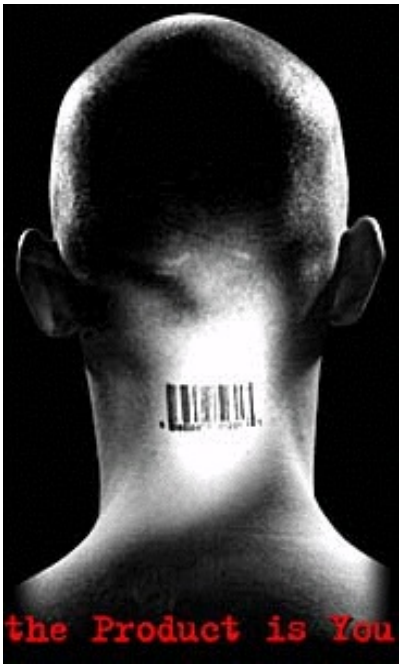


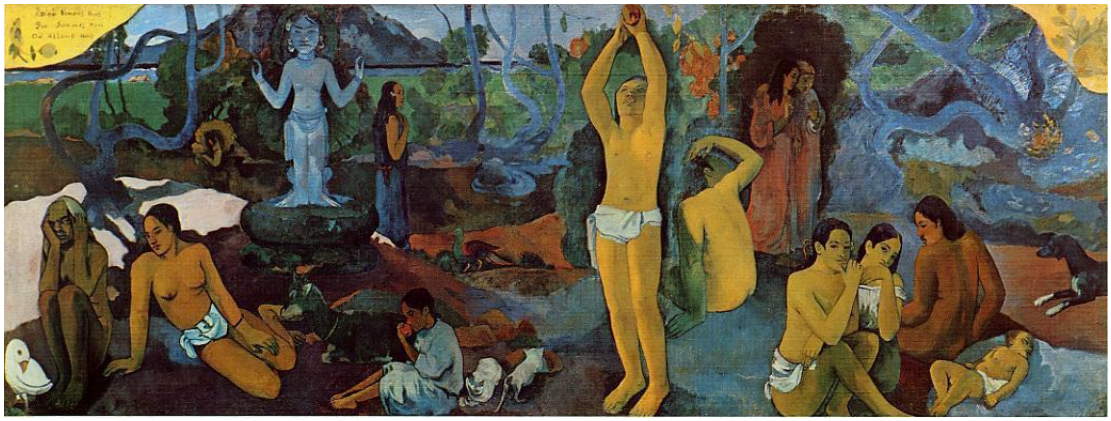
Branding and identity: who am I?

Unit 2

Unit 2: Branding and identity: who am I?

John Aitchison

The quest for identity



Paul Gauguin's famous painting and set of questions: "Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going?" accurately reflects the long lasting human quest for identity. Traditional answers, embodied in myth and religion, find this identity in relation to God or the gods. The Judaeo-Christian tradition sees that identity as being a somewhat fallen image of the divine (encapsulated in these three texts):

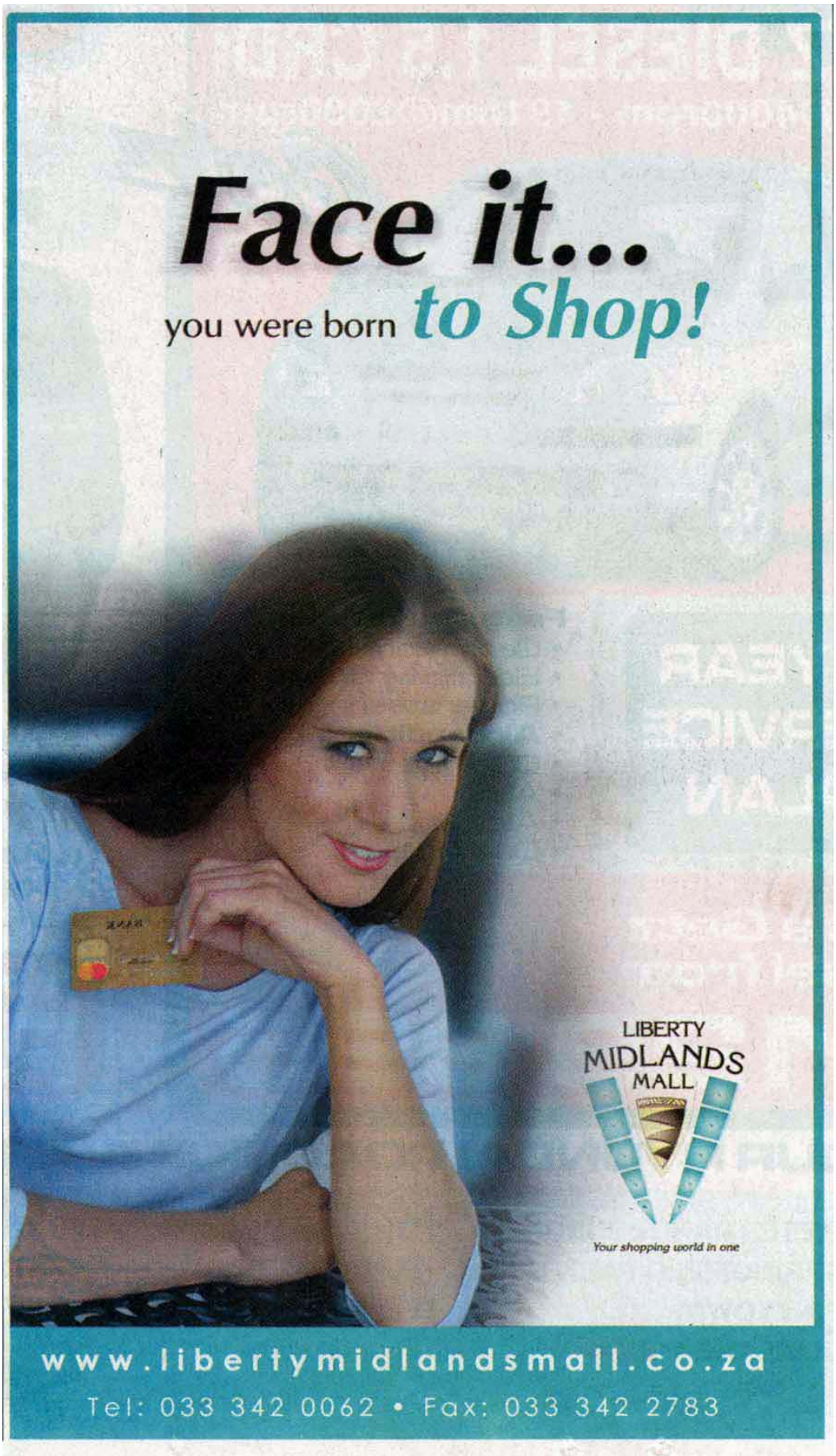
Genesis 2: 27	So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
Genesis 3:19	By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food.
Ezekiel 28:13, 15-16	You were in Eden, the garden of God ... Till wickedness was found in you. Through your widespread trade you were filled with violence, and you sinned. So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God.

The latter thought, that too much involvement in commerce and war is bad for human identity, is echoed by poets such as Wordsworth (in *The world is too much with us* written in 1807):

> The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending we lay waste our powers:
> Little we see in nature that is ours.

Other attempts at understanding human identity include the more cognitive, such as Descartes' "I think therefore I am." through to modern reformulations that suggest that human identity is created through labour (Karl Marx) or the consumption of goods – the "I shop therefore I am." school of thought.

It is this last idea that at heart informs most modern advertising and brand marketing, which is itself, increasingly, not about product description but about identity.


Face it...
you were born to Shop!
LIBERTY
MIDLANDS
MALL
Your shopping world in one
www.libertymidlandsmall.co.za
Tel: 033 342 0062 • Fax: 033 342 2783

A.S.J. Baster in his ***Advertising Reconsidered*** (1935) said, "The major part of **informative** advertising is and always has been, a campaign of exaggeration, half-truths, intended ambiguities, direct lies, and general deception." But we have few advertisements today of the old Victorian kind with extravagant claims, threats and promises, about products, like this one:

> Accept no substitutes!
> Best in the world!
> You'll die an early death if you don't take ENOs!

Now, far more common are the advertisements that don't sell the product, but sell a way of life. Criticism over the last thirty years has been directed not so much against misleading statements in adverts as against the view of life propagated in them.

Contemporary advertising is a potent "educational" force (or "aducational" as some would put it), particularly with advertising on television and social media. The cities and towns of today are saturated with the attitude forming influences of televison, radio, social media, video streaming, and outdoor advertising.

Advertising in an identityless society

Traditional society, whatever its other drawbacks, gave the individual a frame of reference. There were clear emotional, social and religious guidelines hallowed by tradition. People tended to be governed by goals implanted early in life by their elders. There was a fair degree of personal and emotional security for all.

Anxiety, however, is the characteristic of modern industrialised society. With no voices of faith, family or community to guide them, modern, non-tribal, secular people experience a loss of identity and increasing anxiety. Paradoxically they are often more eager to listen to 'authority' than tribal people and are frequently on the lookout for help in choosing from the confusion of desires that throng their daydreams.

The advertisers, on behalf of the manufacturers, are only too willing to provide that authoritative voice:

> The vacuum of belief is like a great gaping void of appetite which the puzzled mind is busy trying to fill with material satisfactions, each merely a passing palliative of a deep unease. This is why the individual does not have to be made to buy things, which many people naively think is the real functioning of marketing today. What happens is that, for the most part, he is so bereft of secure standards to conduct his life upon that he is only too eager to listen to the authoritative voices for guidance as to the standards he should have, and to follow these through the medium of spending patterns.
>
> (Glaser, R. 1967, p. 101)

The desire for identity

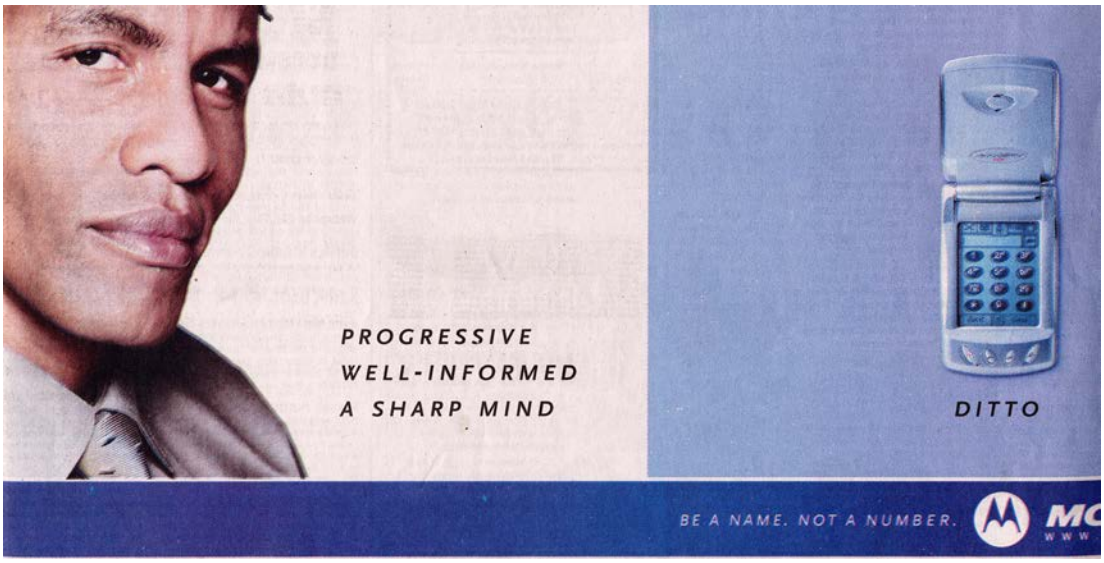
Modern marketing fulfils consumer **desires** not needs. In an affluent society one cannot fulfil basic needs – they have been met already. One cannot sell bread to a person who isn't hungry, but you can sell the person bread in another form (such as corn flakes or pasta or snackbread or corn chips) because of his or her desires to lead "a proper life".

What sells the product is the context into which it fits, catering for the **emotional** needs, the identity the person desires for him or herself. People, insecure of their identity are intent in their shopping (as proved in market research) on **determining and reaffirming their own identity**. The advertiser sells a dream identity. The buyers are asked to see a desirable identity for themselves in a product. Purchase it and they will have an external corroboration of their desires to see themselves in these terms. The buyer gains a pseudo-identity by fantasy associations with what the product **suggests**. Advertising agencies produce desirable and sympathetic symbols of identity which are aimed at triggering off subconscious fantasies sympathetic to purchase and brand loyalty. The choice of these desirable symbols is now **scientifically systemised** and increasingly sophisticated. It is a bizarre inversion of the original goals of the social sciences, namely to understand the sources of irrational patterns of human behaviour and to suggest changes that would result in more rational conduct. The market researchers and psychologists working for advertising agencies now study irrationality – and other aspects of human behaviour – to gather data that may be used by corporations to manipulate consumers. And the companies owning the social media have gathered gargantuan amounts of such data.

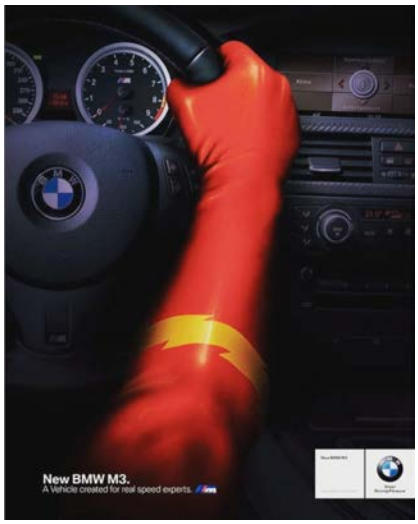
Through such prostituted scientific research the advertisers are now masters of the art of **suggestion**, of presenting people with desirable contexts in which to see themselves. And in which the product concerned always has a vital place! Advertisers know that people are persuasion prone. There is seldom any attempt at real specification. They **assume** our calm acceptance of their **myth-making** language. There is a deliberate encouragement of **sympathetic magic**. Sympathetic magic is the belief that if you behave sufficiently like what you want to be, 'in sympathy' with such a status, then this desired transformation will occur, or be 'magicked' into happening. It is this fantasy that is really being sold in the advert.

It is undoubtably a **doubly false persuasion process**: It is not the real life of the 'haves' (be they the super-rich or the super-beautiful) that one buys but an unsatisfactory copy. And no one is sure that the real thing is worth having anyway. The purchase will probably prove just as disappointing as every other one has been. For most people at heart must know what a tawdry and childish set of symbols they are being sold.

Some identity and sympathetic magic adverts:

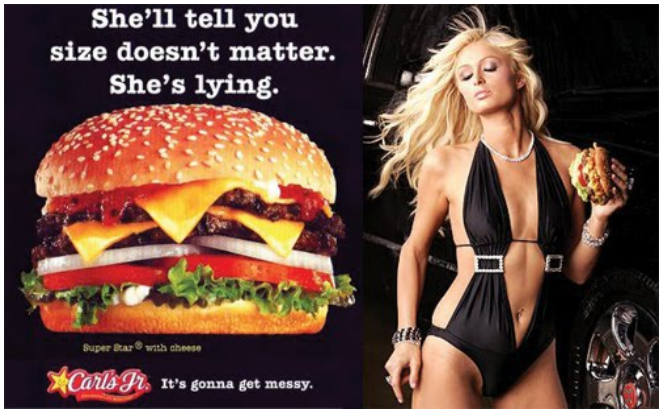


A fairly crass example of sympathetic magic at work in a Motorola advert



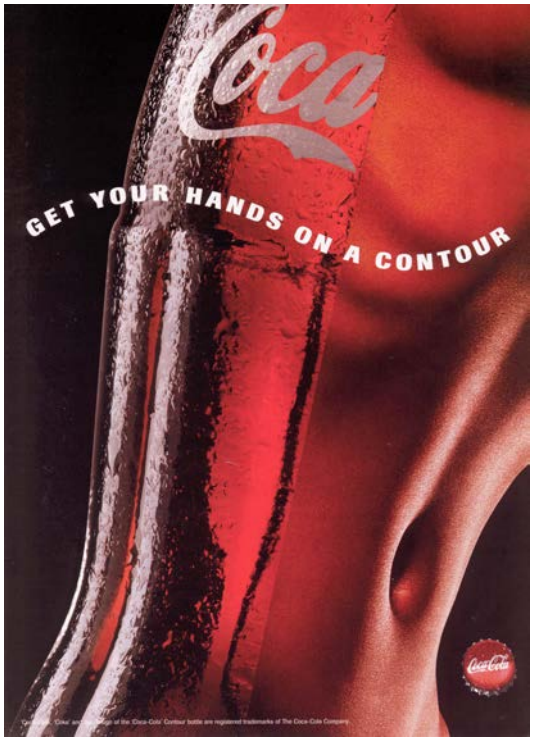
Buy a BMW and you too can be a superhero

Drink Bonaqua and you will have a slender body and be adventurous



You may have a small penis but this burger will do instead and get you this woman

Many of these sympathetic magic adverts are of course about the craving to have a fashionable body image:



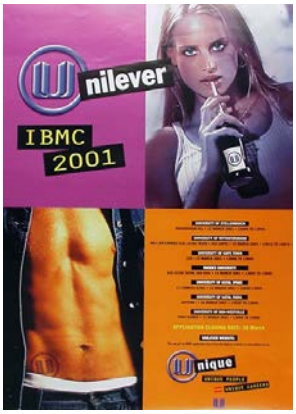
Steady training of the emotions

Advertising dominates our living patterns today and hence also the unthinking acceptance of certain types of personal goals. The mass and social media result in a steady training of the emotions. This training is indiscriminate and beneath the level of conscious thinking. And once these emotional attitudes have solidified it is difficult, if not impossible, to correct them. They are shared by our whole society. They are imbibed from childhood upwards through a massive conditioning process through television and radio and social media.

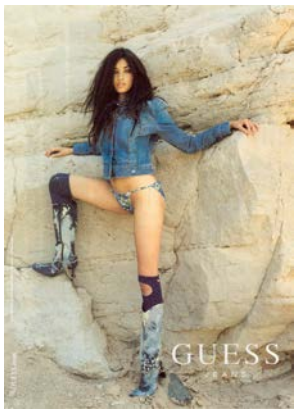
Sexual identities and advertising

Advertisements make everything “sexy” but do not restore to people the proper enjoyment of their own sexuality, largely because it is more useful to advertisers to make people insecure about their sexuality. The fundamental message of nearly all adverts is that sex and love can be bought. It is a fact of human history that sex can be bought, hence the existence of prostitution (and, many would say, certain forms of marriage). The idea that love (and not just sex) can be purchased was one of the great advertising innovations. So we are daily bombarded with messages aimed particularly at those who are grappling with sexual insecurities natural to their stage of human development or life situation – teenagers, young adults, those entering middle age.

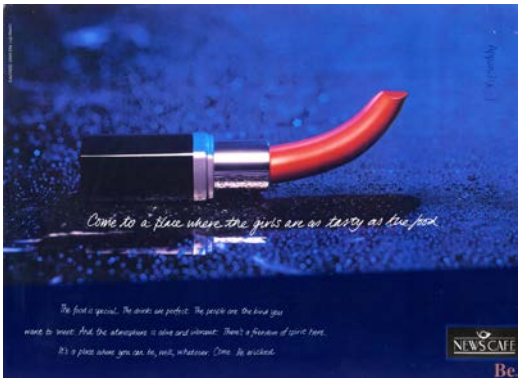
Of course, in current times when virtually anything goes on television, cinema and adverts, the treatment of sexuality may be given ironic twists and humour, or be presented with sledgehammer crassness, event to the extent of rape fantasies.

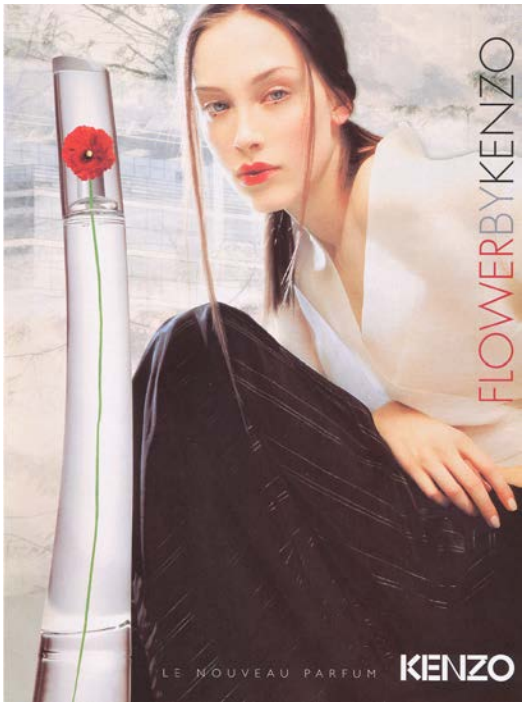


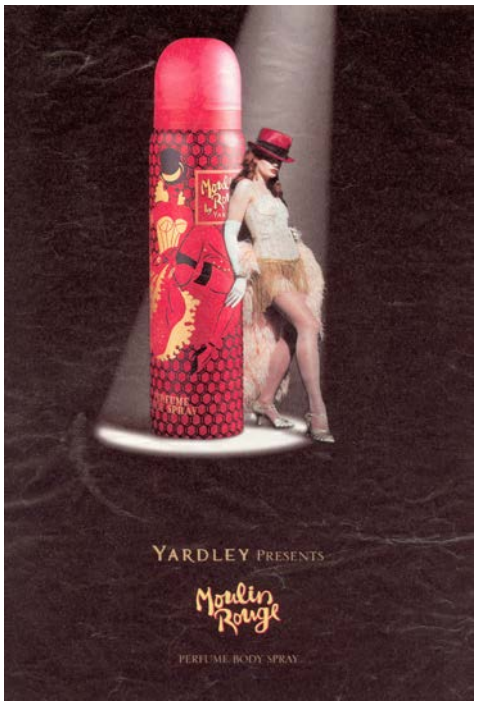
Take this Unilever advertisement directed at, and trying to get the immediate attention of, university students. (Unilever used to sponsor an Ethics Centre on the University of KwaZulu-Natal Pietermaritzburg campus - makes you think, doesn't it?)



Phallic symbols and oral sex are common in modern advertising:

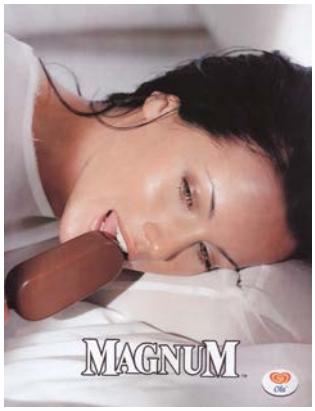


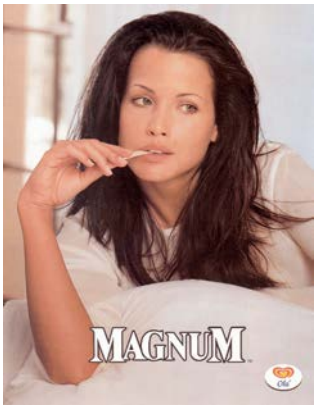




As are the more crass pictures of women in coital positions (the most famous of which was an Opium perfume advert from 2000, which led to endless imitations (for advertising images are invariably visual cliches)). The provocative nature of these images is meant to grab attention and to lock into people's sexual, voyeuristic and rape fantasies (seen particularly in the two Dolce & Gabana examples (one a homosexual one).

But gentler masturbation and oral gratification fantasies remain enduringly popular, usually in relation to self-indulgence in food.





Identifying with other people

This is a question from a ***Marie Claire*** reader survey in the October 2001 edition of the magazine which highlights the advertisers' use of identification with celebrities.

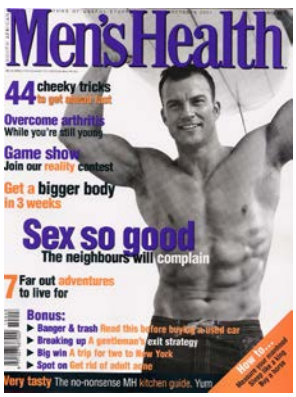
Now look only at the actress on the cover of the October issue of marie claire. Please tick below the one statement that best describes your feelings about her. (Please tick only one)

1. A person I'd like to be
2. A person of my type
3. A person I'd very much like to know
4. A person I'd like to meet just once
5. A person I'd not like to know

Take this press release:

> Jennifer Lopez's popularity and inspirational qualities make her a global icon that women of all ages aspire to. Jennifer Lopez has become a movement, a lifestyle. She represents a style and energy that will be expressed through every aspect of the fragrance product. Jennifer Lopez represents an exciting new addition to our portfolio of living brands. (Bernd Beetz, CEO of Coty Inc.)

Here are some more people magazine readers in the early 2000s were encouraged to identify with.



Identity selling and bogus rebellion

Klein (2000, p. 77) notes that there is a certain self-conscious self-mockery and campness in much modern brand advertising (some of it a self-defence against criticism of what advertisers do). Many brand leader companies also sell under "independent" labels, e.g. Red Line Jeans and K-1 Khakis (Levi Strauss) to allow for what Klein calls "ironic consumption" in which young people "express their disdain for mass culture not by opting out of it but by abandoning themselves to it entirely – but with an ironic twist."

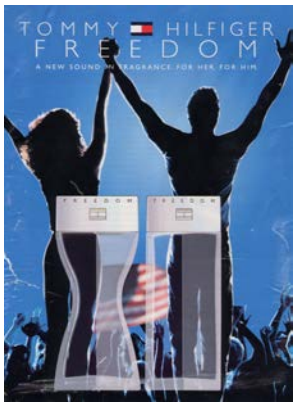
Some brands are deliberately kitch (for example Diesel) and many brands equally deliberately link their fashions and styles with minority groups. Many so-called street fashions are deliberately planted by brandmasters such as Nike and Hilfiger.

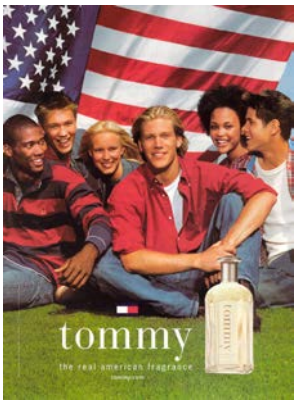
Though such styles and adverts (e.g., Benneton) suggest resistance against the corporate take over of the public spaces it is neutered by the total absence of any political sense and, as Klein (2000, p. 109) states, "in the absence of more tangible political goals, any movement that is about fighting for better social mirrors is going to eventually fall victim to its own narcissism." and she quotes (p. 114) Ann Power's comment in relation to women that "at this intersection between the conventional feminine and the evolving Girl, what's springing up is not a revolution but a mall... Thus, a genuine movement devolves into a giant shopping spree, where girls are encouraged to purchase whatever identity fits them best off the rack."

One of the funniest passages in Klein (p. 76) is her description of Tommy Hilfiger:

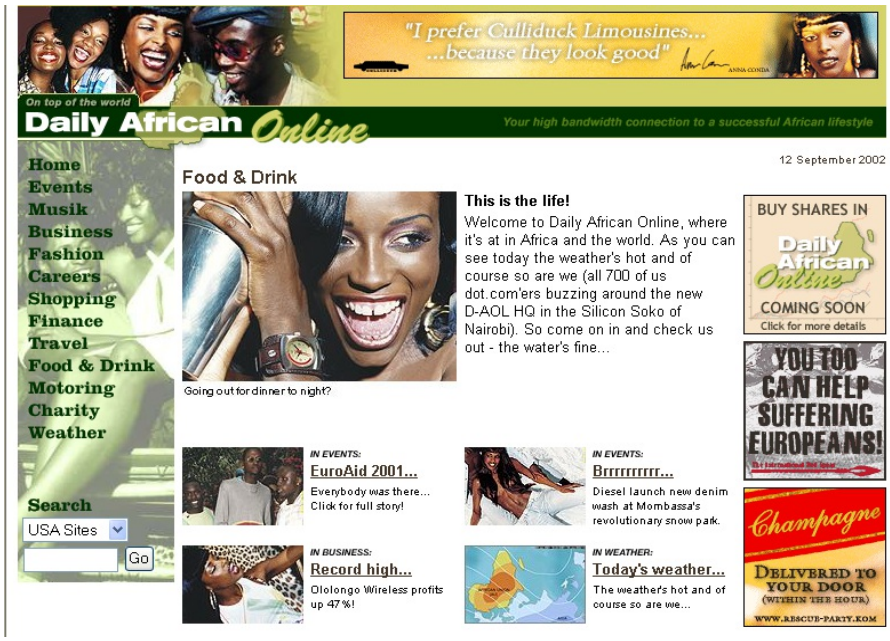
> Like a depoliticized, hyper-patriotic Benetton, Hilfiger ads are a tangle of Cape Cod multiculturalism: scrubbed black faces lounging with their windswept white brothers and sisters in that great country club in the sky, and always against the backdrop of a billowing American flag. "By respecting one another we can reach all cultures and communities," the company says. "We promote... the concept of living the American dream." But the hard facts of Tommy's interracial financial success have less to do with finding common ground between cultures than with the power and mythology embedded in America's deep racial segregation.
>
> Tommy Hilfiger started off squarely as white-preppy wear in the tradition of Ralph Lauren and Lacoste. But the designer soon realized that his clothes also had a peculiar cachet in the inner cities, where the hip-hop philosophy of "living large" saw poor and working-class kids acquiring status in the ghetto by adopting the gear and accoutrements of prohibitively costly leisure activities, such as skiing, golfing, even boating. Perhaps to better position his brand within this urban fantasy, Hilfiger began to associate his clothes more consciously with these sports, shooting ads at yacht clubs, beaches and other nautical locales. At the same time, the clothes themselves were redesigned to appeal more directly to the hip-hop aesthetic. Cultural theorist Paul Smith describes the shift as "bolder colours, bigger and baggier styles, more hoods and cords, and more prominence for logos and the Hilfiger name." He also plied rap artists like Snoop Dogg with free clothes and, walking the tightrope between the yacht and the ghetto, launched a line of Tommy Hilfiger beepers.

Once Tommy was firmly established as a ghetto thing, the real selling could begin – not just to the comparatively small market of poor inner-city youth but to the much larger market of middle-class white and Asian kids who mimic black style in everything from lingo to sports to music. Company sales reached $847 million in 1998 – up from a paltry $53 million in 1991 when Hilfiger was still, as Smith puts it, "Young Republican clothing." Like so much of cool hunting, Hilfiger's marketing journey feeds off the alienation at the heart of America's race relations: selling white youth on their fetishization of black style, and black youth on their fetishization of white wealth.





Some bogus rebellion adverts (Diesel goes ironic (but not too much)!):



Indeed, advertising in the global marketplace hardly takes real diversity into account and has led to irrevocable homogenization. Diversity is not genuinely catered for, though a “candy-coated multiculturalism”, “mono-multiculturalism”, a “global mall” is – as seen so spectacularly in South African Breweries adverts that depict this bogus multiculturalism in bars and taverns that simply do not exist in real life.

In all of this teenagers, who consume a disproportionate share of their families’ income, exhibit a pervasive mind-numbing homogenisation:

> The most extensive and widely cited study of the global teen demographic was conducted in 1996 by the New York ad agency DMB&B’s BrainWaves division. The “New World Teen Study” surveyed 27,600 middle-class fifteen- to eighteen-year-olds in forty-five countries and came up with resoundingly good news for the agency’s clients, a list that includes Coca-Cola, Burger King and Philips. “Despite different cultures, middle-class youth all over the world seem to live their lives in a parallel universe. They get up in the morning, put on their Levi’s and Nikes, grab their caps, backpacks, and Sony personal CD players, and head for school.” Elissa Moses, senior vice president of the advertising agency, called the arrival of the global teen demographic “one of the greatest marketing opportunities of all time.” (Klein, 2000, p. 119)

The unbridled consumerism of MTV seen by 273.5 million households worldwide is one of the most significant factors contributing to the shared and increasingly homogenized tastes of middle-class teenagers. In the early 2000s some 85% of United States of America middle-class teenagers watched it every day.

The branded multinationals may talk diversity, but the visible result of their actions is an army of teenagers marching – in “uniform”, as the marketers say – into the global mall. Despite the embrace of polyethnic imagery, market-driven globalization doesn’t want diversity, quite the opposite. Its enemies are national habits, local brands, and distinctive regional tastes. (Klein, 2000, p. 129)

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Klein, Naomi. 2000. ***No logo. Taking aim at the brand bullies***. London: HarperCollins

Readings

You can have it all

Mark Gevisser

Millenium, Oct-Nov 1996, pp. 31-37 [excerpt from an article on Jane Raphaely, the then editor of ***Cosmopolitan***]

She also struggled with anxiety about not bringing up her own kids directly. “I remember”, she says, “going to listen to Margaret Mead speak. As she came down off the podium, I rushed up to her and grabbed her - ‘Dr Mead!’ I asked, ‘what do you think about children having nannies?”’ All the other women couldn’t wait to hear the answer: this, after all, is the seminal white South African Question. “She said that in extended families, children grew up much stronger than in nuclear ones. If their nannies loved them and were constant, they would have more security, not less. Thank you, Margaret! I’ve held that as my mantra ever since!”

Her feminism is eclectic: she is most certainly well versed in it-indeed, in the late eighties, through a mutual acquaintance, she sent a feminist reading list to Nelson Mandela on Robben Island - and it had some inspired, if unexpectedly intemperate, flourishes. Here, for example, is Raphaely on rape: “If we could teach young women to respond to someone who comes at them unzipping his fly by saying, ‘Yes, now get down on the floor, because I like to be on top,’ the reason for the rape would totally fall away. Rape is about power, about subjugation, its not about sex. The minute we talk rape into sex and specify what we want - ‘Get your kit off, let’s see the tackle’, the whole power dynamic of the situation is changed completely.”

Is her feminism, though, ultimately at odds with her product? The only place she will admit to that is “in the thinness of the models”, something she says she is perpetually struggling against. Her magazines are no longer that stereotypical thing of ‘how to get your man and how to keep him’- even though there’s still an element of it. Where many women find them problematic, though, is that they define, very tightly indeed. what it means to be a woman in the first place.

The office joke, that *“Cosmo* Girls have vaginas while *Femina* women have wombs”, is a parody of how obsessively (and successfully) the company has niched its market into two groups. Go and see Jane Raphaely’s other partner, marketing whizz Volker Kühnel, and he’ll whip out his audio visual display demonstrating the difference between “The *Cosmo* Girl” and “The Woman”: the former is represented by a mounted picture of Claudia Schiffer, the latter one of Gillian van Houten. The former is “modern”, the latter “contemporary”. Cosmo Girl is “proactive, liberal, open to change, has an ambitious streak for making money, goes to gym, eats out, travels abroad and shops at Stuttafords.” *Femina* Woman is “conformist, tolerant, empathetic”, has “covert status, plays tennis, has friends over for dinner, goes to exhibitions and shops at Truworths.” To counter both of them, Kühnel whips out a third poster, of two 40-something mums, with sensible twinsets and short bobbed hair, embracing each other after having just, one presumes, filled the fully automatic with Skip or spread a whole tub of Floro on to enough slices of bread to feed vast, all-consuming broods. These poor dears are *Fair Lady* readers - they are “reactive, have traditional values, need approval, are reserved, spend the evening at home with the family, and shop at Edgars or Foschini.”

Magazines make the bulk of their revenue not from circulation but from advertising. From day one, Kühnel tells me, “we had to be strong. We had to say no to Omo. That image is not a *Cosmo* image. There needs to be synergy between the ads and the editorial.” Synergy, of course, is a two-way street: if ads help sell a magazine to a target group, then editorial content helps sell the products advertised alongside it too. And because there is a commercial imperative to market the ideal woman, the cover-girl, it sets very difficult aspirations for its readers to meet. Very few of *Cosmo*’s readers have Claudia’s pout; very few of *Femina*’s readers have Gillian’s hips, her sexy game-ranger boyfriend, or her perfect complexion.

Femina senior feature writer Marianne Thamm talks of how “when doing a story about ME syndrome, we are told we must find someone who is attractive. A woman suffering from the very real physical effects of the syndrome, with hair falling out and an incontinent bladder, is out of the question! The magazine is aspirational, and we need to find that sort of woman. We’ll hold the piece until we do.” It’s an unspoken axiom in women’s magazines: every woman represented in the magazine’s editorial pages is doing her bit to sell L’Oreal or Lancome or Edgars or Foschini, and you can’t have an incontinent hairless ME-sufferer doing that.

For a hard-nosed businesswoman, eyes only on the bottom line, such considerations wouldn’t matter: if the reader wanted to escape into the fantasy- or the longing - that she was Gillian or Claudia, let her go for it. Sure, shell crash after the experience but hell, she’ll pick herself up by buying another magazine. What complicates Jane Raphaely, though, is that she clearly sees herself as both a businesswoman and something of a missionary, both a publisher and a politician. This leads inevitably to some contradictions.

Her mission, she says, is to give women the tools, via her magazine, to free themselves. “Issues” - Aids, violence against women, pornography, abortion-take up much editorial space in *Femina,* if not in *Cosmo.* This, says Raphaely, is because “it’s targeted at women who do care about things, who are socially aware.” Perhaps because South Africa does not have an articulate, organised women’s movement, it finds itself in the interesting position of having the purveyor of some of the most stereotyped notions of femininity be one of the most outspoken, articulate advocates of women’s rights in this country. Jane Raphaely’s submission to the parliamentary subcommittee reproductive rights, in favour of woman’s right to abortion, was one of the more powerful and influential one’s received. She is taken very seriously by politicians - a position she has nurtured assiduously.

Cynics says it’s a marketing ploy - the more she sets herself up as model and power-broker, the more magazines she sells. ...

Selling the dream of what's inside the bottle

Sunday Times 29 September 2002

[in the "Top Brands Survey", p. 10]

For five years in succession Tastic has come out tops in the food category. It is the food brand that has the highest awareness, the highest trust and confidence and the highest level of brand loyalty.

In an environment offering as many choices as the food market, Tastic's dominance year after year is about branding more than anything else.

If you want the perfect answer to the "rice is rice, only price matters and and brands are dead" line then the success of Tastic is it.

Martin Searl, brand development director for Tiger Brands, which owns Tastic and many other more famous food brands (including Ace, Koo, Black Cat Peanut Butter, Fatti's & Moni's, Purity), says each brand is managed as a business unit which demands a return on investment.

The strategic role of each brand in the business is extremely important because, depending on this role, different profit strategies have to be deployed to exploit the profit potential of the brand.

"This is brand management," Searl says. "To succeed, one needs a business mindset."

He says that there has been a realisation in the boardroom that brands are the critical assets of the business and they need to be nurtured and monitored. It has always been easier to measure and manage tangible assets and yet, increasingly, it is the intangible assets such as brands that differentiate the star performing businesses.

Not long ago, brands were regarded as products. Now, says Searl, "brand is the premium or added value one can give by adding image appeal to the product.

"It's about discovering and exploiting consumers' needs and turning them into aspirational propositions. More and more consumers are being faced with exciting and appealing stimuli in life from the entertainment industry down to the fashion industry and they're now demanding the unexpected and surprising."

Brands have to understand how they trigger aspirations and develop an image appeal around such an aspiration.

"We don't sell products, we sell promises," explains Searl. "We don't sell pasta. Fatti's & Moni's sells inspirational cooking in the kitchen.

“The All Gold advertisement on television is not selling tomato sauce, it’s selling the social good times that come out of forging connections. All Gold is integrating itself into a goodtime moment.”

Branding is about understanding the consumer. And what is important to every consumer? Peer group and social admiration, that’s what

Tastic rice has recently launched a series on television called “expecting company”, which is all about the art of entertaining at home and the gratification people get out of being admired as top-class entertainers.

“The rice is selling the admiration one gets from being recognised as a great entertainer,” says Searl.

The constant challenge for brand managers is “how many times can we get the brand to encounter the consumer and make each encounter an unexpected and surprising one?”

This is about using street visibility, through to linking it to sponsorship events that are aspirational or interesting.

“We treat it as communication rather than advertising, media and pack design.”

The key communication vehicles are the label and the packaging as well as the advertising.

“How the label describes what’s inside the bottle is more important than what it says about the product,” says Searl.

“It’s about a sensory description of what’s in the bottle. I’s about bringing the appetite appeal through the label in the foods context.”

Labels used to be a form of educating consumers about what was in the bottle. Now, says Searl, “we need to use it as a form of exciting consumers to sell them the dream of what’s inside the bottle.”

“The label used to be educational – what this product is and how you use it. Now it’s aspirational – what does the product do for me and how does the brand make me feel?

“The All Gold label has an element of status and quality to it. You’re proud to put it on the table in front of your guests. It imbues you with some status and importance,” he says.