

1

ADVERTISING AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE

Advertising has been a part of the U.S. landscape since the beginnings of the country, although, there has always been much ambivalence about its role in society. Interest in and inquiry into advertising in America dates to 1759 when Dr. Samuel Johnson, literary titan of the 18th century suggested, “advertisers had moral and social questions to consider” (Aaker & Day, 1978, p. 174). Since that time, the institution of advertising has played an increasingly significant role in the financial and cultural economies.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the ideological positions—liberal, Marxist, and conservative—regarding advertising. Understanding these positions will ground advertising’s role in the financial as well as the cultural economy. The cultural role of advertising in everyday life is explored along with audience reception of advertising messages. The social uses in advertising are described and the concept of advertising as a social practice is introduced.

Advertising as we know it is a 19th-century phenomenon. In the latter part of the century, national consumer product advertising arose as an economic necessity as modern society progressed from a competitive economy to an oligopoly. With fewer producers, the excesses of production needed to be widely distributed and advertising was the vehicle with which to stimulate demand among consumers to ensure that the goods produced in large numbers would be eliminated from inventories, and to ensure that the owners of the factories pro-

ducing them could secure adequate returns on their investments. Fox (1984) and Lears (1994) described this process of commodification and the social structure that emerged as "consumer culture," an idealized vision of 20th-century life. Ewen and Ewen (1982) also found during this period similar growth in consumer culture through the rise of mass images, fostered by the fashion and entertainment industries. As advertising replaced traditional means of conveying information its importance grew as a social power along with its ability to set a cultural tone with regard to image and lifestyle. The focus on advertising as a social and cultural power emerged over the course of the 20th century as theorists and critics came to describe the rise of goods and services as signifiers of status in addition to their role in needs gratification.

SOCIAL CRITIQUE OF ADVERTISING

Paralleling the growth of advertising during the 20th century, as the consumer economy emerged, was an economic and social critique of advertising. Liberal critics believe the economic impact of advertising is wasteful, and therefore, it should be eliminated. Such critics believe that advertising creates barriers to entry into the marketplace and thus decreases competition. This, they say, leads to oligopolies. Additionally, the liberal position maintains that advertising is an inefficient conveyor of information, distributing information unevenly. This inefficiency and unevenness leads to an increase in prices because the sum total of advertising must be absorbed into the cost of doing business. With regard to social impact, the liberal position maintains that by placating an individual's wants, advertising maintains the status quo. Other ways in which advertising impacts society from the liberal perspective include creating false wants, presenting bad role models, and affecting programming content adversely.

Leiss, Kline, and Jhally (1986) suggested that the neoliberal and Marxist positions toward advertising are quite similar. The neoliberal and Marxist critique is based on the idea that advertising is a tool of manipulation that controls the market by creating false needs in consumers and by extolling an ethos of consumption. The neoliberal critique overemphasizes the idea that consumption fulfills all needs through the purchase of goods in the marketplace. As all of these needs cannot be fulfilled through consumption, according to the critique, general feelings of dissatisfaction emerge. But neoliberals believe that advertising can be "fixed" through the containment of market forces. This can be accomplished through public policy and government action.

The conservative critique claims that advertising leads to a moral breakdown of society as it foists images of hedonistic pleasure on an unsuspecting public. The conservative position, that politically represents the religious right, criticizes advertising as a celebration of secular humanism.

The critique of advertising in its various manifestations progressed through the 1950s and 1960s. Historian David Potter, for example, proclaimed advertising to be the dominant institution in American society. Potter (1954) claimed for advertising as much influence as the institutions of religion and education, and ascribes to advertising the "power to exhibit social control by shaping popular standards" (166). In the late 1950s, Packard's *Hidden Persuaders* popularized this critical stance, introducing the concept of subliminal advertising to the popular lexicon. Even though there is little scientific evidence to support the notion of subliminal advertising and little reason for advertisers to engage in it, Americans are steadfast in their belief in its existence and hence their belief in the magical forces of advertising. And, Toynebee (1964), during this same period, attacked advertising and its effects on values in American culture and society:

The true end of man is not to possess the maximum amount of consumer goods per head. When we are considering the demand for consumer goods we have to distinguish between three things; our needs, our wants and the unwanted demand, in excess of our genuine wants, that allow the advertising trade to bully us into demanding if we are both rich enough to let ourselves be influenced by advertisements. (144)

In the decades that followed, the rhetoric has been just as strong. Boorstin believes that advertising is the rhetoric of democracy and an important element in understanding American civilization. Real (1977) described advertising's manifest function as conveyor of information to consumers about goods and services, but he adds it does so in the context of "a world of fables, morality plays, reflections of power and priorities in our society" (28).

Leiss et al. (1986) conceptualize advertising as an influential form of social communication.

Our main point is a simple one: Advertising is not just a business expenditure undertaken in hope of moving some merchandise off the store shelves, but is rather an integral part of modern culture. Its creations appropriate and transform a vast range of symbols and ideas; its unsurpassed communicative powers recycle cultural models and references back through the networks of social interactions. This venture is unified by the discourse through and about objects, which bonds together images of persons, products, and well-being (7).

Their concern is for the significance and power of advertising as a purveyor—not of goods and services—of culture. They claim for advertising a crucial role in the culture's meaning-making system.

Perhaps because of its complex role—it is entertaining, supports the media system, and serves as an engine for commerce—this love/hate relationship continues today as advertising is still being referred to as the central institution of American culture (Twitchell, 1996). This love/hate relationship with advertising is rather paradoxical, especially when it comes to the effectiveness of advertising. In a fragmented society advertising reaches a diverse nation through target marketing's appeals to various tastes. This narrow casting of advertising's net takes advantage of multiple, yet highly fragmented, media outlets. The audience to which it is directed is diverse and difficult to control. And, the message through which it makes offers is constructed within highly fractured forms.

Most people, however, "hold simultaneously divergent, indeed opposed, views on advertising" (Leiss et al., 1986: 4). This divergence of opinion is reflective of society as a whole and thus our understanding of the place and purpose of advertising within American culture is not a particularly clear one. Nevertheless, advertising, like the mass media of which it is a part, is fodder for controversy and criticism. We have come to have a complex relationship with advertising as it is intertwined within the financial economy serving to support the capitalist system, and within the cultural economy where it weighs heavy on the issues regarding values, morals, obtrusiveness, intrusiveness, and deceptiveness.

COMING TO TERMS WITH THE CRITIQUE

Advertising competes with other institutions—political, economic, and social—for a place in public discourse and within the private imagination. In order to dominate the culture, advertisements have to be more compelling and encompassing in their appeals than those communicated through other institutions. Sometimes, of course, advertisements do for a short time rise to the level of prominence. Sometimes when an advertisement does so the reasons have little to do with the product per se, and have more to do with the context of the advertisement and related issues: Joe Camel and youthful smokers, fashion and drug abuse, and fashion models and child abuse, just to name a few. Conversely, it may be that other topics—news, entertainment, and so on—may at a point in time lack salience providing the opportunity for advertising to take a more prominent position in popular culture. From time to time advertising becomes news, for example, when pop singer

Michael Jackson's hair caught fire while filming a Pepsi commercial. Fowles (1996) described advertising and popular culture as "allied symbol domains" (xiv).

The inability to commandeer all the media or to create messages that reach a diverse culture suggests that we do not live in an age dominated by advertising. Advertisements lack the ability to reach all of the people all of the time even though oftentimes it feels as though we are inundated by commercial messages. In order to be considered a dominant institution, advertising would have to do more than bombard consumers with images and messages, and consumers would have to actually pay attention, internalize the messages, and perhaps act on those messages and images.

Advertising is more like a re-packager of cultural artifacts rather than an originator of culture. "The advertisement does not so much invent social values or ideals of its own as it borrows, usurps, or exploits what advertisers take to be prevailing social values" (Schudson, 1984: 221). This is so because advertising to some degree reflects the culture of which it is a part. Furthermore, advertising does not directly reflect the culture accurately as it represents a refracted picture of society. Rather than reality, advertising presents to its audiences a form of hyper-reality; an extension of reality that manifests in excessiveness. There is a solipsistic quality to advertising as it does not so much create culture, but it is a product of the culture that feeds culture back into the culture. And because we live in a diverse society, this combination of refracted images projecting the excessiveness of advertising through highly fragmented media sets up the possibility that the interpretations and uses of advertising will be various and wide ranging.

In this same sense, advertising rarely offers anything new, but relies on fracturing readily understood forms in order to gain attention. As there is little economic incentive in being overly risky, generally speaking, advertisers choose not to lead the culture. Advertising campaigns by Calvin Klein and Benneton, for example, have sometimes intentionally heightened social contexts in an attempt to tag their brand name to a social issue in the foreground.¹ Benneton did not originate the social issue of death row inmates who served as background for a recent campaign; they did tag onto the issue and heighten for a short time public awareness of the issue. The primary focus of such advertising, however, is not on products sold by the advertiser. Therefore, the range of possible interpretations grows within this complexity. Once unleashed on the culture, can an offensive advertisement—that mixes high fashion sweaters, as is the case with Benneton, and a public issue like the death penalty—work in the controlled manner in which the marketer desires? If the goal is to raise awareness of the brand, perhaps so, but if the goal is to encourage individuals to purchase Benneton fashions, then the answer is caught in the inter-

textual nature of advertising as it operates within a complex set of social and cultural rules.

Additionally, culture is not static, but rather changes over time. Accordingly, advertising being a product of the culture, over time, changes too. As advertising reflects, or rather refracts, part of the culture it is not one thing over a long period of time; it has a dynamic, yet synergistic, quality. And so under some circumstances, some times, for some individuals advertising, or more likely certain aspects of it, may be relevant. The possible outcomes range from purchasing a product to utilizing a catch phrase in some social situation. However, individuals may pay little or perhaps no attention to advertising, what Krugman (1988) called *learned inattention*. To understand the purpose and place of advertising in American culture, it is important to look more deeply at the variety and range of experiences individuals have with and through advertising, social practices in everyday life.

ADVERTISING AND THE SALE OF PRODUCTS

Advertising operates within both the cultural and financial economies. Considering the inability to measure its effectiveness within the financial economy, it has always been difficult to judge the contribution advertising makes to the bottom line of an organization. This is so if for no other reason than for many companies, sales figures are proprietary information, not shared with the general public, and it is difficult to demonstrate a causal relationship between what we see, read, or hear and ensuing behavior. Driver and Foxall (1984), in their review of the advertising literature, concluded "advertising is helpless when it comes to establishing long-term purchasing patterns" (in Leiss et al. 1986: 5). Leiss et al. amplified this point when they said, "Historical analysis has been unable to determine just how much advertising, as distinct from other factors, increased overall sales and stimulated mass production and distribution. The growth of advertising is correlated to the growth of the industrial economy, but whether as cause or effect is difficult to determine" (14).

Part of the problem with correlating advertising effectiveness and sales is the lack of differentiation between categories such as national consumer goods, retail, business, and professional advertising. There is also confusion regarding the difference between advertising, sales promotions, and direct marketing efforts and the different goals of each. Generally, we accept the term *advertising* to mean any attempt to "sell" a product on behalf of a purveyor. This would include a promotional event, like the Super Bowl, and it might include coupons consumers receive in the mail or those inserted into a Sunday newspa-

per. It might include an advertisement for fashion, cologne, or some other consumer product. But these promotional elements are all a function of the broader promotional mix of marketing of which advertising is only one part. It is likely that today expenditures on other aspects of marketing, such as sales promotion, are greater than those on traditional forms of advertising. This is not merely a semantic difference, between sales promotion and advertising, as advertising is only one part of the larger marketing process; only one element in the mix. Furthermore, the marketing process is a part of the capitalistic economy in which we live. Once advertising is placed within the context of marketing, and once the marketing function is placed within the context of a capitalist economy, as Rotzell, Haefner, and Sandage (1976) point out, we begin to understand the rules of the game. The complexity of advertising's role within the financial economy is matched by its complex role in the cultural economy. It requires a multidimensional approach to understand advertising's place and purpose and to do so, this examination of advertising in everyday life will extend beyond its role in the financial economy. Bogart (1995) suggested advertising's economic function is misleading. There is a need to jettison the economic function of advertising from the social and cultural function if we are going to make generalizations about advertising's cultural role.

This book's primary focus is on the integration of national consumer goods advertising into everyday American life. And although it constitutes approximately 13% of all advertising, national consumer goods advertising is different from most local or regional retail advertising. National consumer goods advertising is the advertising one thinks of when one generally thinks of advertising: 30-second network television commercials or full-page national magazine advertisements. Such advertising is different in content and nature than sales promotions and retail advertising, which are more direct in their appeal and approach; the selling message is more obscure. It tends to rely heavily on image and atmospherics. Fowles (1996) referred to this as *compound* advertising. "The task of the advertisement is to get consumers to transfer the positive associations of the noncommodity material into the commodity, so that freedom and ruggedness equal Marlboro cigarettes, and friendship equals Bud Light" (11). The goal of much national consumer goods advertising is not the direct sale, but brand awareness or some other step on the hierarchy of effects. The hierarchy of effects—awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and purchase—suggests that the goal of advertising is not always purchase and that stages of communication have to be accomplished before purchase is achieved.² Other theories suggest, however, that individuals can make purchases based on the emotional appeal of a product without knowing very much about it. And by the same token, it is possible to make a purchase decision based on knowledge, without any feeling

toward the product or service. Such models as "Learn, Feel, Do Circles" suggest that the road from awareness to purchase may not be as straight forward as the hierarchy of effects would lead one to believe. This "Learn, Feel, Do" model suggests that consumers can (do) purchase a product before they (learn) know much about it. Also, consumers can feel emotionally connected to a product (feel) without knowing much about it (learn).

Expenditures on advertising in 1980 reached \$53 billion. In 2000, approximately \$233 billion was spent annually on advertising (Belch & Belch, 2001).³ Approximately 60% of those annual expenditures were for national consumer goods advertising. These figures do not include expenditures for associated sales promotions. And the industry employs more than 250,000 people. Such extraordinary expenditures suggest that advertising must be effective. However, this assumption is fraught with controversy. The controversy as to whether or not advertising works to directly sell products is not new as famed retailer John Wannamaker, once said that he knew that half his advertising worked, but did not know which half.⁴ Admittedly, there is an awful lot of advertising today. Approximately 1,500 ads are marched in front of our eyes every day. Do corporations advertise so much because consumers do not remember or do not pay attention to much advertising? The problem is, no one really knows to what extent advertising contributes to the sale of products. The preoccupation with the cause-and-effect relationship throws us off the scent of experiences and uses of advertising in everyday life.

Clearly, it is possible for an advertisement or perhaps a long-term campaign, for various but complex reasons, to be effective. By effective I mean it may temporarily lead to—for a period of time—an increase in sales of a product or it may merely mean heightened awareness of a new product being introduced to the market. But, within the construct of effectiveness little or nothing may happen. The latter possibility is confirmed by the fact that most new products introduced fail to penetrate the market. Beyond this range of possibilities, little else is known about the actual impact of advertisements on the financial economy. Perhaps the hierarchy of effects previously alluded to is based on a false premise, as advertisements do not operate in a vacuum. In other words, the creation of "awareness" is not under the sole control of the advertisers. The complexities of the marketing system, as well as social and cultural issues, need to be considered along with the individual consumer's role in this process. For example, Clairol hair coloring advertises its own hair coloring products as a part of a long-standing national consumer goods campaign. However, its advertisements also are a part of the total of advertisements for personal care products directed toward a particular target audience. The impact of such advertising, in this and other instances, goes beyond the product

per se to lead us to speculate on its connection to and impact on other social issues like body image that is conveyed through, for example, ultra thin models depicted in personal care advertisements. In line with this thinking, critics have charged that fashion and cosmetic advertising is responsible, among other things, for the spread of anorexia and bulimia in our society. But the complex relationship that exists between advertising and its audiences makes it difficult to pinpoint what advertising's effects on society are, much less how effective an advertisement is in selling a product. John Wannamaker clearly understood advertising's limitations and in that the complexity of the marketplace when he proclaimed that much advertising fails.

ADVERTISING IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Perhaps there are other things at work beyond the advertiser's attempt to sell products; other ways in which consumers experience and use advertising in the context of their everyday lives. I am referring to experiences and uses that are not accounted for in the dominant paradigm regarding advertising's effectiveness. But the broader question remains: How do we experience advertising within the ordinary practices of everyday American life? In order to understand this, we need to consider the magical system of which advertising is a part (a subject discussed in chap. 2) and to look closely at language and behavior, what de Certeau (1984) referred to as *everyday practices*, that may extend beyond the arena of commerce to include other areas of everyday social life. It is important to place advertising within the complexity of other contexts—cultural and social—in order to see how individuals "operate" within the culture.

In order to understand the work advertising does in the culture—and in that, the work we do with advertising—it is important to describe and interpret a range of uses to which individuals put advertising in the context of their everyday lives. As an example, during the 1996 Christmas shopping season, clothing designer Calvin Klein ran an advertising campaign for CK jeans the result of which brought a U.S. Justice Department investigation into child pornography. The highly imagistic advertisements placed, what at first glance appeared to be, very young models in rather seductive positions wearing, of course, CK jeans. After the investigation, the department quietly dropped its charges. This incident provides an opportunity to examine some of the work advertising does in U.S. culture and society and the work we do with it. Like Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, advertising in contemporary American society can be a moral tale. The CK jeans advertisements themselves along with different interest groups

and individuals attracted to the advertisements played key cultural roles in this contemporary myth-making process and provide lessons about our society and ourselves.

These lessons are presented not only through the advertisements, but through the interactions of a strange group of bedfellows that include: The Calvin Klein Corporation and its namesake and chief spokesperson Calvin Klein, the U.S. Justice Department, media outlets like MTV that ran the advertising and reported on it when it made news, and special interest groups like the American Family Association of Tupelo, Mississippi, headed by Rev. Donald Wildmon. The fallout from this campaign had little to do with those effects traditionally associated with advertising, namely the sale of goods and services. These groups and individuals, among others, are cultural negotiators who participate in the production of meanings and in that the social practice of advertising. Of course, from this perspective what is learned has little to do with the products being sold as advertising takes on a broader cultural role.

In the course of this controversy, Calvin Klein was depicted in the mainstream media and trade press as a sinister business person operating at the fringe of acceptability, and simultaneously he was portrayed as a savvy business mogul for having generated free publicity way beyond that provided by the advertising time and space the corporation purchased. One trade journal reported positive responses that ranged from, "he got what he wanted" to "he spent half his ad budget and got double the publicity." As a result of this advertising campaign, Calvin Klein and his namesake corporation were depicted as immoral, but efficient capitalists. Historically, the immoral but successful business person has been associated with leading capitalists, including some of the greatest like John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie. Because capitalism has few moral guidelines governing how business should be conducted, part of our cultural understanding is that in order to be successful, sometimes you have to stretch or break the rules. This is reinforced through the public discourse generated by this campaign.

Public discourse regarding the Calvin Klein campaign grounds us in the rules of the game as it sets limits regarding what advertising can and cannot portray. That is where the U.S. Justice Department and the Rev. Donald Wildmon enter the picture. These external forces attempt to negotiate the social and legal limits, and Calvin Klein surely knew this as the corporation's advertising has in the past teetered on the edge of acceptability. The success of such a risky venture requires shrewd calculation. Is this a child pornographer, as some charged, or a capitalist doing good business? Or is the lesson that it takes one to achieve the other?

What about some of the others involved from whom these lessons are reinforced? MTV, for example, on whose channel the electronic versions of the advertisements ran, decided to drop the advertisements after public pressure mounted. Interestingly, all the advertisements had already aired by the time MTV agreed to take them off the air. Therefore, as a company whose primary business is selling advertising time, MTV emerged as a winner too. MTV can claim to have stopped running the ads (a moral decision) and claim they ran all the ads (a business decision).

Ironically, the vast majority of Americans probably never saw any of the advertisements from this campaign. And so it is mostly stakeholders that get caught up in the momentum using the opportunity to convey a moral understanding and use the advertisement as a point of engagement. Furthermore, special interest groups like a local PTA might use the advertisements in order to raise community awareness about child pornography or some related issue like child abuse. Clergy might use the advertisements as a point of discussion regarding what is right or wrong in society. And a group of teens might sit around talking about how "cool" the models in the advertisements look. The range of use here is very wide and provides evidence of how people can subvert the intention of the advertiser and find meanings that are relevant to their own lives. This example tells very little about the advertising campaign's effectiveness in moving product off the shelf. That, of course, is advertising's expressed intention. But we see by this example advertising is much more than that. Some variation of this scenario is repeated many times every day, perhaps not with the intensity of this advertising campaign. For example, Gillespie (1995) tracked how British teenagers in the course of their everyday lives used "ad talk" to negotiate their identities. She said, "One of the most tangible examples of the way that the discourses of TV and everyday life are intermeshed is when jingles, catch-phrases and humorous storylines of favorite ads are incorporated into everyday speech. Ads provide a set of shared cultural reference points, images and metaphors which spice local speech" (178). The contemporary world of advertising abounds with opportunities to understand ourselves and the world around us.

As advertising sometimes becomes fodder for social discourse, it periodically impacts language as a slogan, catch phrase, or jingle finds its way into everyday speech. For example, Wendy's fast food restaurants claimed a brief increase in sales when in 1984 the catch phrase "Where's the Beef?" pervaded U.S. society. The catch phrase lives on today as it was jettisoned from the Wendy's campaign and became ingrained in everyday U.S. language. As Americans, we speak in terms of "go power" and "where the rubber meets the road" and declare that if "Mikey will eat anything," perhaps so can we. Advertising's language may extend beyond its initial function to serve,

for example, as expedient communication, a necessity in fast-paced American society. Such social uses of advertising language are examples of what de Certeau described as "poetic ways of making do," and extend our understanding of the ways advertising circulates within the discourse of everyday life. Advertising language is strategic and to a great extent automatic in the ways in which an individual sometimes injects conversations with the lively patter of slogans and catch phrases. As an expression of everyday speech, the use of catch phrases and slogans speaks to the postmaterialist culture in which we live and the ways we experience advertising in everyday life. To this end, advertising makes a small contribution to culture and society; it gives us something to talk about, something to think about and something to dream about. The particularities of advertising language show up in their everyday speech, and as a part of the individual's imaginary social world where advertising or elements thereof are incorporated into our internal dialogue. In addition to the pleasure it may bring, advertising provides social utility and contributes to social identity.

ADVERTISING AND THE AUDIENCE

The question of attention is one that is central to understanding advertising's broader work in the culture. The adage that the business of the commercial media is to deliver an audience to an advertiser is based on the understanding that people will pay attention to media. The commercial media system—newspapers, TV, magazines, the Internet, and so on—essentially rents out the attention of audiences to advertisers. Behaviorally, the audience is conceptualized as sitting stoically in front of the television or magazine for extended periods of time absorbing its content. If a viewer is paying attention to a sitcom, drama, or news program, for example, he or she will also pay attention to the commercials, or so the theory suggests. However, viewing does not equal attention. Bogart (1995) said, "Readers, viewers, and listeners have a built-in capacity for selective inattention" (76). Even when eyes are fixed on the screen or page, individuals may not be paying attention to the content of advertisements. Even when they do pay attention to an advertisement, they may, through some visual or verbal cue within the advertisement, begin to daydream. Campbell (1987) described the importance of daydreaming to the consumption process. He referred to imaginative pleasure seeking as an essential activity of consumption, more essential than the purchase of products. Selective inattention is not a psychological state, but rather a social practice. Coupled with the controversial area of audience measurement and the realization that advertisers, and in that the media, really do not know who is watching,

listening, or reading, the generally held goal of media to deliver an audience to an advertiser is fraught with problems (Ang, 1991).

The notion that advertisers attempt to gain consumers' attention and keep it in order to communicate a message only considers the advertiser's desire, but does not consider the consumer's experience. The assumption is that individuals spend much of their free time watching television (the TV is on in the average home for approximately 7 hours a day), and additional time with other commercial media. In practice, individuals may not pay close attention to advertising or the programming for that matter even when their eyes are focused on the screen or page. In this age of the Internet, people multitask, that is they may surf the Net while listening to music or they may semi-watch television. No matter how sophisticated the methodology used by ratings services to track viewing or magazine reading, they cannot know what is going on in the individual's mind while he or she is consuming commercial media.

Attention is one of those illusory attributes that are complicated by one of advertising's major enemies—the remote control. The remote is a device that allows viewers to switch away from, rather than watch, commercials. Ang (1991) described zipping and zapping as "a cultural battle being acted out" (75). She added, "All in all, advertisers are clearly increasingly worried about the fact that viewers can actively avoid watching the commercials that are embedded in the programs" (76). However, in addition to the actual zapping with a remote control device, viewers can mentally tune out commercials, metaphorically changing stations in their own minds—a form of mental zapping. The remote control device allows the viewer to surf the spectrum of channels or switch between programs and/or commercials. As a result of all this literal channel surfing and the metaphoric form, the question of attention to advertising becomes more complex if not confounded.

In their effort to arrest viewers' attention, advertisers may employ strategies gleaned from entertainment that require the advertisement's message to extend far beyond the product's attributes. One industry approach to the audience problem is to make advertising so entertaining that consumers will feel compelled to watch, read, or listen to it. The result, however, is less than satisfactory as bits and pieces of advertisements sometimes serve as cues that cause viewers to begin daydreaming about things other than the product being advertised. As a result, viewers, listeners, or readers in some cases will remember parts of an advertisement, or they may remember an advertisement, but disconnect elements of it from the product. Other times, consumers will "get it wrong" by misconstruing the name of the product. In addition to what is going on in the consumer's mind, we also understand that sometimes advertising content serves as a cue to talk

to someone in the room, make a phone call, get something to eat, in other words to do something else while the commercials are running.

An approach to studying advertising in everyday life would consider the advertising text and the way that text is used or re-integrated into everyday experience. This approach sees advertising as the sight of a struggle in which individuals negotiate acceptance or rejection of commercial messages. Advertising operates within a matrix in which the advertising industry seeks conformity to its messages and in reaction individuals create tactics to adapt it to their own rules. The terrain in which advertising operates is more like a moving equilibrium that has to be negotiated between the parties concerned.⁵

ADVERTISING AS SOCIAL PRACTICE

Media consumption—watching TV, listening to the radio, reading magazines, and surfing the Internet—is an integral part of everyday life and as such it is not a one-dimensional activity. There are different rituals in which individuals engage when they consume commercial media. Consumption itself is the manifestation of the ways in which we use advertising and through which we routinely attempt to subvert the intended meanings provided by advertisers. There are innumerable possibilities within the consumption process that allow for different kinds of viewers who may have different responses to the same advertisement based on their own interest. Through their consumption of advertising texts, individuals employ methods of transformation they may have honed over time.

Advertising as a social practice refers to the routine behaviors through which individuals consume advertising and it accounts for the tactics they use to make sense of their experience. Advertising sometimes becomes a point of confrontation and perhaps a struggle in which individuals develop tactics to deal with the strategically created messages. The "tactics of consumption" as de Certeau (1984) referred to them, encompass the "ingenious ways" to deal with the political dimension of everyday life. These tactics manifest in our interaction with others and how we process that advertising content within ourselves. Social practice also refers to what we do with advertising content away from media consumption; how we utilize it in our daily lives. This includes, but is not limited to, the way the elements of advertising enter into daily conversations, the ways in which advertising works in our daydreams and other stream of consciousness activity, as well as the ways in which it inhabits our dream world. Social practice also refers to the ways in which advertising encourages and enters into other aspects of our imagination, like the development of imaginary relationships with media figures.

Media consumption, like other everyday practices, as de Certeau suggested, is tactical. There is a political dimension to consuming advertising that is produced for the consumer. In this sense de Certeau (1984) referred to consumers as "textual poachers" (xi). *Textual poaching* is a social practice in which the individual appropriates meaning from a text, like advertising, that is intended to persuade. For de Certeau, appropriating an advertisement would be like renting an apartment. The apartment belongs to someone else, but the renter will re-arrange the furniture in order to make the dwelling their own. It is through such rituals of resistance that individuals make their own meanings through and with advertising. The rituals associated with the social practice of advertising are ways of making sense of the world in which we live. Granted, advertising is only one aspect of this social practice of consumption, but it is an important one.

The advertisement is the site of a struggle—a wholly unequal one—between producers who employ strategies to overcome resistance and consumers who apply tactics to resist. Whereas de Certeau (1984) placed much power on the part of individuals to resist the power of producers, Gramsci (1998) described a compromise equilibrium in which neither side necessarily "wins." On the micro-level, looking at the results of advertising as "compromise equilibrium" based on the political struggle for power at first glance appears to demonstrate how individuals appropriate the contents of advertisements for their own use in ways that are not envisioned by their producers.⁶ Therefore, the question is not just about what advertising does to us. The question must also consider what we do to advertising. Within this line of thinking, it is important to understand the many ways in which individuals make culture through their experience of, with, and through advertising.⁷ It is unclear whether it is advertising alone that makes this struggle possible, but we are engaged in an active relationship with it through which we find meaning, pleasure, and identity (Fiske, 1987).

The power of consumers derives from the fact that meanings do not circulate in the cultural economy in the same way that wealth does in the financial. They are harder to possess (and thus to exclude others from possessing), they are harder to control because the production of meaning and pleasure is not the same as the production of the cultural commodity, or of other goods, for in the cultural economy the role of consumer does not exist as the end point of a linear economic transaction. Meanings and pleasures circulate within it without any real distinction between producers and consumers. (313)

In this sense, the social practice associated with the consumption of advertising is not something that can be imposed on people, rather it is something that people learn, through enculturation, to cope with, resist, and evade.

Other theorists have problems with the concept of resistance, at least the way in which Fiske may over-estimate it (Ang, 1996). The process of creating meaning and identity through the appropriation of advertising is not the work of an empowered audience, but rather "part and parcel of the chaotic system of capitalist postmodernity itself. In this sense, it would be mistaken to see the acting out of difference unambiguously as an act of resistance; what needs to be emphasized, rather, is that the desire to be different can be simultaneously complicit with and defiant against the institutionalization of excess of desire in capitalist modernity" (Ang, 1996: 179). Ang related this position back to de Certeau who described social practices as "escaping without leaving." Morris (1992) viewed the issue of resistance as a systemic one. For Morris, the celebration of resistance is a myth that is apparent only when one focuses on the micro aspects of media consumption when we take the evasive acts at face value. She rooted the notion of resistance in institutional issues of uncertainty, ambiguity, and the chaos that is built into the system. It is the "celebration of limitless flux (that serves) as a mechanism within its ordering principle" (Ang, 1991: 179). It may be that both theoretical approaches hold value for understanding advertising in everyday life as resistance in some form or other does exist at the micro-level and uncertainty and ambiguity at the macro-level. It is most likely that uncertainty (discussed in chap. 2) and ambiguity drive the individual into the system as consumers seek stability through the appropriation of advertising content, and it also may be true that within that institutional process individuals corrupt the message as they seek meaning, pleasure, and identity. Silverstone (1994) added that rather than looking at both (advertiser) strategies and (consumer) tactics, which he claimed are "unequally opposed" forces, the focus should be on "the expressions of activity and creativity within, and constitutive of, the mobile forces of structure" (164). The tension between "security and anxiety" that exist between advertiser and consumer can be studied through ethnographic research that accepts the structural relationships between the two as "transitional."

If the study of advertising is to be situated in the taken-for-grantedness of routine existence, then it is important to extend the ideas of those concerned primarily with media consumption to focus on the dynamic forces at work between advertiser and consumer, and among individuals and within individuals in the context of their everyday lives.

CONCLUSION

Advertising began as news.⁸ Advertising evolved into information. It then became entertainment. Throughout U.S. history, advertising has

come under attack. This is especially so when we reflect back on the past century to view the vital role advertising played in the development of an emerging consumer economy that saw advertising as a means to dispose of excess production. Today, advertising continues to serve all three of its original functions, but advertising as experience is one that has not been accounted for until recently. An advertisement whose central message and selling point are obscure, what I have referred to as national consumer goods advertising, may not be terribly relevant to consumers, but the associative meanings in the advertisements may give way to, in the postmodern sense, experience. The kind of experience to which I refer is a social practice through which individuals negotiate their way through advertising which in our contemporary society is difficult to escape.

Fiske (1987) argued that culture circulates in two economies, one financial and the other cultural. The financial economy is concerned in the case of advertising with the sale of products. In this chapter, I have posited that it is very difficult to find a causal link between advertising and the sale of goods and services. On the other hand, the cultural economy, of which advertising is a part, is concerned with "appropriation and use—meanings, pleasures and social identities" (Fiske, 1987: 311). The cultural economy is exemplified in the extended uses of electronic media, like video games and computers in which individuals can have an interactive experience with a television screen. Terkel (1995) wrote extensively about the immersion into multi-user domains (MUDs) via computer-generated fantasies. As such interactive video games and the Internet have become the model for more sophisticated experience with media content. Like the experience in MUDs, the notion that one can experience an advertisement transcends the way in which we have traditionally viewed media consumption.

We may not be able to determine the answer to the question: Does advertising work? Twitchell (1996) maintained that advertising is more like window dressing whose primary purpose is to make corporations feel good. However, more can be known about the work advertising does in the culture and the work we do with advertising. In order to do so, the consumer has to be conceptualized in a way that conceives of audiences as producers and consumers of meanings. It is imperative under such a framework to consider the text of advertising within particular social contexts. In this way, the reader will see where advertising "lives" and how Americans experience advertising as a part of their everyday lives.

ENDNOTES

1. For a discussion of how advertisements like those for Benetton and Calvin Klein "work" see Meyers (1999).
2. The hierarchy of effects theory is attributed to Lavidge and Steiner who developed it in 1961.
3. Learn, Feel, Do Circles are one model of how the hierarchy of effects works.
4. This famed remark has also been link to Lord Levermore, founder of Lever Brothers.
5. Moving equilibrium suggests that the advertising system is inherently unstable and can be complicated by both internal and external factors.
6. Gramsci's compromise equilibrium implies a fixed point. However, near equilibrium and far from equilibrium need to be accounted for within the varying states of equilibrium.
7. By experience of, with and through advertising, I refer to our reactions to advertisements, the incorporation of its content within our inner dialogue, and the social discourse through which we use the language of advertising.
8. Among other functions, early newspapers served as a responsible report of commercial transactions, and this news was an important part of everyday life. During the Middle Ages, "country men and gentry traveled to fairs to swap the news" (Emery, 1972: 3).

2

THE CARNIVALESQUE, ADVERTISING MAGIC AND THE GAMES WE PLAY

Included among the strategies utilized by advertisers is an ever-evolving grab bag of creative "magic tricks" available as enticements to consumers. This slight of hand, a simple deception in the guise of entertainment, is intended to encourage consumers to engage with the advertisement and enter its fictive world. By enticements I do not mean the explicit offer that may be part of the message, like specific features and benefits of a product or service. Here, I refer to the structural tricks within advertisements and the use of media figures and other techniques to entice consumers to engage with the advertisement. This dialectic between advertiser strategies and consumer tactics is like a cat and mouse game. Additionally, beyond the creative devices used in specific advertisements, on the macro-level magic is built into the system of commerce. By that I mean during the process of engagement with consumers when advertising attempts to sell products and services, it also attempts to sell us ourselves, but not just our ordinary selves (Williamson, 1991). Williamson claimed that some of the time advertising is so compelling as to provide a short-lived vicarious experience through the presentation of an idealized vision of everyday life, one that may temporarily lift us out of our mundane existence. Or as Silvertstone (1994) put it, "goods are imagined before they are purchased" (26).

This chapter considers advertising's basis in the world of magic and wonder. I suggest that wonder, which advertising sometimes evokes, is closely tied to an individual's consent to participate with its