Rhetoric and Advertising

Introduction

In our day and age many reputable scholars consider that rhetoric has flourished with unrivalled success in the world of advertising. They believe that with the decline of rhetoric’s authentic tradition\(^1\) the modern application of its long-standing impact (e.g. as ‘manipulation’) is clearly found within the field of advertising. As a matter of fact, this has been the theoretical and empirical approach taken up by scholars for the past three decades. For example, Linder claims that persuasion not only serves society well as a whole, but also claims that in reality consumers “want to be persuaded” (e.g. as fast as possible due to the pressure of time), implying that perhaps they “want” to be manipulated (p.73).\(^2\) Others, such as Mander, point out that advertising, especially within television technology, fosters persuasion and manipulation rather than critical thinking. Hall believes that information as a dominant element in advertising is undermined due to persuasion (see below in section II). Andren et al. contend that there is an essential difference between non-rational influences that depend on persuasion, and rational influences that depend on argumentation.\(^3\) Argumentation, in their view, functions in favour of the public’s and consumption’s interest, whereas persuasion doesn’t. They claim that rhetoric in advertising doesn’t contain sufficient information and overestimate that it “doesn’t serve either the consumer’s or the public’s interest” (p. 112).

I want to avoid taking such a limited view of rhetoric, precisely when it is incorporated in an investigation describing advertising as an object of reference reflecting the diversity of forms in our so-called “postmodern” era. In other words, I don’t want to overlook rhetorical processes in other social environments with other types of socio-political force. A basic social factor in our present era, as we will see below, is the mutual influence between advertising – as an

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\(^1\) From ancient Greece to the 19th century rhetoric’s pedagogical tradition consisted in the teaching of discourse usually of a forensic, political and religious content, designed for public display and was acknowledged as a species of speech with a clear interceding aim within political and social actions. See Kennedy (1980).

\(^2\) Baudrillard also propounds this position. See below in VI.

\(^3\) Postman also propounds this position. See below in VIII.
institutionalized practice of profit making and symbolization – and the cultural practices of consumers. My position is that advertising in fact ‘persuades,’ ‘manipulates,’ ‘informs’ (and I would add ‘provokes our critical thinking’), but without the unconditional and inconsistent manner cited by these scholars. That is because advertising operates, by all intents and purposes, as an unanticipated and arbitrary consequence in the life-world.

I shall maintain in this chapter that advertising is a multifaceted text shaped and structured through a semiotic process that can be perceived in a penetrating way with the aid of the art of rhetoric (τέχνη ρητορικής). With this approach one can grasp that the distinguishing characteristics of advertising as a communicative act involves “trial and error”; in other words, advertisers fabricate, produce and transmit a creation (i.e. a ‘brain-child’) in which it isn’t entirely certain that it will influence the public with the desired impact they have been aiming for (i.e. to sell the specific product). However, there is a corollary of their effort which consists of a possible influence their creations may have on the public’s cultural practices: namely, to shape and eventually guide acquisitive impulses as a dominant ideology that leads each of us in our pursuit of available goods, or of our consumer fantasies in general. A basic problem that has been overlooked by the aforementioned critics – with regard to persuasion and information – is that advertising consists of a condensed and fleeting fabrication in which the essential components needed to compose argumentation or information seems impossible to develop flawlessly as most advertising people ultimately desire. Consequently, advertising should be viewed in the light of style and appearance, whereby encoded elements of a constructed reality chiefly stir up feelings (e.g. the rhetorical notion of pathos), which are, indeed, unanticipated and arbitrary!

In the first place, we should take into account the fact that contemporary society is fragmented into a constellation of classes, religions, age groups, mainstreams and subcultures, sexualities, races and ethnic minorities who as entrenched entities – representing a particular lifestyle – are distinctly differentiated and can occasionally be in conflict with each other in various

4 Postman has the same problem. See discussion below in section VIII.
manifestations of daily life. This is the constellation of social groups in which each one embraces particular convictions/ideologies and where, willy-nilly, each partakes in conducting a struggle for the management of meaning as a springboard for communicative action. The course of this struggle is located within the multidimensional life-world of late capitalism; in other words, in a space-time continuum that is distinguished for its abundant contradictory and conflicting cultural codifications. This is the postmodern era where, as Lyotard indicates, “one listens to reggae, watches a western, eats at MacDonald’s food for lunch and local cuisine for dinner, wears Paris perfume in Tokyo and ‘retro’ clothes in Hong Kong; knowledge is a matter for TV games.”\(^5\) Even though there has prevailed in certain circles the view that modern society is conditioned by a propensity towards homogenization – (and in fact it “appears” that the dominating forces behind consumption-practices have pursued such a state of affairs) – there doesn’t seem to be any doubt that this view can no longer hold water. This is so because the existing, multidimensional life-world is, above all, dependent on the multiculturalism found in advanced Western societies. For this reason companies and advertisers target particular social groups in their effort to fulfil their set goals. Moreover, the postmodern era is characterized by a new phase of product fetishism; by the fascination with images; by the process of the cultural, political or existential fragmentation within the global crisis; by the de-centring of the subject; by the sense of abandonment (e.g. the feeling of being ou-topos [no-place]), etc. In this way, advertisers exploit the existence of these characteristics for obvious reasons, which means that many people as vulnerable recipients (i.e. decoders) are lured to identify with the marked symbolization of various goods and products. As Williamson notes: “instead of being identified by what they produce, people are made to identify themselves with what they consume (p. 13) [and] the economic and political world as it exists at present depends for its survival upon keeping its participants fragmented” (p. 53, my emphasis).\(^6\)

Today the life-world has been “wired” to the hilt via the Mass Media – but especially more intensely through cyberspace – which has resulted in a barrage of

\(^6\) Even though this passage was written in 1978 there doesn’t seem to be any changes in this situation.
disconnected but fanciful messages. Hence, a phenomenon has emerged which consists of a disparate dissemination of information ensconced mostly in media ‘infotainment’; and where the commercialization of practically everything has held its ground mainly through the contribution of advertising. Information and ideas, to a major extent, are conveyed by means of advertising through style and appearance – a constructed “surface” that enhances a pure spectacle. To be sure, the spectacle is offered for purchase! It isn’t surprising that today’s so-called postmodern era has been characterized as an era of ‘mega-spectacles’\(^7\) that clearly derives from the relentless commercialization of innumerable objects (or of simulacra).

Advertising – which imparts calculated meanings that enhance an ostensible “hale and hearty reality” – is addressed to the aforementioned social groups based on demographic and psychographic parameters. The case in point is that the rhetorical process that shapes advertising lies in a type of specialization that idealizes (e.g. through a flashy art-form) the prearranged message projected by the mass media. This is accomplished not only with the ultimate goal of persuasion, but mainly with the inculcation of perceptions and attitudes that will induce one to adopt conspicuous and vicarious consumption. This doesn’t mean that we must unconditionally accept the preferred reading\(^8\) of what the advertisers project and insinuate. Furthermore, it also means that we shouldn’t dispute those views (many times well-intentioned and forceful) that regard what the mass media dishes out – along with advertisements – as primarily consisting in ignominious manipulation and/or the quashing of our critical thinking. As we shall see further below, things are more complex. Besides, rhetoric as a communicative act manifests itself in various social acts and challenges us to regard its importance as a social order of discourse.\(^9\) The ‘social order’ is structured in various spheres of social action and practices such as, for example, advertising. However, with the notion of ‘order of discourse’ we can observe from a particular angle the singular practices in the social domain that structures the various types of discourse, such as conversations, interviews, dialogues.

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\(^7\) See Best and Kellner (p. 226-242) for an excellent description of mega-spectacles.
\(^8\) See Hall (1980) for his discussion of ‘dominant’, ‘negotiated’ and ‘oppositional’ readings.
between doctors and patients, etc.\(^\text{10}\) A type of discourse which is a determinant of action with widespread effects is generally defined as \textit{rhetoric}. Since advertising is a practice that exercises commercial and cultural authority in the social environment, I shall attempt to clarify how it is linked with \textit{rhetoric}.

Before I begin dealing with the major themes of this chapter, I shall give an account of the faultfinders and then of the supporters of advertising; and later partially sketch the institutional workings of advertising as ‘problematic’ (section I). Moreover, a plausible access to the ‘problematic’ sphere will continue as I depict the link between the creation of the ad as a \textit{rhetorical motive} along with its cultural repercussions; and, as a first move, there will be a mapping of the \textit{rhetoric of advertising} with the further aim of carrying out a substantial discussion (II). Using, as a second move, Aristotelian theory as a valid explication, we shall see that the \textit{rhetorical process} – as a basic component of communication – vitalizes advertising (III). A crucial position that I shall develop is that advertising thrives as a genre within popular culture; hence, we shall see how individual cultural practices are consolidated through advertising (IV). Then, examining closely the discussion concerning \textit{postmodernism}, I shall briefly comment on Baudrillard’s ideas about advertising (V). Hence, I shall be in a better position to interpret the issue of the \textit{social imaginary} and the \textit{codes} of advertising (VI); and as the social codes that emerge from advertisements are described within a semiotic framework, I shall be able to link this issue with the rhetorical process in conjunction with Postman’s viewpoint concerning the postmodern era (VII). One of the most significant theoretical positions in the present chapter will be the development of my own notion of what I call the \textit{rhetorical imaginary}, which I believe will clarify the particular practice wherein we notice the conspicuous expediency of how the thinking out and processing of the advertisement takes place (VIII). I will then finish the discussion analysing in detail select commercial and political advertisements (IX).

\(^{10}\) Fairclough (1989) explains in detail these types of discourse.
I. The Problem of Advertising

Advertising as a socio-economic phenomenon has invoked noteworthy debates that have tended to induce conflicting viewpoints. The historical development of these discussions has revealed that within this battle there is a division between two diametrically opposed camps, whereas, unfortunately, there is a lack of a more “centrist” position taken by well-known critics. From one side of the fence, these critics/researchers condemn advertising with asperity (e.g. covering almost the whole socio-political spectrum: whether conservatives, liberals, or Marxists), who argue in general terms that: 1) advertising diverts our attention from social and political problems and focuses on our personal needs and desires; 2) is sexist and basically uses women as sexual objects, exploiting their sexuality in order to sell products and services; 3) causes anxiety and self-pity in those who don’t have the money to enjoy the life (or lifestyle) that is portrayed as “normal” in advertisements; 4) usually deceives people in regards to what their expectations are of the products advertised; 5) teaches people to equate success with the purchase of a product and consequently instils in them the need to consume right and left as if it were the only means to gain personal happiness or socially acknowledged euphoria.

From the other side, the supporters of advertising argue that: 1) it pays for the magazines we read and the programs we watch (which would be far more expensive without the “generosity” of advertising); 2) reduces the cost of many products through the economies of scale; 3) provides consumers with invaluable information of products and services; 4) it may undertake to persuade people, but it can’t coerce anyone to do something one doesn’t want to do. Zotos briefly defines advertising – with a positive approach based on contemporary marketing principles – as follows:

11 A scholar who has managed to present in part a solid “centrist” position is Jib Fowles.
12 See Leiss et al. (p. 17): “advertising is assailed by conservative groups affiliated with the so-called Moral Majority for contributing to the moral breakdown of society because it presents images of hedonistic pleasure and draws upon overtly sexual themes to promote products.”
13 Galbraith argues that there are no “independently determined desires… to create desires – to bring into being wants that previously did not exist” (p. 141). He believes that advertisements coerce people to desire more and more things, which under normal conditions they wouldn’t desire.
14 See Leiss et al. (p. 18): “advertising is a manipulative tool, controlling the market by creating false needs in customers, and by extolling a general ethos of consumption whereby all needs come to be fulfilled through the purchase of goods in the marketplace.”
“Advertising – as form and content – simultaneously projects messages to many receivers (buyers, consumers) and tries to: a) persuade them by presenting characteristics, qualities, comparative advantages of the product; b) inform them and to let them know something about the product; c) construct and shape the product’s image; d) form a positive attitude for the product; e) differentiate the product and make known its special features; f) project and present a positive image of the company or organization.” (p. 39)

At first sight, advertising appears to be an enigma. Billions of dollars are spent worldwide each year for advertising, and society’s most brilliant minds are employed in it (and receiving bountiful salaries). However, advertising executives have difficulty trying to prove that they are doing anything completely essential! As one executive confessed: “Probably half the money people spend on advertising is wasted… but nobody knows which half” (Berger, p. 325). As Leiss et al. state “advertisers cannot risk not advertising, even though they can never be entirely sure it is worth the money” (p. 40). However, advertising agencies have to persuade their clients that advertising is effectual; though, when they are asked by parliamentary committees or consumer watchdog groups what they do, they tend to argue that what they do is minimal!

Although no one is absolutely certain how advertising works as a whole, there seems to be a general feeling that advertising campaigns are necessary and that they deserve the enormous costs needed to initiate their auspicious prospects. In spite of the general ambiguity that prevails with regards to the advertising agencies’ confiding of secrets – in other words, that advertising works in “mysterious” and “strange” ways and that its strength to shape our behaviour is scant – it doesn’t mean that advertising ceases to have a collective impact on the life-world and to have a decisive influence on us in general. Besides, industrialists and other agents wouldn’t spend so many billions just because they happen to be good Samaritans! (cf. Berger). Moreover, the companies’ disparagement of advertising’s power, as Berger states, “is generally an attempt to escape from regulation by governmental agencies and to escape from criticisms of being manipulative and, in some cases, anti-social, by consumer groups and other interested parties” (p. 326). Anyway, advertising, with its
pseudo-events,\textsuperscript{15} which it tends to concoct, gives the impression that it unscrupulously consolidates an institutional social behaviour where the value system is steered, in principle, by the desired acquisitiveness for goods that parade endlessly in front of our dazed eyes via the vehicle of advertisements.

\textbf{II. The aim of the present discussion}

Those scholars who thoroughly research the world of advertising cannot avoid referring to the thorny question of \textit{rhetoric}, even though in most cases they barely scratch its surface in their studies. Wernick, for example, concludes that advertising, even though joining elements of information and art belongs to “that special branch of communicative arts the ancient world called rhetoric” (p. 27). He considers that the “factual knowledge” that ads project, along with the “aesthetics” of their fabrication, play second fiddle as far as the “teleology of salesmanship” is concerned. In other words, it doesn’t matter whether advertisers use rational or irrational arguments: the ends that justify the means is that they “persuade potential customers that the publicized product or service is worth at least the price of purchase” (ibid.). Therefore, the main thing is the motive, and since the “teleology of salesmanship” is subject to the \textit{social order of discourse}, then the inevitable conclusion is that it is evidently entangled with what can be called \textit{the rhetoric of motives} (see Burke).\textsuperscript{16} Based on this assumption, it appears that the creators of advertisements devote themselves – perhaps even unconsciously – to \textit{the art of rhetoric}. Indeed, it is important to take into consideration the structural processes of the \textit{aim} of this social phenomenon, along with its consequences, since it overwhelms us on a daily basis. Hence, the inculcation of the basic elements of the art of rhetoric will help us to better comprehend the strategies and methods of how ads are formed and fashioned.

In this chapter, I want to broach the theme of understanding how advertising works within the domain of our mass culture as an \textit{ideological message by means of rhetorical dissemination}. At first sight this message is


simply an instrumental process: “You promote to sell” – via the message. However, the processes of social reproduction and control shouldn’t be seen in the light of its role as the social imaginary; namely, in the area in which the functioning of advertising as promotion leads it to making known in a lively way the principles, norms, goals and dreams of those who are the recipients of the message. According to Ewen, it isn’t surprising that advertisers have brought about “a conscious change in the psychic economy” (p. 79) inundating the market with intimations which has as its primary aim to stimulate people to buy products, so that they may be subject to something unforeseen as a social and psychological experience which was previously made unavailable to them. This happened because from the beginning of the 20th century advertisers unfailingly urged people to yearn for daily needs in order to “cash in” their innermost desires based on the acquisition of various products. However, this ‘experience,’ in principle, pertains to material objects that play an important role in the daily life of social interaction as symbols of prestige and economical status, apart from immediate survival needs. It is here that the correlation of this social and psychological experience with the notion of the social imaginary emerges as developed by Castoriadis. However, I shall expand Castoriadis’s notion and link it with the term the rhetorical imaginary in section VIII.

Hall (1965) held that the prevalent tendency in modern advertising shifted from the presence of information to the imposition of persuasion, and that advertising today has both an economic and (mainly) cultural function. However, I should stress here that within modern rhetorical theory information is interdependent with persuasion as an objective. Hence, the shift of the “presence of information to the imposition of persuasion” is structurally latent as

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17 Castoriadis writes that “laws, institutions, morals, customs, language” consist of “collective creations.” Human societies “have without precedent command of a creative capacity. This creative capacity can be called the social imaginary” (p. 66). However, I am interested in how he develops the theme of obsession and desires (a theme that fits in with advertising): “What is mankind’s actuality? Is it obsession and desires? Yes, indeed it is. What constitutes the peculiarity of obsession and desires? It is precisely the fact that obsession and desires – love, glory, beauty, power, wealth – aren’t ‘natural’ but imaginary objects. Imagination, then, is the actuality of mankind” (p. 64), in Cornelius Castoriadis: “We are responsible for our history.” Interviews translated and edited by Teta Papadopoulou, Athens: Polis, 2000.

18 Bryant (1953), one of the most significant theorists of rhetoric in America during the mid 20th century, defined modern rhetoric as a “rational base of informative and persuasive discourse” (p. 7). Consequently, information, in principle, also includes at the same time the highly sought after motive of persuasion.
a springboard for the articulation of an ideological message. And as we shall see further below, the ideological message is ostensibly encoded both in an indiscernible way and also in a way that stands out as being quite “normal.” Hall finds that advertising occupies an eminent position as a system of meaning within the framework of mass cultural reality. Based on Hall’s observations, I shall advance the discussion and broach the issue wherein the relationship between advertising and social practices in the life-world not only revolves, as some believe, around the notion of manipulation, but also around the elevation of the management of meaning as a communicative act that emerges from cultural practices. Leiss et al. notice an important tendency that includes the transposition of communicative emphasis concerning the particular format of information about a product towards the format of information about the social and symbolic use of products. Therefore, advertising isn’t only an expensive venture in distributing goods, but rather an inextricable part of contemporary popular culture: in particular, “its creations appropriate and transform a vast range of symbols and ideas; its unsurpassed communicative powers recycle cultural models and references back through the networks of social interactions” (p. 5). In other words, people are socialized even when they are exposed to the endless projection of the unlimited semiosis of consumer goods (e.g. as codified object-signs) that, as emblematic symbols of fetishism and reification, circumscribe a dominant meaning system. The main point is that unlimited semiosis is triggered usually from media oversaturation and afterwards from the social interactivity of individuals. There is also a tendency where advertising focuses beyond the product, in and of itself, and beyond the needs and desires of consumers. As McAllister writes:

“Ads are not as much about the products as about the consumers – their likes, dislikes, aspirations and social anxieties. Advertisers ask, “what are the most desired values and goals of our customers, and what symbols can we use in our ads to represent these values and goals?” Advertising seeks symbolic control over the perceived

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19 Eco describes this term taken from Peirce: “a process of unlimited semiosis, which, paradoxical as it may be, is the only guarantee for the foundation of a semiotic system capable of checking itself entirely by its own means. Language would then be an auto-clarificatory system, or rather one which is clarified by successive systems of conventions that explain each other. Therefore, a sign is anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on ad infinitum” (2.300). Thus the same definition of the sign follows the process of unlimited semiosis (p. 113).
differentiation of a product by linking the product in the ad with something ‘outside’ the product: a socially desirable object or value for the audience. By symbolically placing the product with the object or some other icon representing the object or value (like Cindy Crawford for ‘hip’), advertisers hope that, through association, the audience will link the qualities of the object/value with the product.” (p. 53)

Indeed, consumer society has brought about a deep transformation of social life, thus producing a change where the previous functioning of goods that satisfied needs are now located within a broad range of the communication of symbolic meanings. Apart from the insistence of certain analysts concerning the issue of “manipulation,” advertising is still significantly marked by expediency that is sustained by the advertisers themselves. This entails, moreover, that the motive’s essence is spearheaded by rhetoric that contributes to the shaping and guidance of the management of meaning. However, as we shall see below, there are other factors that support the rhetorical/semiotic staging of advertising.

Finally, I also want to look into whether political advertising can be seen as participating within the same procedure that confirms it as belonging to the domain of popular culture – which is, I believe, a basic substratum of the life-world. The political spot, as we shall see, is ensconced within the spectrum of popular culture with formulas that allude to a conspicuous spectacle; and is familiar from the world of entertainment via the mass media. It is a commonplace notion that we are living in a transitional period in which traditional institutionalized democracy has evolved into a pseudo media democracy (see Meyer). In other words, if the ultimate goal of advertising (of a product or service) is to transmit a message whose expediency consists in a potential sale or in fortifying the consumer’s faith in brand loyalty, then this means that its goal is undoubtedly to persuade one – for the public’s sake – of the value of the image that is projected. Consequently, we must make it clear whether today’s politicians (or the political parties) “are forced” – due to the colonizing of traditional democracy by the media – to advertise their image using the same formulas as found within the contemporary domain of commercial advertising. And it doesn’t matter, in the final analysis, whether or not this is a sheer form of propaganda!
III. The rhetorical process as invention for advertising

It is quite evident that the art of rhetoric is teeming with inventiveness in various ways within the world of advertising. However, it isn’t at all a simple case that advertisements have a direct influence on the consumer when he or she decides to purchase a specific product. The encoder’s exhortation for the decoder to take direct action doesn’t seem to appear to hit its mark in practice.

As a communicative vehicle, advertising is ubiquitous, so much so that it has been estimated (see Berger, p. 321) that everyday the average person watches 100 televised commercials, hears 60 radio commercials, reads (or takes a quick glance at) 70 ads in magazines and 60 in newspapers. However, studies conducted in the USA have established that approximately 60% of adults are busy with other things when commercials are shown on TV and that fewer than 25% of viewers remember the commercial they saw the previous day (Schudson, p. 3). In Greece a study took place in the insert section ‘View’ from the Sunday Kathimerini in February 2002 (p. 33). The question posed was: “What do you usually do when commercials begin?” The individuals polled answered: “I go to the kitchen/WC” (6,3%); “I watch them” (6,5%); “I watch one or two and then start zapping to other channels” (20,6%); “I finish a chore that I left unfinished” (20,9%); “I immediately switch to another channel” (42,7%); “None of the above” (3%). Notice that the putative consumer doesn’t rush out to buy the advertised product that is highlighted, no matter how persuasive or fabulous it happens to be. As Schudson states: “Advertisements ordinarily work their wonders, to the extent that they work at all, on an inattentive audience” (p. 3). This doesn’t mean that ads aren’t efficacious, since they prove that perhaps they have enough influence for the mere reason that people don’t pay much attention to them! Then, why do most people try to ignore ads? Because it’s all about propaganda, and it’s apparent that simply each one of us realizes that it is.

Nevertheless, a basic aim of advertising is to inform the public of the “value” of a product or a service (see Zotos). Furthermore, information, in my opinion, incorporates dimensions that lead to rhetorical compromises that reveal
the particular information of having diverse expediencies. The fact that information must be codified and that it is composed of signs that designate the value of the product, renders the public susceptible to being drawn to these signs – especially if they are captivating. However, does the effect of codification (e.g. of information) belong to the fabrication of commodity-simulacra, a phenomenon that prevails within our so-called postmodern era as Baudrillard describes? (see below). For example, the information that shows the value of a Grand Cherokee doesn’t focus on what kind of jeep it is (e.g. use-value), but rather elevates it as a simulacrum that codifies an idealized prestige, which ends up being a potential fetish. Indeed, the ensuring of information can be seen better in the light of the codification of simulacra as far as the creation of advertisements are concerned.

I would now like to draw attention to the issue of ensuring information especially as it is found in its representation through language. I shall insist that persuasion by means of the rhetorical process doesn’t only centre on linguistic articulation/representation. Information is also encoded by means of the visual channel. As Leiss et al. stress, there is the case where “persuasive images have more of an impact in decision making, in affective opinion and in behaviour from linguistic expression” (p. 244). Consequently, the conceptual scheme of persuasion as a form of modern advertising implies how cultural elements of the communicative act that are shaped as images are thus able to mould consciences and attitudes. They can with subtlety establish certain forms of thought and attitudes while simultaneously blunting other thoughts and attitudes. The result, based on these parameters, is that there is a culture where images play a more important role than linguistic expression, since they have more emotional, associational and mythical impact. In this way we recognize how imposing an image a Grand Cherokee can be!

Despite the fact that our globalized social being is beleaguered by the unending flow of images and discourse from the media, I believe that there is another important dimension that prevails today: Is it possible that advertising isn’t just a medium that only prompts the fetishism and reification of consumption? Is it also partly an expedient outlet for it to be a medium of entertainment? (see Postman). I want to stress here that advertising as a creation belongs to the domain
of popular culture. The question that is posed is how much of our consumer society – that is related to the world of advertising and entertainment – reproduces dimensions of the rhetorical process.

Advertising is a creation intentionally constructed as a communicative means functioning as if it were a “mouthpiece” for the value of a specific product. If we take this as a “given,” it then becomes compatible with the conceptual scheme of the rhetorical process I want to develop. As Corbett states: “advertising, that vast, ubiquitous industry in 20th century life, is perhaps the best example of an activity that practices what Aristotle preached” (p. 42). For example, when we examine the rhetorical process, we must remember that it is found on three levels:

1) *speaker* / sender (encoder)

2) *logos* (discourse) / the creation

3) *audience* / recipient (decoder)

According to Aristotle’s theory, the *speaker* aspires to project his *ethos* as best as he can in an agreeable and favourable manner. Furthermore, the impact of the *logos* should stir up the *pathos* of the *audience*. Hence, the functional principle that advertisers aspire to establish becomes clearer: first and foremost they depend on the mass media (e.g. as a channel) to deliver an audience to them for selling purposes. In other words, the audience expends “leisure labour” that is realized during a particular time frame (e.g. free time), watching and decoding the *logos* (along with the image and sound) of ads (see Jhally). And advertisers spare no effort in mustering all their creativity to promote the artifice of the “sales pitch,” which is articulated through the reinforcement of the constructed *ethos*. The ultimate goal is to stir up *pathos* in the audience so as to respond to the stimulus generated by the creation-*logos* and to eventually get convinced of the value of an advertised product or service.

Focusing on the *rhetorical process*, what we find at the core of an advertisement is staged as follows:

20 The combination of the three levels with the three types of rhetoric (ethos, logos, pathos) is crystallized to the degree that reveals the socio-psychological dimension of the communicative act – an innovation that Aristotle launched with his treatise *On Rhetoric.*
a) The fundamental notion of the rhetorical process called *ethos* is propelled via the ad and undertakes the vital enterprise of promoting the specific product as “attractive,” “reliable,” and “irreplaceable.”

b) Despite the fact that *logos* (in its classical sense) is the least developed element of *proof* in advertising (e.g. demonstration in argumentation), it functions as a vehicle for the heuristic use of *commonplaces*: hence, the *logos* of ads will draw from the repository of *commonplaces* (consciously or unconsciously) such terms as ‘definition,’ ‘comparison/contrast,’ ‘relation,’ ‘testimony,’ ‘confirmation,’ etc. (see Root, p. 46).

c) Finally, the rhetorical notion of *pathos* emanates from the socio-psychological syndrome that reveals all the complexes of habits, desires and propensities for the acquisition of consumer goods and services. The advertisers’ impressive skill turns towards this socio-psychological reservoir seeking to stimulate the public’s desires with their flashy creations. In this way, animating the various forms of *pathos*, they sweep down upon the social space (life-world) and implant consumer fixations that will potentially foment the *habitus* of acquisitiveness.

An essential characteristic of advertising is the manner in which advertisers design messages that constitute a mingling of elaborate significations with an unremitting effort to appear original. Many believe – as McLuhan proclaimed – that advertising is the most important art of the 20th century. Williams believed that “advertising is also, in a sense, the official art of modern capitalist society” (p. 184). Even though this is debateable, I consider this judgement in part well aimed; and frankly when describing advertising as a creation, it is in fact a crafty and appreciable form of mass art (i.e. let’s say a kind of “pop art”). This implies that advertising has its aesthetic side, despite the fact that on certain occasions it reaches the limit of baseness and takes on the aspect of kitsch. However, what is noticeable in this case is its status as a “creation”; and beginning from this point one understands that it boils down to being an elaborately worked-out fabrication which is produced by the team of advertisers for the benefit of companies with the ultimate goal of persuading the public. Another fact is that it is about a fabrication that is constructed for reasons that includes an obvious motive: Profit. For this
reason we shouldn’t overlook the importance in which this motive functions in the area of political economy.

Nevertheless, I want to underscore the fact that the aim of a prudent rhetorical approach, with regards to advertising as a social practice, is to lead us to a rhetorically deployed refutation of ranting, deception and propaganda: namely, of the component elements that are very often endemic in advertisements – and especially in political spots (see below in XI). However, we have to admit that there is a calculated predisposition for the advertisers to entertain the public; hence, ads are embellished with genres found in spectacles, which hint at condensed shades of literary or filmic forms: romances, adventures, dream motifs (e.g. surrealistic), thrillers, humorous situations, etc.

For a more easier access to our project as we move along, I shall maintain that advertising is a type of *text* that permits of a hermeneutic reading or analysis of a socio-political gravity; which means that we must reflect on the codes that determine the impact of the advertisements’ messages (see the analysis of the ads below). In this way, applying rhetoric in advertising with its unabated motive to persuade (always on the part of the sender/encoder) the receivers (decoders) to accept the message via the mass media becomes the aim of transforming human relationships. In other words, the aim of the advertising campaign isn’t just to persuade the public to purchase certain products/services with an unceremonious transaction. It strives, moreover, to create a pleasant ambience that will infuse in any receiver the feeling of felicity, beguiling one to buy – or to remain loyal, if one buys – those products or services. As long as the advertisers seek to exploit the potential gullibility of the public, thus promoting the feeling of felicity, it becomes evident that they are clearly inclined to interweave their advertising codes with signs steeped in emotional exhortations. Hence, it appears that the Aristotelian conceptual scheme called *pathos* is discernible; and finally *pathos* – as a diffusion of coveted felicity – guides the advertisers’ strategic moves as far as rhetorical processing is concerned.

We are intensely living on a daily basis with the exchange-value of various products/services – on the one hand, with the dire need for rudimentary survival, and on the other with the spell of *symbolic identity* for a particular lifestyle. We
usually see advertising being flanked by ideal episodes/snippets (e.g. the symbolic dramatization of social practices) that are incorporated in the domain of the social imaginary. An alluring and fleeting representation of an image, sound and discourse is skilfully constructed in which it “objectifies” – via the products/services – the uninhibited desire of a mystified “subject.” The objects of the advertisements consist of a complex referent system stamped with social meanings and/or insinuations. Hence, the advertisements’ signifiers and signifieds are marked with ideological connotations (e.g. imaginary meanings) that legitimate and perpetuate the exchange-value – and especially symbolic-value – that we undergo in capitalist society. In other words, the persuasion of advertising doesn’t exclusively centre on what the specific product offers in and of itself (e.g. use-value), but on how it symbolically harmonizes with the “cheerful” sociability of individuals in the forging of close relationships (i.e. amongst each other and always in relation to products and services!). With the appearance of the imaginary manifestations that consolidate the symbolization of ads, an impression is evoked in which exchange-value prescribes the quintessence of desire. Furthermore, it isn’t at all surprising that exchange-value – that is consolidated via the ad – also contributes to the socialization of communication (along with the management of meaning) and especially of desire, and hence of symbolic stylishness. In short, both exchange and symbolic value are the driving forces of our consumer society that govern our human relationships.

With the astounding array of advertisements projected on a daily basis almost the whole range of social values are mythologized (‘friendship,’ ‘family,’ ‘romance,’ ‘beauty,’ ‘kindness,’ ‘success,’ etc.), particularly when consumer products seem on the surface to represent those values. This ‘representation’ tends to lean towards mystification. For example, in the world of advertisements the presupposition has been established that when someone entertains the hope of gaining ‘friendship,’ s/he has to drink the advertised ‘spirits’ in a posh place; to enjoy the warmth of ‘family’ life, s/he has to eat the advertised ‘pasta’; to be triumphant in ‘romance,’ s/he has to use the advertised ‘deodorant’ or ‘perfume’; in the facial expression of a mom, ‘kindness’ is revealed when she offers the child the right ‘concentrated milk’; if one is to be seen as ‘successful,’ s/he must drive such and such an ‘automobile.’
IV. Popular Culture and Advertising

There is a very widespread impression that no other epoch such as ours has shown in such sharp relief the power of popular culture to indoctrinate people, thus provoking illusions, fantasies, and pipe dreams.\textsuperscript{21} If this impression seems to be overblown, popular culture, nevertheless, is considered a \textit{cultural promotion} of the social imaginary that corresponds to the innermost needs of individuals from which they can shape an identity within the jumble of modern society’s conspicuous and vicarious consumption. Indeed, it is commonplace that we are attracted to various products of popular culture, since they “inscribe” in us – on the level of the imaginary – the substitution of our own being in a way that reflects our narcissism in their images. Besides, who isn’t moved (even if it is an ephemeral emotional moment) by the purchase of a pair of shoes or sunglasses (that was first shown, following this season’s fashion, in the pages of Cosmopolitan or on the morning TV show ‘Morning Coffee’), or with the purchase of a Home Cinema, or by watching the latest blockbuster at the multiplex or the concerts of The Rolling Stones, etc.? Popular culture has a ubiquitous presence that is impetuously disseminated through the media; but as a repercussion it may influence us either positively or negatively. Popular culture, moreover, functions like a well-orchestrated performance and constitutes a daily experience for us; but also for many it induces, within this experience, an undeniable pleasure. And the experience of pleasure shouldn’t be underestimated, because as McRobbie has observed “the differentiated market and the ‘medium of consumption’ allows many people to experience something of the pleasures of difference and cultural diversity” (p. 243). This means that the variety of social life extends its possibilities for individuals to shape their particular identifications. As Kellner notes: “A media culture has emerged in which images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life, dominating leisure time, shaping political views and social behaviour, and providing the materials out of which people forge their very identifications.” (p. 1).

Perhaps it would be more prudent to describe the notion of popular culture as ‘mass culture,’ because it is disclosed to wide masses of people as a universal

\textsuperscript{21} We are referring to the historical period that began from 1950 to the present – a period in which television has played the major role in mass culture.
The semiotic system whose chief aim is entertainment. And this is achieved due to the global range of the media, which is controlled almost exclusively by the culture industry. As far as entertainment is concerned, we are inevitably led to the domain of ‘high art.’ Here lies the so-called dividing line between ‘high art’ and ‘low art.’ The case in point is that mass art is classified as art (i.e. ‘low’) with the following characteristics (see Carroll, p.196):

1) “x is a mass artwork if and only if x is a multiple instance or type artwork (e.g., melodrama, sitcom, soap opera, cartoons, [ads] etc.

2) produced and distributed by a mass technology;

3) which artwork is intentionally designed to gravitate in its structural choices (e.g., its narrative forms, symbolism, intended effect, and its content) toward those choices that promise accessibility with minimum effort, virtually on first contact, for the larger number of untutored (or relatively untutored) audiences.”

I should point out that popular culture, though it emanates from the culture industry, doesn’t cease being the most fundamental substratum of the life-world. The modern life-world is reflected in the prevalent media culture in connection with the wider predominance of consumption. It’s not surprising that our society has been defined in general as the consumer society. This is because our existing society is inextricably linked with the production of consumer goods/services that depend, for the most part, on use-value and exchange-value but also, according to Baudrillard, on symbolic-value. And we as consumers undergo the psychosomatic need for survival and existential progress within the social existence that consists of, and is sustained by, the interdependence of goods and services.

The globally diffused consumer culture covers the space-time continuum as a characteristic feature that is also amplified as a semiotic system. Hence, consumer culture transforms into symbolized communicative practices that then constitute cultural practices that are coloured by the patina of the spectacle; and this is discerned in ads. For example, the production of different products is brought about – by virtue of the political economy – with the creation of use-value on the one hand, and on the other with the creation of exchange-value that is
materialized as *signs*. The *signifier* as ‘denotation’ of the product as a rule incorporates a brand name (e.g. *Coca-Cola* = fizzy drink) and a ‘connotation’ (e.g. *Coca-Cola* = a drink for youth, a refreshing delight coloured with “sociability,” *Pax Americana*, etc.) as a *signified*. The product gains a *referential function* that is usually encoded within the framework of a lifestyle at the level of the signifier and the multifaceted signified. And here emerges the notion of symbolic-value that clearly flows from the two terms of political economy. Consequently, the publicity of a product via the ad is reduced to the domain of the spectacle that eventually promotes a particular way of life either consciously or unconsciously. Moreover, Debord compared our modern capitalist society to what he designated as “the society of the spectacle.” So, the “style” of life that we identify with in our daily lives is individualized in each of us as occasion serves and especially by taste when it appears publicly as something that can be gazed at or as something that can be seen as “spectacle.”

If one observes the world of advertising closely, one will discover how the dominating ideology that is emitted in all its forms of representation centres precisely on the area of lifestyle. The way in which lifestyle is fashioned shows how ideology becomes almost strikingly natural. For example, a product is constructed as a sign of use and exchange value which when advertised is refashioned as a unique (socioeconomic) sign. The social fabric looks as if it throbs from the inexorable desire that modern humankind has for acknowledgement and identity. Due to the fragmented and alienated life found in the developed world, today’s individual desires acknowledgement and identity in his or her social circle-*cum*-life-world. For instance, the ad “magically” offers the individual potential self-transformation as a “new identity,” thus linking any changes in consumer behaviour by usually attaining the fashionable style and appearance that can transform him or her into a “new individual.” Consequently, individuals learn to identify with values, role models, and social behaviour through advertising. In the end, advertising constitutes an instrument of socialization as well as encouragement of consumer demand (see Kellner).

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22 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle.*
For this reason, advertisers draw symbolic references from the repository of popular culture. For instance, this is how different showbiz stars in Greece become the mouthpieces of different products/services: Rouvas (singer) embodies ‘Vodaphone,’ Kafetzopoulos (actor/comedian) pitches whatever ‘Germanos’ sells, Zagorakis (footballer, as a close homonym!) drinks ‘Zagori’ mineral water, etc. As Fowles notes:

“The symbol domain of popular culture – consisting of the mediated figures of the Terminator and Bambi and Shaquille and all the rest – offers lavish pickings to advertisers trying to construct attractive messages for reticent consumers. Advertisers will appropriate such popular material as celebrities, music, comedic styles – anything that can drape their products in accepted and enhancing symbols.” (p. 103)

Thus, the reason for the appropriation of celebrities as cultural symbols/idols aims at getting the consumers to become recipients of ethos and especially style as dominating elements for the immanent transformation of identities. The pursuit of an identity (and acknowledgement) happens to be a fixed desire of individuals for the crystallization of a “self-composed personality,” which confirms the potential persuasiveness of the current ideology that is circumscribed by the pursued harmony between individuals and consumer products. Though the two notions of acknowledgement and identity are complex, we have come to understand that we are accustomed to function with the system of the production of social signs as individuals who project through goods an imaginary that is based on the manifestations of lifestyle. Even though the “pursued harmony” appears to be fictitious or a simulacrum, it still doesn’t cease to mark people in their expectation to get satisfied from the ideal signification of objects. Focusing on the behaviour of the contemporary consumer Baudrillard says the following:

“You have to try everything, for consumerist man is haunted by the fear of ‘missing’ something, some form of enjoyment or other. It is no longer desire, or even ‘taste’, or a specific inclination that are at stake, but a generalized curiosity, driven by a vague sense of unease – it is the ‘fun morality’ or the imperative to enjoy oneself, to exploit to the full one’s potential for thrills, pleasure or gratification.” (p. 80)

However, another side of persuasiveness arises that is, in this particular case, the outflanking of itself from “manipulation.” Baudrillard again adds: “the ‘fanatical
egotism’ of the consumer is also the subconscious rough sense of being, in spite of all the emotional rhetoric on affluence and well-being, the new exploited subject of modern times.” (p. 84). Therefore, Baudrillard supports the point of view (see Linder) that manipulation plays a significant role in the processing of constructing messages as a motive for hegemony, because he believes that “to denounce advertising as persuasion and mystification come as much less than their lack of scruples (e.g. he’s referring to advertisers) and much more than our thankfulness to deceive us” (p. 150), we come to the conclusion that in the final analysis we are prey to ‘hyper-realistic’ situations.

V. Baudrillard and Advertising

It’s here that I believe that Baudrillard strays from the straight and narrow with his controversial but nevertheless insightful generalities. With a forward-looking and unwavering point of view, Baudrillard subverts the fixed (e.g. Marxist) analyses concerning the so-called innate foundations of political (productive) economy that he considers anachronistic. Without entering into details, what interests me here is his view on signs in general and how they interrelate with “reality.” According to Baudrillard, consumption – and not production – is the base of social being. Since “reality” has been more or less obliterated in the postmodern era, the objects of consumption emerge as signs that appear more “real” than the real: what Baudrillard calls the hyper-real. Moreover, the object/sign is contradistinguished with what is usually considered real, since it emerges in the life-world as a simulacrum. Hence, Baudrillard stresses that “consumption is the stage where the commodity is produced as a sign and the signs (i.e. culture) are produced as commodities.” We are, basically, consumers of signs; and consequently symbolic-value simulates a social being that allegedly offers a lavish consumer “freedom,” in which one may regress and become irrational. In our era, for one to consume so lavishly with such satiety doesn’t seem to lead one anywhere. Felicity (“pleasure” according to Baudrillard) isn’t related to enjoyment – it is related to “duty” (e.g. for one to consume continuously and unscrupulously), which doesn’t originate from the individual but is imposed by the social being: “One of the strongest proofs that the principle and finality of consumption is not
enjoyment or pleasure is that that is now something which is forced upon us, something institutionalized, not as a right or as pleasure, but as the duty of the citizen” (p. 80). To be sure, the consumer must strive for happiness and felicity within an enormous constellation of simulacra that produces emptiness, since reality no longer exists. In a nutshell, a vicious circle! As far as advertising is concerned, Baudrillard believes that it doesn’t tell lies, nor does it fool us. It is found beyond this, because the arguments it uses are neither truthful nor untruthful.23 “The truth is that advertising (and the other mass media) does not deceive us: it is beyond the true and the false, just as fashion is beyond the ugliness and beauty and the modern object, in its sign function, is beyond the usefulness and uselessness” (p. 127).

It would be impossible to assess the soundness or the accuracy of an ad since its origin doesn’t lie in reality. Advertising doesn’t have any validity because it rests at degree zero from the aspect of meaning: “Advertising as a whole has no meaning. It merely conveys significations. Its significations (and the behaviours it calls forth) are never personal: they are all differential; they are all marginal and combinatorial. In other words, they are of the order of the industrial production of differences – and this might, I believe, serve as the most cogent definition of the system of consumption” (p. 88).

These pretentious statements by Baudrillard remind me of a rehashing of a crypto-Platonism. He adheres to Plato’s claims that images are deceptive phenomena and that they don’t reveal anything and don’t produce knowledge. But he takes a large and fatal step beyond Plato’s position, disclaiming the existence of a reality that can be revealed. To be sure, Baudrillard’s thoughts could easily be considered a specimen of a reversed Platonism, for rejecting “the real” he attempts to dissolve all distinctions between reality and appearance. If we accept that postmodern society is a vast (e.g. Platonic) “cave” where on the walls are projected (simulated) shadows of a “hyper-realistic” series of events and we unfortunates as hostages happen to gaze at in a state of indolence, then we don’t have a say in this. However, if this “cave” really exists as Baudrillard describes, I would want to believe then that there is at least a spark of doubt and resistance against this state of

23 Baudrillard borrows this observation from Boorstin (p.214-215).
affairs by people who have a conscience. For Baudrillard to erase reality so effortlessly with such a broad stroke contrives a standpoint that limits something that can’t so easily be deduced as absolutely true.

Besides, it’s important if we do indeed live in a “cloud-cuckoo-land”: the issue is that we as social beings are “condemned” nonetheless to communicate within our multifaceted life-world; hence, we endlessly construct some sort of “reality” or perhaps myriad “realities.” Therefore, “reality” which is constructed chiefly by the articulation of the social order of discourse is invented by social beings that practice an obvious rhetorical process of the imaginary. Let’s not forget something very important: if the simulacrum/sign is – due to expediency – a mystification, then we are in the midst of the complex network of “the seldom forgotten rhetoric of manipulation” that individuals (e.g. advertisers) exploit to the full! Something we have been exposed to while experiencing all kinds of advertisements in the media, whether they are commercial or political. As a consequence, we must acquire the proper cognitive armour so that we can be in a position to totally comprehend – and eventually fend off – any type of manipulation that arises; something, at any rate, Baudrillard is unwilling to take into consideration.

Finally, I must mention that I don’t discredit most of Baudrillard’s perceptive descriptions, especially those concerning the symbolic exchange of signs *qua* commodities. However, we should keep in mind that the so-called “signs” are skilfully constructed as bearers of communicative action; and these signs are, as a result, the component for the unfolding of the *social imaginary*.

VI. The social imaginary and the codes of advertising

The *social imaginary* includes origins that determine particular *identities*. To begin with, due to our social standing, we usually tend to identify with prototypes that signify different categories such as ethnic, class, vocational, age, cultural (e.g. showbiz idols), sub-cultural, etc. An identity offers the possibility

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24 I want to avoid getting involved with this important philosophical debate concerning “reality,” for it will lead us astray from the main topic.
for a social agent to “play” a role or roles; and therefore act in a way that exhibits one’s ethos and especially one’s style to the life-world. As a consumer each individual is guided by the value that the semiotic pattern materialistically depicts or represents; and this eventually propels one to display whatever recognizable identity one desires, even though it’s possible for one to deviate into the realm of a self-fulfilled fantasy. How we dress, what we eat and where, how we entertain ourselves and where, what make car we drive, what magazines we read, what music we listen to, etc., reveal how we expend our consumer habits on a daily basis.

We shouldn’t overlook the fact that our consumer habits are quite often flexible. Occasionally we abandon ourselves to the pleasures (or daydreaming) of buying products that we clearly can’t afford (e.g. luxury cars). For example, it isn’t surprising to notice a regular worker to squander a whole month’s salary for clothes (or to dress up paying 10 instalments without interest!) and afterwards to show off the newly acquired wardrobe at posh restaurants and clubs (mind you, not that this is in itself morally wrong!). Here the already mentioned illusion of fantasizing plays a part in the desired glamorous dolce vita, which is projected in the media (see the magazines or TV programs on lifestyle). Moreover, consumer “mania” has led large masses of people to despair due to the unbearable credit card debts and consumer loans (see the ads that centre on the case of loans!). Therefore, consumer mania has ended up becoming a socioeconomic epidemic that has trapped many people today, especially those who belong to the middle classes. Yet, how much does the infamous world of advertising contribute to this dire situation?

My aim here is not to present a detailed empirical review of how advertising influences the public from an economic perspective. I will merely refer to studies that categorize the codes that appear in advertisements. The most enlightening study – at least from a neo-Marxist and semiotic approach (apart from the classic study by Williamson) – is found in Sut Jhally’s book. Here the variegated forms and respective motifs (e.g. codes) are described that determine the various meanings of advertisements.
Since a televised commercial is a “dynamic” rather than a static message, Jhally points out the characteristic activities that explicitly demonstrate *inter-subjective relations*. The more or less universal categories that are projected quite often in ads are “romantic love,” “friendship” and “family togetherness” (p. 151). The activities that appear as the largest percentage (based on statistical findings) centre on “personal maintenance” (e.g. of the body), “social activities with friends,” “recreational activities,” “house chores” and “ordinary work situations” (ibid.). As far as the rhetorical forms of codification are concerned, Jhally lists the following categories: “affects appeal: results of use of are spectacular,” “statused/popular reference group appeal: associating with popular set,” “popular activities appeal: exciting setting, special occasions,” “comparison appeal: comparison with other products, other effects,” “famous star appeal,” “sport star appeal,” “relief appeal: reduction of anxiety,” “sensual appeal: feels, looks good, delights senses,” etc. (p. 154). What one can observe with regards to the classic Aristotelian categorization of the three types of the art of rhetoric is that the codes Jhally mentions that appear most often clearly represent *pathos* and *ethos* and much less *logos* (e.g. “the comparison of products”).

VII. The rhetorical process and Postman’s point of view

Although rhetoric plays an important role in the pre-production of codifying advertisements – which is clearly calculated to flatter and/or entice the public – it doesn’t cease in being a different area in which the inventive shaping of discourse and images presents itself as being interlocked with social existence. As Booth claimed, “we live in the most rhetorical age of all time, if by rhetoric we mean whatever men do to change each other’s minds without giving good reasons for change” (p. 36). It is well established, by the way, that advertising has this element of influence (i.e. indirectly), since it can virtually subjugate the recipient with pseudo rational – but above all with irrational – means, predisposing one to accept (without really thinking twice) the fetishism or reification of consumption.
Postman, in his classic study on media, observes that up to the beginning of the 20th century buying and selling was based on the rational transaction that capitalism provided, which was influenced by the Enlightenment (p. 127). According to Postman, the seller had to persuade the buyer of the use-value of the specific product articulating rational discourse with an expressed awareness. With the advent of new technologies, such as the radio and in particular television, the way in which the produced product was highlighted changed radically. Advertising then developed to a point where rationalism began to disappear as if by magic. In this way, according to Postman, a crucial turning point arises in our contemporary culture in which rational discourse begins to gradually disappear as a bearer of persuasion with regard to buying and selling. In addition, advertising is transmuted into an iconic feast where no one gets his fill – he simply “amuses himself to death.” Advertising, in the final analysis, becomes an endless parade of fragmented twenty-second psychodramas. Besides, focusing on a fictitious representation of psycho-dramatic events is subject to the effort of any ad to function as a pseudo-therapeutic solution for any consumer. In other words, the televised commercial, according to Postman, has orientated the company not to produce products with value: instead of doing that, it has shifted direction in order to make the consumers feel valuable. This means that “the business of business” is now a pseudo-therapy (p. 128). What the advertiser needs to know in this case is not how a product is produced properly, but what is wrong with the buyer (i.e. searching for a solution to his/her problems).

Even though Postman in general is on target with his remarks, I believe that he hasn’t quite understood the development and the metamorphosis of the rhetorical art during this postmodern era. He points out that rational discourse consists of the exposition of arguments, which needs time for expansion in presenting propositions; something that is lacking in our era. For example, a determinant factor of contemporary rhetorical art on the part of advertisers is their apparent effort to delude recipients with their creations wherein they tend to put into circulation mere sentimentality and irrationality (cf. Booth). So, advertising, as it operates today on television, is unable to deal with the “form of a proposition.” Postman regrets this sorry state. The issue, then, is he completely disregards that the image or even the soundtrack in advertisements are pulsating
with nuances that emerge as allusions that clearly belong to the category of rhetorical *pathos*. This *pathos* can easily be seen as a subtle sense of persuasion (e.g. the soundtrack that can induce nostalgic memories). Moreover, even the language used in ads – usually sharp and condensed in its articulation and deliberately shaped as jingles – are full of rhetorical schemes (see below). Hence, the declining output of rational discourse in ads is replaced now by non-rationalistic representations of simulated signs that clearly display a cunning expediency that totally belongs to the domain of rhetorical art. Whatever Jhally records as codified events in ads helps us to perceive that the manifestations of particular motifs (including the image, sound, discourse) in the end bring to the surface a consolidated symbolization. This symbolization stems from a rhetorical goal that aspires to a possible *feedback* from the audience; namely, that which is arranged as the stirring up of *pathos*, wherein it comprises the emotionally charged *social imaginary*. It isn’t surprising that *pathos*, as a multidimensional repository in the life-world, reflects the driving force of the *social imaginary* that depends on the symbolic exchange of signs among individuals in our contemporary era.

VIII. The rhetorical imaginary

The rhetorical process as a specific goal of communicative action usually demonstrates the guidelines that stem from an age-old rhetorical tradition that Aristotle founded with scientific acumen. Beginning with the basic definition of rhetoric which he gives, one can with an elementary critical ability closely examine the situational context of any form of public communication and evaluate the force not only of the style of the discourse (*logos*), but also the expediency of the encoder (i.e. the *orator*); and finally how it can have an impact on the receiver (i.e. *audience*). According to Aristotle, rhetoric consists in the ability to discover (or to ascertain) in each special case the existing means of persuasion.25 The means of

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25 “rhetoric, therefore, does not belong to a single defined genus of subject but is like dialectic and that it is useful is clear – and that its function is not to persuade but to see the available means of persuasion in each case (1355b,1,2.)
persuasion (*pisteis*) are divided into two parts: the one in which witnesses’ proofs or written contracts are not invented by the speaker and therefore are considered *artificial* means. The *inartificial* means of persuasion – which interests us here primarily as the key to our analysis – are, as we saw above, three in number: those that derive from the character (*ethos*) of the speaker when during a speech one presents oneself as fair and credible; those that derive from the feelings (*pathos*) of the audience that are roused by the speaker; and those that derive from the truthful or plausible argument (*logos*). (It goes without saying that the inartificial means are created and invented by the orator). Based on Aristotle’s categorization, rhetoric is a branch of dialectical, political and ethical study. As a result, rhetoric is constructed around opinions (*endoxa*); i.e. around probabilities, and therefore it doesn’t have any relation with *episteme* (i.e. the absolute certainty of the original Platonic meaning). However, a noticeable distortion of this established differentiation arises, especially in the area of advertising: namely, the rhetorical process as a pretentious driving force – which I shall name the *rhetorical imaginary* from here on – gives leverage for one to shape the codification of the signs/meanings by presenting the particular message, in many instances, *as if* they were “absolute certainties!”

In this way, the following transgression can be observed: a state of affairs is created in which the agent of the rhetorical process weaves a dubious codification that blurs the dividing line between *probability* and *certainty*. For example, it is common in advertisements to find words used in the superlative form – creating, by skewed means, a situation where the codification propels a “certainty” and “assurance” for the qualities of a product or a service, which may be fictitious and eventually misleading. “The best automobile performance,” “The most nourishing milk,” “The most advanced loan package,” “The most effective cream for cellulite,” etc., are common examples that flow endlessly from ads. In the framework of the rhetorical process in which ads are fabricated, an effort is made to artfully create – as an ulterior motive – a seductive atmosphere of “certainty” that encourages a positive reaction from consumers.

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26 This “part” doesn’t concern us because it is confined to the existing social-historical state of affairs of the ancient Athenian judicial system that Aristotle describes.

27 See *Republic* vii. 521C, 523A, 527A.

28 Or, as Boorstin says, quasi “real” with the presupposition that in certain cases the claim for some qualities of products are really real (instead of false).
Based, then, on these findings we can lay the foundation of the essential character of the rhetorical act as fantasy and the social imaginary as a product of conceptual invention. As far as the social imaginary is concerned, Castoriadis records the following:

“Our language shows the social imaginary at work, as an institutional imaginary, that poses simultaneously a dimension that is strictly logical, which I will name the combinatorial-equation (every language has to say one plus one is two), and a dimensional in-and-of-itself imaginary, for in language and for the sake of it the social imaginary meanings are given that keep a society cohesive: taboos, totems, God, city, nation, wealth, political party, nationality, virtue, or eternal life. Eternal life, even if it ‘exists,’ is obviously a social imaginary meaning, for no one has shown or proven mathematically the existence of eternal life.” (I Anodos, p. 152)

Besides, the notion of social imaginary meanings is compatible with the principles, norms, goals and dreams that are brought to light by the social-psychological worldview of our consumer society. These co-ordinates, that boost the “feel-good” spirit in people, determine the communicative act in general.

My interest in promoting the notion of the rhetorical imaginary consists in the discovery of the underlying reason of persuasion along with the potential impact that it can have on the audience as a cultural re-action. Extending Castoriadis’s observation concerning the “institutionalized imaginary” of language, we know from the tradition of rhetorical study that the rhetorical process offers to each one of us the potentiality to articulate, in any given case, rational or irrational arguments, proved or unproved claims, etc. Given that the established acknowledgement of rhetorical art as the social order of discourse is totally subsumed to doxa (opinion) rather than to episteme (science), we can conclude that we invent in a multidimensional way the imaginary meanings that “keep our society cohesive.” Therefore, the discourse that prevails in the life-world consists of the imaginary meanings that are articulated in the particular categories that Castoriadis pointed to, but also, I should add, in many other situations that are marked by ideological positions. Furthermore, the predominance of fantasy is manifest, for it contributes to the robustness not only of the phenomena Castoriadis underscored (e.g. taboo, love, beauty, etc.), but also of the captivating nuances of
lifestyle (e.g. prestige and status) that is variously depicted in an impressive and imposing way in advertisements.

In principle, I hold that the imaginary meanings constitute a type of signifying practice that presents elements that are believable and trustworthy (i.e. credible) instead of just being purely “true.” The notion of the rhetorical imaginary can determine the social – but especially the cultural – activation of the participants of communication with regards to the management of meaning. However, this activation includes the crystallization of symbolic meanings and ensuing acts that consolidate socialization; that is, a socialization that depends on a social-psychic anchoring of what is believable and of what is trustworthy, where each one of us fervently strives to achieve stability in human relationships. In other words, contemporary mankind doesn’t only want to trust their intimates (e.g. parents, siblings, friends, etc.), but also celebrities (e.g. authors, actors, singers, athletes, journalists, politicians, etc.). Consequently, the rhetorical act is transformed into an imaginary, mutual influence that is based on the projection of messages that reinforces the fixed objective of each one trying to ingrati ate oneself with the other.

In our day and age one can observe the common experience of embracing “truth” shifting to one that embraces “credibility.”

During an age that is dominated by style and appearance in many manifestations of daily life, the persuasiveness of a message or of an image is reduced to how credible or believable it is. As regards this shift, Boorstin notes the following: “That which appears significant isn’t the real but verisimilitude. In this world, where almost anything can be truthful, the socially rewarded art is that which makes things appear as real. This isn’t the art of discovery, but of invention” (p. 212, my emphasis). The case in point – and whatever regards advertising as an institutionalized imaginary – is the controversial issue of how much the codification of discourse or of the image can be believable and trustworthy; and in the end persuasive. In addition, the word pistis (proof), which Aristotle uses as a token of rhetorical proof, has evolved throughout the centuries up to today’s derivative meaning as we know it: believe (which originated from Christianity’s semantic use of the word). This means that discourse persuades the recipient to

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29 See Boorstin, p. 212.
30 He means advertising here.
believe; and subsequently s/he is convinced (= “obeys/is subjected to”) of the discourse. Hence, the rhetorical imaginary emerges as the aspiring sense of performance of each “orator” who “believes” that s/he can be likeable. But, as we all know, this “performance” as an outcome can fall flat, because there is the possibility that no one will believe him/her at all!

Based on rhetoric’s effect on advertising, I hold that the definition of persuasion reciprocates more clearly with the Latin term of the Greek word: i.e., suadere,31 that corresponds with meanings such as, e.g. ‘ingratiation,’ ‘assuage,’ ‘sweet.’ Hence, the sphere of persuasion is circumscribed by meanings such as ‘I become likeable to someone,’ ‘I win someone’s favour’ and ‘I offer satisfaction to someone.’ It isn’t by any chance that advertisers, with a distinct affectation, exploit to the full any possible effect of the rhetorical imaginary that is latent in consumers, thus shaping messages that codify such meanings. Moreover, the advertisers’ effort to encode ‘courtesy’ or ‘satisfaction,’ etc. via their messages constitutes for them the foundation where persuasiveness is by necessity “ensured.” Let’s not forget Postman’s observation concerning pseudo-therapy. That is, since a determinant factor that functions as a bastion of the social imaginary happens to be a psychical balance that contemporary individuals yearn for the moment they endeavour to face the relentless rat-race on a daily basis, there exists the probability of them becoming vulnerable to the received messages from advertising. Consumer goods that are profusely disseminated by ads have the attribute of “mollifying” people; namely, giving the impression that they can (pseudo) “cure” them. And since a basic presupposition of the rhetorical act, according to Burke, is to consolidate identification thus transcending division,32 one can conclude that the rhetorical imaginary contributes to the strategic will of the advertiser to construct messages that will “win the favour” of the audience; that is, to get the consumers to become accustomed (e.g. to acquire the habitus) to “identifying” with the mythologizing of goods.

31 See Burke, A Rhetoric of Motives, p. 52. The English word ‘persuade’ comes from the same root.
IX. Analysis of advertisements

Summing up, I would like to quickly glean the following points that I expounded briefly above. Advertising, as a socioeconomic institution, is a mediated vehicle that encodes the predetermined use-value and the subsequent exchange-value of a product or service; and thus produces imaginary meanings that will have a potential impact on the public. Of course, this process presupposes that a price has to be paid (e.g. economic and psychological at the same time) – as long as the promotional enterprise succeeds with the result that the potential consumer gets persuaded. The process also depends on the social order of discourse (but also on the image and – if it’s a TV spot – the soundtrack) enhancing the institutionalized social behaviour (e.g. clearly here as ‘conspicuous’ and ‘vicarious’ consumption) that is engaged in pursuing of the good life. In other words, it banks on the socialization of the consumer via cultural practices in general and simultaneously encourages one to pursue and purchase any available consumer goods.

The main motive of advertising is to inform the public about the value of the product or the service by fabricating a vivid simulacrum – primarily with a tinge of the dramatic – that is articulated by style and appearance. Since the whole objective of advertising lies in the strategic process of drawing the attention of the public, it not only propels symbolic nuances of the product, but also the reflection of the dominant lifestyle through a persuasive representation. This, of course, depends on the effective outcome of the advertisement’s message in each particular case. The spectacle of pseudo-events that arises due to projections/broadcasts works like a catalyst for amusement and contributes in enhancing the (showbiz) idols of popular culture.

In spite of the efforts of advertisers to impose a proposed (e.g. prevailing) reception/reading of their creations, there will be situations where a decoder (i.e. reader/listener/viewer) resists this and attempts either a negotiable or oppositional reading (here Hall’s observation helps us). Moreover, with the negotiable or oppositional reception/reading, an opportunity is given to an aware individual to scorn the cajolery that accentuates either hype or deceit. (Note that this reception of discredit can be bolstered by a completely formed rhetorical apprehension of things). For example, how many times have we been subjected
to the flagrant distortion of factual knowledge from ads for certain kinds of foodstuff claiming that they are nourishing for our health? (There is a well-known margarine company that proclaims that their product gives us robust health if we eat it without limit!). How many times have we seen ads for creams that promise they will wipe out cellulite within a short time by summoning the rhetorical imaginary notion of “absolute certainty?” In this case, we observe the lack of sufficient information in accordance with research on the consequences of margarine intake; or with the disappearance of cellulite, where for this to occur we need to have a healthy diet and to exercise regularly. With such examples of ads that circulate with communicative embellishments, we see the palpable results of the effort to flaunt appearance in a deceptive manner, which finally reveals the “audacity” of their hype. So, what comes to light here is the potential attempt of the companies and advertisers to manipulate the consumer public, thus concealing the “factual knowledge” that is decisively defined by the world of science. To be sure, cases where there is lack of information can be considered as “collateral damage” of the advertisers’ calculated approach as they aim (and hope) to persuade the public of the specious “value” of a product. This approach owes to the expedience of the advertisers to smoothly pitch their message, without a hitch, to an assumed gullible public. All the same, I don’t want to confine myself to this version of an advertisement (as I mentioned above), because such cases usually consist of the prevailing tendency of promoting the most representative patterns that are found in the majority of advertisements in general. I simply acknowledge that manipulation is a probable emanation of the rhetorical process as far as its particular formation is concerned; and thus I believe that critical thought is the suitable panoply in which one can confute any messages that appear as specious and deceptive. Finally, as participants in the reception of innumerable advertisements that inundate us daily, it is presumed that the rhetorical process functions as the main lever in the construction of the advertisement and as the materialisation of the “preferred and dominant” communicative accomplishment of any particular expediency.
A detailed analysis of an advertisement takes into account a wide range of meaning categories that reveal the multifaceted structure of the total creation. Fowles has developed, in my opinion, the most systematically applied analysis of advertising (see p. 171-174). His thorough description of advertising consists of 23 basic points. Apart from Fowles’ methodical analysis, I shall only apply certain points for practical reasons (i.e. since they are self-evident) – those that I consider relevant for a rhetorical (or semiotic) process. In the following analysis, I shall refer to these vital points when they are in line with the material at hand.

The first example (see figure 1) presents a product of high technology that has probably played the most decisive role in the mediated effectiveness of popular culture (i.e. via the TV appliance), and which happens to be the “coveted” acquisition of many people recently: i.e. the plasma screen. The main slogan of the ad is “The experience begins within.” The signified of the collocation “experience within” is an allusion to something that usually refers to a “religious” or “mystical” – i.e., “metaphysical experience.” To be sure, the following signifiers reinforce this allusion with the clever pun: “DigitAll soul.” This wording creates an ambiguous “soulful” (e.g. psychological) situation; that is to say, we face the paradoxical feeling in connection with whether a high-tech appliance can, in and of itself, really induce such an “experience.” Also, there is the polysemy of the

![Fig. 1](image)

33 1) Product category; 2) placement; 3) intended consumers; 4) aesthetics of the composition; 5) the photograph; 6) foreground; 7) the commodity; 8) elements; 9) possible meanings; 10) states of mind; 11) locale; 12) time; 13) the story; 14) the missing links; 15) idealizations; 16) the ideal consumer; 17) intertextuality; 18) framed out; 19) relationships; 20) self-identity; 21) social status; 22) cultural beliefs; 23) commodification.

34 However, this coupling of words “All soul” could easily – as an extreme outcome – be associated with the macabre connotation of “All Soul’s Day,” that ironically functions here as a boomerang against the efforts of the advertisers to be original with such a pun! In other words, with the potential Freudian slip which is hinted at here shows that the product may “spiritually kill” (metaphorically of course!) the potential consumers! Further, there is another hermeneutic connotation that recalls the notion of “soul” of Afro-American culture; and which is perhaps more relevant as an interpretation: that is, the incomparable élan that emerges from the depths of the soul of an individual and that usually is expressed in dance or in entertainment.
meaning “experience within” which implies that the “experience” emanates from what is broadcast via the appliance itself. Actually it’s here that the phenomenon of fetishism arises as a possible explanation for similar feelings that are related to consumer goods; namely, there exists a well-known stylistic/semantic practice that lies in transferring an animate trait – with the rhetorical scheme called *personification* – to an inanimate object: e.g. the Samsung appliance TFT-LCD has “soul.”

In spite of mentioning something that corresponds to an ambiguous, metaphysical symbolization (or at least to reification in connection with a product), we notice that the main image of this ad depicts the code (i.e. motif) of romantic/erotic idealization. We see a young couple sitting in front of the plasma screen, while the screen itself is transmitting a stereotypical, romantic seascape that is a simulated touch-up. Furthermore, there is another hackneyed representation that Goffman raises: that is, the type of representation that perpetuates the patriarchal referent system where we see the woman who is portrayed as being stereotypically subservient to the man. In the present ad we observe the man sitting on the sofa staring smugly at the screen, while the woman is sitting on the floor curled up in his lap and arm and looking at him with a longing devotion and smiling with that smile that implies ‘thanks’; thus implying that the man has bought the prestigious object and has chosen the right brand based on male know-how (see ‘cultural beliefs’).

Samsung – a colossal multinational company that produces dozens of products – has for two decades or so already “sold” its general *ethos* (i.e. that it is “credible” and “innovative,” etc.). However, it enhances its *ethos* in this ad by nominating itself as the company that has the “eminent capacity” to produce “true inspiration.” Rhetorically, the *logos* of the text follows the beaten track of the structural tactic that we are familiar with from similar ads; on the one hand, the use of superlative phrases and, on the other, the use of the rhetorical scheme of *parison*: “the most advanced world of design,” “the highest analysis,” “the brightest colours,” “the clearest sound.” In addition, it follows the frequent practice used in other ads of high-tech products that celebrate either the concise

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35 It’s a good thing that this specific ad mentions that the image that is projected on the screen is simulated!

descriptions of special terms that refer to the specific gadgets or to statistical data as *validity claims* in the effort to present cogent argumentation. This common practice (or rhetorical strategy) reinforces the projected *ethos* of the particular companies that compete amongst each other. In regards to the stimulus of *pathos*, we notice in this ad the projection of an appliance that is reduced to an object of prestige in a rather subdued dramatization (i.e. with the lack of an exaggerated projection of a luxurious life). I think that the ad’s strategy centres round the romantic motif – by using a common, but chic, middle class young couple – for reasons that lead to the conclusion that it will attract the *identification* of the average reader more effectively.

The second advertisement belongs to the economic category of services rendered (see figure 2). *Citibank* – a well-known American bank – is one of the largest banks in the world, though in Greece it doesn’t seem to be as strong as a financial or credit organization as the domestic banks are. Since Citibank is a major multinational corporation, it is inclined to use the same advertising campaign worldwide; hence it doesn’t refer to a Greek pseudo-event. Moreover, there is the trend of constructing the message with a clear universal (i.e. globalized) signification. To be more specific: that which immediately attracts one as an eye-catcher is the representation of the infant that is dazzled by the bubbles. The codification of an infant’s innocence tends to induce *pathos*. Who wouldn’t be moved at seeing a cute and innocent baby dazzled by a floating bubble? The caption – “Some don’t prefer diamonds” – plays with the idea of juxtaposing material wealth (“diamonds”) with non-material sentiments that one has for a cute little creature. This phrasing centres round the ambivalent behaviour of women; namely, on the one hand with the ideologically supposed inclination to acquire a glamorous object and, on the

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37 Actually it declares this with small letters next to the photo: “Citibank and Arc Design is a service mark of Citibank N. A., or Citibank Corp, used and registered throughout the world.”

38 Here the signification reminds one of the famous song “Diamonds are a girl’s best friend” that was sung by Marilyn Monroe (the archetypal blonde that men “prefer”) from the film *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1953).
other, with the consolidation of motherhood. The caption can be considered as a quasi enthymeme, because its basic premise evokes the rejection of “diamonds” as the most important act the moment it is lined up against the love for a little child. Nonetheless, our critical thought is stimulated from the fact that a corporation that controls money (on a world scale!) seems to stave off the material meaning of prestige, so that it can propel the “humanistic” sense of emotional ties and protection. However, I should stress that this slogan is the spark for the sales pitch concerning “the best service” Citibank offers that is developed further in the text.

Furthermore, there is also an ambiguity concerning the signification of the brand-slogan of the corporation: “Citibank – Live Richly.” For one to live “richly” presupposes on the one hand the accumulation of money (e.g. bank accounts, investments, stocks, etc. for one to enjoy the good life), and on the other the emotional “investment” in close relatives/friends, or in experiences that “enrich” one’s personal/spiritual quest. In other words, Citibank tries to sell the ethos that it first and foremost cares for human worries with the aim of ensuring and protecting money. And who is better qualified to protect our money?

The formation of ethos is based on an immemorial American motto: “Time is money.” Thus, Citibank is a “guarantee” for providing the advantageous service of “time” and “money.” Besides, Citibank espouses this motto as a prop for its ethos, since “shorter lines,” “ATMs” etc. are something that most competitors either promise to offer or already implement. It’s clear that the ad has to find the suitable style that will potentially make it persuasive. First of all, the logos (discourse) of the text employs the rhetorical paradox where assets (i.e. movable and immovable property) are reduced to “time”! Furthermore, this formulation is based on the known tactical use of the superlative phrase (metaphorically marked): “the largest asset is time.” The first sentence is in principle an enthymeme trying to guide the recipient – as an argumentative strategy – to accept the motif of emotional ties (e.g. “for those whom you love”). The paradox escalates to the point where we know that the multi-national bank, which only monitors money and profits, provokes us by scoffing at the meaning of money: “It’s a shame spending time counting money,” “There are more things in life than money.” That says it all! Citibank attempts to apply popular wisdom – “everyone knows that there is more in life than money” – for reasons that
contribute to the stimulation of pathos. The statement that “the bank becomes a simple affair” operates like an end in itself on behalf of Citibank and idealizes appearance; for it is a proverbial forgone conclusion that banks are not “simple affairs” – especially Citibank!

The advertisement for Dior’s product Bikini Celluli-Diet that is pitched “exclusively to combat cellulite,” follows the stereotypical projection of simulated beauty (see figure 3). The dominant sign on the page as an eye-catcher is the sexy body of a headless woman touched-up as a simulacrum so as to be encoded and mythologized as being the prototype of “modern beauty.”

The tactic of depicting a headless – postmodern and quasi-archetype – “demigoddess” is compatible with the latent social imaginary that prevails as a sought after identification; and where each female reader can dream of having such a body, at least in a vicarious manner; that is, that you can imagine your head being on that dreamlike body! However, as a male recipient, this depiction functions inter-textually with the traditional tactic of projecting nude women in Playboy (see the fetishist pink string with matching pink nails!). Hence, sexuality holds a conspicuous place in the strategic transmission of pathos; namely, to affect any female reader with this prototypical image of a sexy woman, so that she will be likeable and attract the lascivious glances of males on the beach! It isn’t surprising that the stimulation of pathos concerning sexual attraction that is projected here ideologically reinforces the fixed social imaginary where woman – in the patriarchal reference system – is seen as a sexual object.39

Using the sensuous style that Playboy “institutionalized,” Dior stages a pseudo-event that puts forward quasi arguments in the text as if they were irrefutable proofs. Logos, with imaginary meanings, circles around the well-

39 Calvin Klein’s advertising campaign in the 90s began showing men acquiring the capacity of being sexual transmitters with allusions to the ambivalence of gender. See Nicola Rehling, p. 145-146.
known clichés that commonly embellish similar ads. It tries to persuade us that “in only one month and one spray, without massage” cellulite will vanish! To be sure, it produces statistical data – “eighty-nine percent” – that “proves” that it “obliterates the appearance of cellulite.” In addition, it trumpets forth as a validity claim the “exclusive worldwide patent of the technology Lipodiet Process of Dior” in order to show that it follows scientific progress; that is, it applauds the mythologizing of science as a panacea for everything, since it can give solutions even to the “magical” disappearance of cellulite. Scientific progress is paradoxically entangled with the rhetorical imaginary which incites the recipient to mentally envision the believability of the “magical” quality of the product – that “the results are phenomenal” due to its “miraculous extract.” The ad continues till the end to steer the management of meaning with regards to “mythologizing,” since it resorts to encode the image of an ancient (i.e. Greek) sculpture (i.e. metaphorically): “Your body is chiselled in a divine manner. The skin becomes marvellously smooth.” Finally, the text strategically highlights the rhetorical imaginary trend that orientates the female reader to accept the “absolute certainty” of the product’s effectiveness: “You cannot get slim so easily!”

The last advertisement is discussed briefly for the reason that it characterizes a versatile type of invention – both rhetorical and semiotic (see figure 4). This ad was published at the beginning of summer and focuses on the latent mass anxiety concerning the loss of weight before the imminent, traditional dash to the beaches. (Here’s a perfect case of the socio-psychological development of pathos!). At first sight, with sky and sea as background, we see in the foreground half of the headless body of a woman in a bikini pinching an unplugged lifesaver valve that is sticking out of her waist! Obviously, this weird simulated sign works wonderfully as an eye-catcher. As a rhetorical trope (presented as an image), this metaphor is codified with a humorous intention; that is, the imagistic signifier (“the pinching of the valve”) is transferred in a lightening flash to the signified: “deflating the fat (metaphorically) out of her body.” Therefore, the ad’s style aspires to comically represent a widespread social worry.

Studio-Fitness-Biodynamic doesn’t beleaguer us with communicative embellishments for services that it advertises, nor does it manipulate the recipient
with frivolous tricks for solutions linked to the pseudo-therapy of her problem. It simply provokes her to accept an ethos that depends clearly on a well-disposed mood of humorously confronting a widespread problem of the social imaginary: the anxiety concerning personal looks. For example, it predisposes the recipient of facing the existing situation of one’s aesthetic appearance (i.e. of one’s body) and the choices that are available for its improvement (e.g. ‘Sign up at the Biodynamic gym!’). With the rhetorical question: “Don’t you think it’s time you started swimming without a lifesaver?” the signifier of the familiar accessory for individuals (usually small children!) who don’t know how to swim, is interlocked with the conspicuous signified: “my plump waist looks like a lifesaver”; and so the joke as logos provokes us to applaud the advertiser’s inventively proposed reading. Moreover, I would say that the “answer” – “In only 45 days you will have visible results in your body!” – despite the fact that it ends with an exclamation of “certainty,” doesn’t carry things too far; because, as we know more or less, anyone who exercises rigorously for 45 days either by oneself or in any gymnasium will certainly lose some “visible” kilos.

Political spots

The televised political spot is a mediated project in which the rival parties or candidates for public office try to influence the voters in a direct and more telling way. Wernick considers that electoral politics resembles the commercial marketplace – that “it is a system of competitive exchange. And the corollary for the political marketplace is the same as for the commercial one” (p. 143). In other words, the voters “purchase” policies by voting for parties and candidates, while the latter offer or promise to offer the policies as an exchange for the benefit of public office. “As deliverers of vision, programme, political options,
administrative capacities, etc. both candidates and parties are presented to voters as a kind of product” (ibid). Consequently, just like the producers of mass goods, the monopolistic position that the major parties maintain has reached the point where they are propped up by a kind of brand-image. Through planning, packaging, and advertising they have constructed a similar method of reaching consumers in order to present and project the policies, persons, and the leadership to the general public.

Despite Wernick’s somewhat cynical description of the state of affairs in North America, we have seen similar manifestations in Greece recently. The televised political spot has become the pinnacle of the pre-electoral confrontation, where the parties’ campaigns focus precisely on the medium as the springboard for communicative contact with the electorate. With the appearance of commercial television stations in Greece at the beginning of the 90s, political spots began to play a major communicative role during the pre-election campaign. As Papathanasopoulos mentions: “In terms of advertising expenditures, television “sucks up” around 80% of the pre-electoral expenses of the parties.” Papathanasopoulos also observes that “in the electoral confrontations of the past decade, ‘in a paradoxical way’ (sic) the same issues of education, health, law and order, foreign policy, agriculture and of course the economy are projected […] The difference is that from campaign to campaign these issues are made much of and are used more as a ‘launching’ of negative advertising” (ibid.). So, we in Greece saw the presence of negative advertising in the elections from 1990 to 2000. Although the negative spots of previous
elections happens to be a huge area for further research, I shall confine myself (due to space) to the political spots that came from the national elections of 2004.

It was obvious that the televised advertising campaign of the two major parties of power in 2004 made a complete about-face as regards the strategy of negative advertising of the previous election campaigns. Apart from that, there is the inkling that the negative spots were considered by the party staffers a useless “gift”; and that they were a boomerang concerning the eventual impact they had on the electorate-viewers (see the spots by New Democracy). Research that took place in the U.S.A. concerning the consequences of attack and negative advertising showed that they provoked a negative reaction in 72% of those questioned, who stated that they felt an aversion as far as the tactics of negative spots were concerned and disapproved of them. Hence, the two big parties – PASOK and New Democracy – constructed, as we shall see, a strategy that focused on presenting the two “new” leaders as celebrities, thus avoiding extreme aggressive advertising; and which seemed, in a roundabout way, to be more suitable for the current postmodern image of the “hale and hearty” lifestyle. However, I don’t want to give the wrong impression claiming that the campaign was only a trivial populist representation of lifestyle. It is a fact that there were spots that included significant imaginary meanings with political adumbrations that belong to the well-known category of “issue-advocacy advertising.” Of course, there were jibes made in the spots where we saw critical comments of the sort: “Whatever PASOK had to give, it gave” and “1990-1993 is enough for me: I don’t want to relive the governance of New Democracy,” etc., but it was quite mild compared to the previous election campaigns.

Before I analyze the political spots of the two major parties, I would like to comment at this point on the manner in which the two leaders, Kostas Karamanlis and George Papandreou, were presented in general by the media.

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45 As Papathanasopoulos acutely observes: “negative spots can have exactly the opposite results (boomerang effects) from those that they are striving for, not so much causing the downgrading of the opponent as causing anger in the TV viewer-voter and finally the upgrading of the opponent that the spot wishes to target,” Kathimerini, 30-5-1999, p. 95. Further down he comments on the controversial and widely discussed spot by N.D. that showed the prime minister, Kostas Simitis, as a remote “alien” with a green head floating in suspension in a glass jar.

46 See Kathleen Hall Jamieson, Everything You Think You Know About Politics... And Why You’re Wrong. New York: Basic Books, 2000, p.100.

47 Besides, this particular “representation” was projected mostly through TV news reports.

48 For more information concerning this topic see Jamieson (p. 125-145).
First of all, given the communicative conduit of TV as it is shaped today – based on its commercial expediency that is grounded primarily on infotainment – there isn’t any question that the “entangled” interplay between the media and the governing political parties bears up well with regards to the perpetuation of their hegemony as a source of “informative” action and masterful influence. In addition, one should mention that the televised time spent during the news hour on highlighting, in a pompous manner, political figures or various policies (and dedications/gala events of all sorts) of every government could be considered a kind of Guinness record! With such an evident and rather saturated projection, it isn’t accidental that these said leaders (and other high and mighty politicians) have become dominant figures on the TV screen. However, this tactic ploy isn’t a fresh idea in Greek television culture. Who can’t forget watching, for example, the dictator Papadopoulos and his henchman, Pattakos, always dancing the tsamiko during national holidays? Moreover, the notorious zembekiko dance of George Papandreou - when he was the Foreign Minister - with his Turkish opposite number, Ismael Jem, a few years ago, seems to be a continuance of this blustering tradition, which is, by the way, the traditional legacy of the dancing talents of his father, Andreas Papandreou, at the night clubs in the 80s; that is, our leaders symbolically embody in an “authentic way” the popular temperament of the average Greek!

At any rate, we see today a different elaboration in relation to the personal promotion of the leaders in the media. Let’s not forget that the two leaders were clearly favoured on the grounds that they are each scions of a political family dynasty, and that the two parties are staffed with expert press people who supply the TV channels with their political and social activities. So we saw, for example, Kostas Karamanlis holding his twin children propped on his shoulders while strolling in the funfair in Rafina (his home suburb); or we saw George Papandreou pumping weights at his neighbourhood gym. We were informed in

49 People over 50 years old.
50 This was going on during the Saturday night shows: “Look What You’ve Accomplished” (Semia Digeni, ALPHA) in the past, and “To Your Health!” (Spiros Papadopoulos, NET, ALPHA), where politicians are seen swinging and dancing – that establishes our own version of politainment made in Greece. The neologism ‘politainment’ flourishes in the USA. See Schultz, “From Saxaphones to Schwarzenegger: Entertainment Politics on Late-night Television,” p.215-239.
51 Here’s another instance for a Guinness entry! Unfortunately, political dynasties and old political families still appear to be an “institution” that is endemic of their omnipotence in Greek political reality.
great detail (of course, in the traditional mode) where they spent their holidays; when they went to concerts and plays; when they made pilgrimages to churches and monasteries; when they made appearances at school ceremonies; when they had banquets with VIPs; when they visited cities, towns and villages where they were offered lush bouquets of flowers or were sprinkled with rose petals and were endlessly kissed and embraced by the folks; when they were speaking at important conferences, etc. It’s obvious – from the point of view of the rhetorical process – that this exploitation of promotion from the party staffers centred round the shaping and crystallization of the ethos of both leaders as “Stars”; and above all in the shaping of the subsequent infusion of pathos. However, in the pre-electoral spots of 2004 a tendency was implemented to manifestly codify the “youthful” and “chummy” style of these two seeking the Prime Minister’s office, which was contrary to the tactics of the past.

I shall begin with the most frequently shown New Democracy spot (see figures 5,6,7,8,9). For starters, Karamanlis is usually shown with low angle camera shots enhanced with a semiotic twist, thus aggrandizing his reputed self-control along with his political authority – an image that he had invested with hard work to gain for essentially rhetorical purposes (as we shall see below). When he assumed the leadership of the party he had undergone repeated criticism with regard to his inexperience of having any leadership qualities, especially those having to do with administrative service (e.g. Minister’s portfolio) in which he had nothing to show.\footnote{Who can’t forget the facetious criticism of PASOK minister T. Pangalos who stressed that Karamanlis couldn’t even run your average little mini market? Of course, that took place before things changed with New Democracy’s victory on 7-3-2004!} However, after a seven-year term at the helm of New Democracy and leader of the opposition party in Parliament, this type of mudslinging that tarnished his image was gradually (till 2004) mitigated. He was able, during this time span, to prove that he had the “makings” of an eloquent speaker in Parliament and to have direct influence on the general
public (it seems he had learnt his “lesson” well from his famous uncle). In addition, due to his tutelage at his uncle’s knees, he cultivated the ethos of an imperious and pompous leader. Nevertheless, there is an ambiguous image of Karamanlis: on the one hand, he appears to be remote, arrogant and rather icy; and on the other, there is an effort on the part of friends and followers using the media to assist in promoting a more familiar character by certifying that Karamanlis is humane, friendly, sagacious, a person with a highly refined sense of humour, etc. Unfortunately, this latter image didn’t get broadcast, except from some established bites in news reports when he was presented with a fleeting smile the moment he was “arm-in-arm” with his wife during public appearances (also promoted as a “glamorous” type); or when smiling and “fooling around” with his children during holidays such as Christmas and Lent, etc.

Despite the fact that Karamanlis’s image remained somewhat ambiguous and lacked elements of a clear-cut distinction, the party staffers and advertisers decided to focus their campaign on simulated events in order to show – in a spectacular way – that the young leader was worthy of admiration and trust.

This spot begins with a green ribbon/banner shattering like confetti and the announcer simultaneously saying: “Whatever PASOK had to give, it gave.” In the next scene we see a small child blowing at a dandelion that scatters (like the confetti) to the four winds – a metaphorical codification that suggests that PASOK has “dissolved.” All of a sudden Karamanlis appears with a self-complacent smile waving to the crowd under the spotlight (with a vivid shade of

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53 From a semiotic point of view, there was an obvious “cloning” effect on the part of the younger Karamanlis as a rising star to mimic the leadership style of the older statesman.

54 Which happens to be, by the way, a customary style of most leaders/Prime Ministers in Greece.
before a pre-electoral speech in an auditorium, while we hear the voice-over say: “We’re bringing policies that the country needs.” Suddenly, we see a swift succession of scenes projecting “unofficial representatives” from different classes of society expressing (with a sound-bite slogan) their “personal” view of Karamanlis. Two women students walking in front of the University of Athens entrance say in succession: “He’s modern,” “He’s ordinary.”

Suddenly, Karamanlis reappears in the same shot of the pre-electoral speech crossing the stage and approaching the podium. In the next shot, the flow of the successive scenes begins again, this time with a young guy saying “I trust him”; two men in their 30s, who are walking in the rain under umbrellas, say “He convinces me,” “He’s the real deal”; “He has nothing to do with the politicians of the past,” a 60ish fisherman claims at an island harbour, while another man says “He’s humane”; “He’s just like us,” says a young guy with a long ponytail crossing the street in the busy centre of Athens; “I feel that I’ve known him for years,” a middle aged woman verifies standing in front of a stone house somewhere in the Mani; “He’s strong, you can depend on him,” adds a chic woman also walking in the centre of Athens. Once again Karamanlis appears in the same shot as before, but this time shaking his followers’ hands. We again return to the successive scenes: “When he speaks, he looks you straight in the eyes,” a female greengrocer intensely remarks behind her stall at the marketplace; a farmer, driving a tractor with Meteora in the background, shouts “He’s decisive”; right after, two cool youths sitting in the small park in front of the Athens Academy say respectively: “I dig that he’s not a square,” “He’s a cool number one!” Towards the end of the spot the final lines, which are the climax of the political message, are expressed by two passers-by, one who resembles a stockbroker and the other a civil servant: “He’s ready to govern,” “He knows all of the issues,” and finally from a chubby farm woman in a pasture saying with a smiling face: “I

55 ‘Blue’ is the official colour of New Democracy.
feel that what he says, he will do” – and immediately there is a zooming in on Karamanlis at the end of the rally hugging a young woman and young man stating to the TV viewers with his own voice-over: “We’ll build a new Greece with meritocracy. We’re bringing the change that the country needs.”

Counting on the barrage of complimentary statements made by ordinary people from all levels of Greek society along with the simultaneous reinforcement of Karamanlis’s ethos, one can see where this rhetorical process of the advertisers’ effort to skilfully “sell” the simulated image of the candidate for Prime Minister stems from. At first sight, it seems a bit bizarre for Karamanlis to refer to “meritocracy” hugging two “blue” youth league members of New Democracy at the rally, while at the same time there is an obvious effort to give evidence that he has “stolen” the hearts of the Greek youth, especially those who aren’t conservative; i.e., those with an extreme look! From a semiotic standpoint, this style of appearance fits mostly those individuals who are indifferent towards conventional politics and either belong to sub-cultural groups or are social outcasts. Even their sociolect along with their roguish airs: “He’s one of us,” “I dig that he’s not a square,” and “He’s a cool number one!” codifies this jarring signification of admiration for the conservative leader of this traditional, political rightwing party. Or is something else happening here? As it stands, I think that Baudrillard’s theoretical notion of hyper-reality seems apt as an explanation. The moment that New Democracy and PASOK persist in appearing to their voters as seemingly “compact” multi-collective parties, the postmodern melting pot of diverse social categories (see above in introduction) cannot be cancelled out as an irrelevant phenomenon for their political propaganda; namely, that all of them can easily fit in as party members! But, which young person can fit in with this seemingly “harmonious” multi-collective party is difficult to discern given today’s frustration and alienation of youth. As a consequence, I believe that the simulated depiction of the cool youth demonstrates something that is completely spurious and, I would
add with leniency, facetious; and that is how it transcends social routines and familiar reality.

In any case, the specific articulation of *logos* by the rest of the citizens aids in lavishing praise on Karamanlis’s “abilities” – a form of expression that is incorporated in the rhetorical category of the *epideictic speech*.\(^{56}\) The montage with Karamanlis (i.e. from the scenes of the rally) being “embodied” at different intervals in the flow of the successive scenes shows that he symbolically magnetizes the specific (fictitious) individuals. Hence, *doxa* and *epideictic speech* is co-articulated so that the desired *ethos* that the spot wants to implant in the minds of the TV audience/voters can effortlessly sink in. And yet, there is no doubt that the characters’ lines reproduce platitudinous clichés that are hackneyed utterances that have embellished innumerable political spots in the past. One could surmise that there isn’t anything new as far as the forming of *logos* is concerned. On the contrary, I think that the “new” lies in the innovation where *epideictic speech* (even though commonplace) is uttered by ordinary people with the simplistic dramatization of the “spontaneous opinion” that is compatible with the elevation of popular culture, rather than by an invisible and composed announcer/narrator, which was (and still is) a common descriptive practice in political spots (see the similar PASOK spot below). Besides, it is a well-known fact that television tends to place emphasis on simple everyday people. As Sanders notes: “the viewers find it easier to relate to characters than to abstract principles. They can empathize with or despise the people they see (on TV), and candidates rely much more heavily on ads about people than ads that stress their issue positions” (p. 4).

However, this use of personal *testimony* reminds me of a variation of the familiar tactic of commercial ads like those for detergents! At any rate, the aim of this spot was to codify the popular resonance of the leader as a “Star”; that is, to stress (and sell) his personal “virtues” (e.g. his “real” image), that only his friends know at close hand. In this way, the rhetorical tactic concentrated on moulding a dramatized framework in which Karamanlis’s image could glow as a “pleasing” one and to be finally established as one “popularly chosen by the people.”

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\(^{56}\) Sanders states that ads depending on “average folk” who express their opinions on the candidate (e.g. with the *epideictic* way, I would add) become more believable (p. 4).
I purposely spent more time on this New Democracy spot not only because Karamanlis won the elections,\textsuperscript{57} but because PASOK paradoxically and fortuitously followed the same pattern in its advertising campaign strategy. For this reason, I shall be brief in my comments.

With regard to the general profile of George Papandreou, we experienced a long period where the so-called “young” politician was forced to disengage himself from the image of being the son of his “legendary” populist father. Even though he had served as a career politician from a young age (almost 25 years in politics!) either as an MP or as a minister in cabinets, he always bore the heavy burden of being called with the derogatory diminutive “Georgie Porgy” as a sign of one who was a politician of limited stature. However, this disparaging image was remarkably toned down during the second four-year-term of the Simitis government, where Papandreou showed himself as being a prudent, “pioneering,” and quite respected Foreign Minister – especially by foreign politicians and journalists. Apart from the improvement made on his image as an experienced politician – (in contrast to Karamanlis at the infancy of his leadership) – there was a prevalent feeling the public had that saw Papandreou as being a “nice guy,” and rather “foreign” to Greece’s socio-political reality; and according to the traditional prototype quite tame – and especially without “nerve” – for a future leader/Prime Minister.\textsuperscript{58}

\textsuperscript{57} I don’t want to imply that this spot played “the” role in New Democracy’s victory! There were other reasons why they won, which is not a topic to be discussed here.

\textsuperscript{58} See how he has been satirized. For example, he was made sport of by Giorgos Mitsikostas in his comedy show. A semiotic fanfare focused on signs such as the American flag, English expressions
Apart from the effort to disengage himself from his old image, Papandreou found himself in an embarrassing situation when he took up the leadership. This was due to the heavily charged reciprocation of adoration towards him from a large segment of lower-class PASOK voters, who literally saw him as the only successor of his famous father and grandfather! And because of this reciprocation, the party and advertising staff didn’t avoid exploiting this situation. As a matter of fact, they trumped up an “epical-lyrical” passage of George’s life in a spot using old family pictures that showed him with his grandfather and his dad – primarily for reasons of spectacularly stirring up pathos.

In this ad there isn’t any voice-over announcement. We simply see signifiers as graphic signs that accompany the swift succession of photographs (see figures 10,11). With the accompaniment of hard rock music, the ad is divided into 4 “chapters”: (1) “History” – with various photos of George with the “Old Man of Democracy” and his father; (2) “Struggles” – with moments from the resistance movement during the Junta; (3) “Change” – phases of the great victory of PASOK in 1981; (4) “Experience” – which is the most significant part – with George found in various poses standing next to distinguished leaders (e.g. Gonzales, Arafat, Mandela, Patriarch Bartholomew, etc.) and snapshots showing him in political action accompanied by slogan-signifiers such as: “authority,” “strength,” “vision,” “plans,” “hope,” “decisiveness,” “victory.” This tactic reminds one of the celebrated lifestyle portraiture of a famous star or of an important historical

interlaced with Greeklish, etc. that underscored that Papandreou was a “naïve American” who doesn’t know chalk from cheese, since he was born and raised there.
personality on television talk-show programmes. What we observe here is, in the final analysis, the staging of a mega-spectacle where the simulacrum-“product” shines via the conspicuous images and the imposing rock music.

However, there were adroit innuendos in the ads that underscored the rhetorical strategy (imagistic, of course) of antithesis of the ad hominem type, where a split frame was presented with a succession of scenes: e.g. on the left showing Karamanlis with a vacant, sluggish look on his face, and on the right showing George in action, either speaking in parliament or at international forums, or signing treaties – and underneath the frame a series of slogan-signifiers in large letters of the type we saw above: “vision,” “renaissance,” “plans,” “prospects,” etc. (see figure 12). The aim here was to crystallize the ethos of an “experienced,” “decisive,” and “self-composed” politician.

One of the most frequently shown PASOK spots showed a similar dramatized context with people from all vocational and social classes (as a representative segment of voters) looking straight at us, but with a significant difference from the New Democracy one: their personal “opinion” of the candidate-“star” was uttered, in first person narrative voice-over, by an announcer with the rhetorical tropes of parison and anaphora (i.e. using the verb “I want”): “I want safety and security,” “I want a dignified retirement pension,” “I want economic growth,” “I want modern public works,” etc., and finally the upshot: “I don’t want to live again under the governance of New Democracy.” The basic slogan of the ads was: “I hope, I decide, I vote – PASOK.” Therefore, we saw the same recipe of moulding simulated events that aimed to stir pathos and to reinforce the spectacle as a pattern of promoting the specific leader as if he were a political “product” whose goal was to win the coveted position of power.

Conclusion

My objective in this chapter was to portray advertising within the framework of a rhetorical paradigm. Advertising has maintained a steady course over a long period of time in its endeavour to “cash in” on its core motive: namely, to persuade and influence the potential customer, client or voter. What
we notice is the unchanging nature of the structural features found either in commercial or political advertising that are represented through ethos, pathos and logos as traditionally defined since Aristotle. Basically, what we discovered were attempts made by advertisers to shape a text using a variety of techniques and gimmicks that can be characterised as rhetorical invention. Notice though that invention seeks to provide what Hall calls a ‘dominant/hegemonic preferred reading.’ However, this doesn’t always guarantee that the recipient of the message will adhere to the stance taken by the encoder’s attempt to persuade (e.g. one may not buy the product/service or vote for the candidate!). There is the contingency lurking around the corner of seeing this effort as being an exercise in “trial and error.” Moreover, the deciding factor seems to be whether one either ‘accepts,’ ‘negotiates’ or even ‘opposes’ the impact of the message’s rhetorical objective.

Advertisements serve a purpose in which the encoder aspires to create a text that will project desire for an object. The ad plays its part as the catalyst for creating a semblance of the good life that is supposedly “secured” through acquisition by training one’s sights on total gratification. The motive behind this purpose is that it will hopefully induce one to acquire the ‘object’ for self-fulfilment. This is the goal whereby consumption is held as the fundamental “given” in human existence that producers, politicians and advertisers seek to manipulate for personal gain. And “gain” is the name of the game. But, two (or more) must play the ‘game.’ Hence the consumer is hailed via the message to also partake in personal “gain,” if s/he is convinced of its import. As we have seen, the ‘game’ becomes sensational, imposing, and even insufferable as it unfolds within the maze of popular culture. Through the various venues of advertising (print, television, billboards, Internet sites) style and appearance are meretriciously featured in consumer goods that appear to dominate the life-world. Advertisements become universal signs of appeal that cater to our daily needs for (conspicuous and vicarious) consumption and are ubiquitously promoted as artefacts that seem inextricably entwined with our sense of social being. To be sure, it is the consumer-recipient of the advert-message who must attend to the visible effect it may have on him or her. In the final analysis, rhetoric has been instrumental not only in the invention of the advert-message’s
form and content, but can also become instrumental in our confronting its manipulative designs.

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