly from ongoing exchanges with them. See, for example, R.W. Pollay, "The Communication of Culture: American Advertising and the Structure of Values", paper presented at the CAA/ACC meetings, Vancouver, B.C., June 1983.
8. S. Jhally, "The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Context of Meaning in Modern Society," Ph.D. thesis, Department of Communication, Simon Fraser University, 1984.
9. See Jhally, *op. cit.*, chapters 4-5 for a fuller discussion.
10. Daniel Pope, *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), p. 265; Michael Ray, *Advertising and Communication Management* (Prentice-Hall, 1982), p. 482.
11. See Kline and Leiss, "Advertising, Needs, and 'Commodity Fetishism,'" and R.W. Pollay, "The Communication of Culture: American Advertising and the Structure of Values."