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Advertising and the Development of Consumer Society

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This essay examines an important type of modern, urban-industrial imagery: advertising. Advertising plays a conspicuous and powerful role in people's lives. Wherever one looks — in the street, in our homes, in theatres — it is there, promoting goods and services, anything that can be sold. Advertising pushes a vision of life which says that satisfaction is available across the retail countertop.

According to the logic of advertising, people are what they own. One's quality as a person is directly proportional to one's ability to buy. In the United States, as in other modern industrial societies, this message is continually reinforced across a broad, seemingly endless, imagistic panorama.

Some products are presented as the symbols by which people achieve financial, professional, or personal power over others: the equation for success. Other ads encourage people to focus negatively upon their bodies — every pore, every orifice, every surface, every imperfection — with the promise that if people use *this* or *that* product they will be *improved*. In the visionary world of advertising we see people undergoing magical metamorphoses, transcending their innate limits and achieving projected ideals of femininity, of masculinity, of power, and of pleasure. Some ads promise to carry people forward into some utopian future; others offer a return to a simpler, more pacific past (to the historic campfires of a mythic "old west," to the days of chivalry, away from the ennui of the present). Some ads offer the promise of individuality in a society where conformity and monotony often seem to be the norm. Others offer visions of community in a world where loneliness is often the experience.

These kind of images and promises are things that we, in the United States, are used to. On television and radio, in print media and on billboards, the consumable life, the buyable fantasy, continually bombards us. Even if we tend to resist a particular message or promise, everywhere the general message is repeated, inescapable.

We must ask many questions of advertising in order to understand its significance and its roots within our lives. Yet in approaching the phenomenon of advertising imagery we must also be cautious. We are dealing with mesmerizing artifacts and can easily be misled. Within the framework of this essay, therefore, it is necessary to approach the development of advertising as an aspect of the general social history of industrial capitalism and urbanization in twentieth-century American life.

Two pitfalls must be avoided. Most media histories let images speak for themselves. They treat images as if they have the ability to tell their own history, apart from society, apart from the real lives of the people with whom they are engaged. Ultimately their historical approach to advertising amounts to little more than mere chronologies. Their underlying assumption is that ads have a self-enclosed cosmology, not directly engaged with the experience of real people.

The second pitfall to avoid is a particular widely held American perception of *the city*. In the United States, the term "melting pot" has long served as a metaphor for American urban life. Under the rubric of this metaphor lies a particular way of seeing the city: that the social history of American cities has consisted of swallowing up and transforming a continual influx of immigrants and migrants. The outcome of this process is a product: "American." While there is certainly truth to the notion that America has transformed people's lives, it is also necessary to see that people — their experiences, their roots, their concerns, their desires — have also shaped the environment they have entered. Urban imagery — advertising — bears the imprint of the lives of the people that they address. To approach an understanding of urban, commercial imagery, images must be seen as engaged in a social-historical process, responsible to the changing terms of social life, of social institutions. Thus, advertising images, though they lay claim to an enormous sweep of vision, must be placed upon the social and political battleground they often intend to mask.

What is this battleground, this social context? The development of the city, of urban life, provides some important clues. If we look across the historical tableau of the past eighty years of urban existence, there is a recurrent lament which deserves attention. Its voice is often romantic, but its troubled content rings true. Three examples, drawn from across the past century, provide a starting place.

The first voice is that of the German sociologist Georg Simmel, who around 1900 expressed some provocative thoughts on the psychological experience of modern, metropolitan life. Writing on "the metropolis and mental life," and noting the potent role of imagery within the city, Simmel observed:

The psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the *intensification of nervous stimulation* which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli. . . . Lasting impressions which differ only slightly from one another, impressions which take a regular and habitual course and show regular and habitual contrasts — all these use up, so to speak, less consciousness than does the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of a single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions. These are the psychological conditions which the metropolis creates.¹

Within his vision of the city and its images, Simmel sensed a population ripped from its traditional conventions of perception, unbalanced and unhinged.

Some thirty years later, the Chicago sociologist, Robert Park, expressed similar concerns as he evaluated the legacy of urbanization upon the millions who had migrated from around the world to American cities during the early decades of this century. "(T)he 'cake of custom' is broken," he began, "and the individual is freed for new enterprises and for new associations." Yet lurking within this context of opportunity, there was cause for concern:

One of the consequences of migration is to create a situation in which the same individual . . . finds himself striving to live in two diverse cultural groups. The effect is to produce an unstable character. . . . This is the "marginal man." It is in the mind of the marginal man that conflicting cultures meet and fuse. It is, therefore, in the mind of the marginal man that the process of civilization is visibly going on, and it is in the mind of the marginal man that the processes of civilization may best be studied.²

Park's urbanite, like Simmel's, is plagued by confusion, caught within a disparity of meanings and understandings. Cultural dislocation, for both, is the central experience of urbanization and modernity. Within the shadows of progress stands the culturally eviscerated individual. Since Park made his observations of 1928, the problem has not gone away. For some, it has become epidemic.

Louis Sass, a psychologist and professor at Holy Cross College, has described similar conditions not just among recent arrivals to the metropolis, but also among their progeny over generations. Writing in the Sunday New York *Times Magazine* recently, Sass noted that:

. . . . (M)any mental-health professionals believe that we live in an era of borderline pathology. Just as the hysterical neurotic of Freud's time — plagued by conflicts of conscience and desire — exemplified the repressive Western culture at the turn of the century, so certain disturbances in an individual's sense of identity and difficulties in maintaining stable human relationships — characteristics attributed to the borderline personality — may reflect the fragmentation of contemporary society.³

What do we see in these examples of this recurrent lament, and what is its relation to our understanding of advertising? First, and very simply, we see a continuum of urban life which, aside from its various benefits, has been marked by social fragmentation and alienation. Without question, many of the messages of American advertising have addressed these problems within their formulae for success or transcendence. According to many advertisements, a sense of balance and belonging, of connectedness and peace of mind, lies at the far end of a purchase.

A second thing worth noting about the three quotes is their language. While each writer speaks of social conditions, their description is decidedly psychological. Their discourse is a product of that which they are describing: a fissure between the material conditions of existence and the psychological modes of understanding that existence. This magnification of the individual psyche, a hallmark of modern life, is likewise addressed by advertising. Consumption, it might be argued, is the most widely available mode of psychotherapy. Advertising speaks to emotional hungers, presents its commodities as emotional nourishments. In America it is a cliché to say that the best way to deal with being depressed is to go shopping.

Something which is not directly confronted in these quotes is the way in which these emotional hungers are expressions of disruptions within the material conditions of existence, characteristic disruptions of the urban-industrial milieu. The person who is buffeted by "the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions," the "marginal man," the "borderline personality," is also someone who has experienced a transformation within the terms of survival. This transformation may include a process of proletarianization, one within which an agricultural or artisanal pattern of work has been eclipsed by new forms of labor and new rhythms of production: industrial, regimented,

bureaucratic. Another aspect of this transformation has been the rise of consumerism as a social relationship, a mode of daily life. If, in the past, people provided for many of their needs directly and collectively, the modern person lives by wages; needs are increasingly embroiled in a choreography of individual purchases and abstract exchange.

If traditional culture was *dependent* upon bonds of family and community, consumer culture makes many of these bonds ceremonial. In the city, more and more of our interactions are interactions with strangers. Cooperation, insofar as it is fostered in the contemporary world, takes place under the hegemonic rubric of the corporation. Within this changed environment of social connections, many of the bonds between people have been increasingly eroded, made fragile; according to the dominant structures of society, they are defined as "unnecessary." People long for community and for self-determination, but in the modern corporate-industrial world, these are elusive, romanticized memory fragments.

Here, too, advertising figures heavily. It historically addresses the transfiguration of survival. It provides a social commentary, a sympathetic voice, *even a critique*, of the very historical conditions of which it is an inextricable part. While reinforcing the priorities of corporate production and marketing, advertising offers a symbolic empathy to its audience, criticizing alienation and offering transcendent alternatives. Needless to say, these "alternatives" are contained, religiously, within the cosmology of the marketplace.

If urban-industrial life has given rise to a critique of alienation, much corporate advertising can be understood as an attempt to appropriate and channel that critique. A good example of this can be seen in a current advertising campaign being waged by IBM to sell small computers. The ads — both print and broadcast — use the likeness of Charlie Chaplin, and make reference to his scathing film comedy about industrial capitalism, "Modern Times" (1936).

"Modern Times" is a masterful critique of an increasingly regimented industrial society, a bitter and poetic examination of modern life and alienation. In Chaplin's film we confront a factory world which increasingly usurps human initiative; in the factory people lie beneath the thumb of productivity, their bodies and souls shaped and overwhelmed by an assembly line. The priorities of such a world submerge human needs and misery abounds. People are seen as useful only if they can be plugged into the productive apparatus. Otherwise, they are tossed aside, like garbage.

Another theme of the film is the relationship between media and power within the industrial world. Those in authority, those with their hands on the controls, utilize the media of communication to

exercise their power. Those who labor, poor folks, remain — within the firm — voiceless.

Yet alongside this grim vision of industrial encroachment, Chaplin's "Modern Times" is also utopian, visionary. Against the robotic rhythms of factory life, it calls for poetry, action, resistance. It offers a critique of work itself, suggesting that pleasure is a more meaningful *telos* for human life. Against the monotony of a mechanical civilization, Chaplin evinces a politics of spontaneity, a manifesto for sensuality and positive disorder. At the film's end, Chaplin — a former factory worker — and his beloved "gamin," take to the road. They walk away from the strictures and disciplines of industrial society.

Today, Charlie Chaplin and "Modern Times" have returned to the public eye. In this incarnation, however, the little tramp is selling computers for IBM. In the IBM ad we once again confront Chaplin as a victim of industrial chaos, overwhelmed by the assembly line. But this time, the solution is different. Beleaguered Charlie is saved by the computer, the quintessential modern instrument of order and control. Here the frenetic conditions of modern life are solved by modern technology. While the film pointed a *way out*, the ad points a *way back in*. The critique has been turned on its head, contained and used against itself. Rather than questioning modern life and work, the ad instructs us into an acceptance of that life.

There are three important aspects of the Chaplin/IBM ads worth mentioning. First, these ads reflect and reinforce the contemporary conditions of labor, the work process, structures of technology. Second, the ads are responsive to the social terms of modern life; they reflect a sense of a world "out of control." Last, the ads offer a symbolic empathy with the critique of alienation and with visions of transcendence through the appropriation of the familiar image of "the little tramp." These three aspects, evident in the IBM ads, are basic components of advertising, and have historically emerged as essential parts within the American urban-commercial vernacular.

The historical development of advertising in the United States, from the late-nineteenth century onward, helps us to understand the contours of an emerging commercial vernacular imagery. By the late-nineteenth century advertising imagery had already developed two important and powerful capacities.

First, advertising made use of techniques which promoted a democratic sensibility. A technique used by more and more advertisers in the late 1800s was chromolithography — color printing which produced lustrous and sumptuous results cheaply. Advertising cards, selling everything from patent medicines to farm machinery, were mass produced

and distributed throughout the county. If traditional culture defined a world where only the wealthy had access to beautiful color pictures — oil paintings — the proliferation of advertising images put, for the first time, colorful works of art in the hands of the masses. While selling their products, advertisers were also providing people with appealing decorations for their homes, decorations formerly unavailable. Today color lithography is everywhere and appears pedestrian, yet to its first recipients it bore tremendous symbolic power. "Chromos" broke the monopoly over art which was formerly a privilege of wealth. In addition to selling goods, color advertisements offered material evidence of democratic social change. The appeal of advertising, then, was partly rooted in its apparent ability to fulfill ancient utopian desires. It made the symbolic accoutrements of wealth available to everyone, free of charge. For people schooled by an historic scarcity of images, the appearance of chromolithography seemed revolutionary. It portended, one might have surmised, a "world turned upside-down." This can be seen in the words of the great black abolitionist — a former slave — Frederick Douglass. He saw chromolithographs as part of the exodus from slavery to freedom. Speaking particularly of the availability of "chromos" to black Americans, Douglass placed these bright images against the grim backdrop of a recently abolished slavery:

Heretofore, colored Americans have thought little of adorning their parlors with pictures Pictures come not with slavery and oppression and destitution, but with liberty, fair play, leisure, and refinement. These conditions are now possible to colored American citizens, and I think the walls of their houses will soon begin to bear evidence of their altered relations to the people about them.⁴

Beyond embodying democratic change, advertising was also a mobile form of imagery; it could reach out to an audience. Printed and dispersed widely in the latter decades of the nineteenth century, advertisements provided a vehicle by which urban life could be presented to the countryside — urban industrial values promulgated among rural folks. A notable example of this was the massive distribution of the Sears-Roebuck Catalogue among American farmers from the 1890s on. Based in Chicago, Sears was a mail-order firm dealing with a primarily rural clientele. For many in the countryside, the advertisements in the Sears catalogue provided a first glimpse of the city. Upon the crowded, densely printed pages of the catalogue — dubbed "America's Wish Book" — rural people saw configurations which contrasted sharply with the open spaces with which they were familiar. Here urban density was depicted not as a condition of poverty and squalor, but as a site

of abundance. Against rural traditions of scarcity and self-sufficiency, advertising — like that of the Sears catalogue — projected urban consumption as a route toward cornucopian existence. On each page of the catalogue, people confronted a quantity and variety of material goods that was previously unimaginable. Advertising was a kind of urban map, suggesting a world of streets paved with gold. Beyond its democratic implications, advertising beckoned towards a new way of life.

By the 1920s, in the United States, a national advertising industry was taking hold — an offshoot of mass production consumer goods industries and their continual need for ever-growing markets. Within the nascent advertising industry, a tradition of commercial social thought began to emerge. If modern, urban life generated a population of "marginal" men, advertising spoke to the vacuums within their lives. Advertising sought to reform people's perceptions, to create markets and sell people a new way of life. Within the ads of 1920s the selling of products was increasingly linked to an ongoing commentary on the terms of modern existence. Ads spoke less and less about the quality of the products being sold and more and more about the lives of the people being addressed.

Behind these new images lay the emerging ideas of businessmen interested in establishing a consumption-based cultural stability among a population in crisis. Advertising was seen as a way of habituating people to the terms of the marketplace. Edward A. Filene, a Boston department store magnate, and an early ideologue of mass consumerism, put it simply:

Mass production demands the education of the masses. The masses must learn to behave like human beings in a mass production world The time has come . . . when all our institutions . . . must concentrate on the great social task of teaching the masses not what to think but HOW TO THINK, and thus to find out how to behave like human beings in the machine age.⁵

Within Filene's vision of education, the priorities of marketing were a motor force, advertising was an essential teaching tool.

Since the American population of the 1920s was more than half immigrant, or the children of immigrants, the question of educating the masses took on a patriotic flavor. The transformation of heterogeneous communities into a coherent national market was often described in political language. Frances Alice Kellor, an advertising woman who placed ads in the foreign language press, saw advertising as a crucial device of social integration. Speaking to businessmen, Kellor argued

that advertising was an imperative of the moment — a way of stabilizing a vast and potentially dangerous immigrant work force:

National advertising is the great Americanizer. American ideals and institutions, law, order, and prosperity, have not yet been sold to all our immigrants. American products and standards of living have not yet been bought by the foreign born in America. . . . If Americans want to combine business and patriotism, they should advertise products, industry and American institutions in the American Foreign Language press.⁵

Once again, the general priority of market development was fused to notions of social order and the obliteration of customary culture. A population of consumers had to be divorced from those memories and perceptions rooted in older ways of life.

By the late 1920s this thrust towards consumerizing the population took on an evangelical fervour. The physics of modern life was underwritten by a religious faith. This faith can be heard in the words of Christine Frederick, an advisor to businessmen, and a leader in the home economic movement:

Consumptionism is the name given to the new doctrine; and it is admitted today to be the greatest idea that America has to give to the world; the idea that workmen and masses be looked upon not simply as workers and producers but as consumers.

Addressing a business audience, she elucidated a formula for the future of consumer capitalism: "Pay them more, sell them more, prosper more is the equation."⁷

The translation of this formula into a social strategy can be seen in the advertisements that were produced from the 1920s onwards. Advertising addressed the conditions of urban, industrial life, and expressed a sensitivity to popular discontents. Simultaneously ads offered solutions embedded in the new universe of consumer goods, a universe which reinforced patterns of life and work demanded by an industrial society.

While advertising addressed the modern stress of work, it also shied away from depicting the factory *per se*. Factory life was a widely experienced arena of boredom and disaffection, but advertisers did their best to dissociate their products from their sources. The separation of product from factory has become an earmark of modern advertising; if we hear anything about the origins of goods, it is most likely fanciful. One American baking company claims that its cookies are baked by "little elves in hollow trees." Generally, ads follows the dictum laid out by copywriter Helen Woodward in 1929:

If you are advertising any product, never see the factory in which it was made. . . . Don't watch the people at work. . . . Because, you see, when you know the truth about anything, the real inner truth — it is hard to write the surface fluff which sells it.⁸

Yet despite this tendency towards mystification, much advertising, from the 1920s on, has — at least subliminally — reinforced the modern imperatives of factory work and mechanized labor. One example appeared in a poster ad for soap in the early 1920s:

A Clean Machine Runs Better.
Your Body is a Machine.
KEEP IT CLEAN.

Along with selling soap, the ad was selling a perception of humanity that fit the new dictates of scientific management. Factory management tended to view labor as an abstract, measurable commodity. In the name of efficiency, managers from the turn of the century studied human motion as a mechanical process, encouraging workers to conform to the most methodical fusions of time, motion, and profitability. Textbooks on scientific management were filled with vast amounts of anthropometric data, all of which envisioned the worker as a machine, to be managed and controlled. This ad for cleanliness, for soap, conformed to such a vision.

Another aspect of modern work was the replacement of artisanal skills by the monotony of machine production. Deskilling of labor was part and parcel of factory work and the assembly line. If one's value in the old world was drawn from one's accumulated skill and know-how, the modern modes of production placed little emphasis on skill. Obedience and appearance became, more and more, the categories of success on the job. Numerous ads reinforced, mediated this transformation. One such ad, also for soap, depicted a number of men and women sitting in an employment office, waiting for job interviews. At the top of the page, the question: "Which two would you hire?" As we look at the people we see a small notation above each head. One woman, applying make-up, has the word "experienced" above her. Others are without experience. The two for whom the jobs are obviously meant sit placidly waiting. Above their heads, the words: "experienced *and* clean." In a world where skill meant less and less, things like cleanliness were magnified in importance. Soap was more than a matter of good hygiene, it was an essential category of

employment. So, too, was the passive posture assumed by the two "lucky" ones.

This instruction of people into the modern terms of work continues today in advertising. We have seen it in the person of Charlie Chaplin, *saved* by the computer. Another, ad appearing in magazines throughout the latter half of 1982, was for the "Rush-Hour Clock," a clock to hang up in the bathroom which was resistant to moisture and fogging. Here a product is offered which will organize life from the moment we get up. Bodily functions will be attuned to the timeclock. If early morning eyes are still groggy, the face of the clock will remain bright and clear. Illustrating the ad is a series of images of people rushing to work. The images, multiple, time-lapse photographs, are very much like the time-motion photographs that were taken of workers to amass anthropometric data. The "Rush-Hour Clock" expands the work-day to encompass the moment of rising.

Another aspect of modern life, addressed by advertising, was the breakdown of traditional social bonds. The city was a world of strangers, and advertising from the 1920s onward, offered instructions on how to negotiate such a world. Basic within this development was the notion that if other people appear to each of us as *distant others*, then we must begin to see ourselves as *distant others* as well. After all, in a world of strangers *everyone* is a stranger. The reinforcement of self-alienation was presented as a survival skill. People were encouraged to view themselves as continually under scrutiny and critical judgment. At the heart of this lay a paranoia about the human body itself. One's body, it was argued, was a decided liability. Odor, appearance, surfaces, became fixations. One ad (1933) for Odo-ro-no deodorant, depicted a woman in her home after a day at work. She holds her dress to her nose, and her face reveals an extraordinary displeasure. "Is this the way I smell to others?" she asks. Should the graphic drama not be enough, readers of the ad are encouraged to perform the "arm-hole odor test" upon their own garments. Against this backdrop of self-vilification, there was hope, however: a product, a purchase which would mask the body, make the self more viable. Within the logic of the ad, a viable self was one defined by commodities, a commodity-self. In a world of quick judgments and momentary glances, such solutions made sense.

One of the social bonds which has suffered most in the context of urban industrialism is the family. Kinship was rooted in a pre-industrial past, underscored by the framework of a common culture. The home had been a center not merely of family life, but of production. Within the urban-industrial context, this center began to erode. Production gravitated towards factories; family members were drawn, often individually, to the wage system. While the

patriarchal family continued as an ideal, it was an ideal increasingly undermined by the structures of the society that surrounded it. The family in jeopardy or tatters has become a meaningful cliché of modern life. Divorce rates climb; aging parents are tossed into the dust-bin; independent youth, responsible only to itself, permeates the cultural climate.

Advertising has engaged this process from all sides. At the same time that it has been a vehicle for narcissism and individualistic consumption, much advertising has evinced a concern for family life. Many products today offer themselves as the cement by which happy family or group bonds will be achieved. Other advertising has noted the decay of mutual dependency with some concern, offering its product as a surrogate, a life preserver. An example of this latter configuration can be seen in an advertising campaign waged in the 1920s by the Prudential Life Insurance Company.

It should be said, at the outset, that the very existence of Life Insurance is testimony to the breakdown of the customary bonds of family and community. Until this century if a parent died, for example, it was understood that care for children would be passed on to others in the family or community. Bonds of mutual obligation were common understandings of life. Even the first forms of insurance were products of mutuality, instituted by fraternal organizations or cooperative associations. Life Insurance, as a corporate-financial enterprise, is rooted in the dissolution of customary networks of support.

If we look at the Prudential advertising, as it emerged in the 1920s, we see that this dissolution had become the raw material for a marketing strategy. The ads to be described appeared in magazines, separate from one another. Yet viewed together they constitute a moral tale, a narrative, a social cosmology of power. They convey the social logic of a corporate society.

The first ad depicts a man leaving a doctor's office. The picture is a close-up, and his face is clearly worried. We share his intimate emotions of fear, guilt, and despair. The caption reads, "Sick! and I let my Life Insurance Lapse." He is afflicted by some mysterious and terminal illness, and as the traditional bearer of family survival, he has failed.

In another ad we see two children standing at the gates of an orphan asylum. One of the asylum matrons whispers to another, "They said father didn't keep his Life Insurance paid up." In another ad, an older son is standing on a corner, in tattered clothes, selling newspapers in the snow. His father failed to make the essential purchase. Now he stands, alone and destitute. Another ad depicts a mother toiling in a sweat shop, her "needle-scarred fingers" grasping nothing but poverty and hopelessness. Here, once again — we are informed — a husband has

"failed in his imperative duty" to buy Prudential Life Insurance. Family breakdown and suffering have been the fruits of his failure.

A last ad stands in stark contrast to the others. It is a magnificent view of the Rock of Gibraltar, the corporate logo of Prudential. Here there is no misery, no weakness, only solidity. The caption reads: "Prudential has the strength of Gibraltar."

While these ads speak, ostensibly, on behalf of the family, they depict a family structure which has been gravely wounded. The father, while symbolically dependent upon his family, is in reality weakened and undependable. Within the modern world, as depicted by the Prudential ads, it is the corporation which has inherited the mantle of responsibility. The father is a vanishing species, while the corporation stands like a rock against the turbulent seas.

Within a context where, as Edward Filene observed, "the head of the family is no longer in control of the economic process through which the family must get its living," the maxims of patriarchal authority had little grounding.⁹ While paying lip-service to the conventions of family life, advertising also played the midwife for a new structure, one in which the corporation alone stood upon a firm social bedrock. Beyond selling insurance or other products, advertising offered an imagistic reconciliation between the terms of a modern urban world, and a population which stood — "marginal" and "borderline" — within that world.

If advertising provided a mediation for the new, often disconcerting situations of modern life and work, much of it also acknowledged the sense of alienation and fragmentation endemic to industrial existence. Alongside its reinforcement of corporate priorities, advertising claimed to offer a way out of the industrial malaise. While legitimizing the logic of consumer capitalism, advertising also provided a vision of utopian alternatives. A 1920s ad for Alpine Sun Lamps provides a provocative example.

There are two illustrations to the ad. In the upper right-hand corner there is an etching of a woman: nude, arms outstretched, facing into the sun. The main illustration (at the center of the ad) shows a woman lounging on the edge of her bathtub, rope open, her nakedness revealed, fondled and nurtured by the "vially interesting message" of her Alpine Sun Lamp. The text of the ad reads as follows:

If you were free to live Were you today to throw off the restraints of social conformity . . . would you, too, first satisfy that inborn craving for Ultraviolet? Would you discard the trappings of civilization to spend strenuous health-brimmed days in the beneficent sunlight?

For most convention-ridden people such action is denied. But the vital

Ultraviolet portion of the sunlight can be brought right into the home by means of the justly famous *Alpine Sun Lamp*.¹⁰

The realities of urban industrialism raised issues of health, fresh air, and inadequate space. Such critiques were not generated by the desire for sun lamps, but rather by more general and fundamental realities of the industrial context. Here in the Alpine ad, however, the critique reappears, along with a Freudian appeal to pre-civilized urges, yet safely confined within the logical boundaries of the marketing process. Advertising today, whether it sells cars as dream machines for country jaunts or "natural" cereals as a means for transcending the admitted evils of chemically fortified supermarket fare, maintains the same logic — the sense that a product contains the negation of its own corporate origins.

In a century where political, social, and sensual realms have been shaken by revolutionary resistance, "mass culture" is a symbolic acquiescence, by capitalism, to the challenges of its critics. Western civilization in general and capitalist society in particular have maintained their hold on the political and social frontiers of freedom, yet alongside these restrictions advertising has often offered an "escape" from the rules of order. It is not uncommon for advertising to depict an exchange process which, despite its concrete limitations, contains the mortar of gratification. The linking of the marketplace to utopian ideals — community, sensuality, peace of mind, self-determination — represents the spectacle of liberation emanating from the experience of domination, discontinuity, and — for many — denial.

Ultimately, the meaning of advertising must be judged against the backdrop of the world it inhabits. Viewed historically, advertising has offered a mediation of contemporary life; it both transmits the priorities of a corporate consumer economy and speaks to the emptiness and frustration so often felt within that very context.

In a sense, advertising may be seen as capitalism's response to observations raised over the past century by Simmel, Park, Sass, and others. Yet if it is a response, it also tends to reproduce the very terms which they describe. Looking at the world according to advertising, then looking at our own lives, the fissure between appearance and reality is so great that perpetual disorientation may be its most significant product.

19. Bagdikian, *Media Monopoly*, p. 4.
 20. R. Samarajiva, "The Canadian Newspaper Industry and the Kent Commission: Rationalization and Response," *Studies in Political Economy* No. 12 (Fall 1983), p. 132.
 21. Todd Gitlin, *Inside Prime-Time*, (New York: Pantheon, 1983), pp. 77 and 85.
 22. See Jhally, *Codes of Advertising*, pp. 80–83 for further discussion.
 23. See William Leiss, Stephen Kline, and Sut Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising* (London: Methuen, 1986) for further discussion.
 24. See Jhally, *Codes of Advertising*, pp. 93–102 for further discussion.
 25. See Sut Jhally "The Spectacle of Accumulation: Material and Cultural Factors in the Evolution of the Sports/Media Complex," *The Insurgent Sociologist* Vol. 12, No. 3 (Summer 1984).
 26. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1956), p. 64.
 27. Garnham, "Political Economy," p. 144.
6. *Advertising and the Development of Consumer Society*
 1. Georg Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," trans. Hans H. Gerth. In Richard Sennett, ed., *Classic Essays on the Culture of Cities* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1969), p. 48.
 2. Robert Park, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man" *The American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. XXXIII (1928). The Sennett, *Classic Essays*, p. 131.
 3. Louis Sass, "The Borderline Personality," *The New York Times Magazine* (August 22, 1982), p. 12.
 4. Peter Marzio, *Chromolithography 1840–1900: The Democratic Art* (Boston: D. R. Godine, 1979), p. 104.
 5. Edward A. Filene, *Successful Living in the Machine Age* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1931), pp. 144–146, 157.
 6. Quoted in Robert Park, *The Immigrant Press and Its Control*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1922), p. 448.
 7. Christine Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, (New York: The Business Bourse, 1929).
 8. Helen Woodward, *Through Many Windows* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1926), p. 298.
 9. Edward A. Filene, *Successful Living*, p. 96.
 10. Edgar Jones, *Those Were the Good Old Days*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), p. 439. This 1920s ad is reprinted in the above anthology of American advertising.
7. *Circumscribing Postmodern Culture*
 1. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), pp. 222, 239–41. Benjamin's account of the audience is taken from Brecht. See, for example, Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill & Wang, 1964), pp. 44, 50, 56.
 2. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), p. 129f.
3. Walter Benjamin, "Work of Art," pp. 232ff, 235ff. Theodor Adorno, "Letters to Walter Benjamin" in *Aesthetics and Politics* (London: Verso, 1980), p. 122. Adorno wrote his essay "On the Fetish Character of Music and Regression of Listening" precisely to document audience regression as against the expectations of Benjamin. In *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, ed. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978).
 4. Benjamin, "Work of Art," p. 224, cf. p. 230.
 5. Benjamin, "Work of Art," p. 218. Dean MacCannell in *The Tourist* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), p. 47f, developed a similar critique of Benjamin. The present account, however, is closer to an immanent account of Benjamin, rather than the substitution of a semiotic account, and is distinct in some crucial places from MacCannell. The position developed here as a characterization of postmodern experience is consistent with Jacques Derrida's critique of metaphysics, in which a centered structure is only possible through the effacement of a play of differences. Only the "second" promotes the anxiety to establish an origin, a "first." See, for example, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference* trans. Allan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 278ff. With regard to the notion of authenticity, see Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).
 6. Horkheimer and Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. 145f.
 7. See my essay "Media Beyond Representation" in this volume.
 8. Many contemporary cultural critics lay emphasis, in polemical relation to traditional Marxism, on the contingency of the association of these images into sets. This seems overstated. Once can imagine the difficulty of articulating together sports with cooking or ballet. The "solidity" of the historical accretions of culture that constrain associations needs a better account at this point. This presentation, through the account of postulation of originals, provides the basis for understanding this solidity — though it is not developed here.
 9. This account differs from that of Jean Baudrillard insofar as the hermeneutic component of authenticating originals is not regarded as exploded or eliminated, but as constructed by the media system as a merely apparent outside. Therefore, the ideology of media "merely reflecting (a prior) reality" is seen as essential to its present functioning and, most importantly, as imbedded in the concrete practices of the media system. See Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations* (New York: Semiotext(e) 1983) and *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1983).
 10. The present discussion is oriented primarily to advanced capitalist societies legitimated by privatized consumption. Nevertheless, it is claimed that the tendency toward "industrially produced identities in the face of the enemy through staged difference" is characteristic of industrialism *per se*. Industrial consumption admits of two major modes of incorporation into identity-formation. First, identity through uncoerced and unrelated consumer choices. Second, through a coerced control over consumption, or a "forced acceptance" of identity. The latter characterizes societies of the Soviet type. Both modes of identity-formation revolve around the social organization of consumption. For the analysis of Soviet-type societies as "dictatorship over needs" see Ferenc Feher, Agnes Heller, and Gyorgy Marcus, *Dictatorship Over Needs* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983). See the review symposium on this book in *Thesis Eleven*, No. 12 (1985), pp. 145–68, with Antonio Cario, Mihaly Vajda, and Gianfranco Poggi.