Greece’s “Spirit of Place” Depicted Through The Rhetoric of Holiday Advertising

Nikos Kontos

Introduction

In recent decades a widespread academic interest in Cultural Studies has taken place producing multiple insights into a vast array of social practices (domestic, workplace, shopping, amusement, etc.). Indeed, many of the social practices described tend to gravitate towards the quotidian consumer-habits of those who live in advanced capitalist societies. This relates, of course, to the singular habits of those who are inclined to expend disposable purchasing power in order to satisfy their desire of indulging in various leisure-practices – such as weekend outings or, in our case, vacation time.\(^1\) In satisfying this particular desire, we cannot ignore the mesmerizing impact the media in general have had on leisure-culture. This has induced many scholars to observe social practices relating particularly to the many facets of the mass media that has become in this day and age the most prevalent cultural institution affecting nearly all walks of life. Obviously, the most common “mesmerizing impact” corresponds to the production and eventual reception of advertising messages - whether in printed texts or in commercials. Given the fact that a cornerstone of many studies has been the semiotic focus of attention on discursive meaning produced and transmitted by media/culture industries, one can then grasp the significance of how recent social practices have evolved (Fiske, 1991; Jensen, 1995). This focus of attention, on the one hand, has become the *sine qua non* of politically committed cultural analysts who have endeavored to explicate the processes and developments of social practices as they materialize within capitalist societies along with their repercussions and, on the other hand, to gauge the contingent reactions of social groups who are exposed to the various messages transmitted by the media (cf. Morley, 1992; Fiske, 1989, 1993; McCrobbie, 1994; Ang, 1991).

---

1 See Urry’s identifications of a number of features of tourism (1990: 2-4): “Separation of work and tourism, as a leisure activity, as different spheres of life. Places stayed in are different from places where the tourist normally lives and works, but the tourist will return to home and work. Places visited are chosen because of the anticipation of pleasure and different experiences from those involved in normal, everyday experience.”
One particular social practice with significant ramifications on the social imaginary has been holiday-making. With reference to media culture, and more specifically to the world of holiday advertising, I will concentrate on social practices involving the accumulation and dispensation of cultural and symbolic capital (see Bourdieu, 1977). My interest lies in determining what effects cultural and symbolic capital have on communicative processes situated in a social semiotics with persuasive overtones found in the advertising campaign of the Greek National Tourist Organization in Time magazine during the mid '90s.\(^2\) This entails, on the one hand, a sifting of the representative elements of motivated signifying practices that produce particular acts of communication based on use and exchange values; and on the other, an assessment of its putative rhetorical impact on an audience. In other words, the main objective is to focus on the articulation of the “produced” text as a supplement of Greece’s National Tourist Organization (i.e. its political economy aim) to sway a particular target-audience along with the conceivable cultural effects involved in symbolic “re-produced” identity formation.

Bourdieu developed a concept establishing the parameters of social contexts, or what he specifically called ‘fields of action.’ A field is always the site of struggles in which individuals seek to maintain or alter the distribution of the forms of ‘capital’ specific to it. Such capital includes not only economic capital in the strict sense (i.e. material wealth in the form of money, stocks and shares, property, etc.), but also cultural capital (i.e. knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions, as exemplified by educational or technical qualifications) and symbolic capital (i.e. accumulated prestige or honor). If the field of action is a site of an ongoing struggle, then one can infer that it will legitimate a rhetorical process in accordance with communicative norms that match either the co-operative or contentious ways of social interactions. Due to its intrinsic value as a process of competitive discursive practices, rhetorical strategy valorizes and then disseminates an array of sign systems to various semiotic environments with persuasion as its ‘common ground’ objective. It follows that as key features within a field of action, cultural and symbolic capital take on the trappings of sign-vehicles for social communication.

An expansive semiotic environment that has also stimulated much interest is

\(^2\) It should be stressed that the GNTO still focuses on the same motifs today as they did in the '90s. See, for instance, their ad campaign “Live your Myth in Greece” during 2004/5.
media culture. Combining analyses based on either the production and/or reception of
media content, researchers have determined that social practices engaged in cultural re-
presentation play a major role in manifesting various signifying systems mobilizing,
reinforcing, or sustaining the inter-subjectivity found within social relations. Moreover,
to contextualize those social practices accentuating the sign systems in which cultural
and symbolic capital are exchanged, becomes, in my opinion, important as a domain for
critical analysis. Depending on the frame of reference, a social phenomenon in the
media provides a backdrop for communicative interplay which enhances an audience’s
contingent participation in popular culture. Media phenomena such as news production,
infotainment, soap operas, sitcoms, reality shows, advertising, etc., are usually singled
out as domains revealing the signifying systems of intersubjective cultural activity.

**On the reception end of media**

Reception theory evolved from the reaction many scholars had concerning the
monolithic theories of media univocality and the manipulative one-way-flow of
information (Enzensberger, 1972; Hall, 1980; Neuman, 1991; Morley, 1992; Jensen,
1995). As a consequence, reception theorists have taken the initiative to demystify the
notion of the “passive recipient.” It was the so-called passive recipient who was
considered by many to be relatively incapacitated - and finally driven to a state of
apathy - from the culture industry’s steady flow of programming in the media; and who
constantly soaked up the ideologically charged messages of the dominant class without
resistance. Based on their perceptive analyses, reception theorists have been cogent in
successfully debunking the oversimplified portrayal of the passive recipient. And with
the advent of postmodern theory there has also been an effort to substantiate
observations acknowledging the fragmentation of a monolithic public into multiple
social formations (cf. Collins, 1989). Owing to their synthesis, these social formations
can be seen as separately constituting a recognized and self-contained audience.

Focusing on meticulous field-work studies, researchers were able to illustrate
and categorize the reactions of various audiences to particular discursive messages
emanating from the media (cf. Morley 1992; Liebes and Katz 1990; Ang 1985). The
major premise they forged and subsequently verified was basically quite simple:
audiences take a very active part in decoding media messages and are in a position to
negotiate their responses (e.g. acceptance/rejection/indifference) with regard to what those messages may entail. In other words, even though there is a one-way, non-dialogic flow of discursive messages addressed to a mass audience (or audiences) by the media, it isn’t necessarily the case that the addressees are in any way constrained to passively absorb the contrived codes that are projected. What is evident, particularly from a sociological (Habermasian) point of view, is the omnipresence of a Public Sphere - however it may be restricted with regard to access - whereby a multitude of discourses compete for adherence by seeking support in matters concerning the representation of cultural/symbolic meaning. Thus, it becomes abundantly clear that given the nature of a public arena where social groups vie for discursive recognition, there emerges the rhetorical situation where an active presence of media addressers, involved as they are in an agon of opposing stances, purposely aim to persuade and move addressees who are certainly not passive, but rather active decoders of the messages received through the channels of communication.

This account of the rhetorical situation becomes relevant in the case of advertising. Advertisers encode messages generated by symbolic strategies (i.e. a sales pitch for a product or service) that are conveyed to an audience of potential consumers. Given its ability to decode the meaning of those messages, the audience will negotiate their content by either accepting or rejecting them; or, as it frequently happens, the audience may conceivably neglect to even negotiate the prospective communicative act.

Hall (1980), for example, suggested that there were three main ways in which a symbolically coded text can be read. A dominant hegemonic reading interprets the text in terms of the preferred meaning suggested by the message. Next, the meaning of a media text could also be the result of a negotiated code. Here the meaning produced by the interface between the interpreter and the encoded message is tactfully contested. Accepting the overall framework suggested by the dominant code the viewer/listener makes contradictory sense of the message. An oppositional reading would run against the grain of the text, making few concessions to the perspective being offered. These three forms of interpretation are offered as a means of locating texts within the dominant discursive strategies, while linking them to an already coded (i.e. targeted) audience.

Hall’s rendering of the audience’s ability to decode discursive strategies exposes the shortsightedness of those theorists who claim that the so-called “masses” consist of
passive recipients invariably caught in the clutches of a dominating culture industry. The influential paradigm of the ‘dominating culture industry’ originated with Adorno and Horkheimer in their classic work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. They were intent on castigating popular culture as being imposed on the working classes by the elite capitalist class which, by controlling the means of cultural production (e.g. Hollywood), insidiously dominated American society. According to Adorno and Horkheimer, mass culture merited condemnation because it is so rigidly controlled by corporations. They formulated a series of positions all predicated on the uniformity of popular and mass culture, arguing that “[c]ulture now impresses the same stamp on everything. Films, radio and magazines make up a system which is uniform as a whole and in every part.... All mass culture is identical” (123). One can gather from their analysis an elaborate account depicting the common masses as being, albeit unwittingly, cultural dupes. The Frankfurt School’s critical analyses on culture - although simultaneously poignant and acerbic - underscored the reification of social practices and finally culminated in Marcuse’s theory of modern society as being ‘one-dimensional.’ Indeed, this implied that modern society was veering inevitably towards homogenization in production, leisure, and, for the most part, culture. Despite their insightful assumptions and their rigorous display of reasoning on the significance of ‘enlightenment’ from a Marxian point of view, the Frankfurt School was nevertheless under the influence of a highbrow bias regarding the *modus vivendi* of popular culture within the modern framework of essentially fragmented social relations.

In a nutshell, reception theory provides a prospect in which one can potentially apprehend the capacity of individuals to negotiate the meaning of a symbolically coded text. Furthermore, this implies the rejection of the assumed “amorphous” masses as being beguiled by a “pernicious” popular culture orchestrated by a core of media producers in collusion with “the” dominant class. What is at issue can be briefly adumbrated as follows: There isn’t just one elite class or social group that is chiefly dominant in contemporary society, but rather a constellation of social groups competing amongst each other in trying to impose on various audiences ideologically marked, cultural prototypes by means of the rhetorical process. As a consequence, ideological and cultural dominance is multifaceted and can be found to play a role in swaying collectivities as diverse as classes, gender, age, and ethnic groups.
Rhetoric and the question of deception

Another pressing issue discussed is whether or not there is a particular homology connecting ideological and/or cultural dominance with ‘deception.’ Are audiences under siege from powerful social groups deliberately forging ahead to deceive? As a matter of fact, there are studies based on in-depth surveys proving that a large majority of the public is wary of accepting the authenticity or validity of media messages (cf. McQuail, 1994). Of course, there have been occasions where certain media events have provoked flagrant deception to a degree where large masses of people were gullible enough to accept implicitly. For example, the insinuated ecological disaster supposedly caused by Saddam Hussein during the 1991 Gulf war with the cormorant stuck in an oil slick, is quite telling. For the most part, one can safely say that these fabricated media events, when they occasionally occur, are an exception. To be sure, there are innumerable cases where deception becomes a very subtle affair in the media and needs to be carefully ferreted out.

When dealing with advertising, however, the question of ‘deception’ tends to obscure matters concerning cultural domination. As we shall see below, cultural frames for goods or services highlighted through advertising are exposed through notions such as idolatry, iconology, narcissism and totemism (cf. Leiss et al., 1990), which can be seen as agencies deployed to ‘entice’ rather than to merely ‘deceive.’ Advertising - viewed as a system of sign-production along with its ideological implications - predicates its existence on promoting prototypes of symbolic action. Such prototypes cover a wide spectrum of social behavior based on consumption ideals relating to family values, eating and drinking traits, beauty care, fashion, leisure, travel, etc. Thus, cultural domination, codified through intricately designed advertising, will tend to be assessed as an ideological mechanism serving powerful social/economic groups, determined as they are to “lure” their prospective audience-consumers by using symbolically charged prototypes; although, from an extreme standpoint, they may be interpreted by some social critics as alienating simulacra (cf. Baudrillard, 1993). Of course, one must consent to the fact that contemporary society is extremely complex, heterogeneous and protean; and that to gauge the responses of individuals (who identify with one or perhaps more social groups) - based on a representative reading of a symbolically coded (media/advert) text - becomes a very arduous task, indeed. The
point is that advertisers, who are aware of the fragmented social formations found in contemporary society, encode their messages with the intent to captivate a target-audience; and the crux of the problem depends on whether that particular audience will apply a dominant hegemonic, negotiated or oppositional reading to their specific “plug.”

Finally, anyone who is familiar with the rhetorical tradition is cognizant of the endless debate on the issue of rhetorical flattery and deception introduced first by Plato in his dialogue *Gorgias*; and which cannot be easily dismissed. Plato initially rejected rhetoric as a kind of knack comparable to cookery, and as a form of flattery designed intentionally to gratify the mob. Rhetoric, in short, was a pseudo-art of appearances rather than a vehicle for conveying truth. At any rate, when confronting the substance of advertising, we have to point out the motives contingent upon the use of flattery (or even deception) as a technique in devising and encoding sign-vehicles for the purpose of persuasion (or even propaganda), which tends to latently manipulate “appearances.” As a consequence, I will focus my attention exclusively on the production of sign-vehicles as an agency for the purpose of attracting the attention of a target-audience to a special type of advert-message on the one hand, and its intended effect to convince on the other. I will therefore refrain from evaluating the audience-readings of such advert-messages from the point of view of reception theory, due to a lack of field-study samples.

Drawing together the threads of the previous discussion, I would like to underscore the following: When taking into consideration the domain of advertising as a ‘field of action,’ we are dealing primarily with (1) *economic capital*, which epitomizes the purpose to profit from marketing a product or service; (2) *cultural capital*, which places emphasis on valorizing the desire for goods or services as part of ritualistic consumption; and (3) *symbolic capital*, which creates a fetishistic ideal of a modeled lifestyle along with its attendant prestige. We should assume that advertisers will also take these fields of action into account when planning their rhetorical strategy. Of course, they will conceal their motive for economic capital and use their resourcefulness by focusing on cultural and symbolic capital for persuasive purposes. They will also be cognizant of the symbolically coded readings available and will endeavor to make the most of cajoling the audience to undertake the dominant hegemonic reading they propose; which, in the final analysis, is the objective for their
marketing purposes. However, there is a risk involved, given that many adverts never really make much of a “direct” impact on audiences (cf. Schudson, 1984).

The tourist gaze

One important aspect of leisure-culture is the signifying practice of tourism. This particular practice has developed dramatically over the past two and half centuries. Taking England as a paradigmatic example, we find that in the embryonic stages of tourism aristocrats and upper class individuals took up traveling by visiting “classic” sites and places in the late 18\textsuperscript{th} and early 19\textsuperscript{th} centuries (especially to Italy and less frequently to Greece of the then Ottoman Empire) in order to enhance their “civilized” status based on what we would now designate as cultural and symbolic capital. With the advent of the railway in the mid 19\textsuperscript{th} century, industrial workers and their families took short holidays to the seaside resorts (i.e. important havens of a thriving excursion-culture) that became the practice of a new phenomenon that has since been acknowledged as the beginning of mass tourism to particular spots thought to be either unique or aesthetically pleasing. The places gazed upon by the working classes were for purposes which were not directly connected with paid work and normally they offered some distinctive contrasts with work (see Urry, 3). It was the Thomas Cook Company, the first organized tour operator (1841), that inaugurated the “package tour” for domestic and foreign mobility to places for those (i.e. primarily of the middle and professional classes) who sought a trustworthy service in order to derive pleasure from sight-seeing and to enjoy leisure away from work and home for short periods of time. However, with the advances in technology during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century (e.g. in telecommunications and jet travel), millions of people in the Western industrial countries took advantage of the leaps and bounds the tourist industry had made in providing them an opportunity to acquire the cultural and symbolic capital necessary for establishing a modern lifestyle.

According to Urry the signifying practice that has become the most prevalent one in terms of this leisure-practice/culture is the tourist gaze. He states that “[p]laces are chosen to be gazed upon because there is an anticipation, especially through daydreaming and fantasy, of intense pleasures, either on a different scale or involving different senses from those customarily encountered. Such anticipation is constructed
and sustained through a variety of non-tourist practices, such as film, TV, literature, magazines, records and videos, which construct and reinforce that gaze” (3). (One could also add that tour adverts/commercials have also played a significant role in this type of anticipation). As we will see, the GNTO’s objective is to underscore the role of “fantasy” as a sign that will convey the expectations a particular target group can meet in order to acquire cultural and symbolic capital. Hence, signs are abundantly available for the tourist to decode and interpret. Indeed, Urry concludes that the tourist is a “semiotician” of sorts, since “[t]he gaze is constructed through signs, and tourism involves the collection of signs” (ibid.). Culler, moreover, argues that “the tourist is interested in everything as a sign of itself…All over the world the unsung armies of semioticians, the tourists, are fanning out in search of the signs of Frenchness, typical Italian behavior, exemplary Oriental scenes, typical American thruways, traditional English pubs” (cited in Urry, ibid.). In our case, it becomes clear that Greece’s “spirit of place,” as a sign system, is purposefully portrayed as a conduit for cultural and symbolic capital. There is a seeing of particular signs: the Parthenon, Dephi, Meteora, etc. This mode of gazing shows how tourists are in a way semioticians, reading the landscape or individual sites for signifiers of certain pre-established notions or signs derived from various discourses of travel brochures and tourist guides; or, in our case, from the travel advert in Time magazine. Indeed, it is the “pre-established” discourse and visual sign-vehicles of the GNTO adverts that will instill this mode of gazing as part of their rhetorical ploy. However, as far as “Greekness” is concerned, we will notice that the GNTO ads mostly stage the aura of ancient and Byzantine Greek sites, art objects and places (the only exception being a scene taken of Santorini – see below) as sources triggering semiotic activation.

The cultural frames of advertising

Advertising as a social phenomenon has come to play an important role within media culture. Irrespective of the fact that advertising is essentially the political economy’s springboard for use-value and exchange-value in bolstering a now globalized consumer society, it is striking how revealing it has also become as a major force in manifesting various signifying systems of the post-industrial culture prevalent today (cf. Jhally, 1990). In other words, it has become a significant catalyst for social
communication. Advertising will reproduce a myriad of cultural practices in such a dazzling and idealized manner that its codifications will reinforce consumption habits (e.g. purchasing) along with conversations concentrating on lifestyle rituals (e.g. elaborating on the purchased).

Bearing in mind the notion of social communication, I would like to briefly focus on an insight that incorporates a semiotic approach to advertising in conjunction with a rhetorical strategy of message production. What is interesting from the perspective of strategy-making is its primary dependency on a rhetorical motive in league with a market-place animus (cf. Sherry, 1987). Moreover, the market-place animus will display the dazzling and idealized signs of products and services aimed at consumers who will habitually respond both monetarily and culturally; thus sustaining the perpetual thrust of use and exchange-value. Consequently, in order for this animus to maintain its hegemony in the lifeworld, advertisers will inevitably engage in the rhetorical process to convince their target-audiences.

The insight I will try to depict is based on a semiotic construct fortified by rhetoric of the advertising technique: that is, persuasion through the means of the verbal and non-verbal (iconic) sign-function. And to narrow my topic I will concentrate on a few advertisements by the Greek National Tourist Organization directed to a target-audience of prospective visitors to Greece. I would like, at this point, to introduce some interesting concepts associated with an analysis of the cultural frames of reference in the world of advertising. In their seminal study on advertising Leiss et al. (1990: 329) focus on four categories which characterize the cultural frames of advertising goods in general.

The first frame is called idolatry and is associated with a product that is abstracted from the process of production and presented as pure use-value. The metaphoric-emotive themes in this type of advert stress ‘quality,’ ‘usefulness’ and ‘descriptiveness.’ As we will see below, the GNTO adverts furnish these aspects as an inducement for the cultivation of cultural and symbolic capital as use-value for personal enhancement. Semiotically, one could embellish this concept of idolatry by viewing it as an example of the semiotic and mimetic plane in social message production (cf. Hodge and Kress, 262). Within the semiotic process (i.e. linking producers and receivers and signifiers and signifieds into a significant relationship) “the message is about something, which supposedly exists outside itself. It is connected to a world to
which it refers in some way, and its meaning derives from this representative or mimetic function it performs” (Hodge and Kress, 5). What this implies for our case is that the mimetic plane reveals the putative desire of one to identify (i.e. idolize) with a product’s (or service’s) esteem that can be seen as reciprocating either self-development or self-aggrandizement (e.g. “I’ve got the latest Apple computer model”; “I’ve got a subscription seat at the opera”, etc.). The GNTO fashions a mimetic plane whereby the iconography and the accompanying discourse constitutes the idolized esteem that will encourage the recipient to identify with it for purposes of attaining cultural and symbolic capital.

The next frame is iconology which represents products that are embodiments of attributes, configured in social judgment and presents themes such as ‘status,’ ‘family,’ ‘health’ and ‘social authority.’ From a semiotic point of view, I would extend this notion and place emphasis on the emblematic sign-function of Leiss et. al’s particular frame. This type of emblematic sign-function can be seen as visually marked frames representing these attributes as social entitlements (e.g. “He’s a renowned architect”; “The Jones’s are a highly respectable family”; “The Parthenon is the most marvelous temple of all time,” etc.). The main slogan for the GNTO adverts is the mythically charged attribute “Greece: Chosen by the Gods.”

The third frame of reference is narcissism which represents products that are personalized with metaphoric-emotive themes projecting ‘glamour,’ ‘romance,’ ‘sensuality’ and ‘self-transformation’ (see the ad in figure 1 showing Santorini, which presents the themes of glamour and romance).

The final frame is totemism that defines a product as a prototype of group-related consumption practices with the emphasis on ‘leisure,’ ‘health,’ ‘groups’ and ‘friendship.’ This frame will reinforce the practices of those consumers trying to achieve
and maintain social solidarity. These latter two concepts - narcissism and totemism - can be cast from a semiotic approach in the form of an intersubjective sign-function instantiating personal or communal indexical meaning (e.g. observing wine and fruit on a terrace overlooking the Aegean during a sunset becomes an index of ‘romance’). Finally, what is reflected in these four categories is the current value system involving social relations characterized by consumer practices. Adverts will use any one or more of these elements in conveying semiotic phenomena that will have both social and referential dimensions.

**Theoretical insights on the GNTO ad campaign**

In shedding light on the techniques of holiday adverts, one must take into consideration the cultural and ideological frames of reference embedded in the rhetorical strategy of message production. Most holiday ads will usually feature ideal locations with the intent to titillate the recipient’s fantasy desires. When looking at a GNTO holiday advert, for example, the first frame of reference functioning as an ‘eye-catcher’ is the ostensible visual code frequently depicting cultural sites (e.g. this is a semiosic plane where ‘idolatry’ prevails, illustrating quality and descriptiveness). The main emphasis lies in the rhetorical motive of capitalizing on Greece’s exalted ancient history, which is magnified in its various ruins, Byzantine churches and museum relics. Many GNTO adverts apply the narrative technique of culture and spatial stories (cf. de Certeau, 1984) invoking a unique spirit of place by signifying an archetypal myth of (cultural/cultivated) identity, which represents the humanistic heritage of Hellenic civilization. This particular myth of identity is encoded as cultural capital which can be shared with individuals (e.g. foreigners) who have accumulated it through education or personal knowledge, or who may eventually accumulate it by reading the ad; thus allowing them to identify - through the agency of the cultural/historical imaginary - with the cultural site itself (e.g. this is another semiosic and mimetic plane where ‘iconology’ is accentuated, alluding to status and social authority). The advert, then, becomes an intertextual frame whereby the semiotic text creates a map of cultural meaning distributed to the knowledgeable/cultivated recipient (e.g. the prospective tourist).

From the rhetorical angle, this type of ad is designed to be imbued with an
animated *ethos* which features the *myth of cultural identity* as a sign-vehicle. This establishes a link between receiver and encoded-message by naturalizing the impulse for *consubstantiality*. The effective use of ethos in rhetorical performance is a driving force in swaying the audience to adhere to the persuasive message-content of the encoder. Ethos is simply the expedient *techne* (“art”) of projecting an appealing self-image. The rhetorical performance banks its success on presenting discourse enunciated by an “appealing” rhetor/encoder in a manner in which the audience will adhere to and eventually identify with. Moreover, with regard to advertising there is also the *rhetoric of the image* that relies on the appealing ethos of the visual code; thus creating an interface between the desiring subject and the desirable (“appealing”) object.

The ideological ramifications of highlighting ancient and Byzantine Greece can be discerned when one takes into account the sense of ethnocentric pride invested in an awesome past by contemporary Greeks. This conspicuous pride - tinged with *cultural* and *symbolic capital* - is hyper-ritualized by the GNTO and its connotative trajectory points towards the aura of an *heterotopia*: i.e., “[a] real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill constructed, and jumbled” (Foucault, 1986: 27). However, this hyper-ritualized *heterotopia* is paradoxically enclosed within a modern (spatial and cultural) *topos*. On the one hand, the paradox arises from the ideologically marked notion - ubiquitously vaunted - that the contemporary Greeks believe they are specially privileged, since they are the descendants of a glorious ancient people; and on the other hand, there is the ambivalent anxiety that they belong to and identify with the economically and socially advanced Europe of the E.U. (i.e. they aspire to become “good Europeans”), but who are also cultural heirs of Anatolia (i.e. an ambivalence which may connote something “backward,” despite entailing venerated customs which display a unique non-Western-like brio). There is also the anxiety concerning the ‘messy,’ ‘ill constructed’ and ‘jumbled’ infrastructure of Greece, which still gives the impression that it’s still in a “developing” stage. (According to recent Greek press coverages, this has produced negative effects on tourism lately). Incidentally, it’s interesting that there is no reference to ‘cultural Anatolia’ (or even modern Greek popular culture) in GNTO ads, which tends to get suppressed in their ad campaigns. Here we notice that the GNTO’s policy of advertising stems from the classical-cultural repository, providing mystificatory effects for an assumed “highbrow” target-audience, while ignoring the vivacious aspects of an autochthonous popular culture.
Consequently, the *heterotopia* functions simultaneously as 1) a code of *cultural capital* lodged in the modern Greek’s sense of belonging to a diachronic and spatial *myth of identity*, yet wanting to share it (cf. the recurrent signifier *filoxenia* = ‘friend to strangers’; i.e., ‘hospitality’ in GNTO adverts); and 2) as *symbolic capital* elatedly transfixed in the social imaginary and endowed with prestige; thus creating ethnocentric closure. In a different context, the aura of the *heterotopia* is also exploited for economic capital, in that the tourist industry is of the highest priority for the Greek government and economy; hence the need for producing persuasive and enticing adverts.

However, there is another frame of reference that works on yet another level of codification. The ‘eye-catcher’ on this level employs the technique of evincing the atmosphere of *seductiveness* by presenting a visual code portraying the “exotic landscape” (i.e. another type of metonymic *topos*) of islands (e.g. like Santorini during a spellbinding sunset – see figure 1). The major emphasis here can be discerned as exclusively valorizing symbolic capital as a means of procuring *rhetorical consubstantiality*; that is, there is the codification of an alluring cue suggesting prestige or self-importance as a motive for one to think about visiting such an exotic place. The prototype encoded is modeled on the ideologically marked sense of intersubjective ‘hedonism’ (along with the stress on the advertising sign-vehicles of both narcissism and totemism). This - in a context that has been stereotyped in the past by many popular cultural forms (e.g. films, documentaries, novels, newspaper and magazine articles) - implies basking in the sun, participating in sea sports, perhaps dancing to bouzouki music, or drinking ouzo till the early morning hours, etc.

**The GNTO ads**

I would now like to focus on a few characteristic GNTO ads. The ads have been collected from the European edition of *Time* magazine. The GNTO carried out an advertising campaign during the mid ’90s in *Time* aspiring to reach a demographically pigeonholed target-audience. It’s no wonder that readers of *Time* are middle and upper-middle class professionals who are highly educated and consider traveling a basic priority in maintaining a distinctive lifestyle. Since this is the particular target-group, it follows that advertising strategy will focus on cultural and symbolic capital, which will then enliven the campaign with evocative narration and vivid photography.
Cultural and spatial stories are the backbone of the narrative technique applied in the adverts. Each advert tends to juxtapose the motif of mythology/history and the culture-site topos. The topos, as a polysemic sign, is the metaphorical and/or metonymic vehicle encapsulating a distinct heterotopia. On the one hand, there is the reference to the ancient world hovering as an imaginative spatial presence through visual and verbal signs; and on the other, there is the reference to this other cultural and symbolic-wonderland as a myth of identity ensconced in a diachronic presence. Observe, for example, the following titled adverts:

“THE SPIRIT OF ZEUS LIVES ON”;
“THE LEGENDARY RUN OF THE MARATHON RUNNER HAS SURVIVED THE LONG RUN”;
“IF ICARUS HAD ONLY FOCUSED ON THE GREEK COUNTRYSIDE, HE MIGHT HAVE LOST HIS DESIRE TO REACH THE SUN”;
“THANK GOD SHE LEFT THE LIGHT ON” (underneath this particular title is a carved marble relief of the ancient goddess Pallas Athena, see figure 2).

These titles encode the cultural frame that will be articulated in the discourse of the following ads. The main logo on all GNTO ads has the slogan “GREECE: Chosen by the Gods” featured, which signifies the “endowed” uniqueness of the country.

In all the sample GNTO ads the narrative centers on a didactic development wherein informational vignettes of either historical or mythological facts are recounted
“Zeus. God of Gods. Father of mankind. Protector of strangers. In the land of the Gods, hospitality was a divine edict from none other than the God who ruled supreme on Mount Olympus.”

“The Acropolis stands proud above the city of Athens, testament to the achievement of classical Greece. And it’s only one of 1,200 wonderful archaeological sites in this ancient land. A land illuminated by the light of Gods.”

Usually the major iconic representation meshes with the didactic narrative, consolidating both cultural and symbolic capital as strategically intended for public display. The rhetorical strategy relies on the artistry of the photographic code (viz. culture-site: Parthenon, Meteora, Olympic stadium, museum statues) along with the narrative sequence (viz. the myth of identity) for its impact. From the standpoint of the proposed dominant hegemonic reading, this type of symbolically coded advert-text counts on an ingratiating technique: to entice the target-audience to endorse the eulogistic portrayal of the ‘unique spirit of place’ through a matrix of verbal and iconic signifiers. A semio-stylistic ploy in most GNTO ads uses anastrophe (e.g. chiasmus) to pose two loaded rhetorical questions in an attempt to verify the “chosen-ness” of Greece:

“Are the Greeks so friendly because of the Gods? Or, were the Gods taken with the friendliness of the Greeks? The Gods could have chosen anyplace on earth. They chose the warmth of Greece.”
“Did the Gods choose Greece for its heavenly beauty? Or, is Greece divine because the Gods lived there?”

If the ad’s message doesn’t immediately induce the recipient to take action and book a package tour to Greece, at least it will have tried to succeed in implanting, through the means of mediatized sign-vehicles, both cultural and symbolic capital in the imagination. In other words, the ethos of Greece’s ‘spirit of place’ will have been contrived and encoded as a potential catalyst for internalized enlightenment or probable (“learned”) social communication.

Under the assumption that these adverts apply a pre-established set of iconic and discursive markers for rhetorical strategy, it becomes evident that the motive to convince will be consolidated through the signifying practices promoting the tourist gaze. Let’s take the example from the advert displaying the scene of Oia, on the island of Santorini (see figure 1). This particular depiction adeptly plays on the semiotic and mimetic plane alluding not only to high culture (i.e. the photo referring to the notable genre of the painted still-life), but also to the cultural frames of idolatry, iconology and narcissism. One can imagine sitting on this terrace sipping wine and eating the luscious fruit with a partner (e.g. narcissism/romance) while viewing the romantic sunset (i.e. emphasizing the anticipated/idealized tourist gaze). As mentioned earlier, this particular ad was the only one in the *Time* campaign that didn’t use a centerpiece photograph of a classical site or monument. The photograph, however, does represent the round tin table (in Aegean blue) and wooden wicker chairs that signifies the traditional décor of Greek coffeehouses and tavernas. Of course, this could be interpreted as a sign illustrating folkloric artifacts – part of a postmodern sign system of rétro that has become a prominent device in enticing the tourist gaze worldwide. Nevertheless, the discourse in the ad-copy reflects the motifs of the myth and history of ancient Greece by encoding a time-honored and highly unique signifier: “hospitality.” The statement that “filoxenia” (hospitality) “was a divine edict” from Zeus indicates the idolatry frame of ‘descriptiveness’ that can be seen as eliciting an invariable aspect of cultural capital.

The other sample adverts use stunning photographs of various classically

---

3 Note that these cultural frames can easily overlap.

4 Urry (12) refers to the astonishing increase of museums depicting mundane objects and places of the past.
marked sites. The major pattern of the discourse is cast in a frame of basically historical information that catalogs particular signifiers embodying an encomiastic portrayal of Greece:

“The Acropolis stands proud above the city of Athens, testament to the achievement of classical Greece.”

“The marathon remains alive. A supreme test of physical prowess. The climax to Olympic Games wherever they are held. A Greek ideal. An international inheritance. Like the Olympic flame itself”, etc.

Hence, the rhetorical strategy is constructed as a ploy to lure the anticipated gaze (through photography) along with the educational appeal of self-development (through the discourse).

Finally, I would like to focus on another dimension of GNTO advertising, which has subtle implications concerning ethnocentric propaganda-techniques. This consists of the controversial issue over the political dispute involving the internationally sanctioned name of the breakaway Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia beginning in 1991; and which is still unresolved. Although there isn’t enough space for me to delve into this hotly debated issue, I will concentrate on a GNTO advert that was strategically placed in *Time* during its intermittent news coverage in 1992.

To avoid any explicit thrusts of ethnic intolerance concerning the territorial claims over the geographic area of Macedonia, the GNTO has once again relied on the classical and Byzantine repository for astute rhetorical purposes in order to support the Greek government’s political position. Titled “MACEDONIA: for 4,000 years, steeped in the history of Greece,” the semiotic layout of the advert-page reads like a makeshift CD-ROM “multi-media encyclopedia” with a potpourri of entries. There is a series of iconic signs whose signifiers are entitled and accompanied by a short (encyclopedic-like) narrative entry:


The latter iconic sign and entry refer to the controversial Vergina 16 pointed star that was initially used as the symbol for the flag of FYROM (which, by the way, was
withdrawn by the Slavic-Macedonian government in October, 1995). Finally, there is a map designating Macedonia within the established Greek borders; thus disclosing the GNTO’s avowed claim to the historical legitimacy of its appellation-reference. The ad focuses on the sign-vehicles of the *heterotopia* and the myth of identity once again - as a subdued, though expedient, rebuttal to FYROM’s claim to the ethnic authenticity of the controversial name of this particular geographic area.

**Conclusion**

As I have pointed out, one can notice that the Greek National Tourist Organization ascribes importance to an exalted type of *cultural and symbolic capital* in their adverts, while choosing to ignore any reference to popular cultural signs. This ties in with their rhetorical strategy of trying to lure the prospective “bourgeois” (professional) tourist to Greece’s *spirit of place*, which is semiotically emphasized by the use of marked verbal and iconic signs delineating a venerable *heterotopia*. Perhaps their avoidance of promoting facets of Greek popular culture as a means to lure tourists depends on a policy of attracting a clientele that is willing to spend more money than the average working or lower-middle class tourist, or the erstwhile backpacker. Having decided to reach out to a particular target-audience, The GNTO has endeavored to compose an advertising campaign that interweaves a sophisticated cluster of iconic and verbal sign-vehicles with an aim to engage the *tourist gaze*. Moreover, this tourist gaze is elevated for purposes of inculcating the cultural frames we referred to earlier (i.e. idolatry, iconology, narcissism, totemism). We also notice their attempt to artfully inscribe, through a proposed dominant hegemonic text/reading, both didactic and discreet (propagandistic) messages in order to convince the recipient to eventually endorse the cultural and symbolic ethos of the land “Chosen by the Gods.”

**REFERENCES**

