

Television Commercials as Cultural Texts

by

Christopher Youngdahl

A thesis  
presented to the University of Manitoba  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
in  
Department of Sociology, University of Manitoba

Winnipeg, Manitoba

1985 Christopher Youngdahl, 1985

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge gratefully the help provided by Nicholas Tavuchis and Charles Axelrod when I was in the process of developing and clarifying the ideas in this thesis. I thank Len Kaminski for his attentive reading of the text. And I especially acknowledge the help provided to me by Mikhail Vitkin during the writing of my thesis and throughout my three years as a student at The University of Manitoba. Dr. Vitkin's insightful criticism of my thinking along with his general support of my studies was a great help to me.

In addition, I thank Gila Hayim and Kurt Wolff, who first introduced me to sociology and to critical thinking.

Finally, I acknowledge with utmost gratitude the involvement of David B. Zilberman in the development of my thinking. I pay homage to the Guru for the knowledge imparted to me.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . . iii

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>page</u>
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
II. TEXTS AND DECONSTRUCTION . . . . .	3
III. A SOCIO-HISTORICAL READING . . . . .	61
IV. A PHENOMENOLOGICAL READING . . . . .	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	125

Chapter I  
INTRODUCTION

0.1

The following text is an analysis of television commercials. In the second chapter I attempt to transcribe thirteen video-recorded commercials into poetic texts. For each text I perform a deconstructive analysis, borrowing certain elements from the methods of Barthes, Derrida, and Zilberman to expose the logic of the commercial texts. I try to expose the texts' original logical intentions by inserting the unthinkable into their content -- specifically by interjecting possible social worlds pressed out of the horizons of the commercial texts. The effect appears to be an evaluative judgement of the texts, but my intent is not evaluative per se. Rather, through this method I wish to reveal the psychological and historical evaluations that the texts themselves make.

0.2

In the third chapter I perform what I call a socio-historical reading of the commercial texts. I trace the historical and psychological evaluations made by the commercial texts back to ways of thinking and being dominant in the unfolding of Western society. Drawing mainly from the works of Marx

and Weber, I seek to describe the way of thinking of the "Puritan-type personality" and its inevitable transformation into what I shall call the "Consumerist-type individual", portrayed in the universe of commercials.

## 0.3

In the final chapter, using certain strategies found in Buddhist theories of consciousness, as well as in the works of Sartre, Kurt Wolff, and Zilberman, I propose a phenomenological approach to the commercial texts. There, I try to demonstrate the isomorphic relation between the way of thinking displayed in commercial texts, albeit at a very rudimentary stage of development, and the way of thinking of the phenomenological analysis. Thus I shall show that in the heart of the phenomenological enterprise lies the potential and trajectory of the new type of civilization represented in its infancy by the consumerist individual.

Chapter II  
TEXTS AND DECONSTRUCTION

1.01

Montage means assembling, joining, uniting, adding, constructing; the production of a composite picture made from various elements. In film it means the selection, cutting, and piecing together of shots into a consecutive whole -- a juxtaposition of heterogeneous shots.<sup>1</sup> Montage does not reproduce the real but constructs or assembles an object by joining chains of varied shots. It intervenes in the world, changing reality. Through montage a film shot becomes a kind of representation without reference. Each shot, being an exact copy of some sights and sounds, uproots these sights and sounds, as it were, from their original context, transforming them into signifiers in a new system.<sup>2</sup> To paraphrase Derrida, every shot can be cited, "put between quotation marks," thus removing it from every given context, "engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable".<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Lotman, J., Semiotics of Cinema, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1976; p.56.

<sup>2</sup> Ulmer, G.L., "The Object of Post-Criticism" in The Anti-Aesthetic, edit. by Foster, H., Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983.

<sup>3</sup> Derrida, J., "Signature Event Context," in Glyph I, 1977; p. 185.

## 1.02

While a film shot is a copy of sights and sounds, it removes them from their original context. Each "grafted text", i.e., each shot "continues to radiate back toward the site of its removal, transforming that too, as it effects the new territory",<sup>4</sup> i.e., the territory of the film system. Montage can have the effect of assembling an illimitable number of new simulated sites as it transforms the "original site".

## 1.03

The prefix "eco" is from the Greek word oikos, meaning "household". Commercials are ecologies in the original sense of oikos: texts about the human household. They also concern themselves with the original meaning of economics -- the art of managing a house or household. But history has reduced oikos to the production, distribution, and consumption of commodities. Thus, the discourse of the commercial is a panegyric of the commodity. Consumption appears as ecology.

## 1.04

The sun rises over rocky desert landscape.

Four balding men wearing animal skins leap about a raging campfire in Neolithic innocence.

---

<sup>4</sup> Derrida, J., Dissemination, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1981; p. 355.

"The Dawn of Burgers", announces a god-like male voice as "Also Sprach Zarathrustra" plays in the background.

Long haired Neolithic whitemen are gathered around the fire

"In the beginning it was hard to get a burger at all".

The savage Neolithic whitemen cook hamburgers on sticks over the fire.

"So when you got one you made the most of it by cooking over fire.

"Today some have forsaken flame and turned to the practice of frying..."

Sickly grey burgers on oily flat surfaces -- Wendy's and McDonald's;

"Forgetting the sizzling taste that only comes from flame broiling".

Thick succulent burgers being flame broiled;

"But at Burger King we say..."

The savage Neolithic whitemen leave the fire and head out toward barren rocky cliffs.

"When you've got something as delicious as flame broiling, you stay with it..."

Neolithic landscape mutates into Post-Modern -- a highway and a Burger King restaurant.

Savage Neolithic whitemen mutate into Post-Moderns getting into car on the other side of the street clutching white Burger King bags.

"...for a long, long time."

## 1.041

Acts of meaning depend on differences -- oppositions such as Neolithic vs. Post-Modern, the difficulty of Neolithic life vs. the ease of Post-Modern life, the naturalness of meat cooked over fire vs. unnatural fried meat, Wendy's and McDonald's vs. Burger King. Such oppositions generate the meaning of the life world presented in the commercial texts.

## 1.042

Neolithic man is a frantic scarcity-driven soul in a barren ecology...at least that is the Post-Modern archetype. But according to Sahlins, food perhaps was acquired with more ease by the Neolithic hunter and gatherer than the Post-Modern fast-food consumer. Indeed, Neolithic people were bereft of fast-food burgers and all the rest of the "needs" of the Post-Modern consumer, but to produce their wants they needed to work minimally. Whether this was the case or not, the Post-Modern world is definitely maintained by a tremendous amount of social labor time. To get their hamburger, Post-Moderns have to produce, for example, a vast communication and transportation system, huge centralized power generators, and highly mechanized and technologized farming and food-processing industries.<sup>5</sup> At the same time the Post-Modern must contend with an ecosystem collapsing under the strain of too much productive activity, forcing all life to work harder and harder for its survival. Despite all this,

<sup>5</sup> See Sahlins, M., Stone Age Economics, Chicago: Aldine Atherton Inc., 1972.

"fast-food" is presented as something ready-to-hand; immediate sense gratification.

## 1.043

So, if we cannot locate in the barren landscape the literal Neolithic origins of humans, this desert must be the origin of the Post-Modern's soul, haunted by the strange image of balding whitemen cooking hamburgers on sticks. It is out of the fire, the eternal axis of energy for this particular Post-Modern psycho-cosmical universe, that desire is born for the flame broiled burger. A valuative metaphysics of differences underlies all appearances in this universe, the hidden purport of the signifying mind: the flame broiled vs. the fried, Burger King vs. Wendy's and McDonald's. Each difference becomes a locus of valuation acquiring a normative dimension, explained in the myth of Neolithic origins.<sup>6</sup>

## 1.044

The desire for the taste of flame broiled beef burgers appears as normal, natural. But what is "natural" about the taste of fast food meat produced through bioengineering and petro-chemical food processing? The real intent is to distinguish Burger King burgers from all the rest. Symbolic engineering enables the ecstasis of fantasizing oneself as having prehistoric needs while eating Burger King burgers.

## 1.045

---

<sup>6</sup> See Zilberman, D., "Semantic Shift in Epic Composition", unpublished manuscript.

One can also fantasize about brutish male savagery. As Sahlins points out, beef connotes strength and "evokes the masculine pole of a sexual code of food which must go back to the Indo-European identification of cattle or increasable wealth with virility. The indispensability of meat as "strength", and of steak as the epitome of virile meats, remains a basic condition of American diets".<sup>7</sup>

## 1.046

In the psycho-cosmical world of the commercial text we have entered, the distinction between semiosis and Being cannot be made. Each iteration into the text involves us in a system of signs referring to other signs. For example, for something to be unnatural, such as fried burgers, there must be something natural, such as broiled burgers. But we see this distinction to be unreal in the lifeworld -- a purely imaginary distinction. The broiled burger functions as an icon for the natural, resembling only another icon -- the icon of the balding neolithic men cooking with fire, which resembles nothing but itself. In the commercial icons of Post Modernism -- cars, highways, and fast-food restaurants -- are superimposed on icons of prehistory, superimposed on desert environment. Such superimpositions hide the reality filmed behind the spectrum of iconic meanings and their metaphoric transfers. The filmshot takes a copy of the environment and removes it from its context, transforming it

<sup>7</sup> Sahlins, M., Culture and Practical Reason, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976; p. 171.

into a signifier in a new system -- the ecology of the commercial. By taking environments, isolating them and merging them with superimposed properties of the commercial system, it becomes a qualitatively new world with new forms of life, as it were. It appears as an environment of symbols growing from icons and mixed signs; its "genetic root system" referring from sign to sign.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.05

In the ecology of the commercial the environment filmed has its meaning located in the context of consumerist practice, turning the environment into an instrument for consumerist orientation -- a sign for consumerist life, functioning independently of the actual conditions which lead to its formation. In the ecology of the commercial the environment serves as a regulative programming element for consumerist behavioral reactions triggered by systems of signs referring to signs.

## 1.055

Film or video does not reproduce the real but constructs or assembles a simulacrum of the real. At the same time the simulacrum masks the fact that there no longer is a real.<sup>9</sup> Burger King is presented as a simulation of the "natural" ecology of the neolithic -- yet that "natural" ecology is

<sup>8</sup> Peirce, C.S., Collected Papers, Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1965; 3.302.

<sup>9</sup> See Baudrillard, J., Simulations, New York: Semiotext(e), 1983; p. 25.

also imaginary. Film replaces and destroys what it simulates, creating as it were, hyper-reals. The idea of "ecological balance" can only be a simulation of consumerist ecology -- a re-presentation of it. The commercial, as the script or blueprint for the spectacle of consumerism, is the truth for proper action in the system.

## 1.06

Just as the ecology of commercials is a purely imaginary one, so too is the social world of commercials. "From the automobile to television, all the goods selected by the spectacular system are also its weapons for a constant reinforcement of the conditions of isolation of 'lonely crowds.'"<sup>10</sup> The social life presented is that of estrangement -- a world of absolute commodity fetishism. "Consumption celebrities", i.e., actors in commercials, appear as cultural heroes, universal symbols of a shared humanity -- in actuality a shared estrangement. In the social world of commercials the commodity attains the total occupation of social life.<sup>11</sup>

## 1.065

The primal commodity is that of the television set. Hour upon hour the isolated spectator sits riveted to the dancing display of its electron particle beams presenting simulated

---

<sup>10</sup> Debord, G., Society of the Spectacle, Detroit: Black and Red, 1977, #28

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., #42

images of social life. These images become the universal signifieds of Post-Modern culture -- the orientation points for the entire system of signification. Television perpetrates the systematic replacement of "natural" sense perception, i.e., human images as the terminal point of references, with video images of the world.

In any competition between an internally generated image and one that is later solidified for you via moving-image media, your own image is superseded. Moses is Charlton Heston. The Sundance Kid is Robert Redford. Isis is a Saturday morning cartoon. Woodward and Bernstein are Redford and Hoffman. Buffalo Bill is Paul Newman. McMurphy is Jack Nicholson. (When Carlos Casteneda was offered an enormous sum to sell the screen rights to the Don Juan series, he refused saying, "I don't want to see Don Juan turn into Anthony Quinn.)"<sup>12</sup>

The spectator becomes a Robinson Crusoe, inhabiting a simulated social world without people. In such a world only acts with things bring about fulfillment.

#### 1.07

"You are the new American society," says the man-from-beyond.

A driving rock beat;

An English pop star on a stage; and running football players:

"The movers and shakers".

A writer drinking a cup of coffee, a young attractive black woman in evening dress at celebrity gathering,

---

<sup>12</sup> Mander, J., Four Arguments For the Elimination of Television, New York: Quill, 1979; p. 242.

"Hold on tight to your dreams", sings the driving rock band.

A woman winning a marathon.

"You are the new coffee generation".

Drinking a cup of coffee, a quarterback seated in a director's chair watches a game film.

"Because coffee is the calm moment that lets you think", says a low sensuous feminine voice.

"Coffee gives you the time to dream it".

The quarterback sketches out a play on a pad of paper.

"Then you're ready to do it".

The quarterback shows the play to his teammates in the locker room during half-time.

The players leap up spiritedly to go out to the field.

"No other drink does that like coffee".

A cup of coffee is poured into a cup, sponsored by the National Coffee Association.

"Hold on tight to your dreams", the driving rock band sings.

A football player leaps through the air to catch a football.

"Join the coffee achievers", says the man-from-beyond.

The quarterback is in the locker room drinking a cup of coffee.

"Do your best", he says, raising his cup.

This text begins with a series of disorienting images identifying the semantic range: a rock group, a football player, a writer, a celebrity, a woman marathoner. They are "the movers and the shakers" -- god-like beings spotlighted on the proscenium of television -- moving and shaking the earth, realizing their dreams. They are "you", the spectator is told -- "you", the new American society. The spectator's essence is defined by that which he passively watches -- a being given in otherness.

## 1.072

T.v. acts as a kind of oneiric machine; its images inhabit our subconscious and simulate our dreams. "Hold on tight to your dreams", is the text's refrain. The spectator is presented with the form of his dreams: rock star, football player, etc. -- a life unfolding in the centre of the spectacle. That is the new American society - media heroes moving and shaking the earth. Those are your dreams -- the spectator's dreams.

## 1.073

The spectator may fixate on these video dreams but cannot appropriate his own participation in the process. Such dreams are remote from the intentional center of the spectator's awareness -- beyond his reach. Yet he is asked to "hold on tight" to these dreams.

## 1.0735

Television emanates unappropriatable dream images exhorting the spectator to appropriate them for himself. Between the passive spectator and the actively moving images is an unbridgable difference. This difference is the condition of all differences in the commercial ecology. It is the "bri-  
sure"; the crack, breach, fault, etc. -- the origin of desire as well as the signs of that desire.

## 1.074

In the commercial ecology the commodity fills in the gap between the active image and the passive spectator. The difference is overcome by consumption. In this text the commodity is the link between the dream and its active realization. It lets you "dream it" and it lets you "do it".

## 1.075

In the commercial the spectator finds his entire subjectivity estranged in the commodity. It is the commodity that lets you think, dream, achieve, and be American. In general, commercials attack the spectator's self-autonomy by objectifying inner processes and subjective states. These are then explained as being dependent on commodities.

## 1.08

One dark night,  
A blond hunk, jacket zipped only half-way up,  
Walks down an empty city street.  
Behind him looms a billboard car,

Above the urban desolation, like a cat watching all that moves.

Suddenly, the billboard car's headlamps spotlight the man.

He quickly turns to look behind, the light shines in his face, illuminating.

The Dodge Daytona backs up in the billboard

And drives off.

Amazement.

The man reels around, the headlights blind him.

He follows the car down dark alley.

Dodge Daytona disappears in cloud of smoke.

And reappears from nowhere,

Behind him, silhouetting his body against blue background.

He perambulates around the phantom Dodge,

Then appears with radiant smile behind the wheel.

Car slinks off down narrow street,

Faster and faster,

Until city lights become a blur.

Warp speed.

"Dodge Daytona Turbo V,

It is an American Revolution".

1.081

This text presents a counterfactual world where a triple transfiguration takes place. The billboard picture of a car

transforms into a real car and the real car transforms into a self-willed organism which then transforms into a space craft. In the billboard we have an advertisement within an advertisement. The billboard cannot contain the car -- it is a static representation. It is decentered by the dynamic motion of the car. But the film cannot contain the car either -- the car's spontaneous motion constantly goes beyond the boundaries of the film, beyond the range of the camera. It cannot be caught, pinned down. Following Barthes, the car appears as a messenger of a world above that of nature: there can be seen in it "at once a perfection and an absence of origin, a closure and a brilliance, a transformation of life into matter".<sup>13</sup>

## 1.082

Here, man exists in a dark, desolate urban cosmos. Surrounded on all sides by decaying buildings, his environment forbodes both physical and spiritual danger. A machine involves him in adventure. It begins to dance around him, casting him in light, disorienting him. It appears as something dangerous, something otherworldly. Finally man enters it, and he takes off in a blur, leaving the cityscape and the planet behind. Baudrillard would refer to this as "Private 'telematics': each person sees himself at the controls of a hypothetical machine, isolated in a position of perfect and remote sovereignty, at an infinite distance from his

<sup>13</sup> Barthes, R., Mythologies, New York: Hill and Wang, 1972; p. 88.

universe of origin. Which is to say, in the exact position of an astronaut in his capsule, in a state of weightlessness that necessitates a perpetual orbital flight and a speed sufficient to keep him from crashing back to the planet of his origin".<sup>14</sup>

## 1.083

For Baudrillard, this presentation of the car as spaceship constitutes the "hyperrealism of simulation". "(W)hat was projected psychologically and mentally, what used to be lived on earth as metaphor, as mental or metaphorical scene, is henceforth projected into reality, without metaphor at all, into an absolute space which is also that of simulation".<sup>15</sup> The machine appears capable of creating a completely simulated ecosystem -- the materialization of the imagination, of dreams, being boundless. But, as we have seen, even the imagination is simulated -- simulated imagination realized in simulated ecology.

## 1.084

The central image that advertising endows the car with is its ability to leave the city behind. Many commercial texts portray the car on open roads in vast, unpolluted, unpopulated spaces. This particular commercial text is set amidst the iconography of dark, decaying, uninhabitable city. But

---

<sup>14</sup> Baudrillard, J., "The Ecstasy of Communication" in Ulmer, G. L., op. cit., p. 128.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

if this ecosystem is uninhabitable, it is the car itself which does much to keep it that way. As Gorz states, the car makes the city "stinking, noisy, suffocating, dusty, so congested that nobody wants to go out in the evening anymore. Thus, since cars have killed the city, we need faster cars to escape on superhighways to suburbs that are even farther away".<sup>16</sup> The car industry becomes a radical monopoly as communities are organized purely around commuting. In the meantime, the image of speed becomes a pure abstract fantasy. What Thoreau noted long ago about the wagon, Illich reiterates about the car. When you figure out all the time spent devoted to the car -- sitting in it, parking it, searching for it, repairing it, earning money for it, etc., "the model American puts in 1,600 hours to get 7,500 miles: less than five miles per hour".<sup>17</sup> Indeed, one is better off walking.

## 1.085

As the car dominates the landscape, contouring space to its requisites, the human being on his own feels less and less mobile. In this commercial text we are presented with the image of the slow walker versus a car which literally dances circles around the walker. But as we have seen, automobile transportation results in dubious gains in speed, while at

---

<sup>16</sup> Gorz, A., Ecology as Politics, Boston: South End Press, 1980.

<sup>17</sup> Illich, I., Energy and Equity, New York: Harper, Torchbooks, 1974; p. 31.

the same time enslaving the individual to "habitual passengerhood".

The habitual passenger cannot grasp the folly of traffic based overwhelmingly on transport. His inherited perceptions of space and time and of personal pace have been industrially deformed. He has lost the power to conceive of himself outside of the passenger role. Addicted to being carried along, he has lost control over the physical, social, and psychic powers that reside in man's feet. The passenger has come to identify territory with the untouchable landscape through which he is rushed. He has become impotent to establish his domain, mark it with his imprint and assert his sovereignty over it. He has lost his confidence in his power to admit others into his presence and to share consciously with them. He can no longer face the remote by himself. Left on his own, he feels immobile.<sup>18</sup>

1.086

In this commercial text we are presented with the isolated individual in a setting of dread and fear. Playing on the crisis of the "habitual passenger", the car is presented as savior for the individual who "can no longer face the remote by himself". At the wheel of the car the individual appears happy and empowered. It is the function, i.e, intentionality, of television to compel the individual to dream of and to demand a better commodity rather than freedom from its servitude.

1.087

While the car's power grows, creating more pollution, destroying the resiliency of the environment, enslaving the individual into habitual passengerhood, a new obsession be-

---

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

comes evident -- the need to escape the rapidly deteriorating environment, to flee to open spaces. But what is it that really must be escaped from -- the decaying city? the deteriorating environment? or the car itself? The logic of the commercial text turns the cause of need into its solution/satisfaction. Here the car's significance is that of freedom from human boundedness to an intolerable environment. But what we have found is that the intolerable environment presented in the commercial is largely shaped by the car itself. The need for car is car created. If the individual feels trapped and limited in an intolerable place in the face of the absence of a car, in the logic of the commercial text, the solution is always the acquisition of a car, a commodity. It is unthinkable to imagine a world without the car, a world in which there is an absence of all cars.

## 1.088

This commercial presents a kind of non-renewable urban world; a world one can discard or leave once a better, more exciting commodity comes along.

## 1.09

The commercial appears as a form of non-renewable culture when its function is tied to the ever-changing flux of new commodities. It appears as a stillborn culture as it were, that cannot be readapted or recycled over the ages -- a culture with built-in obsolescence. To redeem commercials, to

recycle them, to make them speak again and again about the social life they are a product of, means a deconstruction of their original logical intentions, a reversal of their original actions, and an insertion of the unthinkable into their content.

### 1.1

The commercial text as a sign of the commodity creates a false difference, false binary opposition (e.g., natural vs. unnatural burger, freedom of car vs. non-freedom without car, coffee achievers vs. non-achievers). In the void of these false differences a desire is created. The deconstruction of the commercial destroys the sign function, collapsing the difference back into its original unity.

### 1.11

Spotlights play on undulating throng,  
 Waving, moving in rhythm to the strains  
 Of familiar pop tune "Billy Jean".  
 Backstage, comely whitegirl with cowboy hat  
 Dabbing makeup on the purple-sequinned rock star,  
 The rabble awaits.  
 As whiteboy in sportcoat and tie,  
 Carries Pepsi cup in mouth down aisle,  
 Blacks and whites leap up and down  
 Screaming  
 For a white-sequinned glove,  
 A guitar, and more sequins.

The man whose name and picture is written on the t-shirts  
of Pepsi-drinking youths,

Sings, "You're a whole new generation",

While his band, dressed in polychromatic costumes

Passes backstage,

Raised fist:

"Let's Go!"

The man whose feet dance in sequined white socks, sings:

"Ya lovin' what they do"

As his band runs the backstage gauntlet of the adoring,

And girls scream in hysterical anticipation.

"And put a Pepsi into motion".

The band, leaping in air, lands on stage,

As the star runs the gauntlet singing,

"That choice is up to you, hey-eh".

Three arm-waving whitegirls scream.

He enters from above, dancing in blinding white light,

Disappearing into pure white light, hair on fire.

"You're the Pepsi generation."

Two radiantly grinning blackgirls: one holds a Pepsi,

The other is bent down shaking all over in pure ecstasy.

Others clap and dance in the aisles.

"Guzzle it down and taste the thrill of today".

He comes leaping down stage stairs,

To join his band at the microphone.

"And feel the Pepsi Way"

Two open-mouthed whitegirls in ecstatic abandonment.

"You're a whole new generation".

"Pepsi" is superimposed

On darkness of hysterical ecstatic crowd.

1.111

The hero of the spectacle incarnates the collective dreams. He is the one the crowd adores and emulates. Each member of the crowd imagines himself to be the rock star. He is the realized dream, the Achiever. In the commercial he mingles his essence with the commodity (e.g., Pepsi); it is his other body, as it were, a cult object. The commodity accrues his aura as substitute, and identifies the consumer as a member of the group of his emulators as well as enabling the consumer to partake of his essence.

1.112

He is presented as the symbol of unity of a "new generation". True fealty to him is the ecstatic surrender to his charisma. He appears out of a fiery light, a blinding and undifferentiating light, symbolizing the collective consciousness. (As Christ says in James, "He that is near me, is near the fire.") Each person in the crowd, through a kind of ecstatic swoon has become one with the higher transcendent force of the group or the "generation" symbolized in him. They all appear as reflections of him, dancing like him, crooning like him, wearing his emblems, etc.. We see the transfiguration of the individual into the group in the look of ecstatic abandonment in the faces in the crowd, in the hysterical screaming.

## 1.113

He sings to them "Ya lovin what they do". These words have a strange and sinister ambiguity. The "they" could mean "you're a whole new generation, loving what YOU do". Or the "they" could refer to a general other -- the "they" that has staged this event and this commercial; the "they" that provides the simulated dreams and the commodities. "The choice is up to you," he sings, and we immediately see three adolescent girls waving their arms and screaming. They have made the "choice" and abandoned themselves to the "new generation". Thus they have been rewarded with ecstatic bliss. They are feeling the "Pepsi way", "the choice of a new generation".

## 1.114

The "choice" denotes making a choice between Pepsi and various other brands of cola -- a choice between the "hyper-reals" of consumerism, the packaged goods and services designed and prescribed by the consumerist system. It is a choice of swooning infatuation with the system's offerings, leaving unthinkable the possibility of each person choosing between a variety of evolving, self-subsistent commodity independent ways of living.

## 1.115

This commercial portrays the new "massive individualism" of consumerism, i.e., the formation of group identity manipulated by collective symbols. It attempts to define Pepsi as

a sign of one's membership in a "new generation" -- a generation that chooses its identity. Rock music, once a sign of deviance and subversion of the "new generation" is here en-  
framed within the hegemony of consumerist meanings. The in-  
dividual "chooses" his identity through the "packaged" mass-  
media stars he associates with -- buying their  
paraphrenalia, e.g., videos, records, clothes, hairstyles,  
etc., each a sign of the individual's identity, differenti-  
ating the individual from those who choose other commodity  
styles. Differences between people are produced purely by  
the consumerist system.

## 1.12

On her knees on her kitchen floor,  
She brings her hand to her forehead  
And laments, "I can't believe what a fool I was,"  
Pulling on her hair.

She turns and looks into the eyes of her Labrador Re-  
triever.

"I didn't know that Alpo costs the same as other dry dog  
foods.

Well, I...I...I...never even looked,"  
She admits in self-depreciating tone.  
A bag of Alpo dog food.

"I mean who would have thought that with more meat pro-  
tein,

Than ten pounds of sirloin..."

The anguish of steak weighed next to a bag of Alpo.

"It costs the same as those others"

The comely blond places a dish of dog food down for the dog,

"Look, I'm only human...

But I'm getting smarter."

Alpo and a pile of sirloin steaks: beef flavored dinner,

"Real meat protein at a really good price."

1.121

The opening of the text is a scene of lament and self-censure: suffering caused by human folly. On the same level as the dog, the woman is asking for forgiveness. She has committed a horrible sin out of ignorance -- the sin of poor consumption. The dog looks away with regal detachment, transformed into human otherness. At the same time we are given images of dog food and human food (sirloin steak) connoting their equivalence. Thus dog is equal to human and dog food is equal to human food.

1.122

Despite the close proximity of the images of the dog and sirloin steak, there is no danger that the two will be equated here. American cultural logic would forbid it. The commercial reinforces the image of the dog as human -- understanding human speech and having a taste for the same food as humans -- rather than the dog being human food. As Sahlins points out, American culture permits dogs to flourish "under the strictest interdictions on their consump-

tion."<sup>19</sup> Like the sacred cows of India, they roam the streets at will (or pull their owners by a leash) as well as share the same living quarters with humans as if they were part of the family. "The notion of eating dogs understandably evokes some of the revulsion of the incest taboo."<sup>20</sup>

## 1.123

The image of the dog also connotes a lowly and reviled form of existence -- "the life of a dog." It appears that improper consumption lowers you to the level of a dog. In this text the dog appears as priest-confessor. "I never even looked," the woman concedes. But if one sins through improper consumption, one need not be eternally damned. It is possible to receive absolution through good consumption by making right choices and renouncing bad choices. Being human allows one to make mistakes in consumption, but "to get smarter" means to learn to consume better.

## 1.124

Advertising takes over the role of the Medieval Church affirming that every aspect of human existence falls within its compass, extending to the most mundane areas of everyday life.<sup>21</sup> Through the information advertising disseminates,

---

<sup>19</sup> Sahlins, M., op. cit., p. 171.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>21</sup> See Curan, J., "Communications, power, and social order", in Gurevitch, M., et. al., Culture, Society and the Media, New York: Methuen, 1982.

one can obtain grace, ecstasy, and beautification.<sup>22</sup> But through its disregard you can descend to the level of the dog.

## 1.125

The dog as domesticated animal depends on the proper choices by its owner. To make a proper choice one must be able to get beyond the appearance of things. Alpo, although it looks like other dog food, has more protein, and although it would seem to be more expensive, it costs the same as others. By "looking" one can get beyond these appearances and perceive the real differences. "Looking" here means reading the label or seeing this commercial text. For the domesticated animal survival depends on naturae secundus, i.e., culture. The essence of the commodity dog food is given only through the mediation of culture, broken down into the abstract evaluative units of protein and price.

## 1.126

As is pointed out in the commercial text, Alpo is beef flavored, i.e., simulated beef. The simulated, hyper-real world of commodities requires a new form of being present to the world -- a reversal of the previous metaphysics of Being. In the universe of the commercial, "reading", or "looking at" the cultural message is the originary act of knowing. The mediating cultural message is taken as the

---

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Postman, N., The Disappearance of Childhood, New York: Delaconte Press, 1982; p.112.

Real, whereas one's direct intuition of the world -- of things themselves -- is the source of ignorance.

## 1.13

Paunchy, middle aged balding,  
 He holds a garden hose over his head  
 In his backyard, water trickling down his naked torso;  
 Squinting with slight grimace.

"Have you ever noticed, that sometimes the best you can do,

Is settle for second best?"

He glances over to his right doing a double take,  
 Wearing his plaid bathing suit.

Standing in a plastic pool next to the boundary hedge  
 Is the beer-bellied neighbor, dressed in tacky trunks  
 Waving and laughing

While his wife floats calmly in huge backyard pool.

Now the paunchy middle aged man

Is about to take a picture of the great outdoors.

Zip, zip, zip, zip, goes his neighbor dressed in gaudy  
 shirt

Taking several shots with his huge camera,

Before the plaid-shirted middle aged man can take one.

The beer-bellied one just smiles, mockingly,

While the man looks down at his own pathetic little camera.

Now he sits in rowboat calmly fishing,

Looking up just in time

As his neighbor's cabin cruiser passes behind,

The beer-bellied one in captain's jacket

Standing on the bow, near his relaxing wife.

Finally the man peers hesitantly

Through a glass door with reindeer insignia.

"Now you won't have to,

With the new R-series riding mower from John Deere."

He enters a room filled with green and yellow mowers

And after perusing the price tag, sits down on one.

"You see they don't cost more than ordinary riders,

But they're built with extra-ordinary features

And first class John Deer quality."

Now the man ecstatically rides his mower in his yard,

Waving triumphantly to his beer-bellied neighbor.

"So now for the price of someone else's mower,

You can have one of ours."

The cigar smoking, beer-bellied one jealously watches.

"Nothing runs like a Deere."

1.131

We have entered a universe built upon binary comparisons of size: little man / big man, little pool / big pool, little camera / big camera, little boat / big boat. Here the soul of any participant can turn out to be the locus of comparison provided he accept his external possessions be manifested as natural indications of who he is. Such a person appears always to be materially outdone by his neighbor; a

person who must perenially settle for "second best". He is the "ordinary man", middle aged, a bit overweight, having the look of humiliated resignation in the face of life's inequities, suspecting that somehow he is to blame for his own wretchedness but not understanding why. In his mind the world judges a person's dignity in accordance with the outward worth of his possessions. Thus he appears ridiculous in comparison with his neighbor, who has bigger and, therefore, better things. His own attempts at happiness turn into bitter reminders of his own inferiority when compared to his neighbor's happiness.

## 1.132

This commercial text presents a universe of rivalry -- a rivalry between consumers over who consumes more conspicuously. One's possessions act as signs in a code of differences based on what one's neighbors own. "The object-become-sign no longer gathers its meaning in concrete relationship between two people. It assumes its meaning in differential relation to other signs".<sup>23</sup> The consumerist lives through and for his object-signs. The object-signs, through a kind of mute dialogue amongst themselves, determine the quality of their possessor's life experiences. In this commercial text the people themselves never utter a word. Each remains separate, like the television spectator, watching the industrially produced display of sign-object differences. Such a

<sup>23</sup> Baudrillard, J., For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981; p. 66.

play of differences tell them how to feel about their experiences as persons.

## 1.133

The man's passion for the lawn mower is a passion to engage in the production of coded differences and sign values. Baudrillard calls this a "fetishism of the signifier", i.e., "the subject is trapped in the fictitious, differential, encoded, systematized aspect of the object. It is not a passion (whether of objects or subjects) for substances that speak in fetishism, it is the passion for the code, which by governing both objects and subjects, and by subordinating them to itself, delivers them up to abstract manipulation".<sup>24</sup> The subject sees himself as embodying the display of differences he has produced through his acts of consumption. To "settle for second best", means to be second best.

## 1.14

In front of the Rapid Roller Skate factory

"In this rapidly changing world",

Charlie Chaplin dusts off a bronze plate

Inscribed: "distribution branch no. 27"

And then waddles through the factory's double doors.

Where "even the brightest and the best manager in the company,

---

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

May need more than a loyal staff to run a smooth operation".

And workers with roller skates on their feet,  
Dressed in white shirts and bow ties, aprons or coveralls,

Stand in rows for inspection.

They skate off in chaos to perform their tasks

As Chaplin blows the factory whistle,

And ascends to his desk on a central platform.

Round and round the proscenium they skate

Carrying their loads,

As Chaplin talks to his grey haired boss on the phone.

"For when headquarters calls,

And pressure builds".

Papers go flying on Chaplin's desk,

The music speeds up, and the workers skate at a frenzied pace.

"It becomes harder to keep things rolling..."

And Chaplin on the factory floor collides into workers,

"Losing control of the operation,"

Spinning around dizzy, falls onto a conveyor belt,

"And falling behind."

He holds onto a box as he goes down the conveyor belt,

Out the door into a truck which drives away.

"For rapid improvement, a manager

Could use a tool for modern times".

A rose in a vase next to a computer

Patted by Chaplin as he sits at the terminal,

"The I.B.M. personal computer..."

While the workers waltz gracefully as they labor

"For smoother scheduling, better planning,

And greater productivity,

It can help a manager excel

And become a bigwheel in the company".

As Chaplin receives a bronzed roller skate award

From the grey haired boss next to the adoring secretary,

His workers celebrate under the banner "Branch of the Year".

On the empty factory floor Chaplin on skates waltzes off

While the computer whirs away....

1.141

The image of Charlie Chaplin in the factory connotes the alienated proletariat, humiliated and dehumanized by the machine. But in this text Chaplin is transformed from oppressed worker to oppressed boss, struggling only to do his best while his workers under him toil in disorganization. The machinery of the factory is still his ruin, but it is because he does not have the state of the art machinery at his disposal, the latest in telecommunication hardware. The plant is backward, dated. Everything in it has the appearance of the turn of the century, including the workers. But now in "modern times", when speed and organization are essential, backward production facilities fall apart. The center cannot hold: disorder, dehumanization, accidents,

etc., result, creating a factory full of alienated Chaplins running amok, out of control. Only new machines, new technology can save the day, put order and speed into the plant operations, and enable work to run happily and smoothly.

## 1.142

We are not told why the world is rapidly changing, just as (in the car commercial) we are not told why the cities are so uninhabitable. It would seem that humans alone are unable to respond to the pressure of a "rapidly changing world". Chaplin and his workers have lost control of the operation. Diligence, loyalty, and the personal effort of the individual are not enough. The old work ethic, the old values cannot contend with a "rapidly changing world". That the world is "rapidly changing" is an uncontested absolute; the metaphysical starting point of the text. The possibility of ordering economic life in a steady-state, non-rapidly changing way would be unthinkable here. Thus the only solution to the problem of operations out of control is to implement the very technology that propels the system at an even faster rate.

## 1.143

The computer is a knowledge assembly line, manipulating parcels of information at electronic speeds, thus enabling work and life to become more human, more aesthetic, more graceful. We see workers literally waltzing through work. But if indeed there exists the feeling that human organizations

are approaching the limits of their ability to cope with the faster pace of a mass society (and we see this image in many commercials -- from antacid commercials to express mail commercials), it is the computer that has brought us to these limits, conserving the trend towards the massification of society. The computer is now a necessary cog in the functioning of mass society. Its capacity to compute defines the very limits of this society: increasing the rate at which new products can be developed, determining the speed and quantity of production and distribution, while coordinating the social engineering of human desires for the new products developed.

## 1.144

We are given the choice of chaos or more computers. It would be unthinkable to imagine alternative choices e.g., a steady state post-computer world with decentralized production and limited and controlled needs or even the possibility of a steady state maintained by computers. But now all problems appear solvable through more and better commodities. Behind every human success lies intelligent consumption -- the right choices -- whether it be the manager who purchases the right computer, the sports hero who consumes the proper drink, or the housewife who buys the best dog food.

## 1.145

Computers have become a central mechanism for expanding capitalism. Through computers the development of new forecasting and mapping techniques enables the planned advance of technological change. There is a growing capability for organizing highly complex organizations and systems with computers able to handle more and more interacting variables coordinated to achieve specific goals.<sup>25</sup> The nature of such complex systems is "counterintuitive". They involve the interaction of too many variables for the mind to hold in correct order simultaneously.<sup>26</sup> For this reason algorithms (problem-solving rules) are substituted for intuitive judgments.

## 1.146

Computers produce simulated thinking to attend to the simulated environments, simulated foods, simulated dreams, and simulated social selves. Computer thought is wholly a matter of convention: of formal rules acting on contentless symbols.<sup>27</sup> These symbols obtain their meaning solely through their syntactical relations to other symbols, with no possibility of analogy interfering with the rules of the logic.<sup>28</sup> Each element of the formal language can be defined in terms

---

<sup>25</sup> Bell, D., The Coming of Post Industrial Society, New York: Basic Books Inc., 1975; p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>27</sup> Bolter, J.D., Turing's Man, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984; p.76.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 145.

of rules specifying its properties and its uses, just as a game of chess is defined by a set of rules determining the possible moves of each of the pieces.<sup>29</sup> In the formal language of the computer the rules are not permissive; they do not allow the player of the game to choose from a number of alternative "moves" with the "pieces".<sup>30</sup>

1.147

"It is a property of formal languages, indeed it is their essence, that all their transformation rules are purely syntactic, i.e., describe permissible rearrangements of strings of symbols and introduction of new symbols... independent of any interpretation such symbols may have outside the framework of the language itself."<sup>31</sup> Meaning in formal languages has no reference to the world of experience, because existing constructions are considered correctly built and true only in the context of the world the formalist has created. The computer can construct any world imaginable. "One may create worlds in which there is no gravity, or in which two bodies attract each other not by Newton's inverse square law, but by an inverse-cube (or nth power) law, or in which time dances forward and backward in obedience to a choreography as simple or complex as one wills. One can create so-

<sup>29</sup> Lyotard, J.-F., The Post Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984; p. 10.

<sup>30</sup> Weizenbaum, J., Computer Power and Human Reason, New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1976; pp. 46-7.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

cieties in whose economies prices rise as goods become plentiful and fall as they become scarce, and in which homosexual unions alone can produce off-spring... one need only know what can be inferred directly from one's computer-system manual...".<sup>32</sup>

## 1.15

Commercials operate like computers, producing endless arrays of simulated worlds. The input data, i.e., the variables, are the commodities. Commodities obtain their meaning in relation to other commodities, operating as hooks, as it were, upon which meanings get caught according to the program, i.e., according to the logic of the commercial. Commodities "are in themselves only a volatile mixture of relational characteristics and contain no stable core. The characteristics that adhere today to a specific material object may not be simply transferred tomorrow to another discrete object, but may be broken up, rearranged, and distributed among a set of different objects altogether."<sup>33</sup>

## 1.16

A lit candle moving past a bottle of Ivory Liquid:  
Dishwashing Talk.

"Ever do dishes by candle light?"

Asks a sensuous male voice, as his hand

---

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>33</sup> Leiss, W., The Limits of Satisfaction, Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1976; p. 84.

Moves the candle over a suds filled sink

Toward a female hand rinsing a sudsy

Wine glass under a stream of water.

"No, and I hope the lights come back soon,"

Says the female voice.

"I don't," replies the male seductively.

"Oup! There they are!" the female voice exclaims.

Ivory Liquid and a lit candle against a blue background:

"I like it cozy," says the disappointed masculine voice.

"Oh, after fifteen years," says the feminine one,

As the male hand caresses the female hand

With wedding band above the soapy dishwater.

"I thought we'd hold hands," says the male.

"Aww," cooes the female.

"You are still so soft and look so young," says the male.

A female finger tip pushes down the sudsy top of the Ivory Liquid bottle.

The sudsy finger tip caressingly draws down the side of the bottle.

"Well, honey, they've always been into Ivory Liquid,

It's got what hands need to help them stay young looking."

"How come?" asks the masculine voice,

As a headless male and a headless female

Chest face each other.

Two sets of hands dry off with the same dishtowel.

"Because its the mildest of all big brands.

That makes the difference."

"Let me check that," says the masculine voice.  
 The lights go out again as he tenderly  
 Caresses the woman's hands.  
 "Did you do that?" she asks,  
 As she points her finger at him in the shadows.  
 "What?" asks the man,  
 As he points back at her crossing her pointing finger.  
 She laughs coquettishly  
 As their pointing fingers play with each other.  
 Mild Ivory Liquid: because young looking hands,  
 Are worth holding onto.  
 A lit candle and Ivory Liquid standing in suds.  
 Two hands reach across to touch and hold.  
 The candle is blown out.

## 1.161

The romantic air of candle light and wine glass, the metonymic pursuit of a male hand and evasion of a female hand over a sink of suds, luxurious suds, airy, abundant, and caressing, having an aura of a certain "other worldly spirituality" -- such constitutes the semantic range of this commercial text. "What matters is the art of having disguised the abrasive function of the detergent under the delicious image of a substance at once deep and airy which can govern the molecular order of the material without damaging it".<sup>34</sup> The drudgery of housework becomes a sensual play, the

---

<sup>34</sup> Barthes, R., op. cit., p. 37-8.

abrasiveness of detergent an elixer for youth.

1.162

The lights being "out" remind us of the mythical pre-commodity self-subsistent home where "women's" work was a constant struggle for survival and exacted a toll of aged and roughened skin. In such a home there were no spiritual otherworldly suds to protect the body from such drudgery. Now "woman's" work is entirely mediated by commodities that at once preserve the woman's beauty, as well as her softness and her sexiness, i.e., her culturally essential femininity, while transforming her work into a kind of sensual play. This play is capital intensive, employing numerous machines from cars to electric appliances as well as an extraordinary array of petrochemicals, such as dishwashing liquids and oven cleaners.<sup>35</sup>

1.163

With the development of wage labor and the destruction of the self-subsistent household, the distinction between production and consumption became possible. This binary opposition in turn worked to define the opposition between the sexes. In the subsistence household consumption was immediately production and vice versa. Men's and women's work, therefore, appeared equally vital for survival.<sup>36</sup> Now housework appears to no longer contribute to subsistence. It ap-

<sup>35</sup> Illich, I., Gender, London: Marion Boyas, 1982; p. 49.

<sup>36</sup> Idem.

pears as a form of leisure and consumption -- what one does with one's surplus time. A housewife becomes an aspect of the wage earner's free time and leisure. She is pure consumer, as well as pure commodity.

## 1.164

In this commercial universe the male is onlooker, a kind of voyeur titillated by the woman's "play" and by the commodities that "preserve" her essence. The woman and the objects she "plays" with are saturated with sexuality. The man cannot resist -- after all, they are the eroticized fruits of his labor. The commodity of Ivory Liquid has preserved the male's lust for his wife by maintaining her youthfulness.

## 1.17

Youthful lust appears in commercials as the optimal form of relationship between men and women. It is as if love between the sexes can only degenerate from lust -- maturing, detached, agapic love being both undesirable and unthinkable. Such a state of affairs creates continuous anxiety over the natural aging process and permanent attachment to genital sexual desire. Aging can only bring alienation, loss of love, ugliness, death. Youth in the throes of sexual passion appears in the universe of commercials as the originary act, the ultimate form of presence to the world, as it were, the condition upon which the reality of consumption depends. Indeed, consumption becomes a never ending attempt to regain that original ground of youthful lust, each com-

modity proclaiming itself to be the missing trace of that ordinary act, the signifier of lost lust.

1.18

"I don't know, Grace," says the rockstar,  
Atom Ant, with British accent,  
Looking to his left, as a blackwoman  
With very red lipstick, manicured eyebrows, and "new  
wave" hairstyle,

Brings her face to his, gently bumping him with her body,  
"Come on, Atom," she says, perturbed.

"I can't," he says, rolling his eyes

As she moves around his back to his left side, pressing  
against his body.

"It's easy," she replies in seductive voice:

A shiny red motorscooter.

"I've never ridden one," he says.

She rubs his nose with hers.

"It's quick," she says.

"I've never ridden anything, ever," he says.

She rubs his nose again.

"It's fun!" she says smiling,

Then raises her eyebrows a couple of times:

The headlight of a motorscooter.

"I don't even drive, he says as they stand

Side by side looking forward.

Honda scooters, they're anything but ordinary.

Atom and Grace materialize next to the red scooter.

"It's sexy," she says.

"I'll take it," says Atom

Staring at her with wolfish grin.

1.181

This commercial text displays more clearly how commodities act as signifiers of the originary lust. Here the innocent Atom is seduced by the Eve-like Grace into partaking of the forbidden red fruit of the motorscooter by the promise of the scooter's sexiness. Grace has continual body contact with Atom as she moves around him with a grinding action, while all the time we only see their faces. The fact that she is a black woman enticing a white man culturally charges the scene with sexual deviance. But even more important are the sexual associations of Atom and Grace as rockstars. Culturally, being a rockstar connotes wildly charismatic sexual appeal (as we have seen in the Pepsi commercial) and extreme sexual freedom. The rockstar is imagined to be the quintessential partaker of youthful lust. They embody the dreams of the spectātor-collectivity, serving as a fertility symbol, free to have any of their adoring teenage fans. They are the dream come true.

1.182

The Honda scooter is portrayed as a commodity designed for personalized use through its possession of psychological utility.<sup>37</sup> To ride a Honda is "daring", "fun", "quick",

<sup>37</sup> Leiss, W. and Kline, S., "Advertising, Needs, and 'Commod-

"anything but ordinary", and "sexy". Grace prods Atom into partaking in these qualities himself by riding the Honda. The object becomes a projective field for valued human qualities. By consuming the object the individual seemingly acquires these qualities.

## 1.183

The attributes of levity, daring, etc., filtered through the visual imagery of Grace's and Atom's bodies are supplementary to and partake in the primal quality of sexiness. By riding the red scooter, one acquires, above all, the quality of sexiness, a sexiness the commercial text equates with that of a rockstar. Through the consumption of this commodity one can (re)gain "originary lust". Of course, there are many such goods, and as the standards of material consumption are raised, the "originary lust" must be bought for a higher and higher cost. The individual's libidinal attachment to goods drives him to consume more and more. These goods become signs of courtship and territorial dominance like the plumage of birds.

## 1.184

Of course, being involved in the struggle for goods, the daily "rat-race", is that which the commercial texts portray as aging a person, pushing one away from the "originary lust". Such a situation, therefore demands that a person

---

ity Fetishism'," in Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, Vol. 2: No. 1, 1978.

consume more and more commodities to turn back this process.

## 1.19

The "originary lust" is something purely mythical, at once promised and refused. Yet it is held in the collective mind as a point of difference from what one actually has. It is the impossible imaginary norm towards which the consumer strives.

## 1.20

A slim curvacious Joan Collins  
 In long black lowcut evening dress  
 Crosses a lavishly furnished apartment with a skyline  
 view of the city.

How to Build a Fire, by Joan Collins.

"It takes something black,"

Says Joan waving her arm indicating her black evening  
 dress,

"Something brilliant,"

Fondling her diamond earring,

"Something cool,"

Sitting on the couch and grasping the container of cham-  
 pagne on ice next to two glasses

"Something hot,"

Motioning to the fire in the fireplace,

"Something Scoundrel,"

Picking up a bottle of perfume and bringing it towards  
 her face.

"My favorite fragrance,"

She says bringing the cover of the bottle up to her ear lobes and neck.

"It's sophisticated and elegant, and there's something sexy about it, too."

She moves from the couch across the room saying,

"Then when something happens, and it will..."

Leaping flames in the fireplace as the doorbell buzzes twice.

"You can always say it wasn't me,"

She says, placing her hand over her heart,

"It was my Scoundrel."

A bottle of perfume against a black background:

She opens the door to her apartment.

A man leaning in the doorway wearing a red fireman's hat and black tuxedo and bow tie,

Tilts his fireman's hat with one finger and says,

"Somebody here report a fire?"

She stares downward, lips parted, then slowly raises her eyes to his face.

#### 1.201

In this commercial text, Scoundrel perfume is represented as a sophisticated, elegant, and sexy fragrance. A narrative on how to build a fire is constructed developing a symbolic connection between the perfume and sexual pleasure and abandonment. The word "fire" is obviously meant to connote sexual lust. The various objects named as ingredients for

building a fire -- the black evening dress, jewellery, champagne, fireplace -- taken together, connote a night of sexual intimacy.

## 1.202

The image of Joan Collins in the wider cultural sense connotes a scheming, monstrous, and immoral woman. Here she is aggressively planning a sexual encounter through intricate staging and is portrayed as the archetypical seductress. The main ingredient is the Scoundrel perfume, an elixer that will magically bring about a state of lust, while offering a release from moral responsibility. "When something happens..." she says, "you can always say it wasn't me..." --it couldn't be helped, the object was overpowering. Thus, the moral agent is exonerated. The consumer is presented as being overpowered uncontrollably by an object that is by its very nature irresistible. It is not the consumer's fault that the object is so effective. By denying the responsibility of the agent, the problem of guilt associated with giving in to the emotional pleasures surrounding consumption is solved.

## 1.203

As conceived in the 1920's, advertising was a great force "against puritanism in consumption".<sup>38</sup> The Puritan ideal of vigorous self mastery of emotions and disciplined will is

---

<sup>38</sup> Ewen, S., Captains of Consciousness, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.

systematically subverted by the image of a changing self identity, regulated by the significating power of the object. This commercial text presents a woman in cool rational pursuit of a goal, maintaining the Protestant cultural ideal of the active self-controlled personality. But we also see that the goal is that of pleasure and enjoyment and emotional indulgence. Although the commercial appears to conserve the value of personalism, i.e., the value embodied in individualistic, rational, and calculated activity which traditionally stimulated the Western individual in the striving for economical and other interests, it simultaneously negates this value by denying the moral responsibility of the agent. The consumer appears only as the passive recipient of the fruits that the consumed object brings while being held responsible for these effects.

## 1.21

"Wolf em down," McDonalds,

At a children's puppet show, as a pig looks out the window of a straw house,

And a wolf stares in.

"The wolf was trying to blow the house down,"

Sings the minstrel poet with a piano accompaniment.

"Oh no!" shouts the pig with falsetto voice.

"When my assistant brought McDonald's around..."

The overweight puppeteer with both arms in the air

Stares at a red box of McDonald's french fries.

"I got to get out of here," says the pig, as the poet sings.

" I knew I had to wait,  
But those fries sure smelled great."

"I'll huff and I'll puff," says the wolf,  
With the puppeteer still staring at the fries,  
And the children wincing with fright.

"I'll...I'll be right back," says the wolf as the poet sings,

"I just had to have a couple for now."

The puppeteer eats the fries from the wolve's mouth.

"Golden french fries, McDonald's and you."

"Do you think we scared them away?" asks one pig to another.

#### 1.212

This commerical text continues the myth of the irresistible commodity. Cannibalizing on several media and forms -- puppet theater, fairy tale, rhyming jingle -- the commercial text enframes a drama of desire rich in symbolic overlays. The traditional Christian fear of one's cravings -- allegorized in the story of the three little pigs -- is dispelled through the figure of the jolly overweight children's entertainer. His inability to resist his cravings for french fries appears as harmlessly human and even lovable. That he should interrupt his work as puppeteer to give into his cravings is a complete reversal of the "Three Little Pigs"

allegory. The latter, however, belongs to the productivist work ethic of classical capitalist society, being essentially anti-consumerist. Consumption, i.e., indulging in one's desires, in mass society is a central mode of productivity.<sup>39</sup> The more that is consumed, the more that can be produced. The cravings of this lovable children's entertainer are just as essential to the order of production as his labor power.

## 1.213

The lovable entertainer operates as a cultural role model -- a person who gives of himself to make children happy and who is himself child-like in his need for instant gratification. The adult-child is the quintessential consumer -- his cravings are indiscriminate (he would just as soon eat at McDonald's than at a gourmet restaurant), highly suggestible, and spontaneous.<sup>40</sup> Consumerist production as a whole, centered by the mass media, appears as a colossal effort to entertain the society, all production appearing as an aspect of the entertainment or pleasure industry.

## 1.214

This commercial text presents a video allegory of the ordinary lust. Here the lust is portrayed as a child-like infatuation for an irresistible object. Two types of allegory are overlaid in the text: the classical romantic allegory

<sup>39</sup> Baudrillard, J., op. cit., p. 84.

<sup>40</sup> See Postman, N., op. cit.

of the three little pigs and the Post Modern montage-allegory. In the former, we have the image of the pigs building houses to keep the ravenous wolf at bay. The meaning of this allegory is not conveyed by its natural characteristics. It is not literally an admonishment for pigs to work hard and build better houses; rather, it is an arbitrary representation, i.e., a conventional sign, for the idea which it portrays.<sup>41</sup> Only through the effort of interpretation does its meaning become evident. The form, in fact, mirrors the content. The content speaks to the need for diligent self-sacrificing labor to maintain one's life, forsaking present pleasures to preserve one's future, as the allegorical form demands diligent labor of interpretation, forsaking the immediate literal meaning, to strive for a deeper universal truth. In the commercial montage-allegory which enframes the older form of romantic allegory, significance is literal, derived from the natural characteristics of the images themselves.<sup>42</sup> The meaning of the man craving McDonald's french fries is just that: McDonald's french fries are irresistible.

## 1.215

The commercial montage-allegory literally interrupts the "Three Little Pigs" allegory, presenting a contradictory notion with no apparent resolution. It presents a paradigm of

---

<sup>41</sup> Ulmer, G.L., op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>42</sup> Idem.

the breakup and disintegration of the Protestant oriented civilization that preceded consumerist society. The action of the montage-allegory upon the romantic-allegory, models that shift in the cultural logic from classical capitalism to consumerism.

## 1.22

"Star date 1983," says a child

As a spacecraft moves among the galaxies.

At the controls a silver suited spaceboy:

"Our mission: to search the galaxy for nutritious food."

A blond-haired, silver-suited spacegirl sits adjacent the spaceboy.

"We're coming in contact with UFO's,"

She shouts in high squeaky voice as her screen lights up.

Blinding white light floods into the spacecraft

From a can of Franco American "UFO's" flying by.

"Please identify shapes," says the spaceboy.

"I see soft interceptors," says the spacegirl

As a pasta rocket blasts by.

"Tasty star colonies," she announces

As pasta stars rocket into view.

"Incredible aliens," she says

As an anthropomorphic pasta figure floats by.

Finally a meatball blasts by.

"Even meatball meteors!"

A spoonful of pasta with a meatball on top,

"But are UFO's nutritious?" asks the silversuited boy,

While eating a plateful of UFO's with a glass of milk.

"Sure, they're from Franco American," answers the silver-suited girl

As she eats her UFO's and moves in toward the table  
Sitting in her automatic chair.

"How do UFO's taste?"

"Out of this world," laughs the spacegirl.

New UFO shaped pasta from Franco American.

More than just delicious.

1.221

This commercial text presents children in the perfectly simulated environment of the spacecraft. Everything that supports life has been synthesized. All interactions with the outside world are simulated, appearing on screens and operational terminals. The inside of their world looks like a computer terminal. The human body has become almost useless except for programming the synthetic environment in which they travel -- the spacegirl moves about on an automatic chair. It is the great consumerist dream of the future, where everything is regulated from a distance at the computer's terminal, and the computer supports all life through manipulation of the code.

1.222

The children of high tech are finally freed from the earth. Even the food they eat comes floating from outer space. Indeed with corporate control over food production almost to-

tal (currently fifty corporations reap over ninety percent of the profits of the entire food industry) food production becomes entirely dependent on simulated processes.<sup>43</sup> Soils and plants depend on the petro-chemical industries to supply fertilizer for growth, herbicides and fungicides for resistance to disease, and insecticides to resist insect attacks, as well as petroleum to power mechanized production, processing, packaging, and transportation. Foods meanwhile are genetically engineered for high-production yields and for packaging, distribution, and storage requirements, as well as processed through the use of sprays, colors, waxes, and other chemicals to enhance their desirability. All this processing leaves the food nutritionally depleted. Thus many foods, such as the highly processed Franco-American pasta, must be artificially fortified to retain some semblance of nutrition. What is left is a mere simulacrum of food, having in the very process of producing the food, destroyed it. As Baudrillard points out, "simulation thus begins with a liquidation of all referentials."

## 1.223

This commercial cosmos represents the triumph of a neo-capitalist cybernetic order over the capitalist productivist society.<sup>44</sup> Here production constitutes generation by means of models. The children's "work" consists in identifying

<sup>43</sup> Britz, R., The Edible City, Los Altos: William Kaufmann, Inc., 1981; pp. 3-5.

<sup>44</sup> Baudrillard, J., op. cit., p.11.

"shapes" modelled on their telematic screens. In this way they search for the signs of "nutritious food". All their interactions with the world are in the form of processed information and communication. It is the triumph of the algorithmic code.

## 1.23

At their campsite a family eats breakfast around a table,

In a forest, all wearing polyester jackets.

The standing wife offers her seated husband

Some toast, while their young son looks on in the middle.

Smoke rises from the campfire near the tent.

"Nope, no butter, I'm eating lighter!"

Exclaims the man raising his hands.

"We all are," says the wife as a small cat-like animal scurries by.

"Even if it's margarine?" asks the perplexed husband,

"There's nothing light about that."

"Everything's light about this," says the wife

With attractive smile. "Twenty-five percent less salt,

Fat, and calories and no cholesterol," she says,

As her man tries a bite of toast.

Fleischmann's Light against blue background.

Twenty five percent less salt: a knife

Cuts a square of margarine on a butter dish.

Twenty five percent less fat than regular margarine,

Another square is cut.

Twenty five percent less calories:

Still another square is cut.

The husband looks up surprised as he eats toast.

"It's delicious, so why should I eat dry toast?"

"Beats me!" says his son, holding a piece of toast.

"Ha, ha, ha," laughs the man as he pulls the visor of his son's cap down.

Fleischmann's Light: twenty five percent less salt, fat, and calories.

1.231

"I'm eating lighter," says the male in the forest as the compassionate all-knowing sexy wife-mother gives him food and tries to educate him as to his true needs. Here we have the allegory of the male abstainer in the wilderness, seduced back into the fold of consumerism by the woman.<sup>45</sup> The woman understands the true essence of things. She is not fooled by appearances. The man's abstemious ways delude him, lead him into error and irrationality, like eating dry toast.

1.232

Life is like dry toast, unpalatable, irrational without the simulacrum. Abstaining is dry, life-threatening, impotent. The man associates abstaining with "lightness" -- lightness connotes healthiness. "Light" in the religious sense also

<sup>45</sup> See O'Flaherty, W. D., Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva, London: Oxford University Press, 1973.

connotes the fruit of ascetic discipline. The woman argues that there is no need to endure the asceticism of dry toast when consuming can in fact be healthy and "light". The woman teaches him that "everything is light about this". Consuming here is equivalent to abstaining, but with the added advantage of making life more palatable, more rational.

## 1.233

The margarine is presented as more natural than the butter it simulates. It is the choice of those who revel in the natural. The "natural" setting saturates the margarine in "naturalness." But the setting is all appearance as simulated as the margarine, made to conceal the liquidation of the referent. Woodland ecology is here consumed for vacation. The family eats outside in a portable kitchen, having bought their white bread, orange juice, and eggs at the supermarket and wearing their polyester jackets while sleeping in their plastic tent. Look closely and one can see it is all prop, with the neighbor's cat running by in the background. The simulcrum is better than that than that which it simulates; it has less unhealthiness. This is the Great Allegory of Consumerism.

## 1.234

Margarine acts as simulated butter. Although its composition is quite distinct from butter, it is shaped, texturized, and flavored so as to resemble butter. As a simulacrum of butter, it operates as a sign for butter, its

significant power rooted in advertising. Commodities as signs proliferate paradigmatically; here butter equals margarine equals spread. Each commodity tends to engender a variety of interchangeable substitutes. The differences between their substitutes may be real, as in the case of butter and margarine, or symbolic as in the case of different brand names. In this proliferation of commodity-signs, the tendency is towards more synthetic industrialized signs rooted in the manipulation of chemical codes, e.g., natural fabrics proliferate into synthetic fabrics, natural foods into processed foods, etc.. Advertising tells the consumer that such a proliferation of signs enriches and enhances life, giving the consumer more freedom and control, ushering in a life of abundance and joy.

### Chapter III

#### A SOCIO-HISTORICAL READING

##### 2.01

Before the advent of consumerism most goods were produced in the home or the local community. "The arrangement of the home itself reflected its productive and sustaining nature."<sup>46</sup> But now the home has changed from an active center of production to a passive center of consumption. Commodities replace personal action. The self-sustaining community and home operated in a direct relationship with nature for the production of its needs. But a "[c]onsumptionist ideology required a world-view in which people and nature were not merely separate but at odds with one another. Consumerism posed nature as an inhospitable force, a hopeless anachronism. Industrial production and enterprising imaginations claim for themselves the rights and powers of creation."<sup>47</sup> The culture of commodities literally rips itself from the earth.

##### 2.02

---

<sup>46</sup> Ewen, S. and Ewen, E., Channels of Desire, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1982; p. 59.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

By the 1900's, the home had ceased production. Production and consumption had become distinct activities with people purchasing what they had once produced themselves.<sup>48</sup> Commodities were increasingly substituted for the homegrown, home-made use-values or "vernacular values." As Illich points out "vernacular" in Latin is a technical term for the inverse of commodity, the inverse of that which must be derived from exchange value. Vernacular is something generated in the home.<sup>49</sup>

### 2.03

Vernacular now means popular, homely, or indigenous speech -- the mother tongue as opposed to learned language. Originally it meant the first language of a child, picked up informally. But today vernaculars in the original sense are rare, particularly in Western societies. A vernacular language, homegrown, as it were, is "generally very different speech from the one taught by paid educators and by parents who act as if they were such educators. We see, then, that people are considered as creatures who need to be taught to speak properly in order to communicate in the modern world -- as they need to be wheeled about in motorized carriages in order to move in modern landscapes, their feet no longer fit. Dependence on taught mother tongue can be taken as the

---

<sup>48</sup> Idem.

<sup>49</sup> Illich, I., "Vernacular Values," in Kumer, S. (edit.), The Schumacher Lectures, New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1981; p. 77.

paradigm of all other dependencies typical of humans in an age of commodity defined needs."<sup>50</sup>

#### 2.04

The taught mother tongue replaces the vernacular, once expressed in a multitude of local dialects. Such is a central motivation of the linguistical mind -- to impose universals. True vernacular speech was "drawn by each one from the cultural environment, learned from the encounter with people whom the learner could smell and touch, love or hate. The vernacular spread just as most things and services were shared, namely by multiple forms of mutual reciprocity, rather than clientage to the appointed teacher or professional."<sup>51</sup> Taught language as a replacement, a substitute for vernacular speech, is at once a signifier of that speech, a ritualized simulacrum of vernacular, and a mechanism of control over the vernacular and its social bases.

#### 2.05

In the difference between the vernacular and the taught language lies the project of the mastery of the social life underlying language. The clearest example of this is in the hierarchy of the classical Hindu caste -- a hierarchy based upon how competent each jati was in its use of ritualized Sanskrit.<sup>52</sup> A taught language necessarily imposes a hier-

<sup>50</sup> Illich, I., Shadow Work, Boston: Marion Boyers, 1981; p. 63.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

archy of competence. At the highest level are the "authorities". In their activity with language they demonstrate how the language ought to be used. Such activity is subsequently transformed into "ideal" theoretical activity about the language.

## 2.06

An understanding of the meanings and usages of words only in the context of language authorities reduces all other vernacular meanings and usages of words to distortions or personal impositions. The degrees of differences between different individuals' speech measured against the linguistic performances of authorities, constitutes a natural semantic hierarchy.

## 2.07

Commercials present images of consumption authorities performing ritual-like actions with commodity-signs. From one perspective commercials appear as cultural performances concerned with the transmission of cultural norms constituting the specific way of life of consumerism. In such a role they act as commands, inciting the population to consume in the hope that such behavior will bring about future prosperity and happiness. Bearing a system of norms in their content, e.g., the norms of eating flame-broiled burgers, driv-

<sup>52</sup> Srinivas, M. N., Social Change in Modern India, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971. Also see Staal, J. F., "Sanskrit and Sanskritization," in Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XXII, No. 3, 1963; Zilberman, D., "The Birth of Meaning," unpublished manuscript.

ing fast cars, serving meaty dog food, having soft hands, using big tools, etc., the consumer who is preoccupied with status understands the commercial texts as a set of deontic or "ought-to-be" propositions. The commercials incite the consumer to measure himself against the norms and styles of consuming of the consumption authorities. Such an incitement produces a hierarchy of consumers as individuals attempt to minimize the differences in consumption between themselves and the image of the consumption authority.

## 2.08

For Durkheim, socialized human behavior is not the result of attitudes of particular individuals but an original universal totality imposed from above. Society as a whole appears to "infinitely surpass the individual in time as well as space, so it is in a position to impose upon him ways of acting and thinking which it has consecrated with its prestige."<sup>53</sup> Commercials appear to act as mechanisms for the universalization of cultural consciousness, building a common understanding as to the meaning and purpose of life from above, while suppressing vernacular values and pluralistic alternatives from below.

## 2.09

---

<sup>53</sup> Durkheim, E., The Rules of Sociological Method, New York: The Free Press, 1938; p. 102

For Durkheim, the awareness of the collective whole (i.e., collective consciousness) acts as a constraining mechanism that becomes realized in the form of social institutions, i.e., all the beliefs and all the modes of conduct instituted by the collectivity. Each institution collects and condenses the constraining force of the collective, acting as a structure to create and maintain functional human interactions.

#### 2.10

Commercials operate as a reified collective consciousness, as it were, depicting generalized others engaged in normative activities, such as drinking Pepsi. In the Pepsi commercial, for example, the power of the huge audience appears to overwhelm the individual. The crowd can be seen to represent the "New Generation" infinitely surpassing the individual. The "New Generation" makes choices for the individual, such as what beverages to drink -- Pepsi, the choice of the "New Generation". Thus, drinking Pepsi collects and condenses the power of the "New Generation".

#### 2.2

As we have seen in the examples of taught language and consumption, individual differences tend toward a hierarchical ordering measured against institutionalized authorities. For Durkheim, as a society develops and becomes more complex, the once self-sufficient social units tend to disperse into the functioning of many specialized organizations,

e.g., political, economic, cultural, etc.. Each organization accumulates and condenses the constraining force of the collective conscience. But what works to constrain the individual is not so much the threat of immediate retribution but the fear of finding oneself outside the social system which appears to go easily on without the individual's participation or cooperation.

#### 2.13

Organic society imposes order through the creation of dependencies on institutionally produced goods and services. The system of interdependence conserves itself by making each individual appear more and more limited and dependent, less and less able to provide for his wants. The main constraining force on the individual is the fear of finding himself outside the social system that appears to provide for all of his needs.

#### 2.14

To the extent that the commercial acts as an authoritative text, presenting the exemplary styles of consumption, it works as an instrument of normative impact. This action eventually results in a non-valuative "alignment" of the cultural semantics.<sup>54</sup> Consciousness itself becomes so completely organized in its semantic presentations, after the structure of cultural norms, that the self-perception of the

---

<sup>54</sup> see Zilberman, D., Toward an Understanding of Cultural Traditions, unpublished manuscript.

personality as being capable of experiencing alternative, non-consumerist ways of being, is pressed out by the normative pressure into non-being. Thus the individual's behavior and consciousness appear to completely reflect the televised system of normative prescriptions, forming in the individual what can be called a "minus-personality".

#### 2.15

Although we can locate a definite "minus personality" operating in consumerist society, its analysis only describes the limits of experience of the consumerist psyche without describing the inner logic of its construction. Indeed, the "minus personality", although formed by the pressure of normativity experienced in a consumerist society, is not axial in a consumerist society as it would be in authoritarian societies such as the Soviet Union and Tibet.<sup>55</sup> In such societies, owing to the absurdity of value for the cultural consciousness, there is an inability to think about free choice. Obviously within the cultural consciousness of the North American consumer this is not the case. In fact, free choice appears as an absolute given to the consumer; but this "free choice" is limited to the system of commodity fetishism, i.e., to choices between commodities provided by consumerist society. I shall now look at the development of this system and the consumerist personality from the historical perspective.

---

<sup>55</sup> see Zilberman, D., "Understanding Cultural Traditions as Types of Thinking", unpublished manuscript; pp. 34-5.

## 2.116

Originally in North America, with the possible exception of the Southwest, subsistence was maintained through a village system of shifting agricultural and hunter-gatherer activities. The Native-Americans held their demands on the ecosystem to a minimum by moving their settlements from habitat to habitat, seeking food wherever it was seasonally concentrated.<sup>56</sup> Such a way of living required an intimate understanding of the habits and ecology of other species.

## 2.17

Self-sustaining villages, consisting of at most a few hundred inhabitants organized into extended kin networks, were the principle social and economic groupings for the Native American. But their size and location changed on a seasonal basis, breaking up and reassembling as social and ecological needs required.<sup>57</sup> "By keeping population densities low, the food scarcities of winter guaranteed the abundance of spring, and contributed to the overall stability of human relationship to the ecosystem."<sup>58</sup>

## 2.18

---

<sup>56</sup> Cronon, W., Changes in the Land, New York: Hill and Wang, 1983; p. 53.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 41

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

One can speculate on the personality structure of the Native American through an investigation of leading cultural heroes in Native American myth-cycles. One such cultural hero common to all Native Americans is the Trickster, perhaps the oldest of all cultural heroes. He can take the form of a raven, a coyote, a spider, a hare, and other animals. He is depicted as a constantly hungry, libidinous, amoral, wanderer, forever playing tricks on others or having tricks played on him. In this respect, he is represented as both the cunning trickster, as well as the fool. In the beginning the Trickster appears to gradually evolve "from an amorphous instinctual and unintegrated being into one with the lineaments of man and one foreshadowing man's psychical traits."<sup>59</sup> Thus the Trickster is not a static personality but contains within it the potential of human unfoldment.

#### 2.19

At first, the Trickster's insatiable hunger drives him to use force and trickery to obtain his wants. Although he suffers "rebuff after rebuff" in the end he always gains success. In the course of satisfying his voracious appetites he unconsciously creates many objects men need, as well as fixing the customs they are to have.<sup>60</sup> Thus there are episodes "narrating the securing of fire, of flint of tobacco, of food in general and of the main cultivated

---

<sup>59</sup> Radin, P., The Trickster, Schocken Books, 1956; p. 133.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

plants; the regulation of the seasons and of the weather; the assignment of their proper and non-destructive functions to nature..."<sup>61</sup>

## 2.20

Radin sums up the Trickster's evolving personality in the following paragraph.

In a world that has no beginning and no end, an ageless and Priapus-like protagonist is pictured strutting across the scene, wandering restlessly from place to place, attempting successfully and unsuccessfully, to gratify his voracious hunger and his uninhibited sexuality. Though he seems to us, and not only to us but to aboriginal peoples as well, to have no purpose, at the end of his activities a new figure is revealed to us and a new psychical reorientation and environment have come into being. Nothing here has been created de novo. What is new has been attained either by the sloughing off and rearrangement of the old, or, negatively, by the demonstration that certain types of behavior inevitably bring about ridicule and humiliation and result in pain and suffering where they do not actually lead to death.<sup>62</sup>

## 2.21

We can contrast the life of the Trickster with the life of the heroes of the Medieval picaresque novel, represented best by Rabelais' work. (Picaro is the Spanish word for villain or rogue.)<sup>63</sup> In Rabelais' work, like in the Trickster myth-cycle, there are powerful images of the body body with its desire for food, drink, elimination, and sexual life.<sup>64</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>64</sup> Bakhtin, M. M., Rabelais and His World, Cambridge: The

These images appear in extremely exaggerated characteristics of the Trickster -- his enormous penis, anus, and intestines. Bakhtin has traced how the images of the material body in Rablais' work emanated from medieval expressions of folk or carnival culture. Medieval carnival culture celebrated the material and bodily roots of the world, depicting the collective body of humankind as continually growing and renewed, responding to the rhythms of the ecosystem.<sup>65</sup> Its leading themes were fertility, growth, and a brimming over abundance.

## 2.22

The medieval carnival was a purely vernacular celebration, highlighted by folk performances and folk art. It was a spectacle lived and participated in by everyone. There was no distinction between spectator and performer. Its expressions were "sharply distinct from the serious official, ecclesiastical, feudal, and political cult forms and ceremonials. [The carnival] offered a completely different, non-official, extra-ecclesiastical and extra-political aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; [it] built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived a given time of the year."<sup>66</sup> The

---

M. I. T. Press, 1968; p. 18.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid p. 19.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 5-6.

carnival celebrated a temporary liberation from the established order, suspending all hierarchical precedence. Bakhtin notes that this suspension of hierarchy led to a special type of communication -- "the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times."<sup>67</sup> Bakhtin seems to be describing a truly vernacular speech; it is this speech and its images which constituted the basis of the picaresque novel.

## 2.23

For Bakhtin many essential sides or strata of life can be discovered, comprehended, and expressed only through the vernacular language of the carnival.<sup>68</sup> It liberated people from the dogmatic and onesided seriousness of the official or learned cultural language. For Bakhtin, the vernacular language of the carnival contains within it the primordial polyphony of ways of thinking.

## 2.24

In opposition to the vernacular folk culture stood the official monastic culture based on the production of learned Latin. Life in the monasteries was structured by strict

---

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>68</sup> Bakhtin, M. M., Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, Ardis, 1973; p. 131.

conformity to a set of rules, extracted from the writings of the early Church Fathers and called the Rules of St. Benedict. The monks were exhorted "to keep staunchly united, to observe, with the same exactness as before the established usages in chanting psalms, in keeping silence, in quality of food and raiment, and above all in the contempt of personal property."<sup>69</sup> Every aspect of the monks' lives was reduced to common ritualistic exercise. Demand for unreserved obedience and the constant submission to minute regulations, was enforced by severe penalties for transgressions and violations.

#### 2.25

But the monastic culture was never able to subdue the vernacular folk culture. As Shepard points out, for more than a thousand years the folk people of Europe had forced "the austere Church to progressively back off, incorporate heathen celebrations and pagan rituals, wink its eye at festivals of crops and seasons, and enlarge its tolerance for nonhumans and nonChristians...It was as though the ontogeny of every individual coalesced in a transpersonal urge to seek the return of myth (however dressed in Christianized costumes), images and art, the omens and auguries of the natural world and the psychic nourishment of the initiation ceremony."<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>69</sup> Lackner, B. K., The Eleventh-century Background of Citeaux, Washington: Cistercian Publications, 1972; p. 44.

<sup>70</sup> Shepard, Paul, Nature and Madness, San Francisco: Sierra

## 2.26

It was into this world that the Puritan personality entered, determined to reform the personality of the Trickster or Picaro. Puritanism took hold especially in the new city -- "an arid pavement in which space was defined by human logic derived from celestial observation, a cultural nowhere that allowed the etherialized believers to disengage from paths across the earth and the cults of the soil."<sup>71</sup> For the Puritan, death, birth, sex, excretion, secretion, digestion, etc., i.e., all the bodily processes that the Trickster and the Picaro joyfully revelled in, became the foreground on which he wrestled with the devil. "Behind the proud self-consciousness and conscience of the Puritan is the despair of his own organism, fear of that involuntary and unconscious aspect of the self inaccessible to control."<sup>72</sup>

## 2.27

To the Puritan personality, the Trickster and the Picaro, driven by their voracious appetites, are not really personalities at all. They appear ensnared in normativity, whether experienced as the natural rhythms of the ecosystem or as conventional folkways, unable to exhibit true freedom of choice. The earth transforms the Trickster and the Picaro into its image. The true personality, however, strives to

---

Club Books, 1982; p. 80.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

transform the earth in accordance with his own inner ideals. For the true personality, the norm sinks into non-being.

## 2.28

Marx depicts the pre-industrial social formations of the Trickster-like personality as autonomous primitive collectivities working solely for the purpose of self-preservation. They only use what is ready for use, taking from the earth and water what they needed. Marx condemns their gregarious way of life, because the producer never realizes his individual forces and possibilities and forever remains a member of the primitive collectivity, i.e., he never realizes his true personality.<sup>73</sup> As Vitkin points out, in order for historical progress to take place, for Marx, "it is necessary first of all to transform production into the production of individuals who outgrow the narrow boundaries of the natural ties of personal dependency and break them apart", i.e., who free themselves from normative demands.<sup>74</sup>

## 2.29

For Marx, in the communal order the unity of the community appears to stand above all the individuals as the higher or sole proprietor -- not unlike Durkheim's collective conscience. The survival of the commune depends on the reproduction of all its members as self-sustaining.<sup>75</sup> Cooperation

<sup>73</sup> Vitkin, M., "Nature, History, and Society",

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Marx, K., Grundrisse, New York: Vintage Books, 1973; pp.

takes place not for wealth producing labor, but for upholding the association inwardly and outwardly. The commune owns all the property. The economic aim is the production of use values (or to use Illich's term, vernacular values), so as to reproduce the individual within the specific relation to the commune in which he finds himself.<sup>76</sup> "If the individual changes his relation to the commune, he thereby changes and acts destructively upon the commune."<sup>77</sup> Marx conceived the communal way of life, like Durkheim's mechanical solidarity, as governed by a rigid normative order. The individual is seen as nothing more than a slave of the communal unity, a herd animal. His relation to the earth as proprietor, and he finds raw materials and instruments at hand, as well as the necessities of life created not by labor but by the earth itself. Historically this perception of the Trickster personality by the Puritan, produced in the Puritan personality the impression that he had the right to push the Trickster-like Native American off the earth into non-being.

## 2.30

Marx characterized the pre-capitalist forms of society as governed by relations of personal dependency. Whereas, "personal independence founded on objective [sachlicher] de-

---

474-6.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 485.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 486.

pendence is the second great form, in which a system of general social metabolism, of universal relations, of all-round needs, and universal capacities is formed for the first time."<sup>78</sup> The secondary formation is attained through the process of individuation. Exchange functions as the chief means of this individuation by making the herd-like existence superfluous. "Progress" consists in the destruction of the commune, i.e., the vernacular folk society, by dissolving the individuals relation to the earth as a natural condition of production. The individual becomes a "free" worker, objectless, "purely subjective" labor capacity, confronting the objective conditions of production as alien property -- as otherness --value for itself.

## 2.31

By transforming all vernacular values into commodities, men discover their "true" universal needs, i.e., the needs generated by an all sided dependence of individuals upon the exchange of material wealth. This all-sided dependency enables individuals to develop their universal capacities, no longer tied to self-sufficient, stable state communities. For both Durkheim and Marx, industrial or capitalist society above all isolates or atomizes the individual breaking his bond with the sustaining earth, while substituting a human bond: the world-wide system of exchange, for the bond to the earth. For Marx, this means the advent of a truly so-

---

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 158.

cialized humanity. Of course capitalist society is still problematical for Marx in that the social bond becomes objectified in money or exchange value, which inserts itself between people, exercising domination over social relations just as non-economical institutions had done in the past. Marx, therefore, posits a third formation where truly free individuality emerges, each individual having an equal share in the total wealth of the community unmediated by abstract exchange value. Such a society, based on an all-sided dependency and a growing technological domination of the environment, would enable the universal development of the individual. In such a society the norm sinks completely into non-being.

## 2.32

Marx's analysis of pre-industrial societies isolates the coercive action of the norm as the axial mechanism at work in these societies. But this perception of the norm as everywhere at work inhibiting human freedom is more a result of Marx's theoretical positioning than the actual state of affairs in pre-industrial societies. Marx in his theorizing exhibits the irrational fear of being coerced, found also in the Puritan-type personality, perceiving human freedom as being incompatible with the presumption of regularities in social life.

## 2.33

What did, however, become a social actuality was, as Marx clearly understood, the coercive action of the exchange system. This normative system, ironically fostered by the Puritan-type personality's strivings to freely realize its inner ideals through work, began to operate "spontaneously" (as if a natural law of God, as Bentham supposed), destroying through its normative impact all vernacular cultures and ways of life. The Puritan personality had pressed the idea of normativity out of his social consciousness into the "non-being" of social actuality.<sup>79</sup>

## 2.34

This was accomplished through the separation of the body from the rest of nature. The body was brought under control through the rational will by the ascetic discipline of labor. In this way the body, directed by the inner action of the will, appeared opposed to objective nature. For Marx labor appears as "the setting in motion of arms and legs, head and hands, the natural forces of the body, in order to appropriate nature's productions in a form adapted to his own wants."<sup>80</sup> Through labor, humans regulate and control their interactions with nature instead of being ruled by nature.

## 2.35

---

<sup>79</sup> Zilberman, D., "Understanding Cultural Traditions as Types of Thinking", unpublished manuscript; p. 39.

<sup>80</sup> Marx, K., Capital I, New York: Vintage Books, 1977; p. 74.

As Weber points out the Puritan demonstrated his religious merit precisely in economic activity. Through the ascetic discipline of labor, sanctified as the primary means for attaining salvation, the Puritan struggled to gain control over his bodily processes by wresting them from nature's hold. As an inner-worldly ascetic the Puritan accepts the condition of the world as his responsibility and strives through his labor to transform it in accordance with his rational ideals.

## 2.36

As in any ascetic discipline, labor appears as an end in itself. For Marx it becomes a "prime vital need itself". Labor is man's "coming-to-be for himself", his "self-creation and self-objectification".

## 2.37

The ascetic discipline of labor produces value in the world. Through his concrete labor man gives an objective end to nature; he transforms nature into discrete "social hieroglyphs" -- signs of utilities, i.e., commodities.<sup>81</sup> These signs can then be communicated, i.e., exchanged. It is this separation, this rupture, this creation of difference between the body at labor and nature that enabled the code of capital to begin operating, substituting itself for the natural rhythms of the ecosystem.

---

<sup>81</sup> Baudrillard, J., The Mirror of Production, St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975; pp. 45-46.

## 2.38

The collective body of the Trickster is thus broken into autonomous individuals bound now only by the exchange value of their abstract labor in its reified and codified form: money. While,

for the first time, nature becomes purely an object for humankind, purely a matter of utility; [it] ceases to be recognized as a power for itself; and the theoretical discovery of its autonomous laws appears merely as a ruse so as to subjugate it under human needs whether as an object of consumption or as a means of production. In accord with this tendency, capital drives beyond national barriers and prejudices as much as beyond nature worship, as well as all traditional, confined, complacent, encrusted satisfactions of present needs, and reproductions of old ways of life. It is destructive towards all this, and constantly revolutionizes it, tearing down all barriers which hem in the development of the forces of production, the expansion of needs, the all-sided development of production, and the exploitation and exchange of natural and mental forces.<sup>82</sup>

## 2.381

A key to this transformation is the production of new needs, just as products and different kinds of work skills are produced. "The greater the extent to which historic needs -- needs created by production itself, social needs -- needs which are themselves the offspring of social production and intercourse, are posited as necessary, the higher the level to which real wealth has become developed. Regarded materially, wealth consists only in the manifold variety of needs."<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>82</sup> Marx, K., Grundrisse, p. 410.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., p. 527.

## 2.382

Marx describes how the expanding number of needs are materially produced by using the example of agriculture. Once agriculture rests on scientific activities requiring machinery, petrochemicals, genetically engineered seeds, then a whole technical industrial base appears as a need for agriculture. Thus agriculture "no longer finds the natural conditions of its own production within itself, naturally arisen, spontaneous, and ready to hand, but these exist as an independent industry separate from it -- and with this separateness the whole complex set of interconnections in which this industry exists is drawn into the sphere of the conditions of agricultural production."<sup>84</sup> Marx describes here the substitution of self-sustaining naturally grounded production by the world market of general exchange. The former, by finding its conditions of production naturally based, grounds itself in a regional ecologically balanced system of needs.

## 2.383

In a society regulated by universal exchange each need can only be satisfied through the entire system of exchange relations of the society. Each new need strengthens the system further, transforming all aspects of life into commodities, making any form of vernacular production appear antiquated, "unnatural", and degrading. As Illich points

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

out, such a system is controlled by "radical monopolies", industries that become dominant means of satisfying needs that formerly occasioned a personal response.<sup>85</sup> Radical monopolies restructure social life in such a way that it becomes impossible to survive without consuming their products. For example, with the increasing use of automobiles in the twentieth century, communities were reorganized to fit the needs of the commuter, while at the same time mass transit systems fell into decay. It therefore became necessary to own a car.

## 2.39

The rational objective order of things, e.g., economic laws, the market, industrial techniques, and so on, exploit nature ever more efficiently while progressively making people more and more dependent or "social" as Marx would say. For Marx as large scale industry advances, labor time gives way to the power of instruments whose effectiveness depends on the attained level of science and technological progress. Man more and more relates himself to the process of production as supervisor and regulator. He stands outside production. "In this transformation, the great pillar of production and wealth is no longer performed by man himself, nor his labor time, but the appropriation of his own universal productivity, i.e., his knowledge and his mastery of nature through his societal existence -- in one word: the development of

<sup>85</sup> Illich, I., Energy and Equity, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974; p. 57.

the societal individual."<sup>86</sup>

#### 2.40

Knowledge is transformed into technical rationality -- research for the total administration of needs: a type of thinking "that appears full and factual, methodically designed to deliver the goods without indulgence or metaphysics."<sup>87</sup> It constricts the possibility of life to the reduction of one methodic choice: the human being merely decides in favor of the technique that gives maximum efficiency.<sup>88</sup> Everything can be called into question except technical progress. All needs are provided within a completely systematized and "socialized" world.

#### 2.41

For Merton, the Puritan personality's demand for systematic, methodic labor found full expression in the industrious and systematic pursuits of natural philosophy or science, which demanded the constant application of rigorous reasoning. The combination of rationalism and empiricism as associated with the designated necessity of dealing successfully with the practical affairs of life, so pronounced in the Puritan ethic, formed the essence of the spirit of modern science.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>86</sup> Marx, K., op. cit., p. 592.

<sup>87</sup> Hayim, G., "Modern Reality Strategies: An Analysis of Weber, Freud, and Ellul," in Human Studies, Vol. 1, Number 4, October 1978; p. 316.

<sup>88</sup> see Ellul, J., The Technological Society, New York: Vintage Books, 1964.

Scientific activity began playing an increasingly central role in the organization of the economy and the political sphere as well as in the construction of a secular normative culture following the Protestant religious model. This led to the objectification of only the psychological characteristics of the personality (e.g., value orientations and interests, intellectual activity, correlating goals with means, the ability to play organized roles), belonging to the social system as a whole, rather than to a subject.<sup>90</sup> Thus the function of the individual's will in the name of rational goals, becomes alienated from individuals and quasi-personalized in bureaucratic and scientific institutions.

## 2.42

For Weber, Protestantism had initially provided the charismatic energy for breaking the bonds of medieval constraints. He described the shifting of this once revolutionary activity into depersonalized organizations as the "routinization of charisma". The more the rational ascetic applied his personal spirit to the organization of the everyday world, the more this organization began to act as institutionalized personalities, i.e., in rational, systematic, predictable goal-oriented behavior. Capitalism began to reach a crisis with the ascendancy of rational technique

---

<sup>89</sup> Merton, R.K., Social Theory and Social Structure, New York: The Free Press, 1968; pp. 628-660.

<sup>90</sup> Zilberman, D., Toward an Understanding of Cultural Traditions, pp. 180-1.

-- "dead labor" -- over living labor in the production process. The system began to drown in the glut of automatically produced commodities.

## 2.43

The biggest obstacle in this crisis became the Puritan personality itself. An authentic personality conducts his life in an orderly and consistent manner eschewing spontaneous, impulsive behavior. "Impulsive enjoyment of life, which leads away from both work in a calling and from religion, was as such the enemy of rational asceticism...".<sup>91</sup> Protestant asceticism militated strongly against the spontaneous enjoyment of possessions, restricting consumption. Outward luxury was condemned as idolatry of the flesh. John Wesley best expressed the contradiction:

I fear, wherever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion. Therefore I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of true religion to continue for long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase so will pride, anger, and love of the world in all its branches.<sup>92</sup>

## 2.44

Once the external normative organization of society had been made over in the image of the rational "personality", eliminating personal control over production and consumption, the

---

<sup>91</sup> Weber, M., The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958; p. 167.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

personality of the individual could be reconstructed into a consumer. It would no longer be the calling of the individual to remake the world according to his subjective ideals; rather the "social" world now remade the individual. With the advent of the cultural or social sciences, developing hand in hand with the cultural industry, new techniques for the rational control of consciousness developed.

## 2.45

The cultural industry was predicated on the principle that the individual should be shown that all his possible choices for self-fulfillment fall within the range of the social system's productive capacity. As Horkheimer and Adorno point out, "not only does [the cultural industry] make the individual believe that the deception it practices is satisfaction, but it goes further and implies that, whatever the state of affairs, he must put up with what is offered."<sup>93</sup> Not to conform is to be rendered a powerless outsider, a loser. "Something is provided by all so that none may escape; the distinctions are emphasized and extended. The public is catered for with a hierarchical range of mass-produced products of varying quality, thus advancing the rule of complete quantification."<sup>94</sup> The individual was enticed to make choices freely within this range of products, actively and spontaneously constructing his persona as a result of

<sup>93</sup> Adorno, T.W., and Horkheimer, M. The Dialectic of Enlightenment, New York: Herder and Herder, 1972; p. 142.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

these choices.

#### 2.46

The cultural industry aimed to create an individual who would locate his or her needs and frustrations with respect to the consumption of goods rather than to the quality and content of his life.<sup>95</sup> "If a person was unhappy within mass-industrial society, advertising was attempting to put that unhappiness to work in the name of that society."<sup>96</sup> Unhappiness was psychologized and reduced to personal problems, e.g., bad breath, body odor, taste in clothes, overweightness, and so on. Any unhappiness was reformulated as a specific need which could be solved by consuming a particular type of commodity. The realm of needs becomes identical with the range of possible objects to consume. "Everything surging from the subject, his body and his desire, is dissociated and catalyzed in terms of needs, more or less specified in advance by objects."<sup>97</sup>

#### 2.47

In the consumerist society advertising links objects of everyday use to utopian ideals, to the realization of fantasies, to personal freedom and spiritual well-being, and to health and sexual attractiveness. These desiderata supplant

<sup>95</sup> Ewen, S., Captains of Consciousness, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976; p. 43.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>97</sup> Baudrillard, J., For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981; p. 135.

the Protestant ethos with a new ethic advocating hyperconsumption, immediate gratification, self-indulgence, etc.. This new ethos appears consonant with a shift in North American society from a social order based on capital accumulation and industrial development -- the "classic" capitalist society -- to a mass society requiring an expansive network of mechanized transportation and telecommunications to facilitate the consumption of an ever growing quantity of standardized and mass-produced services and goods, the latter becoming increasingly synthetic.

#### 2.47

Central to a mass society is the mobilization of the desires of the individual to induce the consumption of more and more goods. Desires come to function as the basic propulsive force of mass society, enabling its maintenance and reproduction. This is accomplished through the eliciting and structuring of specific states of mass consciousness, the topic of the next chapter.

## Chapter IV

### A PHENOMENOLOGICAL READING

#### 3.01

Phenomenology is the study of the structure of consciousness, considered in its objectivity and apriority. It seeks to ground its knowledge "transcendentally", by delineating the purely subjective conditions which make an objectively experienceable and knowable world possible. For Husserl,

the world which constantly exists for us through the flowing alteration of manners of givenness is a universal mental configuration, as a meaning construct [Sinngebilde] -- as the construct of a universal, ultimately functioning subjectivity, as an element of the world. All objective consideration of the world is consideration of the "exterior" and grasps only "externals", objective entities [Objectivitäten]. The radical consideration of the world is the systematic and purely internal consideration of the subjectivity which "expresses" [or "externalizes"] itself in the exterior.<sup>98</sup>

The task of phenomenology is to reveal the universal rules or pure norms that govern all possible consciousnesses.<sup>99</sup> These pure norms constitute a kind of "deep structure" that underlies the "surface structure" of the external world.

#### 3.02

---

<sup>98</sup> Husserl, E., The Crisis of European Sciences, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970; p. 113.

<sup>99</sup> Husserl, E., Cartesian Meditations, The Hague: Martinus Nihoff, 1973; p. 53.

Norms based on historical or psychological factualities can only constitute relative or sublatale truths, not the pure truths of the universal subjectivity. They act as cultural rules of transformation, as it were, from the deep to the surface structure of consciousness. Therefore, for us to accomplish a phenomenology of consumerist consciousness we must discover how historical and psychological normativity arises in consciousness so that we may bracket its effects and set it aside. In other words, we must carry out a bracketing of everything that constitutes "consumerist" itself, but this bracketing will, at the same time, take stock of all that it brackets. In the end we hope to attain a pure, essential consciousness cleansed of all traces of consumerism. But we shall not assume we can attain such a state without taking into consideration the real historical and psychological factors, as well as theoretical interests, that generated the obscurations of the immediate realization of such a state. Husserl's phenomenology is, in a sense, a product of his failure to bracket his own theoretical interests obscuring the universal subjectivity.

### 3.03

What is attained by our method of bracketing is the right to treat only non-phenomena, i.e., extra-empirical judgments.<sup>100</sup> Bracketing takes no existential positioning towards that which is bracketed. It's a kind of "functional

---

<sup>100</sup> Zilberman, D., "Is the Bodhisattva a Skeptic?", unpublished manuscript; p. 18.

presentation" negating the content of what is presented: only the functional scheme of "distinctive features" remains.<sup>101</sup> In other words the reality of the factors to be presented depends upon the individual consciousness' personal intention towards these factors.

#### 3.04

As stated, this method of bracketing transforms phenomena into purely significational, experience-free constructions, i.e., non-phenomena. Such materialized ideal objects are obtained by our activity as social theorists. It is therefore necessary to somehow deconstruct the significative functioning of these objects -- to materialize them as "signless", "mere ideas". Such a "signless" condition will indicate where both our mental efforts and our means of description of the empirical evidence are exhausted.<sup>102</sup> Thus not only the status of the pure subjectivity remains empty, but each step of the bracketing process also remains empty. All is indeed generated by this pure subjectivity and the locus of emptiness of the former and the latter is in "their unimaginable, mutual non-being one another, i.e., their double difference."<sup>103</sup>

#### 3.05

---

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

Continuing my analysis of commercials (the axial texts structuring consumerist consciousness), I shall borrow from Hegel's phenomenology his method of genetic logic to generate the bracketed material. Having already carried out a general analysis of commercials in the first chapter, I must now locate what appears to be the simplest or most abstract structure in the commercial, i.e., the genetic cell. Such a structure must appear to be universally reproduced in all the other structures of commercials, but also coexist with them as a particular structure. Having located this cell, I must then find the regularities of development of this genetic cell as it unfolds from the simplest to the most complex structures.

### 3.06

What looks to be the basic, most simple intent of commercials is to present the desire for a product as natural. I use the term "natural" with all its connotations -- "innate", "taken for granted", "normal", and so on. Naturality always hides the force of the social norm -- what is natural for one society could be quite unnatural for another. To paraphrase Barthes, commercials appear to immobilize the world of desire, suggesting a universal order which has fixated once and for all the craving for a McDonald's french fry, the love of Pepsi, the need for fast cars, and so on. Commercials in general present desires as basic needs that are universal and can only be satisfied through the standard exchange relations of consumerist society.

## 3.07

For Hegel, too, the most immediate structure of consciousness is desire. Self-consciousness perceives the separateness of the sensate world, but at the same time feels the unity of this other world with itself in the form of a desire to abolish the otherness.<sup>104</sup> Desire, therefore, presupposes a rupture between the self-desiring and that which is desired. The self-conscious individual finds he can only overcome this otherness in so far as he discovers himself in this otherness. This he can find only in another self-consciousness, a duplication of self-consciousness.<sup>105</sup> To overcome difference, the subject, therefore, inserts himself into the social-symbolic world, i.e., into society, its culture, its organization, its language, etc., to enter into the circuit of exchange with other self-consciousnesses.

## 3.08

But this "difference", produced both in consciousness and by consciousness, determines the very possibility as well as the significance of the unity to be striven for. As Derrida discovered, it would be absurd to search for an "originary" difference. Every difference presupposes some metaphysical positioning, permitting a particular form of social production, eg., language, economy, politics, etc., as its apparent solution or overcoming. We are concerned here with the

<sup>104</sup> Hegel, G. W. F., Phenomenology of Spirit, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977; p. 105.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

nature of desire as difference to be overcome by the system of consumerist social relations.

## 3.09

Desire is transformed by the social symbolic world into conventional needs associated with the organized techniques handed down and shaped by each generation for the satisfaction of these needs. Such needs arise out of extended socialization, each individual learning to interpret his desire according to socially accepted needs and to adjust himself to the prevailing modes of approved behavior in the satisfaction of those needs. As Leiss points out and as we have seen in the previous chapter, from the socio-historic perspective, human "progress" appears as the movement away from the "spontaneous providence" of nature for the satisfaction of needs to dependence on an increasing intervention in and managing of environmental processes by the social system as a whole.<sup>106</sup>

## 3.091

For Leiss every need has a material as well as a symbolic or cultural correlate. The material correlate appears to consist in the life requirements of individuals and societies -- the seemingly necessary material exchange of organic and inorganic substances apparently governed by the structure of nature. I emphasize "apparent" here because both the idea

---

<sup>106</sup> Leiss, W., The Limits to Satisfaction, Toronto: The University of Toronto Press; p. 58.

of what is a life requirement and the understanding of the structure of nature are regulated by the symbolic correlate. The symbolic correlate necessitates that material exchanges of life-substances are mediated by elaborate social interaction patterns. These two correlates cannot be separated. A need therefore reflects or refracts the entire system of social relations. This manifests itself as inexorable normative pressure -- the individual has no choice but to perceive the system's needs as his own "natural needs." The intervention in and the managing of the environmental process by the social system as a whole progresses primarily through the coercive regulation of the individual's needs -- the controlled expression and satisfaction of needs through socialization patterns.

### 3.10

Commercials transform the natural significance of cultural life in consumerist society into systems of signs. Specifically commercials transform commodities into highly complex symbolic entities, using them as material substrata to present ways of thinking and being. Commodities then act as loci for the individual's realization of the meaning of his desires in everyday life.

### 3.11

Commercials project an ever changing often contradictory array of qualities, linked with the satisfaction of needs, upon commodities, while destabilizing the individual's pre-

vious judgements about the suitability of other commodities for the satisfaction of particular needs. "Characteristics are distributed and redistributed across previously distinct categories of needs, experiences, and objects."<sup>107</sup> For example, using a certain type of dishwashing detergent is presented as a sensuous experience; coffee is portrayed as helping you think calmly; fast food burgers are shown to be natural; a computer appears to enable you to waltz through work, and so on.

## 3.12

Here is an example of how commercials transform the natural significance of cultural life into systems of signs. In the Ivory Liquid commercial the softness of a woman's hands is isolated from everyday life as a special content. This content is fixated within the system of signs constituting the commercial. It now acts as a reified form, separated from the everyday life from which it was abstracted. But the filmic reproduction of its "givenness" makes it appear as if we are dealing with the original content. Now through the method of montage, the object can appear to have any number of fantastic connections with a person's life in the everyday world and with commodities. Thus, in the Ivory Liquid commercial, softness of hands is presented as retaining ordinary sexual lust in marriage, while a detergent is shown to maintain the sexually appealing softness in hands.<sup>108</sup>

---

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

## 3.13

As Mamardashvili points out, no sphere of human activity can be reified without transformation into ideal subjects and relations.<sup>109</sup> These ideal subjects and relations have a structure and function separate from the content of everyday life, i.e., they evince a realizable form -- regular connections in their compositions -- a form or type of cognition. This type of thinking, transforming the natural significance of cultural life into sign-values appears to arise objectively as a universal object in consumerist culture. Its relationship or coincidence with the consciousness of particular persons is incidental to its generative mechanisms.<sup>110</sup>

## 3.14

For Sartre states of desire are given to consciousness as "centrifugal" and as impersonal.<sup>111</sup> When in the presence of a desirable commodity, only one thing exists in the individual's consciousness at that moment: an-object-that-ought-to-be-consumed. This quality of ought-to-be-consumed lies in the commodity. It acts on the individual with deontic

---

<sup>108</sup> See Schedrovitsky, "Methodological Problems of Systems Research", in General Systems, 1966, Vol. II.

<sup>109</sup> Mamardasvili, M. K., Forms and Content of Thinking, Moscow, 1968; p. 16.

<sup>110</sup> see Piatigorsky, A., The Buddhist Philosophy of Thought, London: Curzon Press, 1984; p. 67.

<sup>111</sup> Sartre, J.-P., The Transcendence of the Ego, New York: The Noonday Press, 1957; p. 56.

force. Sartre quotes Aristotle, "The desirable is that which moves the desiring." One is "in the presence of" a desirable object, just as one is in the presence of the object's color; "there is an objective world of things and of actions, done or to be done, and the actions come to adhere as qualities to the things which call for them."<sup>112</sup>

## 3.15

In consumerist society it is exactly the function of commercials to embed qualities into commodities. "Everything happens as if we lived in a world whose objects in addition to their qualities of warmth, odor, shape, etc. had the qualities of repulsive, attractive, delightful, useful, etc., and as if these qualities were forces having a certain power over us."<sup>113</sup> Thus a dishwashing liquid comes to have the quality of being sensually delightful, a car magically emancipating, a french fry irresistably pleasurable, a fragrance sexually arousing, and so on.

## 3.16

In the case of reflection, the individual experiences the object as his feeling of sensual delight using Ivory Liquid, as his feeling of magical emancipation driving a Dodge, as his feeling of irresistible pleasure eating a McDonald's french fry, as his feeling of sexual arousal smelling Scoundrel perfume. As Sartre points out, through reflection

<sup>112</sup> Idem.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. p. 58.

affectivity is posited for itself.<sup>114</sup> Qualities embedded in commodities by commercials become psychic states sucked in, as it were, by the consciousness of the individual. Thus the significative function of consciousness, i.e., the unreflective indicative experiencing of the world gets turned by reflection into "natural" states of consciousness. As Zilberman shows, "This naturalization is accomplished by converting the artificially defined intention -- 'to exemplify' (apophansis) -- into the natural temperation -- 'to constitute' -- which can be further described as a stationary condition of all elements in the structure of consciousness."<sup>115</sup> Thus when the individual experiences "sensual delightfulness" using Ivory Liquid, that psychic state appears as a natural and stable capacity of consciousness, as opposed to an historically limited, socially engineered non-personal event.

### 3.17

The individual experiences various constellations of qualities embedded in the commodities he consumes as a series of daily ecstasies propelling him onward in the consumerist life world. One can conceive of these states in consumerist society in terms of a vertical ascension from non-commoditized, "surrender-like" states,<sup>116</sup> to those achieved through

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>115</sup> Zilberman, "Hindu Systems of Thought as Epistemic Disciplines", unpublished manuscript; p. 94.

<sup>116</sup> see Wolff, K., Surrender and Catch, Boston: Reidel,

highly complex strategies of consumption. This ascension appears from below, i.e., socio-historically, as the natural unfolding of human potentiality, or from above, as a rigorously engineered spectacle of mass society.

## 3.18

At the apex of the vertical hierarchy of states of consciousness are those related to the "ordinary lust". (see 1.16-1.2) Lust as excessive desire for an object, represents the paradigm for desired states. Commercials saturate objects with pleasures associated with sex, spreading sex over the surface of things and bodies, equating and reducing all desire to sexual desire, while at the same time insinuating that sex is possible only through proper consumption. Anything sexless can become sexualized, e.g., motorscooters, dishwashing detergents, cars, foods, odors, and so on.

We have placed ourselves under the sign of sex, but in the form of a Logic of Sex, rather than a Physics. We must make no mistake here: with the great series of binary oppositions (body/soul, flesh/spirit, instinct/reason, drives/consciousness) that seemed to refer sex to a pure mechanics devoid of reason, the West has managed not only or not so much, to annex sex to a field of rationality, which would not be all that remarkable an achievement, seeing how accustomed we are to such "conquests" since the Greeks, but to bring us almost entirely -- our minds, our individuality, our history -- under the sway of concupiscence and desire. Whenever it is a question of knowing who we are, it is this logic that henceforth serves as our master key...Sex, the explanation for everything.<sup>117</sup>

---

1976.

<sup>117</sup> Foucault, M., The History of Sexuality, New York: Vintage Books, 1978; p.28.

It is exactly in commercials that this rationalization of sex is thematized pragmatically. The consumer is bombarded daily with "bizarre sexual stimuli" and "deranged erotic associations" linking almost all consumption to states of sexual satisfaction.<sup>118</sup>

### 3.19

This state of "originary lust" is presented as the most normal and natural of states. However, its highly romanticized and idealized portrayal makes it the most artificial and imaginary state -- an impossible and elusive norm, ever-changing with the fashion, which all acts of consumption strive to obtain. It is the significatory difference propelling the consumer upward in the vertical climb of states, as he imagines all his realized states as falling short, creating constant suffering.

### 3.20

The "originary lust" is imagined to be experienced by an ideal body, perfect and ageless. Illness, obesity, old age, unattractiveness, etc., i.e., characteristics of the "grotesque body", are presented as states to be overcome by proper consumption. The body to be striven for is an exemplary body, extremely desirous sexually, healthy, exuberant, ageless -- a body cared for, protected, cultivated, reproduced, and preserved by the world of commodities. To over-

---

<sup>118</sup> Slater, P., The Pursuit of Loneliness, Boston: Beacon Press, 1970; p. 85.

come the difference between one's own body and the imaginary body, one must consume the appropriate commodity. The body is broken down into a plethora of "needy" parts: mouth, underarms, skin, hair, teeth, stomach, head/brain, arms, legs, and so on. In code-like fashion, to each needy part corresponds a commodity, e.g., for the mouth, mouthwash; for underarms, deodorant; for skin, beauty creams, for the hair, shampoo; for the teeth, toothpaste; for the stomach, processed food; for the head/brain, drugs; for the arms, tools; for the feet, vehicles, and so on; commodities that appear to make their respective domains of the body more closely approximate the ideal. The range of needy parts appears identical with the range of possible commodities, while the nature of the object becomes largely a function of the psychic states of those who desire it.

### 3.21

Each needy human body part operates as a kind of "desiring machine".<sup>119</sup> Each desiring machine must consume an endless stream of specific commodities to keep functioning and produce an exchange value, e.g., the mouth must consume breath mints to produce sweet smelling breath that can be exchanged for sex, jobs, family harmony, etc.. Machines cannot be self-reliant; they demand a flow of exchange values through systems of exchange interconnecting all other desiring machines. Advertising attempts to root out self-

<sup>119</sup> see Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F., The Anti-Oedipus, New York: Viking, 1977.

sufficient aspects of the body and expose them as anachronistic, maladaptive, inefficient, etc., producing such ill effects as halitosis, underarm odor, acne, dandruff, and so on. By turning each part of the body into a desiring machine every aspect of life becomes commoditized. Ewen writes: "You don't make friends, your smile "wins" them; your embellished hair, and not you, is beautiful."<sup>120</sup> Your Ultrabrite smile is exchanged for friends, your Lilt permanent for sex. "As the ads intimated that anything natural about the consumer was worthless or deplorable, and tried to make him schizophrenically self-conscious of that notion, they offered weapons by which even people with bad breath, enlarged nose pores, corned feet, and other such maladies could eclipse themselves and 'succeed'."<sup>121</sup>

### 3.22

The striving after an exemplary normative state creates a hierarchy structured by the degrees to which individuals succeed in attaining the exemplary states. This hierarchy fosters a kind of "invidious individualism". Veblen uses the term "invidious" to describe a comparison of persons by grading or rating them with respect to relative worth or value. For Veblen, "with the growth of settled industry, the possession of wealth gains in relative importance and effectiveness as a customary basis of repute and esteem,"

<sup>120</sup> Ewen, S., Captains of Consciousness, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976; p. 49.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., pp. 47-8.

emulation being the prime motivation for ownership.<sup>122</sup> (See for example the Deere commercial par. 1.13) Baudrillard argues that "an object is not an object of consumption unless it is released from its psychic determination as symbol; from its functional determinations as instrument, from its commercial determinations as product; and thus liberated as a sign to be recaptured by the formal logic of fashion, i.e., by the logic of differentiation."<sup>123</sup> Thus in the Deere lawn mower commercial the mower's importance lies in the elevated status it endows its user with in invidious comparison with his neighbor. Every commodity finds its meaning in relation to other commodities, according to a hierarchical code of differences. This hierarchical code gets interiorized by the individual consumer who measures his status through the commodity-signs he consumes. "Through objects, each individual and each group searches out his place in an order, all the while trying to jostle this order according to a personal trajectory. Through objects a stratified society speaks and, if like the mass media, objects seem to speak to everyone (there are no longer by right any caste objects), it is in order to keep everyone in a certain place."<sup>124</sup>

---

<sup>122</sup> Veblen, T., The Portable Veblen, New York: Viking Press, 1948; p. 77.

<sup>123</sup> Baudrillard, J., For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981; p. 67.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

## 3.23

The consciousness of the consumerist subject acts as a screen upon which commercials project a world of hierarchically valued objects. But the projections get inversely appropriated; the individual believes he freely projects valuations on the objects. Such an effect gives the appearance of individuals engaged in the free construction of their essence as cultural subjects. The essence of the individual appears constituted by his conscious choices of consumption. His everyday choices between Pepsi and Coke, Ford and Chevrolet, Burger King and McDonalds, determines at each moment his nature, a nature free and spontaneous, constantly changing.

## 3.24

Unlike the consumerist, the Puritan-type personality conducted his life in a consistent fashion motivated by his inner ideals. He was preoccupied with preserving his identity, true to the idea of the ethical. The consumerist looks for structural realization in external codes of significations and invidious values. He constructs a flexible identity, according to changing tastes and spontaneous desires. Kant in comparison with the Puritan-type personality, would call the consumerist individual a "pathologically determined self", acting purely out of desire and inclination.<sup>125</sup> Such a self does not try to establish its actions on universal

<sup>125</sup> Kant, E., Critique of Practical Reason, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merril, 1956; p. 77.

laws, but instead strives to give its desires priority and to make them acceptable as first and original claims. "This propensity to make the subjective determining ground of one's choice into an objective determining ground of the will in general can be called self-love."<sup>126</sup> The Puritan-type personality, on the other hand, perceived his actions as determined by universally rational and objectively moral laws. For the Puritan, reason is the determining ground of his autonomous will. The consumerist, however, bases his actions on singular as opposed to universal nonconceptual judgements of taste.<sup>127</sup> He does not have an understanding of why he acts, but can only describe the states of consciousness that compelled him to act. "Oh, I liked the taste of that better!" says the woman making a taste test. The consumerist individual relinquishes the function of understanding to bureaucratic institutions such as science, the government, the media, medicine, and so on. He accepts the state he is in at the moment as natural, choosing external objects as suggestors of his inner problematical states.<sup>128</sup>

## 3.25

---

<sup>126</sup> Idem.

<sup>127</sup> Kant, E., Critique of Judgement, New York: Hafner Press, 1951; p. 47.

<sup>128</sup> Zilberman, D., "Semantic Shift in Epic Composition", unpublished manuscript; p. 3.

Ultimately in consumerist society the individual finds his identity in the group -- invidious individualism gives way to massive individualism, the most rational expression of the consumerist way of thinking, the unity of the universal and the single.<sup>129</sup> The individual feels united to the group by the fact that he is buying the same type of commodities as everyone else in the group, e.g., the "Pepsi Generation", the "Coffee Achievers", and so on. A commodity must be owned, because others in the group one identifies with already have it. It is experienced from the point of view of the person as Other, with his reactions and judgements adapted to the reactions and judgements which he anticipates in the others of the group.<sup>130</sup> "Those who have not yet bought the acclaimed commodity experience isolation, a feeling of 'being out of touch' with a community project in which everyone appears spontaneously involved."<sup>131</sup>

## 3.26

One's reference group appears to the individual to embody a certain strategy of consumption that expresses his identity. Each group identity appears to stand in opposition to all other group identities, e.g., Micheal Jackson types vs. Atom Ant types, "yuppies" vs. punks vs. "new agers". Each

<sup>129</sup> cf. Hegel, G. W. F., Philosophy of Right, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976; pp. 154-160.

<sup>130</sup> Hayim, G., The Existential Sociology of Jean-Paul Sartre, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980; p. 130.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

group values its own style of consuming, while rejecting other group styles. The individual moves freely through different group styles, choosing now one style, now another, marking stages of the individual's life. In general, "normal" consumers are individuals who identify themselves with the law of obedience to the course of things -- finding their happiness in their access to the totality of consumption.<sup>132</sup> They are made happy by commodities, delighted by their concrete differences; eager to define themselves by their code.

## 3.27

Thus we can speak of the ideal consumers who, having accomplished their tasks during the day, their burdens laid down, sit in their plastic upholstered reclining chairs by their color television sets with video recorders, eating Waist-watchers frozen dinners, heated in their time saving microwave ovens, their figures trim and youthful, holding a can of Pepsi, the choice of a new generation, in Ivory Liquid soft hands, their body smelling of flowers or Irish Spring, their mouth kissing fresh, their polyester whites, whiter than white. Meanwhile, the television networks send out waves across the land illuminating millions of living rooms while the beings who are lit up and illumined by this Great Illumination of Rays all become fixed on perfect consumer behavior.<sup>133</sup>

---

<sup>132</sup> Debord, G., op. cit., par. 61.

## 3.28

The psycho-physiological and individualized mental processes within the consumer's body, together with their counterparts in the cultural schemata of the commercial, appear as the transformed, "covering" form for the content of the socially practiced constructive thinking that generates consumerist social-relations. It is a kind of "dividual" as opposed to "individual" thinking manifested objectively and impersonally, materialized as the entire system of consumerist culture.<sup>134</sup> We can investigate the structure of this way of thinking as it is constituted at the intersection of semiotical pragmatism and the making of commercials. Semiotical pragmatism, as developed by Peirce and Morris, is the leading theoretical discipline underlying the practice of advertising.

## 3.29

Morris defines the basic terms of semiotics as follows: "Semiosis (or sign process) is regarded as a five term relation -- V, W, X, Y, Z -- in which V sets up in W the disposition to react in a certain kind of way, X to a certain kind of object, Y (not then acting as a stimulus) under certain conditions, Z."<sup>135</sup> This behavioral theory of signs cor-

<sup>133</sup> see Conze, E., translator, The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975; pp. 37-39.

<sup>134</sup> Zilberman, D., "Hindu System of Thought as Epistemic Disciplines"; p. 25.

<sup>135</sup> Sargent, Frontiers of Advertising Theory and Research,

responds to what many introductory textbooks explain as the process of advertising.<sup>136</sup> To induce the audience to buy the advertiser's product, i.e., to make the audience disposed to react in a certain way to a certain object, the advertiser must encode his message about the product so as to produce a favorable "expectation" about the nature of the product. Other introductory texts describe the creation of an appropriate "frame of mind" in the consumer towards the product.<sup>137</sup> The goal is to create favorable attitudes which will lead to favorable results. We have discussed this above as the structuration of states of consciousness in the consumer, but here we wish to locate the theoretical activity behind the structuring of states.

### 3.30

We shall locate the fivefold elements of semiosis in Scoundrel commercial (see 1.2). The commercial text as a whole operates as the V term. It attempts to set up in the interpreter, W, i.e., the spectator, the disposition to react to Y, i.e., Scoundrel perfume, in a certain way X. The primary reaction it would attempt to induce in W would be to buy Y. But it also embeds in the perfume certain qualities as expectations, e.g., that the perfume will exude sophistica-

---

Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1977; pp. 113-115.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., and see Boyd and Levy, Promotion: A Behavioral View, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1977; p. 17.

<sup>137</sup> Littlefield and Kirkpatrick, Advertising, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970.

tion and sexiness, thus producing in the wearer a feeling of sophistication and sexiness, while someone perceiving the perfume on the wearer would react to the wearer as if the wearer were more sophisticated and sexy.

## 3.31

We must go to Peirce to discover the origins of Morris's semiotics, so as to unpack his five-fold scheme. For Peirce, "a sign stands for something to the idea which it produces or modifies. Or, it is a vehicle conveying into the mind something from without. That for which it stands is called object; that which it conveys, its meaning; and that which it gives rise, its interpretant."<sup>138</sup> A sign is "anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its objects) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign and so on ad infinitum."<sup>139</sup> All cognition is of the nature of signs, i.e., a thought is a sign of some belief. Each sign must be interpreted by a thought and therefore every sign must be interpreted as another sign.<sup>140</sup> "Intelligent" consciousness must enter into the infinite series of signs interpreting signs. "If the series of successive interpretants comes to an end, the sign is thereby rendered imperfect, at

---

<sup>138</sup> Peirce, C.S., Collected Papers, Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1965; par. 1.334.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., par. 2.303

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., par. 7.356, and par. 5.253.

least."<sup>141</sup> Indeed, according to Peirce's definition of sign the thing itself is a sign -- a representamen functioning only by giving rise to an interpretant.<sup>142</sup> Peircian semiotics approaches the original goal of our bracketing procedure -- the transforming of phenomena into non-phenomena, i.e., into purely significational, experience-free constructions.

## 3.32

In fact, for Peirce even emotional or feeling states are signs. "Everything in which we take the least interest creates in us its own emotion, however slight this may be. This emotion is a sign and a predicate of the thing. Now, when a thing resembling this thing is presented to us, a similar emotion arises: hence we infer the latter is like the former."<sup>143</sup> For Peirce, the content of consciousness, i.e., the entire phenomenal manifestation of mind, is a sign resulting from inference.<sup>144</sup>

## 3.33

Peirce identifies three types of signs -- icons, indices, and symbols. Any pattern rich in content that can be used as an image or paradigm to identify some structure is an icon. For example, a mathematical formula or a model of

---

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., par. 2.303.

<sup>142</sup> Derrida, J., Of Grammatology, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976; p. 49.

<sup>143</sup> Peirce, C.S., op. cit., par. 3.308.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., par. 3.313.

some chemical substance is an icon if we can identify the properties of our experiences of the substance through the formula or model. An icon represents its object mainly by its similarity to it. For Peirce the propositional structure of the sentence iconically reflects the qualitative features of nature.

## 3.331

An index functions as a sign by pointing, as it were, toward its referent, indicating what to do with the thing. It directs its attention towards its referent and is therefore situationally dependent. For example, a weathercock is an index of the direction of the wind which moves it. Medical symptoms also function as indexical signs. Whereas the iconic function of language enables the cognition of qualitative features, the indexical function in language is the semiotic precondition for the identification of individual objects in the context of cognition.

## 3.332

The symbol has an arbitrary or conventional relation to its referent, neither resembling it or having an existential bond with it. A symbol's meaning is not fixed but is dependent on the context of its use. The word, although at times functioning iconically or indexically, predominately operates symbollically. Its non-specified meaning enables different controversial interpretations. Its meaning can only be discovered in a dialogue.

## 3.34

The iconic, indexical, and symbolic functioning of signs becomes relevant to cognition only by being integrated into intersubjective process of making logical inferences about the world within a community.<sup>145</sup> Signs represent social habits. Habits are the "ultimate logical interpretants" of all signs. For Peirce the best way, therefore, to define the concepts or beliefs a sign conveys is to describe the habit it is calculated to produce. A habit is the tendency to act "in a way describable in general terms upon every occasion (or upon a considerable portion of occasions that may present itself of a generally describable character)."<sup>146</sup> Here we have arrived at the genetic structure of the consumerist way of thinking: all presentations of natural significance for the individual, i.e., the beliefs, habits, norms, etc., of cultural life, are represented as systems of signs.

When a person is said to act upon a certain belief the meaning is that his actions have a certain consistency; that is to say, that they possess a certain intellectual unity. But this implies that they are interpreted in the light of thought. So that even if belief is a direct motive to action it is still a belief only because that action is interpretable again. And thus the intellectual character of beliefs at least is dependent upon the capability of the endless translation of sign into sign.<sup>147</sup>

## 3.35

---

<sup>145</sup> Apel, K.-O., Charles S. Peirce, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981; p. 111.

<sup>146</sup> Peirce, C.S., op. cit., par. 5.538.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., par. 7. 357.

For Peirce, beliefs about the world are in constant evolutionary flux, propelled by doubt towards a "final opinion". The criterion for having reached the ultimate opinion would be the correspondence of beliefs with the results of actions. Such a normative ideal character of truth militates against any possible form of relativism in experience. "Truth is neither more nor less than that character of a proposition which consists in this, that belief in the proposition would, with sufficient experience and reflection, lead us to such conduct as would tend to satisfy the desires we should then have.<sup>148</sup> As Apel points out, "The truth of a statement does not have to prove itself in specific practical contexts, nor can it in principle prove itself through such tests. But if certain conditions were fulfilled, it would prove to be true in a continuing tendency to satisfy our logically justified desires.<sup>149</sup> Reality must be defined as something futurefold, i.e., it must be made into the signs of future communications rested upon the normative ideal of the final opinion. Although Peirce would not say so, for he believed in the ontology of his final opinion, such an ideal would in fact be a place empty of all things -- a signless surreality, as it were.<sup>150</sup> The normative ideal stretches towards a signless infinity, since even

---

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., par. 5.375.

<sup>149</sup> Apel, K.-O., Op. Cit., p. 78.

<sup>150</sup> see Zilberman, D., "Is the Bodhissatva a Skeptic?" p. 20.

in Peirce's understanding the world is in constant flux, unknowable as a fixed, lawful structure.

## 3.36

Let us now return to the Scoundrel commercial to detect the Peircian semiotics working in its content. For Peirce, photographs are exactly like the objects they represent because they are "physically forced to correspond point by point to nature." In this respect photography and, therefore, film belong to the iconic class of signs. (As Barthes says, photos are iconic in the sense that they present a kind of "natural being there" of the object.)<sup>151</sup> Certainly the commercial is pervaded with iconic elements. In the Scoundrel commercial we are given a shot of the bottle of perfume against a black background -- a paradigm for the consumer to be able to identify an actual bottle of Scoundrel at the store. The standardized trappings of sensual elegance in the apartment constitute the iconic living space of a sophisticated and successful woman. The handsome, elegantly dressed middle aged man also personifies sophistication and success. Generally in commercials iconic elements are ever-present: e.g., the paradigm of the housewife in her spotless kitchen, the male provider in his suburban backyard with neatly mowed back lawn, big fence, and pool. Commercials present an endless array of standardized appearances, behaviors, and attributes all meant to iconically identify

<sup>151</sup> Barthes, R., Camera Lucida, New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.

normal consumers.

### 3.37

In commercials icons, indices, and symbols are amalgamated in nearly equal proportions becoming, what would be for Peirce, the most perfect of signs.<sup>152</sup> For Peirce symbols "come into development out of other signs, particularly from icons, or from mixed signs partaking of the nature of icons and symbols. We think only in signs."<sup>153</sup> Central to any commercial is the turning of the commodity into a symbol. Ivory Liquid is made to symbolize ordinary lust; the P.C. Junior, successful management; the Deere Rider mower, status; the Dodge, power and freedom, and so on. An introductory text on promotion states the following:

Communication is the essence of marketing, since everything the marketing man does ends up as a piece of communication. Products and their packages are definitely symbols and as such carry all kinds of connotations...For communication to be effective the source must get the attention of the receiver, employ symbols which the receiver understands, arouse needs, and suggest a solution which is compatible with the situation in which the receiver finds himself.<sup>154</sup>

### 3.38

As we have seen, these symbols seek to grab and "temper" the consciousness of the individual, such that the psychical subjectivity of the consumer acquires the normative struc-

<sup>152</sup> Wollen, P. Signs and Meaning in the Cinema, London: Secker and Warbug, 1969; p. 142.

<sup>153</sup> Peirce, C.S., op. cit., par. 2.302.

<sup>154</sup> Boyd and Levy, op. cit., p. 22.

ture represented by the significance of the symbolically charged commodities.<sup>155</sup> Actions of the individual ideally become projections of these symbols, conforming to the meanings embedded in commodities. These meanings are represented in commercials as habitual responses to commodities. Thus Scoundrel perfume is displayed as inciting habitual responses of sexual arousal. These responses to the commodities appear to adhere to the commodities as qualities.<sup>156</sup>

## 3.39

As commercial images become more pervasive in consumerist society, partially present in all forms of social interactions, as a means of their institutionalization, reproduction, socialization, and ontological confirmation, their meaning as signs intends to approach Peirce's definition of truth. As the consumerist's psyche is structured to a greater and greater extent by a symbolically overlaid world of things, expectations "tend" to conform to actual events in social settings. Thus if a woman "believes" her wearing of Scoundrel will arouse and attract a man, and if a man happens along who "believes" that the fragrance of Scoundrel is arousing and attractive, then the sign of Scoundrel will satisfy their logically justified desires. The two come together through a kind of "sympathetic attraction". For

---

<sup>155</sup> See Zilberman, D., "Semantic Shift in Epic Composition". and see again Sartre, J.-P., *op. cit.*, p. 56.

<sup>156</sup> Cf., Baudrillard, J., The Mirror of Production, St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975; p. 128.

Peirce evolution tends to develop from a state of conflict and struggle to a state of concord through "sympathetic attraction". He calls this agapastic evolution, from the Greek word agape, meaning the mutual sympathy or attraction of things toward one another. Such a normative state, of course, is only intended by the commercial text and not actually obtainable.

## 3.40

In consumerist society the individual's self becomes the place of "semiurgical manipulation", of "structural simulation".<sup>157</sup> Both the intentional object and the immediate activity of intending by consciousness are controlled in their very emergence by semiotical means. Through the process of representing norms by signs, the norms themselves are idealized, i.e., made into mere ideal forms, imaginary states that come to orient the force of desire as the individual strives after them. Whereas the Protestant attempted to push normativity out of social consciousness, the consumerist individual strives after ever changing normative ideals (such as the ideal of ordinary lust). These ideals are generated by signs that, as Baudrillard points out, no longer refer to anything at all -- they refer back to other signs. "And, whereas the traditional sign (also in linguistic exchanges) is the object of a conscious investment, of a rational calculation of signifieds, here it is a code that

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Baudrillard, J., The Mirror of Production, St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975; p. 128.

becomes the instance of absolute reference, and at the same time, the object of a perverse desire.<sup>158</sup>

## 3.41

The production of norms through semiotical means in consumerist society roots the individual in systems of ever increasing needs, derived from the logic of the code, the code of the sign-object. Through the reduction the phenomenologist attempts to bracket these ever changing semiotically produced norms as unreal products of the "natural attitude", by "disconnecting" or putting them "out of action" as relative, non-essential structures of his consciousness.<sup>159</sup> The phenomenologist relinquishes the ability to treat these norms as social facts related to his personal intention. They are perceived to "exist" only in the mind of the cultural subject as states of consciousness maintained by habit. Thus the phenomenologist can treat these changing facts of consciousness in terms of semiotical relations between one "mind born" norm and another, i.e., between two mutually signifying concepts. Then he can deconstruct them, as we have done, clearing them from his own consciousness to get back to the so-called "pure subjectivity".

## 3.42

---

<sup>158</sup> Idem.

<sup>159</sup> see Husserl, E., Ideas, New York: Collier Books, 1962; pp. 96-8.

But the phenomenologist can perform an even more radical reduction by clearing his consciousness of his own theoretical interests. To accomplish this he must recognize his own cognitive efforts as forms of cultural activity necessarily limited in their understanding. In fact the phenomenological project of re-presenting the Being of consciousness by signs<sup>160</sup> appears isomorphic with the way of thinking of the consumerist individual. The consumerist society represents the beginnings of a new civilizational type developing in response to the crisis of over production brought on by the religious zeal of the Puritan work ethic. On the surface the new type appears even more tied to commodity fetishism than the classical capitalist society it is moving away from. But as Baudrillard discovered, this fetishism of the commodity is now the fetishism "of a product emptied of its concrete substance of labor and subjected to another type of labor, a labor of signification, that is, of coded abstraction...."<sup>161</sup> Consumerist society, although born in an orgy of materialistic production and consumption, contains within it the germ of the phenomenological reduction. Already commodity fetishism has been rendered a purely signification cultural activity. It is in the natural course of the phenomenological mind to trace its signification acts back to pure subjectivity, back to a place empty of all things -- a

<sup>160</sup> See Derrida, J., Speech and Phenomena, Evanston: Northwestern University Press; 1973.

<sup>161</sup> Baudrillard, J., For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, p. 93.

signless, objectless surreality. This is indeed the strength and the hope of the new civilizational type; the trajectory of its future fruition and the way out of the simulated ecologies.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adorno, T.W., and M. Horkheimer, The Dialectic of Enlightenment, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.
- Apel, K.- O., Charles S. Peirce, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981.
- Bakhtin, M. M., Rabelais and His World, Cambridge: The M. I. T. Press, 1968. Barthes, R., Mythologies, New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.
- Barthes, R., Camera Lucida, New York: Hill and Wang, 1981.
- Baudrillard, J., The Mirror of Production, Cambridge: The M. I. T. Press, 1975.
- Baudrillard, J., For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign, St. Louis: Telos Press, 1981.
- Baudrillard, J., Simulations, New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.
- Bell, D., The Coming of Post Industrial Society, New York: Basic Books Inc., 1975.
- Bolter, J. D., Turing's Man, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984.
- Britz, R., The Edible City, Los Altos: William Kaufmann, Inc., 1981.
- Conze, E. (translator), The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975.
- Cronon, W., Changes in the Land, New York: Hill and Wang, 1983.
- Curan, J., "Communications, power, and social order", in Gurevich, M., et al, Culture, Society, and the Media, New York: Methuen, 1982.
- Debord, G., Society of the Spectacle, Detroit: Black and Red, 1977.
- Deleuze, G., and F. Guattari, The Anti-Oedipus, New York: Viking, 1977.
- Derrida, J., Speech and Phenomena, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973.

- Derrida, J., Of Grammatology, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- Derrida, J., "Signature Event Context", in Glyph I, 1977.
- Durkheim, E., The Rules of Sociological Method, New York: The Free Press, 1938.
- Ellul, J., The Technological Society, New York: Vintage Books, 1964.
- Ewen, S., Captains of Consciousness, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976.
- Ewen, S. and E. Ewen, Channels of Desire, New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1982.
- Foucault, M., The History of Sexuality, New York: Vintage Books, 1978.
- Gorz, A., Ecology as Politics, Boston: South End Press, 1980.
- Hayim, G., "Modern -Reality Strategies: An Analysis of Weber, Freud, and Ellul", in Human Studies, Vol. 1, Number 4, October 1978.
- Hayim, G., The Existential Sociology of Jean-Paul Sartre, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980.
- Hegel, G. W. F., Philosophy of Right, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976.
- Hegel, G. W. F., Phenomenology of Spirit, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Husserl, E., Ideas, New York: Collier Books, 1962.
- Illich, I., Energy and Equity, New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1974.
- Illich, I., Shadow Work, Boston: Marion Boyers, 1981.
- Illich, I., "Vernacular Values", in Kumer, S. (edit.), The Schumacher Lectures, New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1981.
- Kant, E., Critique of Judgement, New York: Hafner Press, 1951.
- Kant, E., Critique of Practical Reason, Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1956.
- Lackner, B.K., The Eleventh-century Background of Citeaux, Washington: Cistercian Publications, 1972.

- Leiss, W., The Limits of Satisfaction, Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1976.
- Leiss, W., and S. Kline, "Advertising, Needs, and 'Commodity Fetishism'", in Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, Vol. 2: No. 1, 1978.
- Littlefield, and Kirkpatrick, Advertising, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970.
- Lotman, J., Semiotics of Cinema, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1976.
- Lyotard, J.-F., The Post Modern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1984.
- Mamardashvili, M. K., Forms and Content of Thinking, Moscow, 1968.
- Mander, J., Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television, New York: Quill, 1979.
- Marx, K., Grundrisse, New York: Vintage Books, 1973.
- Marx, K., Capital Vol. I, New York: Vintage Books, 1977.
- Merton, R. K., Social Theory and Social Structure, New York: The Free Press, 1968.
- O'Flaherty, W. D., Asceticism and Eroticism in the Mythology of Siva, London: Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Peirce, C.S., Collected Papers, Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1965.
- Piatigorsky, A., The Buddhist Philosophy of Thought, London: Curzon Press, 1984.
- Postman, N., The Disappearance of Childhood, New York: Delacorte Press, 1982.
- Radin, P., The Trickster, Schocken Books, 1956.
- Sahlins, M., Stone Age Economics, Chicago: Aldine Atherton Inc., 1972.
- Sahlins, M., Culture and Practical Reason, Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976.
- Sargent, Frontiers of Advertising: Theory and Research, Palo Alto: Pacific Books, 1977.
- Sartre, J.-P., The Transcendence of the Ego, New York: The Noonday Press, 1957.

- Schedrovitsky, "Methodological Problems of Systems Research", in General Systems, 1966, Vol. II.
- Shepard, P., Nature and Madness, San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1982.
- Slater, P., The Pursuit of Loneliness, Boston: Beacon Press, 1970.
- Srinivas, M.N., Social Change in Modern India, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971.
- Staal, J.F., "Sanskrit and Sanskritization", in Journal of Asian Studies, Vol. XXII, No. 3, 1963.
- Ulmer, G.L., "The Object of Post-Criticism" in The Anti-Aesthetic, Foster, H. ed., Port Townsend: Bay Press, 1983.
- Veblen, T., The Portable Veblen, New York: Viking Press, 1948.
- Vitkin, M., "Nature, History, and Society", unpublished manuscript.
- Weber, M., The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.
- Weizenbaum, J., Computer Power and Human Reason, New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1976.
- Wolff, K., Surrender and Catch, Boston: Reidel, 1976.
- Wollen, P., Signs and Meaning in the Cinema, London: Secker and Warbug, 1969.
- Zilberman, D., "The Birth of Meaning", unpublished manuscript.
- Zilberman, D., "Hindu Systems of Thought as Epistemic Disciplines", unpublished manuscript.
- Zilberman, D., "Is the Bodhisattva a Skeptic?", unpublished manuscript.
- Zilberman, D., "Semantic Shifts in Epic Composition", unpublished manuscript.
- Zilberman, D., Toward an Understanding of Cultural Traditions, unpublished manuscript.
- Zilberman, D., "Understanding Cultural Traditions as Types of Thinking", unpublished manuscript.