

IDEAS IN PROGRESS

Judith Williamson

**DECODING
ADVERTISEMENTS**

Ideology and Meaning
in Advertising

LONDON

Marion Boyars

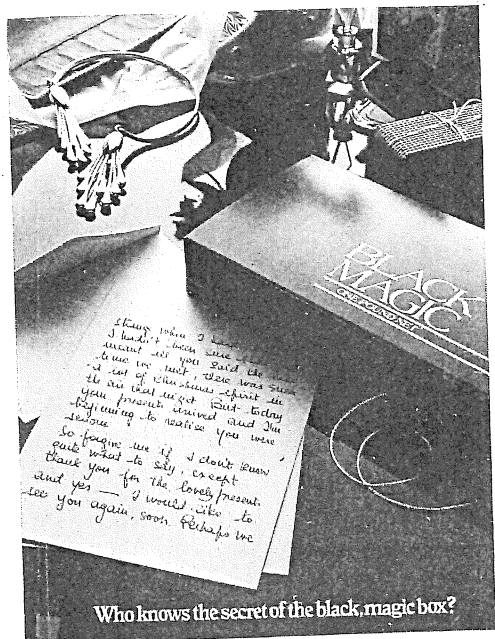
NEW YORK

CHAPTER SIX MAGIC

A87: This ad incorporates many of the strategies discussed in the first part of this book—'objective correlatives', absence, language, hermeneutics, narrative—but these are organised according to a referent system which is appealed to in two ways: firstly, in the brand name; secondly, in its transformation into adjectival status—'. . . the black, magic box'. It is the myth of magic that allows our knowledge to intersect with the transactions between the signs in the ad. Because we know what 'magic' does, the replacements in time and space which have been discussed in Part One are provided with a short cut in our assumption of a *magical* transformation.

The objects in the ad signify two presences—unseen, as in the kitchen example (A40). There is the woman whose letter is partially revealed; and the man who has sent the gifts and will receive the letter. The crucial phrases in this letter are: '. . . the last time we met . . .' and 'I would like to see you again soon'. Both of these narrative possibilities are left open for conjecture. The shadow of the box is cast over the details of their previous encounter, and the letter ends: 'perhaps we. . .'. I have already shown that the function of absence (here, of both people and language) is to form a place for the spectator of the ad—it is we who may complete the narrative, fill in the details of the preceding events, and construct the people who have experienced them. We may also purchase and consume the magic box of chocolates which contains the secret of its contents and whatever went on at the Christmas party. What is the man signifying in his magical present? Something sweet, magical and dark. The 'Black Magic' both connotes what has happened and holds the secret promise of what will happen: which is coded according to what we already know about the chocolates. The magic box allows the man to be present in the same space as the woman (since they are both signified through objective correlatives) and *magically* to obtain her favour—she doesn't 'know what to say' because the spell of the present has already determined her actions.

The 'Black Magic' suggests a yet to be experienced sweetness (an absent series of events for absent people) in the consumption of the box's contents and the development of a relationship; and this possibility is also seen in the relation between the unwrapped, but unopened box, and the still wrapped, smaller box beside it. In an obvious way, this is a point in favour of the 'Black Magic', since it has been opened first. She seems to have *magically* known what it contained, for there is no other explanation for this being the only unwrapped parcel. Magic gives a privileged access to information. The relationship between ourselves, we who actually construct the woman from the puzzle of the objects, and *what* we have formed, the woman herself, lies in that shadow cast across the letter. She knows what is written—while we do not. Where our knowledge intersects with the woman's is in magic. What we have in common with her is the knowledge of the magical powers of the box. It has brought the man into the room and promises the fulfilment of the Christmas encounter. Since we know these are magical objects we too can be promised the effects suggested in the ad. We can buy a box of 'Black Magic' and present it once again. It is this possibility that is as yet unrealised,



Who knows the secret of the black magic box?

A87

generated by our knowledge of the box's powers, that draws us into the ad as Sorcerer's Apprentices.

Not only has she opened the magic box first, but she has also written the letter before proceeding to the other present. Because it is unopened it guarantees her continuous presence—she must return to the space represented in the ad to discover the lesser secret of the other box. Presents/presence/present: of course, in the ad the box will never be opened, just as she will always be about to place the freshly written letter in the envelope that awaits it. This is another string in the chocolates' magical bow, for the 'Black Magic' box is forever unwrapped and about to be opened. It is the presence of the other, unwrapped box that produces a movement in the ad, between what is closed and what is open. Other details indicate this: the closed perfume bottle, that suggests a potion, and the open powder compact. This movement is enacted ad infinitum in the perpetual present of the ad.

The status of the other objects as objective correlatives, that stand for the woman, means that the *woman herself* is about to be unwrapped. She who unwraps will be unwrapped for she is trapped in the implications of that 'Perhaps we. . .'. This is already indicated in the discarded jewellery—which signifies her and her future conduct.

There is also the possibility that all the objects are presents. This means that what is used to signify her presence are presents. In the top left hand corner the purse is placed on top of wrapping paper. If all the objects are placed within the narrative of the man—*he who gives*—then her story is merely that she has been given presents/presence. In which case their presence in the room is all the more magical, for what signifies her has come from someone else, the man, and also signifies another place, from which they have been sent. Now *magic* produces effects in time and space: it transforms one thing into another, just as we can make the objects in the ad stand for the people who possess them; it can transport something to a different place, just as the magic box places the man in the room. And it produces results, just as the box will reveal its contents and fulfil the events preceding its presentation.

'Who knows the secret of the black, magic box?' It is this caption that binds together the transactions of the ad. The 'who' that knows is, of course, the person who has written the letter and has experienced what it describes. She will also experience what it promises. But the guarantor of this 'who' is the spectator of the ad addressed in the question. We construct the characters of the narrative and fill in the gaps left in the story. This status of the spectator, in guaranteeing a content for the referents of the objective correlatives, means that the 'decipherer' and the 'deciphered' are merged in the hermeneutic of the black box. This merging is performed by magic, for it is we who potentially know the secret, since we may buy a box of 'Black Magic', and it is our magic wands that make the ad function. The question in the caption is tautologous—for the answer to the secret of 'black, magic' is 'Black Magic'.

The assumption of the ad is that we know magically and that what we know is magic. The box and the ad are both things that can be known—or rather things that imply knowledge. The box can be

opened; the ad deciphered to reveal what is absent. And this absence is both spatial and temporal—there are the man and the woman, who are spatially absent, and the past and future events, which are merged in the box, since it refers back to past events (the Christmas party) and carries on to future events ('perhaps we...'). So we cut across time and space in finding out 'the secret of the black, magic box.'

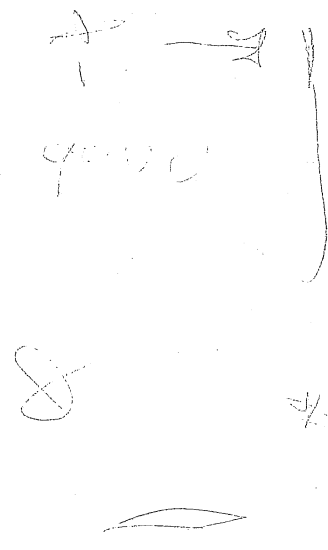
The Uses of Magic

Magic is not a single unified referent system, as it is not a 'thing', like nature, but a process, a mythical means of *doing* things. Thus unlike 'nature' or 'time', it does not involve a particular area in relation to which we may be misplaced by ideology—it represents the misplacement itself, and is an area of transformation rather than an area of time or space in which our position may be transformed. Magic is therefore a kind of pivot around which misrepresentations may be produced—it is a transformational referent system, a short cut for moving between other systems. It is important to realise, then, that magic does not stand in this part of the book as on a level with 'nature' and 'time', but as a particular twisting of the relationship between the two. And far from being a prototype for one kind of transformation, it is simply the heading, the organising mythology, under and in which a multiplicity of transformations, productions, and actions can be short-circuited or misproportioned without explanation—since the explanation is that it's *magic*.

Magic always involves the misrepresentation of time in space, or space in time. Time is magically incorporated into space, in such things as the crystal ball—an object which *contains* the future—and space is magically produced out of time, in conjuring up objects out of nowhere, *instantly*, by means of spells or alchemy. In the centre of these magical processes, the axis of their performance, is the subject: you, the buyer or user of the product.

Consumer products and modern technology provide us with everything ready-made; we are always users, not creators; manufactured goods make up our world, removing the need for any action from us. In advertising it is essential to compensate for the inactivity forced on us; hence advertising's Romanticism, its emphasis on adventure and excitement (cf. A65b). But the only thing we can *do* in fact is to buy the product or incant its name—this is all the action possible as *our* part of the excitement offered. Such minimal action inevitably creates a 'magical spell' element: from a little action, we get 'great' results (or are promised them). That action is our buying, although in

magic - process
transformational referent system
short cut for moving between other systems



magic - production of results disproportionate to the effort put in

magic can be used to misrepresent any system of production
and misrepresents consumers turned into producers

products produce
of effects disproportionate
to the effort put in

the advertisement it is usually transposed into something else. Thus, whatever aspect of magic is actually referred to in the ad, the primary piece of magic that is referred to by the ad, is our act of buying and consuming, which is misrepresented *not* as consumption but as *production*.

Magic is the production of results disproportionate to the effort put in (a transformation of power—or of impotence into power). In this sense, as I have suggested, all consumer products offer magic, and all advertisements are spells. But the ads in this section all go further than this in that they appeal specifically to our sense of magic, they assume a system of transformation where such disproportionate results appear, miraculously, but precisely *because* of this miraculous quality, we do not feel we need ask for an explanation, since this is the definition of a miracle. It is rather like the situation described in our interpretation of surrealism: the less sense it makes, the more sense it must 'really' make, and the deeper this sense must lie. The more amazing results advertisements offer us, the more these come within the non-explanatory system of 'magic', and the less amazing they thus seem, because it is *not* amazing for magic to be amazing.

Magic can therefore be used to misrepresent any system of production. The magical results of buying a product, have, as I said, the function of turning consuming into producing—the end of the ad (to make us buy) is turned into a *beginning*—it initiates all these miraculous events; in Chapter 3 we saw how a hermeneutic constitutes us as producers of meanings while limiting us to the role of consumers of solutions. The misrecognition of consumption and production is of crucial ideological importance, as has been discussed in Chapter 2. Magic allows us to feel that we may not only be producers of meaning, but of *material effects*—thereby even more efficiently than hermeneutics diverting our attention from the process of material production of goods. In the advertisements that follow, it will be clear that *products* themselves are seen as producers—of effects disproportionate to their size. But the process of *this* production is of course always an absence, since magic is instant, it just 'happens', metaphysically, and does not *work, materially*. It is one absence in ads that we need never fill in: since the reference to magic, the evocation of it implicitly even if not overtly, in itself fills the gap between action and result and makes it cease to be a gap at all. There is an elision in space and time which negates precisely the space and time of production. This is clearly analogous to the negation in ideology of the actual system of production in society. In emphasising the effects of the product, in other words its role as

produce by proxy -
buy the product -
it produces the result
at a distance

ad. de. mag. process
denies its own

the...
the...

the...
the...
the...

producer, the image of magic in advertisements denies the fact that the product is produced, removing it from its real place in the world and at the same time promising a product from the product. We are allowed to be producers only by being consumers. Thus we can produce by proxy, merely, since we buy the product, and it will then produce the magic result—beauty, love, safety, etc.

Our act of buying, and saying the product's name, is thus a spell which provides a short cut to a larger action, performed not by us but by the product. A similar kind of short cut is seen nowadays in the pressing of buttons, and in mechanical gadgets. In its promise of instant results with very little effort, magic as used in advertising reflects an indisputable element of modern everyday life. The passivity of the individual increases with the ability to plug into a vast source of external power, though like the magician of old (cf. Faustus) we never produce or control the forces we have learned to tune in to. Electricity and electrical media have made the 'instant' quality of magic come true: immediacy and fast results are no longer the province of witchcraft and sorcery. And as short cuts and passivity go together, the former creating the latter, so does passivity necessitate the promise of more short cuts, short cuts to wonderful activity which will compensate for that passivity. This creates a never ending exchange between passivity and action, a translation between technological action and magical action with our own *inactivity* as the turning point. Technology deprives us of a control which we are given back in the surrogate form of spells and promises.

But of course, we are *not* in control of the results of these magic practices: the result is already determined by the product, the magical object, and by the words we are told to use, the spell. Magic is a kind of determinism: it consists of particular rites which have particular and predetermined results and effects. This is why you need a book of spells, the formulae for producing different things on different occasions. Every child who reads fairy stories knows this. Thus magic is closely related, in its process, to the idea of hermeneutics already discussed: it is the physical parallel to that conceptual determinism, and has the similar effect of making the subject feel active while in fact channelling his action in one direction. The result of a 'spell' is as much 'already there' as the answer to a puzzle. Things will happen after a Badedas bath, but all we can do to spark them off is to have the bath, and we cannot *choose* what will happen: the picture shows us that what happens is that a young man arrives in a sports car. The nature of what happens after the bath is thus

page: 143 pre-scientific ordering of nature

determined as being sexual: you do not, for example, get offered a new job or become able to play the violin.

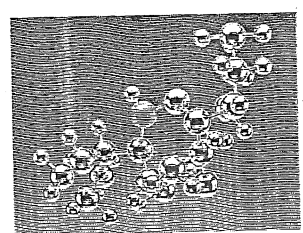
Since the only element of chance in magic is whether or not you will tap in to these predetermined channels of power, and not what these channels will do (the two ends of the process are always fixed) it is clear that magic involves a very definite order—though not an order of *things* but of results. It is therefore very closely enmeshed in the idea of 'nature', as the magical forces, in their determinism, have some 'natural' status. In fact 'magic' constitutes a sort of pre-scientific ordering of nature, not by an actual organisation of the elements of nature but by an assumption that some organisation does exist, some inherent causality.

It is precisely because the invisible lines between things, the tracks along which magical forces run, are so 'natural' and inevitable, that they may be (apparently) completely arbitrary. The disproportion of their two ends, of cause and result, is the very measure of their magicality. And the determinism which links the two is what makes the idea of *process* superfluous: producer and produced, cause and effect, are collapsed together since one already implies the other. Therefore the result is always *contained* in the cause, just as a certain kind of question (what does 2 + 2 make) contains its answer.

This aspect of magic is again closely linked to modern technology, which in its production of transistor radios, pocket calculators, mini-cameras etc. places such an emphasis on miniaturisation. This could almost be described as one of the great myths of our time: the focus of the *microcosm*, the part that contains the whole—the great in the small and the many in one. The microcosm appears not only in real 'science' but in many current trends of ideas. The Subjectivist Idealist tradition in literary criticism has always been centred on the idea of the illuminating moment, the part which reveals the whole—in other words, the hermeneutic key. Thus, a little does not only produce a lot, but *contains* it. The condensed content only has to be released. This is true equally of the atom bomb and a can of condensed soup.

The technological image of the great-into-small, complex-into-simple idea is shown in the following advertisement for a bank's services:

A88



A simpler way to tackle complex problems

 **Midland Bank Group**

A88: The 'simpler way to tackle complex problems' is illustrated by an atomic structure: which represents simultaneously the complexity and the clarity of 'Science'. It is mystically complicated, but offers a magically simple entrance to such complication.

relationship between magic, nature, time, space, ideology

magic of nature + magic
don't represent nature / magic,
but use their systems of reference
to mis-represent our relation
to the world around us + us
ourselves

I have argued that, as always in advertisements, the images produced and organised around a particular referent are not random or complete in themselves, and do not actually signify that referent, but are fundamentally and inextricably related to the material basis of our society. Images of nature, as already seen, and of magic, do not 'represent' nature and magic but use these systems of reference to mis-represent our relation to the world around us and the society we live in. The organising referent system is not signified by the images drawn from it, but is made to signify something else, about a product and hence about production and consumption generally. Our very misplacement in relation to the referent system—as its signified, which we 'know', is snatched from under us and made to mean something different simply in terms of the system—this displacement in relation to our knowledge is the means of our imaginary misplacement in the relations of society. Magic is, however, different from nature and time, in that it always involves a mis-relation: we do exist in nature and time, and it is the creation of imaginary forces in nature and time which deny that existence, which constitutes magic. Magic is a sort of black hole in both nature and time—it is the creation of the unnatural in no time at all. It is also like a black hole because by involving us in this creation and making us actually seem to be the initiators of it, we are sucked into this unnatural, non-temporal and non-spatial time and space. We are invited to spend summer in Haigland (see below) or become somebody else, invisible after using a blonde rinse ('Where's Jane?' she went blonde with Hiltone): in other words, to spend time in non-existent places, to become a non-existent person. This is an 'absence' which does not gape, for us to fill it up, but an 'absent' absence which denies us any position at all, draws us into its non-being.

It is thus clear that magic is a transformational system which can incorporate many different elements of ideology: it is a meta-system where all the misrelations and elisions of other systems take place, a point of translation and exchange. Since it has so many ideological functions—or rather, so many bits and pieces of ideology run together in it (hermeneutics, 'the natural', determinism, myth of the active subject, 'Science and Technology', etc.) all of which ultimately have the same function, to misrepresent to us our place in the productive system, it is not surprising that 'magic' itself is, within its own myth, comprised of many different properties. It is, again, common nursery knowledge that magic involves genies in lamps and bottles, rites and spells, sudden growth or miniaturisation, turning things to gold, magic wands and implements, and a vast

Different myths from the myth of magic itself

(1) alchemy - a lot from a little

(2) spells - words

(3) grows in a (tiny) space in a bottle - contain present power in one small vessel

(4) crystal ball
microcosm
time & space
essence
time & space

number of other things from carpets to rings, all of which make up the iconography of magic. It is these things which will be found in the examples to follow: they have been organised in terms of different myths to be found 'within' the myth of magic itself, that is, by the 'magical' property, rather than the ideological function. Having outlined the relationship between magic, nature, time and ideology I shall simply proceed to show how the idea of magic is present in ads where it may not be immediately apparent, as it was in A87 with the 'Black Magic'.

alchemy - commodity placed before an action or its results affects (strong desire + results)

spells - word in the same area

(a) Alchemy

A89



It takes only the smallest difference to make a better mashed potato.

New Wondermash is real mashed potato pieces. But now it's even better. It's in smaller pieces. So it mixes more easily, makes smoother, tastier mash.
6 out of 10 women in independent tests said they preferred New Wondermash to the other leading brand of instant mashed potato.
Try it yourself. You'll see that it takes only the smallest difference to make a better mashed potato.



Wondermash makes smoother mash.

A89: Here we are shown a potato microcosm—an atom: it is the smallness of the potato pieces which guarantees their magicity. After all, they produce 'Wondermash' which, even on the level of its name, claims to be more magical than ordinary potato powders. There is no logical reason why the smallness of the pieces should make the mashed potato better, other than that their being small enhances the 'wonder' of the transformation. 'It's even better. It's in smaller pieces.' The scientific magicity of the picture is shown by its magnification; you can see all the lines of the finger and thumb, every peak and cavity of the microcosm. This gives you the impression of looking through a microscope, and the enlargement of the potato atom only serves to show how small it must be when not seen under microscopic conditions. The idea of 'the smallest difference' also brings in the whole idea of differentiation, yet with a transformational imbalance: so that the smallest difference in the causal area, the magic potion, can create a great difference in effects, in the magic released. The little granule magnified in the picture encapsulates a vast amount of mashed potato. But note that we are shown the granule and not the result, the actual mashed potato—because the granule contains and represents the result. Thus the magic microcosm, the capsule, has a lot in common with the symbol.

This ad shows several magical elements, then: the word, 'Wondermash', the condensation and encapsulation which can release forces greater than themselves, the scientific miracle of breaking things down into minute particles, and yet being able to see these particles. And nature is transformed—'cooked', as in A61, to produce a short cut in time, 'instant' mashed potato instead of arduously peeled, boiled and mashed potato.

a lot from a little



A LOT OF MAGIC COMES FROM A LITTLE YEAST.

Yeast Pac is the only face pack which contains nature's miracle worker yeast. It's what makes yeast the different.

Before your next night out give yourself a quick ten minute facial with Yeast Pac and feel the difference. It deep cleanses the pores and draws out the impurities, freshening up your skin leaving it delightfully clear.

There are two types of Yeast Pac: pink sachets for normal skins and blue for problem skins.

Also on treatment economy tube. Look out too for Yeast Pac Clean and Refresh.

It's the yeast in Yeast Pac that makes it different.

Yeast Pac

A90

A90: This ad makes explicit the magical nature of producing a lot from a little: 'A lot of *magic* comes from a little yeast'. The form of this ad is very similar to that of A78, where Max Factor gave to your eyes the shimmer that nature gave to stars, butterflies, etc. Here, we are shown examples of 'natural' magic (rather different from the scientific magic that *re-created* nature in the previous example) where something *seems* to come from nowhere, like the bubbles in champagne which stream from the bottom of the glass, or the 'lift' in bread, which is a magical growth. The blurb of the ad tells us that yeast is 'nature's miracle worker'—this assumes that nature is full of miracles, and that miracles are 'natural'; no contradiction between the miraculous and the natural interferes with the image of transformation. The point about the yeast is that it transforms what is already there, it is able to work over nature, *naturally*. So that the new life in your skin is created in a miraculous way, yet also, because of magic's determinism, it was already there potentially, the new skin is still 'natural' because the magic is natural magic and has fixed results. The combination of the natural and the miraculous is a paradoxical one but as with most of the paradoxes in advertisements, it is carried off successfully because it seems inevitable. The determinism of the rising loaves and the bubbling champagne ensures this. The connection between specific causes and specific results is shown by the colouring of 'pink sachets for normal skins and blue for problem skins'. There are formulae, spells, with given effects; magic is the ultimate form of guaranteeing results. It involves transformation and *exchange*: but an exchange which is entirely within determined bounds, making explicit the determinism of exchange in all the signification of advertisements.

A91



A91: Here again, the 'lot from a little' transformation is seen. One drop of the magic potion works wonders: it adds 'the final touch of *perfection* to your casserole'. Perfectibility is only attainable through magical means. Another point is that here, as in many other ads of this kind, the product has *alchemic* properties. Not only do Lea and Perrins, Oxo, etc., go a long way, they provide the philosopher's stone that turns base metals into gold, transforming everything else in the stew. It is the same principle as the yeast transforming the bread, or champagne, or your skin, by alchemy. Lea and Perrins 'brings out all the other succulent flavours', and will 'enhance roasts, pies, stews' and so on. The catalyst which effects a transformation in other objects is part of the process itself, only felt by its results; just as the philosopher's stone is not itself made of gold, but can transform other things into it. So here we have moved from the original encapsulation of results (Wondermash) to the encapsulation of process itself. Nobody wants to eat a stew that *tastes* of Lea and Perrins sauce. It represents change, a 'touch of perfection', in other words an improvement: and stands for the improving process rather than the result.

A92: This product does not claim to transform a whole stew, but a whole life, turning one person into another. 'Where's Jane?' She too is enclosed, framed, firmly encapsulated in the past, in the inset picture.

Where's Jane?

"Yesterday, I went blonde with creamy-rich Hiltone..."

"I chose Hiltone because I knew the name. The creamy conditioners sounded nice too. I assumed my new blonde hair would feel as good as it looked. And I wasn't disappointed. Next time I looked in my mirror, a cool, gentle blonde looked back. Soft and silky smooth. With sunny highlights and a healthy shine to every strand."

"Bigger eyes, brighter smile—everything about me seemed more alive, more exciting. And I thought, 'Where's Jane?' 'Is that cool, beautiful blonde really me?' And then I realized..."

"Life will never be the same again!"

hiltone



A92

That picture of her is the capsule that has exploded into the larger, unbounded picture: so each contains the other, although they are so different. In the 'microcosm' inset, 'Jane' seems to be dreaming of the future, of the new self shown below: she is the 'little' that gets turned into 'a lot': 'Bigger eyes, brighter smile—everything about me seemed different, more alive, much more exciting'. Notice that magic helps her to come alive, or 'more alive', just as yeast pack gave 'new life' to your skin. Magic compensates for lifelessness, inactivity. So the 'little' Jane becomes the 'cool, beautiful blonde', who is bigger; thus the small picture leads to the larger one. But it is spatially *contained* in the larger one: and the way it is placed directly over the head of the 'new' Jane (or non-Jane) makes it seem like merely an idea in her head—just as 'thoughts' in comic strips are always positioned above the thinker's head. So plain Jane's dream is made to come true and she herself, or her original self, becomes no more than a dream in the new world. The inset picture where she has brown hair, has an eyeline looking out of the frame *away from us*: we are not meant to identify with her, she is just dreaming. The blonde Jane looks straight at us, catches us like a glance in a mirror, turning the opposite way from the inset face.

This is the 'Cinderella' syndrome, the magic of personal transformation. However, I have so far only mentioned the two 'Janes' in the ad: but there is another face, the blueprint for the new Jane. This is the blonde face, or rather, half-face, on the Hiltone packet. The new Jane looks more like the packet face, than like her own face as shown before she dyed her hair. The magic potion, the stuff that works the transformation, draws you into it, giving you its own qualities. Thus the packet is what really encapsulates the new Jane: between the bottom left hand picture and the top right hand one, an exchange has taken place, to produce the main picture, bottom right, where the two axes of the insets meet.

The words of the ad are clearly relevant to the Lacanian idea of the 'mirror phase' as discussed in Chapter 2. 'Next time I looked in my mirror a cool, gentle blonde looked back. . . . And I thought, "Where's Jane" . . . "Is that cool, beautiful blonde really me?" And then I realised. . . .' This also has a magical element about it: 'Mirror, mirror on the wall, Who is the fairest one of all?' (I suppose in this context 'fairest' could be taken literally.) There is the *Through the Looking Glass* referent as well.

The final magical aspect of the ad is the importance of the *word*, the product's name. 'I chose Hiltone because I knew the name'. She knew the right thing to say, the spell that produced the results. She did not choose Hiltone because she *knew* anything about it: she just thought 'the creamy conditioners sounded nice'—enticed by the mystical *sound* of the words.

(b) Spells Having seen how a commodity can be placed between an action and its effects, or rather, between desire and result, encapsulating in itself a transformation, we can go on to see how language can also be placed in this position: functioning so as to enclose process and eclipse production's temporal space.

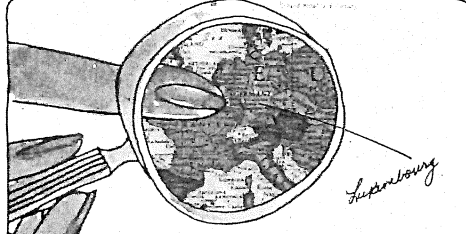
A93: This ad involves the classic formula for a spell: there is a special gold liquid, a prepared vessel, a series of ritualised gestures and an act of consumption—and all directed by an ordered sequence of words. The performance of these 'rites' as described, in a specified order, produces a miracle: love. The whole thing reads like a conjuring trick and a spell. Even ordinary words are given a magical quality: 'Then I said, "hold the glass up to your mouth, tip it a little and swallow what comes out."' (I call this "drinking".) So an everyday action and word are transformed, taken from our field of knowledge and into the structure of a mystical order, given a more than ordinary 'meaning' and power. Obviously the magical element here is not, on one level, meant to be taken seriously; but the idea of producing love, though not explicitly through magic but through a drink, is still a magical one—it offers dramatic results to a specific action and incantation.

A94: The magical emphasis on spells is a very convenient one for advertisers with brand names to project, since the idea of *incantation*, saying the spell, is made to coincide with the act of purchase and saying the product's name. Here, 'Dunlop Aquajets' become magically special words: they are the invocation, they provide safety in the face of danger. They are almost a prayer: but one with guaranteed results. The utterance of words is our only participation in the business of creating safety in the car: there is nothing else to do except be glad we said 'Dunlop Aquajets'. We have to rely on a power greater than us, beyond us, doing the work for us: the manufacturers, who thus gain almost a supernatural status. Yet *we* are made to feel like producers: we say 'Dunlop Aquajets', and thus create safety in the rain. This replaces the fact that somebody else actually made the tyres and *materially* created their safeness: we *reproduce* the force of their production.

Here the referent of the words has become their *effect*: 'Dunlop Aquajets' signifies safety, and is made to *produce* safety: the process described in Chapter 1 under 'the product as generator'. Referent and sign become joined along the *axis of action*. The sign will produce or ensure the referent: together they *do* something. Activity is removed from us and transferred to *signs* and *symbols*.

Once again here we have the inset: the enlarged, encapsulated, representative microcosm, the *'key'* to the rest of the picture. It shows the secret of the whole spell and of the large illustration: it magnifies the unique Aquajet itself, that little detail from which such great results are produced.


And the important point is that they are produced, initiated, by you, by the words, the sign itself. There is even a sort of ritualistic exchange of words, as the forecast says 'rain' and then you will be glad you said 'Aquajets': the forecast *saying* 'rain' is substituted for actual *rain*. The ad does not say 'when it rains you'll be glad' . . . but involves a series of determined lines, a password—and events are apparently produced by words: the forecast saying rain produces the rain in the picture, and our words 'Dunlop Aquajets' produce safety in the rain.



THE ROCKY ROAD TO LOVE.

Finding David was easy. Certainly a lot easier than finding Luxembourg. Winning his heart was not so easy. Here's what I did: First I had David put a few rocks in a glass. Then I told him to hold the glass. Then I poured some Guervo Gold Especial into the glass. (It's the best, you know.) Then I said, hold the glass up to your mouth, tip it a little, and swallow what comes out. (I call this "drinking".) Well, let me tell you, David's eyes lit up as the Cold Gold went down, and he broke out into a nice, big grin. Altogether, I'd say David never enjoyed a drink more. And that's how I found love. In a manner of speaking.

Julie



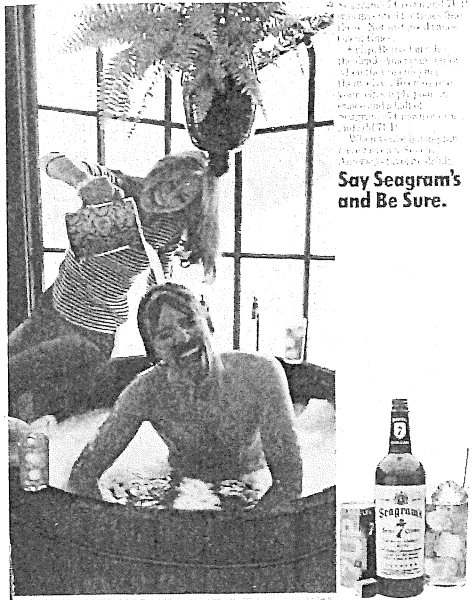

GRIP THAT RAINY ROAD

When the forecast says rain you'll be glad you said Dunlop Aquajets.



DUNLOP SPSPORT AQUAJET RADIALS

SEVEN & SEVEN



A95: Most of what has been said in relation to A94 also applies to this ad. You 'say Seagrams and be Sure': the ad does not even say what it is that we are to be sure about—presumably that we are getting Seagrams, and not another brand, so the spell is actually a tautology. An example of correlation is found here, as the caption goes, 'to enjoy one yourself, simply pour an ounce and a half of Seagrams 7 Crown over ice...' and the girl in the picture seems to be doing just this, but instead of pouring Seagrams over ice, she is pouring water over *him*. The fact that he is in a most unusually shaped bath may be partly explained by this analogy, since it resembles a tumbler in which one might drink Seagrams. It seems odd that he should be in a bath at all, if he is not there as a surrogate ice-cube. So the illustration is again a manifestation of the spell, it follows the words and instructions in the written part of the ad, and releases the magic: the *fun* that comes from Seagrams whisky and which they have clearly managed to release through the correct rites.

This merging of referent, effect and sign is seen in an ad already looked at in an earlier chapter, A53, where words magically appear on the gold packet. The referent becomes the result of the sign, they appear together. In the A53 picture there is a smoking lamp, precisely like Aladdin's, and the orient jewels give a further 'Arabian Nights' effect. This introduces another feature of magic:

(c) *The Genie in the Lamp and the World in the Bottle*

The 'encapsulation' motif can go to the extent of containing a person or place in one magical vessel.



A96: The brandy glass here contains someone, in a variation on the genie in the magic lamp idea. The glass really is a perfect microcosm for the world around it, as the figure in the glass holds up *another* glass; thus the brandy encapsulates and is a microcosm of its own reality, just as all products are seen to represent the realities or myths shown in their advertisements. Notice how the glass gives us a privileged access not only to a world, a figure from the past, but it actually seems to magnify some barrels on which are inscribed mysterious hieroglyphics. Thus a mystical writing is revealed, full of magic symbols and strange carvings, a spell *inside* the product, revealed to us by it, rather than being our invocation of the product. This strange writing is also present outside the glass, however, since the bottle and glass, and cork, and some papers (more secret messages, since we cannot read them) are all lying *on* a barrel with scratched symbols on it, like the ones in the glass-picture. The 'explanation' for the man and barrels 'in' the glass is that they are *reflected* in it: but this must mean that the man is standing just where the spectator must be, and *he* does not belong in the eighteenth century. So either the spectator is magically transformed into this eighteenth century connoisseur, with his (probably smuggled) barrels

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A97

of brandy, and thus the reflection is perfectly normal, *or*, the spectator is perfectly normal in which case the reflection is magical since it shows someone who is not there, and who is from a different historical era. Again, this aspect of the ad involves ideas discussed in various different parts of this book: the product's ability to reflect/create, the mirror-image, the capturing of time (cf. next chapter) and so on. The importance of magic is that it provides a blanket referent for any kind of unusual or inexplicable transformation or production.

A97: We are invited to spend our holidays in 'a new place'—Haigland. Here, the bottle has not only a containing effect—the world is in the bottle—but a magic carpet effect as well, because Haig will take us to this new place. 'All you need is a large bottle of marvellous mellow Haig...' and 'You don't need a passport... You don't need luggage... You don't need those ghastly seasickness pills'. So not only can Haig produce this place, Haigland, it can take you there in no time with no trouble. The people in the picture are hardly visible in the obscurity of the night, but there is a fire and they are arranged in a semi-circle around the Haig bottle; although it is in the foreground and they are in the background, not *literally* sitting around it but apparently so in the spatiality of the ad. This is like a magic group, a rite: drinking Haig round the fire like witches round a cauldron. As in many magical myths, fairy tales and legends, an object is the means of reaching a mystical place, one which is not in this world. This aspect of magic thus relates to the fetishism of products, their supposed ability to create auras and effects—the projection of which idea is the main function of advertisements.

Ideas, feelings, time past (Martell, A96) and time future (Embassy, A99), worlds and people can all be miraculously contained in objects. This makes objects seem very important: society overemphasises and clings to them as the material representations of otherwise ungraspable things. Life and meaning are attached to objects that might seem worthless in themselves. In all societies but our own we call this fetishism. To return to the 'Black Magic' ad at the beginning of this chapter: the 'black, magic box' (the comma cleverly turns the *name* of the product into two meaningful adjectives) is a fetishistic object, it holds a secret, has a mystical aura quite out of proportion to its actual contents. It is endowed with a power that, for a simple object like a box of chocolates, can only be magical. Thus boxes can hold not only products but can *produce* in themselves.

A98: It would not be an exaggeration to see the 'World of Lambert and Butler' as a kind of sect, separated from us by an altar-like table, enclosed by it and set apart by being behind it, just as in all religions

150

Spend Summer in Haigland

When you're planning your summer holidays, you might consider a new place: Haigland. You don't need a passport. You don't need luggage. You don't need those ghastly seasickness pills.

All you need is a large bottle of marvellous mellow Haig and a few excellent friends. The summers are splendid in Haigland.

Don't be vague. Relax with Haig.

The world of Lambert & Butler.

The first of a new generation of distinguished cigarettes. Lambert & Butler International Size, with a quality and style that sets them apart from other cigarettes.

INTERNATIONAL SIZE

LOMBERT & BUTLER
POPE LANE LONDON

A98

repeat - Johannes - thing, product, other
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 to differentiate people



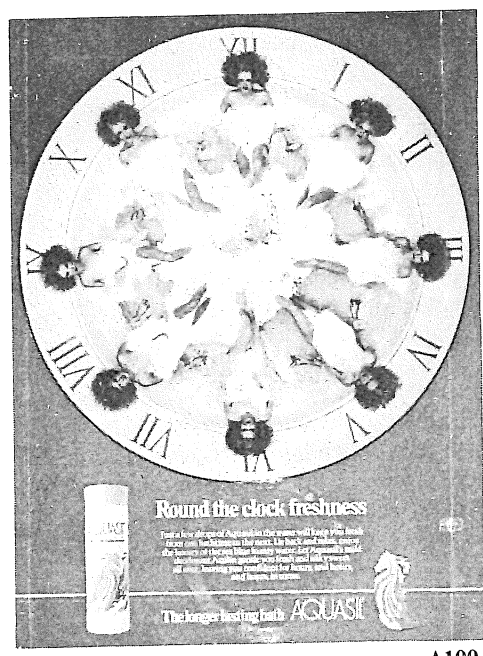
Embassy Regal
 today's outstanding value

A99

only the priest and the initiated may be behind the altar. (Of course, they are also set apart by smoking the Lambert and Butler cigarettes, which are themselves endowed with a 'quality and style that sets them apart from other cigarettes'.) Thus, as in Lévi-Strauss' analysis of totemism, a thing, a product, which is differentiated, is used to differentiate people. This ad (though with a different picture) has been referred to before. However, this picture shows most clearly the magical elements of the ads. Not only does the altar/table cut the Lambert and Butler sect off from us, but certain magical objects of no apparent use (all made of either gold or glass, magical substances) are placed on the 'altar'. Certain drinks are being passed round and drunk, and cigarettes of a certain kind are burning, like incense, in this inner chamber of the élite. This room and its arrangement and the cigarettes themselves strike me as extremely fetishistic and if the people were not of our own culture we would no doubt see it as such.

One of the magical objects on the Lambert and Butler altar was a round, shiny globe, with obscure reflections and images in it. This object has a particular place and name in the mythical bricolage of magic:

(d) The Crystal Ball/Magic Circle



Round the clock freshness

The longer lasting toothpaste AQUASE

A100

A99: There is a whole series of Embassy ads like this one. It illustrates the microcosm idea, the enclosure of a world; however, the global image here involves more than just encapsulation, a world in a world. Time is involved: the architecture in each of these ads is ultra-modern and futuristic. The crystal ball is used to indicate the future: it is a microcosm of space and time, encircling time in space. It is ironic that the caption is 'Today's outstanding value', because the picture suggests that today is already tomorrow, that the Embassy is pointing into the future, as the cigarettes lean up into the centre of the ball, the muffled globe of light.

A100: Here we have another spatial way of expressing and enclosing time: the magic circle. Again, there is the 'just a few drops' line, the magic fluid that has such power. There is also something like a rite (cf. A97 round the bottle) in the very picture, the bodies and the circular vessel with its slightly strange markings (Roman numerals are less familiar than Arabic ones)—which, in making a phrase 'round the clock', physically real, have a calligraphic function (see Chapter 3). I have already shown the way in which calligraphy conflates sign and referent. This is part of the idea of the spell, where words conjure up the very thing which they represent. Someone is shown in this ad literally round a clock; and this uses the circle and physical image to enclose and capture (through representation) a non-physical reality, time.