

IDEAS IN PROGRESS

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**DECODING
ADVERTISEMENTS**

Ideology and Meaning
in Advertising

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A sign is quite simply a thing—whether object, word, or picture—which has a particular meaning to a person or group of people. It is neither the thing nor the meaning alone, but the two together.

The sign consists of the Signifier, the material object, and the Signified, which is its meaning. These are only divided for analytical purposes: in practice a sign is always thing-plus-meaning.

We can only understand what advertisements mean by finding out *how* they mean, and analysing the way in which they work. What an advertisement 'says' is merely what it *claims* to say; it is part of the deceptive mythology of advertising to believe that an advertisement is simply a transparent vehicle for a 'message' behind it. Certainly a large part of any advertisement *is* this 'message': we are told something about a product, and asked to buy it. The information that we are given is frequently untrue, and even when it is true, we are often being persuaded to buy products which are unnecessary; products manufactured at the cost of damaging the environment and sold to make a profit at the expense of the people who made them. A criticism of advertising on these grounds is valid, and I would support it. However, such a criticism is in many ways the greatest obstacle of all to a true understanding of the role of advertisements in our society, because it is based on the assumption that ads are merely the invisible conveyors of certain undesirable messages, and only sees meaning in the overt 'content' of the ad rather than its 'form'—in other words, ignoring the 'content' of the 'form'.

That a 'content' of 'form' should be such a paradoxical idea draws attention to the assumptions inherent in the use of these words. 'Form' is invisible: a set of relations, a scaffolding to be filled out by 'content', which is seen as substantial, with a solidity of meaning. These connotations make the terms 'form' and 'content' particularly unsuited for my argument, since it is based on the assumption that the conveyors of messages are things—and significant things—in themselves; and that it is messages which exist in the realm of the ideal. So having introduced it only to make this clear at the outset, I am now going to drop the terminology of 'form and content'. Although the *word* 'form' and the *word* 'content' may usefully be used singly, as a pair they constitute a conceptual attitude which I find unhelpful in any attempt to engage with meaning as a process, rather than as the end-result of a process.

The terminology which I will use in place of 'form and content' is that of 'signifier and signified'. This is not a simple replacement, an updating of terms, but involves a total reversal

of emphasis. Signifiers are things, while form is invisible; signifieds are ideas, while content implies materiality. Furthermore, while form and content are usually seen as separable and their conceptual unity is one of opposition (form vs. content), signifier and signified are materially inseparable, since they are bound together in the *sign*, which is their totality. What is *meant* by a sign, the signified, may be talked about separately from what means it, the signifier; but an understanding of this terminology involves the realisation that the two are not *in fact* separated either in time or space: the signified is neither anterior nor exterior to the sign as a whole. Therefore my use of these words has in itself a very particular significance: it emphasises both the materiality and the meaning of the signifier in any communication.

The role played by the signifier in creating meaning is shown very clearly in the following advertisement for tyres:

A1: The ostensible meaning of this advertisement is that Goodyear Tyres have a very good braking performance. The written message states this: 'That set of Supersteels had already done thirty-six thousand miles when I drove onto a jetty at Bridport, Dorset for a test of braking performance. We set our marks only 66 feet apart, and from 50 mph, those Supersteels pulled me up in half the Highway Code stopping distance (125 feet). And on that same jetty they still held a clean, firm line through a slalom—even after 36,000 miles of motoring.'

This is a rational message: it describes actual tests and results and gives a logical argument to show that Goodyear tyres are safe and durable.

Now look at the picture. The jetty is supposedly here as a test of braking power; it provides an element of risk (will the car be able to stop before reaching the end?) in the experiment, a convenient and yet dramatic way of measuring the maximum braking distance. It has a place in a rational 'scientific' proof, and its function thus seems to arise merely from its place in the transmission of the 'signified' in the ad.

However, the significance of the jetty is actually the opposite of risk and danger and it works in a way that is not part of the rational narrative sequence of the verbal ad; it functions in its second role as signifier on a completely different axis from that of the signified and cuts vertically through it. The outside of the jetty resembles the outside of a tyre and the curve is suggestive of its shape: the whole jetty is one big tyre. In case we need a mental nudge to make the connection, there are actually some tyres attached to the outside of the jetty, on the right hand side of the picture. The jetty is tough and strong, it withstands water and erosion and does not wear down: because of the visual resemblance, we assume that this is true of the tyre as well. In the picture the jetty actually encloses the car, protectively surrounding it with solidity in the middle of dangerous water: similarly, the whole safety of the car and driver is wrapped up in the tyre, which stands up to the elements and supports the car. Thus what seemed to be merely a

Goodyear G80 Supersteels

After a 36,000 mile run-up, I hit the brakes at 50 mph. I hit the brakes at 125 feet.

GOODYEAR

G80 Supersteels for performance that lasts

part of the apparatus for conveying a message about braking speed, turns out to be a message in itself, one that works not on the overt but almost on the unconscious level; and one which involves a connection being made, a correlation between two objects (tyre and jetty) not on a rational basis but by a leap made on the basis of appearance, juxtaposition and connotation.

This advertisement shows how the signifier of the overt meaning in an advertisement has a function of its own, a place in the process of creating another, less obvious meaning. It has already emerged that this 'latent' meaning, unlike the open 'manifest' message, does not simply lie completed in the words, for us to read as a finished statement. There are three crucial points here. In the first place this 'meaning of the signifier' involves a correlation of two things: the significance of one (the jetty) is transferred to the other (the tyre). This correlation is non-sequential; the two things are linked not by the line of an argument or a narrative but by their place in a picture, by its *formal structure*. In the second place this transference of significance does not exist as completed in the ad, but requires us to *make* the connection; it is nowhere stated that the tyre is as strong as the jetty, therefore this meaning does not exist until we complete the transference ourselves. In the third place, the transference is based on the fact that the first object (the jetty) *has* a significance to *be* transferred: the advertisement does not create meaning initially but invites us to make a transaction whereby it is passed from one thing to another. A system of meaning must already exist, in which jetties are seen as strong, and this system is exterior to the ad—which simply *refers* to it, using one of its components as a carrier of value (in the case of A1, strength, durability)—i.e. as a currency.

The systems which provide ads with this basic 'meaning' material—a grist of significance for the ad mill—are what I call '*Referent Systems*': the subject of Part II. They are clearly ideological systems and draw their significance from areas outside advertising. But the way in which this material is used and ordered inside advertisements, and is made to mean, is the subject of this half of the book; in the course of which I hope it will be made clear that this process of meaning, the work of the *signifiers*, is as much a part of ideology and social convention as the more obvious 'signifieds'.

Therefore I have used the term 'advertising-work' deliberately, because of Freud's crucial emphasis, in understanding dreams, on the 'dream-work' that is the *system* of creating meaning.

I intend to start with an investigation of signifiers and their systems in ads.

CHAPTER ONE A CURRENCY OF SIGNS

'A sign is something which stands to somebody for something else, in some respect or capacity.'

C. S. Peirce¹

'That which exists for me through the medium of *money*, that which I can pay for, i.e. which money can buy, that *am I*, the possessor of the money.'

Karl Marx, | *Economic and
Philosophical Manuscripts*

Referent

Saussure says that with the word H-O-R-S-E, where the concept of horse is what is signified, the referent is what kicks you. Thus the referent always means the actual thing in the real world, to which a word or concept points. The referent is external to the sign, whereas the signified is part of the sign. (However, the external 'reality' referred to by the collection of signs in an advertisement is itself a mythological system, another set of signs. These mythologies I call Referent Systems:(cf. Part II.)

In A1 we saw how two things—an object from the ordinary world (jetty) and a product (tyre)—were connected. The jetty stood for a certain quality (strength), and by making the object and the product interchangeable in terms of this quality, its value adheres to the product. The intermediary object, the jetty, in representing a value which becomes attached to the product, is thus a sort of currency. Currency is something which represents a value and in its interchangeability with other things, gives them their 'value' too. It thus provides a useful metaphor for the transference of meaning; especially as this meaning is so intimately connected with real money transactions.

As a preliminary to this chapter I want to start with a look at colour in visual advertising: it provides an introduction both to my method of analysis, to the way in which most visual adverts function, and to various aspects of the use to which this functioning can be put. Although the colour cannot be reproduced here it is described in the analyses. The next six examples all use colour in a slightly different way, but in each case it is the basis for a connection or connections unstated by the verbal part of the ad, and sometimes quite—apparently—irrelevant to it.

¹From *Collected Papers*: quoted by Umberto Eco in 'Social Life as a Sign System' in *Structuralism: An Introduction*, Paladin Press, Oxford 1973.



Go where there's still room.
Enjoy a screwdriver made with white rum from Puerto Rico.

Sooner or later you'll find girls and dudes who know just what's different enough. So try mixing with white rum from Puerto Rico. Not only does it taste like a natural affinity for orange juice, it also has a smoothness that suggests vodka and gin.

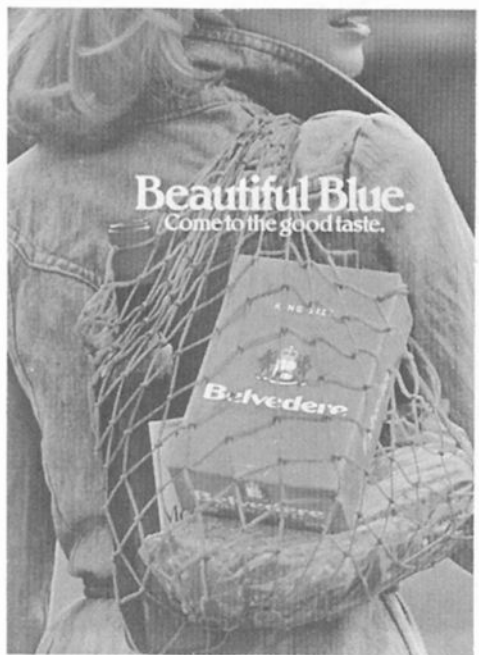
No accident that smoothies. We work as it does in Puerto Rico. So we make our drinks in white rum. It's a smooth as silk aging can make it. Or get it through the

screwdriver, a great and particularly smooth.

Now you know why 80% of all the white rum in the United States comes from Puerto Rico. So be sure to look for the words "Puerto Rican Rum" on the label of the brand you buy.

Then enjoy the smoothness of white rum from Puerto Rico whenever you are going with a drink you'll love. And now you know why.

PUERTO RICAN RUMS



Beautiful Blue.
Come to the good taste.

A2 Colour tells a story: In this picture the colour 'axis' is the triangle of orange-gold, formed by the two glasses of screwdrivers and the sun behind the trees. This connection already suggests a warm, natural, pure, light quality in the drink, since it is linked to the sunlight. This gold colour is echoed in the golden corn which surrounds the couple, also suggesting something natural, ripe, mellow. The other colour connection in this picture is the white of the couple's clothes and of their bag. One would expect this white to be a reminder of the 'White Rum' but in fact it functions differently inside the picture. It helps tell a story, bridging time past and future. The white bag is already full of golden corn; this 'harvesting' is a piece of past consumption that hints at a similar action in the (at present undrunk) golden screwdrivers being placed inside, consumed by, the white couple. This hint is supported by the additional fact that the golden sun is just about to set, to 'go down' just as the drinks will. And so, as sure as the bag is already filled, and the sun is bound to set into the white sky, the drinks will, undoubtedly, end up inside the white people.

This 'story' gives a new meaning to the words beneath. The idea of there being 'still room' now refers less to the environment (although it obviously does this on a simple level—countryside, a field, is shown) than to the fact that there is room inside the people for the drinks. The theme is, in fact, *filling up*, like the corn in the bag—consumption rather than expansion. It is significant that the space shown—the 'room' in the 'intended' sense—is not particularly expansive and is almost entirely taken up with the three white, consuming figures (the man, the woman, and the bag).

In this way there is an almost total reversal of the meaning one might expect, just as it is the people who are white, the consumers, *not* the 'White Rum', which is in fact the thing that is 'going where there's still room'. A basic idea of space and extensiveness has been made to operate through the picture in a way that really 'means' quite the opposite: enclosure, consumption.

A3 The oral connection: 'Beautiful Blue' is not, in fact, the most important colour in this ad. The blue cigarette packet merges into indistinctness in the blue of the denim, and the blue shopping bag. The colour that *does* stand out, poking through the string bag, is the deep red-purple of the bottle top, that exactly matches the colour of the girl's lips. Significantly, these are all that is shown of her face: nothing else in it matters, only the mouth, the means of oral consumption. The bottle and the mouth are joined by colour as clearly as if there were an arrow from one to the other. There is an obviously sexual suggestion here: however, the connection of bottle and mouth is a parallel for that of cigarette and mouth, which is the subject of the ad. The important word in the ad is 'taste': this is the theme of the *picture* and the crucial element in selling cigarettes.

A4 Connecting an object with an object: This is perfectly simple: the colours of the cigarette packet are exactly those of the cup of coffee—white and maroon; and there is even a hint of gold on the rim of the packet's lid, matching the rim of the cup and saucer. The assumption here is that because the containers are the same (in terms of colour) the products have the same qualities: here, primarily mildness, though also a slight suggestion of richness. The cup of coffee acts as an 'objective correlative' (cf. section b) for the quality invoked.

A5 Connecting an object and a world: Here, the colours—black and white, with a touch of silver—and also the shapes—rectangular, streamlined—connect the cigarette packet to what the ad itself describes as a whole 'world': 'the world of Lambert and Butler'. The visual link between the packet and the world is exaggeratedly apparent: literally everything in the room is black and white and geometrical. However, as the two containers were compared in the last example, here also the correlated objects, packet and world, are in fact containers; the parallel of the cigarettes being, here, not coffee (in matching cup) but people (in matching room). The people are the contents of the room just as are the cigarettes of the packet. Thus the words can be read as relating directly to the people; they are obviously terms usually applied to people and *not* things, yet here, in using them *about* things, they are equating these with people: 'The first of a new generation of distinguished cigarettes [/people]... with a quality and style that sets them apart from other cigarettes [/people].' So here the colour correlation brings explicitly into focus a link between the people and the cigarettes that was implicit in the words chosen. There is, however, another sort of reversal here as the packet of cigarettes is, supposedly, an accessory to the distinguished, stylish world depicted, fitting into it visually by colour and style; yet, in naming the *world* after the *cigarettes* ('the world of Lambert and Butler'), and in greatly exaggerating the features of the cigarette box in this physical world, we see that the world and the people are actually an accessory of the product, and not the other way round. Instead of the product being created out of a need in the world, it creates its own world, an exaggerated reflection of itself.

A6 Connecting the object and a person: The product is a whole kitchen, yet here again, the person—a woman—has been made to match it. Her white clothes immediately link her to the slightly open cupboard, whose interior is the only other patch of white in the room. This gives a suggestion of availability. The woman's skin is precisely the same colour as the eggs. Her hair matches the cupboards. Again, we see that while the kitchen is meant to reflect *her*, she is in fact merely an object in the kitchen like one of the copper pans or the eggs or pieces of French bread. No wonder she looks so uncomfortable in it.





A7 *The retinted world of the advertisement:* Finally, a straightforward example just to illustrate the wide use and significance of colour correlations: the product and the world and the woman (the consumer) are all reduced to just two colours (gold and brown)—a typical manipulation or restatement of the world to link it to the two-dimensionality of advertising. This shows very clearly what has been seen in all these ads: a selecting of certain elements, things or people from the ordinary world, and then a rearranging and altering them in terms of a product's myth to create a new world, the world of the advertisement. This is the essence of all advertising: components of 'real' life, our life, are used to speak a new language, the advertisement's. Its language, its terms (here, gold and brown; the 'bronze lustre' message), *are* the myth; for as we have seen, they are too full of coincidence, of colour co-ordination, to be real. The very means of expression (as shown by colour, in this case) is the myth.

Now bronze beautifully and protect your skin!
Revlon's BRONZE LUSTRE COLLECTION for Sun Lovers.

Don't melt away all the sun's useful protecting power with a greasy tanning product. Use the Revlon Bronze Lustre Collection. One which is made in moisturizing and a perfect sun screen cream to prevent sun-burning.

Revlon's Bronze Lustre Protection Face Cream is the primary skin-protecting tanning cream that lets you enjoy the sun's rays. (Through all recommended tanning.)

Revlon's Bronze Lustre Sun Block for water to bath clean skin with a protective treatment against the sun.

Revlon's Bronze Lustre Cream cleanses skin, gives skin glowing, radiant glow to white skin.

Revlon's Bronze Lustre Cream is gentle. Exfoliates normal and extra dry skin when bathed.

Revlon's Bronze Lustre Sun Block for the face.

Revlon's Bronze Lustre Sun Block for the lips.

REVLON

Use of colour is simply a *technique*, used primarily in pictorial advertising, to make correlations between a product and other things. Since this book is based on magazine advertisements which are more easily reproduced than those in the cinema or on TV, I have included analyses of ads A2–A7 simply to alert the reader to this technique. The use of colour is not significant in itself; it is the significance of the correlation it makes that forms the basis of my theory. It is important not to confuse the particular properties of the technological medium with the generic properties of advertisements. On the screen, for example, connections are made by cutting, by the reverse field technique (where facing fields of vision are shown alternately), and so on. There is an advertisement for chocolate in cinema intermissions where a girl jumps upwards into the air, and then there is a cut to a bar of chocolate leaping upwards—so that the *movement* is continuous, although the objects are different. The cutting here fills the same correlating function as colour in the preceding ads; what is important is that ads in all media make these connections, *through formal techniques*, not on the level of the overt signified but via the signifiers.

Having established with these examples that such connections are made, I now embark on my theory of *why* they are made, and the significance of *how* they are made.

(a) *Differentiation*

There is very little real difference between brands of product within any category, such as detergents, margarine, paper towels and so on. Therefore it is the first function of an advertisement to *create* a differentiation between one particular product and others in the same category. It does this by providing the product with an 'image'; this image only succeeds in differentiating between products in so far as *it* is part of a system of differences. The identity of anything depends more on what it is *not* than what it is, since boundaries are primarily distinctions: and there are no 'natural' distinctions between most products. This can be seen by the fact that a *group* of products will sometimes be marketed with the same 'image', in a set or 'range' (cf. All)—these usually have names, like 'Maybelline' or 'Spring Bouquet' etc.: the limits of identity are chosen arbitrarily, it is clear, because in other cases two identical products from the very same manufacturer will be given different names and different images. If two different bottles of cleansing milk can have the same name—'Outdoor girl' or suchlike, but a third, apparently similar, can appear with a different name and therefore with supposedly different properties, it immediately becomes apparent that there are no

logical boundaries between most products. Surf and Daz essentially contain the same chemicals. Obviously there are products with special qualities or particular uses, but these do not usually need extensive advertising campaigns: the bulk of advertising covers exactly the areas where goods are the same: cigarettes, cornflakes, beer, soap.

I am taking a group of perfume advertisements—two of which come from the same manufacturer: these provide a good example of the creation of ‘images’ since perfumes *can* have no particular significance. This is a type of ad which can give no real information about the product (what information can be given about a smell?) so that the function of differentiation rests totally on making a connection with an image drawn from outside the ad world.



A8: Catherine Deneuve's face and the Chanel bottle are not linked by any narrative, simply by juxtaposition: but there is not supposed to be any *need* to link them directly, they are as it were in apposition in the grammar of the ad, placed together in terms of an *assumption* that they have the same meaning, although the connection is really a random one. For the face and the bottle are not inherently connected: there is no link between Catherine Deneuve *in herself* and Chanel No. 5: but the link is in terms of what Catherine Deneuve's face *means to us*, for this is what Chanel No. 5 is trying to mean to us, too. The advertisement presents this transference of meaning to us as a *fait accompli*, as though it were simply presenting two objects with the same meaning, but in fact it is only *in* the advertisement that this transference takes place. Chanel No. 5 only has the 'meaning' or image that it shares with Catherine Deneuve by having become associated with Catherine Deneuve through this very advertisement. So what Catherine Deneuve's face means to us in the world of magazines and films, Chanel No. 5 seeks to mean and comes to mean in the world of consumer goods. The ad is using another already existing mythological language or sign system, and appropriating a relationship that exists in that system between signifier (Catherine Deneuve) and signified (glamour, beauty) to speak of its product in terms of the same relationship; so that the perfume can be substituted for Catherine Deneuve's face and can also be made to signify glamour and beauty.

Using the structure of one system in order to give structure to another, or to translate the structure of another, is a process which must involve an intermediate structure, a system of systems or 'meta-system' at the point where the translation takes place: this is the advertisement. Advertisements are constantly translating between systems of meaning, and therefore constitute a vast meta-system where values from different areas of our lives are made interchangeable.

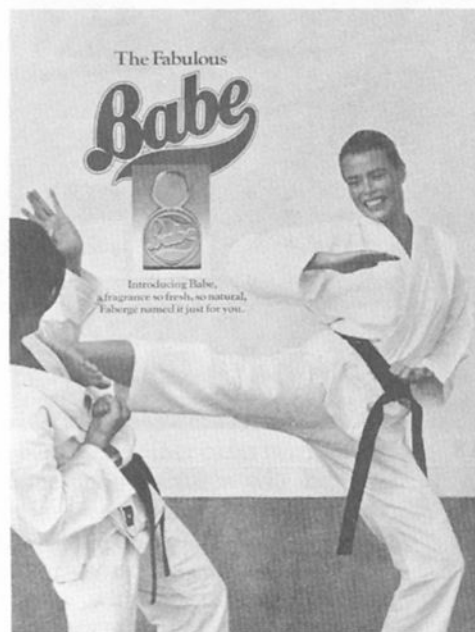
Thus the work of the advertisement is not to invent a meaning for No. 5, but to translate meaning for it by means of a sign system we already know. It is only because Catherine Deneuve has an 'image', a significance in one sign system, that she can be used to create a new

system of significance relating to perfumes. If she were not a film star and famous for her chic type of French beauty, if she did not *mean* something to us, the link made between her face and the perfume would be meaningless. So it is not her face as such, but its position in a system of signs where it signifies flawless French beauty, which makes it useful as a piece of linguistic currency to sell Chanel.

The system of signs from which the product draws its image is a *referent system* in that the sign lifted out of it and placed in the ad (in this case, Catherine Deneuve's face) *refers back to it*. It is not enough simply to know who Catherine Deneuve is: this will not help you to understand the ad. Someone from another culture who knew that Catherine Deneuve was a model and film star would still not understand the significance of her image here, because they would not have access to the referent system as a whole. And it is only by referring back to this system as a system of *differences* that the sign can function: it is hollow of meaning in itself, its signified is only a distinction rather than a 'content'. Only the form and structure of the referent system are appropriated by the advertisement system; it is the relationship and distinction between parts, rather than the parts themselves, that make an already-structured external system so valuable to advertising. The links made between elements from a referent system and products arise from the *place* these elements have in the whole system rather than from their inherent qualities. Thus Catherine Deneuve has significance only in that she is not, for example, Margaux Hemingway.

A9 Babe: The 'image' of this ad derives its impact from the existence of precisely such ads as A8, as it is able to 'kick off' against the more sedate Catherine Deneuve image and others like it. This new perfume, 'Babe', has been launched in a campaign using the new 'discovery' Margaux Hemingway. The significance of her novelty, youth and 'Tomboy' style, which has value only *in relation* to the more typically 'feminine' style usually connected with modelling, is carried over to the perfume: which is thus signified as new and 'fresh', in relation to other established perfumes. There would be no significance at all in the fact that Margaux Hemingway is wearing a karate outfit and has her hair tied back to look almost like a man's, were it not that *other* perfume ads show women wearing pretty dresses and with elaborately styled hair. The meaning is not, however, generated *inside* the advertisement system: there is a meaning in terms of 'women's liberation' and 'breaking conventions' in a model's having a tough, 'liberated' image (in one TV ad for 'Babe', Margaux Hemingway mends the car while her boyfriend watches) rather than a passive, 'feminine' one. In the widest

A9



sphere of meaning which the ad draws on, even outside modelling and images, the meaning still depends on a contrast, since the very idea of women doing karate is only significant because most women do *not* and have not done anything of the sort. (See Chapter 8.)

So this advertisement uses the 'Margaux Hemingway' image, *which itself depends for its significance on not being Catherine Deneuve's image* to give 'Babe' a distinct place in the inventory of perfumes, emphasising its novelty (its *not being like* what has gone before) and its difference from all the others. It uses a contrast made in social terms, 'feminine' vs. 'liberated', as signified by two models, to make a contrast between products.

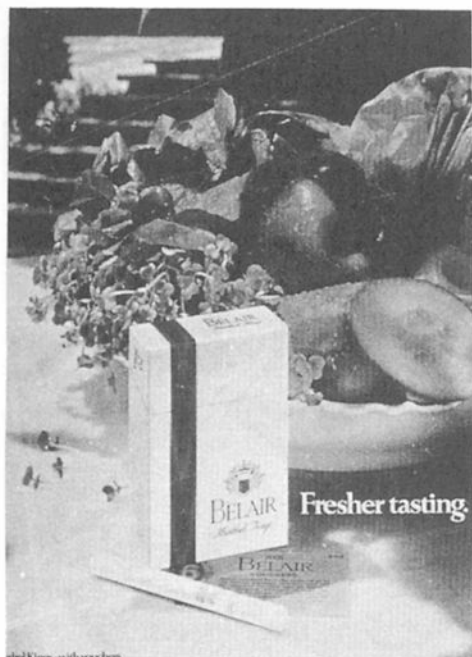
In the mythological system of fashion and publicity Catherine Deneuve and Margaux Hemingway are mutually differentiated and can only have value as signs in relation to each other: as Saussure says: 'in all cases, then, we discover not *ideas* given in advance but *values* emanating from the system. When we say that these values correspond to concepts, it is understood that these concepts are purely differential, not positively defined by their content but negatively defined by their relation with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is that they are what the others are not.'¹ Thus with Catherine Deneuve and Margaux Hemingway it is the *difference* between their significances (taking them not as women but as signs, for this is what they are in this context) that makes them valuable in advertising. Advertisements appropriate the formal relations of pre-existing systems of differences. They use distinctions existing in social mythologies to create distinctions between products: this seems like the reverse of 'totemism', where *things* are used to differentiate groups of people: however the differentiating process in advertisements works in both directions simultaneously. I have only unravelled the elements of this process in order to make the discussion of them clearer, focusing here on the differentiating of products, while 'totemism', differentiating between people, is discussed in the next chapter.

¹Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, quoted in *Saussure* by Jonathan Culler, Fontana, 1976, p. 26.



(c) *Product as Signified*

The product, which initially has no 'meaning', must be given value by a person or object which already has a value to us, i.e., already means. Therefore at this stage something about the product is being signified and the correlating thing or person is the signifier. The following ads are all examples of products being *given* meaning; in A12 and A13 the correlative is simply an object; A14 shows a person as correlative, as with Catherine Deneuve in A8; A15 uses a correlative which becomes significant in its potential absence; A16 shows an example where I think the correlating process has defeated itself, by over-emphasising the product, at the expense of grasping the 'image' of the correlative. But all these ads use the same method of linking two objects (even if one of them is a person): the 'correlative' one acting as an intermediary both for the abstract quality, and for the product (which is the second object and a correlative of the abstract at one remove).



A13: In the Belair ad we are shown foods which we *know* are fresh-tasting, and invited to ride on the accuracy of this information to the assumption that the other oral pleasure invoked, smoking Belair, is also fresh-tasting. How can a *cigarette* really be 'fresh'? Yet it seems to be, because of the dewy drops on the cucumber.

This cigarette ad and A12 and also A4 (where the quality is mildness) use a known correlative—a car for luxury, cucumbers for coolness—to sell us an unknown and unproved correlative. We have to make a leap of credibility and the known-correlative object is our stepping stone. The words in the Belair ad here make no claims: they are positioned close to two things and since we know their relevance to one, why not to the other?

The Sanderson advertisement A14 implies that the product has a meaning which fortunately corresponds to somebody's life-style, but that meaning is only created in the ad:



A14: The Sanderson series of adverts—'Very (name of celebrity), very Sanderson' shows the Romantic tendency to latch personality to something/someone outside the self: ('Nelly, I am Heathcliff!'¹)—an emotional correlative. In the advertisement, Susan Hampshire *is* Sanderson, and Sanderson *is* Susan Hampshire: they are grammatically equated by being placed in apposition. The idea that the product can *be* her, its identity merge with her own, illustrates just how far the 'objective correlative' can go: you see somebody in their wallpaper. But Susan Hampshire *is used as* a correlative to *give* the wallpaper meaning; she is classy, impressive, desirable, a correlative for these qualities: the wallpaper, by connection, is classy, impressive and desirable too. Her 'personality' is the signified; the wallpaper is signified as having 'personality' as well.

However, there is a further implication in the wording of the ad: the fact that it is an achievement for the paper to be both very Susan Hampshire *and* very Sanderson, implies that Sanderson does have an image, a quality of its own, and that by a wonderful compromise, this quality can also suit another image, an individual's personality. Yet it is from this that Sanderson derives its image in the first place. The wording sets up Susan Hampshire and Sanderson as *different*, but *united* in the wallpaper: but in fact they are the same, united by Susan Hampshire since her image is what creates Sanderson's. And this wonderful vehicle of Susan Hampshire's self-expression, is, paradoxically, available to us all for a certain price per yard.

¹ *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë.

And two more complex attempts at transferring meaning:

A15: This ad makes use of *cliché* and its fallibility as a correlative. The ring and the bridal veil stand for marriage, and in each picture the strong male hand stands for 'Promise, Confidence, and Security'. The pictures are clichéd illustrations of these three words, and provide a correlative for the building society's promise of them. But the point of the ad is to undermine the 'Confidence and Security' offered by the man. . . . 'The future never quite takes care of itself. . . . Now and then it needs a little help.' The cliché of masculine security and promise is exposed, to show the need for Halifax. Yet simultaneously, the image of the ad, the hand and the ring etc., undermined in its literal sense of marriage-as-security, is used in all its clichédness to represent the promise, confidence and security offered in reparation by Halifax. Despite breaking through the cliché of the signifier on one level, at another the ad uses it fully.

In other words, Security, *signified* by the hand, becomes a *signifier*, in its possible *absence*, of the need for Halifax: it is then returned to its original status of signified through the conduit of the product.

Promise.
Confidence.
Security.

Somehow the future never quite takes care of itself. Now and then it needs a little help. The sort of help the Halifax can give. With the Halifax, saving is so simple. You can choose from five different schemes. All offering the opportunity of a consistently competitive return with a high degree of security. Get to know the Halifax today. Tomorrow will look that much brighter.

HALIFAX
BUILDING SOCIETY

The biggest in the world

A15a

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A15b