

RHETORICAL MOTIVES IN ADVERTISING:
A THEORY OF ADVERTISING GENRE
AS RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

A Thesis Submitted to the College of
Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in Interdisciplinary Studies: Rhetoric and Popular Culture
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

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Abstract

Variouly argued to be information and news about products or studied to be made a more effective sales discourse, advertising, most especially national brand advertising, is ubiquitous and unrelenting in all public spaces in our society. We see and hear more advertising discourse than any other kind of discourse and it attempts to persuade us not only toward more consumption, but also toward a core value system based on consumption and commercial transaction. This study argues that, in fact, advertising functions as a kind of religious discourse and that it constructs a view of audience that has ethical consequences and implications for civility in society and for actions taken to be in the public's best interest. The work is interdisciplinary in nature in that it draws on sociological theories of religion and identity and on qualitative studies of advertising, and it also uses rhetorical critical methods to theorize generalities of brand advertising.

The first chapter offers an interdisciplinary overview of critical studies of advertising, while the second chapter shows how rhetorical criticism contributes to advertising studies. The third chapter offers a rhetorical analysis of key texts written by the early men who shaped public opinion about advertising discourse. They relied on metaphors of religion to convince audiences for their memoirs that advertising could be a useful tool for American business. The dissertation contends that these strategies infused and shaped the advertising genre itself, enabling modern advertising discourse to use persuasive strategies inherent in the discourses of religion and the remaining chapters elaborate this argument. Rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke's work that describes how language itself manifests the structure of the Christian guilt, mortification, redemption drama is used to show how advertising functions in a structurally similar manner. This study also makes use of sociologist Hans Mol's contention that religion functions to

sacralize identity, and uses his argument to posit that advertising, as a religious discourse, sacralizes individuality and, thus, makes the pursuit of individualism as crucial to identity.

The dissertation shows how, as a result of advertising's parallels with religious discourse and in its sacralization of individualism, the genre paradoxically implies that mass consumption is a way to express individualism. Advertising suggests this belief through its enthymemes, which rely on individual's audience members to believe that each of them has an entelechial drive toward an idealized and attainable perfection of self. Advertising constructs its audiences as people who are narcissistic, and this focus on self-realization results in advancing a corollary of beliefs and ideologies that have repercussions for our understanding rhetorical civility. The unstated ideologies implicit in advertising are explained using Symbolic Convergence theory. This study has found that advertising's persuasiveness is a result of its ability to speak to people about their deepest human needs in seemingly meaningful ways.

Acknowledgements

As I have learned in the process of writing this dissertation, writers do not write in isolation. Therefore, I owe a debt of gratitude to several individuals.

First, I would like to thank my academic supervisor, Dr. John Moffatt. He has always encouraged me and asked many questions to help me clarify my arguments. He has returned draft after draft promptly and with thoughtful comments. Without his generous guidance, this dissertation would never have come to be. I aspire to become the kind of academic supervisor that he is. Further, my committee members have been a dream team: Dr. Richard Burton, College of Engineering; Dr. Barbara Phillips, Edwards School of Business, and Dr. John Thompson, Professor Emeritus of St. Thomas More College. They recognize both the difficulty and the necessity of conducting interdisciplinary studies. Their unflagging support and encouragement, professionalism and thorough critiques have helped me to become a better scholar. Finally, my external reader, Dr. Kendall Phillips, asked questions that have helped me to plot a course for my future research and suggested directions that will be very fruitful for me to explore.

In addition, I would like to thank the College of Engineering and especially Dr. Bob Gander and Dr. Malcolm Reeves who have supported the study of communication. I would also like to acknowledge Ron and Jane Graham, and Dr. Jennifer MacLennan for her role in creating the Ron and Jane Graham Centre for the Study of Communication in the College of Engineering, and for the time she spent teaching rhetorical criticism, theory, and practice. I am also deeply grateful to my colleagues in the Graham Centre, Rebekah Bennetch, Dr. Corey Owen, Deborah Rolfes, Burton Urquhart, and Gwen Jones who have provided collegial support as well as friendship and encouragement. Each of them has helped to make the Graham Centre a

welcoming laughter-filled place to teach, study, and work. I am grateful to them and especially to Burton for his thoughtful discussions with me.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank my husband, my dearest John Butler, for persevering with me through a process that has been difficult and exhausting, even as it's been thrilling.

Dedication

To my dearest friend Margaret Halabura for pushing me, for believing in me, and for being so generous in her support of this endeavor.

I am a lucky woman.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction: The Everyday Miracles and Wonders of Advertising..... | 1 |
| 1.1. Buying in to Advertising..... | 1 |
| 1.1.1. Advertising: A Rhetorical Practice | 1 |
| 1.2. Advertising: An Ubiquitous Form of Public Discourse..... | 10 |
| 1.2.1. Advertising and Electronic Media | 10 |
| 1.2.2. Advertising and Public Space | 12 |
| 1.2.3. Advertising and Private Space | 14 |
| 1.2.4. Advertising and the Human Body as “ Media Space” | 15 |
| 1.3. Naturalized Assumptions of Advertising..... | 17 |
| 1.3.1. Advertising as Mental Landscape..... | 17 |
| 1.3.2. Anonymity of Advertising Creators..... | 20 |
| 1.4. Some Claims about Advertising | 23 |
| 1.4.1. Advertising as News and Education | 25 |
| 1.4.2. Advertising as Mirror..... | 26 |
| 1.4.3. Advertising as Art and Entertainment..... | 27 |
| 1.4.4. Advertising as Contemporary Folk/Fairy Tales..... | 30 |
| 1.4.5. The Audience Exerts Power..... | 31 |
| 1.5. Advertising as Social Discourse | 33 |
| 1.5.1. Advertising as Community | 33 |
| 1.5.2. Advertising Influences Self-concept..... | 35 |
| 1.6. Advertising as Transformation and Religious Discourse | 37 |
| 1.7. Advertising: From social cohesion to social transformation | 38 |
| 1.8. Conclusion: The Symbolic World and Advertising..... | 39 |
| Rhetorical Incarnations: Using Rhetorical Theory to Reveal Advertising’s Social Order..... | 42 |
| 2.1. What is a Rhetorical Perspective?..... | 42 |
| 2.1.1. Durkheim’s Elementary Forms of Religious Life | 46 |
| 2.2. Burke and Language | 48 |
| 2.2.1. Terministic Screens..... | 48 |

| | | |
|----------|---|----|
| 2.2.2. | Burke and Symbolic Action..... | 51 |
| 2.2.3. | Language and Persuasion..... | 52 |
| 2.2.4. | Advertising as Narrative; Narrative as Ethical Discourse | 54 |
| 2.3 | Ethical Criticism | 54 |
| 2.4. | Identification as Prime Motive..... | 59 |
| 2.4.1 | Identification and the Enthymeme | 60 |
| 2.4.1.a. | The Enthymeme and Popular Culture..... | 62 |
| 2.4.2. | Identification and Exigence | 63 |
| 2.4.3. | Identification and Narrative Devices | 64 |
| 2.4.4. | From Identification to Burke’s Dramatistic Pentad | 65 |
| 2.5. | Dramatism and the Historical Scene..... | 67 |
| 2.6. | Burke: Language Enacts Social Order..... | 69 |
| 2.7. | Sacralizing Consumer Identity..... | 70 |
| 2.8. | Fantasy Themes | 71 |
| 2.9. | Conclusion | 72 |
| | Redemption and Genesis: The Beginnings of Modern Advertising..... | 73 |
| 3.1. | Introduction..... | 73 |
| 3.2. | Scene/Act | 81 |
| 3.2.1. | The Rhetorical Scene: A Brief History of Patent Medicine Era..... | 81 |
| 3.2.2. | Scene as Rhetorical Exigence | 82 |
| 3.2.3. | Symbolic Act: Redemption of Advertising..... | 84 |
| 3.3. | Agent/Scene Ratio: Revising the Scene with New Terministic Screens | 86 |
| 3.3.1. | Copy Writers: Redefining Content | 86 |
| 3.3.2. | George Rowell and the Professionalization of the Advertising Agency | 89 |
| 3.3.2.a. | Transformation of Advertising Agencies..... | 90 |
| 3.3.2.b. | Neither News nor Education: Advertising as Puffery..... | 91 |
| 3.3.2.c. | Rowell: First Steps to Advertising’s Redemption | 92 |
| 3.3.3. | Earnest Elmo Calkins: Imagery Persuades and Advertising Transforms | 93 |
| 3.3.3.a. | Calkins: Aesthetics and the Persuasiveness of Art | 94 |
| 3.3.3.b. | Advertising as Agent of Transformation | 95 |
| 3.3.3.c. | Calkins as Aesthete | 95 |

| | | |
|----------|---|-----|
| 3.3.4. | Walter Dill Scott: Psychology of Persuasion..... | 96 |
| 3.3.4.a. | Scott and the Psychology of the Audience | 98 |
| 3.3.5. | Claude Hopkins: The Science Behind the Advertising Scene | 98 |
| 3.3.6. | Albert Lasker: Social Contract as Scenic Element | 99 |
| 3.3.7. | Agent/Scene Conclusion..... | 101 |
| 3.4. | Scene/Agency | 103 |
| 3.4.1 | Hopkins: Scene/Agency: Scientistic Clusters..... | 104 |
| 3.4.1.a. | Healers, Pilots and Guides, Heroes and Leaders | 104 |
| 3.4.1.b. | Law Givers..... | 106 |
| 3.4.1.c. | Hopkins: Saviour and Scientist..... | 107 |
| 3.4.2. | Lasker: Scene/Agency: Frames of Religion Cluster..... | 109 |
| 3.4.2.a. | Healers, Preachers, Heroes and Leaders | 109 |
| 3.4.2.b. | Advertising as Scientific and Supernatural Force..... | 112 |
| 3.4.2.c. | Lasker’s “Glorious” Force | 113 |
| 3.4.3. | Earnest Elmo Calkins..... | 113 |
| 3.4.3.a. | Heroes and Leaders..... | 114 |
| 3.4.3.b. | Advertising as Both Social and Natural Force..... | 115 |
| 3.4.4. | Agency Scene Conclusion | 116 |
| 3.5. | Agent/Agency Ratio in James Webb Young | 119 |
| 3.5.1. | Admen: Agents of Creation, Perception, and Enlightenment..... | 120 |
| 3.5.1.a. | Admen: Agents Who are Hunters and Shepherds..... | 121 |
| 3.5.1.b. | Admen: Agents of Teaching | 122 |
| 3.5.1.c. | Admen: Agents of Medicine..... | 123 |
| 3.5.1.d. | Admen and Religious Allusion..... | 124 |
| 3.5.2. | Advertising as Organic Force | 124 |
| 3.5.3. | Advertising as Evangelism | 125 |
| 3.5.4. | Advertising as Metaphysical Philosophy..... | 127 |
| 3.6. | How Advertising Discourse Fulfilled Its Teleology: The Miracle Performed by Terministic Screens..... | 128 |
| | Redemption and Genesis: The Beginnings of Modern Advertising | 134 |
| 4.1. | From the Redemption of Advertising to Advertising’s Promise of Redemption | 134 |

| | | |
|--------|---|-----|
| 4.2. | Elements of Ritual Drama in Advertising..... | 137 |
| 4.3 | Advertising and the Symbolic Nature of Humans | 142 |
| 4.3.1. | Symbol-Using Animal | 142 |
| 4.3.2. | Inventor of the Negative and Separated from His Natural Condition by Instruments of His Own Making | 144 |
| 4.3.3. | Goaded by Hierarchy and Rotten with Perfection | 147 |
| 4.3.4. | Summary of “Definition of Man” | 150 |
| 4.4. | Dramatism & Advertising’s Primary Motives..... | 151 |
| 4.4.1. | Advertising: The Negative and Conflict..... | 152 |
| 4.4.2. | Advertising: Hierarchy and Guilt..... | 154 |
| 4.4.3. | Advertising: Hierarchy and Perfection | 157 |
| 4.4.4. | Advertising: Hierarchy and Mystery | 159 |
| 4.4.5. | Advertising: Purification through Mortification..... | 162 |
| 4.4.6. | Advertising: Redemption and Transcendence | 163 |
| 4.5. | Conclusion: Advertising Enacts a Discourse of Salvation | 164 |
| | Advertising and Rhetorical Indisposition: A Narcissistic Paradise | 167 |
| 5.1. | Religious Discourse and Identity | 167 |
| 5.2. | Mol’s Identity and the Sacred..... | 173 |
| 5.3. | Objectification..... | 175 |
| 5.4. | Commitment | 179 |
| 5.5. | Ritual..... | 185 |
| 5.6. | Myth..... | 192 |
| 5.7. | Extrapolating identity: What Are the Consequences of “Individualism” to “Consumer Identity” | 194 |
| 5.7.1. | The Consumer Narcissist..... | 194 |
| 5.7.2. | Primacy of the Individual..... | 197 |
| 5.7.3. | Narcissism and Civil Society | 198 |
| 5.8. | Conclusion | 199 |
| | Advertising and Covenant: The Rhetorical Vision Inherent in Advertising Discourse..... | 202 |
| 6.1. | Fantasy Themes and Rhetorical Visions..... | 202 |

| | | |
|--------|--|-----|
| 6.2. | Symbolic Convergence Theory: An Overview..... | 204 |
| 6.2.1. | Dramatizing Messages..... | 206 |
| 6.2.2. | Fantasy Theme..... | 208 |
| 6.2.3. | Rhetorical Visions..... | 211 |
| 6.3. | Character Themes: Pursuit of Perfection in Identity..... | 213 |
| 6.4. | Action Theme: Pursuit of Novelty..... | 215 |
| 6.5. | Setting Theme: What Is a Community and What Does It Do?..... | 221 |
| 6.5.1. | A Rhetorical Vision that Excludes..... | 229 |
| 6.6. | Setting the Scene for Alienation and Division..... | 230 |
| 6.7. | Compassion..... | 232 |
| 6.8. | Conclusion..... | 233 |
| | Conclusion: Revelations from Advertising..... | 236 |
| 7.1. | Advertising as Religious Discourse..... | 236 |
| 7.2. | Advertising's Teachings..... | 238 |
| 7.3. | Identity Invoked by Advertising..... | 239 |
| 7.4. | Burke and the Guilt-Mortification-Redemption Cycle in Advertising..... | 240 |
| 7.5. | Narcissistic Individuality and Consequences..... | 242 |
| 7.6. | Advertising Incivility and Social Consequences..... | 244 |
| 7.7. | Impact of Study of Rhetorical Scholarship..... | 245 |
| 7.7.1. | Suggestions for Future Research:..... | 248 |
| 7.8. | Conclusion..... | 250 |
| | Works Cited..... | 252 |
| | Biographical Sketch..... | 264 |

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Everyday Miracles and Wonders of Advertising

“Pepsi: Now available in the afterlife” (*The Invention of Lying*)

1.1. Buying in to Advertising

1.1.1. Advertising: A Rhetorical Practice

There is a place, about 30 seconds away, where people do not suffer (for long) or die, or experience the anguish that life sometimes invites us to endure: it is Adland, and there, people have fabulous family lives and fabulous sex lives. They have reduced the appearance of wrinkles, and learned how to look younger, feel younger, and act younger. In Adland, a major catastrophe might be an orange juice spill handily cleaned up by super absorbent paper towels, or a car that does not shine the way it could if the owner simply used a particular kind of car wax. Celebrities hawk clothing, toiletries, vehicles, and Visa cards, and angels cook with cream cheese demonstrating product availability in the afterlife. Ads promise us a little taste of heaven, tempt us with sinfully delicious chocolate and promise us transcendence from our ordinary lives into the extraordinary experiences that are often portrayed in advertising. The 2009 movie *The Invention of Lying* mocks the promises of Adland in a scene where a bus ad promises that Pepsi will be available in the afterlife; sometimes it seems that advertising’s promises are almost as outlandish as this movie implies. In Adland, problems are solved with product purchases, relationships are strengthened over brand-name burgers, and the characters in the ads live happily ever after. Advertising gives us clever and amusing mini-stories as it describes and sells

its merchandise. Not many people take seriously every claim made in ads, but most of us also believe that there are kernels of truth in what advertising tells us, in part because advertising's narratives display patterns of experience representative of our own experiences. Historian Daniel Boorstin in fact notes that asking whether ads are true or false is as "obsolete as the horse and buggy" (214). He claims the "advertiser's art then consists largely of the art of making persuasive statements which are neither true nor false" and that the novel appeals of advertising "are both effects and causes of our exaggerated expectations: products and byproducts of image-thinking" (214). We understand that the "truth" of advertising exists in showing us emotional experiences. In addition, we all know that advertising is always selling us something and that it is always persuasive, but we mostly believe that we are inured to that persuasion.

Advertising is helping us to buy more than just products or experiences, and helping us to buy into more than just consumption. In this dissertation, I will argue that advertising, as a symbolic communicative act and as a genre, is persuading us to adopt a particular self-concept with an attendant corollary of beliefs and behaviours and that it is a morally-infused discourse that covertly shapes modern notions of how to live the so-called "good life"; in fact, it functions in a manner similar to traditional religious discourse because it functions as a socializing discourse. It is part of the human condition to long for transcendence and to desire transformation; advertising discourse has waxed in the public arena at the expense of other socializing discourses, such as religious discourse, offering masses of people instruction in how to undergo transformation and thus experience transcendence.

Advertising is one of the most, if not the most, prevalent form of rhetorical practice and one that everyone will point to when asked to identify persuasive discourse. It is a persuasive discourse that usually urges its audience to take action, whether that action is to buy, to develop a

belief in the integrity of, or to form an attitude about, a particular product, brand, or even experience. Even “image campaigns” or simple price and item ads may be considered persuasive because they keep a business’s name prominent in print or on the air which means that even if consumers are not in the market for whatever product or service the business sells, they remain conscious of its existence. Advertising that does not seem overtly persuasive is in fact a sample of persuasion in that it belongs to what Aristotle would call the deliberative genre of rhetoric¹. Deliberative rhetoric exhorts or dehorts an audience to undertake a course of future action, but it may also affirm beliefs that the audience already holds. Thus, corporate sponsorship of particular events, for example, is persuasive in that it builds relationships with the audience through building the audience’s familiarity with products or brands; in turn, familiarity can breed credibility, in that a brand name, a product, or a business’s name emphasized in the public arena may be the first one an audience thinks of when the audience is looking for something particular that is related to that product. Rob Walker, New York Times columnist and author of *Buying In: The Secret Dialogue Between What We Buy and Who We Are*, cites a Red Bull marketing campaign as a perfect example of what he calls “stealth marketing;” before the “energy” drink became popular, its producers “devised and underwrote [Red Bull’s] own stunts and competitions in obscure disciplines” such as street luge (146). The competitions drew in people who would ordinarily describe themselves as inured to marketing ploys. However, the Red Bull product soon became familiar to these people and came to be associatively linked with a maverick sub culture. No matter where we look, from sub-culture groups who denigrate

¹ For a description of Aristotle’s three divisions of rhetoric, see Aristotle (1358). The divisions are political (deliberative), legal (forensic), and the ceremonial oratory of display (epideictic). Deliberative rhetoric is used to convince audiences to take future actions; forensic rhetoric is used in courts to argue for guilt or innocence and corresponds with the past because it argues about events that took place in the past. Epideictic rhetoric is ceremonial rhetoric designed to honour the moment either by praising or assigning blame. These generic divisions are useful to modern rhetoricians because they give us insight into the purpose of particular instances of communication and are crucial to understanding context.

marketing and artificiality to mainstream die-hard brand-name loyalists, advertising permeates all aspects of our lives.

Keeping business, product or brand names prominent and in the forefront of an audience's perception is itself a form of persuasion on at least two levels. First, awareness of a business or product is the first step to acceptance. The more we hear a brand name, the more aware we are of it, and the more likely we are to choose it when we are deciding between comparable products. On a second, more abstract level, the very existence of advertising foregrounds the importance of goods and materials in and to our lives. The genre itself works to persuade us that our consumption patterns are "typical" and "normal". Advertising influences our perceptions of the world around us as well as our attitudes toward material goods by normalizing consumption through the thousands of ads we see every day. The onslaught of the genre, with its cultural weight and intensity, wants to persuade us to something more than just buying the goods and services that we require to live or that we require to announce our status to others.

Advertising seeks to influence our understanding of our own identities². Other critics have made the argument about the relationship between consumer products and identity. Just one example comes from political scientist and cultural critic Benjamin Barber, who says,

Consumerism plays a role in forging identities conducive to buying and selling. Identity here becomes a reflection of 'lifestyles' that are closely associated with commercial brands and the products they label,

² Cultural critic Raymond Williams and sociologist Robert Dunn offer two more examples of this identity argument. Williams, in *Problems in Materialism and Culture* (1980), claims that if we "make the right purchase within a system of meanings to which [we] are all trained" people will respond positively to our "displayed signals" (189). Dunn, in *Identifying Consumption* (2008), notes the emergence of the term "lifestyle" saying this concept "is central to a mapping of consumption practices in general and issues of identity in particular. . . . Lifestyle functions as (1) a vehicle of self-identity by providing resources for definition of self, and (2) a determinant of social and cultural identity by providing outward indications of where one fits in the social and cultural scheme of things. In the latter respect, lifestyle performs important communicative functions by giving expression to consumers' cultural dispositions and tastes" (121).

as well as with attitudes and behaviors linked to where we shop, how we buy, and what we eat, wear, and consume. (167)

Barber believes that brand identities will “displace traditional ascriptive identities that are associated with place and birth that are divisive and hence unsuited to the global marketplace” (170). However, my argument is not about how commodities express or influence individual identities. Instead, this dissertation examines how advertising itself seeks to shape a common identity for all its target audiences as it models ways to consider self, others, and community attachments. Ultimately, this study explores the implications its modelled behavior has for civil behavior and concepts of compassion. Advertising’s persuasive strategies operate through our own ways of defining our identities. Rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke says that,

[T]here are . . . ways in which we *spontaneously, intuitively, even unconsciously* persuade ourselves. In forming ideas of our personal identity, we spontaneously identify ourselves with family, nation, political or cultural cause, church and so on. (1966, 301)

Because advertising is the primary mode of public discourse, showing the everyday wonders and miracles of advertising to us all the time and everywhere, it is an influential part of our public symbol system. It attempts to influence our understanding of ourselves and our relationships.

We respond to advertising spontaneously and intuitively, if not always consciously. It shows us, in mini-narratives, what it means to be human and portrays characters taking actions in a variety of contexts. Through these actions, advertising models behaviors for us. In modeling ideal behaviors, advertising seeks to influence us on the same level as religious discourses do. In fact, some argue that advertising impels us to perform sacred acts. For example, media theorist Arthur Asa Berger, in *Shop Til You Drop*, suggests there is

[A]n important religious or sacred dimension to our consuming passions; and the same passions and fervor that animate religious belief in people are found in a . . . [secular] form, shaping their behavior as consumers in contemporary societies. Shopping, then, if we adopt a religious perspective on things, becomes a sacred act. (6 – 7)

Like religious discourses, advertising models ideal attitudes and actions, as it promises audiences transformation and transcendence and, ultimately, a form of salvation.

By religious discourses, I mean various kinds of texts and oral practices that help to socialize people and instill moral and ethical principles. Religious discourses are socializing in nature and prescribe ways we should live, behave, interact, and be in relationship with our society. They are inherently rhetorical in that they attempt to persuade people to accept fundamental beliefs about what it means to be human, what constitutes the “good life,” how to build relationships, what characteristics we should strive to cultivate, what ideals behaviours are, how to participate in civic life, and how to fulfill our complete human potential as individuals.

In this dissertation, I will argue that advertising functions in a manner parallel to religious discourses; it is a secularized, “non-denominational” kind of evangelizing discourse. In fact, advertising’s ubiquitous nature has placed it in the foreground of public consciousness displacing more traditional religious discourses. By “displaced,” I mean that now people are more likely to recognize advertising slogans, logos, and campaigns than they are to know, for example, “The Lord’s Prayer” or parables and bible stories. Cultural critic and English professor James Twitchell tested this hypothesis. He describes an informal experiment where he asks students to define or explain a shortened list of “what every American needs to know” culled from E.D. Hirsh’s *Cultural Literacy* and compares their understanding of that list with a list he generates

consisting of advertising slogans (1996, 6 – 7). The students are, of course, experts in the ad slogans. However, regardless of the demographic, people see more advertising in public space than any other kind of discourse, so we become aware of products that are not necessarily being marketed to us. My dissertation will argue that advertising functions like religious discourse in many very significant ways; it speaks about what it “believes” to be held sacred, how to achieve our fullest potential as humans, how to participate in civic society, and how to understand what it means to be compassionate. Advertising invites us into “religious” feeling in that it speaks to our deepest human needs to be loved, respected, and fulfilled, and to love and respect others.

I intend to draw parallels between how religious discourse functions and how advertising discourse functions in relation to convincing audiences to accept an ideal identity as it is evoked in the discourse. Both religious discourse and advertising discourses ask their audiences not only to believe in transformation, but also to actively seek ways to attain that transformation. Both discourses attempt to influence beliefs as well as actions. Advertising “speaks” to its target audiences about what to believe and how to demonstrate these beliefs. Advertising teaches people how to “worship” the notion of individualism, and demonstrates how the individual is linked and obligated to her community. As rhetorical critic Edwin Black says, “we can see in the auditor implied by a discourse a model of what the rhetor would have his real auditor become” (1970, 113). Both advertising discourse and religious discourses imply to their audiences ideal ways of believing and acting. They strive to accomplish their goals, in part, through stories.

Advertising specializes in narratives selling stories to its audiences. In fact, according to Pierre Berton’s *The Big Sell*, it is the story that sells (109 – 136). Advertising’s narration is one that offers transformation, transcendence and redemption to the audience. This argument will be elaborated in Chapter 4 using Burke’s theory of redemption drama. Advertising preaches, or

rather, evangelizes as it tells its stories. In this role, it is deliberative rhetoric, which aims to influence future action. While advertising clearly sets out to persuade its audiences to take a specific action, I will argue that it also acts as a form of moral persuasion because it persuades its audiences toward actions, and actions always have moral consequences. It invites audiences not just to *do* something, but also to *become* something.

Advertising also has a “naming” function in that it names features of the human condition that otherwise would be unknown to us. For example, while bad breath has existed since humans began breathing; it was not something that needed to be combated until Listerine decided to function as more than just an antiseptic. With the help of admen, the term “halitosis” was coined and it described a social issue that was destroying lives and careers (Turner, 1965, 213). While mouthwash may seem like a silly example of how advertising socializes, it exemplifies the socializing force of discourses which also function to tell audiences what is proper and decorous behavior. In addition, advertising tells us how we “sin” against our fellow humans, for example, by making them endure our untreated halitosis.

While religious discourses flourished in public spaces, they became a part of the popular culture. People could easily identify characters and themes derived from the Bible. Over the past century in North America, advertising has similarly flourished in public spaces and, likewise, is a significant aspect of popular culture. Churches brought communities of people together and built common ground among them. Likewise, advertising brings communities of brand users together and builds common ground among them. Advertising is part of the air we breathe and its precepts seek to infuse our beliefs and actions.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine some key features and key claims about and by the advertising industry showing how these claims help naturalize advertising, embedding

it as discourse that recommends ways of knowing and being. I will describe some of advertising's features to suggest that these features position it as a discourse that carries a message beyond its primarily commercial one that encourages consumption. The significant message behind the messages of advertising is very like the messages carried in religious discourses because, as a genre, it posits an ideal of human nature and relationships, asserts a conception of sin, advances its vision about the nature of the sacred, and asserts a message of redemption, perhaps even salvation. Perhaps most importantly, advertising, like religious discourses, presents a powerful theme of transformation.

The rest of this chapter is divided into five main sections. The first two will examine how advertising's ubiquity and naturalized assumptions enable its social power, but also how its assumptions make advertising problematic because it wields a strong social influence. First, I will suggest that these features are significant foundations for advertising's persuasiveness and social influence and help advertising form parallels with religious discourse. Second, I will explain how advertising's key features problematize it, helping to make it more than a simple commercial discourse that offers "news" about new products to "target" or rhetorical audiences³, and I will lay out some of the claims that have been made about advertising to orient the reader to views on advertising. In the third major section of this chapter, I will explain how advertising has become such a significant and influential social discourse. In the fourth section, I will discuss advertising's function as a social discourse, explaining its impact on group identity and self concept. In the final section, I will discuss advertising's transformative function. Advertising is as much, or more, a part of our modern mental landscape as religious discourses were historically; in fact, advertising may have an even greater influence, due to technological

³ Lloyd Bitzer specifies that a "rhetorical audience" is "distinguished from a body of mere hearers . . . [and] consists only of those person who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (1968, 8).

changes of the past century. This chapter outlines some of the assumptions I am operating with as I build the arguments presented in Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Because of its ubiquity and because of the emotional intensity of individual ads as well as campaigns, we need to become aware of how advertising attempts to shape us as moral beings, just as religious discourses attempt to shape their target audiences into moral beings. This study will expand the current scholarship about advertising by arguing that it functions in ways parallel to religious discourses.

1.2. Advertising: An Ubiquitous Form of Public Discourse

1.2.1. Advertising and Electronic Media

Advertising is the most common form of discourse in the public forum. Historically, political speech or religious speech had more influential public presences, but now advertising supersedes all other forms of discourse. No other discourse appears with the frequency and intensity of advertising. Advertising historian Richard Pollay noted in 1986 that “[t]he proliferation and the intrusion of various media into the everyday lives of the citizenry make advertising environmental in nature, persistently encountered, and involuntarily experienced by the entire population” (18). Its presence has expanded along with the capacity of technology to disseminate messages to mass audiences. Its pervasiveness should give rise to concern.

Advertising is both pervasive and persuasive and seeks to influence not only our actions, but also our beliefs because it is an axiom of persuasion that action is motivated by belief. Media critic Neil Postman invites us to focus our “attention on the forms of human conversation,” postulating “that how we are obliged to conduct such conversations will have the strongest possible influence on what ideas we can conveniently express” (1985, 6). Because advertising is everywhere, it seeks to exert an influence on how we converse and the underlying assumptions

of our conversations. I use the word “conversation” and “converse” in the same sense Postman does: he uses

[T]he word “conversation” metaphorically . . . [referring] to all techniques and technologies that permit people of a particular culture to exchange messages. In this sense, all culture is a conversation or, more precisely, a corporation of conversations, conducted in a variety of symbolic modes. Our attention here is on how forms of public discourse regulate and even dictate what kind of content can issue from such forms. (1985, 6)

Postman argues that there is a strong connection between “*forms of human communication and quality of a culture*” (1985, 9). In other words, form dictates content. We live in a culture whose most common form of public communication is commercial in nature. This dissertation examines how that form has an impact on the content of beliefs about the nature of the human spirit and our interactions with each other.

Advertising exploits all public communication genres – news, public service announcements, entertainment forms, and blogs are only a partial list – adapting itself to mimic the conventions of the genre it assumes and sometimes even disguising itself as part of the content⁴. The more media we have available, the more we are immersed in advertising. Even news media only partially functions to deliver news to the public; its primary function is to sell an audience to advertisers. Media does not primarily serve the community it operates in as surely as it serves the advertising dollar. For example, news programmes on TV and radio will often

⁴ A recent local example is the 8 August 2010 *Saskatoon Sunday Sun*. The front page has a picture of the VWAG (Vaughn Wyant Automotive Group’s) “management team;” in the upper left hand corner in a small font are the words “Advertising Feature”; at first glance, the front page picture looks like it will highlight the weeks’ most significant content. Flipping the page, the reader comes to the Sun’s actual front page. Using this tactic, the *Sun* has usurped its own credibility and lent credence to the impression that the full page is a story of community interest, rather than an advertisement.

cover the release of new products. In fact, advertisers often have editorial control⁵. In addition to the control advertisers have on content, they sometimes exert influence in form too; newsmagazines and newspapers frequently contain lengthy inserts in which only the fine print reveals them as advertising. The displacement of civic discourse with advertising is most visible in the mass media where “advertising is the primary income source for the mass media” (Herman 3), and where it is sometimes difficult to tell what is a commercial and what is a “news” story. In *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, Boorstin observes that advertising, since its “modern American beginnings [has been] a prototype of ‘made news’” (205)⁶. Advertising has displaced news and often displaces news formats in print and electronic media.

1.2.2. Advertising and Public Space

Advertising not only takes up more space and time than content supposedly intended to inform and better communities, but its messages stare at us from the doors of bathroom stalls; product placements are inserted into movies and TV shows; company logos decorate our clothing and dominate our visual fields in malls and on downtown streets. Advertising clutters all public spaces: roadside billboards, local sports fields, arts and music festivals, schools, universities, cyber space, and even churches⁷. Simply, ads are ubiquitous. In our culture,

⁵ For examples of advertisers controlling content, see Gloria Steinem, “Sex, Lies, and Advertising,” *Gender, Race, and Class in Media: A Text Reader*, eds. Gail Dines & Jean M. Humaz, (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995, 112-120), or Jan Van Evra, “Headlines vs. The Bottom Line,” *Inside Language: A Canadian Language Reader*, eds. Jennifer MacLennan & John Moffatt (Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall, 2000, 140 – 142).

⁶ Boorstin also claims that “an advertisement was designed to suggest not merely that something had happened, but also that something was good” (*The Image: A Guide to Pseudo- Events in America*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1992) 211. Echoing Boorstin’s claims about the relationship between advertising and news media, William Leiss, Stephen Kline, Sut Jhally, and Jacqueline Botterill in *Social Communication in Advertising: Consumption in the Mediated Marketplace*, 3rd ed, 2005 note that the earliest advertising agents of the late 1800s who directed “advertisers to media suitable for their purposes” began “to have some influence over the press” (106).

⁷ For a description of how corporations work with churches to sell everything from Disney movies to vehicles, see “Product Placement in the Pews: Microtargeting Meets Mega Churches” <http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article.cfm?articleid=1605>. Published 15 November 2006. Accessed 1 November 2008.

advertising is the most prevalent form of public communication, superseding political, scientific, religious and news discourse in its volume and scale.

We are exposed to numerous commercial messages every day in all public spaces and in our private spaces too. In *Adcult USA*, Twitchell estimates that the “average [American] adult today sees some three thousand [ads] every day” (1996, 2)⁸. Canadian authors Terry O’Reilly and Mike Tenant, in *The Age of Persuasion* write,

[O]n [any] given day, at least 300 and as many as 6000 marketing messages are lobbed [our] way. Statistics suggest that people spend more time exposed to advertising than they spend eating, reading, cooking, praying, cleaning, and making love combined. (xiv)

Considering that even advertisers say it is very difficult for individual ads to break through the ad clutter everywhere, a remarkable amount of money and time is spent on advertising⁹. Advertising is embedded in every aspect of our lives and we seem to have no urgent sense that it could or should be different. Commercial messages, it seems, give us a kind of symbolic satisfaction because advertising infuses many of our purchases with symbolic meaning. For example, the difference between a brand name item and a “knock off” is largely symbolic.

⁸ Similar statistics are repeated in several works. For example, in Arthur Asa Berger’s *Ads, Fads, and Consumer Culture* (2004) one critic suggests that Americans spend 486 hours a year watching TV commercials and another that the average American will spend the equivalent of one year of his life watching TV commercials (56-57). See also the American Association of Advertising Agencies’ web page at <http://www.aaaa.org/eweb/upload/faqs/adexposures.pdf>. This information seems dated and does not account for new forms of technology where advertising is embedded, such as in video games. Of course, these estimates do not take into account the myriad other forms of advertising which we are exposed to every day, and it may well be impossible to accurately estimate the number of commercials and advertisements we see daily, especially when we consider product placements in shows and movies and event sponsorships.

⁹ Berger, in *Ads, Fads, And Consumer Culture*, estimates it is a \$200 billion a year industry. (1). Leiss et al, in *Social Communication*, 3rd ed, 2005 quote the Senior VP and Director of Forecasting for Universal McCann saying that global advertising in 2003 was a \$471 billion dollar business, with more than half, 249.2 billion from the United States (3).

Advertising seems to teach us how to want and use the products we buy as artefacts that confer symbolic meaning to our identities.

1.2.3. Advertising and Private Space

It seems advertising is not only the wallpaper of public space, but it also invades our private space in its drive to persuade, and we welcome it in, in part because it tells us the worth, not only financially, but also symbolically and socially, of the things we own and how they increase our own worth. For example, Michelin does not make tires just for vehicles; the tire company provides its customers with the tools to keep their families safe and secure. In fact, Michelin's slogan, "Because so much is riding on your tires" suggests that the customer is implicated in the design of the product and that Michelin's products are made exclusively for "you". It suggests the consumer knows how important the tires are and thus demands the latest and best in technological design. Michelin tires enable their owners to protect and defend their families. The tires, in essence, become symbolic fortifications. The advertising helps transform the consumer from ignorance to enlightenment because without advertising, the average driver would probably think of tires as something for the car, rather than something for the family who rides in the car. Brand names can become icons that signal safety and security. They may become symbols of how to treat people lovingly, with kindness and respect, and they may symbolically manifest our intention to cherish our loved ones.

However, because branding is a significant form of advertising and our homes are filled with brand name items, the boundary between private space and public space has been eroded. This erosion has been a long while in the making, and it has happened with our consent. In the earliest days of radio advertising, some of its critics suggested that advertising should not be allowed to "invade" the private spaces of people's homes without being invited (Fox 153), but

now there are certainly fewer reservations because we, the audience for commercials, do not make a clearly demarcated distinction between public commercial space and private space ourselves. Post World War II America has been called “A time and place where economic prosperity and television were turning citizens into consumers, [and] living rooms into salesrooms” (Ewen 1). Now, 70 years later, with a computer in more than half the homes in Canada and the prevalence of Internet access, along with traditional advertising media, ads are more a part of our waking lives than ever before.

A wired world allows us access to an incredible amount of information, but it also allows advertisers access to us whenever we surf the net, communicate with friends via social networks, and even when we send emails. For example, Google’s Gmail practises “content extraction”, monitoring users’ email for key words and then targeting users with ads that are guaranteed to speak to their audience’s needs and wants¹⁰. In an age of images and target markets, advertising lives in the most intimate spaces of our homes. There is no “commercial-free zone”, no space that we hold too private or too sacred for commercial messages. Advertisers even send messages to the “third screen” – our cell phones (Walker 127), so now we can have targeted ads delivered directly into our pockets or purses. No other form of public discourse takes up so much public and private space or so much time on TV or radio.

1.2.4. Advertising and the Human Body as “Media Space”

We do not seem to mind advertising’s presence in our lives, even though we are quick to flip past commercials when we’re watching TV. In reality, we are complicit in advertising’s incursion into every area of our lives and in helping marketers make brands successful. First, as I have argued, we accept its presence everywhere and do not demand commercial-free public or

¹⁰ See Sarah Elton’s article, “Got a date Friday? Google Knows.” *MacLeans Magazine*, 21 August 2006. Macleans.ca accessed 14 October 2008.

private space¹¹. In fact, we speak our support of the ubiquity of the commercial enterprise, sometimes in extreme ways by willingly turning our bodies into commercial space and living billboards. For example,

In 2005, a man auctioned off his head on eBay. He was followed by a woman who auctioned off her belly, a student who auctioned off his back, and a young couple who auctioned off their baby. Thus began the boom in “body advertising.” (McLaren and Torchinsky 43)

Sometimes, we are such fans of products that we do not “sell” ourselves as advertising space, but become advocates of brands for no financial gain. Fans of particular brands may not only drape themselves in slogan or logo covered materials, but may take other actions to accrue brand identity to their own identity; McLaren and Torchinsky describe one woman who “drinks fourteen cans a day, paints her fingernails with Pepsi logos, and chooses her dates based on whether they drink Pepsi” (71). Brand fans (or entrepreneurs) are willing to sell their own flesh as advertising space; almost all of us wear or have worn tee-shirts advertising brand loyalty; some people advocate brands in social spaces or personal blogs. Occasionally, the blog authors are paid advocates, but sometimes, the testimonials are spontaneous and unpaid. No matter where we turn, we are immersed in advertising: with our assent, it has been turned into “the prevailing vernacular of public address” (Ewen 1).

¹¹ While there are some commercial free TV zones, such as PBS, they are the exception, not the rule.

1.3. Naturalized Assumptions of Advertising

Because advertising is the most familiar and frequent form of discourse that we are exposed to, we have been enculturated by its presence to accept some fundamental precepts about it. Naturalized assumptions about advertising make its presence acceptable to us and our assumptions about it give it a centrality in our public and private lives that make it an influential form of discourse in both. We know and accept that advertising takes up every available space and that the ads are more important than those who create and produce them. We are willing to believe that advertising is an effective and efficient way to get out the word about new products and increase competition and that it is necessary to economic prosperity. We also see that advertising mirrors society; it both contributes to and is affected by trends in popular culture; we might be inclined to agree that the audience plays a significant role in the exchange that advertising seeks with its audiences, but we might disagree about the significance of the cultural role that advertising plays. Nonetheless, it is the discourse that most of us are steeped in from the beginning of our lives.

1.3.1. Advertising as Mental Landscape

Advertising is ever-present if not consciously attended to, and because it is such a part of our mental landscape that we do not really notice it, it is, therefore, perfectly positioned as a persuasive discourse. Persuasion works most effectively when it is not seen as persuasion and the audience's critical guard is suspended. Rhetorical theorist Roderick Hart says, "[a]ll rhetoric denies itself and . . . good rhetoric denies itself completely" (31). In other words, discourse that does not appear to be persuasive discourse may be the most persuasive of all. When we are unaware of how steeped we are in the presence of commercial persuasion, then we are not using our critical skills to examine closely the most implicit assumptions of advertising discourse. This

is not to say that people do not recognize advertising as persuasion: quite the contrary. However, we may not recognize the full implications of advertising's influence or, the messages behind the message of advertising as a body of discourse or as a genre. We may not recognize how it attempts to influence our core values. Advertising seems to be a taken-for-granted aspect of modern life and one that does not position itself as ethically infused.

According to many modern rhetorical critics, all communication is rhetorical because, even when it does not overtly seek to persuade, it builds identification. Although Aristotle suggests that we build identification with people in order to persuade them, rhetorical theorist Kenneth Burke argues just the opposite: that we persuade people in order to build identification or common ground. In Burke's rhetorical theory, our primary motive for communication is to bridge the gulf that separates individuals from each other. Rhetorical critic Barry Brummett notes that "everyday objects, actions, and events" all contain "*rhetorical dimension[s]*" (1994, 4) because everyday objects, including advertising, are "signs of group identifications (1994, 15). Group identifications are important and necessary to people, and they occur so that we can build community with others with whom we identify, while ensuring that we are symbolically separated from groups with whom we do not wish to be identified. Thus, commercials "speak" to us, even when we are not part of the target audience. While we may not be induced to buy a specific product, advertising suggests to us a way of believing and a way of thinking about the world that we all understand, even if our understanding is not consciously and explicitly articulated by us. Commercial messages are the building blocks of popular culture and they bind us in a common identity; they constitute a significant portion of our symbolic landscape. As Hart notes, "communication is an attempt to build community by exchanging symbols" (36). Because advertising is a pervasive form of public discourse, we are engaged with it, in part, in its function

as a community-building discourse. We come to share in some of its core assumptions, usually without being entirely conscious of what those assumptions are.

Advertising's very presence in all avenues of our lives and in every corner of our communities reinforces its significance and emphasizes its underlying ideologies. As a genre, advertising models attitudes and values for its audiences. Postman says that "we measure a culture by what it claims as significant" (1985, p. 16). The very weight and scale of advertising make it a significant symbolic force in our lives and suggest its influence and significance even as we often claim that we are immune to it, and that it is just "annoying clutter". Further, we defend its presence as necessary to a healthy economy. We are steeped in advertising discourse and in its values and assumptions which are not overtly part of its messages. Even those ads as may call attention to themselves in an ironic way by incorporating and embedding trends in advertising in their own presentation reinforce advertising's underlying assumptions. These ads may obviously be persuasive, but what is not made explicit is the world view that they help to sell. The world view is not simply one in which consumption is an activity: advertising desires to invade our very core values as it ushers us toward a particular identity and way of life.

Advertising discourse models attitudes and expresses those attitudes rhetorically. The less we notice it and think about it, the more easily it can exert its influence because, in not noticing it, we think that we are impervious to it and, the result of that thought process is that we have no critical protection from it because we do not employ our critical skills to examine its inherent assumptions. That means that the advertising discourse uses the common sense assumptions of the audience, and because the assumptions are simply common sense, the audience participates in helping the message build its argument and thus, its persuasiveness. Aristotle named this rhetorical structure "the enthymeme," claiming it is the "substance of persuasion" (1354a).

Enthymemes are rhetorical syllogisms, but unlike logical syllogism, they leave out a major or minor premise, but offer conclusions. They will be defined and their function described in the next chapter. The audience must hold the major or minor premise in common with the speaker in order to arrive at the same conclusion. Because the most effective persuasion is that which builds naturally on the beliefs of its audience, the advertising industry, with its army of analysts and researchers, is well equipped to build common ground with target audiences. We are distracted from the message behind the messages because we believe that, since we know it is persuasive, the best way to be critical is to analyse its explicitly persuasive appeal. But analysis of the explicit persuasion does not take into account the element of unconscious persuasion, an element that is fundamental to rhetorical theory.

1.3.2. Anonymity of Advertising Creators

When an ad rouses us to laughter or to some other emotional response, we are appreciative that we have been given something to remember. But most of us do not know where the ad came from and we usually are not interested enough to ask. Inured as we are to the idea of advertising as persuasion, we do not find most advertising particularly remarkable, even when an individual ad or campaign delights us. In fact, we expect ads to attempt to stand out from all the others because advertising clutter makes individual ads seem invisible. Nor is it typical for us to examine how the commercial message has created common ground between us and an unknown speaker, and a ground that is substantial enough to exert an emotional pull. That advertising's creators work anonymously, for the most part, naturalizes commercial discourse because there is no one individual whom we can hold responsible for it. It becomes the common social capital of our culture even as we each have an individual relationship with it. This anonymity helps us internalize some of its persuasive objectives. On the other hand, when a politician, for example,

stands up to speak, we see her and believe she is responsible for the words coming out of her mouth, even when we know she has not written her own speech. The anonymity of the creators of advertising helps to naturalize this commercial discourse in a way that no other form of public communication is naturalized. It seems to grow naturally out of our midst as a culture, the offspring of the marriage of entertainment and technology. Since we do need some of the products we buy for subsistence and utilitarian purposes, we consequently may be less critical of what else we are buying when we pay for an object or a service.

The ad writers and producers tell us stories, but they do not claim their place as authors and creators. In the relationship between audience and advertiser, we tend to see ourselves in relation to the messages and products in advertising, but not in relation with advertising's creators because we do not pay attention to the authors, only the artefacts. When the ad is a testimonial, whether it is from a celebrity or an "actual" client, we build a relationship with the character in the ad, but the relationship is mediated through the product. This process of relation is similar to the process of becoming caught up in a story: we become involved with the plot arc or the characters, but not usually and not explicitly, the author. Like authors of fiction, ad creators do not invite us explicitly to see ourselves in a relationship with them. The men and women who conceive of, write, and produce these ads are a blend of creative artist and astute business person. They function as a conduit between mass culture and popular culture but, paradoxically, in a culture that thrives on fame and celebrity, ad makers are mostly anonymous and never mentioned in on-screen credits or by-lines.

Because the ad creations are unsigned and unclaimed, they are thrust more fully into the spotlight as naturalized artefacts that grow out of the context in which they appear. We welcome them into our private lives because they seem to be a natural part of our environment. That this

should be so seems absolutely natural to us because it has been this way since the birth of modern advertising¹². While we are inundated by ads, we are also mostly de-sensitized to their pervasiveness and, mostly, incurious about their makers. It may seem that ads are not important enough to be publicly and proudly claimed by their creators except within the industry's circle of professionals. It may seem that ads are disposable: print advertising ends up in the recycle or garbage bin, while ads on electronic media such as TV, radio, and the Internet seem ephemeral, with a fleeting life. It may also seem that the ads produce themselves. We do not admire the creative teams who write, produce, storyboard, or illustrate ads, nor do we ask about their unconscious intentions or look for patterns and motifs in their work, even though we do so with other modes of discourse; for example, movies have audience ratings, TV shows often come with advisories and warnings, and political commentators take on politicians. Advertising goes mostly unnoticed¹³.

Because the ad makers are mostly anonymous, a significant aspect of their situational context is hidden. One of the naturalized assumptions is that the people involved in creating the ad are not as important as the ad itself. This assumption is based, in part, on the anonymity of the ad's creators. Since the product, brand, or company is more important than who actually produces the messages, advertising is not visibly attributable to people, making it seem a kind of organic outgrowth of the relationship between economic systems and communication technology.

¹² Daniel Pope, a business historian claims, "institutionally and ideologically, modern advertising had taken shape by 1920" (7). He also asserts, "By 1920, American advertising had more in common with its counterpart today than with the advertising of a generation earlier" (6). See *The Making of Modern Advertising* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

¹³ The advertising industry does recognize its own creativity with a variety of awards, and there are ethical standards and limits put on commercial content by various bodies; however, for the most part, advertising does not experience the same public critique that other forms of public discourse do. For example, political rhetoric is examined on shows such as NBC's "Meet the Press," and CTV's "Question Period" to name just two.

These powerful and influential commercial messages are a part of the landscape and may even appear to be endorsed by the groups who own or manage the public spaces in which they appear. For example, when public transit buses are splattered with ads, audiences may believe that the transit company believes in or supports the use of the product being advertised. The association between the medium and the messages it carries may suggest that it approves those messages¹⁴.

1.4. Some Claims about Advertising

As I have established, advertising is absolutely everywhere, from public and private space to the human body. Its ubiquity enables us to see it as a totally natural part of our mental and cultural landscape. In this section, I will offer brief descriptions of some of the claims made about advertising by critics and advertising's creators alike. In addition to the anonymity of advertising professionals and their invisibility in the process of creating ads, there is debate among them about the efficacy of advertising, which further serves to naturalize advertising as part of our cultural landscape. I mean, because even the industry is wary of making claims about advertising's effectiveness, advertising can be considered an innocuous discourse whose worst crime, some argue, is to encourage conspicuous consumption that results in further environmental injury¹⁵. Some argue it is a necessary to a capitalist economy, and say, "[a] market economy and its advertising are inextricably linked . . . and the level of advertising investment in

¹⁴ I worked as a copy writer in a variety of radio stations between 1979 – 1992, and I was often called upon to participate in promotional events sponsored by my station, where I would frequently end up in conversations with people who wanted to know why we would make advertising contracts with less than reputable businesses. It occurred to me then that some people in our audiences seemed to believe that the radio station acted as a kind of respectability filter for the businesses that advertised with it. In other words, listeners believed the radio station would not allow "shady" businesses to advertise on its air.

¹⁵ Sut Jhally makes this argument in the video, *Advertising and the end of the world*, 1998.

a country is directly proportional to its standard of living” (Frith and Mueller 55). As we will see in the next few pages, the advertising industry itself has claimed that advertising is news or education about a product; suggested that advertising is a mirror and that the world presented in ads is simply a reflection of the world we live in; and called advertisements a form of art or entertainment that demonstrates clever language use and imaginative imagery. It has been called “folklore”¹⁶ and, indeed, its narratives often look and act like modern versions of folk and fairy tales. The genre is similar to the oral folk and fairy tales of the 18th and 19th Centuries because ads may be perceived as belonging to popular culture rather than to the company who has commissioned them or the advertising agency who has designed them. Additionally, the two genres are similar, because, according to folklore and fairy tale theorist Jack Zipes, fairy tales “create communal bonds,” and, historically, “were closely tied to rituals, customs, and beliefs of tribes, communities, and trades. They fostered a sense of belonging and hope that miracles involving some kind of magical transformation were possible to bring about a better world” (1999, 1 – 2). Zipes notes that fairy tales “instructed, amused, warned, initiated, and enlightened” (1999, 2). Advertising seems to perform the same functions. Zipes also notes that “the appeal of fairy tales still has a great deal to do with utopian transformation and the desire for a better life” (2006, 106). However, advertising’s commercial stories are ultimately about product, and the stories give meaning to those products. Ads may even become iconic, transcending their context, such as Coca Cola’s “I’d like to teach the world to sing”¹⁷. Lastly, almost all critics and

¹⁶ Marshall McLuhan coined this term in *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*. 1951. Madera, CA: Gingko Press 2002. He says “the folklore of industrial man” includes advertising, entertainment, and modern media and “stems from the laboratory, the studio, and the advertising agencies” (v).

¹⁷ This campaign is unique in advertising history: the jingle for Coke came first, and was then turned into a pop song that became a billboard topper in 1971. The Coca Cola company donated the first \$80,000 in Royalties to Unicef; the sheet music for the song is still being sold today and according to “Coke Lore”, “the song version is being sung in school glee clubs and church choirs and played by high school bands all over the world” (http://www.thecocacolacompany.com/heritage/cokelore_hilltop.html).

practitioners claim the audience exerts power¹⁸. Advertising is clearly understood in a host of ways and while its primary function is commercial, it does play a variety of economic roles and social roles; it is a complex discourse.

1.4.1. Advertising as News and Education

In the early days of advertising in the United States, advertising men claimed that ads contained product news and were simply a way to educate the public on the products that were available. Even now, some contemporary marketing texts categorize one form of advertising as informative, saying it seeks to inform its audiences about new or improved products, while claiming persuasion in advertising itself is neglected by those within the marketing discipline¹⁹. Informative advertising is separated from persuasive advertising which may be defined as advertising that creates attitudes toward a product. Such claims have been made by people in the advertising industry for nearly a hundred years. They have insisted that advertising offered information rather than attempted persuasion, delivering product “news” to savvy consumers and aiding those consumers in making choices between products. Even business historian Daniel Pope claims that historically, “national advertising was a new and potent method of instructing and advising millions of shoppers” (109). However, there is no attempt in the delivery of “product news” to be objective or unbiased. In fact, for an advertiser to do so would not be in the best interests of the producer, not to mention the advertising agency. The earliest admen in the

¹⁸ Leiss et al (2005) in *Social Communication* 3rd Ed, note specifically that “power circulates in the relationships between advertisers and audiences” (431). Likewise Stephanie O’Donohoe’s article, “Living with Ambivalence: Attitudes to Advertising in Post Modern Times” offers a brief survey of the literature that discusses audiences’ “complex and multidimensional” interactions with advertising.

¹⁹ John O’Shaughnessy and Nicholas Jack O’Shaughnessy’s *Persuasion In Advertising* (2004) argues that “persuasion is the most neglected area in advertising texts,” saying their book’s “specific contribution is to draw out the implications . . . of research on persuasion done outside the field of marketing academe (for example, in social psychology, linguistics and sociology) but highly relevant to it and, as yet, almost invisible in the extant marketing literature” (ix).

United States seemed to understand advertisements as an information-providing service, and admen simply connected manufacturers with consumers through the ads. In addition, admen sometimes saw themselves as advocates for the public, asserting they had the power to influence manufacturers to make better products. For example, one of earliest successful copy writers, John E. Powers, said during an interview with *Printer's Ink* in 1895 that he wrote copy by “[sticking] to the truth, and that means rectifying whatever’s wrong in the merchant’s business. If the truth isn’t tellable, fix it so it is” (quoted in Fox, 28)²⁰.

1.4.2. Advertising as Mirror

Sometimes, it is claimed that advertising is simply a mirror for society. Ads reflect the trends and values of the society. In this conception of advertising, it is what society accepts that drives what advertising shows us: If ads are shallow and puerile, it is because that is what society accepts; likewise, if advertising demonstrates materialism and consumerism in a positive light, that is because we consider them to be positives. Advertising is inextricably linked with societal values. However, advertising does not just mirror us; it also shapes us because while it shows us ourselves, it does not show us ourselves in the complexities of our lives²¹. It simplifies and reduces humanity, showing us only as consumers, yet it observes our psychological complexities

²⁰ Powers’ words seem ambiguous. They may be understood to mean to reposition the copy so that some form of truth can be told or to work with the clients until the product was such that it could be advertised in good conscience. Powers had a reputation for honesty and writing low key copy, so I am interpreting in the latter way. I read Powers this way because other advertising people have claimed that a shoddy product, even when marketed properly, will not draw repeat purchasers. An example of this assertion can be found in Pope who paraphrases the founder of *Printer's Ink* journal, George Rowell, saying “the merit of the commodity determined the merit of the advertisement (186).

²¹ Historian Stephen Fox makes the mirror argument in *The Mirror Makers* asserting the audience plays a role in shaping advertising. See also advertising scholars Frith and Mueller’s *Advertising and Societies* who say advertising both reflects and shapes a society. For a slightly different point of view, see Richard Pollay’s “The Distorted Mirror: Reflections on the Unintended Consequences of Advertising,” who says that the “revised perspective” his article puts forward “may . . . lead to an increased sense of moral duty or social responsibility for individuals and organizations, professional and academic” (19).

in its efforts to show us how products meet our social, psychological, symbolic, and interpersonal needs.

Advertising also mirrors our relationship with other aspects of culture such as the responses we have towards art and entertainment. An example of the conflation of art and advertising can be seen, historically, in Andy Warhol's Campbell's soup can art²². On the other hand, if advertising is corporate-sponsored art and entertainment, then there is no need for ad makers to "sign" their works because their talent has been purchased and their "art" no longer belongs to them, contributing to the anonymity of individuals in advertising. This authorial invisibility reinforces the argument that ads simply mirror society: they belong to all and are made by people who are in and of society. But authorial invisibility also contributes to embedding advertising more naturally in the symbolic atmosphere of popular culture.

1.4.3. Advertising as Art and Entertainment

Sometimes, advertising both inspires and is inspired by art, whether visual or narrative. However, when advertising is understood as art or entertainment, we accept it differently from how we would if we considered it purely a discourse designed to persuade us to action. With advertising exploding all over the Internet, ads are interactive and animated and sometimes like video games. These types of ads exploit the medium and make the ads more exciting in their interactivity. In this respect, advertising "mirrors" society in that it exploits what people are familiar with and uses entertainment venues as commercial ones. The assertion that advertising mirrors society suggests that audiences, in fact, shape advertising and are not passive recipients of ads, but active "consumers" of them.

²² James Twitchell, 2000, in *Twenty Ads that Shook the World*, cites the Pear's soap chromolithograph (advertising poster) that used painter John Everett Millais' painting, "A child's world" to sell soap as a seminal example of this conflation.

This orientation is strongly reflected in the contents of many advertising journals. In fact, some marketing professors, such as Susan Fournier, argue that goods play an anthropomorphic role for many people. Using case studies, Fournier argues in “Consumers and Their Brands” that often consumers see themselves in relationships with products. Of course, advertising contributes to how that relationship is construed. Sometimes, advertising is positioned as a response to a demanding audience who insists on being “entertained” in exchange for being a “market segment” target. For example, Stephanie O’Donohoe examines audience ambivalence to advertising, suggesting that consumers of advertising see it as something to “be enjoyed as well as endured” and that they believe, “as a form of popular culture, it has various hedonic, aesthetic, and intellectual rewards” (103).

Advertising often does reward us for watching it by providing us with ads that are funny, touching, imaginative, unique, or innovative; such ads may even become common ground for us in our everyday lives. Ad slogans sometimes catch the imagination of an audience, so “Where’s the beef!?”, “Just do it” and “Manly yes, but I like it, too” came to be fodder for comedians and everyone “got” the joke²³. When ads are parodied on TV shows, such as Saturday Night Live’s “Tylenol Extreme” ad, they truly become a part of our cultural capital and give “exposure that is priceless” (Walker 121).

It is true that the distinction between entertainment and advertising and art and advertising is often blurred²⁴, especially since the ad makers of the modern world have included a range of authors and directors from the 19th Century American writer, Bret Harte²⁵ to 21st

²³ These have been slogans for Wendy’s, Nike, and Irish Spring soap, respectively.

²⁴ For the argument that advertising is a form of corporate art argument, see Twitchell’s *Adcult USA*.

²⁵ Fox, *The Mirror Makers*, 23

Century film director Spike Lee²⁶. A new trend is commissioning authors to write “lit ads”; for example, the jewellery maker Bulgari commissioned novelist and former copy writer Fay Weldon to write a novel featuring their products, which she did (Berger, 2004, p.70)²⁷. If we pause to think about it, we do know intellectually that advertising is always attempting to persuade for commercial ends, but when we are entertained by commercials, we may easily forget their commercial purposes.

When we see advertising as entertainment, we often forget that entertainment is a form of persuasion in its own way. According to Brummett, “cultural artifacts,” from TV shows and narratives to sports figures and sporting events, clothes and hairstyles “are material manifestations of . . . groups” that we may identify with; when we consume these cultural products or events, we are influenced by the culture from which they emerge: they’re part of an “integrated set or system of artifacts” that exert influence (1994, 31). We might not associate entertainment with the persuasive process, so when advertising seems to be purely entertaining, we might not be conscious of how we are being influenced by it. In addition, even entertainment is rhetorical and does offer implicit arguments about its subjects because it relies on our common sense assumptions as it dramatizes themes that are important to the human condition.

²⁶ Twitchell, *Adcult*, 228. Twitchell also notes that David Lynch has done ads for Calvin Klein; Ridley Scott for Apple computer; Woody Allen for Campari; Spike Lee for Levis, Nike, the Gap, and Barneys; and Federico Fellini for an Italian grocery store chain (228).

²⁷ That Weldon took up the challenge caused a bit of a stir. For more details on the controversy, see “Dismayed Authors” at Salon.com <http://archive.salon.com/books/feature/2001/09/05/bulgari/index.html>. Accessed 20 May 2008. In addition to explicit paid promotional product mentions, some novelists simply mention brand names to achieve verisimilitude. For example, popular horror novelist Stephen King’s stories are filled with brand name mentions, but I’ve not found evidence to suggest that either ad agencies or corporations pay him for the “promos.” However, these product mentions in popular novels reinforce the notion that advertising discourse monopolizes all cultural discourse.

1.4.4 Advertising as Contemporary Folk/Fairy Tales

Advertising campaigns may look like art and we may understand them as the art of popular culture; individual ads, for example, might be understood as mini-narratives or flights of fancy, in fact, a sort of abbreviated and elliptical modern fairy tale. As I noted earlier, for McLuhan, advertising was an essential ingredient that constituted the “folklore of industrial man” (v). In these commercial fairy tales, sometimes the product is heroic, sometimes it provides help to the character on a quest, or sometimes, the product is the “grail” that the character quests for. Because of the anonymity of the creators and because of the ubiquity of commercial messages, advertising, it can be argued, has some similarities to the folk tales of earlier centuries, in that the stories told by the ads are “passed on” and become a kind of cultural glue that helps hold popular culture together. If advertising is a form of folk or fairy tale, then it too plays a role in teaching us what it means to be human. Folk and fairy tales, especially literary ones, according to Zipes, teach cultures normative behaviour. Zipes says fairy tale writers have been “concerned with questions of manners, norms, and mores . . . and sought to illustrate popular behaviour and what constituted noble feelings in their narratives” (1999, 13). The characters and tales encourage audiences to be like the characters either through the values the characters embody or the values the characters are directed to embrace. As folk or fairy tales, advertising then becomes what Burke calls “equipment for living” because they help to prepare us psychologically and imaginatively for the everyday encounters that make up our daily lives (Burke, 1973, 293)²⁸. The

²⁸ Burke refers specifically to proverbs as “equipment for living” because they function to size up a common situation and offer bits of wisdom on these situations. He says proverbs are part of a comprehensive social vocabulary that “throw[s] forth observations that are as accurate, in the realistic charting of human situations, as any ideal semantic formula” (1989, p.100). He says proverbs “‘size up’ or attitudinally name . . . [an] endless variety of situations, distinct in their particularities” (1989, p.78). The example he gives is “whether the pitcher strike the stone, or the stone the pitcher, it’s bad for the pitcher” (1989, p. 78). Burke asks us to imagine a philosopher in a primitive society “in disfavor with the priests, [who attempts] to criticize their lore. They are powerful, he is by comparison weak. And they control all the channels of power. Hence, whether they attack him or he attacks them, he

makers of advertising are creating commercial “wonder tales” that cannot help but shape the values of their audiences, providing them with “equipment for living”.

1.4.5. The Audience Exerts Power

The ad-makers sometimes argue that people are too canny to be conned, too hard-headed to be hornswoggled, and too discriminating to be deceived by the exaggerated claims some ads may make. Modern advertising practitioners and theorists profess modesty about the successes of their “product,” more often claiming that good products simply sell better than “poor products, [which] regardless of the amount of advertising lavished upon them, are weeded out by the consumer” (Leiss et al, 1986, 34). According to Leiss et al, some professionals in the advertising industry claim they aren’t even certain *if or how* advertising persuasion works:

Advertisers claim they simply do not have the knowledge or tools required for manipulating people . . . Indeed, after reviewing the literature one is tempted to conclude that in no other domain has so much effort yielded so little insight. (1986, 34)

While Leiss is speaking in a tongue-in-cheek manner, I think we must question exactly what it means when people claim that the audience exerts “power” in the relationship between advertiser, message, and consumer. Walker questions the idea that the “consumer is in control”:

[W]hat would constitute proof that the consumer is ‘boss’ and ‘in control’ in some way that’s new and unprecedented? Lower credit card balances? A conspicuous absence of logoed apparel on city streets and in malls? A disappearance of consumer fads,

is the loser. . . . [H]e could adequately size up the situation” with the proverb about the pitcher and the stone (1989 78).

trends, and crazes? A decreasing amount of advertising?
Shrinking landfills? Bigger and more effective boycotts of
unhealthy or ethically suspect products? (xvi)

People are not programmed, nor can they be, to mindlessly shop, but advertising does seek to influence our actions. The audience exerts power in its interpretation of advertising and may wield influence through its purchasing decisions, but since advertising dominates our mental environment we are sure to be influenced by it to some degree.

Marketers argue, and justifiably so, that most people are not so easily influenced that they simply run and out and buy what advertising tells them they need. Our purchases are based on all kinds of needs, including symbolic ones, as marketing people know. Some contemporary media theorists, such as Raymond Williams, argue that advertising discourse gives meaning to products, and when products have meaning, people who purchase those products buy into that meaning: “[y]ou do not only buy an object: you buy social respect, discrimination, health, beauty, success, power to control your environment” (189). Thus, while the creators of advertising seem skeptical of the ability of advertising to persuade an audience and while not all ads may persuade their target audience to take the action of buying the product, persuasion is not always about altering actions, but sometimes about altering beliefs and attitudes. The beliefs and attitudes that advertising alters may not be only about the product or brand that is the subject of the ad itself. Due to its scale and ubiquity, advertising has cultural weight and, taken as a body of discourse, it may persuade people to attitudes about the world around them. It may also alter the way we understand the concepts of individuality, empathy and compassion, community, and interpersonal relationships.

1.5. Advertising as Social Discourse

1.5.1. Advertising as Community

Advertising's role as social discourse and its attendant influence in our lives is the most important aspect of advertising for the purposes of my argument. Advertising no longer simply sells a product or educates the public about new products, if it ever did. Cultural critic Gillian Dyer, writing in 1982, says that advertising has "become more and more involved in the manipulation of social values and attitudes . . . In this respect it could be argued that advertising nowadays fulfils a function traditionally met by art or religion"(2). Advertising plays a variety of roles and has a complex relationship to culture. I do not want to argue that advertising is a religion or that consumerism is a religion. However, I will argue that advertising functions in ways similar to religious discourse in that it both advises and admonishes, exhorts and even goads audiences to embrace its messages. Pollay offers a summary of the views of a variety of critics from a variety of disciplines, saying, they have understood advertising as "promoting . . . a whole lifestyle and accompanying rationalizing attitudes . . . [as] moral . . . instruction that contain injunctions about how life should be led . . . [and as] secular conditioning . . . directly competitive with the instruction and ideals of religious teachings" (1986, 30).

Advertising seeks to prepare audiences for the actions they must take in order to identify with the images it presents. Likewise, religious discourses prepare us for the action we need to take in order to identify as an adherent to a particular religion. The discourse makes it possible for adherents to have faith, to believe, and to participate. In its hortatory capacity, advertising functions in a way similar to religious discourse and, therefore, attempts to influence our core beliefs and values. In fact, Boorstin attributes an epistemological function to advertising, calling it a "touchstone of our changing concept of knowledge and reality" (211). Because it functions to

shape as well as distribute cultural knowledge, it plays an ethical role in society, and it does so by building identification.

Advertising builds identification in several ways. First, as other critics have argued, advertising gives meaning to products and emotionally connects people to products. Semiotician Judith Williamson gives diamonds as an example: “[they] may be marketed by likening them to eternal love, creating a symbolism where the mineral means something not in its own terms, as a rock, but in human terms, as a sign” (12). The meaning that inheres in a product and that is crafted and shaped through advertising is interrelated to meaning in other products which is also crafted through advertising. In other words, advertising “sets up connections between certain types of consumers and certain products” (Williamson 12). Advertising specialists identify our patterns of consumption, but advertising may also shape our patterns of consumption. One of the ways we express our identity is through what we consume. Advertising discourse exploits our need to express our identity, but its exploitation of that need is an attempt to shape our identity.

Advertising persuades us to believe claims about products, but it also invites us to be something. For example, we are not just computer users, we are Apple Mac or PC computer users. Each brand has a cluster of characteristics associated with it that we accrue to ourselves when we buy the product and use it. Suddenly, computers are not just tools: they are an integral part of our social identity. In the current Apple Mac ads, the Mac is personified as a cool, hip and relaxed young man, while PC is depicted as stodgy, middle-aged, balding, and uptight. Whole communities spring up around products and those products may come to play the same role in our lives that the hearth fire did in ancient societies. We metaphorically gather around the

product, basking in its glow and feeling privileged to be so close to its warmth²⁹. Advertising discourse helps us accomplish transformations in pursuit of new identifications.

1.5.2. Advertising Influences Self-concept

Advertising usually encourages us to take action. When we are influenced to take action, that means that our belief systems have been affected and our self-concept has undergone a shift, even if it is infinitesimal. Self-concept has been variously defined, but a staple in the definitions is social psychologist Morris Rosenberg's definition where self-concept is "the totality of the individual's thoughts and feelings having reference to himself as an object" (quoted in Sirgy, 1979, 7). Simply, "self -concept" is the way we regard ourselves; it is composed from our interactions with others and our reflection on those interactions. Self concept is multifaceted, dynamic, and capable of change, and it adjusts in response to "challenges from the social environment" (Markus and Wurf, 299-300). In fact, according to rhetorical theorists Golden. Berquist, and Coleman, self-concept is key to our actions and our understanding and "is the *center* of the belief system" (211). It is through self-concept that we are open to influence. Messages and speakers can show us new ways of understanding the world and our relationship to it; if our beliefs about self are frequently disconfirmed and disturbed, and result in our changing our understanding of ourselves, then by necessity, the flexible self-concept will shift to accommodate the new belief system. Advertising creates common ground and as it does so, it engages our self-concept as we begin to intuitively recognize shared substance.

When common ground is created between one individual and another, it means both implicitly recognize a shared substance. We see characters in advertising playing the roles of

²⁹ For a description and an example of an on-line brand-created community, see Muniz and Schau's article "Religiosity in the Abandoned Apple Newton Brand Community." *Journal of Consumer Research*. Mar 2005. 31:4. 737-747.

parent, sibling, spouse, business person, cab driver, house painter, or any other number of roles that we play in real life. We identify with the characters, their roles, and their challenges, and as we identify with them, we may understand them as symbolically representative of ourselves. Advertising may demonstrate to us what we lack or show ways to enhance ourselves, our relationships, or our lives. It may teach us how we are inadequate; it may show us an ideal life, ideal relationships and ideal selves. It may convince us to pursue the ideal in order to enrich and fulfil the self. Advertising engages our self-concept and frequently implicitly challenges it and thus, engages us at our most fundamental level: where we build identity. It helps us affirm our identity or encourages us to fashion a new one. Like all effective rhetoric, it persuades audiences to more than just action; it influences us at the core of our belief systems. Advertising is not just a persuasive discourse: it creates identification. It is in its ability to affect our identity that advertising exerts significant and deep influence. Like all rhetorical practices, it influences the way we think, what we think, and how we act, all of which stem from our understanding of a coherent self-concept.

As the most prevalent form of public communication, advertising has a strong influence on its audience's identities. It is influential in shaping our identities, in part, because it is everywhere. We are immersed in the symbolic environment created by advertising. While we are not automatons that can be programmed to mindlessly buy merchandise we do not need, advertising necessarily exerts an influence on us because we are immersed in a world whose primary public discourse is a commercial one. Consequently advertising affects our attitudes, beliefs, opinions, and perceptions, and not only about the products advertised³⁰. A key concept in the study of rhetoric is that before an audience can be persuaded to take an action, they must be

³⁰ Pollay's article, "The Distorted Mirror" surveys the arguments of a variety of scholars from a variety of fields who view advertising "of the scale we now experience" as neither "inevitable nor benign" (19).

convinced, which means that discourse must create the mindset that makes the action possible. Advertising makes consumption possible, just as religious discourse makes belief in religious precepts possible. Both discourses have to prepare us so that we are able to believe their claims. The volume, mass, and scale of advertising discourse both reflect and shape our expectations about the world we inhabit and our own place and role in that world.

1.6. Advertising as Transformation and Religious Discourse

Advertising has a social function similar to the social function of religious discourse in that it suggests a way of being in the world and helps us recognize how we are achieving transformation, in the case of advertising, through building consumer identities. In *Crazy Talk* Neil Postman argues,

[R]eligion serves . . . to minimize fear and isolation, to increase freedom, and provide a sense of continuity and oneness. Religious language achieves these purposes by creating metaphors and myths which give concrete form to our most profound fears and exaltations. Above all, religious language provides people with a coherent system of principles by which they may give ethical purpose and direction to their lives. (1976, 15)

As religious discourse prepares us to embrace a set of moral attitudes and gives meaning to our network of relationships – with self, with other individuals, with communities and with the concept of divinity, so does advertising. I will argue that it prepares us to embrace consumption as a way of life and gives meaning to our relationship with goods and products. It models for us a set of moral attitudes and “a coherent set of principles” which attempts to give “ethical purpose and direction” to our lives. Likewise, both discourses prepare us for an attitude or orientation

toward our existence. Rhetorical critic Kenneth Burke asserts “religions . . . form the kinds of attitude which prepare men for . . . acts” (1961, v). Advertising too helps formulate our attitudes and prepares us for ongoing acts of consumption. In addition to persuading us to consume, it also shapes our attitudes toward ourselves and our world.

1.7. Advertising: From social cohesion to social transformation

Despite the attention given to individual issues, such as body image and gender stereotypes, and despite the fact that some critics of advertising allude to it as a form of religion, no one has made an extended argument to show how advertising discourse might constitute a form of religious discourse, and no one has carefully examined the assumptions behind advertising that make it relevant to compare it to forms of religious discourse³¹. Advertising serves up a form of mythology about consumption and this mythology has been a century in the making. Advertising messages are designed to sell products and brands, but along with the sales message, I will argue, we are being sold messages that sacralise a particular identity, specific actions, and a set of beliefs that include ideal ways to think about our fellow human beings, about our society and our communities, about sin and salvation, and about the sacred. Its goal is to shape our attitudes about ourselves, about our relationships with others, about our relationship and understanding of the sacred and our understanding of what it means to engage in civil society.

In fact, for all of advertising’s pervasiveness, the message behind the message of advertising discourse is nearly invisible. It may seem that we have learned to ignore most of it,

³¹ John Fiske says “the metaphor of consumerism as a religion . . . is simply too glib to be helpful, and too attractive to those whose intentions, . . . are to expose the evils and limitations of bourgeois materialism” (Reading the Popular 13). However, even though Sut Jhally, in “Advertising as Religion” and Trish Sheffield, in *The Religious Dimensions of Advertising* have argued that advertising *constitutes a form of* religion, I have not encountered any critic who has argued that advertising *performs the same functions* as religious discourse or that, as a genre, it enacts Burke’s redemption drama theory.

but the constant barrage of messages we are subjected to helps shape our attitudes towards the real world we live in. It sells us a commercialized identity. But, because we are so immersed in advertising and so surrounded by it that it has simply become a part of our visual and mental landscape, the commercialized identities we see in ads are mostly unnoticed. These commercialized identities are completely naturalized. From this ideal position, advertising inundates us with an implicit message about what it means to be in relationships with ourselves, others, and society.

1.8. Conclusion: The Symbolic World and Advertising

Advertising messages shape our mental environment simply because they *are everywhere* and associated with almost every human endeavour and accomplishment. In fact, without commercial discourse, some of the products we treasure would not be as meaningful to us as they are. It shows us how products can help us create, maintain, affirm, even transform our social identities. Advertising promotes brand identity and frequently, we assert our identity with the items we purchase. We are not only complicit in allowing advertising to assume and maintain a dominant role in our symbolic worlds, but we embrace advertising, it seems, because it is a cultural discourse that gives the things in our lives symbolic meaning and, “[i]n giving value to objects, advertising gives value to our lives” (Twitchell, 1996, 4). Advertising is an integral aspect of our culture.

Twitchell goes so far as to claim, “[a]dvertising has become the dominant culture” (2000, p. 3). Perhaps it is because of its predominance that audiences do not question its ethical foundations, assuming that it reflects cultural values which themselves are based on acceptance of taken for granted assumptions. Twitchell inquires why other professions – doctors, lawyers, English professors – all have “institutional memories” while “admen don’t” (2000, 3) suggesting

our culture is amnesiac in nature when it comes to advertising. It is true that while Shakespeare has a presence in popular culture, some of the trailblazers in 20th Century advertising may not be known by name; however, they have left a legacy. The advertising profession has not cultivated “institutional memories” in the public’s mind in the same way that other professions may have, but advertising has a long, varied, and well – documented past.

Advertising’s “institutional memories” reside in the memoirs and “how to” books published by the ad men of the early twentieth century. Some of the foundational books include Earnest Elmo Calkins and Ralph Holden’s *Modern Advertising* (1905), George Rowell’s *Forty Years an Advertising Agent* (1906), Walter Dill Scott’s *The Psychology of Advertising* (1917), Claude Hopkins’ *My Life in Advertising & Scientific Advertising* (1923 & 1927), and Albert Lasker’s work (1925). More and more, cultural and business historians, and marketing specialists call on these books to examine advertising’s modern roots³². However, these books are interesting from a rhetorical perspective rather than just a historical perspective, for it is in these works that the foundational assumptions of modern advertising reside. In addition, it is in these works that we see set in motion advertising’s potential to function as a religious discourse. These assumptions about advertising carry into later writing by advertising men, such as James Webb Young’s *How to Become an Advertising Man* first published in 1963.

In this dissertation, I will demonstrate those assumptions and call on the early advertising men’s works to show how those assumptions were laid down in their works and have become entrenched in the past hundred years. My dissertation will argue, using the methods of rhetorical criticism, that advertising is sermonic in nature, urging us to accept precepts that are similar to those found in most forms of religious discourse. The significant difference is that advertising, as

³² For example, see Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); or Pope’s book.

a form of religious discourse, narrows rather than enlarges our understanding of what it means to be human beings engaged in complex relationships with others.

Chapter 2

Rhetorical Incarnations: Using Rhetorical Theory to Reveal

Advertising's Social Order

“The end or effect of primary concern to the [rhetorical critic] is the pattern of attitudes and thought processes induced by the [messages], particularly in relation to the terminal action [they seek] to elicit”³³.

2.1. What is a Rhetorical Perspective?

The study of rhetoric entails the study of how discourses serve a social function in society and help both to structure and to enable interactions. Rhetoric studies the relationship between individuals and public communication and symbols and society, and it looks at the effects of public discourses. It uncovers patterns. Rhetorical theorist Edwin Black writes, “[m]ost rhetorical discourses can be interpreted as seeking to regulate an audience’s conception of a subject and its definition of the issues attending that subject” (1992, 153). One of the tasks that advertising performs is to regulate an audience’s conception of particular products, services, or brands, while it interprets our needs and wants, and suggests how those needs and wants can be met through adopting a product, service, or brand. As we will see in the Chapter 3 analysis, the earliest advertising professionals strove to regulate how society understood the meaning and use of advertising. However, through their strivings, they made advertising a discourse that attempts to regulate not only how products are viewed, but also the nature of human relations.

³³ Thomas R Nilsen, “Interpretive Function of the Critic,” *Western Speech* 21 (1957): 70-76.

Thus, advertising performs a second regulatory function, one that seeks to have an impact on social relations and social order because advertising offers moral guidance through the ethical reality it portrays. As a morally infused genre, its impact is implicitly religious in nature in several aspects. First, it shows its audience what an “ideal” identity is, as imagined in advertising discourse, and what it means to be a person; second, it implicitly exhorts the audience to effectively sacralize their individuality and treat it as such through ritual practices. Lastly, advertising as a genre, offers a rhetorical vision of human relationships and societal ideals.

Other critics have argued for understanding advertising as performing a religious function, but none have argued that advertising itself functions as a religious discourse. For example, communication theorist Sut Jhally uses religious terminology to focus on how commodities are represented in advertising in his article “Advertising as Religion.” He describes four historical stages of advertising practice: idolatry; iconology; narcissism; and totemism. The “idolatrous” stage of advertising, from the 1890s to the 1920s, “has a strong theme of veneration of the products . . . Commodities are idols in early advertising” (222). According to Jhally, the second stage, “iconology,” prevalent from 1920s to the 1940s passes from the “worship of commodities to *their* meaning within a social context . . . In the stage of iconology both products and persons are embodiments of reigning social values and the world of advertising is . . . meaning – based. Commodities are the icons of the market place” (223). The narcissism stage comes next, “where the product reflects the desires of the individual . . . [and] [t]he world of objects here enters the everyday world of people and performs in magical ways” (223 – 224). The final stage, dominant from the 60s to the present, Jhally calls the totemic stage, in which “utility, symbolization, and personalization are mixed and remixed under the sign of the group . . . [so that] products are badges of group membership” and in which “products give magical

access to a previously closed world of group activities” (224). Jhally’s arguments are significant to my work because he points out some of the major historical trends in advertising. However, my work builds on his, arguing that advertising is not primarily about commodities but actually shapes an idealized vision of self for members of target audiences. Advertising then exhorts these audiences to claim their idealized identity so that they can experience transformation and, ultimately, redemption. This transformation occurs not through consuming particular commodities, but through consuming itself, because the work of advertising is not primarily about selling individual products or brands but about consistently seeking to influence audience’s identities.

Tricia Sheffield is a religious studies scholar who, like Jhally, wants to argue for the totemic orientation of advertising and advertising’s role in maintaining a “culture of consumer capitalism”(4). However, she challenges Jhally’s position, arguing that “advertising should not be understood as a religion, but as containing religious, that is, totemic dimensions that make it a culturally potent force” (3). Sheffield sketches the three totemic dimensions: “[f]irst, advertising has the religious dimension of a ‘divine’ mediator figure;” second, “advertising as an image producer has a religious dimension of sacramentality akin to transubstantiation” in that objects become symbols and the “converted material objects are totems” (3). The third and final dimension is that “advertising can bear . . . ‘ultimate concern’” which is “reflected in advertising’s ability to mediate the proposition that the identity that matters most is constructed, in part, by the objects that an individual chooses to own” (4). Sheffield believes that “the culture of consumer capitalism . . . may have to be distinguished as a ‘false religion’” (4). Unlike Jhally who claims advertising is a fetish religion, Sheffield maintains it has religious dimensions, but is not a fetish religion. She claims that advertising is a “totemic mediator” between product and

individual, that advertising transforms the product in a process akin to sacramentality, that it “imbues [objects] with an aura of the sacred” and that “through ownership of such commodity-totems, individuals are thus formed into . . . consumption clans” (150). While there is no doubt that we conceptualize and affirm our identities, in part, through and with objects, I argue that advertising itself seeks to influence the self-concept of audience members, as well as their behaviour. Neither Jhally nor Sheffield note how advertising actually imparts a view of morality based on its ethical implications for human relationships.

Proving or disproving the falsity of religious practice is not the focus of this dissertation. Taking my cue from Emile Durkheim’s work, I will argue that religions only work for societies when they meet social needs and that advertising seeks to demonstrate an audience’s social needs and then suggest how those needs can be mediated. Therefore, my work approaches advertising as rhetorical practice, not as economic practice or theological doctrine. One of the reasons advertising is a successful cultural discourse is that it addresses universal human concerns and holds out the promise of transformation and redemption. While Jhally claims that advertising is different from “established religions in that there is no moral core at its centre that is articulated in a ritualized form” (226), there is at least an ethical core, although it may be substantially different from the moral and ethical cores of established religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, or Islam and, it may be argued that the ethical core is articulated in a ritualized form. To examine advertising as a religious discourse, I will call on Durkheim’s work in *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, and to argue for an ethical centre of advertising, I will call on the discipline of rhetorical ethical criticism as it is described by critics such as Wayne Booth, Marshall Gregory and Martha Nussbaum. I will examine advertising as a rhetorical form of social drama that attempts to shape and influence social practice in ways similar to religious

discourses. I will argue it plays an advisory role, instructing audiences in a consumer ethic which has moral implications. Due to a confluence of circumstances, including its pervasive nature, its link to technological communication habits, and its investment in pathos appeal, this advisory role makes it function as a form of religious discourse.

2.1.1. Durkheim's Elementary Forms of Religious Life

When I speak of religious discourse, I am using the term “religion” in the same manner sociologist Emile Durkheim used it. For Durkheim, religion is an “eminently social thing”; “a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them” (44). Advertising, likewise, is an eminently social thing and a socializing thing. It identifies and targets each and every person in our society. Its suatory nature attempts to unite target audiences into a unified system of beliefs about products, brands, and characteristics of brand-name users, but also about human nature, relationships, and community and civic duty. Advertising is similar to religious discourses because it implicitly encodes what is sacred, or set apart and unassailable; in addition it offers instruction about how to recognize and act toward the sacred.

The concept of individualism and the necessity of nurturing individuality in order to achieve an ideal self is held sacred in advertising. Durkheim makes a distinction between our “individual being” and our “social” identity. By individual, Durkheim means “the body, its drives and appetites, its sensory apparatus – in short, our body being considered as distinct from our human being” (Fields lv). In advertising, the individual's drives are pandered to and, through the force of elevating individualism to the status of the sacred, advertising seeks, whether intentionally or not, to have an impact on social practices and mores. According to Durkheim,

“the ‘social’ is the source from which comes the humanizing discipline of the “individual” that creates the “person.” Hence, the following distinction between “individual” and “person” (Fields 1v): “Our sensations are in their essence individual. But the more emancipated we are from the senses, and the more capable we are of thinking and acting conceptually, the more we are persons” (Durkheim 275). The advertising genre’s success rests on separating “the individual” from its attachment to the social, even as it, paradoxically, uses the social to construct the individual. Advertising seeks to bind what it means to be a person to our senses, rather than urging us to think and act conceptually as other civic discourses might. I will therefore argue that the “individual” is sacralized in advertising and that the “social identity” that advertising seems to wish to construct is inherently commercial.

Advertising insists it is the social duty of the consumer to recognize, focus on, and nurture her sense of individualism at the expense of any other activity or any other form of identity. This focus on individualism and its sacralization happens through rites of consumption. The rites are practised in the hopes of achieving transformation. However, the individual is always in a state of need and can never fully realize the ideal individuality promised by advertising. Durkheim believes that religion sustains collective identities (xxv); advertising promotes and sustains the collective identity of “consumer.” Advertising advocates continual consumption so that wanting, shopping, and purchasing are rituals and practices that create “the routine framework for everyday” (xxv) which Durkheim identifies with religion.

For Durkheim, religions always contain “unified systems” of representation concerning human nature and always share views of collective conduct. As I will argue in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, advertising contains a unified system of representations concerning human nature. It also makes clear its view of collective conduct, not only explicitly urging its audiences to consume,

but implicitly asking us to see each other and treat each other in the ideal ways it imagines in its various iterations. Moreover, according to Durkheim, religion must also offer a conception of the universe (141), which advertising also does, as I will demonstrate. To argue for advertising as a form of religious discourse, it is necessary to understand the role of language in creating a system of unified beliefs, envisioning a church in some form, distinguishing between the sacred and profane, and providing a conception of the symbolic universe.

2.2. Burke and Language

2.2.1. Terministic Screens

Chapter 3 lays the groundwork for an analysis of the effects of the early admen's language choices. Kenneth Burke characterizes the act of choosing terms as an act of selection and calls these acts of selection "terministic screens". In its function of naming, defining, and evaluating, language offers the speaker's perspective on a situation, event, object, concept, idea or characteristic. In fact, Burke argues that "words are more given to attitudinizing than naming; [and] language is [therefore] the dancing of an attitude" (1973 B, 9). For example, when the early admen refer to advertising as "gospel" they reveal their attitude toward that discourse, but they also shape their audience's understanding of the function of that discourse. In naming something, we offer a perspective and in offering that perspective certain qualities are screened out. Burke says "the nature of our terms affect the nature of our observations, in the sense that the terms direct the attention to one field rather than to another" (1966, 46). Terministic screens enable observations, but also set limits on what observations are possible. Burke explains, in "Terministic Screens" that language selects, reflects, and deflects features (1966, 44 – 62). Thus, other characteristics are deflected, while in the very act of naming an object, event, or idea is itself an action of selection which, in turn, reflects particular characteristics. Whenever we talk

about anything, we use terministic screens, in that language acts as a filter as our terms direct the attention to particular features of reality, while necessarily deflecting attention from other features. To return to the example of calling a commercial discourse “gospel”, we see that labelling advertising in this way deflects other ways of seeing that discourse, such as through the lenses offered by terms such as “propaganda”, “puffery” or “fairy tale”. “Gospel” suggests not just truth, but sacred truth, while the other terms are aimed in different directions, ones that suggest outright manipulation, exaggeration, and fiction, respectively.

The patterns of language that build up around particular disciplines such as advertising operate as terministic screens for both the people in the discipline and those outside it. The terministic screens shape both the rhetor’s and the audience’s understanding of the discipline. In other words, the nature of the terms we use affects the nature of what we see, and the nature of the terms affects the nature of what the audience will accept. A rhetor can call on terms the audience already accepts to build a shared understanding of a topic and by using a terminology already familiar to the audience, the rhetor shapes an audience’s understanding of a particular area of human endeavour; thus the rhetor and the audience come to share common ground about the nature of the endeavour. Because the terms we choose will be shaped for us by our rhetorical situation which is always dynamic, we see that our linguistic choices are arbitrary and that our choices reflect our own habits of mind. However, language choices are not pre-determined, but reflect speakers’ attitudes; the way we talk about things becomes a strategy to reinforce our own attitudes and shape the attitudes of others toward our projects. The various ways advertising is discussed, as I have outlined in the Introduction, offer countless examples of this phenomenon.

The discourse that we use to talk about anything can become a specialized vocabulary because language is socially constructed; we come to recognize certain vocabularies as

appropriate and useful for talking about particular topics. As a society accepts the terms used to talk about topics, the terms can gain the status of what rhetorical theorist Richard Weaver calls “uncontested terms” (1985, 214). An uncontested term is one that is accepted at face value although it is abstract enough to carry different meanings in the minds of many people; for example, as I pointed out in the Introduction, advertisers, marketers, and others interested in advertising have contested definitions of advertising, sometimes seeing it wholly as news about a product, sometimes as mere persuasion, and sometimes as art. When we assume we know what a term means we do not contest the semantics of the term. An uncontested term is a powerful linguistic agent because it smuggles in nuances which are simply unavailable for examination. These terms can carry the ideals of a culture and ideals are principles of conduct. Uncontested terms carry “tendency” in that they shape our understanding and consequently, our actions toward people, things, and ideas. Advertising discourse will always contain uncontested terms that prompt us to respond to it as a religious discourse. Uncontested terms in advertising may include “family”, “loyalty”, “community”, “love”, and “courage”, for example. These terms name meaningful human characteristics, but the way these characteristics are manifested in advertising varies significantly from the way they are manifested in our everyday lives. Likewise, when advertising implies significant human relationships, such as spouse, daughter, son, mother or father, the way these relationships are enacted are underpinned by an ideology of commercialism rather than by altruism and human care and concern. The religious tendency of advertising is in its vocabulary. The vocabulary exhorts its audiences to types of attitudes and actions.

2.2.2. Burke and Symbolic Action

Burke's well known distinction between "action" and "motion" helps explain his thesis that language is symbolic action. For Burke, the idea of "motion" arises out of and is dictated by raw being: physiology and biology. Babies are born, grow into children, age into maturity, and die – this is motion. "Motion" describes occurrences imposed by the physical nature of reality; it is outside the domain of human choice or influence. It is inevitable; it is non-symbolic. There is no choice involved and human influence sits outside the boundaries of motion. In the idea of "action," on the other hand, there is the idea of human will, human choice, and human intervention. Burke characterizes this ability of language to carry tendency, which influences auditors' attitudes and actions, by calling language "symbolic action", Burke rejected the idea that language is transparent or opaque and simply carries meaning. He argued that language is a way for humans to interact with each other. Sociologist Joseph Gusfield explains that Burke's theories of language "[provide] for a reflective facility that imposes a symbolic interpretation of objects and events upon the raw world of sense data" (8). Burke's system of language shows how communication and, thus, relation is chosen, and opens the door for the understanding that those choices are always intentional, even if the choices are unconscious and even if the rhetor is not consciously aware of her intent. Burke says that "there can be motion without action [but] action is not reducible to terms of motion" (1989, 53 – 54). "Action", and thus language, is always about symbolic meaning. My dissertation will demonstrate that advertising is pure action and that as a genre; it functions with religious intent even if that is not the intention of its creators.

Burke argues that since language is symbolic action, our deepest symbolic motives are manifested in our language use. These symbolic motives may be hidden from us and inaccessible

to our conscious minds. There are several layers to understanding what Burke means when he says that language is symbolic action. First, it is symbolic action in the most practical of ways since language is a system of symbols. Thus, using language to speak or to write is performing actions with symbols. In addition, however, language is symbolic action because our language sets the stage for our actions. It directs our attention through our terministic screens. Language is not just something we have: it is something we do. It is not simply a transparent carrier of meaning: it makes meaning. Language sets the stage for how we understand the world around us and how we articulate the world inside us. The language choices we make both reflect and shape our understandings of ourselves, of the world, and of the relationship between us and the external world, manifesting our needs and desires. The language of advertising works the same way. Part of the challenge of analysing advertising resides in the extent of its entanglement with our symbol systems.

2.2.3. Language and Persuasion

Persuasion proceeds from language's potential to be symbolic action and directs that action toward specific goals and purposes. Language is suasive in nature because of the social utility of language. We use language to interact with other people; this interaction invites identification and the result is persuasion. As rhetorical critic Karlyn Kohrs Campbell notes, “[p]ersuasion is a result of the interaction between man and his language; man is capable of persuasion because of his ability to respond linguistically and semantically” (5). Thus, language builds identification, and identification opens a channel through which influence can be exerted. Because language helps to name things and experiences in the world around us, it manages meaning, and the management of meaning also exerts influence. According to Campbell, “the first dimension of language is naming”, a process that selects qualities on which to focus our

attention (6). As we name, consequently, we define, and definitions have an evaluative quality because names are more than labels; they can and do act as categories and definitions.

How we name, or define, something will dictate how we act towards it because the way we name it suggests how we are going to classify it. Definitions not only include “essential attributes or characteristics that something must have to be labelled in a particular way by a particular linguistic community” (Campbell, 6). They are evaluative in that they also label “an individual’s experiences with and his feelings about the acts, events, objects, persons, conditions, and relationships to which they refer; as a result, names are evaluative because they stand for experiences and feelings” (Campbell, 6). Names and labels foreshadow how we will treat the things to which we attach them and how we expect others to treat them. In fact, according to Weaver, terms are “incipient propositions” [which] “set up expectancies of propositional embodiment” (1985, 210). Thus, the way we choose to name things, concepts, ideas, actions or people are choices which, in actuality, present a form of argument that proceeds from a term’s definitional capacity. For example, when advertising is called “news” it is categorized as informative discourse.

The earliest admen called advertising a “gospel” and compared it to a natural but potent “force” like electricity. From the beginning of modern advertising, these terms, “gospel” and “force” have positioned advertising as a kind of religious discourse with a power to refashion beliefs and thus, values, in its audiences. Therefore the way advertising has been named and defined demonstrates symbolic motives which are often unconscious. Even as advertising directs our attention toward particular products, it deflects our attention from the meaning behind the meaning of advertising discourse and how it works as a genre. Because advertising is a genre of

linguistic action, it is a form of symbolic action; it has the capacity to affect the behaviour of others which means that it has ethical consequences.

2.2.4. Advertising as Narrative; Narrative as Ethical Discourse

Burke's characterization of language as symbolic action stresses language-use as an action. Because language use is an action, it is also, therefore, a choice. When we make choices, we enter into the territory of ethics because we make our choices based on our ideas of "the good". Consequently, ethical choices emerge in the narratives underlying advertising as a genre. Advertising sells a product by simultaneously selling its audience a narrative about a way to live. In other words, advertising advocates for forms of conduct. Narration, as defined by rhetorical theorist Walter Fischer, is "symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them" (58). When we understand an advertising message, we are interpreting its narrative. In interpreting, we are, in effect, "trying on" the ideas presented to see how they fit. When we try on ideas, we are, even if only momentarily, affected by them because we are co-creating meaning. The choices that audiences make in response to ads represent an alignment of the audience's ethics with those implied in the narrative. Thus advertising, and the influence it exerts through its narrative engagements with its audiences, attempts to influence the way people understand and view the events portrayed in discrete ads. If advertising influences our perceptions of what is the best or most appropriate way to act, then it exerts an influence that is ethical in nature.

2.3 Ethical Criticism

Advertising is implicitly a narrative, and therefore the linguistic action involved in narrative sets up an ethical dimension or has ethical consequences. Successful advertising

depends absolutely on its sense of what an audience has to believe in order to process the message. Rhetorical critics, such as Wayne Booth, Marshall Gregory, and legal and ethical scholar Martha Nussbaum, argue that narratives have ethical implications because they build identification with us and invite us into their narrative worlds. Thus, for the time we are engaged in the world created by the narrative's vocabulary, we are influenced by it and subject to its laws and norms. This influence is necessarily asserted through the fact that we understand the message. One of the foundational assumptions of rhetorical criticism is that effective messages are built on the common-sense assumptions held by the audience and appealed to in the message. Successful advertising depends absolutely on the audience's assumptions in order to process the message. Ethical criticism consists of interpreting and evaluating values espoused in a narrative or genre, and then offering a reasoned judgment of those values and the impact they may have on society.

Any critique of advertising's purposes will have an ethical dimension. Ethical criticism does not advocate censorship or simple puritanical readings, but, according to Booth in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, it is a systematic method of criticism that results in showing "how the virtues of narratives relate to the virtues of selves and societies, or how the ethos of any story affects or is affected by the ethos – the collection of virtues – of any given reader" (11). Likewise, Gregory in "Ethical Criticism: What it is and Why it Matters" explains the aims of ethical criticism do not include "thought control, censorship . . . or the management of others' conduct" (202). To understand advertising as rhetorical, as symbolic action, and therefore as human conduct, means to understand it as an undertaking with ethical consequences. Gregory argues we cannot escape questions of ethics and morality:

Because human actions are imagined and chosen rather than prescribed or programmed. Because there is a dimension of choice to almost all forms of human conduct, conduct is always subject to moral and ethical evaluation” (195).

Gregory maintains that ethical criticism is the analysis of how fictions exert influence, saying, “[e]thical criticism addresses . . . consumers of fictions both literary and non-literary with the aim of helping them see, understand, and appreciate the powerful ways in which fictions invite them into specific ways of feeling, thinking, and judging” (202). He notes that ethical criticism “tries to help [readers] see that if these invitations are accepted, especially on a repeated basis, one very likely consequence is a permanent influence on readers’ hearts and minds” (202). Since advertising is inherently rhetorical in nature, and since rhetoric may be defined as “an attempt to build community by exchanging symbols” (Hart 36), it follows that an examination of advertising discourse includes an examination of how it intends to attempt to shape the virtues of its audiences and society. Analysing the nature of the communities that advertising seeks to build among its target audiences by examining the specific nature of symbolic exchange will offer significant insights into what people respond to in their search for identification and meaning.

Moreover, just because we believe we are immune to advertising and because we may understand it as a form of entertainment does not mean that it should be outside the scope of examination through the lens of ethics. Booth advocates examining “the ethical values of stories we tell each other as ‘imitations of life,’ whether or not they in fact claim to depict actual events” (15). Gregory concurs, arguing that “our interactions with stories in one form or another -- [including in] commercials . . . – is constant and ongoing” (194), and insisting that there is “no such thing as being ‘merely’ entertained”; he believes that

[E]ven at the lowest possible level of engagement, the intellectual and affective exertions that are required just to understand the content, shape, and direction of a story in fact involve a complicitous agreement to let the story have its own way with [an audience's] beliefs and feelings – at least for the time being (200).

Examining advertising as a discourse with ethical dimensions means questioning more than how advertising to children should be regulated or whether to allow advertising of dangerous products such as tobacco.

Advertising engages us in stories and gives us, intentionally or not, strategies for behaviour and responses to events and relationships in our real lives. According to Gregory, our responses to “stories occur on a continuum with [our] responses to real life . . . [and] are in some important sense a kind of practice at forming responses to real life” (10). Nussbaum agrees in “Exactly and Responsibly: A Defense of Ethical Criticism,” affirming that “narratives and their authors influence us and help make us fully responsible to the complexity of our experience ‘as social creatures’”(63). Nussbaum argues that imaginative works can help to increase our understanding of compassion through the exercise of our imaginations. However, our primary form of “imaginative works” available publicly – advertising – may actually deplete our sense of responsibility to others and, as a consequence, reduce the “complexity of our experience as social creatures”.

Advertising subverts Nussbaum's claims for literature because it reduces complex identities to one identity: consumer. It reduces human pursuits to one pursuit: the pursuit of perfection of the individual. Advertising does not offer well-rounded characters struggling to come to terms with the essence of the human condition, the nature of happiness, the nature of evil, or the purpose of suffering. Advertising cannot both accurately represent the human

condition and perform its job, which is to encourage consumption by selling audiences on the belief that they can achieve an idealized self with the right pattern of purchases. It cannot do both because to focus on the nature of the human condition would be to focus on humanity, rather than to focus on the narcissistic individuality that advertising calls on to sell its products and its ideology.

We need to evaluate advertising through the lens of ethical criticism because as imaginative works that are everywhere, influencing audiences of all demographics, it is important to understand the social influence it can wield. Nussbaum argues that imaginative works can develop our sense of compassion because they “develop . . . imaginative abilities in a valuable way and are therefore helpful to citizens” (65). A given of her argument about ethical criticism is that imaginative works can develop our understanding of “the experience of poor people, prisoners, racial minorities, and other excluded people, with a view to improving their lot and ameliorating their suffering” (66). In advertising, however, poor people simply do not exist, suffering is trivialized to sell goods or services, and excluded people, such as racial minorities, are important only if they can help build identification with a particular target market. Thus, advertising cannot engage with the political realities of groups without purchasing power.

Advertising engages audiences through a complex process of identification. Discrete ads are carefully crafted to appeal to, and are aimed at, specific target audiences. These ads build common ground with their audiences and among audience members, aligning groups of people into “brand” users and creating brand communities. It builds consubstantiality by both reflecting our identities back to us and by projecting identities revised slightly through interaction with products. In its projections, it suggests ways for us to conceptualize ourselves, ways to see and understand other people, and ways to visualize community. It accomplishes these tasks in part by

locating the product, and the characters who are so like the target audience, in a kind of community established by the narrative of the ad. Advertising as a discourse exists to build consubstantiality between “target markets” and brands and between people and things.

2.4. Identification as Prime Motive

As indicated earlier, Burke’s rhetorical theory asserts that “identification” is the key principle in rhetoric. In this premise, he departs from traditional definitions of rhetoric, such as Aristotle’s. Aristotle urged identification to construct successful persuasive strategies, while Burke argues that we construct persuasive strategies so that we can build identification, which he calls “the edenic term” (1969, 62). He calls it the “edenic term” to suggest that in a perfect world with perfect harmony among people, we would be in such absolute agreement with each other about everything, there would be no need for rhetoric. Thus, according to Burke, the ultimate rhetorical motive is identification. Burke enlarges the “notion of rhetoric so that it is change in action or attitude through identification” and not simply persuasion (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 174). The notion of rhetoric as identification is integral to seeing how rhetoric builds social knowledge and binds communities. Likewise advertising builds identifications with and sometimes between target markets, building social knowledge and binding communities through common understandings of material goods. When we build identifications with others, we are building common ground and building a community. In fact, identification is achieved through sharing and creating common rhetorical experiences (Hart, 276). Advertising, with its ubiquitous presence, attempts to build such a world of common experiences for us.

Through common rhetorical experiences, we gain an understanding of the goals and ideals a society strives for. These common rhetorical experiences are shared in and through public discourse, which creates necessary identifications. Like all effective rhetoric, advertising

builds public identification and projects ideals and goals for our society. Burke's theories of rhetoric take its study deep into psychological motivations because, as he explains, all rhetoric is a rhetoric of motive, and when we start asking why someone does something, we are looking to impute motive. With identification as Burke's key term in rhetoric, we can understand how persuasion happens at an unconscious level because we may be unaware of the identifications we are making (Foss, Foss & Trapp 176). Thus, advertising "works" on its audiences on more than one level. It explicitly urges us to take action, but it also invites us to make identifications that occur below our level of conscious understanding.

In its narrative incarnations, advertising builds identification in several ways that occur below the level of conscious and critical awareness. It builds common ground enthymematically, through its positioning of exigence and solution, and through narrative devices, such as character, setting, and plot development.

2.4.1 Identification and the Enthymeme

The primary way in which advertising builds identification is through its use of enthymemes. An understanding of the enthymeme is central to understanding persuasive discourse because it both creates and is built from common ground between the rhetor and the audience. For Aristotle, the enthymeme is "the substance of persuasion" (1354a). The enthymeme is a syllogism or an argument structure, but it is a "rhetorical" syllogism, rather than "logical" syllogism. A logical syllogism proceeds from explicitly stated premises to a formal conclusion that must be drawn from explicit acceptance of the major and minor premises³⁴. On the other hand, a rhetorical syllogism would have one or more suppressed premises which means

³⁴ The most famous one is this: All men are mortal. Socrates is a man. Therefore, Socrates is mortal. A rhetorical syllogism would simply arrive at statement of belief: Socrates will die someday. The rhetorical syllogism suppresses the explicit statements about human mortality and Socrates's humanity to arrive a belief that is popularly held: people die.

“that the speaker does not have to *lay down* his premises but lets his audience supply them out of its stock of opinion and knowledge” (Bitzer, 1959, 187). The enthymeme is persuasive because the audience fills in the missing premises and often does so unconsciously, arriving at agreement with the speaker without giving the statement much thought.

Because the premises of the argument structure are suppressed, it is difficult for the audience to argue with them, and since the audience members fill in the missing premise, in essence, they participate in building the argument. When they fill in the suppressed premise, they are essentially accepting the definitional structure of the premise. Edwin Black notes, “the major premise is not ordinarily explicated out of confidence that it is a conviction shared by the rhetor and audience alike” (1992, 159). Thus, while audience members appear to draw their own conclusions about statements, they are, in fact, being guided by the persuader but the conclusion is co-created.

Enthymemes are the substance of rhetorical influence because they represent common-sense assumptions held by a group, a community, or a culture. According to rhetorical theorist Lloyd Bitzer, the enthymeme’s structure is built “through the joint efforts of speaker and audience” (1959, 189). Advertising depends on enthymemes. For example, in order to sell beauty products that claim to “minimize the appearance of wrinkles,” the audience has to believe that wrinkles are undesirable. An ad that sells Viagra shows a man driving a classic 1960 Mustang, but no woman appears in the ad. The message here works on the enthymematic assumption that muscle cars are equated with virility. Without the enthymeme, the ads would be nonsensical. Enthymemes are rooted in the belief systems of communities and arise from concepts that are believed to be true, whether they are or not. The power of the enthymeme resides in its ability to speak to audience members’ emotional reasoning, not only their logical reasoning.

2.4.1.a. The Enthymeme and Popular Culture

Linguist Norman Fairclough extends the critical reach of Aristotle's enthymeme with his work on "critical language study" which examines common sense assumptions and points out the dynamic interrelationship between popular culture, language, and cognition. Fairclough's work is useful to my study because it affirms advertising's sphere of influence in our every day lives. According to Fairclough, vocabulary clusters are manifestations of common sense assumptions which reflect cultural ideologies. He argues that ideologies "are a means of legitimizing existing social relations . . . simply through the recurrence of ordinary familiar ways of behaving which take these relations ... for granted" (2). Fairclough's work demonstrates how social conditions shape language use but also how "cognitive processes are socially shaped" (16). He notes that language use is a social process that is "not merely a reflection or expression of social processes and practices, [but] is a *part* of those processes or practices (16)", which helps explain how advertising exerts influence in societal life and in individual's lives. Without the persuasive power of enthymemes and common sense assumptions, advertising would have a difficult time making sense, let alone exerting significant social influence. Audience members are implicated in the creation of meaning in advertising and their involvement helps strengthen the identificatory bonds.

Rhetorical criticism scholar Barry Brummett argues that the language used in the public sphere exerts influence on members of society. He claims that everyday actions, objects, events, and experiences, the meat of popular culture, influence the public, demonstrating how artefacts, texts, or events that we might not ordinarily consider persuasive are forms of persuasion. Brummett claims that sushi, blue jeans, and TV programming are all forms of persuasion. These are all forms of popular culture, which Brummett defines as sets of interrelated signs and

artefacts. He names these “sets” texts: “[a] text is a set of signs related to each other insofar as their meanings all contribute to the same set of effects of functions”(1994, vii). Brummett distinguishes between “discrete texts” which have a clearly defined beginning and ending and “diffuse texts” whose boundaries are less sharply defined (1994, 63 – 64). For the purposes of my argument, the advertising genre in its entirety functions as a “diffuse text”. Advertising is a part of the pop culture scene that seeks to influence and persuade us to see and to act in particular ways, in fact, to become particular types of people. This persuasion occurs enthymematically, drawing people into groups and cementing group membership with common sense assumptions about meaning. Popular culture surrounds and persuades us, and advises us about what is significant in our day-to-day lives.

2.4.2. Identification and Exigence

The second way advertising builds identification is through what Bitzer describes as a key element of any rhetorical situation: the exigence. Bitzer explains that rhetorical discourses arise in response to what he calls a rhetorical exigence: “an imperfection marked by urgency; . . . a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (1968, 6). Rhetorical messages, those intended to have an affect upon an audience, arise as a response to the exigence that the rhetor identifies; in this case, the rhetor is the advertising genre itself. The rhetor not only has to identify an exigence, but has to convince the audience that the urgent defect he has identified is one that will affect them too. Advertising creates a framework for its message through its demonstration of audience need and lack, and it shows members of its audience the exigence and solution in creative and clever ways. Advertising dramatizes the benefit of the product, evoking in the target audience the idea that they too will see similar benefits if they use the product. For example, beer commercials sell good friendships, good

times, and often good- looking women. Burke says that we build identification by showing how we are like others. The beer-drinking public is construed as people always in search of a good time and always having a good time. However, even though alcohol commercials state in fine print, “Drink responsibly,” the primary focus of the commercial is not to sell responsibility but to sell the idea of pleasurable beer consumption. Civic responsibility is not a primary part of the message and the community that is being sold is one formed by human connection to a product, not connection to each other. Advertising builds identification by convincing the audience that they have an exigence and that the product can mediate or solve the exigence, thus promising transformation from need and lack to fulfilment. At the same time it promises transformation, advertising is setting out a value system and an ethical system by convincing audiences to adopt its belief systems.

2.4.3. Identification and Narrative Devices

A third way, and one of the most powerful ways, advertising builds identification is through narrative devices, such as character, setting, and plot development. It builds identifications, showing members of the audience how they are like the characters in a particular commercial or how they *could* become like that character. As advertising builds identification with the audience, it must also inhibit, even negate, the audience members’ confidence in their own identity because they are not identical to the character in the advertisement; in fact, members are invited to see themselves as inferior because they are not the characters acting out their lives in 30-second bytes on the screen. Commercials implicitly promise that when members of the target audience start using a product, they will become more socially fulfilled and, in fact, “better” characters in the roles they play. The commercial promises some kind of transformation, whether personal or communal, through the use of the product. This promise of transformation is

played out over and over again in each plot of every commercial. To return to the beer commercial example, sometimes the main characters of the beer commercials are comic and foolish, but by engaging with the product in the commercial, they establish a stronger social connection with other characters. For example, the Ranger and the Sasquatch series of commercials for Kokanee beer features the incompetent Ranger whom the gorgeous “Glacier Girls” come to idolize³⁵. In the case of beer commercials, the setting is often the community in which characters are interacting. However, the community is not held together entirely through bonds of friendship. The advertisement leads the target audience to believe, on some level, that it is the interrelationship of product and character that makes the community a community. The product functions as an integral part of the setting and its use, or coming to know of its use, provides the plot line.

2.4.4. From Identification to Burke’s Dramatistic Pentad

Kenneth Burke offers a range of theories that will be integral to my study because they will help me describe advertising as a discourse that has a significant social impact and one that attempts to circumscribe human motive and to co-opt identification as the prime motive. Burke’s rhetorical theory is a study of human relations and motives as they are encoded in communication. He argues that our motives are encoded in our language choices, but also that our language choices shape our motives. He offers a theory of language, and embeds that theory in his conception of communication as a dramatistic effort.

Advertising always implicitly enacts a drama of human relations, therefore Burke’s theory is well-suited to analyse advertising. Burke sees communication as the enactment of drama and advocates the use of a critical method he calls “dramatism” to uncover motives. He

³⁵ Selected commercials in the Kokanee “Ranger” series can still be found at www.youtube.com. Accessed December 2010.

asks, “what is involved, when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?” (1962, xv) arguing that to answer such questions we need to be able to demonstrate motives. He describes the dramatic pentad as consisting of five key terms which he calls the “generating principles” that help us to make “rounded” statements of motives. He says that all “statements that assign motives can be shown to arise out of . . .and terminate in” (1962, xvi) the five key terms of the pentad: act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose.

Burke defines the five key terms of his dramatic pentad as follows: “act [includes] . . . what took place, in thought or deed”; scene is “the background of the act, the situation in which it occurred” (1962, xv). Agent is the doer, or actor or “what person or kind of person performed the act”; the term “agency” describes the means or instruments the actor used and the purpose describes what the actor hopes to accomplish (1962, xv). Scene explains background, setting, or context, any of which may be sociological or philosophical and the term “act” includes language which, as I have explained, Burke called “symbolic action”. Burke notes it is “a principle of drama that the nature of acts and agents should be consistent with the nature of the scene” (1962, 3). Later, he added a sixth term “attitude” making the dramatic pentad “incipiently a hexad” (1989, 135 – 136). Burke suggests that the key terms give us insight into the drama of human relations when they are paired into what he calls “ratios” (1962, 3) or “way of placement” (1962, 1).

Burke suggests that particular ratios help to reveal individuals’ motivations in persuasion and help motives emerge by casting light on the kinds of identifications being presented. He claims that the “scene contains the act” (1962, 3), arguing that the scene is a “fit container for the act, expressing in fixed properties the same quality that the action expresses in terms of development” (1962, 3). In the context of this dissertation, the scene/act configuration is

necessary to understand how the language choices of the early admen arose out of their grounding in a particular historical scene in which religious discourse was familiar to both them and to their audiences. The Act/Agent ratio helps uncover the reasons that the admen took the particular actions they did and especially why they chose the language they chose to talk about advertising.

Burke notes that language is action and that language also shapes actions. Therefore, because motives are not only encoded in language choices but language choices shape motives, the ratios of scene/act and act/agent can help to explain how advertising grew into a kind of advisory discourse that would ultimately come to resemble a religious discourse.

2.5. Dramatism and the Historical Scene

In Chapter 3, I argue that the society's attitude toward advertising provides the scene which contains the admen's memoirs. The scene/act ratio is useful to show why the advertising men writing in the late 1880s and early 1900s needed to redeem advertising in the eyes of the general public. In this chapter, my assumption is that the admen are the agents and their writings are agency, their act is the redemption of advertising, and the scene is the social world of that time.

A critical method that dramaturgic analysis makes use of is cluster criticism: Burke notes how the two function together:

[D]ramatism is a method of analysis and a corresponding critique of terminology designed to show that the most direct route to the study of human relations and human motives is via a methodical enquiry into cycles or clusters of terms and their functions (Burke, 1976, 7).

To use the early advertising men's writings as a foundation for my argument, I first chart clusters of key terms in their works. Burke tells us that key terms are recognizable through their repetition and their emotional intensity. Once the key terms are identified and classified, the critic distills the pattern of association that accompany the key terms. Then the patterns are used to uncover implications and chart clusters of associations that coalesce around key terms in the discourse. Through charting the clusters, the critic can identify the linguistic motives that underlie a rhetor's discourse. Burke observes that

[T]he work of every writer contains a set of implicit equations. He uses 'associational clusters.' And you may, by examining his work, find 'what goes with what' in these clusters – what kinds of acts and images and personalities and situations go with his notions of heroism, villainy, consolation, despair etc.(Burke, 1976, 20).

By studying the associational clusters, a critic can see the interrelationships between what is associated with what and what is dissociated from what. The critic then theorizes the significance of the implications. Cluster criticism also helps to uncover the enthymemes at work in discourse. Cluster criticism makes explicit the speaker's world view and offers insights into the rhetor's construction of the world view of the audience. It helps to reveal a speaker's implicit motives. Through the method of cluster criticism, I show how each ad man saw himself doing something more important than just teaching others how to move products. The admen were driven by their sense that they were creating new kinds of interactions between people and products, in fact, creating "consumers". They see themselves as somehow god-like, an understanding which comes through in their vision of their work as a gospel.

2.6. Burke: Language Enacts Social Order

Advertising functions like religion in several ways, which I will outline in Chapter 4 by making use of Burke's theory of language, which he argues is inextricably linked with human motivation. Burke maintains that human motives are both described in and shaped by language. He explains that motives both guide our actions and influence our perceptions. But more importantly, he argues, situations and motives are inseparable because the situation becomes our motive and our word for the motive characterizes the situation. Rhetorical theorist James Jasinski summarizes Burke's understanding of motives, saying "in short, motives are cultural principles embodied in vocabularies that shape and guide human perception and action" (370). In other words, how we name a situation tells us how we will respond to it; the way we name it becomes a motive. Thus, if person A takes person B's comment as an insult, naming the comment in that way means that A will be motivated to respond in a particular way, whether in kind or defensively. However, because A names B's comment as an insult, the motive is inherent in the naming and the response is dictated by the naming. Burke notes that even when language is used "trivially", "the motives inherent in [the possibility of its] *thorough* use are acting somewhat as goads, however vague" (1984, vi) [My emphasis]. Therefore, even when speakers or writers use a particular kind of metaphor, perhaps unconsciously, their choices will direct them to further explore the path that their language has set them on. Because advertising is an ubiquitous form of communication, we can learn about the motivations that fuel the genre. Advertising reduces and simplifies human motive by showing the primary human motive as a drive to improve and perfect "the self" and focus on individualism. I will argue that the advertising's linguistic motives intend to act as goads for its audiences, and I intend to demonstrate that it attempts to goad audiences to accept a commercialized view of relationships, including an understanding of

social identity that insists people are “consumers” and an understanding of individual identity that insists people are deficient and inadequate.

Burke views society itself as arising through language and being shaped by language. He insists that “social, linguistically grounded motives” (1984, 274) are at work in all discourses and that these motives are encoded in the structure of ritual drama, which Burke envisions as having a guilt-purification-redemption structure. I will argue that this structure is the essential structure of all advertisements. The understanding of life as ritual drama and language as enactment of that drama underpins Chapter 4. Burke understood human life as drama. Burkologist William Rueckert explains that Burke links “linguistic action – with . . . ritual drama – and ends up with the proposition that the essence of all linguistic action is to be found in ritual drama” (128). For Burke, ritual drama is “the archetype in the . . . drama of human relations, the essential characteristics of which will be necessarily be reflected in all linguistic action” (Rueckert 128). The drama of human relation contains “seven interlocked moments”: the Negative, Hierarchy, Guilt, Mortification, Victimage, Catharsis, and Redemption (Rueckert 131). I will argue that these “seven interlocked” moments are at work in the advertising genre.

2.7. Sacralizing Consumer Identity

In Chapter 5, I argue that the concept of “individuality” and a corollary of beliefs that support how to create, affirm, and demonstrate it are central to advertising’s continuation. The assumption that individuality is sacred is enthymematic to advertising. Each and every ad suggests that there is an experience or a product that will enable a person to enhance herself in some way on the road to becoming the best version of herself possible. Audiences for advertising are asked to believe that their individual natures can be enhanced and perfected through embracing a consumer identity. The genre attempts to sacralize that identity through a four-part

process. Sociologist Hans Mol argues that sacralization of identity occurs through objectification, commitment, ritual and myth. I will use his theories to show how the discourse seeks to perpetuate consumer identity by convincing the audience members that it is crucial for their survival to objectify individuality and pursue the perpetual enhancement of the self through the principles of commitment, ritual, and myth. The advertising genre implicitly encodes this core value in its messages. Only by convincing audiences to accept this core value can advertising keep itself relevant in the face of its own insistence on promoting novelty. A consequence of the sacralization of individualism is what rhetorical theorist Harold Barrett calls “rhetorical indisposition.” He claims that rhetorical indisposition results in “diminished potential in interaction with others” and in motivations resulting from “unfavourable narcissism” (12).

2.8. Fantasy Themes

In Chapter 6, I will use rhetorical theorist Ernest Bormann’s symbolic convergence theory to assert that the advertising genre implicitly lays out themes about what is important to living the good life. Bormann suggests that groups of people create and affirm identity by participating in the creation of fantasy themes, or stories that are constructed collaboratively. According to Bormann, fantasy themes are made up of the elements of drama and narrative: character, setting, and plot for example. Fantasy themes may be understood as motifs. For example, in some early 20th century magazine ads, a woman would be about to lose her husband because she did not understand how she, and consequently he, was suffering from halitosis. Clusters of ads that suggest our relationships will be ruined if we are not using the right personal hygiene products constitute “fantasy themes.” These themes may feed into what Bormann called “rhetorical visions” which occur when the various themes are put together to demonstrate a relatively coherent world view. To return to the halitosis example, the theme of a woman

endangering her relationship status may be considered to be integral to the rhetorical vision that it is a woman's mandate to dedicate herself to physical beauty in order to be of value to her mate.

I will argue that advertising projects a variety of fantasy themes such as "the perfection of personal identity," the "pursuit of novelty," and "the construction of community". I will further assert that these fantasy themes, if taken to their natural conclusion would result in changing our understanding of "compassion" and how it is practised.

2.9. Conclusion

Because rhetorical theory demonstrates ways to examine genres of discourse, it is possible to argue that advertising has one main agenda that it pursues. This agenda is not primarily to sell products, brands, goods or services, but to issue an implicit invitation to its audiences to accept its fundamental ideologies. It identifies individual members of audiences as consumers and suggests that the primary concern of its audiences is to buy into the belief that individualism and the quest for the ideal identity is the most worthwhile quest available to pursue. Advertising not only visualizes people who are primarily consumers in pursuit of buying their way to individual and ideal perfection of self, but also as people who will accept advertising's version of what is significant to humanity and what constitutes civil behaviour.

Chapter Three

Redemption and Genesis: The Beginnings of Modern Advertising

“Advertising ministers to the spiritual side of the trade”³⁶.

3.1. Introduction

Cluster criticism will show that each of the pioneering admen saw himself as doing something more important than strategizing how to sell products. While each man was personally invested in designing and executing advertising, each was developing more than a discourse that would support business enterprises. The men were changing the belief systems of a nation. People like Claude Hopkins, Earnest Elmo Calkins, and Albert Lasker were driven by the idea that they were creating new kinds of interactions between people and products. They were creating a culture of consumption and, indeed, creating consumers. By applying Burke’s method of cluster criticism, we can see the symbolic motives manifested in their language. They saw themselves as powerful, almost god-like, a view which comes through in their idea of themselves as scientific and heroic, evangelistic, and visionary. They very much saw themselves as creating and wielding a powerful force: advertising, sometimes represented as a force that comes through nature, but sometimes as a spiritual force. The admen believed they were forging an extraordinary transformative force and through that deed or because of it, they became extraordinary themselves. The admen positioned advertising as a gospel, sometimes by implying

³⁶Calvin Coolidge, 1926, in a speech to the annual meeting of the American Association of Advertising Agencies.

that it carries the “truth” that will save a nation and its members, other times by actually calling it “gospel”. In this chapter, first I will explain the historical circumstances surrounding advertising, and introduce some of the key players who worked to shape and craft advertising into the discourse we know today. Then I will offer a survey of the “frames of acceptance”³⁷ Hopkins, Calkins, and Lasker created that ultimately enabled advertising to become understood as a discourse that held out the promise of transformation.

Lloyd Bitzer declares that rhetoric is “pragmatic”, that “it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce some action or change in the world”. He defines rhetoric as “a mode of altering reality . . . by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action” (1968, 3 – 4). The early advertising gurus who wrote memoirs and “how to” books for an audience of other business people were involved in something very pragmatic. They had a very clear objective in mind: the salvation and redemption of advertising discourse. The popular view that advertising was mere “puffery”³⁸ provided the exigence they had to mediate. The early advertising writers declared they had a highly practical purpose: to teach others about advertising. But their works were also instrumental in another way: they functioned to change the way the public perceived advertising, showing its potential to help strengthen the commercial enterprises of a nation and build the character of a nation and its people³⁹.

³⁷ Burke defines “frames of acceptance” as “the more or less organized system of means by which a thinking man gauges the historical situation and adopts a role with relation to it” (1984, 5).

³⁸ The word “puff” seems to be interchangeable with the word “advertisement.” However, Nathaniel Clark Fowler notes, in an 1889 book, *About Advertising* that a puff differs from an advertisement because a puff must contain newsworthy information (53 – 56), and is most effective when “the puff” is not recognizably an advertisement. According to Fowler, the word originates in France, and is derived from *pouff*, meaning a style of headdress. Fowler claims that at least two Duchesses adorned their poufs with scenes that depicted some kind of personal victories. Thus, “puff” is kind of exaggerated boast about an event or in the case of advertising, a product.

³⁹ Historian Roland Marchand’s *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity 1930-1940* (1986) describes advertising men as “missionaries for modernity” whose work both reflected and sold the American dream and built the economy. He says, “advertising leaders . . . educat[ed] consumers in everything from the use of

The audience's new understanding of advertising would be shaped through the influence of what Burke calls "terministic screens" as they appeared in the early advertising writers' works. As we saw in the previous chapter, terministic screens function in three ways: they reflect reality, they deflect reality, and they select reality.

First, the admen's terministic screens reflected reality in that their language choices both mirrored and reinforced the influence that advertising wielded to help sell products to a mass audience. There were particular aspects of advertising that could be measured and some results that could be reproduced generally. For example, one could measure advertising's results by counting the number of coupons sent out and the number returned. Indeed, Claude Hopkins, the man who perfected mail-order advertising, claimed that advertising "is based on fixed principles...The causes and effects have been analysed until they are well understood . . . and we act on basic laws" (313). Hopkins promised measurable results. Like other advertising men of his era, his "terministic screens", as exemplified by terms "fixed principles", "causes and effects", and "basic laws", reflect a faith in scientific systems. He reinforced that belief in his writing about advertising.

Concomitantly, these terministic screens deflected attention from other ways of understanding advertising discourse, particularly ways that might show the discourse as deceptive or manipulative. Since this perception of advertising was the very exigence that the early advertising men's works would mediate, it was imperative that the negative associations evoked by advertising be made invisible or at least be made to fade into the distant background. To this end, the admen's strategies were to emphasize the scientific efficiency of advertising. As rhetorical theorist Richard Weaver argues, rhetoric is "an art of emphasis embodying an order of

toothpaste and higher standards of dress to a love of beauty . . . [and] . . . harness[ed] America's modern industrial system to uplift of its citizenry" (8).

desire” (1970, 17), and the ad men’s emphases demonstrated their desire to mediate the exigence advertising faced. Casting the negative into the background in discussions of advertising demonstrated an emphasis that would help to move advertising discourse into new territory. In developing new “screens” through which to look at advertising, the writers could convince both themselves and their audiences to understand advertising as a discourse that served a necessary and practical purpose, rather than one that took advantage of an audience so that shysters could line their own pockets. While advertising’s primary purpose was commercial, the writers’ terministic screens helped to justify and sustain its significance as a form of public discourse at the same time circumventing the negative impression it traditionally left on people. I will argue that the authors launched a campaign against the negative beliefs that the public and business people had about advertising, in part, by suggesting that advertising provided accurate product descriptions and actually provided news about products to audiences.

Lastly, terministic screens also selected ways to reconceptualise advertising. The writers framed advertising discourse as two different but related categories of terministic screens. First, advertising was conceptualized as a scientific discipline and a discourse, which if used scientifically, could guarantee results for business. The advertising writers laid out theories of “proper use” in their writings, suggesting the reproducibility of “experiments”. They claimed that effective advertising, the situations in which it was used, and the results it could achieve, could be reproduced by anyone who followed their advice. The authors called on metaphors that evoked the scientific, which gave advertising the cache of a science-based discipline.

At the same time, advertising was described by admen as a type of “gospel,” (Lasker 131) a “good news” about products that spread “the truth” and assisted citizens to make not only better product choices but also to live better lives. Marchand characterizes “the adman” as giving

“advice that promoted [a] product” (xxi) and “counsel[ed] and uplifted[ed]” the audience (xxii). In this incarnation, advertising discourse was assumed to provide factual news about a product in such a way as to benefit the audience. For example, copywriter and advertising agent Charles Austin Bates said, “now the majority of people look upon the majority of advertising as strictly honest business news” (quoted in Lears 199). It was characterized as straightforward in its message design, plain in its language, and forthright in its assumptions; it relied on “reason-why” copy that demonstrated why a product was necessary and what it could do, and it was assumed that the audience had good common sense. In fact, advertising was “no mere commercial tool, but a great moral and educative force, capable of serving ‘unselfish social purposes’” (Marchand, 9)⁴⁰. Presented as a “gospel” advertising was simply “the truth” about product information and news, not necessarily an identificatory discourse that made people and brands or products consubstantial. By framing advertising discourse in these two ways as both science and gospel, the ad agency authors managed two separate feats: first, their comparisons, between advertising and science and between advertising and gospel, linked advertising with respected and known practices. Thus, their public treatment of advertising helped to elevate its reputation. This linkage meant that people could learn a new way to think about advertising because the authors created common ground, linking old information (science and gospel) to new information (advertising as progeny of both science and religious endeavour). The authors built a bridge between known and trusted entities (science and religion) and an unknown and mistrusted entity (advertising) to depict commercial discourse as public service rather than as half truths or out-and-out lies.

By anchoring advertising in these two ways of knowing, scientific and religious, the admen accomplished a second feat. They positioned themselves as men understanding and

⁴⁰ Marchand offers a bibliography of sources that made this claim: George Creel in *How We Advertised America*. See fn #33, 367.

therefore controlling a powerful and mysterious, perhaps even superhuman force. They describe advertising as a “great force” (Lasker 10) which is “like radium” (Lasker 96); as a discipline likened to “science and mechanics” (Hopkins 316); as a social force that trains people to action, through admen who “are teaching the nation to think differently and act differently (Calkins 3); and as a “gospel” (Lasker 131). By constructing advertising in these ways, the ad men fashion themselves as especially gifted – they understand how advertising works and they know how to harness, direct, and control its power. The advertising men garnered the cache of both scientist and preacher/prophet. They positioned themselves as wise men with a message of salvation. Their positioning was successful because they drew on concepts that exerted a powerful hold on the imaginations of their audiences, namely science and evangelical religion.

The terministic screens of scientific and religious discourse are separate but related because the central concepts behind them are what Weaver calls “god terms”, those terms which signify the highest strivings of a society. For Weaver, a “god term” is “that expression about which all other expressions are ranked as subordinate and serving dominations and powers. Its force imparts to other terms their lesser degree of force, and fixes the scale by which degrees of comparison are understood” (1985, 313)⁴¹. “Science” and “gospel” are words that exert a strong emotional intensity signalling concepts that carry cultural weight and function in the advertising men’s writing as “god terms”. A “god term” is one that provides some “‘ultimate’ legitimation” which “every hierarchy of values, ranks, principles, or roles reaches” (Duncan, 1968, 66). As Campbell explains, god terms function “as an organizing principle that orders ideas into a

⁴¹ One of the examples Weaver gives in *Ethics* relates to the word “facts.” He says that when we claim to know the facts of something we have “the kind of knowledge to which all other knowledge must defer” (315). He points out that facts “are frequently not facts at all in the etymological sense; often they will be deductions several steps removed from simply factual data” (315). He says that “facts” became a “god term” when our system of verification changed, sometime during the Renaissance, from divine revelation or dialectic to “verification with physical reality” (314 – 315).

hierarchy of relationships. The term symbolizes an ultimate value reflected in attitudes and actions or a fundamental principle unifying patterns of beliefs” (68). Weaver asserts that science has become such a term, one “which treats as a substance or a concrete reality that which has only conceptual existence” (1985, 315). Weaver argues that “science” can be used as a general abstraction that carries rhetorical force. For example, in modern times, diet pills sport claims about “clinical trials” or “scientific proofs” which makes the claims seem trustworthy because we have come to believe that “science” and “scientific” is the concept to which all standards must adhere.

Likewise, “gospel” and religious allusions also carried a significant rhetorical force in the admen’s historical context. The admen relied on the rhetorical force of these particular “terministic screens” to accrue to themselves not only the respectability and authority of “science” but also the moral rectitude of religion, as we see in Lasker’s six-hour 1925 lecture, which he calls a “sermon” and in which he insists that advertising and teaching others about advertising is a form of “gospel” that needs to be “spread” for “service to our profession” (131). In teaching other admen and business people about advertising, the early writers attempted to make advertising a disciplined area of knowledge and to create disciples who would follow them and preserve their works and their words, which is how Lasker’s “sermon” came to be preserved in written form⁴². They conceived of themselves not only as professionals in a discipline where knowledge could be taught and passed on, but also as gifted prophets or oracles and, in the finest tradition of a gospel preacher, filled with the spirit of the good news of advertising. This new emphasis on science and religion arose in response to the need to redeem the ethos of advertising from its anchoring in the pseudo-science of the patent medicine era.

⁴² Lasker delivered a six-hour lecture in advertising April 1925, which was taken down verbatim by a secretary in the Lord & Thomas firm, originally published in twenty-six installments in *Advertising Age*, and finally published in book form in 1963. See S.R. Bernstein’s “Foreword” in *The Lasker Story: As he told it*.

In the rest of this chapter, I will use Burke's dramatisic pentad, as identified in the previous chapter, to examine how various influential admen helped reshape advertising, noting the individual contributions of each and analysing the "terministic screens" of three influential authors. The first ratio dealt with will be Scene/Act. First, I will describe the historical scene showing how it constituted a rhetorical exigence, and argue that it called into being a symbolic act of redemption. The second ratio I will examine is Agent/Scene. In this section, I will introduce the people who helped reshape the scene. The "agents" include two copy writers of influence, several of the most prominent admen of the age, and the first psychologist to explain the psychology of persuasion. I will argue that the historical scene shaped the rhetorical situation, but that their individual symbolic acts of redeeming advertising in turn exerted influence on the scene. After the Agent/Scene ratio, I will move into the Agent/Act ratio. In this section, I will give examples of how each adman contributed a particular "terministic screen" to the project of redemption. In the fourth section, I will use cluster analysis to develop the Agent/Agency ratio, arguing that the terms in selected admen's writing acted as "agency" in that these terms helped change advertising from a discourse of hawkers to a discourse of scientists and preachers. Drawing on the Hopkins, Calkins, and Lasker texts, I will demonstrate what each author contributed to the transformation of advertising. Together, all of these men were instrumental in bringing significant changes to the world of advertising. The copy writers who influenced the perception of advertising were John E. Powers and John E. Kennedy. Walter Dill Scott was the earliest social scientist to make advertising an explicitly psychological enterprise. Powers, Kennedy and Scott, while not instrumental in developing their own agencies, made contributions to advertising thought that would influence the US advertising world centred in the eastern states.

Through analysing clusters of terms used in selected admen's writings, I will document the metaphorical tendencies carried in the terms they used to write about their nascent profession and practice and argue that the implications of their language still resonate in the religious-like function of modern day advertising. As Barry Brummett points out, "thought, perception and motivation largely follow the . . . tendencies of the systems used" so "language takes on a life of its own and pulls human motivation in its train" (1993, xii). I will finish the chapter by leaping ahead in time and calling briefly on examples of terministic screens from adman James Webb Young writing in the 1960s to show the teleology of the early admen's symbolic re-conceptualization. I will point out how the seeds planted in the writing of the earliest admen came to fruition in the authors who followed using as an example Young, whose advertising discourse portrays advertising primarily as a creative, even mystical, enterprise and the adman as demiurge.

3.2. Scene/Act

3.2.1. The Rhetorical Scene: A Brief History of Patent Medicine Era

The historical scene of the patent medicine era made the admen's agenda of salvaging advertising's reputation imperative. Advertising's almost total association with patent medicine was one of the prime reasons the early admen had to deflect the enthymematic assumptions that people made when they thought of advertising. Roland Marchand confirms,

Patent medicines had loomed large in nineteenth-century American advertising. The lingering effects of that association continued to fuse images of the modern advertising man with recollections of carnival barkers, [and] snake-oil salesmen (8).

In fact, patent medicine was the mainstay of advertising agencies (Schudson 163), and because of its prominence, “advertising” as a concept evoked images of hucksters and charlatans selling fakery from the back of a covered wagon. The enthymeme that the admen challenged was “advertising sells snake oil. Snake oil is fraudulent; therefore, advertising is fraudulent”. Patent medicine ads made outrageous claims and this fact seemed a characteristic associated with all advertising. Even worse, the early patent medicines of the 18th century sometimes killed the people who took them (Turner 40) and, although by the early 20th century patent medicines might not be deadly, they had stained the public’s perceptions of advertising. Its redemption occurred through a convergence of technology, commercial and economic development and social changes, but the earliest advertising men had rhetorical work to do to transform and redeem advertising as a public discourse.

3.2.2. Scene as Rhetorical Exigence

In the early days, “advertising was considered an embarrassment” and “[a] firm risked its credit rating by advertising; banks might take it as a confession of financial weakness. Nobody . . . took responsibility for it...In the absence of any government regulation, the entire business was conducted in a half-light of bunkum and veiled appearances” (Fox 15). The cultural scene provided the rhetorical exigence that the admen had to remediate. All in all, advertising not only tried to sell “snake oil” to the public, but also was a business enterprise in which scam artists flourished. Fox observes that “polite magazines of the era [late 1800s] took pride in *not* imitating” a pulp magazine that was created simply as ad space (39). As a result of patent medicine’s reputation, respectable magazines were reluctant to accept any kind of advertising, fearful of what their readers would think (Fox 39). Some magazine editors were willing to say “no” to the profit patent medicine ads could generate because a magazine’s reputation could be

jeopardized and advertising dollars could not buy back an audience. According to Fox, monthlies such as *The Atlantic* and *Scribners* were underwritten “by publishing houses that filled back pages with ads for their own books. . . [but] allowed only a few pages of advertising for outsiders . . . Harper’s none at all” (39). It seems that for the editors of these magazines, retaining the respect of intelligent readers was more important than turning a great profit. In fact, “George Rowell once offered Harper’s \$18,000 for a back-cover ad promoting the Howe Sewing Machine but was turned down” (Fox 39).

If media and business were suspicious of patent medicine advertising, the general public was particularly hostile to the claims of patent medicine. According to advertising historian E.S. Turner, 1890 - 1914 saw “the mounting of vigorous attacks on the more presumptuous of the medicine men. If advertising were to be made respectable, it was necessary to dissipate two centuries of distrust created by curemongers” (158). For advertising to become a tool for commercial enterprise, it had to be re-imagined for both the general public and for business because “many reputable firms refused to advertise in the same columns as the medicine vendors” (Turner 158). Some of the publishers of magazines decided to do something about patent medicine claims. *Colliers* and *Ladies Home Journal* led the way to expose “dishonesty and chicanery by the medicine men” (Turner 159). These magazines mounted a journalism campaign that resulted in “many publications, usually the more prosperous ones, [being] persuaded to ban or to censor patent medicine copy” (Turner 160).

The tension between advertising as a discourse that promoted and perpetuated the lies of charlatans and one that benefited people and a nation had to be resolved. Eventually, according to Stephen Fox, “...two leading women’s magazines, *Godey’s* and *Peterson’s*, did surrender their back covers to the Great American Tea Company, but . . . [still] restricted advertising to

less than a page per issue” (39). Print media were careful about the ads they accepted, in part so as to not compromise their reputations.

However, even after reputable magazines began to allow reputable advertising within their covers, one of the challenges that remained was that many advertising agencies were part owners of patent medicine companies (Turner 163), so the advertising specialists had to face the financial challenge of disentangling themselves from a profitable undertaking. Eventually though, advertising agencies began to refuse patent medicine advertising in an attempt to distance themselves from chicanery: “[l]eading agencies . . . dropped their patent medicine accounts as soon as they could afford to do so. . . [even knowing] that [the business] could be forthwith transferred to a rival agency” (Turner 158.) However, even in the face of patent medicine’s reputation, advertisers maintained financial interests in such products. For example, Claude Hopkins’ 1933 work notes that he still retained a financial interest in the patent medicine company that sold the germicide Liquizone (97 – 98). Nonetheless, patent medicine’s stranglehold on advertising began to dissipate, and that, in conjunction with the new attitude being nurtured by the advertising profession, meant that advertising was well on its way to becoming the pervasive and accepted discourse that it is now. What patent medicines did do for advertising was to demonstrate its considerable power as shown in increased patent medicine sales. What the admen did for advertising was to redeem it so that under the pens of the earliest advertising men, national advertising became a kind of cultural glue that would bind a nation together.

3.2.3. Symbolic Act: Redemption of Advertising

The historical scene put pressure on the advertising men to redeem advertising’s reputation. As Marchand points out, “[a]dvertising leaders chafed under public suspicion of their

craft” (8). It is not surprising then that the admen responded to the scene as they did because, according to Burke, the “scene is a fit ‘container’ for the act[,] . . . implicit in the quality of a scene, [is] the quality of the action that is to take place within it” (Burke, 1969 A, 6 – 7). Advertising was considered a transgressor in societal discourse. It was in this context that writers like Claude Hopkins, Albert Lasker, and Earnest Calkins began to reshape how the general public and business people understood advertising; in fact, they were out to redeem it. The earliest admen’s terministic screens reshaped and re-imagined advertising discourse; however, their acts of redemption were not monolithic and were effective, in part, because of a shifting orientation of society as a whole and its new communication technology. While the authors were certainly aware that advertising was considered an embarrassment, they also saw its potential, and they chose to talk about it in terms that would give it the respectability they believed it deserved. Because of the works of these early admen, eventually, business people could advertise without fear of being seen in the same light as quacks and thieves.

According to rhetorical theorist Donald Bryant, one of the functions of rhetoric is to adjust “people to ideas and ideas to people” (413), and the earliest admen’s works, over the course of 30 years or so, did just that in three ways. First I will argue that the authors helped people to adjust to seeing advertising not as a scheme to make money by selling flawed products such as patent medicine, but as an evangelical-type of discourse that helped the general public make better decisions about the products they bought. National brand advertising converted people to a new way of differentiating between products and that conversion was based on a new way of understanding the job that advertising did. Second, in addition to adjusting the understanding of the general public, the early admen also converted media outlets, such as magazines and newspapers, to viewing advertising as a discourse that enlightened audiences

about the best quality products while generating revenue; lastly, they converted business people to seeing advertising as a discourse that assisted in building a competitive economy. Each of the author's terministic screens built upon the work of the others before it, creating a new rhetorical situation for advertising, one in which it was a discourse that was not only tolerated, but enthusiastically accepted as a civic discourse that could transform lives and a nation.

The historical scene of advertising provided the exigence that the advertising men mediated with their memoirs. The scene necessitated their acts of redemption. It constrained their writing situation in such a way that writing to redeem advertising's ethos became the best choice available to them. The men managed their act of redemption through terministic screens that helped their audiences, indeed, even a nation, reconceptualise advertising as a discourse that could provide a form of salvation itself. In the following section, I examine the advertising men's writings in terms of Burke's Agent/Act ratio to describe how each man contributed to shift the terministic screens through which society saw advertising, thus setting a scene for advertising to become a discourse of salvation and redemption, even as it was being redeemed itself.

3.3. Agent/Scene Ratio: Revising the Scene with New Terministic Screens

3.3.1. Copy Writers: Redefining Content

The two earliest "agents", in the Burkean sense of the term, who contributed to changing a nation's attitude about advertising, were copywriters. The linguistic filters provided by John E. Powers and John E. Kennedy had a tremendous impact on both the advertising industry and the admen who really modernized advertising, making it the pervasive discourse we live with now. Powers helped to reshape the scene of advertising, helping to turn the tide of opinion about advertising discourse by showing it could be used in a forthright manner. Kennedy influenced the scene by emphasising that copy had one job to do and that job was to increase sales. Their

terministic screens are symbolic acts of transformation and this idea of transformation became an instrument that other ad men used to position their rhetoric so that it could perform its acts of redemption. The screens help us to understand the strategies at work in the act of redeeming advertising's severely compromised ethos.

Powers was one of the first full-time copywriters in the United States and he helped to remodel the advertising scene with a soft-sell, understated, colloquial style of writing. He was hired in the 1880s by John Wanamaker of Philadelphia's Wanamaker's department store (Fox 36). Wanamaker was the ideal audience for the new kind of advertising man who emerged from the historical scene. Wannamaker, who had considered the ministry, "went into business with . . . an evangelical purpose ('the idea clung to [his] mind that [he] could accomplish more in the same domain if [he] became a merchant and acquired means and influence with fellow merchants')" (Fox 35). Wanamaker acquired influence by initiating retail advertising, and pioneering an advertising discourse of "credible understatement", which acted as an antidote to patent medicine's "blaring overstatement" (Fox 35). Working in Wanamaker's department store, Powers developed a style of copywriting that consisted of simply printing the "news of the store," in what he termed a "talking style of writing", and his copy, the "Powers' style of copy" was known for an odd candidness. By calling advertising a "talking style of writing", Powers evokes the image of friends in civil conversation. To promote a Wanamaker sale, he once wrote that the products "'looked better than they [were], but [were] worth a quarter we guess'" (Fox 37). He downplayed any notion of selling, sounding conversational and as though he were offering advice to a neighbour. According to Fox, the advertising industry embraced him as "its first lodestone, pointing the way to a more respectable future. Powers' factual, direct, common-sense copy became a style to be embraced and led to the idea that content was more important

than style” (38). More importantly though, Powers’ “talking style” initiated the terministic screens that showed others how advertising could be transformed to seem a trustworthy discourse that offered news about products. His work would help to move advertising out of the patent medicine camp and enable people to see advertising as a trustworthy source of information. Powers’ low-key style, with its emphasis on content, seemed to point the way towards helping people understand advertising could be truthful, honest, and a reliable information source.

Another copywriter who wielded influence in revising the advertising scene in the States was a Canadian, John E. Kennedy, hired in 1903 by Albert Lasker of Lord and Thomas advertising in Chicago (Turner 150). Kennedy defined advertising as “salesmanship on paper” (Fox 50). His definition suggested that advertising was more than “mere description” and not just “repetition, picturesque exaggeration, or slogans” (Turner 150). Kennedy claimed that copy should “offer a concrete *reason why* the product was worth buying”, and that “True Reason-Why” copy is Logic, plus, persuasion, plus conviction, all woven into a certain simplicity of thought – pre-digested for the average mind, so it is easier to *understand* than to *misunderstand* it” (Fox 50). Kennedy claimed that he was writing in the style of “old patent medicine ads” that “operated on good reason-why principles” (Fox 51). Although Kennedy’s copy may have shared commonalities with patent medicine advertising, his approach to copy writing suggested a belief that people were convinced by the attributes of the product and thus by logic and reason, not by emotional manipulation. However, “these arguments and reasons . . . were not necessarily ‘rational’; . . . [and reason-why copy overcame] buying resistance with an arsenal of factual *and emotional* arguments” (Marchand 10) [My emphasis]. Because Kennedy’s copy style gained new followers after the Powers and Wanamaker style of “credible understatement”, the two styles

worked together to create and advance new terministic screens about advertising which would play a role in refiguring the advertising scene. First, it could tell the truth, and second, it could use rational arguments that reasonable people could accept if the arguments were strong enough to be convincing or reject if not.

Advertising was beginning to be understood as more than just snake oil salesmanship; however, it took the advertising men who ran agencies to work with these new terministic screens and show advertising as discourse that could actually “civilize” a nation. While Rowell, Hopkins, Lasker and Calkins were operating roughly contemporaneously, I treat them in order of the chronology of their publications.

3.3.2. George Rowell and the Professionalization of the Advertising

Agency

George Rowell is a significant figure in advertising for several reasons: first, because of his role in modernizing the ad agency; second, because of his forthright attitude about advertising as puffery; and lastly because of his prediction that advertising would turn to the study of psychology to help it connect more effectively with its audience. Rowell reworked the advertising scene by giving it the respectability born of “professionalization”. Born in New Hampshire in 1838, he opened one of the first advertising agencies in the U.S.A in 1867 (Fox 30)⁴³, founded the trade journal *Printer’s Ink* in 1888, a publication which is still a mainstay of the advertising trade, and published his memoir *Forty Years an Advertising Agent* in 1906. In his memoir, he positions himself as the innovator of modern advertising, the pioneer of researching circulation numbers, and of course, the man behind *Printer’s Ink* which, he notes, was referred to

⁴³ However, there were other agencies operating earlier than Rowell’s. For example, according to Leiss, Kline and Jhally, “Volney Palmer . . . set up his agency in Philadelphia in 1843 [and] is generally considered to be the first independent advertising agent in North America” (1986, 105).

as “The Little Schoolmaster in the Art of Advertising” (Rowell 359). He saw himself as an educator in the field of advertising, and he provided a forum for the professionalization of advertising practice in the format of *Printer’s Ink* while maintaining candidness about how advertising boosted the public’s interest in products.

3.3.2.a. Transformation of Advertising Agencies

Rowell enhanced advertising’s ethos because he transformed the advertising agent’s job from space broker to media consultant and helped mediate the conflict of interest situations that many admen found themselves in. He transformed agents to the status of the “media consultant of the modern agency” (Lears 91). Initially, print media paid agents to sell space and clients paid agents to buy space for them. The agent, in a conflict-of-interest situation, made money from both sides but was not particularly accountable to either. Rowell developed an advertising directory of newspapers around the USA and eastern Canada so that agencies did not just sell space in and for newspapers, but instead, became advisors to clients about buying spaces in newspapers and periodicals that would give them the best coverage considering their product and sales goals. By assuming the role of advisor, the agent became accountable to client. According to T.J. Lears, Rowell,

[D]eploying established idioms of plain speech as well as newer ones of scientism . . . [Rowell] played a major role in formulating the chief tasks of the modern advertising agency: to serve the interests of its corporate clients by identifying their products with rationality and progress, and to cleanse advertising of its associations with peddlers and other marginal operators (93).

Rowell efforts to create a directory suggested that buying space could be orderly and organized, perhaps even regulated. He was the first advertising agent to establish a record of markets, bringing out, in 1869 “the first annual edition of *Rowell’s American Newspaper Directory*” (Fox 30).

Rowell’s investment in the success of advertising is seen partially in the early publications of *Printer’s Ink* where he at first promoted his own agency primarily and then advertising and other ad agencies in general. Gradually, the magazine became a respected “independent trade journal” (Pope 133). This journal served his interests in promoting advertising as a panacea for the business man who needed to increase his sales. Most importantly, with *Printer’s Ink*, he provided a forum for professional advertising men to discuss all aspects of advertising.

3.3.2.b. Neither News nor Education: Advertising as Puffery

Another significant feature of Rowell’s memoir is his taken-for-granted understanding that advertising messages were commercial propaganda, which were not obligated to tell “the truth”, rather than messages that educated the public about a product. While the memoir chronicles Rowell’s professional life and his contributions to establishing agencies similar to our modern ones, his work is particularly interesting in its openness about what Rowell considered advertising discourse to be – puffery – and who advertising writers pandered to – the client.

For example, Rowell relates a story about a client who offers a sample of his product to the editor of *The Post* so that the editor can produce an ad, or what Rowell calls “an editorial opinion” for the product, but the editor-in-chief tells Rowell the client should write his own ad. The client is horrified, claiming that his sample was not a bribe, but a genuine gift whose use

would prove to the editor the attributes of the product. Rowell's comment on the situation is that if the client were to write his own ad

There will be no freshness or spontaneity about his paragraph, and, being an honest and conscientious man, he will say nothing that is not absolutely and accurately true. The editor of the paper, on the other hand, knows little about the goods to be puffed and cares less. He wishes to say what will please the man who solicits the puff (50 – 53).

Rowell is very candid about how advertising works. First, since ads are written by editorial staff, they look like official product endorsements by the paper, and second, he implies that the people who write copy are not bound as the manufacturer is to the same standards of truth. The admen who wrote after Rowell were very careful to cleanse their profession from any such stains on its credibility.

Lastly, Rowell predicted that advertising agents would eventually turn to psychology to create successful advertising (Leiss, et al, 1986, 111). While it is clear that even understated and “reason-why” copy did implicitly consider the psychology of the audience, the practice of telling and selling the benefit of the product for the audience would not be emphasized until advertising executives started hiring people to do marketing research. Research would explicitly make advertising about the psychic benefits accrued to people from the purchase of the product, rather than about the qualities of the product.

3.3.2.c. Rowell: First Steps to Advertising's Redemption

While Rowell is chronologically first of the admen in this study, he was the last to openly refer to advertising as exaggeration and puffery. He is a kind of missing link between the men whose patent medicine advertising was outright lies and the later ad men who declared

advertising to be a sort of numinous force in the world. While he harnessed certain energies that worked for snake oil salesmen, such as his understanding that advertising was puffery and not obligated to be “truthful”, he also contributed to the professionalization of advertising, legitimizing the practice of advertising and putting it on the first leg of its journey toward redemption.

3.3.3. Earnest Elmo Calkins: Imagery Persuades and Advertising Transforms

Earnest Elmo Calkins was a different kind of formative influence on advertising, known for changing the face of print advertising, literally, by crafting artful designs. He was born in 1865 in Galesburg Illinois (Fox 41; Lears 308) into a strongly Baptist family. As a youngster, he became deaf after a bout with the measles and, by the time he was in high school, he worked for a print shop setting in type patent medicine ads (Fox 41). According to Lears, while Calkins was attending Knox College and editing a newsmagazine, Rowell invited him to promote Rowell’s magazine *Printer’s Ink* in return for a free subscription. Calkins did so and after familiarizing himself with the trade magazine, decided to try a career in advertising. He started writing copy for the Bates agency in 1891 and, with Ralph Holden, opened an agency in 1903 (Lears 309). Calkins brought to advertising the concept that imagery persuades. Images, however, work much differently than “reason-why” copy that offers denotative logic, whereas image offers connotative logic. Images create associations, not arguments, and convince not through reason but through the visual power of transformation: seeing is believing. The associations of visual persuasion are not articulated, but are evocative in nature, and therefore, particularly useful to advertising. Calkins contributed the terministic screen that advertising was art.

3.3.3.a. Calkins: Aesthetics and the Persuasiveness of Art

Calkins published many books over the course of his career, but his book *Modern Advertising*, published in 1905 and co-authored with his business partner Ralph Holden, lays out a view of advertising that emphasizes aesthetics as a persuasive element. He believed that the “atmosphere” in a print ad could be a powerful selling tool. Calkins and Holden billed their agency as the “first full service agency” because in addition to space brokerage and media selection, they offered copy writing and design services to their clients (Lears 309).

Calkins brought the advertising industry to the realization that layout and design, in short, visual appeal, were just as important, if not more so, than copy. In fact, his ads were almost all picture (Fox 70), and through his influence, print advertising came into its own as a visual media more so than a textual one. He became well known for the artistry of his designs, his belief that advertising was simply “corporate sponsored art for the masses” (Lears 313) and an analogy that linked copywriters and ad designers to Michelangelo (Lears 340). Calkins linked admen with one of history’s greatest artistic innovators, when he claimed,

[T]he specifications with which [the advertising artist] approaches his work do not differ greatly from those given Michelangelo when he painted . . . the Sistine Chapel. . . . The quality which makes art does not depend on the fact that Michelangelo painted religion instead of motor cars, but in the fact that Michelangelo was a great artist. His work was applied art, and advertising is in the same category (qtd in Lears, 313).

Calkins was instrumental in establishing the idea that entertainment, art, and advertising were “all of a piece” (Lears 310). Calkins established the terministic screen that allowed commercial discourse to be understood as artistic endeavour and cultural practice.

3.3.3.b. Advertising as Agent of Transformation

Calkins was also responsible for a campaign that made explicit what is implicit in all advertising discourse, the theme of transformation. In this theme, he was ahead of his time, when he designed a breakfast cereal ad campaign that drove home advertising's ability to demonstrate transformation to its audience. Calkins was responsible for creating the brand character of the popular, funny, "Sunny Jim" of the Force cereal commercials. "Sunny Jim" started out the Force ad campaign as Jim Dumps, a sour and unhappy character who is transformed by the cereal product into a happy and successful fellow (Fox 46 – 47). Over the course of the marketing campaign, Jim Dumps transcends his own unhappiness and has his character transformed and improved by his use of a product. The Sunny Jim campaign was one of the first campaigns to create identification with its audience and hold out an ideal for the audience to aspire to that was dependent on a product. Modern advertising relies on this type of transformative practice.

3.3.3.c. Calkins as Aesthete

Calkins' belief in the efficacy of advertising art was not embraced by all. An article in a 1908 edition of *Printer's Ink* suggested that "picture pretty" ads did not work. He did not, however, allow critiques of his advertising style to change that style and persisted in visual "puffery" imagining and portraying mundane objects in images of mystery and beauty. T.J. Lears notes that Calkins was "nearly a caricature of the detached aesthete" (311). However, Calkins was a canny advertising agent too, saying, "A picture . . . can say things that no advertiser could say in words and retain his self-respect" (qtd in Marchand 336). In many ways, Calkins' advertising philosophy predicted how modern advertising would function. That aesthetics and atmosphere have a compelling persuasive power is a foundational belief of modern advertising. This belief had one of its earliest advocates in Calkins who understood the concept of visual

metaphor and its persuasive power. It was his work that, in part, helped to rehabilitate advertising discourse from its reputation of being empty bombast that served the interests of only admen and commerce. According to Calkins, advertising brought art to the masses⁴⁴. Relying on the power of imagery to imply messages that simply could not be refuted or debated, advertising began to exert powerful identificatory processes on its audience.

In addition to being an astute advertising artist, Calkins also advocated for the advertising industry to adopt standards that would put it in the same professional realm as the law and medicine; the knowledge and expertise needed to enter the profession would be defined and classified and passed on to prospective agents (Marchand 36). His terministic screens helped to detach advertising it from its strictly economic moorings and to make it a living, breathing part of popular culture, practiced by legitimate professionals, not racketeers. Earnest Elmo Calkins was able to sell an attitude about a product as much as the product itself.

3.3.4. Walter Dill Scott: Psychology of Persuasion

If Calkins pioneered the idea of artistic beauty and entertainment as tools of advertising, then Walter Dill Scott provided the scientific support these ideas needed by explaining how psychological appeals could be used to move an audience to accept a product. Scott provided the next element of “agency” with his book, *The Psychology of Advertising: a Simple Exposition of the Principles of Psychology in Their Relation to Successful Advertising*⁴⁵. Even though he did not work as an adman in the industry, Scott is a significant figure in the history of advertising

⁴⁴ According to T.J. Lears in *Fables of Abundance*, a 1906 article *Printers Ink* claimed that “irrelevant but catchy ‘advertising ideas passed with the notion that advertising is literature or art’” (199). This debate still has life in it. See for example Twitchell’s work on advertising and popular culture in *Adcult USA*.

⁴⁵ In 1917, at the time of publication, Scott was not only the Director of the Psychological Laboratory of Northwestern University, he was also the Director of the Bureau of Salesmanship Research, Carnegie Institute of Technology and President of the National Association of Advertising Teachers.

because he theorized psychological motivation in advertising and advised admen how to plumb the psyches of their audiences to craft ads that would effectively motivate consumption.

Scott's seminal work was the "first systematic attempt by a social scientist to examine advertising" (Leiss et al, 1986, 111). According to Michael Schudson, Scott was the "earliest guru of scientific advertising (173). His work is interesting to a rhetorical critic because of its theory of emotional appeals, its claim that the only function of advertising is "the influencing of human minds" (Scott 3) and its explicit concept of consumers as audiences who need to be pandered to by ensuring that viewing advertising induced feelings of pleasure in them. His book is directed to businessmen and its only concern with the audience is how they may be influenced to buy. Scott was one of the first psychologists to "apply experimental techniques to advertising" (Pope 337) and the concepts he emphasized are picked up and elaborated in the work of Claude Hopkins in his books, *Scientific Advertising / My Life in Advertising*.

Scott's *The Psychology of Advertising* was first published in 1908 and was in its eighth edition by 1917. Scott's work provided the theoretical support for the idea that ads could sell "atmosphere" and made the case that audiences responded better to arguments through association than arguments from logic. Scott understood that this type of advertising could be more effective than "reason-why" copy that simply appealed "to already motivated-to-buy shoppers" (Pope 339). The psychologist claimed that "the actual effect of modern advertising is not so much to convince as to suggest" (Scott 83). He contributed to the advertising industry's engagement with finding psychological ways to motivate people to buy one product rather than another.

3.3.4.a. Scott and the Psychology of the Audience

Scott agreed with the usefulness of rational appeals, but emphasized the necessity of associating products with status and pleasure and using emotional appeals to move audiences to buy. He affirmed the success of “reason – why” copy, which was described by John E. Kennedy as designed to “persuade and motivate” (Leiss, 1986, 111). However, its foundation was appeal to reason, practicality, and logic⁴⁶. By contrast, Scott emphasized the necessity for pathos appeals in addition to logos appeals so that people would be psychologically motivated to spend their money on products they wanted rather than just needed. He helped solidify the image of the “consumer” as non-rational in her buying decisions.

3.3.5. Claude Hopkins: The Science Behind the Advertising Scene

Claude Hopkins is another extremely influential voice in advertising, whose works *Scientific Advertising* and *My life in Advertising* were published in 1933 and 1937 respectively. He contributed the terministic screens that claimed advertising as a “science”, promising that specific techniques would net specific results. In Hopkins’ philosophy of advertising, psychological appeals and appeals to reason resulted in a rhetorical balance that made his advertising campaigns some of the most effective in the history of advertising. In his texts, he positions himself as a guide and a guard, theorizing his successful campaigns and analysing the failure of others. Historian Stephen Fox calls him one of the “greatest copywriters of all time” (53), and Hopkins’ attitude toward his own success reflects a like attitude. Hopkins, trained as a preacher and preaching occasionally by the time he was 17, was raised in a religiously strict

⁴⁶ In the advertising industry, the early 1900s saw some debate over how “reason-why” copy worked. Some people argued that it appealed to the consumer’s rationalism and gave her reasons to buy. Others argued that since it gave reasons to buy, it provided “motivation” to buy. Some argued that it provided rationale to buy, and still others claimed it also helped consumers justify their purchases. Daniel Pope briefly describes the debate (341) and gives the sources of it in *The Making of Modern Advertising*.

home. One of the stories he recounts is working hard to save enough money to buy tickets to a dramatic performance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and then having his plans cancelled because the minister of the church told his mother the theatre was wicked and letting her children go would instil an appetite for theatre (13 – 14). When he rejected his mother's strict Methodist upbringing, he applied what he knew about preaching gospel to preaching a gospel of advertising. Fox claims that "in advertising Hopkins found a secular replacement for the suffocating Christianity of his youth" (53). For Hopkins, advertising was a vocation, not merely a job.

Hopkins knew that the most effective ads created a demand for the product, as he notes when he describes patent medicine advertising by saying, "[t]hirty years ago, medicine advertising offered the ad.-writer [sic] his greatest opportunity. It formed the supreme test of his skill. Medicines were worthless merchandise until a demand was created" (76). He demonstrates how reason and logic married with psychology can result in making the advertised product desirable and in motivating the consumer to action. Hopkins tried to scientize human needs and wants and defined effective advertising as that which increased product sales. Now, while the advertising industry is more hesitant to make absolute statements about what constitutes effective advertising, Hopkins' philosophy of advertising still exerts a strong, if not always widely acknowledged, influence.

3.3.6. Albert Lasker: Social Contract as Scenic Element

Albert Lasker, a German Jew from Texas, differed from his colleagues first because he was outside both the geographical and religious mainstream of the other advertising men (Fox (57). However, like his colleagues, he exerted a strong influence on the advertising industry. Albert Lasker contributed the terministic screen that advertising was an exchange: offer people

free entertainment and they, in turn, will not protest advertising. He was the first adman to recognize the potential interface between advertising and entertainment.

Lasker ran the advertising firm of Lord and Thomas in Chicago for forty years, and one of his major contributions was the way he recognized, fostered, and nurtured the talent of others, such as copy writer John Kennedy and Claude Hopkins. Unlike his peers, Lasker did not write memoirs or “how to” books; however, an informal six hour lecture, or “sermon” as Lasker termed it, on advertising was transcribed by Lord & Thomas and kept in the agency’s files⁴⁷. Other than that, most of the information about Lasker comes from other sources.

Lasker started the Kennedy school of copy writing, where he taught Kennedy’s copy principles to a series of copy writers. He assiduously studied the techniques of advertising and promoted that study as one of the agencies “greatest assets” (Turner 150). His promotion of Kennedy’s “reason why” copy “preceded the strategy of appealing to the public’s hopes and fears” (Turner 150) and, in essence, Lasker pioneered market research. In addition, Lasker not only taught Kennedy’s copy principles to other copy writers, he also challenged clients to test their “usual copy in one city . . . against Lord & Thomas copy in another” (Fox 50). The challenge was issued in a pamphlet created to promote Lord & Thomas, with a result of bring in “hundreds of letters a week from inquiring manufacturers” (Fox 50). Lasker was determined to prove that advertising was neither art nor literature, but “salesmanship on paper” (Fox 50). Lasker shunned general publicity, arguing that ““keeping [the advertiser’s] name before the people’ is wrong” (Fox 50) and that the only copy that counted was copy that actually sold goods.

⁴⁷ According to the Foreword written by editorial director, S.R. Bernstein, the document that has been turned into the book *The Lasker Story: As He Told It*, is transcript of an informal six hour talk that Lasker gave in April 1925 to the staff of Lord & Thomas. It was first published in twenty-six installments in *Advertising Age*.

Most importantly, Lasker recognized that entertainment could be a vehicle for advertising messages; he saw this potential in the advent of radio. Lasker made impressive inroads in radio advertising because he introduced what advertising historian E.S. Turner calls “the element of aggressive salesmanship” (369). Lasker pioneered the idea of a brand name programme. He realized that clients could “sponsor” entertainment so that in essence, a show would become an advertisement. He illustrated how advertising and entertainment could be successfully married with his creation of the Pepsodent programme which gave the popular duo “Amos ‘n’ Andy” their start and turned them into household names in America. We may conclude then that Lasker believed that the public would tolerate the intrusion of advertising into their living rooms in exchange for free entertainment. Thus Lasker contributed the terministic screen of “the social contract” of advertising.

3.3.7. Agent/Scene Conclusion

The historic scene of advertising, where it was vilified as a discourse that sold tonics produced by quacks by telling half truths and lies to the public, both shaped and was re-shaped, or even redeemed, by the advertising men. Powers and Kennedy’s practice as copywriters gave the genre legitimacy by showing it could be used in a low key, soft sell way to inform people about products and sales and giving them good reasons to buy. Rowell professionalized the business of advertising by developing the modern agency, starting up a trade journal, and fashioning himself as an educator; he represents a transition between the pre-modern advertising and the advertising discourse that we live with today. Calkins demonstrated that arguments are not the only way to sell goods and that images make associations that are more powerful than arguments. His contribution helped advertising develop its theme of transformation. Scott explicitly identified the fact that suggestion is more effective than telling and that association is

more psychologically effective than argument in advertising. Hopkins scientized the practice of advertising, and Lasker, as we will see, used specific religious language that, perhaps inadvertently, drew attention to the sermonic nature of advertising. The ideas of these men coalesced, readying the public arena for the role that advertising now plays and, indeed, creating modern advertising as we know it. Moreover, through their transformation of advertising, they helped make advertising a transformational discourse. Advertising stopped being information about a product and instead became revelation about the product's symbolic role and function in the life of the consumer. As Fox notes, "[t]he art of Calkins & Holden, the copy of Kennedy and Hopkins, and the headlong drive and executive skills of Lasker together made advertising a force that not only moved goods but also might change how people lived" (63 – 64). These men are representative of the forces that helped to make advertising a social force and the primary form of public discourse in the civic arena to the extent that advertising displaced forms of religious discourse and implicitly offered its audience ethical instruction rooted in an explicitly commercial enterprise.

Through the filters they employed to talk about their craft, each of these men contributed to reshaping the scene of advertising and how it was understood both by the general public and business. They changed society's orientation toward advertising. Burke notes that "an orientation is largely a self-perpetuating system" (1984, 169). The orientation the admen achieved simply followed the trajectory they initiated. The next section explores a Scene/Agency ratio using cluster criticism to argue that the ad men's terms helped turn advertising into a powerful socializing discourse that was more than merely commercial: it was a discourse of salvation and transcendence, helping people to understand that advertising was an intangible force that

produced tangible results and that the admen heroically moulded that force to benefit a nation and its people.

3.4. Scene/Agency

Admen like Claude Hopkins, Albert Lasker, and Earnest Elmo Calkins used their words as “agency” to place advertising in a new scene. In the rhetorical scene created by the admen, advertising transcended its former reputation to become a discourse that offered transformation to its audiences. Using cluster analysis, I will show how the admen’s writings became the agency through which the scene of advertising was infused with the aura of the scientific and the religious. There were two consequences to the admen’s re-visioning of the scene. These consequences occur through synecdoche because, as Burke notes, “the contents of a divine container will synecdochically share in its divinity” (1969 A, 8). The admen’s works and language choices transformed the scene, or what Burke called the container, and thus changed the substance of what is contained in the scene: advertising discourse. Consequently, as the admen transformed the reputation of advertising, they also transformed themselves.

The admen transformed the scene of advertising consequently transforming their own roles. As I will argue in the next section, the admen saw themselves in a role that seemed to combine aspects of both scientist and preacher, healer and guide, prophet and lawgiver. As the men educated their audiences about advertising, they also persuaded that audience to re-imagine both the adman and advertising’s purpose. They distanced themselves from patent medicine sales, elevating advertising and, in the process, themselves.

3.4.1 Hopkins: Scene/Agency: Scientific Clusters

Hopkins sets the stage for others to see advertising as a scientific discipline and the adman as heroic explorers and trail blazers, and perhaps even omnipotent. Hopkins proclaims his methods as scientific, advocating the view that advertising is a scientific discipline and calling for disciples to accept his guidance or face “catastrophe” and “conspicuous disaster” (4 – 5). The clusters of terms in Hopkins’ work make admen specialists and advertising a discourse that promises success to those capable of handling it. Admen heal, guide others along the way and protect them from disaster and catastrophe, and by doing so reveal the “natural” laws of advertising that Hopkins explains to his readers.

3.4.1.a. Healers, Pilots and Guides, Heroes and Leaders

In *My Life in Advertising*, Hopkins says, “every advertising venture in its initial stage means simply feeling the public pulse” (4). There is the suggestion that the nation is ill and suffering and that the admen heal it by inspiring faith in advertising. This metaphor suggests admen can offer medical consultations and diagnose public illness. In fact, Hopkins identifies an exigence for the public, a nation in need of healing, and then implicitly offers consumption as a solution to the problem. In Hopkins’ work, the admen use advertising as medicine. Hopkins attempts to accrue to himself the professionalism and rigor of medical training when he says, “I have gained what others gain by medical research, by spending their lives in a laboratory” (308).

Because Hopkins conceives of advertising as a science and associates it with the pursuits through which civilizations are built, such as exploration; by extension then, the admen become scientists, navigators and pilots, and pioneers or trail blazers who make advertising safe for those who will come after them. Navigation in particular is a science that depends on a navigator’s sense of geography as well as his ability to “read” the territory accurately and interpret it

correctly. In *My Life* Hopkins refers to “advertising men who pilot some big and costly ship to the rocks,” saying that “Pilots who prove reckless are forever feared (p.4 – 5). He asserts, “I have seen scores of promising men in this line wreck themselves with their ships, just because they ventured with all sails spread on some uncharted course” (5).

Hopkins thus sees himself as a map maker and guide. He urges those he intends to teach to take advantage of his book, which chronicles fundamentals of advertising. Those who do not, face dire consequences. For example, Hopkins likens admen who are not guided by previous advertising work to “a Columbus starting out to find an undiscovered land” (317). These admen, if they achieve success, do so simply by accident, as Columbus “discovered” America, not because of a specific purpose. Before Hopkins, “men were guided by whims and fancies – vagrant, changing breezes” and rarely “arrived at their port” except “by accident” (317). He says that when “each early mariner . . . mapped his own course” the “wrecks were unrecorded, so countless ventures game to grief on the same rocks and shoals” (317). Hopkins brings order to what was the chaotic world of early advertising.

According to Hopkins, admen are navigators who have travelled extensively in the territory of advertising. They know the dangers and can circumvent them. They have explored unknown territories, charted these mysterious places and come back to bring the good news to those who want to travel, but fear the unknown. They are courageous and fearless heroes and leaders who have made advertising safe for others. Scientific admen are “safe pilots” because they have “sailed the same course” (317) and recorded the results of their experiments. Hopkins himself is heroic because he has travelled the dangerous road and can assist others in their journey.

3.4.1.b. Law Givers

Hopkins sees his teaching book as a cross between a physics text and scripture. In it, he advises his readers that “no wise advertiser will ever depart from these unvarying laws” (316)⁴⁸. However, it is the adman who creates and enforces the laws, not nature or a deity. Hopkins declares that the purpose of *Scientific Advertising* is to set down these “laws” so that others may flourish. Like the patriarchs of the Old Testament, Hopkins brings laws to the audience or “his people” to help them have a successful life. In essence, the laws guide advertisers through their professional life. In fact, he believes that he “owes a statement to successors” and that “every pioneer should blaze his trail” (1 – 3). He proposes that his book will deal with “universal principles” claiming that there is “technic in advertising as in all art, science, and mechanics” (316). Hopkins elevates advertising to what he believes is its rightful place, next to those practices that can be taught by observing the axioms at work in the discipline. For example, advertising is likened to law and art. He observes that many men will “recognize technical knowledge in vocations [such as law or art,] but not in advertising”, which “seems so simple to them because it aims at simple people. They do not realize that no life time is long enough to learn much more than the rudiments” (131). Hopkins believes that the practice of advertising is a complicated one, even as he claims that advertising is scientific and that there are tried and true methods that achieve results.

If advertising has “basic laws,” it becomes comparable to, for example, physics. This comparison means that admen, like physicists, can – after careful observation and experimentation – safely state “laws” or givens that are unvarying or absolutely predictable. From these givens, all sorts of other inroads can be made in understanding the “force” of

⁴⁸ Some of the unvarying laws Hopkins teaches in *My Life in Advertising* are “offer service”, remember “salesmanship,” use “headlines,” “psychology,” “free samples”; be “specific,” but “tell your full story.”

advertising. Hopkins makes an argument for advertising to be conceived of as a science in an attempt to elevate advertising's reputation to that of a science. Hopkins says that "success is a rarity, maximum success impossibility, unless one is guided by laws as immutable as the law of gravitation" (318). Hopkins, the one who passes on these immutable laws, having "discovered" them through his own experimentation, takes on the role of ultimate authority on the subject.

In *Scientific Advertising* the metaphors that Hopkins uses invite his readers to understand advertising as a scientific pursuit. He intends the book as a text for students of advertising and as a "safe guide" for advertisers, and his stated intention is to remove any uncertainty from the pursuit of advertising. Hopkins attempts to build up faith in advertising. He claims that "the only uncertainties pertain to people and to products, not to methods" (317), reinforcing the idea of his own omnipotence. Hopkins emphasizes that advertising has "basic laws" (313) and chooses to see it as a scientific discipline, claiming, "[a]dvertising in some hands has reached the status of a science" (313). Here, "science" is the "god-term" and by claiming advertising is a science, he arrogates the status accorded to science to advertising. He claims that there are "universal laws" of advertising (317). By making this declaration, he suggests advertising has commonalities with the natural world.

3.4.1.c. Hopkins: Saviour and Scientist

Hopkins is the author of the "good book" of advertising and claims for himself a superior position as both guide and guard, while emphasizing he is a "common" person. He guides others to safety and he guards the reputation of advertising by declaring it a science. At the same time, he insists that admen must keep in touch with the common people. Blending the role of scientist and saviour, and like Jesus ministering to the poor, Hopkins proudly claims that poverty "took [him] among the common people, . . . [He] came to know them, their wants and impulses" (8).

He may be one of the “common people” but success in advertising helps him transcend from his commonness. Again, like Jesus, he implicitly claims to have “ascended” stating that “[t]he higher we ascend the farther we proceed from ordinary humanity,” but he insists “that will not do in advertising” (35). He says he has recorded his successes and failures in advertising “solely for the purpose of aiding other to start far up the heights [he] scaled” (3). When he uses metaphors of ascension, he suggests he guides others to a higher plane. He gives concrete form to the idea that he is guiding others to a destination and helping them transcend. Hopkins of course is the premiere guide and pilot and, by using his book, other copywriters will learn from his mistakes. His has shown them the way.

In fact though, Hopkins does see admen as superior to the general public. He exhibits a benevolence that can only come from superiority when he says, “[t]he happiest are those who live closest to nature, an essential to advertising success. So I conclude that this vocation, depending as it does on love and knowledge of the masses, offers many rewards beyond money” (310). In this comment, Hopkins shows his preacherly beginnings, partially through terms and partially through tone: “vocation” connotes religious calling, and the tone echoes the one which preachers use to call attention to Christ’s divinity and humanity and preach a gospel of love and tolerance. Hopkins seems to position himself and all admen as Christ-like, insisting that admen must be part of “the mass,” yet different in essence. Admen should strive to be greater than the “masses” with whom they must be able to interact, understand, and interpret. They need to be among the masses yet are not of them.

Hopkins sees himself and all admen as heroic saviours, benevolent and driven to help “the masses”. He focuses on science and claims that advertising has basic laws. He warns that disobeying the laws he reveals will lead to disaster and catastrophe. The voice Hopkins adopts in

both his texts is firm, even severe. Advertising is a wild frontier that can only be conquered by well-prepared heroes.

3.4.2. Lasker: Scene/Agency: Frames of Religion Cluster

While Hopkins and Lasker share some commonalities, Lasker's voice is somewhat moderate because he understands advertising as a force of nature itself and as an organic energy to be harnessed. In *The Lasker Story*, Lasker marries religious metaphors to scientific ones to produce a scene in which advertising is a great natural and mysterious force with the power to blight or kill that can be managed only by admen. In this scene, advertising is somewhat mystical, but at the same time, its results can be tested, just as the results of mechanics or medicine can be tested. None the less, there is something extraordinary, even supernatural about advertising and those who create it.

3.4.2.a. Healers, Preachers, Heroes and Leaders

Like Hopkins, Albert Lasker appropriates the respectability of medicine and its institutions to advertising, comparing his agency to the Mayo clinic; in describing the success of Lord and Thomas when he is talking about how two other advertising agency heads came to him for advice, he says, “[y]ou can liken this institution to the Doctors Mayo at Rochester, Minnesota” (94). The Mayo clinic represents the most modern medical practices; it represents the most advanced science, and it is the facility that houses the best medical practitioners in the country. It is a balance of research and practice⁴⁹. This comparison of the ad agency to the Mayo Clinic would be a very effective one because of the clinic's innovative reputation. Like Hopkins,

⁴⁹ The Mayo Clinic had its beginnings in St. Mary's Hospital opened in 1893 by a family of three doctors. Eventually, the Mayo family's practice became an institution partnered with a variety of physicians to create a modern hospital with a team of specialists. It developed between 1893 and 1919 evolving from a “medical partnership to The Mayo Foundation.” See “Tradition and Heritage” at <http://www.mayoclinic.org/tradition-heritage/growth.html>.

Lasker is attempting to articulate ways to write ads that will motivate people to buy products; the medical metaphor suggests that the public's implied lack of motivation is an illness of the spirit, and that the adman can alleviate the malaise. They are specialists who will work together to solve the problems of both producers and consumers.

Lasker, more than either Hopkins or Calkins, compares advertising to gospel and admen to preachers, in part because these were the analogies that best seemed to fit his enterprise of explaining advertising. Lasker believes that admen have the responsibility to their profession and fellow businessmen to be able to teach the limits and benefits of advertising. He says of the Lord and Thomas ads that the [limits and benefits] are “those things we are undertaking to *preach* in our copy and that I want to impregnate you with” (95) [My emphasis]. In this metaphor, teaching other admen and businessmen about advertising is preaching, but Lasker also implies that admen are progenitors and creators. He uses the phrase “impregnate you with” twice in his speech (86), suggesting admen can achieve a linguistic immaculate conception. The language choices Lasker makes link advertising discourse and its practitioners with religion; teaching others about advertising is likened to religious proselytising. Lasker describes his doctrine of advertising saying, “[t]his is the kind of gospel I want to preach, that is the kind of service we are going to give” (131). He insists that “agreeing on that gospel we must be consumed with a fire of energy and enthusiasm to spread it, not only for our own profit, but for service to our art and to our profession” (131), sounding like a preacher.

Lasker prefaces his speech to Lord and Thomas employees with, “[t]his is like a Sunday morning sermon: I am making the announcements of the different activities of the church for the coming week and having finished it I will get to the main text and preach on it” (87). He is the preacher, the copy writers the neophytes and congregation. Lasker sees admen as seekers and

sharers of knowledge. He says admen at L & T are “groping for light”, “seeking more light”, and wanting to “give out light” (88.). His words echo with biblical allusions to light in his insistent associations between admen and light⁵⁰. Thus admen are responsible for illumination and guidance of both future admen and their clients.

The role of admen becomes clear by the implication of the metaphors about what advertising is. Lasker claims, “[a]dvertising is a force that is very hard to use. It is like radium, can cure the incurable or burn and scar (95 – 96). By likening advertising to radium, Lasker implies that admen are skilled, scientific, and even heroic because good admen can handle a dangerous material without causing harm to themselves or to others. Admen are not just scientists, they also have a touch of the magician about them as can be seen when Lasker says, “[e]very account we touch multiplies as if by magic (35). Lasker, determined to emphasize the power of advertising, draws upon mystical metaphors as easily as scientific ones. In Lasker’s opinion, admen can be taught – in fact, Lasker saw Lord and Thomas as a vehicle through which John E. Kennedy’s copywriting skills could be disseminated. However, good admen are not just taught; they must come with some inborn predisposition to it. Lasker says that admen must have flair (71). He claims that “you are born with it but experience develops it” (71). Thus, while advertising is scientific and while admen have scientific impulses, there is also an element of the mystical in the profession and truly successful admen have something in their genetic make up that cannot be learned or taught. They are heroic and demonstrate leadership.

Lasker also makes it clear that knowing how to use language does not necessarily infuse it with the persuasive spirit. Thus, not all admen are created equal because some will write with a

⁵⁰ The most relevant “light” metaphors are in Matthew 4:16, which according to Cruden’s Biblical Concordance is about the gospel as spiritual comfort (370); in Matthew 5:14: “Ye are the light of the world;” in John 1:9 which refers to Jesus as the “light”; in Psalms 119:105 which refers to God’s word as a “light unto my path;” and in Luke 16:8 and Ephesians 5:8 which refer to those who have been enlightened by salvation;

quality of magic, while others will not. Lasker says, “I learned that reason why wasn’t words any more than the Gettysburg address was words or the Lord’s Prayer or the 10 commandments” (39). In this comparison, the language of ads is compared to the language of politics and of prayer and sacred commandments. Lasker implies that advertising is more than words: it is iconic; it remakes the world symbolically and changes how people think.

3.4.2.b. Advertising as Scientific and Supernatural Force

In addition to comparing advertising to radium, Lasker claims advertising is a “great force” (10) with “strength, power, potentiality” and the advertising agent is an “accessory” to that force with the same characteristics” (101). Advertising is a physical force and one that is potentially dangerous. Lasker advises that in the wrong hands, “Advertising can blight. Kill, kill, kill” (73.) Again like Hopkins, Lasker sees dire consequences for the uninitiated who attempt to direct the force without training. He compares himself before learning from John E. Kennedy to “the fellow who uses electricity but doesn’t know what force it is” (25). Advertising, like electricity, is an invisible presence, but one that carries a charge that can either energize or kill.

However, it is also a force of the natural world, not just of the human made components of the world: for example, “advertising tradition is grounded, its roots are deep” (Lasker 34). Sometimes Lasker’s work treats advertising as a natural force, but sometimes as a manmade force. For example, Lasker likens advertising to “a high powered rifle” (134). In all the metaphors though, advertising is powerful with the ability to harm people as well as help them.

Lasker has a great deal of reverence for advertising, saying it is an awesome force that should be feared, respected, admired, a “glorious” force (116), a wonderful force (109). He believes in trying to bring advertising to its full “glory” (98). These descriptions suggest that advertising is “awesome” in its full sense of the word, inspiring both wonder and fear. Lasker’s

book is homage to the potential of advertising. Lasker refers to the mystical potency of advertising when he says that “the experienced advertising agent knows that it is advertising itself that is the miracle, not its accoutrements” (85). Thus advertising’s power may be greater than the sum of its individual parts, which means that advertising men may be a force through which advertising runs.

3.4.2.c. Lasker’s “Glorious” Force

Despite Albert Lasker’s non-Christian background, he makes explicit use of Christian religious language and metaphors, perhaps because he recognized that the language of evangelical Protestantism would resonate with his audience. In Lasker’s work, admen play several roles such as preachers and heroes who bend a dangerous force to do their will. The discourse itself is treated as a sacred object with otherworldly power. Lasker stresses that if handled clumsily, advertising can be a killing force, while insisting that advertising men are similar to doctors, thereby implying that these men can wield the power of advertising with surgical finesse.

3.4.3. Earnest Elmo Calkins

Unlike either Hopkins or Lasker, Earnest Elmo Calkins is more subtle in his comparison between advertising men and leaders of nations and heroes. Rather than using vivid metaphors, Calkins relies on images that ground advertising’s strength in the power of its original media: the press. He states “modern advertising” is a result of the “the shop and the newspaper joining forces” (3). He says “America has forged from her press a power which has helped to make her shopkeeping the most wonderful in the world” (3). This power is advertising. Considering Calkins has been called the aesthete of the early advertising world (Lears 311), he is, in many ways, the one who seems most bent on focussing on advertising’s contribution to commerce. For

Calkins, art is not separate from commerce, but helps commerce function. Calkins depicts the admen as heroes and leaders; he compares them to religious leaders, and he emphasizes advertising's role in transforming a nation.

3.4.3.a. Heroes and Leaders

For Calkins, advertising is the discourse that holds a nation together and one that attracts the best people: “the advertising of manufactured articles – the real bone and sinew of commerce – is today the great field in which the best energy and best ability are being used” (5). Calkins goes on to assert that

Young men. . . .who, in any other country, would fill places in the church, or stateand who in any other age would be makers of history, are the ones whoare building up the circulation of publications converting them into assets of great value, and who are making the names and trade-marks of articles advertised vastly valuable (5).

Admen are characterized not only as leaders of nations, but also as religious leaders.

First, Calkins compares advertising men to nation builders: “Napoleon himself is the fairest prototype of the advertising man With the passing away of Napoleon, passed from the modern world the opportunities for such work as his. Other fields were left, however, for the man like him with a genius for organization, knowledge of human nature, capacity for tireless study of cases and effects, of conditions and remedies” (3). These other fields include business and advertising is an aspect of business. For Calkins, advertising men are the best of society and they elevate the world they operate in; he claims that “Such men have gone into business, and with that advent business has been elevated to a field of endeavour greater in its rewards than

any other offered by the world today” (3). The advertising business is the highest order of business and commercialism is the highest valued concept.

Calkins suggests that advertising men elevated business from petty commercialism to something much finer: “Such men found business commonplace and petty, but made it a profession; they introduced into it the ability and methods that formerly had changed the world’s maps, founded dynasties, and created political parties” (3). Advertising and by extension, advertising men have exerted as much power as other major forces in the world.

Calkins emphatically believes that advertising men are performing a sacred duty. He compares the function of advertising and ad men to the function of religious warriors and prophets. He calls admen “The Peters and Savonarolas of to-day”, saying that admen are “teaching the nation to think differently and act differently” (3). Calkins elevates the adventures of the adman by comparing his story to the “[t]he story of a Peter the Hermit, or a Savonarola, fiercely and earnestly impressing a crowd with his convictions” saying that such stories are “thrilling” (3)⁵¹. Calkins compares admen to moralists and visionaries who have been characterized as “prophetic”. He believes both admen and advertising have a significant and moral impact on the world they influence.

3.4.3.b. Advertising as Both Social and Natural Force

Calkins believes that advertising men, using the gospelic power of advertising discourse, are changing the world in ways as significant as the changes wrought by religious leaders. He pinpoints the heart of the transformation that advertising has made when he says, “[a]dvertising

⁵¹ Peter the Hermit (1050 -1115) was a French monk who rallied peasants to join the First Crusade (OED) and Girolama Savonarola (1453-1498) was an Italian preacher and reformer who became the virtual ruler of Florence after he denounced corrupt leadership (OED). According to historian Keith Thomas, “Other so-called ‘prophets’ had, like ...Savonarola, been moralists and religious leaders whose warnings of the disasters which would overtake their people if they did not reform had acquired a prophetic character in the eyes of later generations” (466).

has come to mean not merely the printed announcements of the merits of an article or an institution, but that high and unusual power of impressing a great number of people with a given idea” (4). Advertising has ascended from mere announcement to a discourse that provides identificatory meaning among masses of people.

For Calkins, advertising is a force that is comparable to forces of physics and nature. He says, “advertising is that subtle, indefinable, but powerful force whereby the advertiser creates a demand for a given article in the minds of a great many people or arouses the demand that is already there in latent form” (4). Here he claims the power of advertising to arouse in people a sense of what they lack and to inspire desire to have more. He is not talking about desiring fulfilment from intangibles, but about desiring material abundance, when he comments, in 1905, that advertising “has been successful far beyond the expectations, certainly beyond the knowledge, of many who produced it” (4). He then compares advertising men and electricians, saying “[t]here are many working electricians who, while familiar with all the practical requirements of their work are ignorant of the actual nature of electricity. So with the advertiser . . . Neither [the advertising man nor the manufacturer] has appreciated the real nature of the force employed” (4). Calkins advises his audience that the advertising expert is the man to employ the “force” effectively

3.4.4. Agency Scene Conclusion

The works of Hopkins, Lasker, and Calkins represent the general attitude of the earliest admen toward advertising and to show the terministic screens through which the filtered society’s gaze. The early advertising men envisioned themselves as, at the least, heroic and at the most, god-like in their ability to control the “glorious” force that was advertising, shepherd other admen to a flourishing life, and yet, walk among the “common” man, acting as a priest-like

conduit between consumers and manufacturers. The admen offered transformation and salvation to the businessman and his products, to the consumer of those products and, in fact, to the nation as whole. The earliest admen describe advertising itself as a “force” that can “enlighten”, but warn that if used unwisely, it can “blight”, and in the adman’s hands, advertising is a kind of gospel. They are the ones bringing good news to manufacturers and consumers alike.

People bought into the admen’s visions. By the 1920s, powerful people in society, such as President Coolidge, believed those who controlled advertising could offer salvation to commerce and perhaps even humankind. For example, it is no accident, in 1926, that President Calvin Coolidge said “Advertising men [were] moulding the human mind” and “their work [is] ‘part of the great work of the regeneration and redemption of mankind’” (quoted in Marchand, 9). Coolidge simply perpetuates the attitude the admen helped to entrench in a nation. Their campaign for advertising successfully established advertising as basic to both the economic and spiritual health of America.

The advertising writers made frequent use of language loaded with religious connotation to talk about advertising and in doing so, they framed the genre of advertising as one that shared commonalities with religious discourses. In other words, they treated advertising as though it were sacred. As Burke notes, the way we talk about things suggests a program of action toward that thing (1984, 177). Their language is what Burke would call “the dancing of an attitude” (1973, 9)⁵². The symbolic associations the authors made between advertising and religion showed their attitude toward advertising, but this attitude-demonstrated-in-language, in turn, set up a teleological symbolic function for advertising. In other words, the advertising men’s linguistic frames of acceptance became a ground for advertising to take root in and blossom into

⁵² Burke argues that a rhetor’s state of mind, attitude, is what predispose her to act; thus, attitude is incipient action.

a discourse that functioned in some of the same ways as religious discourses do. By using the idioms of religion to portray advertising as a kind of sacred force, the admen invited their audience to buy into this perspective and once bought into, the perspective becomes entrenched, because “Language is a way of acting together by living the substance of the perspectives captured in each idiom” (Heath 131). By the 1960s, the overlap between religion and advertising had become fully entrenched.

While the early writers provided the ground that has enabled advertising to play the role of a discourse of morality, modelling behaviour and attitudes for its audience, their “frames” for advertising suggested it could do more for audiences than just unite them with material goods. Initially, it was compared to a scientific endeavour, but it was always treated with a reverence befitting the sacred. The advertising men described it as a scientific phenomenon; the practice of it as a metaphorical journey; and with terministic screens that suggested its status a quasi-religious doctrine. Hopkins defines advertising as “salesmanship-on-paper”, Lasker treats it as an invisible force that nourishes or blights, cures or kills; Calkins describes it as a method of implanting suggestions in a mass audience through identification; and Scott considers it a discourse that evokes and suggests, rather than argues and urges. All of the authors are reverential, suggesting that advertising is sacred. It is set apart from other forms of discourse, and it has a special power that can only be controlled by unique men. The terministic screens of these early authors took root. The concepts they seeded flowered between the 1930s and the 1960s, and in the past 40 years have become a naturalized part of the landscape of advertising. In the next section, I’ll offer some examples from James Webb Young’s 1963 book, *How to Become an Advertising Man*, which will show how the scientific explanation of advertising gave way to an

explanation that emphasized mysticism and creativity, in addition to emphasizing the connection between religious discourse and the theory and practice of advertising.

3.5. Agent/Agency Ratio in James Webb Young

By the 1960s, when James Webb Young is writing, the earliest admen's terministic screens have achieved a kind of symbolic perfection. Advertising is both scientific and quasi religious, but in his book, *How to Become an Advertising Man*, the terministic screens shift from being mainly concerned with glorifying the "scientific" to exalting the mysteries of creativity in advertising. Young focuses on the ideals of creativity, intuition and instinct. Advertising is revered as a science, but also venerated as an art, one that attracts intuitive and creative thinkers. Because Young claims that the substance of advertising is intuitive thinking (83), his book aims to foster those who have the potential to become admen, but for those who do not have a natural gift, it is also a "how-to manual" for developing intuition. Young's work outlines the qualities necessary to those who wish to become admen, and he explains the qualities of advertising. Through examining the nature of advertising as it is revealed through cluster criticism, we can also understand some of the implied qualities of advertising men.

As I will show, Young sees admen as building a strong nation by spreading news and motivating men to act. They are providing for primary human needs, including symbolic orientation in the world. Like farmers, they wield the equipment that provides sustenance. They are urbane and sophisticated by virtue of a business that demands they be broadly knowledgeable. They are shrewd like military strategists, but they are also creative and intuitive. In fact, according to Young, "intuitiveness . . . is central in the creative process in advertising" (87). Unlike Hopkins, who forwards a theory of advertising, and Lasker who forwards a theory of admen's duties, Young emphasizes the characteristics that identify a successful adman. With

the addition of the metaphysical philosophy underpinning assumptions about advertising, the profession and the discourse itself were primed to take on the roles played by religious discourse. From the earliest writers, we learn that advertising is a glorious force for good wielded by heroes and prophets, and by the 60s, admen are almost omnipotent.

3.5.1. Admen: Agents of Creation, Perception, and Enlightenment

Young stresses, “Perception is important” in the creation of an adman (6). The adman must be preternaturally attuned to all around him. Young claims that “becoming an Advertising Man is a life long process” (7). For Young, as for Hopkins, advertising is a vocation, too. He gives the title, “Advertising Man” the significance of a proper noun by capitalizing it; he gives the profession special significance beyond the ordinary by explaining professional development in terms of a “life long process.” Young says, “[a]dmen have qualities beyond the mechanics of advertising” (10). There is a hint of religiosity in how Young describes advertising men because he sees them as ultimately creative and, creation is, of course, linked to sacred processes. In fact, Young quotes a prospective adman as saying, “[s]ounds to me like only God Almighty could ever meet all the requirements” (13). However, Young’s book is addressed to those who need guidance in the process of “becoming” admen.

Young believes that admen, through their advertising work, are intertwined with advertising’s enlightening process. For example, he calls advertising knowledge a “seven branched candelabra” (17) saying the light from it is a “blend of the whole” (17); he then outlines seven categories of knowledge an adman needs. In Judaism, a seven branched candelabra or a “menorah” symbolizes “divine wisdom” (Unterman 133). Regardless of whether Young intended this particular connection, his language choices link advertising knowledge to spiritual enlightenment because in our metaphorical system, there is an ontological connection

between light and understanding and knowledge, and by alluding to the menorah, Young alludes to a religious artefact. Like Lasker does, Young sees admen as “light-bringers”. Through the adman’s efforts, consumers can come to a state of knowledge and understanding. The news of advertising is elided with spiritual understanding.

The adman is not only associated with bringing “light” to his audience, there is also a hint of the American frontier hero in the way Young describes admen. He says, “[t]he Genius of American Admen runs counter to adoption of any . . . formalism” (10). The particular brand of genius Young respects has a nationality, and there is an element of the renegade in it since it runs counter to conventions. The statement connects admen to the independent frontiersman so apparent in American culture such as Davy Crockett, Daniel Boone, or Paul Bunyan. The frontiersmen make their own way in the world, as do the American admen, who, as Young notes, depend on their sensitivity, attuned perception, disciplined intuition, common sense, and brave risk taking (10).

3.5.1.a. Admen: Agents Who are Hunters and Shepherds

The metaphors that Young uses to describe admen and their duties show them as powerful strategists who are dominant, masterful, and in control. For example, Young compares admen to hunters who draw beads on markets. He says, “[s]et your sights sharply on market groups before you fire and draw a bead on the target market” (38 – 39). This comparison suggests admen are keen eyed and steady handed. They “hunt” people, not for sport but for profit. In contrast, people are objects: “targets” and “markets” who may be hit squarely with a message that will put them in the hands of the hunter. In addition to being hunters and stalkers, admen are also miners. For example, when Young calls consumers “prospects” (30), this suggests that admen are the ones who will “mine” the prospects. This terminology suggests that

people have a commercial value. Young also encourages the adman to lead the prospect step by step through the ad or the consumer may escape (31). Thus, like Hopkins, all admen are guides or shepherds; Young guides novice admen into the business, teaching them how to shepherd the “prospect” through the ads. Admen are also required to “master” the arts involved in advertising, such as “mastering” as completely as possible the process involved in discerning wants” (13). Young tells the novices, that there are “no limits on the kinds of knowledge useful to the adman” (16).

3.5.1.b. Admen: Agents of Teaching

Young sees himself a teacher because his book is written to guide others and share insights. Everything that he says an adman should be applies to himself since he is an adman, and since he assumes the footing to offer advice to others⁵³. According to Young, there is some ultimate truth and authenticity that can be found in a genuine adman – he uses the phrase “the true Adman” (10) as though there may be false prophets or pretenders to the position of adman. Furthermore, he sees himself as a nurturer of these new admen, and his book will deal with nurturing the sublime qualities that they require (10). He will also initiate new writers into the “secrets of persuasive writing,” implying there are mysteries that admen must be inculcated into (35). One such mystery is the mystery of persuasive language use. Young believes that admen can learn about the nuances of language, such as rhythm and word order and their impact on semantics, by immersing themselves in Shakespeare and the Bible. He says of these sources, “if they can’t teach you language sensitivity, you probably can’t be saved by any form of baptism” (p.35). For Young, learning to use advertising language effectively is a form of rebirth into the occupation of an enlightened persuader.

⁵³ George Dillon outlines a complete theory of advice-giving in his book, *Rhetoric as Social Imagination* and uses the term “footing” to describe where an advice giver positions herself in relation to her audience.

3.5.1.c. Admen: Agents of Medicine

Admen not only have a mystical sort of presence in the world; they are also, as they are in Hopkins' work, medicine men. Young says, "advertising . . . will never cease to produce surprises – even as the complex human animal produces surprises for the most experienced practitioners of *materia medica*" (13). This Latin phrase is defined as "the remedial substances used in the practice of medicine: the branch of medicine that deals with their origins and properties" (Speake 353). Young compares admen to doctors or healers. The two practitioners are alike because they both provide remedies, one for suffering patients, the other for "suffering" clients. The admen minister to the producers who are suffering because goods cannot be moved. However, they also minister to wanting consumers by showing how those wants may be filled by goods. Young says the adman must "master as completely as possible the processes involved in discerning the wants, [and] in finding the wanters" (13). In this instance, the admen are not only providing a remedy for producers of goods, but they are "discerning" or diagnosing "wants" in the general public as though the public has a sickness that the adman can cure.

In Young's parlance, admen are truly Renaissance men. He says an adman must study his field "with the detachment of a social scientist studying the manners and morals of a people (39). He compares them to "practitioners of other arts where the reactions of humans are the indeterminable "x" of the equation" (49), such as publishers or play producers. He declares that admen must know the ways of people (53). In addition to their many roles, admen must be attuned to "stagecraft" (36), and realize they may need "technical assistance" in TV and radio. But first and foremost, an adman is a good salesman who has "guidelines that good show [men] [do] not (44). Admen are to observe "human weaknesses and foibles" but also their nobility, sacrifice, and discipline, because out of these observations will come the "fresh, appealing

proposition” (31). The proposition not only catches the consumer’s attention, it enshrines the adman’s services as invaluable. People are valued for what they do and what they offer in return, not what they are.

3.5.1.d. Admen and Religious Allusion

James Webb Young’s work has several implicit allusions to religion and the sacred, but he also makes explicit connections. For example, he says, “[w]hen the Ad Man contributes this new and appealing proposition . . . his services become the Pearl of Great Price” (31). With this allusion to Matthew 13:46, Young likens the adman’s work to the kingdom of heaven. Young most likely intends only to emphasize that that an adman’s creativity may literally be priceless because the long term consequences of effective advertising may be impossible to track. However, the metaphor puts the adman in the position of conduit. The advertiser and consumer’s needs and wants coincide in the adman’s service. The service allows consumer and producer to become consubstantial in their wants and needs; this consubstantiality is provided by the adman’s “pearl of great price.”

3.5.2. Advertising as Organic Force

Young emphasizes that advertising is related to “organic” processes, that intuition is “both respectable and important,” even in the eyes of “those scientists most noted for their devotion to the rigor of quantitative methodology” (83 – 83). He encourages intuitive leaps of creativity. While Young explicitly stresses that advertising success depends on creativity, he also makes some suggestive comparisons between advertising as preaching and advertising and natural forces, advertising and domestic pursuits such as farming, and advertising and military strategies.

3.5.3. Advertising as Evangelism

Young's "how-to" book for new copywriters relies on implicitly comparing the writing of advertising to the spreading of news. Young's book declares that "advertising success depends on "word of mouth evangelism" (58). Young's word choice demonstrates how he connects advertising with preaching gospel⁵⁴. Young's metaphor perhaps suggests his understanding of advertising as a doctrine. The allusions to preaching or spreading Christian gospel are evident even in this chapter's title: "How Advertising Works: By Spreading News". This chapter title could be read as an allusion to preaching gospel, which is the spreading of the "good news."

Young's work hopes to both inspire and instruct novice copywriters. He advises his audience, saying small ads can be a "greater test of . . . skill than many a double-page spread" (64) and paraphrases scripture to inspire his initiates. In the King James Bible, it says, "[s]eest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings; he shall not stand before mean men (Proverbs, 33:39). Young says, "[s]eest thou a man diligent in his small ads, he shall stand before kings!" (64). Young intends to make his point vividly, so he paraphrases "the author of Proverbs." For Young, it seems as though the language of advertising itself transcends the mere business of men, and in fact elevates and transforms them, putting them in the company of royalty but also in the company of authors of scripture.

In fact, advertising can transform nations. Advertising is a force of nature that contributes to the wealth of a nation, so it is in itself a patriotic practice. Young opens his chapter "How Advertising Works: By Overcoming Inertia," saying, "[i]n physics inertia is defined, in part, as that property of matter by which it continues in its existing state of rest, unless that state is

⁵⁴ The concept of marketing as evangelism is explicit in Guy Kawasaki's *Selling the Dream: How to Promote your Product, Company, or Ideas – and Make a Difference – Using Everyday Evangelism*. New York: Harper Collins, 1991. Almost every section and chapter title contains word, "evangelism:" for example, "Stages of Evangelism"; "Advanced Techniques of Evangelism", "Evangelizing the Opposite Sex, and "Recruiting and Training Evangelists".

changed by external force” (65). He continues on to say that advertising is that external force and that it can “overcome some state of rest in man” (65). Advertising, thus, is a liberating force because, as men’s energies are released, “the true source of the wealth of nations” is activated (66). As advertising “releases men’s energies,” and transforms inertia to action, it contributes to the national economic health. It encourages consumption, so Young equates national health with financial strength. Because advertising motivates people to action, which benefits the nation, it is a patriotic force too, which engenders patriotism in those it motivates to consumer action.

In addition to advertising being a physical force that overcomes inertia, it is also a physical force that generates spiritual sustenance. Young deliberately calls on a biblical-sounding metaphor when he compares advertising to the activity of farming. He notes that “advertising can till the ground and sow the seed; but there must be harvest hands to garner the crop” (68). He echoes “the parable of the sower” from Matthew 13: 18 – 34. In addition, this allusion reinforces advertising’s connection to patriotism because, like those who till the ground and plant the seeds, advertising contributes to the nourishing of a nation. As a force of nature, advertising is mainly compared to organic processes. But, Young also shows how it sustains primal human needs. According to Young, advertising provides a “primary need for orientation” by making some product or concept familiar (53). It provides an orientation for business as much as Christ provides an orientation for Christians.

Young further compares advertising strategy to military strategy (74). He says, “[t]here are some parallels between a military and an advertising operation” (74). Young notes that tobacco baron G.W.Hill called business war, and says that the word “campaign” “seem[s] to imply some of the same idea” (74). Young believes that military strategists and the “Advertising Man” both have to “formulate a plan of attack” employing strategies and tactics. The “enemy” is

the competitor. Young says, “a new stratagem in advertising can, as in the military sense, turn a competitor’s flank, exploit a weak spot in his lineup or even draw him off into the defense of something which is not going to be attacked” (77). If advertisers are in military competition, the territory being fought for and over is the consumer. Thus, the military metaphor objectifies people who purchase goods as much as they are objectified by being called “targets” and “prospects”. In addition, the military metaphor shows advertising as an aggressive enterprise, like a commercial Crusade.

3.5.4. Advertising as Metaphysical Philosophy

However, Young suggests that being involved in the advertising is equivalent to a solid multidisciplinary education too. He says, “[t]here is depth to [advertising], and there is expansion and growth for the mind in it, because it ramifies all other subjects. Repeat *all*” (90). Young emphasizes that advertising is force that will allow the ad man to grow his mind, so that advertising is not only beneficial to the nation, but also to the man who takes it up as a career. Young claims that the risk of boredom is reduced by the “variety of products and services dealt with and by the stimulus of association with other creative people” (90). Advertising is a multifaceted discipline that needs unique and intuitive men to help it create its ideal world.

Advertising transcends mere satisfaction of material wants. Young likens the mysteries and complexities of advertising to the mysteries and complexities of a world overseen by God. Young quotes an old hymn: “God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform” (49) and follows the quotation with, “[s]ometimes it seems advertising does likewise” (49). Thus, advertising’s works is compared to God’s works and the admen then stand in a God-like position, because they create ads as God creates wonders. Most likely, Young is not trying to be sacrilegious or irreverent, or deliberately provocative. His metaphors are for emphasis, designed

to provide an argument that advertising is not only or entirely scientific. His use of metaphors, in fact, demonstrates his respect for and veneration of the power of advertising.

3.6. How Advertising Discourse Fulfilled Its Teleology: The Miracle Performed by Terministic Screens

Burke's dramatic pentad offers a way of examining how the admen enacted the redemption of advertising through their discourse. In early days of modern advertising, the historical scene rejected advertising because of its association with patent medicine. Thus, the earliest admen faced a difficult task: how to redeem advertising's reputation. This redemption is exactly the deed they performed and in doing so, they set advertising on a new course because they re-shaped the scene in which advertising operated through applying new terministic screens. As Burke notes, the scene both contains the act and provides a fit container for the act. When the admen wrote about advertising using terministic screens provided by religious discourses, they fundamentally shifted attitudes about advertising and expectations of the discourse's reach, strength, and purpose.

By speaking about advertising in terms of religious metaphor, the admen prepared the way for advertising to begin to function as a religious discourse. In advertising's early days, the scene shaped how the admen would respond; in turn, they re-shaped the scene, so that by the 1960s, advertising had fully absorbed the characteristics that the earliest admen ascribed to it, and in fact, was positioned as a discourse that ministered to society's psychological, social and consequently, spiritual well-being. Representative both of the understanding of advertising for their times, and for the influence their authors wielded on their profession, the books of Rowell, Hopkins, Lasker, Calkins and Scott are significant in understanding how advertising discourse

came to function in ways similar to religious discourse and how it came to occupy a place of primacy in society that had traditionally been occupied by religious discourse. It was increasingly presented as an evangelical gospel and eventually, it came to function in ways similar to religious evangelism. The books' authors have played a formative role in shaping our understanding of modern advertising, and their works represent the twenty-year span in American history in which advertising became a significant and integral part of public culture. This period gave birth to national brand advertising, and these men influenced and shaped the public perception of advertising and set a standard for how other advertising men would think about their practices and roles in the advertising industry.

Early practitioners of advertising may have used metaphors of science and religion in their discussions of advertising because religion, science, and advertising are fundamentally social practices; religion and its rites and practices, as common and public social practices of a culture, seem to have been displaced by science and its rites and practices; the early admen linked advertising and science, but also drew the advertising genre into the realms of religious discourse, thus uniting scientific and religious discourse tendencies into a social practice that everyone would be influenced by to some degree.

Advertising, like science and religion, is an attempt to persuade audiences to accept a particular belief system. The early admen explained advertising in terms of science and religion partially because these were terms with which they and their audiences were familiar. By describing something that was unknown – advertising – in terms of something known – science or religion – early practitioners of advertising gave their profession a legitimacy it otherwise lacked. On the other hand, since, as Burke claims, terministic screens reflect aspects of reality,

but also select and deflect other aspects, the use of metaphors of science and religion to describe advertising helps the audience to regard it in the same light as science and religion.

Once we accept a metaphor, we have accepted a way of viewing reality. This acceptance sanctions particular actions “because we act according to the way we conceive of things” (Lakoff 5). Metaphor is a conceptual system and as such “may create realities for us, especially social realities . . . [and] may thus be a guide for future actions” (156); As Lakoff and Johnson argue, conceptual systems are central to defining our daily reality” (3). The earliest advertising practitioners relied on scientific metaphor, borrowing from the prestige of science to give its cachet to advertising. However, religious language also contributed to changing the frames through which advertising was viewed. Later advertising specialists, such as James Webb Young, preferred metaphors of religion possibly to loosen the stranglehold scientism had on what he positioned as a thoroughly creative art. The social upheaval of the 60s blew wide open the concepts of traditional religions; their rituals, practices, and beliefs were open to public interrogation in a way they had never been before. Perhaps Young saw another opportunity for advertising to attach itself to the public search for meaning because like religious discourses, the advertising genre is one that answers our very human quest for symbolic meaning.

Admen like Hopkins, Calkins, Lasker, and Scott were both shaped the scene but were shaped by it. Through the confluence of technology and economics, advertising came to have a social impact similar to religion, in fact, to displace religious discourse in public life. For example, the church played an integral role in community life, but with the advent of urbanization, its force was weakened because as people streamed into cities, communities were no longer formed entirely around belief systems or physical proximity. Marchand notes that early “advertisers came to recognize certain vacuums of advice in modern society . . . [and offered]

expertise and solace in the face of . . . modern complexities and impersonal judgments that made the individual feel incompetent and insecure” (xxi). In conjunction with urbanization, commercial enterprises began national brand advertising and advertising began to play a leading role in popular culture, a role that, according to Twitchell, is primary in modern life, binding people across the continent through their sharing of advertising as a cultural commodity. The metaphors of religion gained currency as a way to conceive of advertising that is with us still. Because metaphors help us organize our world, the acceptance of these metaphors has real consequences.

Metaphors used to discuss advertising provoke certain reactions in an audience. Metaphors of science and religion may have reduced both audience and advertiser resistance to this form of mass communication. For example, by discussing advertising in terms of either religion or science, the writers were essentially making an argument about advertising. Both science and religion are belief systems that help humans feel as though we are transcending human limitations of understanding. We cannot use the naked eye to see cells and atoms, but science proves their existence; similarly, we do not see God nor do we have irrefutable proof of a God’s existence; however, faith makes it possible to believe. In envisioning advertising as a scientific discipline, advertising accrues to itself the respectability of science. In envisioning it as a powerful force with the power to save or destroy, it accrues the metaphysical properties attributed to religious discourse.

The early admen used metaphors of science and religion to explain advertising’s power, its potential, its effect, its role in commerce, and the ad man’s relationship to his message. These two powerful forces, scientific and religious, denote two sides to power, namely the natural, explainable, quantifiable as opposed to the supernatural, the unexplainable, and the mystical.

Because advertising had been likened to both the power of science and the power of religion, the admen called on these two things to try and help students of advertising and advertisers understand the potential of advertising. The conceptual frameworks of both science and religion gave people insights into things they could not know or understand. Advertising became a way of knowing “the truth”. It is powerful; it appeals to primary human needs; it offers a way to transcend individual understanding. So too do science and religion. Further, both are both married to creative thinking. Artistic creation has often been seen as a sacred pursuit because creation is understood as sacred. Because advertising on a mass scale in mass media was an unknown, these men drew on what was familiar to both them and their readers using metaphor to constitute arguments for the profession.

That these men called on the metaphors and terministic screens used in popular religious rhetoric of the time in the U.S. is not surprising. Rhetorical theorist Ernest Bormann’s research suggests that the “notion of the sacred flowed into and vitalized the secular persuasion . . . in the history of mass communication in the United States” (2001, 3). As Bormann points out, communication can create shared fantasies, and the admen’s writings served to do just that: create a shared fantasy about the power of advertising and the role of those who controlled it.

The “terministic screens” the advertising men used were necessary to salvage advertising’s early reputation, but they also laid the foundation for understanding advertising discourse as one that enacts or parallels powerful aspects of any religious discourse such as those aspects that help us understand human relationships with each other and with the universe, our purpose in the world, and our obligations and duty to our communities. The key players of advertising in the early 20th century re-imagined advertising discourse as both a scientific one

and one that promised salvation; the latter concept was at least partly motivated by the need to perform an act of salvation on advertising discourse itself and repair its reputation.

As the admen performed acts of salvation on advertising, it came to promise a kind of salvation to its own audiences. As I will argue in the next three chapters, advertising offers us advice about our own identities and about how to achieve these identities. Advertising functions as a socializing discourse, just as advertising does. It teaches us how to understand what it means to be in a community, and how to treat others.

Chapter Four

Redemption and Genesis: The Beginnings of Modern Advertising

“[There] is [an] ultimate social principle” which underpins all symbol systems . . . “[D]eep belief in *any* type of social legitimation functions in society in much the same way as the supernatural in religion. We ‘legitimize’ hierarchies through grounding their ‘causes’” in that social principle.⁵⁵

4.1. From the Redemption of Advertising to Advertising’s Promise of Redemption

I established in the previous chapter how the early advertising writers, such as Lasker, Hopkins, and Calkins, were successful in redeeming advertising from its reputation as snake oil salesmanship. Their terministic screens helped them to position advertising as something significant, powerful, and necessary. They accomplished this task by implicitly comparing advertising to gospel. As Burke notes, “[w]e . . . apply our old vocabulary in new ways attempting to socialize our position by so manipulating the linguistic equipment of our group that our particular additions or alternations can be shown to fit into the old texture” (1984, 46). The early admen naturalized advertising within American culture by fitting a commercial discourse into the texture of familiar religious discourse.

The admen imposed a kind of cosmology on advertising, and their vision of the genre and its capabilities was so successful that later admen accepted the terministic screens of their

⁵⁵ Hugh Dalziel Duncan, *Communication and Social Order*, New Brunswick, USA: Transaction Publishers, 1985, 416.

forefathers uncritically. The admen's descriptions of advertising are what Burke would call, "the dancing of an attitude" (1974 B, 9), and as Burke notes, attitude is incipient action (1969, 42). By describing advertising through metaphors of religion, the admen helped infuse the practice of advertising with ethical and spiritual significance; in fact, they initiated the discourse to function as a kind of religious discourse, and as advertising has become more and more firmly established as a primary form of public discourse, it has indeed begun to function in a manner similar to religious discourses.

The acceptance of the metaphors of religion that surrounded advertising discourse made it seem natural when advertising began to define "good behaviour" and admonish "bad behaviour", to describe what constituted "sin" and to demonstrate what products offered "salvation". Perhaps the shift in emphasis from selling product to attempting to minister to people's psychological and social needs was a natural progression, but this progression occurred as advertising began to function in ways similar to the manner in which it had been described. In short, the "glorious" force of advertising began to show the consumer how she was "sinful", what she could do to atone, and how this purification would lead to transcendence and redemption.

As advertising went from print to air waves, from billboards to cyber space, from TV to public washrooms, it strove to attempt to influence not only purchasing decisions, but also beliefs, attitudes, and actions. The beliefs, attitudes, and actions which advertising wants the audience to share and adopt are grounded in the commercial goals and values inherent in the genre. These commercial goals indicate a very specific understanding of human purpose and society, while rhetorical criticism helps reveal the concepts of society implied by the discourse (Nilson 89). As sociologist Hugh Duncan insists, "the study of language as rhetoric tells us what

kind of goals men select to stimulate themselves and others to act” (2003, 169). Through the rhetorical study of advertising, we can see the goals it selects to stimulate its audiences to action. These goals can be understood by applying Burke’s dramatisitic theory of language to advertising. This application will be a demonstration of his theory that vocabularies simultaneously encode and reveal the particular structure of the institutions they represent. I will argue that advertising discourse encodes and reveals an attitude towards people and society that seeks to alter the nature of human relations. Advertising is a form of public communication that strives to urge its audience to a way of acting that is better for the genre itself than it is for people and society.

If “[c]ommunication is preparation for action” (Duncan, 2003, 112), then advertising prepares its audience for very specific symbolic actions, which includes accepting how advertising defines “individuality”, and “identity”, and how it situates the individual in society. Advertising displays a consistent view of identity and social order, and it sets up a hierarchical discourse that attempts to induce audiences to buy into its view.

Advertising legitimizes the hierarchy it sells by grounding its cause in an “ultimate social principle”, in this case, the principles of consumption and commercialism. Burke’s theory will help me argue that these principles underpin every aspect of advertising, and in such a way as to attempt to influence human relations, just as religious discourse does. Each individual ad plays out a mini-drama that is similar to the ritual drama, which according to Burke, organizes language use. In this chapter, I will map out Burke’s theories and show how they bring advertising’s redemptive motives to light. The theoretical constructs are closely related and, at times, overlap.

4.2. Elements of Ritual Drama in Advertising

Burke argues that our language structures the nature of human relations. He makes this argument through his theory of the “drama of human relations” which “is an elaborate and deliberately worked out secular version of the [ritual] drama” (Rueckert 46). Ritual drama is structured based on what Rueckert describes as “the seven interlocked moments” which include the negative, hierarchy, guilt, mortification or victimage, catharsis, and redemption (146). Burke’s arguments suggest that the vocabularies that grow up around social institutions will be structured as ritual drama is structured; this structure exerts a powerful and significant persuasive force in society and on human relations.

Advertising, I will argue, uses the symbolic structures of ritual drama, just as religious discourses do. According to communication scholar David Bobbitt, Burke’s theory of dramatism highlights conflict between principles of social order that are good or bad (6), which, Bobbitt argues, constitutes a redemption drama: “[f]or Burke, guilt-purification-redemption is a constantly repeating symbolic ritual that responds to an archetypal need in humans as symbol-using animals” (29). Burke believes that there are fundamental truths about the human condition to which effective genres of discourse speak; in these discourses, he identifies patterns that surround particular belief systems, that emerge from a study of the works of particular authors, or that are evident in discourses emanating from particular institutions (Brummett, 1994, xiv). His arguments about dramatism show us that action, including language as symbolic action, is “dramatic because it includes conflict, purpose, reflection, and choice. Consequently, the purpose of transforming the self and/or society is always present” (Gusfield 10).

The elements of ritual drama help us to understand how advertising can be so appealing. Just as religious discourses offer strategies to enable adherents to engage in their social and ethical worlds, so does advertising. Both discourses have, as a motive, a desire to influence their audiences' values, beliefs, and ultimately, actions. The motives they both appeal to in their audiences include the desire to find the keys to living the so-called "good life". Religious practices bind communities together through a shared substance and shared beliefs about what is right and wrong, about how to behave, and about how to treat others. In religious discourse, the shared substance or ground may be the nature of the sacred, and the practices needed to nourish those identifications, ostensibly with the sacred, but ultimately with the community. Both advertising and religious discourses create and maintain a social world, but more importantly, both exhort their audiences to live in a particular way so that transformation of identity can be achieved. Each discourse achieves its success because the "language forms available for use in a culture are the stuff of [acceptance frames]. To understand them is to understand the structure of thoughts, the grammar of motives by which explanation and justification [of an institution] is arrived at" (Gusfield 14).

Advertising shares the evangelical orientation that is characteristic of religious discourse and operates in a parallel fashion. Like the discourses of all major religions, advertising proselytises to audiences, promising a transformative way of life. It seeks to achieve a particular mental state in its audience, one that will encourage the audience to practise consumption as a way, perhaps the only way, not only to live the "good life", but more importantly, to practise consumption, to perfect our identities, and indeed, our very natures. Advertising sustains a paradox, however. It promises us that we can be perfected through consumption, but we can never achieve the personal perfection which advertising demands we strive for, nor can we

achieve the transformation necessary to stop needing the products and services it hawks. To sell transformational themes, it has to make assumptions about ideologies that its audiences will accept including how individuality and community are achieved, and it has to invite audiences to participate in its world view. These assumptions are embedded in the ideological networks of advertising, and these ideological networks are based on powerful motivators at work in the human condition.

According to Burke, these powerful motivators can be exposed and analysed because there are “overall-all terms for naming relationships and developments that, *mutatis mutandis*, are likely to figure in all human association” (1984, 274). He stresses primary motives such as “Guilt, Redemption, Hierarchy, and Victimage” (1984, 274), calling these elements “social, linguistically grounded motives” and suggesting they are at work in all discourses, including theological discourses which he uses as models for understanding language. While the motives that Burke outlines are clearly connected to Christian religious discourses, I plan to show how advertising discourse makes particular use of these motives too.

Advertising functions like ritual drama in several ways; it encodes social order, encourages guilt, and offers ways to expiate the guilt, and thus, purify the self in preparation for redemption and salvation. First, it implies a social order, or hierarchy, rooted in commercial transactions. Because we are audience to hundreds of ads on a daily basis, we see how life and people are meant to be. Second, the social order or hierarchy implied in advertising breeds guilt or what Burke also describes as anxiety (1961, 202) or differentiation (1989, 15). Advertising seeks to instil guilt to remind the consumer of his “sinful” nature or to emphasize how the audience member is differentiated both from the characters in the advertising and from others who use the product. Guilt is encouraged as each ad seeks to convince its target audiences of

their inherent flaws. Advertising seeks to promote apprehension and uneasiness in its audiences as it prods desires to overcome this unease and promises to help audiences claim their rightful place in the social world. In other words, advertising implies that we suffer from a kind of “original sin” or what Burke would call “categorical guilt”; according to Duncan, “categorical guilt is not a result of personal transgression” (2003, 122), but points to a paradigm of what he calls “social disrelationships” (2003, 121). As consumers, as target audiences, we inherently lack what the discourse exhorts us to buy, while it, at the same time, shows us how what it sells has an identificatory function. All advertising illustrates how its audiences are out of sync with the social world and thus, our responsibility as consumers is to seek harmonious identification with others. This identification, so advertising promises, happens through product purchase, and with product purchase comes the expiation of guilt, at least momentarily. Therefore, consumption is a form of atonement.

In advertising, the fundamental exigence is that the audience members are filled with lack which is the overweening characteristic of consumers; it is the “sin” that stops them from achieving the perfection that advertising promises for them. Perfection of the self is promised in the products and experiences that advertising sells, and perfection of identity is promised through acts of consuming. However, the perfection of self is not achievable, and the perfection of identity would result in the “consumer” becoming free from lack, a state that advertising can never acknowledge, let alone encourage. The genre holds out the lure of an ideal identity, or goads with the principle of perfection, because it promises that with the expiation of guilt comes purification and from purification comes redemption. In advertising’s version of redemption, consumers are redeemed and undergo a transformation from people who are filled with lack to

people who have, momentarily, transcended their state of want. Advertising suggests that transformation can occur if we simply make discerning purchases.

However, as in Christian sacramental religions, the perfection does not occur permanently, so the pursuit of perfection demands reiteration of the ritual. In Christian religions, people are born in original sin, and baptism is an act of purification. It alone, however, is not enough to guarantee redemption, so the adherent must continue to strive to attain a redeemed state. Thus, one continues to confess sins, to attend mass, to participate in the Eucharist and to take Communion. The striving for redemption through ritual acts is the act of faith the Christian must continue. The striving for perfection through the ritual of consumption is likewise the act of faith the consumer must continue.

Since we can never achieve the perfection at the heart of the social order envisioned by advertising, the genre can only be effective if we feel guilt because we have not and cannot achieve what advertising seems to offer us so freely. According to Burke, “guilt arises out of the negation of the principles of social order” (Duncan, 2003, 122). Thus, advertising must attempt to convince us that we must not stop consuming because to do so would negate the principles of social order inherent in the genre, namely consumerism and commercialism. In Burke’s “interlocked moments”, guilt leads to mortification, which in turn leads to catharsis and then redemption. The interlocked moments are cyclical, so once a momentary “redemption” occurs, the consumer begins a fresh descent to bottom of the hierarchy. From there, advertising invites him to ascend afresh as various ads reaffirm his categorical guilt. To understand how advertising, and other religious discourses, achieve their persuasive potential, it is necessary to understand how the “symbol-using animal” responds to symbols. Thus, in the next section, I will discuss how the advertising genre addresses our humanity by explaining Burke’s definition of “Man.”

4.3 Advertising and the Symbolic Nature of Humans

Advertising and other religious discourses are persuasive because of what Burke calls the symbolic nature of humans. In “The Human Actor: Definition of Man” Burke explains how human nature and language are both of a piece, in part, through his definition of human which consists of a five part clause. Burke says,

Man is the symbol-using (symbol- making, symbol-misusing) animal inventor of the negative (or moralized by the negative) separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making goaded by the spirit of hierarchy (or moved by the sense of order) and rotten with perfection. (1989, 70).

Burke’s definition of man is explained below, and in section 4.3, the principles inherent in the definition are applied to advertising discourse through the theory of dramatism.

4.3.1. Symbol-Using Animal

The first clause declares that we are “the symbol-using, symbol-making, symbol-misusing animal” (1989, 60). Burke’s initial clause emphasizes two aspects of human nature: symbolic and animalistic, paving the way for the ideas that follow in the other four clauses. Like all animals, we have physical and physiological needs, which are important motivators, but unlike most animals, we are more strongly driven by symbolic needs and we can meet most of our physiological needs more satisfactorily by attaching a strongly symbolic element to them. This dichotomy is acknowledged in Burke’s description of motion, non-symbolic behaviour and action, symbolic behaviour. For example, it’s not just enough to eat; we have to “eat well.” It is not enough to have shelter, we need to have shelter that affirms and reinforces our identities. In many ways, advertising does help us to satisfy our physiological and biological needs because

we do use advertising to garner information about where to get food, shelter, and clothing. However, because of its enthymemes about society and human interaction, advertising does much more than show us ways to meet our needs to stay alive. The enthymemes may vary from individual ad to individual ad, but as a whole, the genre operates on the assumptions that human relations are commercial transactions and that a perfected individual identity can be achieved by focussing on enhancing the self through consuming the right goods and services. The more advertising discourse we are audience to, the more familiar we are with, and thus the more accepting we are of, its enthymematic messages. Advertising discourse operates on its own symbol system, in essence, becoming its own language and setting up dramatic elements to which it expects audiences to respond.

Advertising imparts a set of symbolic principles which are never articulated, but are intended to be absorbed implicitly by audiences. These principles are the messages behind all commercial messages. Advertising's ultimate success is in meeting our symbolic needs, even if it is only for 40 seconds at a time. In the symbolic arena, advertising attempts to give products the meaning for which we are so hungry, but in giving meaning to products, advertising also seeks to give meaning to those human interactions and relationships in which the products are used. Advertisements not only tell us what to buy but also what to be. They show us how products affirm and reinforce our identities, but also how they can help us achieve the perfection of self that advertising promises us is possible. Advertising helps sate our symbolic appetite by investing goods and services with significance, and in doing so confirms Burke's point that our symbolic needs are as important as, maybe even more important than, our biological needs. Burke notes, "even the most primitive of tribes are led by inventions to depart somewhat from the needs of food, shelter, sex as defined by the survival standards of sheer animality" (1989, 67)

because of a universal human need for symbolic meaning. Interwoven with symbolic meaning are two concepts that hinge on the negative.

4.3.2. Inventor of the Negative and Separated from His Natural Condition by Instruments of His Own Making

Burke's definitional clauses "inventor of the negative" and "separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making" depend exclusively on understanding the distinction between "action" and "motion". According to Burke there are no negatives in nature because nature is pure motion or raw physicality. Sociologist Joseph Gusfield explains,

Motion is the animal side of human beings. Here human [behaviour is] determined. [It is] the summation of the forces and factors which impinge on people to produce behaviour. The image of the human being is that of a passive reactor to external conditions. They move but they do not act (9).

Action, on the other hand, refers to behaviours chosen because of our symbol-using natures. Thus behaviour that may be a reaction to physical or natural stimuli becomes infused with symbolic motives as a consequence of language use. Gusfield explains,

[A]ction implies assessment of the situations and the people . . . It implies reflection upon one's interests, sentiments, purposes, and those of others . . . [Humans] understand their world by depicting it in symbols and by placing meaning on events. Animals respond to stimuli directions: humans interpret the events (9).

In other words, motion may impinge on us, but action influences our cognitive and emotional responses and thus, our choices. With the addition of the concept of “the negative”, the human animal becomes an ethical creature.

Humans are inventors of the negative because the negative only exists in language, a distinctly human trait. The concept of the negative, which is linguistic in nature, simply cannot exist in a world of motion because that world just *is*; it simply exists with no regard for choice, while the concept of action revolves around choice. Burke demonstrates how the “negative” exists only in language with the example he gives in his 1952 essay, “A Dramatistic View of the Origins of Language.” He says, “we may *say*, ‘The ground is *not* damp’, But the corresponding actual conditions in nature are those whereby the ground *is* dry” (251). The completeness of Burke’s understanding of “the negative” includes his assertion that the concept is fundamentally a moral one. If we understand the negative in terms of linguistic action, then the negative implies choice and, thus, it is ethical in nature because ethics refers to habits of action and choices. Because of the linguistic negative, humans come to recognize that there are actions that should not be taken. Burke says, “[t]he negative is in its very heart moralistic; it is the act of dissuasion reduced to one syllable” (1961, 54). Burke explains that for humans, “the negative” has a dramatistic function as well as a moral function, claiming the morality of “the negative” can be heard clearly in the hortatory, “Thou *shalt* not” (1989, 64). The things that we *should not do* are communicated to us through our social interactions. Both advertising and religious discourses respond to our need for symbolism and its capacity to help us feel what it means to be fully human because they both insist that we make choices or engage in symbolic actions. It is through symbolism that we come to understand the concept of how we lack or how we “sin”. Both religious discourse and advertising discourse strongly imply various “thou shalt nots” from the

Ten Commandments of the Old Testament to the implied ones of advertising such as, “do not stop consuming”, “do not accept the manifestations of aging”, or “do not be too poor to buy things”, to name just a few. In the advertising genre, there is a social order imposed that is predicated entirely on negatives: we lack, we are not good enough, we are not what we could be. Advertising imposes the lack and insists that we cannot continue on as we are; it then urges us to seek to ascend the hierarchy it has imposed. It sets up a social order for us, but since we cannot obey its exhortations to achieve perfection, it sets us up to fail.

Because humans are the “inventors of the negative”, any discourse becomes persuasional because it attempts to influence human action. Without the concept of “the negative” advertising would founder because it thrives on showing us what we are not and what we do not have. Advertising uses the negative to emphasize to us our imperfection and the distance between what we are and what we could be or wish we were. Without “the negative” we could not be filled with desire or conceptualize some kind of appetite that could only be sated symbolically. We conceptualize imperfection by negating perfection even if we have never experienced it. Thus, negation gives birth to ideals. For example, we understand we can never be perfect, but we understand perfection only by understanding what something lacks that keeps it from attaining perfection. By believing, for instance, that we need to “get into shape” we must believe that we are *not* in shape or that we lack the right shape. If we believe we are overweight and that we need to lose weight, we are demonstrating our understanding of negative categories. The negative exists symbolically, and in advertising, it becomes a way to conceptualize some kind of appetite or desire. In other words, while we exist in a state of motion, we live our lives in a state of action as Burke distinguishes the concept, so we do not choose food and clothing simply to meet sustenance and warmth needs but because we respond symbolically to symbols. Advertising

exerts an influence because it seeks to persuade us to satisfy our desire for action through consuming its symbols.

Burke's distinction between action and motion helps us to understand how we are separated from our natural condition by instruments of our own making. Simply, because we use language to reflect on motion, we are separated from merely experiencing the world as animals do. We can reflect on ourselves, which means the "I" can be objectified. Because we can think about ourselves as objects, we can think about ways that we can be improved or perfected. Our nature as symbol users make us ripe for the messages of advertising.

From these clauses of the definition, "inventors of the negative" and "separated from self by instruments of our own making", we come to understand how advertising is sustained by the concept of the negative. Negation implies lack and according to all commercial messages, the consumer festers with lack. Advertising seeks to stimulate our symbolic appetites, in part through its depiction of the negative. However, at the same time as it shows us how we are deficient and how we can fulfill ourselves, it also implicitly tells us that we cannot remove the deficiency nor can we fulfill ourselves, especially in the ways it suggests we should. This state of seeing ourselves in terms of what we are not or what we do not have leads to the next clause of Burke's definition.

4.3.3. Goaded by Hierarchy and Rotten with Perfection

Burke's fourth clause in the "definition of man" reads "goaded by the spirit of hierarchy" or "[m]oved by a sense of order" (1989, 69). Rueckert explains, "hierarchy is any kind of order; but more accurately, it is any kind of, graded, value-charged structure in terms of which things, words, people, acts, and ideas are ranged" (141). The very nature of society, from ancient to modern, comes from our sense of hierarchy. The hierarchic goad is very obvious in the fact that

we have preferences: our taste in everything from food to clothes, houses to cars, leisure activities to professional affiliations – all are ranked hierarchically within and among different categories. The moment we prefer one pair of pants over another, one tee shirt over another, we are creating a clothes hierarchy, and of course, governments, the military, and universities have institutionalized hierarchy. We see hierarchy in play in all human interactions, from choosing friends to choosing mates, from earning degrees to earning a living. Further, there are hierarchies within hierarchies. Hierarchy arises naturally out of societal structure. Burke observes, “to the extent that a social structure becomes differentiated, with privileges to some that are denied to others, there are the conditions for a kind of ‘built in’ pride” (1989, 69).

Hierarchy services advertising very effectively because hierarchy creates exigence. Exigence suggests that one state of being is preferred above another. Advertising, by showing us what may be possible, shows us what we are not or what we do not have at the same time as it demonstrates the benefit of becoming what we could become or having what it is selling.

As it attempts to convince us of the exigence, it creates a hierarchy. For example, when we see a recent TV commercial for a brand of toilet paper where the package shines in the spotlight of the bathroom lights, a choir sings, and the tag line suggests the tissue is a miracle, the ad attempts to set up a hierarchy based on the symbolically attributed qualities of bathroom tissue. For example, most toilet paper advertising sells the idea that the product is clean, pure, sterile, hygienic, and, of course, soft and strong. The hierarchic principle thrives in advertising discourse, which hopes to assist us with the creation and maintenance of hierarchies and invites us to juxtapose our ordinary realities with the more fun and glamorous reality that are its stock in trade.

Out of the principle of “hierarchy” comes Burke’s last, “wry codicil” in the definition of man: “rotten with perfection” (1989, 70). The principle of hierarchy suggests the principle of perfection. For example, a woman may be a mother, but advertising shows “the best mothers”. Friendships are closer, relationships more intimate, families more loving, and people happier in advertising. It sets up a thematic hierarchy of “the best attainable”. Advertising invites us to believe that from the principle of hierarchy we can attain the principle of perfection. It shows us this image: I am not X but I can become X. Some advertising demonstrates this principle ironically, as in the Old Spice ad that depicts a handsome man just out of the shower saying to his audience,

Hello ladies, look at your man, now back to me. Now back at your man now back to me. Sadly, he isn’t me . . . but [if he] . . . switched to Old Spice he could smell like he’s me” (Old Spice, The Man Your Man Could Smell Like).

Hierarchy helps us establish that objects, experiences, or people are unlike and advertising often shows us *how* they are unlike which implicitly evokes the motive of perfection.

Burke argues this principle of perfection is “central to the nature of language as motive. The mere desire to name something by its ‘proper’ name, or to speak a language in its distinct way is intrinsically ‘perfectionist’ (1989, 70). Once we have separated things linguistically with “this is not that,” language provides us with the goad to get to the “that” and define it in its essence. In the desire to pin down the essential nature of things, we both attribute motives and are goaded by the motives we attribute. Burke connects the idea of “rotten with perfection” with Aristotle’s concept of “entelechy”, the notion that each being aims at the perfection natural to its

kind” (1989, 71). Whether advertising shows, for example, women as mothers or women as CEOs, there is implicit in the symbolization the idea of the perfection of the word “mother” or the phrase “CEO”. For Burke, entelechy operates in the realm of symbolic action: “a principle of perfection [is] implicit in the nature of symbol systems; and in keeping with his nature as symbol-using animal, man is moved by this principle” (1989, 71). Burke explains that we often apply this principle of perfection ironically when we call someone “a perfect fool” or a “perfect villain” (1989, 72). The principle of perfection is one of thoroughness, so we are moved or goaded by a principle of thoroughness in our symbol use.

4.3.4. Summary of “Definition of Man”

Burke’s definition of man is integral to understanding how dramatic principles operate in advertising discourse and how they are persuasive. The categories of motion and action, in conjunction with Burke’s definition of man, marry the animal aspect of humanity with the symbol-using aspect and demonstrates the interrelationship between the two aspects. He argues that language separates us from our natural condition (our animal aspect) or from simple motion and, in part, it does so by creating the “linguistic” negative. With the invention of the negative comes the human ability to create hierarchy through the simple formula of “this is not that,” thus setting up the “this” to be preferred over the “that”. Once we have created our hierarchies, we are “goaded” by hierarchic principles, as much as we are “rotten with perfection”. Once we have created the goad, it manipulates us, insisting we live by the hierarchies we set up. Burke argues that language itself functions on these principles, but also that genres, based on these principles, arise and involve us in their vision for the world. The result is that some genres of discourse, such as advertising, may come to function as a kind of redemption drama driven by the key clauses of Burke’s definition. Because advertising is ubiquitous, its commercial principles infuse

the social world in which we exist, and its motives are enthymematic. It is an engaging public discourse, and Burke's definition of man helps to categorize and analyse how it attempts to engage, influence, and affect us.

4.4. Dramatism & Advertising's Primary Motives

Advertising, like religion, has an eminently social function, in addition to its more strictly commercial function. It seeks to establish social relationships among people, but also to establish and consolidate its own position as a kind of primary framework in which social relations take place. Because of its pervasiveness and because of our response to symbol systems, advertising seeks to influence people's attitudes towards objects and experiences, but also towards other people. As it attempts to influence attitudes, it also attempts to influence beliefs and values towards society. Advertising seeks to influence social relationships by dramatising its vision of social order which, in turn, affirms its enactment of social relationships. We can understand how it attempts to exert this influence by examining the genre through the lens provided by Burke's definition of man and the dramatic nature of language. Burke claims that ritual drama is enacted through seven interlocked moments⁵⁶, any one of which can act as a catalyst to start the sequence of action in the drama of human relations (Ruekert 141). Thus, according to Burke, in ritual drama we see "the archetype . . . of the drama of human relations" and the "paradigm of all linguistic action" (Rueckert 128).

These "moments" are infused with symbolic intensity as is ritual drama which is, in part, why advertising is such a powerful genre of discourse. Burke explains his theory as an "intricate line of exposition," (1989, 280) and Gusfield summarizes the foundation of Burke's society, saying, "[i]f drama, then conflict. If conflict, then hierarchy. If hierarchy, then guilt. If guilt, then

⁵⁶ Burke's "seven interlocked moments" are first discussed on p.70 of this dissertation.

redemption. If redemption, then victimage” (33). Inherent in discourses, especially those with explicit and significant presence in social life, is the drama of human relations. When we use Burke to analyse advertising, we see how this commercial genre is infused with religiosity, while an understanding of the dramatic nature of language shows how advertising seeks to exhort its audiences to actions and attitudes that are enthymematic to advertising. In the next six sections, I will explain how advertising fulfils a role that has traditionally been filled by religion. It seeks to help us fulfill our symbolic identification needs; it connects us in a very loose way to other “believers”, and it seeks to make us feel we are an integral part of something larger than just a product or a brand community.

4.4.1. Advertising: The Negative and Conflict

As I noted earlier, the concept of the negative fuels the entire advertising genre. It moralizes with its hortatory negative implying “‘Thou shalt not’ continue on without” the product or service it sells. It attempts to reinforce in its audience a sense of deficiency or sin, in effect creating conflict. The instant an ad suggests that we need something, it seeks to create or emphasize a conflict within us, while attempting to convince us that if we consume, we may achieve a kind of symbolic resolution. For example, if we are a “do-it-yourselfer” home renovator, the conflict is between our skills and the projects we tackle. By shopping at Home Depot, a “diy” paradise, we may achieve the entelechial perfection of the “do-it-yourselfer” symbolism on which such advertising relies. All members of the audience are deficient in material goods, from clothing to cars, from personal hygiene products to office supplies. However, it is not just deficiency in material goods that advertising sells. It also sells us the idea that we are deficient as we are. Wrinkle cream, for example, sells us on the idea that we are deficient in youth. Weight loss ads sell us on the idea that we are deficient because we have too

much flesh. Cleaning products sell us on the idea that we are insufficiently clean. Ads that sell us stuff for our kids sell us on the idea that we are lacking as parents and that to be a good parent means to be a consumer of products. However, just buying and using the product is not really enough to fill the void that advertising itself seeks to create for its audience, nor can consumption of products perform the acts of transformation that advertising seems to promise. Thus, the ideal self can never be realized because, “ideals . . . are incapable of being perfectly realized” (Rueckert 46). The inability to achieve the transformation advertising implicitly promises leaves the audience in a state of conflict because the consumer cannot exist without a developed sense of lack, and ultimately a consumer’s identity comes to be predicated upon lack. Advertising must reinforce that aspect of identity.

Conflict is inherent in the relationship between advertising and its audiences because the identity of “consumer” cannot be perfected without continuous consumption; however, in fact, it can never be “perfected” because the idea of perfected – past tense – suggests that it is something that can be achieved and moved forward from; in addition, as Rueckert points out, ideals cannot be achieved because they cannot be perfected. The consumer, by definition “consumes.” When we stop consuming, even momentarily, we are rejecting the identity that a major cultural discourse insists we try to achieve. If we want to achieve the perfection that advertising discourse promises, both with the consumption of goods and service, and in the ideal identities depicted in commercials, we must continue to consume or be lost. As with any religion, one cannot be a member of the congregation without striving to achieve what the religion posits as the ideal human character. In advertising discourse, the perfection of identity lies in the continual striving or the continual consuming. The moment we have completed a commercial transaction, we are

no longer consumers and the ideal identity advertising posits for its audience is lost: we are once again deficient, even with the latest purchase fresh out of the store.

4.4.2. Advertising: Hierarchy and Guilt

As Burke notes, as soon as the concept of the negative is introduced, the principle of hierarchy follows because humans, as symbol using animals, begin to rank phenomena as soon as differentiation occurs. Because hierarchy seems to evoke a principle of perfection, Burke argues that a constituent of hierarchy is hierarchic guilt.

The hierarchic principle runs its course in the advertising genre in at least two ways; the first one is concrete and the second more abstract. First, in individual ads, the hierarchy that is constructed is one that tries to convince us that we should prefer Brand X over brand Y because it is “better” in some way, whether it is actually a more worthy product or whether the ads have managed to give a more intense meaning to the product. We mount the hierarchy of goods by pursuing the “best” brand. “Best” could mean the one that “expresses” the “consumer’s” personality, one that is the cheapest or most expensive, or one that reveals how the consumer sees herself, or one that helps her create a coherent consumer identity based on complementary brands. The second way hierarchy is constructed in advertising is through its dual ways of attempting to exert pressure on its audiences’ identities. First, advertising implies the consumer is an imperfect individual because she lacks a quality that buying a product or service advertising sells would impute to her, such as youth, beauty, confidence, or sex appeal. For example, there is a Depends commercial for adult incontinence products that shows a well groomed middle-aged woman whose hair flips with each bold glance she casts as she strides down the street. This commercial sells bold, adult confidence to its audiences. Second, the consumer is also an imperfect one because she has not yet made the purchase required to become perfected.

Hierarchical guilt comes from an upset of the social order as it is imagined implicitly in advertising discourse.

From advertising's construction of hierarchy comes the genre's encouragement for the consumer to feel hierarchic guilt. First, because she has not purchased the product or service, she has not ascended the goods hierarchy for example, as those characters in the commercial using the product may have done. On the other hand, if the consumer is a user of a product, but still has not achieved the idealistic life presented in the ads for the product, she is invited to feel guilt because she has not been transformed by the product. In advertising, consumers are not good enough the way they are, but even after buying into the product, they are still not good enough because they must keep consuming more and more to achieve the principle of perfection that advertising suggests can be achieved. While this cycle of consumption is fuelled by guilt and lack, it is also the only way of perfecting the consumer's identity. The cycle of consumption that fuels the consumer's identity has its parallel in Christian discourses, where the practitioner must come to church weekly to be absolved. The concept of original sin, or as Burke would call it, categorical guilt, functions in both religion and advertising discourse to make audiences acknowledge their "sinful" state, rather than to help them transcend it.

Closely connected to hierarchic guilt is Burke's hortatory negative. We see examples of the hortatory negative in the Biblical concept of the Ten Commandments. For advertising, there are two hortatory negatives implied; the first is, "thou shalt not fail to strive for personal perfection" and the second is "thou shalt not fail to consume". Once this order is established in the advertising genre, consumption is the ultimate good and the only way to meet identity needs because non-consumption would be nihilism. Consumers must mount the hierarchy, striving to transcend from ordinary and banal to extraordinary and original, through rituals of consumption.

But our identities are never achieved once and for all and we must always reiterate them. Hence, consumption is an ongoing ritual that both momentarily achieves and maintains consumer identity, and continually both promises and denies the consumer individual perfection.

Religious discourses prescribe behaviour and attempt to control that behaviour by the promise of rewards, whether they are spiritual or material in nature. Likewise, advertising prescribes and attempts to control behaviours in the same fashion. The ideal world posited in advertising shows a hierarchical order: those with the product mount the hierarchy of “consumerism” and achieve transcendence, over and over again. In addition, when we cannot achieve perfection of the dual aspects of identity that advertising exhorts us to achieve, namely that of an ideal self and an ideal consumer, we are rejected from the social order advanced by advertising. According to Burke’s theory of language, that rejection leads to guilt. The repetition of messages for products works to suggest consumers are guilty of not buying the right products or not consuming in the ways they should be.

As Christianity attempts to persuade its believers that they are born in “original sin”, so does advertising attempt to impute that categorical guilt to potential consumers. The very existence of advertising itself suggests that there are those who are not consuming; its existence emphasizes each audience member’s “sin.” If we were all clean enough, young enough, vital enough, caring enough, thin enough, beautiful enough, happy enough, there would be no need for the genre that imputes strongly symbolic meanings to ordinary mundane goods. In the world of advertising, idealized people living idealized lives and enjoying idealized social relations that are realized through a commercial experience imply a world that consists of just the opposite: our world situated outside of advertising.

The advertising genre suggests that the worst thing an audience can do is to fail to acknowledge our categorical guilt of failing to become perfect. Guilt arises from the hierarchical motive because, according to Burke, “Order leads to Guilt (for who can keep the commandments)” (1961, 4), and it is human nature to crave order, even as we reject some elements of the order. Whether our rejection is conscious or subconscious, the very existence of advertising discourse as we know it suggests that audiences reject some of its principles of perfection or at least fail to achieve the perfection advertising holds out to us. In other words, because advertising keeps on selling images and lifestyles, as well as products, and because no matter how much we purchase we do not achieve the lifestyle depicted, and the very existence of advertising reinforces our guilt. If guilt comes from not adhering to the hierarchy, then an inherent aspect of hierarchy is the notion of perfection. Burke notes that “the negativistic principle of guilt implicit in the nature of order combines with the principles of thoroughness (or ‘perfection’)” (1989, 280) and motivates humans to rhetorical action. For Christianity, a key step in the conversion process is the rhetorical action of admitting to an essentially sinful nature, while in advertising, the conversion process is the rhetorical action of admitting to a nature characterized by lack, deficiency, and urgent imperfection.

4.4.3. Advertising: Hierarchy and Perfection

One of the concepts that religious discourses must grapple with is that of perfection. Most major religions hold out the promise of the perfection of human nature through relation with the divine. In religions that promise immortality of the soul, the soul is perfected, or achieves a thoroughness of being, once it gains and maintains contact with the “ultimate reality” whatever that ultimate reality is. In a similar manner, advertising invites its audience to strive for “perfection”. Perfection in advertising is not attained through meditation, selflessness, sacrifice,

and rejection of worldly goods, however. Perfection is achieved by embracing worldly goods, through practising conspicuous consumption, and through being obsessed with materialism and appearance. Through the promises of the advertising world, the audience is invited to strive to attain the perfection awaiting at the apex of the hierarchy. Religious discourse describes the ideal believer and offers guidance on how to achieve that ideal. Likewise, advertising discourse enables each audience member to imagine an ideal individual self and offers ways for individuals to achieve the perfection of their own unique selves.

In advertising discourse, the perfection of people also occurs in their identity as consumers, but that identity can only be perfected through the mounting of the hierarchy which occurs through the act of consuming. The label “consumer” has a teleology that can only be borne out in a habit of consumption. Becoming a consumer and being a consumer is a process, and it is the practice itself that is significant, not the material goods that are accumulated through the practice, although acquiring the material goods helps cement faith in the practise. According to Burke, each stage of the hierarchy is “infused with the spirit of the Ultimate Stage” (1969, 118), thus each act shares in the meaning of the total action, just as each ad shares in the total meaning of the advertising genre. Each purchase, no matter how small, urges us closer to the ideal identity of consumer as it allows us to reiterate the identity advertising holds out for us to wear.

Trying to achieve the consumer identity results in a double bind, however. To become the perfected consumer, one must consume. But one can never achieve perfection, because the perfection is in the consumption. The advertising genre seems to promise that our deepest, most human yearnings can be satisfied through consumption, but we can never really scale the hierarchy and stay at the top. We can never achieve paradise, because the paradise exists in the

acts of consumption and therefore, paradise can only be achieved through endless consumption, which results in our needs never being met, only endlessly stimulated. Foss notes that in Burke's theory, "each being aims at the perfection natural to its kind, and things are seen 'according to the perfection (that is, the finishedness) of which that kind is capable'" (1985, 206). Advertising shows its audiences the perfection of consumer identity, but suggests that this perfection can only be striven for, never truly arrived at. Because there is a distance between the ideal self advertising hopes to help the consumer imagine and the real self, as well as between the perfected consumer advertising imagines and the real consumer, divisions of identity exist.

4.4.4. Advertising: Hierarchy and Mystery

According to Foss, "hierarchy unifies its members through the perfection embodied in its ideal, [but] hierarchy is also characterised by division" (1985, 207). Division leads to what Burke calls "mystery" because we are separated from others by the hierarchy itself. According to Burke, mystery is one of the most persuasive principles in rhetoric because mystery demands that people question how they are different from others and how they can become like others. Mystery seeks to understand how to achieve the transformation necessary to not just *identify* with others but to become *as* others. Mystery is, fundamentally, the most persuasive aspect of advertising. Advertising shows us a world that does not exist, populated by characters who have lives only in the Adland. Both myth and mystery, Adland encourages us to see its characters as substantially different from us; they then become "mysteries" to us. Advertising attempts to seduce audiences to desire the transformation that will make audiences at one with advertising's fantasies, and somehow, the mystery of transformation occurs through the product. Through this mystery, advertising is persuasive in its selling of ideals. It uses all the tools at its disposal to

convince us that we can live a better life and achieve an ideal self through consumption. In advertising, hierarchy and mystery are perpetuated in three ways.

First, there is the hierarchic separation between us and the characters that populate advertising. Inherent in this division is mystery. Because we are separate from others, they appear “mysterious” to us in their separateness from us. They may be “beautiful people” engaged in living “the good life” and doing exciting things. A recent example of living “the good life” can be seen in a lottery commercial where a group of friends are playing hide and seek in an unconventional way: one group is in a boat and the second group is in a helicopter. Or the characters may be “like us”, ordinary people engaged in ordinary activities, such as doing laundry or cleaning house or cooking. But the “ordinary” people in the ads have life easier than we do because of their relationship with the product. Stains magically disappear with Mr. Clean’s magic eraser, and the simple act of baking Pillsbury-cookies-in-a-tube mends family relationships or ends childhood crises. Housework becomes an act of joy, when combined with the right products. Whether the characters that populate the ads are beautiful people or ordinary folk, we are separated from them and they are mysterious to us because they are living lives that we are not. In an ad, the character or characters move from the crisis of not having the product to the happiness of having it. In the process of diverting crises and becoming happy or successful or fulfilled, the characters acquire a kind of symbolic power imbued in the product. This powerful symbolic quality is a part of the hierarchic separation between audience and ad characters that ultimately enables them to experience transformation from fractured identities to whole identities.

The second way advertising imposes mystery on us is through the way it implies the audience’s need for transformation. Advertising invites us to see a discrepancy between us as we

are as individuals (the real us) and us as we could be with the aid of the product (the ideal us). The potentiality of the new us is mysterious to us while the current us is deficient, thus we are attracted to the vision of a new identity. Rueckert explains, saying that mystery is a “form of . . . social courtship – the wooing of one class by another, either higher or lower, for purposes of transcending social estrangement” (144); Thus, “all persons, places, things and ideas acquire a ‘hierarchic charge’ and become important in the vast and complex drama of social courtship” (144). According to Rueckert then, “depending upon one’s position in the hierarchy, the persons, places, things and ideas acquire ‘mystery’ – what Burke calls the ‘mysterious glow of status’ and become . . . both instruments of wooing and that which one hopes to gain by wooing” (Rueckert 144). The ad world becomes an instrument of wooing, attempting to persuade and seduce us with the idea that our lives will be better if we have the product. But ads also depict what we hope to gain by the wooing: lives of power, joy, credibility, and unified identity.

The third way that advertising perpetuates hierarchy and therefore reinforces mystery is in the way it segregates us from others by dividing us into brand camps. Advertising attempts to reinforce mystery by showing us the gap between us as particular brand name users and others who choose different brand names. Advertising promises to solve this particular mystery by making us whole and selling us complete identification through our commercial brand choices. However, this promise is another one advertising cannot fulfill because it is the nature of identification that it reinforces our divisions from others. Nonetheless, when we prefer a brand over another, we become complicit in participating in the hierarchy advertising holds out for us.

According to Foss, “mystery performs two important functions in a hierarchical system. One is that it encourages the maintenance and preservation of the hierarchy because it encourages obedience” (1985, 208) and “it enables the members of the hierarchy to identify and

communicate with one another . . . by hiding some of the differences that do exist and allowing beliefs to be held about substances they share” (1985, 209). Audiences seem to accept being called consumers by the advertising world. Because we accept advertising as our central form of public communication, we are “obedient” to it. We believe it does not affect us and in this belief we are obedient to its rather self-conscious presence in our lives, where it will often comment on itself⁵⁷. We allow advertising the space it demands. It also enables “consumers” to identify with each other through the scenarios it presents and the products it sells, thus hiding some of the differences we have and enabling us to identify with each through the product or the transformation that the Adland promises.

4.4.5. Advertising: Purification through Mortification

Advertising does not usually overtly attempt to mortify its audience, but covert mortification is a significant source of its power⁵⁸. We are constantly awash in the message that we are not good enough as we are and that we are in danger of humiliating ourselves by not taking advantage of the benefit that advertising offers. Advertising draws attention to our imperfections implicitly suggesting we should be self-conscious about our presence in the world and do everything possible to transcend ourselves and our ordinary lives. We are “mortified” in two ways by advertising discourse. First, it shows us, through its vision of Adland, how we are deficient, not good enough, and unworthy. It teaches us ways to feel embarrassment about

⁵⁷ For example, there’s a car commercial that starts out looking like a TV ad for the “Snuggli” – a blanket with arms. As the ad progresses, the viewers see a crowbar tip at the top left hand corner of their TV screen and the Snuggli ad is pried off to reveal a muscular man standing in front of a SUV destroying the snuggli ad on the screen. The tag line is “you spend too much time indoors.” This vehicle ad distracts us from the fact that the audience for the ad is spending time indoors watching the TV ad and, in fact, that the vehicle ad itself encourages us to go “outside” by getting inside a vehicle.

⁵⁸ Overt mortification does occur in some public service advertising and in health-related advertising. For example, a recent TV campaign encouraging fitness shows a big-bellied middle-aged man sitting on a doctor’s examining table, but the aged body has the head of small boy. This commercial attempts to make audiences, probably of parents, feel mortified that they are not making their kids play and are, thus, making the child old before his time.

ourselves, our bodies, our scent, our biological processes, what we eat, how we love, and what we love. Second, since encoded in advertising is the idea that the audience can only perfect its identity through consumption, when we are not consuming, we should also feel guilt or mortification about not striving to achieve our ideal consumer identity. Our guilt is particularly resonant in ads that exhort us to “save the planet” by limiting consumption on the one hand, but on the other, exhort us to consume “green” products. We are asked to “end poverty” but never asked to stop consuming and poverty is never linked to consumption. The advertising genre seems to thrive on showing us how we may be guilty of a variety of social offences, but it also holds out the means to cleanse ourselves of that guilt brought on by our lack and by the need it attempts to create to have us affirm our consumer identities. We are offered the means to purify ourselves or absolve ourselves from our “sinfulness”, whether it is because we may suffer the threat of social negation or because we have not been the best consumers we can be. Mortification can be alleviated through purification, which occurs through purchase. In the brief moment of consumption, we are on the razor’s edge of personal transformation and the fulfilment of the entelechial motive that advertising imputes to us. In that moment of purchase we have mounted the hierarchy successfully and are ready to begin the cycle anew.

4.4.6. Advertising: Redemption and Transcendence

Advertising promises redemption to its guilt ridden congregation in two ways. First, advertising promises to redeem the individual and help him achieve his own personal perfection, and second it promises a way to redeem the flawed consumer identity. First, if individuals in the audience are made aware of their lack, they can overcome their deficiency by a single act of consumption. In the first moment the consumer owns the product or uses the service, the promise of personal transformation prevails. Redemption lingers between payment and use. However,

whatever transformation may be achieved, it is not the transformation to an ideal self because the ideal self can never be realized. Second, if the audience is in between consumings, it should be considering its next act of consumption. Consumption brings redemption and transcendence as we become perfected teleologically as consumers. Each purchase becomes an act of redemption and rebirth because our consumer identity is reiterated through the act of consumption. Secondly, each act of consumption promises a remedy to the exigence that the individual ad has pointed out and that the product has promised to solve. However, advertising never stops; it is constant, so we are constantly shown how we lack. The more our lack is brought to our attention, the more we are goaded by hierarchy. If we ascend the hierarchy, we are goaded by the negative as well as by the ascension itself. Thus the cycle starts again and we must reiterate our identity as consumers by continuing to consume. We must ascend the hierarchy through more purchases and demonstrate our constant willingness to address our guilt and pollution.

4.5. Conclusion: Advertising Enacts a Discourse of Salvation

Burke argues that patterns of discourse which surround particular disciplines or institutions will arrange themselves in ways similar to the patterns manifested in ritual drama. Both advertising and religious discourses manifest these patterns. The motives inherent in advertising are similar to those inherent in religious discourses, in particular evangelical discourses. Both seek to change behaviour through promises of salvation and exhortation to live the consuming life. Advertising shows us the things we lack, the social privileges we deny ourselves, and the ways we are deficient, but at the same time, demonstrates how these wants and deficiencies can be mediated with consumption. The implicit promise that it offers is that we can actually become transformed and transcend our all too human traits. However, for advertising to be effective, it must convince us that salvation is possible while paradoxically

showing us that salvation is impossible. Thus, salvation is probable, but not absolute, reinforcing a basic tenet of rhetorical practice which deals with probabilities rather than certainties. The only kind of redemption available to us in advertising is the redemption enabled in the act of consuming.

Both advertising and religious discourses attempt to convince target audiences not only that they are insufficient as is, but also that they are individuals who can be redeemed and transcend their flawed nature. Advertising discourse implicitly asks us embrace the conflict between how we are and what we could be as envisioned in advertising. Its effectiveness operates on the assumption that it can instil a sense of guilt in us for not attaining the perfection that it promises is just one purchase away, and that we will continue striving (purchasing) to attain that perfection which seems so real in advertising. When we attempt to assuage the guilt and mediate the conflict, we begin a momentary ascension of the hierarchy that it implicitly builds. At the moment of purchase there lies in front of the consumer the potential Promised Land that advertising has mapped for us. In the moment of the purchase, we stand to be transformed from ordinary to extraordinary, from non-consumer to consumer. Once the purchase is made and the glow of the moment wears off, we have not been transformed. In addition, we are no longer achieving the perfection of the term “consumer”. Thus, we are exhorted to engage in the cycle “one more time” and again and again and again. In this manner, advertising as genre sustains itself as a significant cultural discourse, proving it is eternal, beyond the reaches of product longevity, fads, and styles. It goes on even as products and target audiences change. Advertising, unlike religious discourses, cannot give us concrete ways to change ourselves because in all its messages it has to iterate the same message: we are not good enough, we can try to consume our way to fulfilment, but the fulfilment exists in the action of consumption itself.

Advertising has to focus on target audiences as individuals and persuade the target audiences that narcissistic individualism is the highest good, which has significant ramifications for a civil society.

Chapter Five

Advertising and Rhetorical Indisposition: A Narcissistic Paradise

“Obviously individualism and narcissism are not synonymous, but the reduction of a commonweal to a series of private first-order desires and the trivialization of the common good as nothing but aggregated discrete private interests can be thought of as a kind of regression.”⁵⁹

5.1. Religious Discourse and Identity

Burke’s theories show how we are primed to respond to messages that offer us a role in the guilt – mortification – redemption drama that he claims often plays out naturally in language itself. Since we respond to language use in the ways that Burke has argued, and since we have been primed to understand advertising in terms of a salvational discourse, I argue that it functions as a form of religion, in part, because it attempts to influence our very identities. I will argue that advertising invites us to imagine ourselves as beings to whom individualism is the most sacred and significant aspect of personhood. As Edwin Black in “The Second Persona” notes, how a rhetor imagines the audience is recoverable through examination of the rhetor’s choices; because advertising insists on telling us how inadequate we are and then showing us ways to improve ourselves, its focus is on individualism as the most important human quality, and it invites us similarly to focus on our individualism rather than on other people or our communities. Advertising imagines us as an audience devoted to self-enhancement to the exclusion of genuine human connection and civic good. It invites us to aspire to and to partake of

⁵⁹ Benjamin R. Barber in *Consumed*, 159.

a narcissist's paradise. And when we respond to advertising, we are, on some level, responding to the goads inherent in the discourse.

According to sociologist Hans Mol, religion may actually be defined as the sacralization of identity (x). Sacralization means, according to Mol, the "process by means of which on the level of symbol-systems certain patterns acquire . . . [a] taken-for-granted, stable, eternal quality. Sacralization, then, is a sort of brake applied to unchecked infinite adaptations in symbol systems" (3). Advertising, like other major religions, helps sacralize identity and applies this "brake" so that the ideal consumer identifies herself as a consumer first, and any other aspect of identity is secondary.

In advertising discourse, the taken-for-granted quality is "individualism". The advertising genre's key to putting the brakes on "unchecked infinite adaptations" of its symbol system is its focus on and concern for "individualism" and helping its target audiences both achieve and announce their individualism through their purchases. Thus, in advertising, a consumer identity is not tied to brands, purchase patterns, or "lifestyles", but to consumption. Advertising must be able to "check" infinite identity adaptations in its audience in order to secure a stabilized consumer's identity that is unchanging even as brand loyalty may change. By sacralizing individualism across the genre, advertising ensures that this quality is emphasized in discrete iterations of advertising. Sacralization then "produces immunity against persuasion similar to the biological immunization process" (Mol 5). In other words, advertising's goal is to ensure that we cannot be persuaded to stop consuming. It is advertising's *raison d'être* to ensure that while a consumer may switch brands, he will never be dissuaded from consuming.

The identity that advertising works to sacralize is that of the "individual". Without the sacralizing of individualism, the ideal consumer identity could not be maintained and could

become open to continuous differentiation. In other words, advertising exhorts the pursuit of individualism and confers identity and meaning through the practice of consumption as action toward the quest of personal perfection above any other consideration. If individualism was not the primary aspect of a consumer identity, identity maintenance would occur in other ways. Advertising would have to acknowledge the contingency that people might choose not to consume, other than for utilitarian purposes. For example, if a consumer gets attached to a particular brand that becomes obsolete, rather than choose another brand she may become unwilling to participate in continual consumption. In its own best interests, advertising must integrate identificatory significance into the paradigm of consumer identity, so that consumers find their identity not in a particular product, but in the very act of consuming. It has to reckon with our need for identification to get us to see ourselves as consumers. In other words, advertising does not just cultivate brand affinity, but affinity with identity as a consumer. Audiences are asked to embrace the idea of being a consumer and that one aspect of identity is stabilized in the advertising genre. Thus, for example, mothers are not just mothers, but consumers of mom-oriented products. Advertising promises meaning and belonging first, through consumption, and second through the goods it promotes. The secondary identity is as a consumer of particular products whose acts of consumption build an individualist identity. That meaning that advertising promises to consumers is integral to advertising in order for it to continue with the same assumptions that have underpinned it for the last hundred years. Advertising perpetually invokes an audience of “consumers”. This invocation means that a person may stop being a consumer of a particular brand, but will not feel as though an aspect of identity has been removed because the baseline identity of an audience member is first and foremost as consumer. Mol claims “future differentiation appears to hinge on a baseline of

existing identity and the guarantee of future identity” (3). Advertising isolates and sacralizes one aspect of identity, and in order to continue to exist, that aspect is stabilized through consuming in general. Thus advertising attempts to exert control over the baseline of current and future identity for its target audiences.

As a result of this focus on the self, the ideal consumer would be a genuine narcissist. This outcome is a cause for concern because it could lead to what rhetorical theorist Harold Barrett calls “unfavourable narcissism” which leads to “rhetorical indisposition.” According to Barrett, “*rhetorical indisposition* [represents] the disabling influence of unfavourable, oppressive narcissism”(x). It leads to a state of “diminished potential interaction with others”(x) and therefore, Barrett believes, it is a threat to human society. Advertising seeks to create its ideal audience of narcissists in its drive to encourage continual consumption.

The cycles of consumption that advertising advocates can only be sustained through advertising’s certainty that the only relevant pursuit its audience undertakes is the pursuit of self-perfection. Advertising urges a commitment to the enhancement of individuality as a primary message of its genre; this commitment to the concept of individualism and dedication to enhancing the self, even perfecting the self, has consequences for interpersonal relationships as well as for community relationships and for the practice of civility and compassion. Because advertising is a primary form of civic discourse, it provides a significant portion of our symbolic environment and models its version of ideal behaviour. If we accept the modeling as appropriate, we are accepting a role of people incapable of responding to other people and capable only of pursuing narcissistic forms of gratification. A final consequence of a commitment and devotion to pursuing individualism in this way is a strong sense of alienation, and division from and blindness to others, an argument that will be fully elaborated in Chapter 6.

Advertising sells self-enhancement and celebration of the individual along with its products and services. A firm commitment to and belief in individuality is the fulcrum upon which advertising rests. It suggests that the way to “honour the sacred” is by consuming. It suggests that each and every member of each and every target audience can achieve a perfect self: physically, emotionally, and materially. The beauty of advertising’s vision is that it works enthymematically because it encourages its audience to believe that each individual audience member supplies the vision of a perfect self, while at the same time advertising inundates people with its own consumeristic vision of human perfection.

On the other hand, this vision of self that can be realized and perfected through consumption is undermined by advertising’s competing vision of the ideal consumer. In this vision, the ideal consumer only exists in the moment of consumption, but it is an ideal to be striven for through continual consumption. Given the apparent fruitlessness of the consumer’s quest for redemption, how can advertising sustain an audience’s commitment to its vision? It is sustained and the competing visions reconciled through advertising’s drive to sacralize individualism. Pursuing individualism, enhancing the self, fixating on self-improvement: all these activities demonstrate to audiences that the highest good to be sought is individuality.

In this chapter, I will discuss how advertising seeks to sacralize that one aspect of identity: individualism. The primary identity that it wants us to assume, of course, is that of a consumer, but by sacralising individuality, advertising seeks to weld the consumer identity onto its audiences. As I have noted earlier, religious discourses hold out identities for their audiences exhorting them to right beliefs and right actions. Advertising holds out “individualism” as the right belief and the right goal of all action: it is indeed the holy grail of the advertising genre. It is crucial that audiences internalize a belief in the sacrosanct nature of individuality, even if

unconsciously, in order for them to maintain and affirm their status as consumers. In sacralizing individuality, the genre idealizes, models, and attempts to persuade its audience that it is the most significant constituent of identity. This constituent becomes fixed and immutable across the advertising genre, and transcends products, brands, and experiences that individual advertisements promote.

In evoking a consumer identity for all its target audiences, advertising essentially makes a consumer identity the only choice available if the audience wants to partake of the salvation offered through the attainment of a perfected individuality. In advertising, the notion of “individualism” is set apart from the product and kept sacred, in part through encouraging the worship of individualism through a kind of ritualized devotion.

If, as Mol claims, “religion defines man and his place in the universe” (x), and if advertising functions as a religion, then how does it define its audiences and their places in the universe, and what is the effect of the identity advertising asks us to become emotionally attached to? This chapter will answer those questions.

I will first summarize Mol’s argument and then describe how individualism is sacralized in advertising by drawing on Mol’s description of sacralization as occurring through a process. I will show how that process occurs in advertising. Sacralization occurs through a four-part mechanism consisting of objectification, commitment, ritual, and myth. I will then argue that advertising models a way of being in the world and a way of seeing “the self” at work in that world with an end result of attempting to create a society based on narcissistic individualism which, as Barrett argues, is at the root of rhetorical indisposition and, therefore, is a threat to civil society.

5.2. Mol's Identity and the Sacred

Mol argues that identity arises out of a dialectic between integration and differentiation and that the integrating function of religion works to stabilize identity. He argues that identity occurs within “fragile frames” that can be threatened or even dissolved leading to crisis for both individuals and societies. He notes that both the “latent functions and essential relevance of religion” is its ability to stabilize identity and “mitigate anxiety” (79). He believes that this stabilization of identity and the consequent reduction in anxiety result in the creation of order, which in turn, feeds identity. Advertising attempts to function in similar ways. Its insistence on a consumer identity and its exhortations to perfect self are both attempts to stabilize audience identity and mitigate anxiety. However, as I have previously noted, advertising is paradoxical in this function because while it ostensibly gives consumers ways to overcome the anxieties it breeds, success in this endeavour would be advertising's downfall.

Mol says, “religious beliefs and rituals meet the need for order and identity by providing interpretations of reality” (68). Advertising functions in this same way. It offers adherents (consumers) rituals (shopping and consuming) to help create order. As it does so, advertising also offers a common interpretation of reality, which according to Mol is “a prerequisite for social identity and the constructive link with personal identity” (67). Lastly, advertising attempts to integrate all forms of identity into a consumer paradigm, as it provides an interpretation of reality in which consumption and self-enhancement are sacred duties.

Mol notes that symbol systems are fundamental to the human ability to adapt, but that endless adaptation would be deleterious to individual identity and to society because endless adaptation would compromise an individual's ability to function as part of coherent society. Thus, identity is sacralized, creating order on both the individual and social levels. Mol claims,

“sacralization protects identity, a system of meaning, or a definition of reality, and modifies, obstructs, or (if necessary) legitimates change” (6). Advertising’s sacralization of individualism provides a system of meaning that underpins the entire genre. It is necessary that it do so because the sacralization process gives continuity to all advertising across products, ad styles, historical context, and perhaps even cultures.

Advertising’s implicit calls for self-absorption and self-focus help it make its exhortations to accept a consumer identity as the first order of culture. Its goal in having audiences accept this identity is its own self-preservation⁶⁰. Mol says that “religious practices give special underpinning to particular conceptions of order within a culture, thus making the security of the individual less precarious” (9). Advertising underpins a particular conception of order, but it also creates and affirms this conception of order.

Mol wants his readers to bear in mind both “the latent and primary sources of identity (3). Advertising offers, arguably, for most of us, a latent form of identity. However, with its presence everywhere and with everything open to sponsorship, it is perfectly positioned to take on the role of providing audiences a primary source of identity and it operates as though its audiences have agreed to take on that role. It has an integrating force, in part, simply because of its ubiquity, but also because of its concern with the issues fundamental to the human condition. In the next four sections, I will describe Mol’s four-part process of sacralization and demonstrate how advertising uses these processes for its own ends.

⁶⁰ In fact, self-absorption and self-focus generally mean that people spend more money on consumer goods. See the 2008 article, “Misery is not Miserly: Sad and Self-Focused Individuals Spend More” in *Psychological Science* (19) 6, 525 – 530. Authors Cryder, Lerner, Gross and Dahl investigate what they call “the misery is not miserly effect”.

5.3. Objectification

According to Mol, objectification is a significant mechanism in sacralising identity. Mol defines objectification as “the tendency to sum up the variegated elements of mundane existence in a transcendental point of reference where they can appear more orderly, more consistent and more timeless. Under certain conditions, this transformed point of reference may in turn profoundly transform conceptions of existence or provide the leverage for transformation” (11). In advertising, the transcendental point of reference is “consumer.” Advertising objectifies a consumer’s identity in two ways. First, it teaches the individual consumer to view herself as a conglomeration of bits and pieces that can be improved upon. Thus, faces and feet, hands and elbows, hair and torsos, fingers and toes, eyes and lips, are distinguished as separate from the self, not as a part of the self. These separate parts may be improved upon in a variety of ways using a variety of products. The improvements the consumer makes on the bits and pieces, so advertising promises, will feed into the creation of the perfected self. The second way it objectifies the consumer identity is to implicitly integrate the pursuit of perfection with the perfected consumer. Advertising thrives because it does not give a totalizing vision of an irredeemably flawed person; because it offers a piece by piece examination of flaws, the genre reinforces a commitment to its promises that these flaws can be fixed one piece at a time. A person cannot be a perfect consumer without the knowledge of her own imperfections and the motivation to fix them through consumption. Advertising gathers all aspects of its target audience’s identity and sums them up into one: consumer.

For advertising, objectification means that mundane shopping experiences, from toilet paper to athlete’s foot powder, for example, all transcend the mundane because these necessary purchases help affirm and consolidate the consumer identity, which transcends individual

products and brands. Therefore, even when we shop for utilitarian products, such as bathroom tissue, advertising hopes that we will buy “cottony softness”, cuddly kittens, playfulness, and cuteness rather than just toilet paper. A fundamental aspect of our lives is consumption, thus advertising wants to urge us to make “consumer” integral to our philosophy of what individuality means to each of us and seeks to weld this identity maintaining function even to the most practical purchase.

Although the most obvious function of advertising is to shepherd target audiences toward particular purchase decisions, it functions as a genre to fix its target audiences with the primary identity of consumer. Products will come and products will go, brands will grow in popularity and wither, but advertising will work to shape and mould the one constant in the consumption equation and that is people. Its job is to objectify a consumer identity so that it becomes mostly invisible to us, but at the same time, unassailable in the notion of its rightness as an identity.

In advertising, consumer identity transcends the pursuit of new material goods, new experiences, and even new relationships. It is the one constant across all forms of advertising. One of the messages behind the messages of advertising is that everyone should be willing, able and, in fact, eager to consume. The consumer’s identity, objectified in advertising, transcends any benefit to be had from the purchasing and owning of the things themselves. Advertising solidifies the identity of the consumer by objectification in that the act of consumption constitutes consumer identity and the purchase itself provides objective proof of the act. For example, with every purchase, from a particular brand of car, such as a Mercedes or a Volkswagen, to a particular line of designer products such as Prada or Vera Wang, the consumer is expected to understand that he has “objectified” his identity and commodified it. Identity can

be bought. He is now a Mercedes man, or she is now a Prada woman. The product makes consumer identity visible through its physical existence in the world.

Advertising sacralizes individualism as a primary aspect of a consumer identity, in part, through objectification. Sociologist Peter Berger, in *The Sacred Canopy*, observes that the sacred “is apprehended as “sticking out” from the normal routines of everyday life, as something extraordinary and potentially dangerous, though its dangers can be domesticated and its potency harnessed to the needs of everyday life” (25). Berger’s observations help us to see the paradox of advertising’s construction of individualism. It sells “individualism” as a cornerstone of consumer identity, but the real danger to advertising is that the target audiences may come to believe the message of individualism, and to pursue it in ways that do not include continual consumption. Advertising must always constrain its vision of individuality by encouraging anxiety and offering solutions to alleviate that anxiety. It encourages us to develop individualism but only to the extent that we are narrowly self-focussed. Advertising harnesses our interpersonal needs and communicates fundamental meanings to us. Advertising appeals to us through our desire for consubstantiality. As humans, we desire human connection, and it promises us this connection if we enhance ourselves appropriately through consumption. Advertising’s discrete iterations show glimpses and moments of lives lived by ad characters with whom target audiences identify. These moments and glimpses are dream-like and internalized by audiences. The ads play on our fantasies, sometimes helping create them, sometimes just fleshing them out. Target audiences know, for example, that using a particular type of perfume or cologne is not going to render them irresistible to the lovers of their dreams; however, the ad makes this fantasy an imaginative reality for the audience. The process works because the audience is encouraged to have faith, if not in the product, then at least in the process of consumption. Advertising’s revelation is that

this version of the good life exists and to have *a chance* at it, the audience has to keep consuming. The advertising genre relies on its belief that the audience, for the moment it entertains the ad and its messages, for the instance it participates in the dream, participates in a moment of pure solipsism. Advertising seeks to construct a consumer ethos for all audiences, which means that all that exists in the individual's world is, at that moment, contracted and negated, subsumed into a private fantasy of momentary perfection of the individual. In this manner, selling "individualism" is the objective of advertising.

Objectification of this particular trait, individualism, works in two rather paradoxical ways. First, advertising needs to entrench individualism in its discourse to keep its audiences determined to reveal their individualism through consumption. In advertising the authentic individual can be revealed through consumption. While a consumer's identity is constructed through patterns of consumption, the pattern is unique to each person, dependent on tastes and inclinations. The underlying message is that the more stuff a person accumulates, the more this abundance will strip away extraneous substance to reveal the authentic person beneath it all.

On the other hand, advertising's exhortations to individualism function to lump groups of people together in sub-categories of identity, for example, as brand name users. In an ironic way, the consumer identity works to unite people through this paradox of individualism and conformity. We are invited to express our individuality by purchasing the same brand everyone else has. However, objectification of a consumer's identity plays another role in that it assigns meaning and order to our social identities. Berger argues that

[O]n a deeper level . . . the sacred has another opposed category, that of chaos. The sacred cosmos emerges out of chaos and continues to confront the latter as its terrible contrary. This opposition of cosmos and chaos is frequently expressed in a variety of cosmogonic myths. The sacred cosmos, which

transcends and includes man in its order of reality, thus provides man's ultimate shield against the terror of anomy. (26)

If we accept that the pursuit of individualism-by-consumption is a sacred duty, advertising can inure us against the imaginative pulls of a more complex identity. By exhorting everyone to embrace the notion of narcissistic individualism and the identity of consumer, advertising manages to deflect our attention from the chaotic interplay of varied identities vying for notice even within the genre. Advertising holds the chaos of humanity at bay by reducing human complexity, being intolerant of human fallibilities including our physical beings. As advertising attempts to influence us to see ourselves as deeply flawed, it also attempts to shape our habits of perception about others.

5.4. Commitment

In building identification based on a paradigm of transgression and redemption as I argued in Chapter 4, advertising assumes that we will become attached to the notion that we can become "perfect" and that consumption may help us achieve that perfected identity. The theme of every commercial is the transformation and ultimate perfection of the individual, which is modeled through the stories, associations, and visual rhetoric of advertising. Advertising needs this commitment from audience members. Mol describes commitment as the "emotional attachment to a specific focus of identity. It is precisely through emotional fixation that persona and social unity takes place" (12). Advertising through its varied incarnations and through its pathos appeals helps develop and strengthen our emotional attachment to "individuality" and thus to a consumer's identity. This commitment occurs in several ways.

First, advertising sells us on the idea that our purchases help us express our individuality and that the goods we buy tell us and others stories about ourselves and our identities. Rob Walker, in *Buying in: the Secret Dialogue between What we Buy and Who We Are*, argues that we demand and that marketers are invested in selling us “authenticity” (11). He claims that the fundamental tension of modern life is that “deep down . . . we all want to feel like individuals. [But deep down] we all want to feel like a part of something bigger than ourselves” (22). Advertising discourse functions to enable us to do both. Advertising tells us that through purchases of particular brands and associations with particular commercial symbols, we can demonstrate both identification with and division from others.

Second, in building identification on a paradigm of transgression and redemption, advertising urges a commitment through its pathos appeals and face appeals. Pathos appeals arouse the audience’s emotional connection with the message and the speaker and enable the audience to be put into a frame of mind where persuasion is possible. Commercials are designed to appeal to us not on a rational level, but on an emotional level. They are most effective when they speak to our core beliefs about ourselves. Our core beliefs about ourselves are tied up in face. Sociologist Erving Goffman defines face as “the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself”; he says “face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes” (5). When we identify with the characters in advertising we are imaginatively participating in the interaction rituals in which they participate in the commercial itself. Thus we adjust our view of self and align our face and self-concept with the action of the commercial. When we identify with the characters as we are meant to our action tends to affirm our belief in the promises made by the commercial and the emotional reality created by the ad. Our purchases reinforce what Goffman calls “line”: “a pattern of verbal and non verbal acts by which he

expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself” (5). When the purchase does not provide the transformation advertising promises, the consumer suffers a kind of face loss. The face loss occurs on two levels. In part, it occurs because on some level, the consumer “bought” the message of transformation. But on another level, face loss occurs because in the consumer’s core belief system, it is the “self” who has failed to achieve the transformation, not the product that has failed to transform us.

Advertising often builds in this kind of face loss by putting the onus for success on the consumer. For example, MacDonald’s slogan “I’m lovin’ it” suggests that if a consumer does not love it, it is her problem because everyone else is loving it. Nike says, “just do it” but, if after buying the Nike product a consumer is not transformed into a runner, then he has not been doing “it” (what ever “it” may be) properly. U Weight Loss clinics promise, “Real People. Real Results” suggesting if dieters fail there is a question about their authenticity. A hair colour product suggests audiences should buy their product, say, “because you’re worth it”. If the consumer buys it and is unhappy, her worth should be questioned, not the product’s chemical composition. Ads for banking service ING Direct offers both an injunction and accusation in the slogan, “save your money” as though if audiences do not bank with ING they might as well throw their money out the window. And if audiences do bank with them and do not save money successfully, the fault is with the disobedient customer. A final example is the Scotia Bank’s slogan, “you’re richer than you think” suggesting that money problems or poverty exist in the customer’s mind. In many ways, advertising suggests a product’s effectiveness rests on the purity of the consumer’s commitment to it. The consumer has to consume appropriately.

The third way advertising tries to build an audience’s commitment to a consumer identity is with its attempts to convince us that we are as smart and savvy as those in the

advertising industry and that we cannot be taken advantage of. Modern advertising, with its ironic relationship to its audience suggests that it is as knowing as we are about its machinations, but it also wants us to believe that we are as knowing as it is. For example, a recent UbyKotex tampon campaign, “why are tampon ads so ridiculous” mocks earlier tampon advertising, while claiming that Uby “breaks the cycle”⁶¹. The rhetoric of irony works to build a relationship between the speaker and the audience. The audience feels as smart as the speaker in the commercial suggesting the audience is in a position to confirm what the audience has known along and that we are not *really* being persuaded. This unity between speaker/audience and audience/message creates identification and contributes to the audience’s understanding of its own “uniqueness”. Carrie McLaren and Jason Torchinsky note this effect in *Ad Nauseum* when they say that advertisers use “a style of advertising that congratulates the smart (and supposedly advertising-resistant) customer while simultaneously pushing the product” (258). The authors note that MTV defined young viewers “with advertising that made fun of advertising . . . but while MTV was busy courting [them and their] peers, it ran a rather revealing campaign in trade publications like *Advertising Age* . . . [that depicted] a twentysomething slacker coolly lounging in an easy chair . . . gazing smugly at the camera. The headline, directed at media buyers, read: ‘Buy this 25-year-old and get all his friends absolutely free’ (248). Advertising often treats the audience as knowing, smart, and savvy, and in doing so, strengthens the audience’s commitment to their own identities, which includes their consumer identity. In fact, treating the audience this way is another way that advertising focuses on individualism because the ads flatter the target audience.

⁶¹ This commercial and others in the campaign are available to view on YouTube (22 June 2010).

Consumers do not simply passively respond to commercial as automatons obeying the command to shop, nor are we as savvy as we would like to think. However, the belief that consumers have “changed” is one that corresponds to the commitment aspect of sacralization. I mean that audiences are not as savvy about commercialism as we think we are and as ads often imply we are. Walker calls the conception of the savvy consumer a “mythology”, noting that

Right around the turn of the twenty-first century . . . a ‘new consumer’ had started to appear . . . Somehow we had all become more or less impervious to marketing and brands and logos; we could *see through* commercial persuasion . . . The only problem with this theory was that it did not match up with the realities of the marketplace. . .the mythology of the ‘new consumer’ is counterproductive – both for marketers and, more important, for the rest of us. (xiv)

The relationship between what we buy and who we are is complex in our daily lives, but a consumer’s individualistic identity is stabilized in the discourse of advertising itself. The implication is that we are consumers provided we keep consuming and that our stable identity depends on a consumer commitment to the belief in the perfection of the individuals. That commitment to revealing, affirming and enhancing our individuality provides a stable reference point for advertising.

In fact, the belief that we are not persuaded by commercials while others might be is called “the third person effect”. This effect is another way that advertising builds commitment to identity because it reinforces our commitment to our beliefs about our identities. W. Phillips Davison defines the “third person effect: “[a] person exposed to a persuasive communication in the mass media sees this as having a greater effect on others than on himself or herself” (1). This effect reinforces our commitment to believing ourselves to be free and individual, and to

believing that belief comes from us rather than being infused into the culture, in part through advertising. However, we are affected by advertising but tend not to notice its effects or effectiveness when we are its direct targets. We tend to consider advertising that is directed at us as just “common sense”. Its enthymematic assumptions are ours and thus, so much a part of us that we have difficulty unravelling them from the work that advertising does. Because of our beliefs about advertising, we help re-enforce the commitment to identity that advertising fosters.

Commitment is a significant integrating force for personal identity too. Social psychologist and persuasion expert Robert Cialdini notes that commitment is a powerful motivator which he says results from both personal and interpersonal pressures to behave consistently with [comments we have already made] (52). This “commitment to commitment” means that we will often “act in ways that are clearly contrary to our own best interest” (Cialdini 53) simply because we desire to be consistent in our actions. Every time we take the action of buying a product, advertising relies on our commitment to appear consistent with our earlier actions. Thus, action, in the form of purchase, helps solidify our beliefs and interpretations of our own identities. In addition to solidifying belief, our behaviour acts as evidence to help us shape and reshape our self-concept which, in turn, predicts future actions, which in turn, confirm the reformulated self-concept (Cialdini 67). Every time we are successfully influenced by an advertisement and act upon its exhortation, we are implicitly acquiescing to advertising’s instance on our consumer identity and its main constituent, narcissistic individualism. Advertising builds its successes on the cornerstone of repeated actions, and these repeated actions become ritualistic in their nature.

5.5. Ritual

“Ritual” has been variously defined by various scholars from diverse fields. Sometimes it seems to refer to repetitive actions acted out in the belief that the re-enactment will have an impact on some real-life event. An example of this use of the word “ritual” can be seen in activities that sports fans may perform in the hope that the actions will contribute to the team’s win. Anthropologists Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff claim that secular ritual helps to order culture and social life and “collective ritual can be seen as an especially dramatic attempt to bring some particular part of life firmly and definitely into orderly control. It belongs to the structuring side of the cultural/historical process” (3). While Moore and Myerhoff argue if “the realm of the religious and the realm of the sacred are not treated as co-terminous [sic], then it is possible to analyse the ways in which ceremony and ritual are used in the secular affairs of modern life to lend authority and legitimacy to the positions of particular persons, organizations, . . . moral values . . . and the like” (3-4). I will argue that advertising invites us to perform rituals that have a dual secular and sacred function. First, consumption acts as kind of secular ritual that affirms the rightness of consumption as a habit and necessity. But, consumption is also a ritual that makes sacred the concept of individualism.

According to Durkheim, religious phenomena fall into two categories: rites or particular modes of action, and beliefs or states of opinion. He says that rites can be distinguished from other human practices only by the special nature of their object: “[i]t is the object of the rite that must be characterized in order to characterise the rite itself” (34). He explains that rites are rules of conduct that prescribe how man must conduct himself with sacred things. Mol uses the term to mean “repetitive re-enactment of human systems of meaning” (232). The consumption constitutes the ritual re-enactment and advertising’s system of meaning. Furthermore, advertising

specifies ritual conduct toward the self and encourages consumption. Thus it sacralizes identity by making two aspects of identity the object of rituals. First, there are rituals of consumption to enhance individual self or personal identity. At the same time these rituals promised a “new and improved self” they also help sacralize a social identity, that of consumer. Advertising promises audiences that each and every member can attain some level of perfection as an individual and the quest for the perfected individual is exhorted by the advertising genre. Thus, the nature of the sacred object is a person’s “individual” self, and in part, the ritual also stabilizes social identity as consumer. The objects of the rites are the perfection of an individual self and the perfect of social self.

David Kertzer in *Ritual, Politics, and Power* notes that “ritual is an analytical category that helps us deal with the chaos of human experience and put it into a coherent framework” (8). Advertising manages the chaos of human experience by putting it into a commercial context, while traditional religious discourse has situated human experience in relationship to connections with divinity. As an analytical category, it seeks to convince audiences that consumption is a ritual that will help ground and stabilize fluid identities. Mol notes that “rites articulate and reiterate a system of meaning and prevent it from being lost to sight” (232). By exhorting rituals of continual consumption, advertising seeks to press us into treating the notion of “self” and “consumer identity” as sacred, set apart from the everyday and unquestionable in their positioning. Repeated consumption, like the repeated actions of other rituals, is integral to advertising’s socializing force. The genre intends to keep us practising the pursuit of perfected individualism which, like other religious rituals, “restore[s], reinforce[s] or redirect[s] identity” (Mol 232). Ritual keeps sacred the object of the rites and connects practitioners to each other.

Advertising sacralized individualism and connects practitioners to each other, loosely, as consumers in a consumer culture.

Ritual plays an integral role in maintaining a consumer identity. Otnes and Scott in “Interaction Between Ritual and Advertising” note that ads promise transformations of identity (41), and that rituals also “confer transformation” (37). Advertising ensures that its target audience repeatedly performs required rituals which reinforce social order and the place of the individual in society – both as they are mapped out in the advertising genre. Practising rituals of consumption maintains consumer identity and reinforces the idea of the transformation of identity promised for the individual. Mol observes,

Ritual maximizes order, reinforces order, reinforces the place of the individual in society and strengthens the bonds of a society vis-à-vis the individual. Through repetitive, emotion-evoking action, social cohesion and personality integration are reinforced. (13)

Thus consumption, which of necessity has to be repeated, functions ritually even when we are consuming ordinary and daily items. Mol says,

According to Durkheim (1954, p.375), the ‘traditions whose memory (ritual) perpetuates express the way in which society represents man and the world. . . .Through (ritual) the group periodically renews the sentiment which it has of itself and of its unity; at the same time, individuals are strengthened in their social natures.’ Ritual also restores identity. (13)

The ritual of consumption and all it entails strengthens the bonds of the individual to society both through individual patterns of consumption, but also as fully participating consumers in society.

Advertising shows that the consumer can use the symbols purchased to communicate his individual identity to others, while at the same time maintaining the consumer identity the genre advocates. The bond between individual and society that is strengthened is a commercial one based on shared identity as consumers.

Ritual is also used to reinforce order and restore identity when a disruption has occurred. Advertising initiates its own disruptions and then offers consumption as a ritual to heal the disruption. Disruptions of identity occur with each purchase in two ways. First, individual identity is disrupted because advertising has promised the purchase will offer transformation and the transformation does not occur. Thus, the consumer is exhorted to continual pursuit of personal transformation, which is always implicitly promised, but never occurs. Second, “consumer identity” is disrupted. To maintain the consumer identity, the audience must always be consuming; thus, after a purchase, the “consuming” identity is ruptured. In other words, no purchase is the ultimate and final purchase, so in the moment after the purchase has been made, the identity of “consumer” is temporarily suspended. The individual identity constituted in advertising is based on continual striving and failing, and the consumer identity is based on continual consumption. Consumer identity is nearly always in a state of disruption, but the consumer is urged to maintain faith, but more importantly to demonstrate loyalty to the identity of being a consumer through continued consumption.

For a consumer identity to be maintained through a ritual of consumption, it is necessary that advertising consistently demonstrates that people’s lives are happier and better when they consume: advertisements show happy consumers in each and every commercial produced. We seem to believe the fictions that advertising sells us and this belief is developed, in part, through our practice of consumption. The action reinforces belief and develops our commitment to the

belief. Our capacity to be convinced and to believe the messages behind advertising may be explained with neuroscience's examination of "mirror neurons". By watching people consuming happily, we partake of their happiness psychologically. David Dobbs, writing in *Scientific American* explains how this is possible in his discussion of mirror neurons in an article called "A Revealing Reflection":

These are neurons in key parts of our brain – the premotor cortex, centers for language, empathy, pain – that fire not only as we perform a certain action but when we watch someone else perform that action. The discovery of this mechanism, made about a decade ago, suggests that everything we watch someone else do, we do as well, on a mental scale.

Neuromarketing research will find this useful for advertising, but it offers more of an explanation about how persuasion works than a new way to persuade⁶². Marketing guru Martin Lindstrom celebrates this same discovery in his book *Buy-ology: Truth and Lies about Why We Buy*. He notes, "[i]n short, everything we observe (or read about) someone else doing, we do as well – in our minds" (58). What this means is that watching people perform an action initiates the same brain process as performing the action ourselves. Since action confirms beliefs, the mental action that we perform when we see a commercial means that each and every commercial we witness has the opportunity to cement advertising's consumer identity, and to encourage the ritual action of consumption. Thus, seeing commercials reinforces the desire to perform the ritual action in the hopes that consuming will provide the same benefits in real life as it performs in Adland.

⁶² However, some groups do not think that neuromarketing is about simple description. According to *Newsweek* writer Clint Witchalls's 2004 article, a public-interest watchdog group, "Commercial Alert" contacted Emory University "which conducts research on behalf of BrightHouse [a neuromarketing company,] asking it to stop its experiments."

Consuming taps into our primal instincts, possibly because it is a “repetitive, emotion-evoking action” that replicates a form of “hunt”. Thus, it functions like ritual in its repetitiveness and in its emotion-evoking capacity. When we are primed to shop, we share the same head space of the hunter and mythologize those emotions that are stirred by “the hunt”. The consumer hunts for the “perfect” commodity, feels the thrill of anticipation when it is found, and the hit of satisfaction upon the purchase. Lindstrom says, “shopping can actually make people happier, at least in the very short term . . . And that dose of happiness can be attributed to dopamine, the brain’s flush of reward, pleasure and well-being” (63). Exposure to advertising lets us experience transformation imaginatively, and then when we enact the ritual and make the purchase, we get a blast of dopamine, and the ritual of consuming begins the restoration of the consumer’s consuming identity. However, due to the nature of the consumer’s identity, the cycle of consuming must start all over again once the flush of novelty fades. Consumption is not just self-satisfying but affirms the social bond among consumers, which is an important part of ritual.

This emotion-evoking action, consumption, helps us achieve a form of social cohesion brought about by sharing in the consumer identity within the self sustaining system of advertising. Mol notes that “rites cleanse or purify, and, in the process, reinforce social expectations and superimpose constraint” (234). For religious rituals, this process stops individuals from causing chaos within the society. For advertising, this process plays in treating consumers as though the stop consuming would result in societal chaos. Rituals are the re-enactment of familiar practices; “[t]he re-enactment of sameness affects identity positively (Mol 235). By encouraging audiences to consume, which sacralizes “individualism” and creates social identity, particularly among brand users⁶³, advertising exhorts consumption as ritual practice,

⁶³ Otnes and Scott note that “[Products] can serve as cohesive conduits of identity formation in the same way brand name products can link members of certain age and class categories in society” (37).

because “ritual integrates personal identity” (Mol 235) and social identity (Mol 237). Mol notes that “rites demand the renunciation and the sacrifice of socially harmful instincts” (235). In advertising’s symbolic system, other methods of realizing personal and society identity are sacrificed while consumption is the only ritual that reinforces consumer identity. Mol’s discussion of ritual as a way of confirming the bond between individuals and societies is confirmed in Dell deChant’s definition of ritual in *The Sacred Santa: Religious Dimensions of Consumer Culture*. He notes that the properties of rituals include repetition, acting or performance, stylized behaviour in actions or “through the use of symbols”, order – “they are organized events at prescribed times and places”, and they are staged and they have “a ‘collective dimension’, [in that] they have ‘social meaning’ and carry a ‘social message’” (11). The ritual of consuming to maintain identity denotes action that must be repeated. Consuming or shopping is behaviour which carries a symbolic message. Perhaps the symbolic message is not so apparent and significant when shopping for utilitarian purposes, but it is especially so when shopping for items that are infused with symbolic meaning. However, Mol says that religious institutions “sacralize those beliefs and values which society at large regarded as crucial for existence” (237). Likewise, advertising sacralizes the “individual” because it regards the audience’s acceptance of this idea of what is sacred as crucial to its own existence. de Chant argues that malls are a kind of post modern temple where such rituals occurs; certainly, they are the staging places of ritual and part of the collective societal dimension that all religions call for. de Chant notes that “rituals and myths are intertwined in such a way that rituals re-enact myths and myths illuminate rituals” (11). Likewise, in advertising, the ritual of consumption is intertwined with the myth of transformation promised in advertising.

5.6. Myth

Mol says, “[m]yths interpret reality . . . [providing] the fitting contour for one’s existence, sublimating the conflicts and reinforcing personal and social identity” (4). Moreover, “myth sacralizes through recurrent narration” (14). Advertising functions as myth in that it interprets reality through the lens of commercialism and, therefore, necessarily, it must sublimate conflicts to reinforce a consumer identity. Advertising makes conflict simplistic, not showing the struggles that people have to go through to overcome the conflict, but simply depicting an easy solution to the conflict. However, this “conflict” is integral, as Burke would note, to creating drama and enabling the guilt-mortification-redemption cycles. While mythologies from other traditions depict characters in conflict with self or society, and demonstrate how particular characteristics either help the protagonist overcome her conflict, be defeated by it, or learn to cope with the conflict, advertising shows that conflict can be eliminated in an almost magical way, simply by making the right purchase. Buy the product: solve the conflict.

In this way, advertising makes the process of struggling with conflict invisible. For example, in his chapter on “Negative Advertising” Hopkins advises his readers to “show the bright side, the happy and attractive side, not the dark and uninviting side of things. Show beauty, not homeliness; health, not sickness. Don’t show the wrinkles you propose to remove, but the face as it will appear” (306). Thus, when selling a woman a washing machine, do not show her chained to a washing tub, but show her doing something fun (Lasker 29 – 30) while the machine sits in the background as though it has gathered up the dirty clothes, loaded itself, and is capable of running the clothes through the wringer. In advertising, the conflict must be easily resolvable through consumption. Unlike cosmogonic and other religious myth, advertising has neither the means nor the motive to deal with the conflicts and suffering inherent in human life.

It is not advertising's job or responsibility to deal with the stuff of human suffering. It is a mythology that is bereft in some areas, but it is a persistent mythology. Myth conditions and teaches behaviour by showing patterns of conflict resolution that are ethical in design. Advertising attempts to condition and teach behaviour that will enable its audiences to achieve the identity that advertising holds out for them, by painlessly and effortlessly resolving conflict. Advertising shows beautiful people living the good life, or not so beautiful people finding ways to become beautiful. As audiences take in not just one advertisement but thousands and hundreds of thousands a year, the transformations depicted in commercials become mythic in scope.

Traditionally myth requires ritual to cement its teachings. Likewise advertising as a mythic narrative advocates ritual performances of consumption. When audiences shop, they are participating in the ritual. In fact, consumption is the only way to claim and maintain the identity that advertising holds out. Consumers re-enact the myths that advertising sells. Through this ritual, consumers affirm their acceptance of the myths. Mircea Eliade says, "one becomes truly [human] only by conforming to the teachings of the myths, this is, by imitating the gods" (100). In advertising the characters in the ads whose lives and selves are transformed have god-like qualities in that they are set apart from the audience, and their lives, albeit in 15 – 60 second slices or half-page pieces, are made available to masses of people. When target audiences imitate the behaviour of consumption, seen in advertising, they can become "truly human" in the way that advertising depicts what it means to be truly and "perfectly" human. However, advertising makes manifest the goal of transformation and perfected individualism through its ubiquitous repetition. Advertising, as myth, seeks to have its audiences commit to the process of the ritual, the consumption, rather than the result. The result, perfected self, is indefinitely deferred.

5.7. Extrapolating identity: What are the Consequences of “Individualism” to “Consumer Identity”

Advertising establishes and models a public symbolic reality in which two aspects of identity are sacralized: the personal identity of the individual and an ensuing commitment to enhancing and affirming that identity, and the social identity of “consumer” and the ensuing commitment to consume in order to maintain identity. This emphatic positioning of individualism and its perfectibility shifts advertising’s advocacy of identity into the territory of narcissism because advertising does not just encourage enlightened self-interest, but depends on its audiences to become fixated on self and the perfection of self. Thus advertising takes a necessary rhetorical injunction, (the speaker’s responsibility to show the audience the benefit to them of the message) and constrains it so as to make it become an unhealthy obsession with self. Advertising’s obsession with convincing audiences to seek self-perfection and an ideal consumer’s identity entrenches unhealthy narcissism as an ideal human character trait in the discourse.

5.7.1. The Consumer Narcissist

Successful, persuasive, and ethical rhetoric needs to demonstrate to audience members how they may benefit from hearing or seeing a message, and acting on it. The rhetorician owes this consideration to both her message and to its audiences. If audiences do not see the net benefit to themselves, they will seldom be motivated either to take the action the rhetor is requesting or to begin to change their beliefs. However, because advertising litters the symbolic mindscape in our society, advertising, through its constant repetition seeks to inculcate an attitude in its audiences that everything in the world should demonstrate benefit to them.

Advertising always demonstrates benefit to the audience, but it demonstrates the benefit at the expense of wider, more altruistic benefits with the motive of helping people become better citizens in their communities. This stress on personal benefit makes advertising rhetoric less about healthy individualism and more about unhealthy individualism, even narcissism. In fact, advertising mythologizes consumption as self-actualization.

I will call on rhetorical theorist, Harold Barrett to define “narcissism” and explain how it creates what Barrett calls “rhetorical indisposition”. The cumulative effect of sacralising an identity of narcissistic individualism results in an understanding that it is right and necessary to be self-absorbed to the exclusion of all else. The concentration of the focus on this quality changes healthy individualism to a narcissistic individualism.

According to Barrett, “narcissism as a personality problem is characterized by dependence on assurances and attention of others in an effort to sustain self-regard” (ix). Advertising feeds rhetorical indisposition by demonstrating that the main character of the ad will become more well-liked, more loved, a better person, a better spouse or parent, by his engagement with a product and through how his relationships are mediated by the product rather than through interpersonal processes. The narcissist focuses entirely on the self, but the paradox of this disorder is that the narcissist relies on the affirmation of an adoring audience. Advertising embraces this paradox, suggesting that individualism cannot be perfectly realized without the approval of others, which the consumer will gain by using the product. Advertising tries to sell unique individuality as a concept, but in displaying how consumers can make the effort to become individualistic, it shows individuality as a characteristic that is mainly for the benefit of observers. Thus, the people in commercials begin to fill dramatic roles and the people watching commercials are invited to participate in the drama that advertising enacts. Advertising implicitly

tries to convince its audiences that they can buy approval and implies that with that approval consumers will garner their own audiences who will bear witness to the consumer's life.

This focus on the protagonists of the commercial seems to demonstrate that self-absorption is the key to a happy life, and in combination with consumption, the way to improve self by using consumption as a transformative process. Barrett says, “[e]xcessive self-occupation works against success in identifying with others – an essential rhetorical function” (ix). In advertising, target audiences are invited to identify with the characters depicted in the ad and with other people who share a brand community with them, rather than with flesh and blood people in their own neighbourhoods. Barrett notes that “[w]hen used in a maladaptive or pathological sense, narcissism refers to inordinate self-absorption: extreme self-interest and limitation in the capacity to care for others” (ix). The advertising genre ultimately aims to build narcissistic individualism in its target audiences because, fundamentally, that is the psychological profile that is most like to produce audiences who both consume more and consume more industriously.

Barrett argues that there are consequences for narcissistic individualism. He says it leads to what he describes as, “*rhetorical indisposition* [which represents] the disabling influence of unfavorable, oppressive narcissism”(x). According to Barrett, the opposite of rhetorical indisposition is “rhetorical disposition [which] is fostered by useful adversity” (Barrett 28). This means that “rhetorical disposition” is encouraged when people can fail successfully. In other words, when our requests are denied, when our interpersonal persuasiveness fails us and we learn from that rhetorical failure, we are learning new rhetorical strategies and, thus, failing successfully. However, in advertising, all failure is unsuccessful in that when the consumer fails to attain the perfected identity or to experience transformation from flawed to ideal character the

advertising genre does not show the consumer how she has failed successfully, but holds out the same promise of transformation if consumption is sustained.

Because advertising visualizes “the consumer” as the perfected realization of human identity, it must continually offer reasons to consume in order to keep the audience striving to achieve a consumer identity. By continually demonstrating the paradox that the individual is lacking but that individuality is sacred and worth striving for, the advertising genre seeks to engage people with and through products, while appropriate rhetorical behaviour seeks to engage people with other people. If advertising seeks to engage people communally, it is only through common consumption, where the product mediates relationships. Advertising seeks to contain interaction within a brand community.

Barrett argues that staying alive and thriving depends on human interaction and mutual confirmation, but in advertising, staying alive depends on human/product interaction. In the advertising genre, thriving depends on person / product interaction. Advertising erodes the individual’s identity as it is formed and informed by real interactions with real people at the same time that it sells individualism. But advertising’s individualism is based on the conformity of being a consumer, while “autonomy of being . . . marks personal individuality” (Barrett 149).

5.7.2. Primacy of the Individual

Individuality is constructed against public discourse; we are always in relation with commercial messages: we could construct identity against these messages. According to Barrett, “how we experience ourselves in relation to others provides a basic organizing perspective for all interpersonal events” (28 – 29). Because advertising is such a substantial element of civic discourse, because it has been given such status as a significant and integral part of our culture, it provides a backdrop against which we “experience” ourselves in relation to those people in the

ads. In fact, in *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch notes, “advertising makes creation of self the highest form of creativity” (168). In this way, advertising commodifies even our relationships with ourselves, in addition to our relationships with others. Advertising encourages a culture where the role of others is to be an “audience” for the spectacle of self.

5.7.3. Narcissism and Civil Society

Objects and experience gain primary status because it is through them that individualism is maintained and, ultimately through their consumption that consumer identity can be momentarily achieved. Because advertising establishes a symbolic reality and engages its audience in that reality, it has consequences for social behaviours. In sacralizing individualism and making the pursuit of the perfection of individualism the ultimate human good, advertising directs its audiences toward a narcissistic individualism. Since advertising substitutes consuming for interpersonal interaction, it denies people the opportunity to be recognized as individuals through relationships and grants individualism only through consumption. This focus on narcissistic behaviour and attitude, if surrendered to by the audience creates Barrett’s “rhetorical indisposition” which, he argues, has dramatic consequences for the practice of civility in society.

Without critical examination of some of the symbolic patterns of the advertising genre, we may risk identifying all our relationships and our very selves with the relationships and depictions of individuality posited in the commercial paradigm of advertising discourse. While a healthy sense of self in relation to others, which Barrett calls “rhetorical disposition”, is imperative to social development and social continuity, advertising models a narcissistic form of individualism. In modelling this particular symbolic pattern, advertising is implicitly implicated in promoting an ethic that identifies the self as central to all endeavours with, as I will argue in the next chapter, an end result of reducing practices of, or even belief in, compassion and posing

a threat to civil societies and real world communities. Moreover, narcissistic individualism and rhetorical indisposition lead to alienation and division, so harm the individuals themselves as well as the society. If advertising asks its audiences to see the world with the idea of “self” at the centre of all considerations, then narcissistic individualism is the fulcrum on which the consumer’s identity rests.

5.8. Conclusion

According to Barrett, from the time we are infants, “staying alive depends on human association. And it is that association which provides the ground for discovery, practice, and development of social behaviors – behaviors which eventually evolve as agencies of rhetorical interaction”; successful interaction involves the “participants responding *appropriately* to each other” (25). Because advertising is the primary model of public communication and because it fosters narcissistic individualism, it can compromise successful rhetorical interaction because it seeks to change our idea about what constitutes *appropriate* interaction.

Barrett, talking about our earliest rhetorical interactions, notes the need for mutual confirmation. He claims that in a rhetorical interaction, when one of the parties disconfirms the other by denying the other’s significance through a certain gesture or in any other way, the relationship is put in jeopardy and our development as people with appropriate rhetorical dispositions is at risk (Barrett 24 – 25). Advertising works on this paradigm because all advertising messages, in essence, disconfirm the audience, showing the audience how they are lacking. Advertising messages tell their audiences that the audiences are not good enough as they are. It re-directs identity formation away from social interaction and towards commercial transaction. The audience is significant only insofar as it can be persuaded into consumption and developing a relationship with a brand or product, but the core self of the audience is consistently

disconfirmed. In addition, the relationships depicted in advertising are depicted in relation to the “star” of the commercial, so advertising not only disconfirms its audiences, but models people disconfirming others.

There are implications for a civil society in the public persona that advertising holds out for its audiences. These implications include increased alienation and division and a possible negative impact on relation and community building behaviours. Two relation-building social behaviours which could be affected by the substance of advertising are the demonstration of compassion and the building of community, both of which I will discuss in the next chapter. As advertising invites us to reject ourselves at a fundamentally human level, it also invites us to reject others for the same reasons. Thus, these relation-building activities are undermined by the value system of advertising, which relies on the cultivation of narcissistic individualism and the pursuit of novelty as well as the substitution of commercial transaction for human interaction.

As advertising models a sacralized individuality, it trivializes others because the protagonist of the commercial, the one the audience is to identify with, is the one in relationship with the product. Therefore, any other people in the commercial are simply interchangeable objects: they are “roles” rather than persons and provide a foil for the protagonist. The presence of others in commercials is to provide an audience for the main character. Sacralized individuality contributes to the development of narcissistic individualism, a trait, that according to Barrett is potentially civilization-destroying. Advertising hooks the sacralization of narcissistic individualism to our need for instrumental consumption, thus naturalizing a consumer identity. Because the consumer identity is naturalized, when we consume, we are participating in a particular kind of rhetorical vision. While advertising prompts us to transcend our ordinary daily lives and transform ourselves, it keeps us from the benefits of doing so in a communal setting. It

suggests, in fact, that communities are commodities and we can simply buy our way into the ones we desire. It would keep us from recognizing our embeddedness within our communities.

Chapter Six

Advertising and Covenant: The Rhetorical Vision Inherent in Advertising Discourse

“Through symbolism we recognize who are the powerful and who are the weak, and through the manipulation of symbols the powerful reinforce their authority.”⁶⁴

6.1. Fantasy Themes and Rhetorical Visions

As I have argued, advertising is the most ubiquitous form of public discourse and one that insists we view ourselves as narcissistic individualists. In exhorting us to embrace advertising’s particular brand of narcissism, it also invites us to view our lives as commercial transactions and it enacts this philosophy in every iteration, attempting to convince us that all of our human needs can be met through practising consumption and engaging in commercial transactions.

Advertising constitutes its audiences through its vision of who will respond to the ad, whether the response is to buy a product or to imaginatively identify with the characters in the ad. When we identify with the characters in the ad, we have several kinds of identification available to us: we can identify with the characters because they are similar to us, we can identify with the transformation they have experienced or will experience by the product’s use, or we can identify with a product or brand’s character itself. Advertising not only spins out an identity that envisions people primarily as consumers, but also constitutes and reconstitutes that identity in each and every ad that is produced. It hopes for a covenant between its audiences and itself. In

⁶⁴ David I Kertzer, *Ritual, Politics & Power*, London: Yale U P, 1988, p 5.

return for belief, it provides its audiences with a vision of order, of the good life, and of human purpose.

Because advertising is a form of social communication, because it reaches millions of people daily, and because its value system is wholly constituted to assist a capitalist economy, these features all combine to give it an epistemic function. It creates knowledge about how to achieve an identity. Advertising does not just show people how to “buy” an identity, it also plays a role in shaping belief and demonstrating what kinds of identities are to be valued and respected. This role may or may not be consciously assigned by advertising’s creators, but because of advertising’s cultural weight and frequency, the genre is well-positioned to exert this kind of influence. But what are the values that advertising entrenches in its audiences? How does it invite us to act in relation to others and to interact in society? What values does it model as significant and worthy? To help ferret out specific values embedded in advertising discourse, I will use Symbolic Convergence Theory (SCT) and its primary unit of analysis, fantasy theme, to argue that advertising sells a distinct rhetorical vision of society composed of two primary character themes, one overarching action theme, and a setting theme. These fantasy themes culminate in a rhetorical vision of our social world and interactions. I will argue that advertising attempts to convince us to care about only the health and wellbeing of ourselves, so that we cannot engage constructively with genuine social problems because we are preoccupied with consumption problems and striving to attain the fulfillment that advertising promises us and shows us but, ultimately, denies us. Advertising attempts to convince us to care only about ourselves through its emphasis on self and through its implicit exhortations that both identity and relationships are commodities that we can buy; others are integral to our happiness only in how they can enhance our strivings to achieve a perfect self. It wants us to accept that the road to

happiness and fulfillment will be traversed through a devotion to self-enhancement. However, if we actually examine these claims against legitimate ethical claims to civility and compassion then we can see why it is dangerous to accept advertising uncritically. To build an argument about advertising's inherent ethical underpinnings, I will first describe SCT and its elements. Then I will discuss the character, action, and setting themes. Finally, I will argue that the rhetorical vision the advertising genre portrays is one with implications for our notions of civil society.

6.2. Symbolic Convergence Theory: An Overview

Symbolic convergence theory examines how people's symbol systems converge to create a shared understanding of the social world that results in group cohesion. It helps to explain how people get caught up in a common world view (Cragan 29). According to rhetorical theorist Ernest Bormann, "[t]he theory explains the appearance of a group consciousness, with its implied shared emotions, motives, and meanings, not in terms of individual daydreams and scripts but rather in terms of socially shared narrations or fantasies" (1985, 128). Advertising seeks to create a kind of group cohesion by envisioning us all as citizens of a consumer utopia. It creates and sustains our fantasies about how we can perfect ourselves and experience transformations through products. It creates a shared understanding of what is important in the world. Although it is showing us what is important in the advertising world and what is important to the commercial world, its portrayal of those values leaks into the "real" world because advertising is also so much a part of the real world. Advertising helps create a shared consciousness, and in its constitution of a consumer identity, it exerts a binding influence on group cohesion. Because of these features of advertising, SCT is a valuable critical tool because it "allows [us] to look at human 'talk' and explain how collectivities of people build a common

consciousness that provides meaning, emotion, and motive for action that transcends both time and place” (Cragan 31). In other words, advertising helps build a shared symbol system among various target audiences through its construction of a common consciousness while SCT provides a method for examining the consciousness it creates.

SCT helps explain how advertising and audience co-create the meanings of messages, since “the message itself provides the location or locus of meaning”; this theory contrasts with other communication theories where meaning is thought “to exist in the rhetorician . . . who picks the words to create the message . . . [or the view] that the medium conveying the message provides meaning . . . [or] the view that meanings reside in people, the receivers of the messages” (Cragan 32). As I have shown in Chapters 4 and 5, the majority of advertising messages focus on how we are deficient as we are and encourage the pursuit of narcissistic individualism in order to fully achieve individualism and, consequently, a consumer identity. To support its message, the advertising genre offers a symbolic world view of values, beliefs, and moral actions.

When we accept advertising’s embedded assumptions about world view, values, beliefs, and ethics, we are complicit in helping advertising create knowledge about how the social world should function and our obligations to community, relationships, and ourselves. SCT reveals epistemological assumptions through its components which include “dramatizing messages”, “fantasy themes”, “fantasy theme chaining” and “rhetorical visions” (Cragan 31 – 32). The relationships among fantasy themes, fantasy chains, dramatizing messages and rhetorical visions are complex. However, these terms provide a methodology to explain advertising’s symbolic potency. In his book, *Force of Fantasy*, Bormann says, “[m]y purpose is to illuminate how individuals talk with one another about their here-and-now concerns until they come to share a

common consciousness and create a sense of identity and community” (3). In advertising, individuals are not exactly in dialogue with the ads targeted at them, but there are similarities. Advertisements “speak” and audiences respond, with censure, with indifference, with appreciation, or with action. Advertisements, through the work of marketers, sociologists, and psychologists have shaped the way we talk about the “here-and-now concerns” of our lives, from mental health to dental health, from toothpaste to toilet paper, from pain management to home management, from houses with curb appeal to people with sex appeal. Other here-and-now concerns central to humanity include aging gracefully, living well, how to be accepted and respected by the groups we identify with, and how to participate in interpersonal relationships so that we can give and receive friendships, love, and respect. Advertising is deeply immersed in these concerns; in fact, it speaks to our deepest human needs and in doing so it offers us a vision of ourselves both as we are, but also as we could be (if we purchase the right stuff). It offers us a vision of ourselves by doing what it does best: creating a common consciousness and sense of identity and community with members of target audiences.

6.2.1. Dramatizing Messages

Dramatizing messages, according to Bormann, are ones

[T]hat contain one or more of the following: a pun or other word play, a double entendre, a figure of speech, an analogy, a fable or narrative. The most important element of dramatizing messages . . . is a narrative or story about real or fictitious people in a dramatic situation or setting other than the here and now communication of the group. (2001, 4)

Dramatizing messages abound with word play, fantastic images and fantasies, dream-like sequences, narratives in miniature and even longer story lines. Part of the power of advertising

lies in its storytelling capabilities. Media critic Marshall McLuhan has called it the “folklore of industrial man” (1951), ascribing to it the characteristics and functions of traditional folklore. Each advertisement is a kind of “dramatizing message”. It dramatizes both consumer identity and a commercially-bound value system. The content of the dramatizing messages spark the fantasy theme.

The audience has to participate in sustaining the dramatizing messages, and this participation is called “fantasy theme chaining”. When we call on advertising slogans, for example, to make jokes, we are “chaining out” the dramatizing messages. Fantasy chains happen when the participants in the rhetorical situation use something from the original message, for example, symbols, phrases, or puns, to participate in conversational play that extends the message’s meaning. We “chain out” messages when we make the slogans and brands a part of our everyday talk. Just one example of how we play with commercial messages can be seen in the use of the late 1960s Virginia Slims advertising slogan, “You’ve come a long way baby”. Typing that branded phrase into Google produces over 360,000 hits⁶⁵. This slogan has chained out to refer to not only the original ad campaign, but also to a variety of other concerns. For example, it refers to titles of current articles and books, some that examine women’s issues⁶⁶,

⁶⁵ As of 27 October 2010

⁶⁶ See for example, the following references:

[You've come a long way, baby - Los Angeles Times](#)

13 Jun 2010 ... "If there's anything worse than being single, it's sitting around talking about being single," said Mary Richards, the 30-year-old who had ... [articles.latimes.com/2010/jun/13/.../la-ca-singlelady-tv-20100613](#)

[You've Come a Long Way, Baby – Today's Celebrity Gossip from Evil,](#)

28 Jul 2010 ... You've Come a Long Way, Baby. Jul 28, 2010 at 07:30 am by Sarah. Remember when Katharine McPhee was just a gawky American Idol contestant ... [evilbeetgossip.film.com/.../youve-come-a-long-way-baby/](#) - United States

[You've Come a Long Way, Baby: News Anchor Barbie Becomes a Reality ...](#)

You've Come a Long Way, Baby News Anchor Barbie Becomes a Reality. Posted by Ron Futrell Sep 25th 2010 at 12:19 pm in Television. [bigjournalism.com/.../youve-come-a-long-way-baby-news-anchor-barbie-becomes-a-reality/](#) -

[You've come a long way, baby: women, politics, and popular culture - Google Books Result](#)

some that examine food packaging⁶⁷, some that refer to music⁶⁸, and at least one that refers to war⁶⁹. Sometimes the slogan is used ironically to show that times have not changed at all, but sometimes, it is used with sincerity. The “Slims” slogan is an example of how audiences have used a commercial message and “chained it out” over 30 years or more with a result of co-creating meaning with the producers of the commercial.

6.2.2. Fantasy Theme

SCT uses fantasy theme analysis to explain how group consciousness arises and how people jointly experience the same emotional response to a situation, event, or character. Bormann defines “fantasy” as a technical term: “‘fantasy’ refers to the creative and imaginative shared interpretation of an event that fulfills a group’s psychological or rhetorical needs” (1985, 130). Rhetorical needs are met in the group through the shared interpretations which occur along thematic lines. Thus, “fantasy Theme Analysis is the basic method to capture symbolic reality” (Cragan 33). Advertising works in tandem with mass media to have people come to jointly experience similar emotional responses to the consumer identity that advertising seeks to inculcate, although it targets different audiences in a superficially different manner. The fantasy themes of advertising function, like other fantasy themes, “to present a common experience to shape and evolve that experience into symbolic knowledge” (Cragan 35). As I demonstrated in Chapter 3, the earliest advertising men exerted a powerful influence in repositioning advertising

Lilly J. Goren - 2009 - Political Science - 289 pages. In *You've Come a Long Way, Baby*, Lilly J. Goren and an impressive group of contributors explore the remarkable advancement achieved by American women in a ...books.google.ca/books?isbn=0813125448

⁶⁷ [Packaging | You've Come a Long Way, Baby | Food Processing](#) 8 Oct 2010 ... Private label products have enjoyed a tremendous year; in addition to product improvements, packaging also is taking on the national brands.www.foodprocessing.com/articles/2010/private-label-packaging.html

⁶⁸ [You've Come A Long Way Baby: Fatboy Slim: Amazon.ca: Music](#). You've Come a Long Way, Baby picks up where the smash single left off, cheekily pairing acidic synthesizers and drum machines with big, dumb vocal samples. ...www.amazon.ca/Youve-Come-Long-Way-Baby/.../B00000D9VL

⁶⁹ [YouTube - McCain, You've Come a Long Way, Baby](#) John McCain on length of US military presence in Iraq.www.youtube.com/watch?v=41LDK-aDIVc-morevideos

as a kind of salvationist discourse. Their collective “fantasy” of advertising was not only accepted, but embraced by a society running toward modernization because that “fantasy” met the rhetorical needs of the people in that historical context. Over the decades, advertising has come to spin its own “fantasies” including the one that transformation can be purchased and that the banality of daily life can be transcended through consumption.

Religious discourses also hold out the promise of transcendence to its audiences, but advertising, due to its ubiquity, has displaced the cultural force of religious discourse as it has displaced it in the common arena of the public sphere. Religious discourses encourage audiences to transcend their greed, selfishness, pettiness and other ego-oriented strivings, while advertising encourages audiences to transcend material limitations and perhaps even physical realities such as aging and personal attractiveness. The creation of consumer identity and the promotion of narcissistic individualism are central to advertising’s promises of transcendence. Advertising creatively and imaginatively interprets events and circumstances that target audiences might experience in their lives. It understands psychological needs and targets those needs with its messages. Advertising gives meaning to the materials we buy, but it also gives meaning to our identities and helps us create identifications with others. Without advertising, “stuff” would only be functional. Cultural theorist Raymond Williams says, “[i]f we were sensibly materialistic, in that part of our living in which we use things, we should find most advertising to be of an insane irrelevance” (185). He points out that goods need advertising to inject them with symbolic meaning and that this lack amounts to a “failure in social meanings, values, and ideals” (185). Symbolic convergence theory uses fantasy theme analysis to help explain how advertising gives us the symbolic meaning we crave and how we are complicit in developing that meaning.

Advertising messages portray several kinds of fantasy themes and the audience is necessary to co-create the fantasy theme. According to rhetorical theorist Sonja Foss, there are clusters of fantasy themes including character themes, action themes and setting themes (Foss, 1996, 123). She notes that these three types of fantasy themes “correspond to the elements necessary to create a drama” (123). The character theme is about the agent and his motives and characteristics. The action theme is the plotline or the action of the drama or “the actions in which the characters engage;” setting themes are where characters act out their roles (Foss, 1996, 123). Fantasy themes are dramatizations of events, not the events themselves. Fantasy themes are ways of interpreting events of the past or explaining future events, but they are removed from the here and now situation of the participants. Advertising take place away from the “here and now” of its audiences in that it takes place in an imaginary world and depicts fictional story lines.

Fantasy themes are played out in small groups as well as in mass media. Bormann explains that being caught up in a fantasy theme is comparable to being caught up in any narrative, from a novel to TV show. He says, “[w]hen members of a mass media audience share a fantasy they jointly experience the same emotions, develop common heroes and villains, celebrate certain actions as laudable, and interpret some aspect of their common experience in the same way” (1985, 131). The marketing industry has spent lots of time and money learning to adapt messages to target audiences, but underlying each and every message are particular values and beliefs that are enthymematic to these audiences and in fact, enthymematic to most audiences targeted by advertising. Bormann notes that “values and attitudes of many kinds are tested and legitimized as common to the group by the process of fantasy chains” (1972, 398). When an advertising campaign is successful, the audience has helped to legitimize the fantasy themes that are part of its rhetorical situation.

Fantasy types populate fantasy themes and are “stock scenarios repeated again and again by the same characters or by similar characters” (Bormann, 2001, 7). Advertising is filled with such stock scenarios and characters. Just some examples include “The stupid husband,” “the hungry teenager”, and “the all-knowing mom.” Foss says that “fantasy types allow a group to fit new events or experiences into familiar patterns” (1996, 125). In part, this is how advertising flies under our critical radar. Because the fantasy types which advertising first creates and then relies on are familiar, they fit within our experience, and they correlate with the emotional responses that other advertising for similar products has taught us. Through examining fantasy types, the critic can open the window on the rhetorical vision that different fantasy types create.

6.2.3. Rhetorical Visions

Bormann writes “A rhetorical movement contains small group fantasy chains, public fantasy events, and a rhetorical vision in a complex and reciprocal set of relationships” (1972, 399). The advertising genre, with its access to both mass and selective media, can achieve evangelizing power similar to the persuasive power of religious discourses. Fantasy themes coalesce into rhetorical visions just as various themes in a play coalesce into a dramatization. Bormann says,

A rhetorical vision is a unified putting-together of the various scripts that gives the participants a broader view of things. Rhetorical visions are often integrated by the sharing of a dramatizing message that contains a master analogy . . . which pulls the various elements together in a more or less elegant and meaningful whole. (1985, 133)

Individual iterations of the genre, regardless of what discrete ads are promoting, contain a rhetorical vision of the ideal identity – a consuming identity – and of how that identity should be

achieved, as well as of the characteristics – narcissistic individualism – and ideal behaviours associated with maintaining that identity.

Thus advertising serves up a rhetorical vision, for example, of the character of particular brand users. One of the ways that advertising does this is to blur the line between “branding channels and everyday life,” according to pop culture writer Rob Walker (xvii). He gives several examples of how brands become an integral part of everyday life: product placements integrated into movies, computer games, comic books, and Web video shows; ads for TV shows tattooed on eggs, and teenagers “recruited to wear temporary tattoos of the chain’s logo on their foreheads” (xvii). Blurring these lines is what Walker calls “murketing”, which he claims is embraced by the so-called savvy consumers of the 21st century (xviii). Walker says that branding attaches an idea to a product and when we consume the product, we are consuming the idea (8). According to Walker, one of the most important ideas we consume is that of “authenticity” and the goods we buy contribute to the rhetorical vision of ourselves that advertising sells us and that we buy into.

The rhetorical vision of advertising is unified by its push to help target audiences achieve their identities and it speaks to individual audiences through slogans and brands. Bormann describes rhetorical visions as “usually indexed by a key word, slogan, or label”; he notes, “such indexing is a special case of the symbolic cueing phenomenon” (1985, 133), which means that group members can share “a total coherent view of an aspect of their social reality” (1985, 133). An example of how this indexing may occur can be seen in how brand slogans function. When a Nike brand owner hears, “just do it”, she is cued to recall the social reality she inhabits as a Nike user, which in turn, becomes part of her self-concept. Rhetorical visions help groups share a coherent interpretation of reality. Bormann says, “[w]hen a rhetorical vision emerges, the participants in the vision come to form a rhetorical community” (1985, 133). Advertising spreads

and reinforces a rhetorical vision of values that bind people together, just as various religious discourses bind people together through rhetorical visions of what it means to be Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, Mormon and so on.

6.3. Character Themes: Pursuit of Perfection in Identity

In advertising, there are two primary character - fantasy themes. The first character theme features a person who has achieved a perfected and idealized identity. If the character is female, she might be beautiful, mysterious, powerful, and acting out her role in a setting that enhances her characteristics. An example of this kind of character type can be seen in the 2004 Chanel Number 5 ad directed by Baz Luhrmann and featuring Nicole Kidman⁷⁰, or any of the “film” ads for Chanel since 2004⁷¹. In this kind of character theme, the ad hopes to convince us that we might accrue some of the characteristics that we are supposed to believe the product has conferred to the character in the ad. The second character - fantasy theme features someone whose identity still needs perfection. For example, ads that sell products specifically to parents might show either a harried parent whose child, and consequently the parent herself, is transformed through interaction with the product. Another example of this character-fantasy is seen in Axe hair care products for men where unattractive men are transformed by the use of the product.

In other words, the character that we identify with in the ad is either how we see ourselves or how we would like to see ourselves. Thus characters have been either transformed already through their association with the product, or are deeply deficient and in need of the

⁷⁰ See Emma Halls' January 2004 article, “Kidman to appear in Chanel 5 Ads.” <http://adage.com/article> accessed Oct 2010.

⁷¹ “Night Train” is the current(27 October 2010) ad film on the Chanel N5 webpage at <http://www.chaneln5.com/en-ca/#/the-film>.

transformation promised by the advertising for the product, even in campaigns that are touted as not portraying the usual ad values. For example, the Dove soap campaign of recent years shows a variety of women who do not fit the usual constraints of idealized beauty. Dove products, however, enable these women to attain a kind of entelechial perfection, but they still are only capable of achieving the (limited) perfection available to them due to the product. Dove's so-called "Campaign for Real Beauty" sells soap and personal care products. Each ad implies that the products will help reveal any woman's "natural" beauty, but even more importantly will help her to accept herself as Dove accepts her. This acceptance is demonstrated through the choice of models.

Character fantasy - themes are increasingly important to advertising. Marketing authors Margaret Mark and Carol S. Pearson's book *The Hero and The Outlaw: Building Extraordinary Brands through the Power of Archetypes* never explicitly mentions the term "fantasy theme" or "character theme". However, the entire book is devoted to advising advertisers how to develop what Bormann would call meaningful dramatizing messages that spark fantasy themes, in particular, character-fantasy themes. Mark and Pearson tap into mythic character themes by naming characters such as "The Hero", "The Outlaw", "The Magician", "The Explorer", and "The Sage". These marketers imagine and label several incarnations of character-fantasy theme, and while there are variations on the theme, the most prevalent fantasy-character themes are the two that I have identified: those who appear to have been transformed through their relationship with the product and those who will experience transformation after discovering the product. Communication theorist Em Griffin says that even "when a skillful image-maker sparks a fantasy chain, he or she has little control over where the conversation will go. Fantasy chains seem to have a life of their own . . . yet once a fantasy chain catches fire, the theory predicts that

the group will become more cohesive and of one mind (Griffin 31). The fantasy types identified above are ones that have created audience identifications for more than a hundred years.

6.4. Action Theme: Pursuit of Novelty

Advertising's rhetorical vision is one where the pursuit of novelty is one of the highest goals. Thus, an action theme is the pursuit itself. This action theme plays out in several ways. First, novelty is paramount in advertising itself. Individual ads have a short shelf-life because they become "stale" through repetition and familiarity. Because advertising campaigns are continuously changed, novelty is a quality that is accentuated through the genre itself. Secondly, obsolescence is built into the majority of the products we buy, and we see this obsolescence highlighted especially with computer and electronic technology. However, some products become "obsolete" in part because they cannot fulfil the promises of their advertising. Nonetheless, novelty itself becomes a quality that is worthy of pursuit. Thus, lastly, and most importantly, novelty becomes a powerful featured element of culture. In fact, the "newness" of things becomes the standard by which to evaluate their quality.

When novelty is entrenched as a cultural characteristic, it begins to act as a yardstick with which to evaluate not only ad campaigns and products and services, but also relationships. As an embedded aspect of culture, it becomes a significant aspect of a world view. Its pursuit will affect what we buy and colour how we view ourselves, our relationships, and our communities, and even the ceremonies and rituals through which we observe changes in our lives. It can also fuel competitiveness between people since consumers who buy the latest products seem to ascend the commercial hierarchy at an accelerated pace compared to those who do not consume the newest products. Thus even novelty can have an impact on a civil society. In addition, an

unavoidable and inescapable aspect of novelty is that it wears off. Novelty itself can never satisfy us, nor can its pursuit, but advertising is relentless in its blandishments to have us pursue novelty.

The pursuit of novelty as an action theme has been noted by other critics, but not in the language of SCT. For example, sociologist Colin Campbell, in his book *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* argues

[T]he essential activity of consumption is . . . the imaginative pleasure-seeking to which the product image lends itself,” asserting, “the modern consumer will desire a novel rather than a familiar product because this enables him to believe that its acquisition and use can supply experiences which he has not so far encountered in reality. (89)

Campbell believes that novelty and insatiability are linked and necessary to the “mental hedonism” of the modern consumer; however, insatiability is a quality that advertising assumes its audiences have, and that it hopes to exploit and spark the desire for novelty. Novelty is linked to identity because advertising invites us to assume that novelty and its pursuit is an integral part of cycle of consumer identity. Advertising shows us what we lack, tries to instil the desire for transformation in our ordinary lives, and promises, implicitly, transcendence. When, inevitably, the transformation either does not occur or does not lead to transcendence, advertising brings us back to the starting gate, encouraging us to search for the new product that will deliver on advertising’s promise of salvation at the same time that its consumption will deliver us to our ideal identities as consumers. Advertising both supplies and nourishes the pursuit and consumption of novelty because the consumer identity is only achieved at the moment of consumption, and because the transformation that advertising promises does not occur. Thus, the

act of consuming must be reiterated. Novelty, as an action theme, makes the reiteration a sensible action.

Advertising encourages us to seek novelty because, in each ad, we are promised transformation through product purchase. However, no product can deliver on the multiple implicit promises of advertising. It is self-referential in this aspect: since it cannot deliver on its promises, it encourages audiences to accept the idea that constant consumption will bring about the transformation and sustain the transformed identity. Therefore, when one product doesn't give us what we seek, advertising encourages us to move on to the next one and the next one and the next one.

Through its self-referentiality, advertising cements the pursuit of novelty as its central action theme. Campbell implicates the consumer in the action when he points out,

[T]he fact that a so-called 'new' product may not, in reality, offer anything resembling either additional utility or a novel experience is largely irrelevant, as all real consumption is a disillusioning experience in any case. What matters is that the presentation of a product as 'new' allows the potential consumer to attach some of his dream pleasure to it, and hence to associate acquisition and use of the object with realization of the dream. As soon as this identification has taken place, the product will be 'desired', as some of that intense longing which is generated by the practice of day-dreaming becomes linked to the product in question. (89)

However, advertising helps generate day dreams, suggesting that consumption is, in fact, not a disillusioning experience, but the only experience that will enable the consumer to assume the identity that advertising implicitly holds out.

Another way advertising thematizes the pursuit of novelty is through generating the “novelty” of a product in ad campaigns. A specific product might not change, but the campaign has to in order to be “fresh” and to break through advertising clutter. Thus, novelty is an illusion because a new ad campaign may signify a new product, when in fact, the product is exactly as it was. When a product is allowed to call itself “new”, the change may be as small as a change to the colours of its packaging; however, advertising campaigns must always be new and “fresh”. They are novel and they generate novelty. Campbell says, “[s]ince the very practice of day-dreaming generates that diffuse desire which has been designated as longing, all that is required for the creation of new wants is the presence of objects in the environment which can be ‘taken as new’ to some degree” (Campbell 89). In many ways, “new” is an illusion, but novelty is important for advertising’s success because, as Campbell notes, “it is possible to understand how the regulated introduction of controlled elements of novelty into those products with a high aesthetic significance is necessary in order for the continued attempt to realize days-dreams to occur” (93). Novelty offers constant stimulation of our imaginations.

Novelty can stimulate desire and generate new beliefs in the possibilities of and potential for use of the product or the brand. Campbell argues that objects simply need to “be differentiated from those currently consumed to a sufficient extent to be identified with illusory images. Obviously, the ‘real’ nature of products is of little consequence compared with what it is possible for consumers to believe about them, and hence their potential ‘dream material’” (89). But, what is real about the product or brand is its relationship to the symbolic world and work of advertising. The products are symbolically presented in advertising so as to become enmeshed in the fantasy themes of advertising and thus the rhetorical visions, such as the rhetorical vision of novelty.

Novelty stimulates the belief that transcendence can occur after every failure of transformation to occur. Campbell sees novelty as integral to nourishing the audience's "pleasurable dramas":

The idea that contemporary consumers have an insatiable desire to acquire objects represents a serious misunderstanding of the mechanism which impels people to want goods. Their basic motivation is the desire to experience in reality the pleasurable dramas which they have already enjoyed in imagination, and each 'new' product is seen as offering a possibility of realizing this ambition. (89 – 90)

Advertising does more than enable the pleasurable dramas of novelty, it helps create them. Campbell says, "[t]he illusion is always better than the reality: the promise more interesting than actuality" (90). What is significant about audiences continually buying into the drama of novelty is that the pursuit of novelty desensitizes people's imaginations or makes people incapable of innovation, imagining new concepts for themselves. The push for novelty intends to stimulate even more consumption so that the audience may gain the same thrill with each and every quest to find the product that will enable the transformation. Campbell argues, "[t]he cycle of desire-acquisition-use-disillusionment-renewed-desire is a general feature of modern hedonism" (90) and that may be so, but it is also a strong component in the cycle of the consumer's identity as it plays out in the advertising genre, as I have argued in Chapter 4.

Campbell's work affirms my argument that novelty is an action fantasy theme in advertising. While he declares, "[m]any of the cultural products offered for sale in modern societies are in fact consumed because they serve as aids to the construction of day – dreams" (93), I believe that advertising shows audiences how the product can be used to maintain the

identity that advertising projects on its audiences. Products may come and go, but advertising is eternal. It is advertising's capacity to help audiences participate in the exchange of symbols necessary to build community that keeps advertising relevant and keeps encouraging audiences to seek novelty which is entwined with advertising's fantasy themes.

While Campbell is not explicitly making an argument for fantasy themes and rhetorical visions, he is describing the power of a rhetorical vision. Fantasy themes chain out into rhetorical visions, and visions are developed through group involvement. Campbell says, "the processes through which dreams become attached to products do not depend entirely upon the efforts of advertisers, for individuals may spin fond fantasies around something seen . . . in a shop window without the benefit of their images and copy" (91). This ability to weave products into our imaginings is the power of the fantasy themes that advertising helps create. Advertising may initiate themes, in dramatizing messages, but target audiences chain them out. There is cooperation between media and audience, between message and "community". If novelty is one of the most significant overarching action themes advocated in advertising, then community is one of the main setting themes expressed in advertising.

In the rest of this chapter, I will examine how advertising creates communities and what kind; what advertising teaches us about compassion, and what pursuits it encourages us to undertake in order to achieve self-fulfillment. Advertising's portrayal of community constitutes a "rhetorical vision", and "rhetorical visions contain motives that prompt or propel true believers to act out a fantasy" (Griffin 30). The goal of advertising is to have us accept, even embrace its rhetorical vision and to invite us to become consumers in our everyday ordinary lives, not just in the moments when we shop. Advertising has an economic motive as it exhorts us to buy into that motive and let it usurp all other motives.

6.5. Setting Theme: What Is a Community and What Does It Do?

Communities socialize people, giving guidance about interpersonal relationships, power structures, and appropriate behaviour. They are built through shared beliefs and practices, and they inculcate people with norms for civil behaviour and beliefs about the common good. The concept of “community” is a complicated one and is made more so by the technological age we live in. Communities can grow from similar interests, including hobbies, games and sport, religious views, and geographical proximity, but communities can be “global” ones too. For example, the Internet allows groups from the world over to connect and communicate. Communities are affirmed through ritual practices and beliefs. Likewise, communities of consumption are formed in similar ways and are built by people through their patterns of consumption and by advertising’s concept of targeted audiences. Communities of consumption are affirmed through the ritual practice of consuming, but also through the beliefs about the product that advertising attempts to perpetuate. Advertising implies that at an individual level, a person’s status in his community is established through his patterns of consumption.

This is not to say that common consumption patterns establish a sense of community, something advertising historian Michael Schudson emphatically denies; however, he notes that culture is a sharing of symbols, and brands are just that: the shared symbols of our culture (159). These symbols act in the same way that religious signifiers used to act for communities, signifying a familiar social order. For example, a crucifix might signify Catholicism, while the six pointed star might represent Judaism, and the crescent moon might represent Islam. In Adland, the Golden Arches symbolize familiar food, the Shell sign represents gasoline, and the familiar colours and shapes of the Pepsi and Coke symbols help to shape our vision of community. Symbols help bind people together in shared communities, and the formation of

communities leads to shared ideals about what constitutes appropriate behaviour and civility, and “the common good”. Advertising encourages a rhetorical vision of community that binds people together through their shared consumption practices and presents an orderly view of right beliefs and good behaviour.

However, in advertising’s social order, appropriate behaviour, civility and the “common good” are interpreted in ways that not only emphasize the commercial nature of the discourse, but also mainly benefit the product’s selling acceptance and its producers’ bottom lines. Because of the pervasiveness of advertising, and because of the nature of its symbol system, advertising has been changing the concept of “community” since its modern inception⁷². Cultural critic Stuart Ewen argues that “business assumed an expansionist and manipulative approach to the problem of popular consciousness” and that advertising’s “basic impulse . . . was one of control, of actively channelling social impulses toward a support of corporation capitalism (81). Whether that was the intention of the earliest ad men, they did have mass media on their side and they could quickly and effectively reaches masses of people. Their ad campaigns helped “teach” people what the new social world required of them if they were to thrive. More importantly, it offered them a rhetorical vision of community which was one where the socializing influence of family, friends, and geographical community became supplanted by the socializing influence of advertising consumerism.

The advertising of the first part of the 20th century attempted to socialize people into a particular type of civil behaviour – consuming – which was fuelled by advertising’s encouragement to pursue novelty and sensation seeking rather than community building. Ewen argues that advertising’s brand of socialization was a consequence of the premeditation of

⁷² Advertising historian Daniel Pope notes, “By 1920, American advertising had more in common with its counterpart today than with the advertising of a generation earlier” (6).

various people who represented business and corporate structures or the new consumer ideology. Ewen gives the example of John B. Watson of Johns Hopkins who was a “founder of modern behavioural psychology” and “a proponent of transferring psychological development away from traditional areas of socialization (e.g.,the family) and for making the realities of commercial life the guiding principles of child-rearing” (82). In 1922, Watson became a vice president of J. Walter Thompson advertising agency. According to Ewen, Watson

[P]rovided psychological avenues by which home life might be supplanted by the stimulation of the senses – a direction toward which business in its advertising was increasingly gravitating. Pleasure that could be achieved by the individual within the home and community was attacked and deemphasized, as corporate enterprise formulated commoditized sensual gratification. Watson labelled all but the ‘gratifications’ of the marketplace as perverse and psychologically and socially damaging. (82 – 83)

The drive for sensual gratification is fuelled by sensation-seeking which, in turn, is fuelled by the pursuit of novelty. This cycle makes it difficult to focus on meaningful commitments because civility and good behaviour are envisioned as consumption rather than involvement in human relations. Thus, advertising’s rhetorical vision of novelty-seeking audiences de-stabilizes meaningful community.

When advertising envisions community, its focus is on consuming to better the individual, not the group. According to Ewen,

Ad men attempted to convey a picture of the world in which small groups were no longer proper realms for the communication of values – it was within the corporation and the

mass-industrial context that people might find a replacement for outdated communities and the sustenance they afforded. (96)

Advertising sells an ideal of community where the focus is on the individual, a focus which effectively turns people's interests in helping inward toward helping themselves become the ideal consumer, rather than outward toward helping build strong communities. For example, many social marketing campaigns urge audiences to buy something that the ads say people need and then offers to donate a portion to a cause. Starbucks "Ethos" bottled water promises a portion of each water purchase is donated to the creation of water supplies in third world countries. It is through consumption, not community action, that people are invited to believe that they are part of a larger community.

In Adland, civil behaviour consists of striving to attain the perfection of identity that ads promise each individual can achieve by making the right purchases. Advertising is still most effective in its selling of consumer identity when it works on people's fears of not being accepted, loved and respected. Ewen argues that historically "[c]orporations were presented as an alternative for communities which were pictured as being eroded by mistrust: people fragmented from one another by such privatized problems as . . . 'sneaker smell,' 'paralyzed pores' ... 'underarm offense' (97). Such a focus on private problems obscures problems such as poverty, crime, and addictions, just for example. Advertising offers an alternative sense of community, one that is based on commerciality. Early advertising began the work of building "communities" of brand users. That work has been continued well into the 21st century.

Although there may be no formal enforcement, there are ethical consequences attached to good or bad behaviour in all communities, and all communities, including consumer communities, have implicit guidelines of behaviour that constitute civil behaviour. However,

advertising does not constitute “civility” in the same way that communities outside of Adland may constitute it. Barrett explains, “*Civility* is a social virtue and an old idea. Sophrosyne, a name for self – control and moderation . . . may be close in meaning. . . [T]he exercise of civility involved adherence to the four cardinal virtues: courage, temperance, justice and wisdom” (146). Advertising does not inculcate the values that Barrett describes, nor can it in its role as a commercial discourse. Therefore, even as it mimics religious discourse, it has a paucity of depth and meaning. By contrast, religious discourses urge us to enact the common good through the embrace of altruistic behaviours such as teaching us to affirm others, to recognize community appropriately, and to make commitments to relationships. Advertising, on the other hand, exhorts us to pursue novelty in order to enhance ourselves, to embrace a commitment to honour individualism above all else, and to recognize brands as the most relevant symbols of community because we can buy our way into them. We are urged to substitute genuine human involvement with the act of buying.

A rhetorical vision of community that assumes the brand is more important than those who use it weakens social bonds and thus, destroys social capital. Sociologist Robert Putnam defines social capital as the

[C]onnections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense, social capital is closely related to what some have called ‘civic virtue.’ The difference is that ‘social capital’ calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. (19)

Social capital is built through human relationships, not through relationships mediated through products. Brands cannot unify communities or bring people together as community members in a meaningful way because a community is more than simple “mutual fandom” (Walker 31 – 32). If

the substance that binds communities together is a brand, when members change brands, they lose membership in the community by losing what marketing authors Albert Muniz and Thomas O'Guinn call "their special status" as people branded by what they buy. For example, it is impossible to be a part of the Pepsi Generation if the consumer switches to Coke. Muniz and O'Guinn claim that "consciousness of kind" is one of the most important elements of community. They note that brand users refer to themselves as being "different" or "special" in comparison to users of other brands (418); they claim that these sentiments illustrate consciousness of kind in their recognition of a distinct social category (419). They are right that brands can be used as symbols of identification, but to base the concept of "community" on a brand alone impoverishes the concept of community and reduces its many functions.

One of the most important features of community is that it teaches us how to get along with those who are not like us. Brand communities, by their unifying symbolic nature, cannot perform this function and, thus, an important aspect of the nature of community is lost. In losing this aspect, brand communities represent a reduction in the nature of community. This reduction results in stifling tolerance to and acceptance of difference. Putnam notes, "frequent interaction among diverse set of people tends to produce a norm of generalized reciprocity" (21). A key word here is "diversity". Brand communities cannot tolerate diversity at the most fundamental level. Advertising's rhetorical vision of community suggests that first, to be a part of a community, a person has to be a consumer and not just a consumer with utilitarian consumption patterns, but a consumer whose identity is managed through relationship with brands. It is not enough to consume soft drinks, but one should consume brand name soft drinks. Second, those who cannot consume substantially cannot be members, let alone members who are as highly valued as substantial brand users.

Advertising envisions two kinds of communities: one is the community portrayed or implied in ads themselves which revolve around the product being sold; the second is the brand community outside of the advertising world that grows up around brands that people have in common. The communities portrayed in advertising itself are imaginative ones: neighbourhoods are prettier than in real life, kids are more well-behaved, and neighbours are caricatures who act as foils for the ad's main character. They may be inoffensively envious, in dire need of being educated (particularly about the product), helpful or obstructionist. Their sole purpose is to help position the product or service being advertised. Advertising suggests that when we use the brand it sells, our lives and our communities might become more like the ones we see in Adland. However, what is the impact on people when communities in the world outside Adland are formed around brands?

These communities have at their heart commercial enterprise, and it seems inevitable that the nature of the community enterprise would affect human relationships within the community. According to psychologist Reuben Fine in *Narcissism, The Self, and Society*, “[c]ommunities cannot be properly understood without reference to their underlying orientations” (256). The underlying orientation of all advertising is commercial with the purpose of selling products and experience. The commercial nature of the “community” enterprise that underpins brand communities turns “community” into a symbol of economic health, rather than a symbol of the psychological health of the community. Participation in a community in a way that is meaningful to civic society means to be interested and involved in the life of the community.

What it means to be interested and involved in community life is interpreted much differently, for example, by marketing authors Albert Muniz and Thomas O’Guinn than by rhetorician Harold Barrett. Muniz and O’Guinn believe that brands do help to bind communities.

In their article, “Brand Community”, they define a “brand community” as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand . . . Like other communities, it is marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility” (412). Muniz and O’Guinn note that “communities are also marked by shared moral responsibility” which they define as “a sense of duty to the community as a whole, and to individual members of the community” (424). They claim that moral responsibility in brand communities includes communal survival which means integrating the retaining members (424), and “looking out for and helping others in their consumption of the brand” (425). Barrett might argue that helping others to consume would contradict the virtues of temperance and wisdom, particularly when helping others consumer more effectively leads to undesirable results for a majority of people, such as pollution, overburdening of natural resources, and debt. Muniz and O’Guinn claim that brand communities are “neither any more nor less real than many other forms of community” and that “there [are] legitimate [communities] found in the presence of the very forces that typically are blamed for destroying [them]” (426). However, Muniz and O’Guinn cast emphasis on how the community serves the brand and is grounded in people’s relationships to and with products, rather than in human relationships. This emphasis on brand makes commercial transaction, not human interaction, the foundation of community. For Muniz and O’Guinn, the “community” serves the commercial success of the brand and plays “a vital role in the brand’s ultimate legacy” (412). The authors say that members of brand communities are not “more lost or homeless in their consciousness simply because the social organizing objects in question happen to be commercial” (415). However, as Fine points out, “no examination of communities or group can be value free; values are inherent in their formation, maintenance, and dissolution” (254). Muniz

and O’Guinn claim that the community serves the brand, a claim that people in so-called brand communities might dispute. Nonetheless, advertising discourse positions brands in such a way that its rhetorical vision of community puts the brand at the centre and marginalizes people.

Muniz and O’Guinn note however, “brand communities have a relatively hedonistic and liberatory ethos, where pleasure is more sanctioned than restricted, and where unbounded individuality is celebrated” (427). When communities are based solely on the pursuit of narcissistic individualism they are not communities in any meaningful way because they do not seek to achieve the greater good. In fact, with a focus on narcissistic individualism, it becomes almost impossible to even consider the greater good. Instead, relationships are viewed through the lens of benefit to the individual and communities are viewed through a lens of finances. For example, the Body Shop suggests that buying their products will not only “protect the environment”, but also the people in distant countries who are struggling to provide goods to Body Shop buyers. The message is that the more we consume, the better off the whole world will be. Advertising expects us to believe that we are being responsible members of communities through consumption.

6.5.1. A Rhetorical Vision that Excludes

While the Muniz and O’Guinn article does demonstrate how brand communities fit into a vision of the term “community”, what they don’t talk about is how this vision is a rhetorical vision that advertising inherently sets up for people. Neither do the authors seem to address some of the other fundamental assumptions about community. First, in advertising’s rhetorical vision of community, people must be a brand consumer to participate in community. This assumption excludes people who are inadequate consumers or even non-consumers. Advertising’s rhetorical vision is underpinned by the assumption that community means bettering and sustaining the life

of the brand, more so than the lives of the people who use it. Further, it envisions consumers pursuing what Muniz and O’Guinn call “liberatory” individualism, which contributes to an unhealthy type of narcissism, and excludes other types of identity. Lastly, advertising pushes audiences toward sensation and novelty-seeking actions.

Brand community may be a form of community, but as Fine says, we must look at the underlying orientations of a community to understand it. The underlying orientations of brand communities are a part of advertising’s rhetorical vision of community. The rhetorical vision demonstrated in “brand community” suggests the attitudes of a dystopic enclave rather than a community pursuing ends for the common greater good. If brand communities share a moral responsibility, the examples that Muniz and O’Guinn give make us question what “morality” means. For example, the authors interviewed Saab owners who would stop and help anyone in a broken-down Saab, but would drive past motorists broken down in other makes or brands of vehicles (424 – 425). These examples suggest that brand loyalties may sharpen the us/them division that may exist in communities.

Rather than creating better communities, the rhetorical vision of advertising pictures narcissistic individuals in pursuit of novelty. If what brings these individuals together is a “brand,” those who choose other “brands” are excluded from the community. Advertising’s rhetorical vision of society includes significant alienation and division from non-consumers, who make up about two-thirds of the world’s population. Advertising helps set the scene to reinforce alienation and division.

6.6. Setting the Scene for Alienation and Division

It seems that advertising’s rhetorical vision would lead to social groups who are alienated from those who do not consume the same brands, as well as from those who simply do not

consume or do consume appropriately. According to Ewen, historically, ads presented a “world in which the individual was constantly judged by others, a world in which there was the total absence of positive bonds between people” (Ewen 99). Advertising encourages us to understand the positive bonds between people as those made by the consumption of common brands. If one does not consume or consume appropriately, then one is excluded from community and socially alienated. According to sociologists Goodman and Cohen,

[I]n a culture based around production, the poor are imagined to be those who do not produce, that is, the unemployed. Poverty, in the cultural imagination of consumer culture, is tied less to being a failed worker than to being a failed consumer. Those who are visibly poor, who beg on our streets and fill our homeless shelters, are assumed to consume the wrong thing, usually the wrong drug. (100 – 101)

However, poverty is not usually linked to our own habits of consumption, and because advertising insists we see ourselves as deeply flawed, it makes it easier to believe those who cannot or will not consume are even more flawed.

Goodman and Cohen point out “[i]n a consumer culture, [the poor] are not very visible . . . [and] are difficult to recognize” (101). If we accept the rhetorical vision presented in advertising, we accept the belief that people have value for their affiliation with products, rather than for their own intrinsic value as individuals. Community envisioned as “brand communities” further divides and alienates those who do not have the wealth to consume from those who do. Goodman and Cohen note that

The poor in consumer culture, despite being materially better off, are not able to fully participate in this culture because they have

less disposable income after basic necessities are acquired. Poverty is not just the inability to buy things; it is also the inability to engage in the central practice in our culture. (101)

Brand communities shored up by narcissistic individualism may create a recipe for the trivialization of others, and a society where compassion is construed only as sympathy for those who cannot consume as prodigiously as most North Americans do; thus, in advertising's ideology, the most authentic relationships are developed with products not with neighbours.

6.7. Compassion

According to Burke, we form identity as much “against” as much as we do “with” others, as he makes clear in his discussion of division and identification (1989, 179 – 181). Group cohesion automatically expresses an us/them mindset. There cannot be a “we” unless there is “they”. When we are united in our rhetorical visions of a consumer society, we are just as strongly alienated from others. The more we strongly identify with the “we,” the more we are divided from “they”. Since advertising fosters narcissistic individualism putting the self at the centre of each dramatizing message, the genre is not conducive to people valuing one another in a committed way.

The philosopher and legal scholar Martha Nussbaum says that, “compassion . . . involves a significant quasi-ethical achievement: namely, It involves valuing another person as part of one's own circle of concern” (2003, 336). However, when we cannot think much past how our next new purchase will help us achieve our ideal and idealized identity, it is difficult to consider the welfare of others. Compassion is necessary for social justice, but advertising's mandate as a genre is not to advocate social justice. It cannot afford to show people who do not consume.

Social marketing does hook itself onto causes, but it still ultimately asks people to identify “wants” as needs and to sate needs with consumption.

Because advertising concentrates on the centrality of the ego and ego satisfaction, it inherently encourages its audiences to focus on “individual self” not others. As religious studies scholar Karen Armstrong, notes “[c]ompassion is not a popular virtue, because it demands the laying aside of the ego that we identify with our deepest self” (469). Advertising denies the suffering of life and thus denies its audiences access to compassion that will result in new action. Although it co-opts the themes of religious discourse to speak to us about what it means to be human in terms of transformation and transcendence, it ultimately fails in helping humanity become more humane.

6.8 Conclusion

Advertising’s fantasy themes about character, action, and setting help develop a coherent rhetorical vision which has tremendous import for our practice of public morality. The rhetorical vision extrapolated from advertising’s world view shows how a value system may have an impact on how people act and behave toward each other and perceive themselves and others. If the pursuit of narcissistic individuality is the primary character trait that advertising shows us, over and over again, then acting socially to create stronger social bonds and better communities is not only hard to do, but becomes an inappropriate goal. Advertising scholars, Leiss, Kline, Jhally, and Botterill say, “[w]ithin the field of consumption individuals are not burdened by the morality of others, they need not concern themselves with their community, neighbours, democracy, family or children. They are free to engage in unfettered self-fulfilment” (330). If we pursue novelty at the expense of everything else, we are bound to a cycle of continually striving to find something more exciting, something that will give us the same thrill the “newness” of the

last product did. That will surely affect our understanding of commitment, steadfastness, and consistency. Advertising's rhetorical vision puts an emphasis on self at the expense of other, which means a diminished capacity for compassion and an unthinking consumption.

Advertising sells a rhetorical vision of people who have fulfilled the teleology of individualism that advertising promises them is possible. In advertising, people are living to their fullest potential as consumers, but we do not see the cost, either in terms of human cost or in terms of ecology. Advertising seeks to diminish our capacity for compassion and puts blinders on our eyes. In presenting a world of stuff that can help us achieve our consumer identity, advertising seeks to strip us of the very qualities that make us human.

When we buy into the vision that advertising sells, we are buying into our own diminished capacity for human interaction and human action. Advertising scholar Russell Belk writes,

We see, hear and read about an unprecedented culture of abundance in which others are depicted not so much drowning in an avalanche of unnecessary and burdensome possession, nor polluting the planet and voraciously devouring its limited resources, as they are portrayed enjoying a pleasurable feast of luxuries that could not be imagined even in the dreams of the most privileged in prior centuries. (67 – 68)

Advertising seeks to train us to believe that consumption is wealth, that community exists through brands, and that the most important person in the world is the individual. Thus, when we accept advertising's philosophy, we are buying into a form of religiosity because the symbols of consumption, the brands, are portrayed as symbols of transcendence and salvation.

Advertising parallels religious discourses in many ways; however, it is not developed to nourish what is most human in us, but to bring out the strongest motives to consume. It is a discourse that does not teach us to love one another, but teaches us a paradox: to love ourselves at the same time it asks us to recognize how deeply unlovable we are without the miracle of the product to transform us. It cannot teach us tolerance or forgiveness and it encourages us to misdirect our energies away from authentic social change by pretending that giving a portion of proceeds from sales of something is equivalent to fighting for real social change.

Advertising cannot show us social injustice and sell us on this idea at the same time, and its ethic means it has to sell products. This ethic has consequences for our sense of compassion: We cannot have compassion for those who do not consume, which has an effect not only on the way we see people in our own cities, but also how we see people in other countries who do not have the same amount of wealth as we do.

Advertising does not tell us how to handle grief and suffering, because in Adland, grief and suffering are trivialized and both are “curable” with the miracle of the product. While it is true that goods are important to us, both for utilitarian purposes and for the purposes of expressing our taste and individuality, advertising’s fantasy themes catch us up in the rhetorical visions of the genre, effectively blinding us to the needs in the world around us, with the implication of hampering us from engaging constructively with genuine social problems because we are plagued by the problems upon which advertising invites us to focus.

Chapter 7

Conclusion: Revelations from Advertising

“When people viewed images associated with strong brands – the iPod, the Harley-Davidson, the Ferrari, and others – their brains registered the exact same patterns of activity as they did when they viewed . . . religious imagery.”⁷³

7.1. Advertising as Religious Discourse

This dissertation has examined how advertising discourse performs and functions in ways similar to religious discourses. By examining the memoirs and “how to” books written by the earliest advertising specialists in the United States, the dissertation argues that these men, in trying to redeem their nascent profession, planted the seeds for the discourse to function as a kind of religious discourse. While they were writing in the late 19th and early 20th century, their vision of advertising as a force that would change public behavior has been realized into the 21st Century. That the admen salvaged advertising’s reputation and turned it into a discourse with the cachet of science and the spirit of religion attached to it points to their rhetorical acumen, and reinforces the significance of situation context in shaping discourse.

Both Kenneth Burke and Lloyd Bitzer assert the categorical imperative of “scene” as a shaping context out of which persuasive rhetoric grows. The admen’s writings arose in an historical time where advertising discourse was not just common or cheap, but was, in fact, often criminal. The historical scene limited the writer’s rhetorical options, but the strategies they chose

⁷³ Martin Lindstrom in *Buy-Ology*, 124.

enabled them to resurrect advertising into a rhetorical form that operates in a manner similar to religious discourses, and specifically to evangelizing discourses.

People are persuaded when a rhetor can meet them in familiar territory and move them from that territory into new and unfamiliar territory. To accomplish this task, the rhetor has to build common ground by linking what is familiar to the audience with the new material the rhetor wishes the audience to understand. The earliest advertising men talked about advertising discourse using the same types of terms that they would use to talk about religion and religious experience. By calling on religious language to discuss this new form of public address, advertising, the ad men crafted a strategy to get persuade people to accept advertising as a legitimate form of discourse. Their strategy was more successful than they could have possibly imagined. From a rhetorical point of view, this strategy is effective because it helps people understand something new in terms of something familiar. The admen linked commercial language to religious language and helped their audiences to understand advertising in a new way.

Advertising has been called “news about products” and has, thus, functioned as a kind of gospel. However, it has also exerts a strong influence on, and in fact, often constitutes, a substantial portion of the modern world’s symbolic universe. It is socially influential, in part because it is everywhere, but also in part because of its naturalized assumptions, and the anonymity of its creators. As a genre, it shows us an ideal of human life and relationships, guides us to understand how we “sin” as consumers, shows us what is sacred, and tells us how we can attain salvation.

7.2. Advertising's Teachings

In Chapter 3, I introduced the “Great Men” of advertising history whose contributions are significant and formative to how the modern world understands advertising. I showed how each man began using discourse rooted in religion and religious imagery to discuss advertising. I argued that the earliest ad men’s language choices function as “terministic screens” that have shaped the way advertising has been understood. I examined how George Rowell, Ernest Elmo Calkins, and Claude Hopkins, some of the most prominent advertising men of the early 20th Century contributed to defining advertising’. As well, I looked at Walter Dill Scott’s work to show that advertising has always had an explicitly psychological bent. I analyzed the clusters of metaphors in their work to show how their language choices had a “sermonizing” effect, in essence, persuading their readers that advertising was a sacred force and aligning it with science and art. The men’s terministic screens worked to provide salvation to what had been a disreputable form of discourse. Advertising became a “godsend” to a nation moving into the 20th century.

By calling on metaphors of both religion and science, the admen helped advertising accrue the cachet from these discourses to itself. Advertising was a powerful and miraculous discourse that could resurrect or blight business. But advertising was about more than just commerce. It also taught people about ideal behavior. Thus, having bad breath or serving bad coffee became ways to “sin” against those we cared about. It also began to suggest to audiences ways to transcend their state of lack and achieve redemption from their sinful ways. When advertising was positioned as a gospel, it began to act as one.

Religious discourses evoke an ideal of human nature, teaching audiences about what it means to be human and what it means to suffer, what is held to be sacred, what ideals of human

relation should be striven for, and how to achieve the religion's ultimate goal. Advertising performs many of these same functions. It teaches about its ideal of human nature and what advertising believes it means to be human. It defines and addresses its version of suffering, shows us what it holds sacred, describes and dramatizes ideals of human relations, and implicitly implies what its ultimate goal is for its audiences and how to achieve that goal. However, while the world's major religions seek to expand our understanding of ourselves, our place in the world, our relationships with others and our duties to our communities, advertising seeks to limit our understanding and our experience by demanding self-absorption of its target audiences.

The ideal of human nature that advertising evokes is one wherein people are consumed with knowledge and anxiety about their lack and deficiency. The solution to this deficiency is not self-reflection, but self-absorption. The quest to mediate the deficiency is encouraged through consumption rather than through the pursuit of relationships with others and genuine involvement in our communities.

In advertising the meaning of suffering is entwined with its efforts to convince us of our deficiency. Suffering is primarily self-involved and comes from social and status anxiety, and a lack of goods, rather than through our love of others and our commitment to their well-being and happiness.

7.3. Identity Invoked by Advertising

Advertising also implicitly suggests an ideal identity for its audiences. There are two parts to this ideal identity. The first part of the identity is that of a perfect individual identity. The genre has the rhetorical function of convincing audiences that to attain this ideal identity, they must consume and that through consumption of the right products, each individual will achieve his or her own version of ideal identity. However, the products can never bestow what the

advertising promises, but each ad promises this identity. It asks us to transcend our lack and our deficiencies by using particular products, but the products do not help us achieve transcendence. Paradoxically, even as advertising promises us that our dreams for self-realization can come true, it ensures that this self-realization can never occur. In fact, it depends on this self-realization to never occur in order to affirm to audiences that the ideal identity is that of consumer. Thus, on the one hand, advertising promises audiences that they can perfect their individual identities even as each and every iteration of advertising tells the audience members how deficient they are as audience members. Advertising's audiences are thus envisioned to be people who constantly partake in the cycle of consumption and the only perfection of identity available to the audience is in the moment of consumption.

7.4. Burke and the Guilt-Mortification-Redemption Cycle in Advertising

Advertising makes what is inherent in language an integral part of our action and experiences as “consumers”. In Chapter 4, I called on Kenneth Burke's theories to show how advertising, like other powerful discourses, promises what humans seem to desire the most. It satisfies our symbolic yearnings and these symbolic yearnings are coded into the nature of language itself. Burke argues that language itself helps generate motives which shape our perception of the world. I argue that advertising's motives for its audience's identity are encoded in its forms.

Advertising's effectiveness can be understood linguistically in that “the negative” fuels the entire genre. Advertising is always about what we do not have, cannot have or does not exist. Many of the symbolic ideas that are attached to the product are things that we can never have, no matter how many times we purchase the product or one like it. For example, no cream can

reverse the aging process; no joint medication will restore a 70-year old hip to its 20-year old incarnation, and consuming more does not protect the environment.

In addition to the negative, advertising is also strongly entwined with the concept of hierarchy which is a principle inherent in language. Burke suggests that our understanding of language is built on our understanding of the concrete and abstract. For example, “perfection” is an abstract concept, but when we conceive of ourselves as wealthy, wrinkle-free jaguar-driving sex-machines who are in demand with friends and lovers, and living an advertising dream, we may be in touch with a concrete example of what would make us feel that we were perfect. Advertising is expert in the area of selling dreams.

Language also encodes an element of what Burke calls mystery and that mystery is made manifest in advertising that shows us a world that does not exist but seems realistic, a world populated with fictional characters who are, nevertheless, like us, and a world where the worst things that happen can be fixed or repaired with a purchase. In addition, we are separated from others by the “mystery” that their individuality poses, but also separated from ourselves because we are so goaded by hierarchy, that, like language, we yearn toward a transcendent god-term.

Lastly, Burke notes that the concept of “pollution” is intertwined with “the negative” and “hierarchy”. Because we are awash in “lack” and “polluted” by our own hierarchical goads, we are contaminated. Advertising promises to redeem us from this linguistically-oriented position we are stuck in and to help us transcend the hierarchies that exist in our minds, in our lives, and in our social worlds. Advertising magnifies these hierarchies and enhances our yearnings to transcend them. What language use seems to set in motion, advertising capitalizes on.

Advertising implicitly invokes this perfection of identity in its structure of guilt-mortification-redemption. Burke’s concept of guilt suggests that it is ontological, and the

advertising genre gives presence to the anxiety of being human. If, as Burke argues, we are inclined to feel guilt in the inevitable presence of any hierarchy, then advertising makes effective use of this inevitability. It invites and encourages audiences to feel guilt about their entire range of human experience. Thus, advertising seeks to turn self-reflection to self-consciousness and anxiety. The desire to love and be loved is mired in regret and remorse; the relationships between spouses and kin are revealed to be lacking in substance as substance is conceived of in advertising.

Advertising introduces additional ways for its audience to feel guilty, ranging from pointing out how and where skin can sag to what odors the human body is subject to emitting, or from demonstrating what ideal relationships look like to what types of activities happy people engage in. Then, after showing the audience members how they are deficient, it encourages mortification. Advertising seeks acknowledgement from its audiences that they are, indeed, unworthy and unacceptable. This acknowledgement occurs each and every time an ad influences us to purchase something. In that moment of consumption we truly become a consumer in need of the aid that products can give us.

The structure of advertising moves the audience from guilt to mortification and then on to the redemption conferred by acts of consumption. Redemption is only momentary however, and the instant a purchase has been made, advertising again functions to attempt to convince audiences to see themselves as beings who are deficient.

7.5. Narcissistic Individuality and Consequences

The guilt-mortification-redemption strategies embedded in the structure of advertising are powerful motivational tools, but they are given continued relevance because advertising makes one aspect of humanity sacred at the expense of all others. In advertising, people are invited to

feel inadequate because they age, experience rejection and disappointment, and undergo biological processes. Advertising, through encouraging its rituals of consumptions, tries to convince us that we can abolish time and space and undergo an experience that is religious in nature. It accomplishes its sometimes paradoxical objectives by implicitly making sacred the aspect of individuality.

The advertising genre engages in rhetorical strategies that attempt to convince audiences to sacralize individuality. Most ads implicitly promise individuals that they can become better than they are, through consuming and engaging with products. The idea of “the best” or the ideal is a logical consequence of becoming “better,” and yet, that logical consequence cannot be realized or we would have no need for advertising and it would end up doing itself out of a job. However, advertising attempts to convince audiences that individuality must be nourished and respected as the ultimate goad in becoming a fully functioning consumer.

I have argued that modern advertising seeks to have an impact on our self-concept and thus, influences our identities. Advertising’s generic forms constitute an audience’s identity, speaking to ideals of human behavior; however, advertising encodes its own ideals which are woven into advertising’s fabric, thus becoming the primary pattern of identity formation. Advertising encourages individualism and, in fact, sacralizes the notion of individualism. The object of worship in advertising’s religiosity is the concept of “individuality”. This worshipful attitude and the sacralizing of individualism encourages the pursuit of individualism to the exclusion of any other consideration, making this pursuit narcissistic in nature. Social psychologists Jean Twenge and Keith Campbell in *The Narcissism Epidemic: Living in the Age of Entitlement* argue that there has been an overall cultural shift “toward a greater focus on self-admiration” (38). The authors argue that the epidemic has been created by at least three

elements: 1) “a media culture of shallow celebrity”; 2) the Internet which “serves as a conduit for individual narcissism”; and 3) “easy credit” (x). They say, “the narcissistic inflation of the self was the cultural twin of the inflation of credit”(x). Advertising helps promote the fantasy of celebrity and offers a world of “stuff” to help audiences exercise their credit. Advertising contributes to inculcating narcissistic individualism as an ideal trait, which has consequences for a civil society. I explained how the cultural weight and intensity of advertising ramp up the message of individualism making narcissistic individualism the end goal of advertising’s rhetorical power.

I have argued that in the goal of making everyone’s identity over into a consumer identity, in addition to making narcissism a highly prized cultural value, advertising also fosters ideological values, attitudes and beliefs about novelty and the practice of compassion, and that narcissistic individualism and novelty have repercussions for how we understand community and for how we believe that a civil society is maintained.

In using individuality as the primary sacred concept in its repertoire, advertising does not enrich humanity. Ultimately, other forms of public address invite audiences to participate in a civic and a civil society, but advertising invites the audience to reject civility because it focuses attention on the individual in a supremely narcissistic way.

7.6. Advertising Incivility and Social Consequences

Ultimately, the most dangerous aspect of advertising rests in its rhetorical vision of people and society. In advertising, the focus is on encouraging self-absorption to the exclusion of every other consideration. Advertising exhorts its audiences to implicitly accept that relationships are built through interaction with products, that communities can be bought into and exist through commercial interaction rather than human interaction, and that the most

effective way to interact in the civic area is through acts of consumption. Benet Davetian in *Civility: A Cultural History* concludes that “the degree of satisfaction of a people with their civil culture will very much be affected by the extent to which they feel meaningfully connected to other members of their culture” (507). Advertising is a significant cultural tool that works toward disconnecting people from meaningful relationships with each other.

Advertising ostensibly advises us on how to be in our social worlds and what to strive for in order to achieve fulfillment in our lives. Advertising helps create “knowledge” by showing us how we are lacking. It teaches us what to value and what is important. However, since it is a commercial discourse with one main goal, it does not always seek what is best for its audience. It helps us arrive at social truths and helps us build our common-sense assumptions: in essence, it functions as a religious discourse because it plays many of the roles traditionally played religious discourse.

7.7. Impact of Study of Rhetorical Scholarship

This dissertation fills a gap in the scholarly study of communication because it examines advertising’s historical roots and theorizes about how this commercial genre attempts to influence the nature of human communication. I am not the first critic to talk about the religious dimensions of advertising, but I am the first rhetorical critic to argue that advertising has more than just religious *dimensions*, and that, in fact, advertising function as a religious discourse because, as a genre, it offers transformation and transcendence in its every iteration. Sometimes the transformation is proffered overtly as we see in many ads for beauty products aimed at women, but the transformation promise is always proffered covertly as well. Because each ad addresses the exigence of its target audience’s lack and then offers the thing advertised to remediate the exigence, it implicitly promises transformation through the ritual of consumption.

The target audience's lack may be as simple as not having the product, or as complicated as lacking the characteristic that consumption of the product can impute.

The disciplinary conventions of rhetoric are well-suited to fill the gaps left by other disciplines, because rhetoric examines situation, speaker, message and purpose, and human motives of both speakers and audiences. It is strongly concerned with examining how people arrive at systems of beliefs, with what persuades them, and with how they are persuaded. Rhetoric is concerned with identity formation and transformation. It seeks to uncover the intentions at work in any discourse, but its roots are deep in public discourse. I have used rhetorical methods to examine how the intentions of the earliest admen positioned the discourse as having religious force and argued that advertising continues to exert an influence that is strongly religious in nature.

If advertising were not the most pervasive form of public discourse, its religiously-infused characteristics would not have the same import. However, because every person in our society is constantly exposed to the overt promises of transcendence in every ad they see or hear, people are marinating in what commercial discourse makes sacred. Advertising functions on a guilt-mortification-redemption paradigm to which, as Burke argues, humans respond.

The only other discourse to which people have historically had this kind of exposure is religious discourse, but even then, due to technological differences, religious discourses were not as intensely featured in the general public's daily lives. Because of the technological age we live in, advertising has the opportunity to pervade every aspect our lives. It also has the motive to ensure that boundaries between the private, the public, and the commercial are erased. Advertising constitutes a view of its audience; it invokes an ideal audience in each ad. When we

respond to advertising, we are, in part, accepting the role it constitutes for us. I hope that my work will help us to understand what we buy into when we buy products.

As I have argued throughout, advertising functions in ways similar to religious discourse, providing revelation about both products and consumer, and it is inherently paradoxical. I would like to make it clear that I am not arguing that advertisers and advertising writers are deliberately unethical, but I am arguing that as the primary form of public discourse, it may have an impact that we have not considered very clearly or rigorously, in part because we are not always conscious of the covert motives that the advertising genre forwards. Advertising transcends products, production, the economy, and almost every tangible thing it sells. What is important to advertising is creating an identity for its audience and that identity is the consumer identity. Paradoxically, an act of consumption does not create the identity, but continual acts of consumption appear to bring people close to achieving the identity because the act of consuming produces only a momentary fulfillment of the idealized identity.

People need meaning, people need self-respect and love; People need to identify with others and with something larger than themselves or their immediate communities. We need to feel part of something more than the flesh and bones of what we are. Advertising helps meet that need. People need a rhetorical centre. Advertising provides it and no other discourse can compete because no other discourse has the opportunities for speaking to audiences the way advertising does. However, we should ask ourselves, “is this the discourse that should have the run of our symbolic worlds?”

However, advertising lacks what major religious discourses offer and that is a way to grapple with difficult things, like difference, compassion, integrity, ethics, death, grief, and evil.

Ideally, religious discourses primarily benefit those who participate in them, rather than corporations.

7.7.1. Suggestions for Future Research:

I think this line of enquiry provides a fruitful area for rhetorical scholars. Scholars could investigate the connections between religious practices, such as the sale of indulgences and the commercial practices of shopping. It would also be fruitful to examine advertisements for specific connections to the structure of religious discourse, such as preaching, prayer, hymns, and parables.

In addition, neuromarketers and neurologists are discovering things about brain science that seem to confirm some of the arguments I am making here; However, some scientific research might be used to dispute some of my claims, for example, my argument about novelty as a societal ideal. Associate Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Emory University, Gregory Berns, published *Satisfaction: The Science of Finding True Fulfillment* in 2005. In that work, he suggests that novelty is one of the keys to finding satisfaction because it drives us to pursue challenges and adversity. Thus it might be argued that advertising helps to stimulate natural brain function. Regardless, his work confirms how advertising is so effective because it hooks itself onto some of our very natural desires, such as the desire for novelty, as well as meaning, joy, and community.

Rhetorical theory would be useful to examine how advertisers conceive of consumers as an audience for a particular type of advertising. For example, what do they pinpoint as the target audiences' fears, dreams, hopes, and wishes? It might also be fruitful to Canadian studies to examine Canadian/ American differences in advertising writers' memoirs. Work needs to be done on the connection between New Age beliefs and advertising. According to Max Weber's

work, all economic systems have a moral underpinning. I think an argument can be made that the moral underpinning is New Age religious beliefs. I would also like to further explore the connection between folk and fairy tales and advertising and, in fact, to produce a “morphology” of advertising because I think that advertising operates on archetypes and stock characters.

7.8. Conclusion

The rhetorical scholar Roderick Hart claims that rhetorical criticism “presents practical techniques for uncovering the wishes and schemes hidden in public discourses” (6). The most important task my study performs is to reveal how advertising seeks to position itself as a discourse that functions as a discourse of religion. It wishes to exert an ethical influence, a social influence, and perhaps even a political influence. It makes commerce, rather than interpersonal relationships, the heart of human interaction. I hope that my work can assist people in understanding advertising in a new way. When we can see the strategies a discourse is using, we may give informed assent to being persuaded in that manner or we can refuse the manner of persuasion on offer.

Advertising does affirm our humanity. Because we accept it and because we sometimes respond to it, we know that we are driven to strive for a better world. We seek transcendence and transformation; we want a better world. Advertising attaches itself to our deepest yearnings, but co-opts them for its own commercial purposes. It asks us to substitute satisfaction gained from relationships for satisfaction gained from a combination of consumption and advertising narrative.

Advertising is not going away, nor should it. It engages us, it makes us laugh, and it also gives us information about goods and products available in the marketplace. It has been around, in one form or another, for centuries, but in its current incarnation it appeals to our deepest and most significant human instincts which have traditionally found their outlet in religious expression and practice. We need to re-think our relationship to advertising instead of either dismissing as trivial discourse or assuming that it is turning people into automatons who shop on command. We have free will and just because advertising seeks to function in a religiously-

infused manner does not mean that we have to accept its premises. By using rhetorical criticism and analysis, we can have more conscious responses to its goals, and we can struggle to ensure that advertising is weighed and judged appropriately. We need to always remember that we can achieve our goals of gaining and giving love and respect, helping communities, and exercising our compassion through authentic connection with other people, rather than with or through products.

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Biographical Sketch

Jeanie Wills has worked professionally as a copy writer and Creative Director at several Canadian Radio stations. She left her career as an advertising writer to complete a BA Honours degree and a Master's Degree through the English Department at the University of Saskatchewan. After teaching English at St. Thomas More College, U of S, and at Saskatchewan Indian Federated College, she returned to graduate studies to complete a PhD in Interdisciplinary Studies at the College of Graduate Studies and Research, University of Saskatchewan. The theme of her PhD degree is Rhetoric and Popular Culture.