

Toward A Critical Theory of Advertising

**By John Harms and Douglas Kellner
(jbh221f@smsu.edu and kellner@ucla.edu)**

Since the emergence of "critical" media studies in the 1970's, a substantial literature has developed that examines and questions the role of mass communications and advertising within the institutional structures of contemporary capitalist societies. In contrast to "administrative" media studies that focus on how to use mass communications within the given political economic order to influence audiences, sell products, and promote politicians, *critical research* has addressed the social and cultural effects of mass communications and their role in perpetuating an unjust social order. One facet of critical analyses of advertising -- exemplified by Goffman's *Gender Advertisements*, Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements*, and Andren, et. al.'s *Rhetoric and Ideology in Advertising* -- has examined the content and structure of advertisements for their distorted communications and ideological impact. Employing semiotics and/or content analysis, numerous critical studies working at the micro level have examined how advertising's mass communications "persuade" or "manipulate" consumers.

By contrast, works such as Schiller's *Mass Communications and American Empire*, Ewen's *Captains of Consciousness*, and Bagdikian's *The Media Monopoly* present broader historical analyses which locate advertising and mass communications within the history of contemporary capitalism and examine their impact on the larger social and political economic structure. Studies such as these have probed how advertising and mass media have contributed to the development and reproduction of an undemocratic social order by concentrating enormous economic and cultural power in the hands of a few corporations and individuals.

These two facets of critical media studies have generated numerous insights into the conservative social functions and ideological effects of mass communications that were ignored by "administrative research" which tended to focus on the effects which mass communication had in carrying out certain specific tasks (i.e. capturing an audience, selling goods, conveying messages, producing votes for politicians, etc.). One persistent problem, however, has plagued critical media studies and blunted its potential impact on cultural studies and public policy. Very rarely have critical studies of advertising and mass communications adequately articulated the linkage between the macro political economic structure of mass media and the micro mass communication forms and techniques so as to reveal both the socio-economic functions of advertising and the ways that ads actually shape and influence perception and behavior which reproduce the existing social system. The failure to clearly and comprehensively articulate this linkage has often generated an implicit "conspiracy theory" suggesting that a few elites in control of the mass media consciously conspire to manipulate culture and consciousness. This deficiency has plagued critical analyses of advertising and communications which have generally failed to explain how mass communications in general, and advertising in particular, can exercise the power and impact that critical theorists suggest.

A variety of recent books address these problems and in this article we shall point to their contributions toward developing a critical theory of advertising, while also indicating some of

their limitations. Several recent books on advertising take an explicitly critical sociological orientation toward advertising as a means of reproducing the existing capitalist society. [1] This literature argues that not only does advertising carry out crucial economic functions in managing consumer demand and in aiding capital accumulation, but it also helps produce the sort of ideological ambience required by consumer capitalism, thus linking, more or less successfully, macro and micro analysis. Some of this literature provides illuminating historical framing of the history of advertising and the consumer society, as well as providing sociological analysis, cultural and ideological critique, and political proposals to regulate or curtail advertising in contemporary capitalist societies.

Consequently, recent critical studies of advertising begin to develop a more adequate critical theory of advertising. In this article, we shall examine some of these contributions and argue that a critical theory of advertising should be developed within the framework of a critical theory of society which combines historical, sociological, cultural, and political analysis. Then we indicate how the recent critical literature on advertising provides contributions to this task, but argue that none of these approaches provides an adequate comprehensive and systematic theory of advertising. To explicate and evaluate recent critical perspectives on advertising, we examine some studies emerging from North America and contrast this literature with the postmodern theories of Jean Baudrillard and the neo-Marxist perspectives, similar to those of the Frankfurt School, of Wolfgang Fritz Haug. Next, we propose a model for developing a critical theory of advertising and combine these theoretical perspectives with some concrete proposals concerning political actions that might be taken against advertising in the contemporary era.

North American Perspectives: The Canadian Contribution

Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products, and Images of Well-Being, by William Leiss, Stephen Kline, and Sut Jhally, and *Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society*, by Sut Jhally address the problem of linking media analysis to political economy and social and cultural theory in order to explain how advertising and mass communications exercise their power in contemporary capitalist society. We might see their collaborative work as constituting the Canadian contribution to North American critiques of mass culture and society. For William Leiss -- a student of Herbert Marcuse -- is in the Department of Communication at Simon Fraser University, Stephen Kline is on the faculty of Environmental Studies at York University, and Sut Jhally (now in the Department of Communication at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst) did his graduate work in Canada.[2] His *Codes of Advertising* was originally a dissertation (Simon Fraser University, 1984) which he revised and expanded after his collaboration with Leiss and Kline in their collective work.

Social Communication in Advertising (hereafter SCA) opens with a summary of the "debates on advertising and society" which provides a concise survey of the controversies surrounding advertising and of the various analytical frameworks used to address these controversies. The authors' vantage point is to conceptualize advertising as a form of social communication which plays a complex set of roles within consumer capitalist societies. By expanding the concept of the "information" conveyed in advertising beyond that of utilitarian product features to include symbolic meanings, the authors view advertising as an influential form of social communication.

This approach provides insights into how commodities mediate social relations and focuses attention on the cultural impact of advertising and its multifarious social functions.

The Leiss/Kline/Jhally text locates advertising within the larger structure of a "market-industrial economy" where the institutions of media, industry, and advertising converge. A central premise is that "we can grasp the implications of present-day practices best by seeing how they were composed and put into place step by step during this century" (1986, p. 6). Thus a substantial portion of the book involves tracing the historical development of each of these key institutions and how they formed a constellation making advertising an institution with a "privileged form of discourse" (1986, p. 3). The authors describe the "origins of the consumer culture" and the transition "from industrial to consumer society." In this process, the communications media and advertising agencies evolved hand-in-hand into "the modern advertising industry" where advertising is a central institution of the "market-industrial economy."

In a study of "The Theater of Consumption," the authors examine the structure and content of advertisements and their social and cultural impact, using both semiology and content analysis. The first study, derived from Jhally's doctoral dissertation, involves an analysis of television commercials sampled from sports programming targeted to males, and prime time programming targeted to females. Jhally's goal was to illuminate "the differentiated codes used by advertisers in their messages directed at male and female audiences" (1986, p. 176). The study reveals, not surprisingly, that advertisers utilize different codes and strategies to appeal to different audiences and genders. For example, "beauty," "family relations," and "romance" are codes used to address female audiences while "ruggedness" and "fraternity" are primarily male advertising codes.

The second study, conducted by Leiss and Kline, involves an historical examination of magazine advertising (1908-1984) for the trends and uses of audience codes. Following Leymore's semiological analysis in *Hidden Myth: Structure and Symbolism in Advertising* (1975), Leiss and Kline analyze magazine ads for their use of "person," "product," "setting," and "text." One important trend discerned involves the steady decline in the use of text or copy in ads and the increase in display and illustrations, confirming claims by Daniel Boorstin (1962), Guy Debord (1975), and Jean Baudrillard (1975 and 1983) concerning the increased importance of images in contemporary culture.

A second important trend involves a shift of emphasis within ads away from communicating specific product information towards communicating the social and symbolic uses of products. To illustrate this trend, the authors present 25 ads from different historical periods. For example, a Bull Durham Tobacco ad from the turn of the century "places greatest emphasis upon language --description of the product, promises, and argument" (1986, p. 190, whereas a contemporary Marlboro ad is revealed to have no copy nor product information, just an image that "conveys a range of attributes...to be associated with the product..." (1986, p. 202).

In studies of "Goods as Satisfiers," and "Goods as Communicators" the authors piece together their main thesis. The consumer society has caused a "profound transformation in social life" involving "the change in the function of goods from being primarily satisfiers of wants to being primarily communicators of meanings" (1986, p. 238). In the consumer society, individuals define themselves as consumers and gain fundamental modes of gratification from consumption.

Hence, marketers and advertisers generate systems of meaning, prestige, and identity by associating their products with certain life-styles, symbolic values, and pleasures.

Informed by sociological and historical accounts of how market relations erode traditional sources of meaning and anthropological insights into how material things perform social communication functions concerning social standing, identity, and lifestyle, Leiss, Kline, and Jhally have expanded the category of "information" within advertising to include not just functional product information, but social symbolic information as well. It is in this sense that goods function as "communicators" and "satisfiers" -- they inform and mediate social relations, telling individuals what they must buy to become fashionable, popular, and successful while inducing them to buy particular products to reach these goals. As the authors point out, "quality of life studies report that the strongest foundations of satisfaction lie in the domain of interpersonal relations, a domain of nonmaterial goods" (1986, p. 252). But in the consumer society, commodities are important adjuncts to interpersonal relations because they communicate social information to others. "They serve as a 'projective medium' into which we transfer the intricate webs of personal and social interactions" (1986, p. 261).

The significance and power of advertising, according to the analysis presented in SCA, is therefore not so much economic, but cultural. "Advertising is not just a business expenditure undertaken in the hope of moving some merchandise off the store shelves, but is rather an integral part of modern culture" (1986, p. 7). Advertising is significant because, in consumer capitalism, individuals depend on it for meanings -- a source of social information embedded in commodities that mediate interpersonal relations and personal identity. Advertising should therefore be conceived as an important institution in the consumer society because it produces "patterned systems of meaning" which play a key role in individual socialization and social reproduction.

Consequently, the "marketplace" should be seen as a "cultural system" (1986, p. 263ff.) and not just as a mechanism for moving commodities and money. Furthermore, it is cultural symbolism and images that provide crucial insights into the nature and functions of advertising. The authors' analysis of the "persuasive" form of modern advertising indicates how cultural forms of social communication create meanings through non-discursive visual imagery which come to shape consciousness and behavior subtly by sanctioning some forms of thought and behavior while delegitimizing others. For instance, advertising conveys through its images positive presentations of assertive "masculine" behavior and images of well-groomed and fashioned men and women who want to be successful in the dating and romance game. Thus, advertising presents proper and improper images of behavior and role models for men and women. The result is a culture where image plays a more important role than linguistic discourse, for while verbal imagery is discursive, visual imagery is non-discursive, emotional, associative, iconic, and fictive.

In these ways, advertising plays a key role in the transition to a new image culture, and thus in the transition from a discursive book/print culture to a figurative media culture. In this media culture, domains of social life ranging from religion to politics fall under the sway of the reign of images. As the authors point out, "iconic representation," or persuasive images, have a greater impact in decision-making, "affective opinion," and behavior than verbal discourse, and can be

absorbed without full conscious awareness and without being translatable "into explicit verbal formulations" (1986, p. 244). Consequently, the authors suggest that advertising is a form of social communication which promotes non-communication, or what Habermas calls "systematically distorted communication." Distortions result from techniques that are nonrational, nonlogical, imagistic, and that affect individuals subliminally and unconsciously. Advertising promotes "commodity fetishism" and a fetishized consciousness that invests goods, services, and individuals, etc. with symbolic properties, associating products with socially desirable traits.

Studies of commodity fetishism and the extension of other Marxian categories to the analysis of advertising is the focus of Sut Jhally's *Codes of Advertising*. Jhally takes as his starting point the analysis of the commodity in Marx's *Capital* and applies the categories of exchange value, use value, surplus value, commodity fetishism, etc., to studies of advertising and the communications media. He provides a detailed and insightful explication of Marx's theory of commodity fetishism, while applying the concept -- and other Marxian categories -- in interesting and provocative ways to a vast amount of material. In so doing, he provides a sharp critique of Baudrillard's attack on Marxism in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign and The Mirror of Production*, demonstrating conclusively through a wide range of quotations that Marx does not, as Baudrillard claims, naturalize needs, use values, etc. Rather Marx provides a powerful critique of bourgeois apologetics which claim that capitalism is legitimate because it provides people with what they want and fulfills their pre-existing needs. Against this ideology, Marx argues that needs, use values, and ideologies are historically produced under capitalism and thus serve as essential elements of social reproduction.

Consequently, Jhally attempts to demonstrate how traditional Marxian economic categories and analyses can be used productively to analyze advertising and mass communications and can be combined with semiological analyses of codes and the production of meaning. Both SCA and Jhally's *Codes* provide much useful analysis of how advertising produces consumers and how the consumer society reproduces itself. But while Jhally's use of Marxian categories to analyze advertising as an institution is often illuminating, he sometimes resorts to a somewhat vulgar Marxism, as when he insists on interpreting media communication simply in terms of the exchange value and use value produced by capital, rather than analyzing the interactions between media content, forms, institutions, social and political environments, and the uses of the media by the audience. While he provides a critical political economy framework to analyze the social and economic functions of advertising and mass communications, he is less successful in analyzing how audiences themselves decode the ads and what specific meanings and effects are produced by the interaction between ads and audiences. Although he carries out an "empirical study" of advertising codes and fetishism (1986, p. 144ff), his study is highly quantitative and abstract and fails to provide analysis of specific meanings, ideologies, or effects produced in the actual ads which he studied -- none of which are analyzed in any detail. Moreover, Jhally fails to offer any proposals concerning public policy aimed at the regulation of advertising, or suggestions concerning how a society might be organized without wasteful advertising for socially unnecessary products.

By contrast, the "Conclusion" to SCA examines advertising for "its proper place within a democratic society" (1986, p. 302), and raises some serious questions about modern advertising

practices. One is "that the discourse about goods today is too narrowly controlled by commercial interests, and that it should be framed more broadly.... we do not believe that any single institution should control the public discourse about goods" (1986, p. 306). Another issue involves advertising's impact on overall media content, i.e., "the avoidance of 'controversial' subjects, banal program formats, stereotyping of audience segments, {and} ownership concentration in media industries" (1986, p. 307). The authors also point to "the reduction in rational appeals" (1986, p. 309) and the increasing use of "persuasive" communication techniques in marketing, politics, corporate "image-building," and other domains of public discourse.

These are all significant issues concerning advertising and democracy, though, unfortunately, the authors of SCA offer few suggestions about "what is to be done," and generally present a liberal, Social Democratic perspective on advertising. Although they quite correctly "suggest that it is time to change the focus of attention from advertising practice to the set of institutional relationships through which advertising is tied to the social issues that concern us most" (1986, p. 306), they do not adequately develop this insight and suggest what advertising practices and institutional relationships must be examined and changed. And while they tend to ground study of advertising in historical analysis, their historical perspective fails to situate the trajectory of advertising in terms of specific developments within capitalist society itself and its specific functions in the process of capital accumulation and social reproduction. For a more systematic framework and multidimensional analyses along these lines, one needs to turn to European theorists such as Wolfgang Haug, while for analysis of the shift to the growing importance of image in contemporary societies one might turn to the French postmodernist theory of Jean Baudrillard.

Continental Perspectives: Haug and Baudrillard

Wolfgang Fritz Haug's *Critique Of Commodity Aesthetics: Appearance, Sexuality and Advertising in Capitalist Society* continues the German tradition pioneered by the Frankfurt School and examines mass communication and advertising as key elements within capitalist dynamics and social structure. Currently Professor of Philosophy at the Free University in Berlin, Haug has been editor of the independent Marxist journal (*Das Argument*) since 1959 and is author of two books on commodity aesthetics and mass culture which have been translated into English (1986 and 1987). As Haug explains, his task "was to derive the phenomena of commodity aesthetics from their economic basis and to develop and present them within their systematic connections" (1986, p. 8). Guided by the effort to expand Marx's critique of capitalism, Haug develops Marx's concept of "secondary exploitation" showing how citizens of contemporary capitalism are not only exploited in the production process, but also in the process of consumption.

Haug argues that what he calls "commodity aesthetics" shape the values, perceptions, and consumer behavior of individuals in contemporary capitalist societies so as to integrate them into the lifestyles of consumer capitalism. The concept of commodity aesthetics emerges within "the problem of realization" (i.e. capital accumulation, the realization of surplus value) and the tension between "use-value" and "exchange-value." The concept describes the ways that aesthetics are integrated into the production, distribution, and marketing of commodities. More

specifically, commodity aesthetics refers to "a beauty developed in the service of the realization of exchange value, whereby commodities are designed to stimulate in the onlooker the desire to possess and the impulse to buy" (Haug 1986, p. 8). In other words, commodity aesthetics uses aesthetics to sell products and consumer capitalism in the form of advertising, packaging, marketing, and display. Much like Boorstin, Debord, and Baudrillard, Haug emphasizes the importance of image and appearance in contemporary society, and reveals how they are connected to the sales effort and to the capitalist political economy.

Commodity aesthetics involves the promise of happiness engineered by advertisers through the consumption of images which appeal to human needs and sensuality. Just as Horkheimer and Adorno discussed "the culture industry," and Enzensberger "the consciousness industry," Haug criticizes the "illusion industry," or "distraction industry," for being tools of domination which exploit people's needs and manipulate them into accepting consumer capitalism. "Since the vast majority of people can find no worthwhile goal within the capitalist system, the distraction industry appears to be a good investment for the system as a whole, as well as for competently run private capital.... With shades and shadows the illusion industry populates the spaces left empty by capitalism, which only socialism can fill with reality" (Haug 1986, pp. 121-22). Haug's critique is grounded in analysis of the ways that the capitalist economy uses advertising to maximize profit and this focus on the fundamental processes of capitalist production separates his work from analyses such as Vance Packard's *Hidden Persuaders* that criticize only "appearances" and "techniques" of advertising and obscure their relation to "normal capitalism." "Packard does not as much scratch the surface of the real causal relationships in this complex" (Haug 1986, p. 143). For Haug, many current analyses of advertising are flawed by assuming that an evil conspiracy on the part of marketers is the cause of "advertising excesses." However, there is no "systematic theory for corrupting the masses" (Haug 1986, p. 54). The real cause of commodity aesthetics lies not in individual motivations or conspiracy but is a logical result of an "unrestrained economic fiction" (Haug 1986, p. 108) that has been developing historically; i.e. the pressure to maximize capital accumulation or to go out of business. Haug's key insight is that manipulation is less a technique than an historical process whereby the capitalist system forces corporations to maximize their profits by all means available and to create needs to buy products that individuals do not really need.

A central part of Haug's historical critique of capitalism and analysis of manipulation involves the "moulding of sensuality," and "how human need and instinct structures are altered under the impact of a continually changing prospect of satisfaction offered by commodities" (1986, p. 45). According to Haug, the drive for exchange-value propels a concern with the appearance of commodities that culminates in "the technocracy of sensuality" involving "the domination over people that is affected through their fascination with technically produced artificial appearances" (ibid). This process "turns the sensual being...into a dependent variable of the capital valorization process" (Haug 1986, p. 80). In short, selling commodities requires a "promise of use-value" that involves images that appeal to consumer's senses and needs. Moreover, these needs can never be fully satisfied if capital accumulation is to continue. Thus emerges "aesthetic innovation," planned obsolescence, and fashion, all engineered to keep individuals on the consumption treadmill so essential to continued capital accumulation. "The appearance always promises more, much more, than it can ever deliver. In this way the illusion deceives" (Haug 1986, p. 50).

The major strength of Haug's critique of advertising is both the rigorous theoretical apparatus with which he conceptualizes advertising within the process of capitalist society and the wealth of concrete detail concerning how advertising, packaging, sales, and the manufacture of fantasies and illusions actually take place. For instance, based on an incisive analysis of contemporary trends in the German advertising industry, Haug provides illuminating insights into consumption in early capitalism (pp. 19ff.); brand names and competition of images (pp. 24ff.); promotional gifts and shoplifting (pp. 34ff.); techniques to render previous consumption habits and use values obsolescent (pp. 34ff.); salestalk and techniques (pp. 57ff.); programming of the body and fashion (pp. 72ff.); the moulding of sensuality and promotion of youth (pp. 87ff.); and techniques of the illusion, or distraction, industry (pp. 117ff.).

Against standard critiques which associate advertising with manipulation and the production of "false consciousness" and "false needs," Haug argues that "manipulation could only be effective if it 'somehow' latched on to the 'objective interests' of those being manipulated" (Haug 1986, p. 6). Following this line of inquiry, he attempts to demonstrate the ways that advertising distorts needs for sensual gratification, human interaction, and a sense of self-worth by providing dubious role/gender models, anxieties, and fantasies. He claims that advertising and commodity aesthetics take these genuine needs and through a "moulding of sensuality" shape human needs so that they "are now estranged and distorted beyond recognition" (Haug 1986, p. 6). In contrast to critics such as Vance Packard and Wilson Bryan Key who suggest that single advertising messages are powerful and manipulative, Haug views manipulation as a more subtle historical process which is all the more insidious because it is less visible at any given moment.

Indeed, Packard, Key, and those who argue that advertising directly and immediately influences consumer behavior are assuming the validity of the old "bullet," or "hypodermic," theory of communication which claims that communication messages directly and immediately shape thought and behavior. Haug argues by contrast that advertising is more significant for its long-term effects on thought and behavior than its short term impact on consumer behavior. This position provides a useful corrective to those like Schudson (1984) who dismiss claims concerning the power of advertising simply because there is no conclusive evidence that advertising works immediately and directly to induce consumers to buy a specific product as a specific and ascertainable result of exposure to advertising.

There are both interesting similarities and differences between Haug's theory and that of French theorist, Jean Baudrillard. Baudrillard, for many years a sociologist at Nanterre University who achieved notoriety as a theorist of postmodern culture in the 1980s (see Kellner 1989a), focuses his early works on analysis of the system of objects and signs which constituted the consumer society. Haug's theory of how commodity aesthetics induce individuals to desire or purchase certain products is similar to Baudrillard's theory of how the "political economy of the sign" helps integrate individuals into the consumer society. Furthermore, Haug's description of the incorporation of aesthetics into advertising, packaging, display, etc. runs parallel to Baudrillard's analyses of how the "implosion" of aesthetics and commodification in contemporary capitalist societies provides an aestheticization of commodities and a commodification of art and aesthetics. This phenomenon is certainly manifest in advertising which employs the most advanced aesthetic techniques to sell commodities and promote consumption as a way of life. Haug's analysis of commodity aesthetics is particularly useful in concretely demonstrating how

aesthetics is embodied in the advertising, packaging, production, display, and selling of commodities. In contrast to Baudrillard who abstains from discussing how advertising manipulates people's needs and from analyzing the utopian contents of advertising, Haug is able to suggest some important ways that advertising lures consumers to products and to consumption as a way of life.

Yet we believe that Baudrillard's analysis of "sign value" provides a superior framework to Haug's notion of "aesthetic illusion" for analyzing why people seek various products, what actual gratifications they derive, and what social functions consumption actually serves. In contrast to Haug, we do not believe that the category of illusion is particularly helpful in describing the processes of consumption and commodity gratification. Rather, as Baudrillard argues, building on Thorstein Veblen's analysis of conspicuous consumption, individuals seek various commodities as *signs of social* prestige, position, and success (1975). For Baudrillard, commodities form a system of hierarchically organized goods and services which serve as signs pointing to one's standing within the system. According to Baudrillard, consumers have a sense of the codes of consumption whereby certain cars, clothes, and other goods signify relative standing in the hierarchy of consumption. Thus certain objects have more prestigious signification, are desired, and therefore provide certain social gratifications.

On this analysis, needs, use values, and consumer practices are all socially constructed and integrate individuals into the consumer society. Thus it is real social practices and values rather than mere illusions which induce individuals to play the game of conspicuous consumption. By distinguishing between use, exchange and sign value, Baudrillard adds an important dimension to sociological analyses of consumption by pointing to the element of prestige and hierarchy in the game of consumption. Moreover, he stresses how uses, wants, needs, and sign values of commodities are all socially constructed, as part of a system of production and consumption. This analysis provides a powerful antidote to mainstream economics by arguing that the needs and wants which commodities satisfy are socially constructed to bind individuals to certain forms of consumption. Thus, rather than giving people what they want as apologists of capitalism claim, capitalism moulds the very desires and forms of consumption that motivate people to consume. Baudrillard's theory of sign value is also an antidote to forms of vulgar Marxism which believe that use values and wants are natural and can be used as standards to criticize their distortion under capitalism -though, as noted, we agree with Jhally that Baudrillard tends to ignore, or to be unaware of, the extent to which Marx already stressed the historical constructedness of needs, use values, and all social behavior (for further discussion see Kellner 1989b, pp. 34ff). Moreover, Baudrillard goes too far in positing the total production of a system of needs and fails to account for resistance to advertising and domination by the system of needs and objects or the possibility of creative consumption and the use of commodities to enhance human life.

Thus, while Baudrillard's theory of sign value provides important insights into social organization and how individuals place themselves into a social order through a differential system of commodities, Haug explains how individuals fall prey to manipulation by illusory commodity aesthetics. Haug in contrast to Baudrillard is weaker on sociology, yet stronger on political economy and the utopian appeal of ads. Indeed, Baudrillard increasingly erases political economy from his theory and provides a vision of society, especially in his later writings, in

which signs proliferate and come to determine the course of social development. This semiological idealism assigns primary social force and efficacy to signs, codes, simulations, etc. and erases material determinants of the production of signs, denying that political economy and the imperatives of capitalism are any longer fundamental social forces. Against this idealism, we prefer Haug's combination of political economy and cultural analysis.

Yet Baudrillard's work is not without use. All the recent works on advertising that we have examined converge on the increasingly important role of image in consumption and social life with Baudrillard providing one of the most detailed explorations of the life of signs and images in contemporary capitalist societies. On the other hand, his postmodern social theory obscures the extent to which "radical semiurgy," the proliferation of signs and images, is itself a function of the current stage of capitalist development. For contemporary capitalism uses new technologies and new aesthetic techniques as crucial sources of capital realization which provide new ways to sell commodities, to produce consumer selves, and to produce a new form of capitalism. This configuration synthesizes new technologies with a reorganization and restructuring of capitalist society itself, capital as techno-capital in a multi-national world capitalist system (Kellner 1989a).

Theorizing Advertising

Our probing of recent critical perspectives on advertising and consumer culture reveals that a critical theory of advertising requires more adequate social theories that will situate advertising within developments of consumer capitalism, mass communications and culture, and the social and political trends of a given society at a given point in history. Thus a critical theory of advertising requires conceptualizing advertising as part of the contemporary form of capitalist society. Aspects of historical perspectives on advertising within the context of capitalism are found in the works of Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen (Ewen 1976; Ewen and Ewen 1982; and Ewen 1988) and Jackson Lears and his associates, as well as SCA. Ewen (1976) traces the origins of advertising to an attempt in the first decades of the twentieth century to manage consumer demand to meet the exigencies of mass production. Individuals had to be taught to purchase goods which they had formerly produced themselves and that it was morally acceptable to pursue gratification and pleasure through consumption.

In *Channels of Desire* (1982), the Ewens trace the emergence of the consumer society through the rise of mass images and new advertising, fashion, and entertainment industries. They explore some of the ways in which desire was channelled into consumption and into desire for ever new and ever more consumer goods. In *The Culture Of Consumption* (1983), editors Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears document how capitalism develops a culture appropriate for a society organized around the principle of profit maximization via the production and consumption of commodities. Drawing on the work of historians they describe how facets of the cultural sphere -- science, advertising, reading magazines, politics, identity, and world-view -- go through the historical process of commodification and become structured to form the "consumer culture" which "is an ethic, a standard of living and a power structure" that provides a "set of sanctions for the elite control of that society" (p. xii). In short, they describe how "consumption became a cultural ideal, a hegemonic 'way of seeing' in twentieth-century America" (p. x). Much like the Ewens, Fox and Lears explain how "images of autonomy obscured its eclipse" (p.xvii).

Lears claims that capitalism eroded the "symbolic structures outside the self" and that the ideal of individualism acquired a new "therapeutic ethos" characterized by "an almost obsessive concern with psychic and physical health." National advertising, by presenting sensually appealing images of commodities communicated "the promise of self-realization through commodity consumption" and propelled the transformation to a culture of consumption and a new form of "capitalist hegemony." A major contribution of Lears' analysis is the documentation of how the "therapeutic ethos" linked advertising and commodity consumption to concern with identity and image.

Based on this and other recent research into the origins of twentieth century consumer capitalism, advertising emerged as a crucial part of a dual challenge to the corporate sector to manage consumer demand and diminish working class radicalism. Through its incorporation into radio and television, advertising also allowed big corporations to gain control of mass culture and the entertainment industries (Kellner 1990). Capital thus was eventually able to colonize the "public sphere" and to replace a public of rational citizens who discussed political and social affairs of common interest with atomized consumers who passively viewed the spectacles of mass culture in the privatized spaces of their homes (Habermas 1989). In this way, the space of potential political opposition was filled with the sounds of popular music and the sights of stars and celebrities acting out the ideological scenarios of the culture industries (Horkheimer and Adorno 1972).

In Baudrillard's terms, capital thus gained control of the mode of signification and consumption as well as the mode of production, while utilizing an aestheticized commodification to promote the wonders and joys of the consumer society. The "commodity aesthetics" described by Haug was thus part of a strategy by capital to colonize culture and everyday life and to use aesthetics to promote consumption. The result is a commodity self which sees buying and consumption as a solution to problems and consumerism as a way of life: the "good life" in contemporary capitalism.

Advertising thus must be theorized as part of an expanding capitalist mode of production in the transition to consumer capitalism. This analysis suggests that political economy today should pay attention equally to production and consumption which form the chief vectors of the contemporary capitalist system. Economistic Marxists previously neglected the sphere of culture and consumption with a one-dimensional focus on production, while today postmodernists like Baudrillard tend to ignore the dynamics of production altogether, while we believe that political economy and the dynamics of capitalist production continue to play a key role in the constitution of contemporary societies. Many contemporary analyses of advertising and culture replicate this problem by not sufficiently paying attention to the dynamics of capitalist production and their continuing roles in the constitution of contemporary culture and society.

A critical theory of advertising must therefore analyze its economic functions as a manager of consumer demand and of market share, as well as its impact as an ideological force in social reproduction. On both levels, advertising should be seen as an indispensable force in the reproduction of consumer capitalism and in the maintenance of capitalist hegemony. Indeed, advertising has multi-faceted social functions, ranging from short range efforts to induce

individuals to buy specific products to more long range functions that attempt to sell consumer capitalism as a way of life.

An adequate historical periodization of advertising, therefore, would have to trace its growing social influence both in terms of the skyrocketing aggregate amount of resources dedicated to advertising (a topic we shall take up in the next section) and in terms of its changing messages, strategies, and effects in accord with changes within the development of capitalism. As traditional sources of meaning erode and traditional ideologies wither, advertising assumes more social power. And as Baudrillard, Lears, and the authors of SCA have argued, advertising plays a key role in the transition to a new image culture where aesthetic figures replace discursive concepts as a mode of cultural communication and power. It seems reasonable to conclude that in this environment, advertising is playing increasingly important roles in subtly shaping consumer needs and continuing to channel desire into various products, fashion, and life-styles. Carrying out such research would involve looking at large aggregates of ads over time and theorizing the ways that dominant types of ads shape needs and communicate specific notions of a commodity self, gender and role models, and consumption as a way of life.

The books that we have examined provide aspects of a critical theory of advertising, but none have carried out a systematic and historical analysis of the many roles of advertising within contemporary consumer capitalism. None have developed adequate institutional analysis of the interrelationships between big business, advertising agencies, and the media monopolies, delineating the ways that advertising helps control media content and helps constitute a commercial media environment which creates a world in its own image: consumer paradise.[3] No theory of advertising has adequately traced the ways in which advertising promotes the commodification of culture, the self, human relations, and politics -- indeed, none of the books examined analyze the growing importance of advertising in politics, although, admittedly, a vast literature on this topic is beginning to emerge which we propose should be -- and so far has not been -- integrated into analysis of the broader social roles and functions of advertising in reproducing consumer capitalism (the study of "Politics as Consumption" in Fox/Lears 1983, pp. 145-175 provides some insights into the role of advertising in the commodification of politics).

Critical perspectives on advertising should also provide methods and examples of reading advertising critically, which show how ads are rhetorically constructed, how they communicate and manipulate, and how individuals can resist their seductions and fascination. While all of the books examined touch on these issues, they fall behind the level achieved by Leymore in *Hidden Myth* (1975) and Williamson in *Decoding Advertisements* (1978), as well as the work of Goldman and his collaborators (Goldman 1983/84; 1987; 1989; Goldman/Montagne 1987; and Goldman/Papson, in press).

Judith Williamson inaugurated a study of advertising which combined semiological and ideological critique in close reading of individual ads. She argued for the importance of incorporating mode of address and the ways that ads engage audiences in ideological forms. This emphasis on how advertising works and effects its audience contains important contributions to microanalysis of advertising and her stress on the importance of class and gender models in advertising influenced later feminist and Marxist analyses.[4] For example, Goldman's analysis of Macdonald ads (1983/84) dissects a category of "legitimation ads" that show how

Macdonald's packages history and concrete memories to sell products that enlists its audience in the commodification of memory and celebration of basic ideological values of U.S. society (i.e. patriotism, the continuity of history, family, consumption, etc.). Studies of perfume ads (Goldman and Wilson 1983; Goldman 1987) and drug ads (Goldman and Montagne 1986) demonstrate how the semiotics of advertising associate the products advertised with socially desirable values and signs and provide commodity solutions to individual and social problems. Goldman's studies with Stephen Papsen (in press) show how recent Levi's ads utilize a pseudo-individuality and populism to sell its jeans, while recent Reebok campaigns incorporate postmodern imagery and cynicism to sell shoes. These ads combine analysis of specific marketing and aesthetic strategies with analysis of contemporary social trends, using advertising as a prism to read contemporary social trends while using sociological analysis as a means of interpreting contemporary advertisements. Such sociologically informed analysis thus uses advertising to study contemporary society and social theory to analyze advertising -- precisely the sort of dialectical optic which characterizes critical theory at its best (see Kellner 1989a).

Critiques of advertising should thus draw on the most advanced work in semiotics, post-structuralism, feminism, hermeneutics, and other methods of interpretation and ideology critique, as well as on critical social theory. This sort of close reading could combine microanalysis of specific texts and methods of advertising and their effect on everyday life with macroanalysis of the broader social functions of advertising. Consequently, to adequately theorize advertising requires historical and dialectical analysis which situates advertising within the social processes of consumer capitalism. The texts that we have examined in this study have begun the task of developing more systematic perspectives on advertising, yet have tended to be deficient in either their historical perspectives, their failures to adequately theorize advertising as an institution, or their failure to adequately propose some measures to curtail the growing power of advertising in contemporary capitalist societies.

Above all, a critical theory of advertising operates from a standpoint of human emancipation from unnecessary and unjust forms of domination. As the works examined here suggest, advertising's current role in society is exploitative, wasteful, and manipulative and represents a form of domination that perpetuates capitalist hegemony and that thwarts participatory democracy and the development of individual autonomy. Viewed from a historical, developmental perspective, advertising must be viewed against the erosion of traditional social structures of meaning which it replaces with ideals and images of privatized commodity consumption. Advertising undermines the psycho-cultural base for a public sphere and democratic participation in social life. While democracy requires an active, inquiring public citizen/subject, advertising is part of a privatized consumer society which offer commodity spectacles as a substitute for participation in social life. Democracy requires that its citizens express concern about public life and actively participate in efforts to reform and improve society. Advertising attempts to assure and assuage its audience and to promote the belief that individual commodity solutions are present for all problems.

Thus advertising has emerged as a privileged non-democratic and privatized form of discourse which has its own ethics, (anti-)politics, and view of the world. A close examination of the relationship between increasingly concentrated and powerful corporate advertisers and increasingly fragmented and isolated consumers/citizens reveals that advertising's practices and

trends contradict democratic ideals and goals. This raises the question -- central to critical theory -- of the perspective from which advertising can be criticized and what sort of politics can counterattack the anti-democratic and noxious effects of advertising -- topics that we shall take up in the concluding two sections.

Criticizing Advertising

A critical theory must therefore attempt to ascertain the effects of advertising on the economy, politics, culture, and everyday life and to propose remedies for its harmful effects. From the standpoint of economics, advertising is arguably a tremendous waste of resources, talent, and capital. According to a booklet, *The Role of Advertising in America*, produced by the Association of National Advertisers, in 1986 more than 102 billion dollars was spent on advertising which constitutes fully 2% of the gross national product; by 1988, advertising expenditures were estimated to be \$109.65 billion a year (*Advertising Age*, May 15, 1989). By contrast, in 1970, 40 billion dollars was spent on advertising in the United States while by 1980, 56 billion dollars was squandered, so the amount of advertising expenditure is growing, almost doubling between 1980 and 1988!

In addition, the amount spent on design, packaging, display, consumer research, and marketing is also stupendous; Haug claims that in West Germany more money is spent on these aspects of sales and distribution than on advertising (Haug 1986, p. 151f.). While there is some controversy over the relative amounts spent on advertising and promotion for the United States, we believe that it is safe to estimate that an equal amount of resources are spent on the other aspects of marketing as on advertising and that therefore it is safe to conclude that over 200 billion dollars a year, or about 4% of the gross national product, is spent to promote and move consumer goods. Indeed, recent industry literature indicates that while 15 or 20 years ago, 60% of a corporation's budget was spent on advertising in the United States while about 40% was spent on marketing and promotion, there are indications that the reverse is the case today. In recent issue of *Advertising Age*, it was claimed that corporations spent about \$125 billion on sales promotion in 1988 (May 8, 1989).[5] It is becoming conventional wisdom in the advertising world that in an oversaturated and highly competitive marketplace, corporations are spending much more money on research to target their market, on packaging and display, and on promotions to move the product -- i.e. coupons, in-store sample and display promos, and expensive mailings which often include free samples.

Whatever the exact figures and relative percentages invested in advertising and promotion, it is clear that corporations are currently expending tremendous amounts of money in what Baran and Sweezy (1966) called the "sales effort." This investment in advertising, marketing, and promotion in turn promotes the trends toward monopoly concentration, conglomerate mergers and take-overs, and an economy dominated by giant corporations. In the expensive advertising and promoting marketplace, only the major players can compete. This leads to economic concentration and quasi-monopoly control of the economy by giant corporations who can afford the advertising and promotion efforts. Furthermore, the trends for capital to become concentrated and centralized affects the mass communications industry and the prospects for democracy. Specifically, as media capital becomes concentrated, so do the interests that shape media content. This involves not only the reduction in the number of media owners and interests (e.g., the

Time/Warner merger), but also the consolidation or conglomeration of interests (e.g., the G.E. take-over of NBC) so that major producers of consumer products also control the media through which their products are advertised. The net effect of capitalism's "free market" organization of the mass media is to create concentrated and centralized media conglomerates with narrower and narrower interests. Given that most citizens depend on the mass media for information about current affairs, this developmental dynamic threatens democracy by limiting the diversity of information available to consumers/citizens.

Monopoly concentration thus leads to more advertising control of mass media and monopoly and concentration in media ownership that leads to more and more direct and extensive corporate control of popular culture and society. In these ways, advertising also exercises power over non-advertising media content and provides giant corporations with increased power over consumers. On the surface, it appears that mass media content is produced for consumers. In fact, mass media content in the U.S. is designed to attract consumers that are then sold to advertisers as audiences. In short, the mass media make money primarily by selling time/space (really audiences) to advertisers, and only secondarily from charges to consumers. What this means practically is that the interests of advertisers will dominate those of consumers when it comes to issues of media content. Bagdikian reports the economic logic behind this curious phenomenon. "Newspapers, magazines, and broadcasters in 1981 collected \$33 billion a year from advertisers and only \$7 billion from their audiences. The almost 5 to 1 dependence on advertisers has insulated these media from the wishes of their audiences" (1983, p. 123).

Thus, the television networks and other advertising controlled media tend to produce programming that appeals to advertisers. Advertisers are interested and concerned that the mass media attract consumers and communicate content that is amenable to consumption. What is noteworthy here is not only the banal "entertainment" that is offered to audiences (i.e. a constant reshuffling of the themes of sex, violence, adventure, and sensationalism), but also what is systematically not communicated -- namely, thought-provoking social and political issues. Advertisers recognize that stimulating consumer audiences to think critically does not promote the happy atmosphere necessary for their persuasive advertisements to work or sink in.[6] Those controlling the media recognize these interests and produce the appropriate attractive entertainment without the direct intervention of advertisers. This influence on non-advertising media content does very little to promote the awareness necessary for participatory democracy or to guarantee a diverse, varied, and thought-provoking media culture.

The interests of advertisers vis a vis consumers is thus apparent in the overall structure of the mass media where the imperatives of advertising eclipse consumer interests in non-advertising media content. In addition, advertisers also control the form of the commercial mass media with ads interrupting the programming every ten or fifteen minutes. Two features of modern advertising -- intrusion and repetition -- reveal the power of advertisers as opposed to consumers. As most audiences are irritatingly aware, the commercially supported media are structured so that advertisements intrude and/or interrupt non-advertising media content. Commercial broadcasting is interrupted every few minutes for commercial messages, while newspapers and magazines engage in "stripping" which breaks up stories over a number of pages and intrudes ads in a distracting way into the written text.

In short, the mass media are structured so that consumers are more or less forced to see/hear advertisements. Moreover, many ads are endlessly repeated because consumers are not interested and do not pay sufficient attention to particular ads. The emergence of "zapping" is indicative of consumer's negative relationship to advertising. That the media are structured to facilitate intrusion and repetition reveals the distorted relationship between consumers and advertisers and the ways that the interests of advertisers shapes the form and content of print and broadcast material.

Furthermore, the current structural location of advertising in the political-economic structure of American society is such that advertising is subsidized by the public in two ways. First, the costs of advertising are passed on to consumers in the form of higher product prices. Second, advertisers deduct advertising costs from their taxes as business expenses. The overall result of this structural configuration is that advertising appears to be free, and that producers are encouraged to advertise. This explains, in part, the tremendous expansion of advertising in the United States. Consequently, it is a great swindle when apologists for commercial television argue that audiences are getting a "free lunch," since consumers pay for the advertising that finances programming through the form of higher prices for commodities.

The tremendous cumulative investment in advertising and promotion and failure to tax these activities contributes to the contrast between "public squalor" and private affluence, even opulence, which is a structural fact of life in the United States. While federal deficits grow and already inadequate social programs are cut, corporate profits and investments in advertising proliferate. Corporations monopolize the most ubiquitous form of public communication, advertising, for their own private and selfish ends. Advertising wars between corporate products intensify and small corporations which cannot afford the massive advertising budgets cannot compete in the corporate marketplace. "Free enterprise" is reserved for those who can afford to compete, while small businesses suffer growing disadvantages and public squalor grows even worse.

Questions also need to be raised concerning how advertising effects and helps shape individual personality structures while distorting social relationships. Numerous examinations of advertising's development have documented the historical trend in advertising content away from rational product information towards emotional images and symbols. Modern advertising increasingly communicates emotional images designed to evoke feelings from consumers that are then associated with products. Such emotional, associative communication leads to a decrease in social rationality as advertisers tap consumer's passions and create "product identities." It is claimed that consumers will pay more for products infused with the symbolic satisfactions provided by advertising and that thus ads should aim at emotionally seductive images that will associate the product with socially desirable traits.

Such associative and subrational effects, however, increase social irrationality as well as producing higher prices for nationally advertised products. Furthermore, advertising produces a personality structure that believes that there are commodity solutions to all personal and social problems while commodifying and reifying social relationships through its products. It is absolutely crucial that this shaping or channeling is viewed as an historical process and not as the immediate result of some sort of media event, e.g., "subliminal seduction." The "manipulation"

of human needs by the mass media in general and advertising in particular is a very subtle process that must be viewed historically. For example, we can only understand how advertising can channel desires into the commodity form by recognizing how capitalist development has fragmented social relationships into which human needs could have been channeled. Advertising's power must be viewed against this type of historical background. The ultimate criticism is not that advertising creates false needs, but that it moulds real needs and passions into distorted social relationships such as the commodity form. The moulding process involves both a distraction of attention away from other humans ("the distraction industry") and a focusing of attention towards things ("commodity fetishism").

This view of mass media and advertising power does not fit within any of the dominant models or theories of the media. Both the "hypodermic needle" or "bullet" theory, and Lazerfeld's "two-step flow" theory, view mass media impact as a short term event. By contrast, the effects of advertising result from long-range trends of historical development. A central feature of critical theory of advertising is thus sensitivity to historical trends. Indeed, history provides the evaluative yardstick for the normative perspectives of critical theory (Kellner 1989a). Consequently, in theorizing advertising it is essential to maintain an historical, developmental perspective since advertising appears on the surface to be insignificant and is easily dismissed as something irrelevant or tangential to production, social life, and personality development. For a critical theory of advertising, advertising's power and influence can be understood only by viewing it from an historical developmental perspective which requires integrating theories of communication with theories of society. Specifically, advertising practices must be located within the dynamics of capitalist development.

Advertising therefore inhabits a crucial intersection between economics, culture, politics, and society that stands at the center of important social developments and processes. The power of advertising is thus multifaceted: it becomes a privileged discourse in a new symbolic environment which shapes consumption, as well as the form and content of media, politics, and thought and behavior. Consumer capitalism is unthinkable without its advertising and marketing apparatuses, and advertising in turn can only be grasped within the framework of contemporary capitalism. Only a multi-dimensional social theory which combines historical, economic, political, cultural, psychological, and ideological analysis can thus provide a critical theory of advertising which specifies its social effects in a critical perspective that can specify precisely how advertising harms the fabric of social, cultural, and political life.

What is to Be Done?

This leads us to some concluding political thoughts on the appropriate response to advertising: what can be done to curb its worst excesses and to produce a more rational, democratic, and healthy society? Would, indeed, advertising have a meaningful role in a "good society," or is it merely an excrescence of a deplorable mode of consumer capitalism that should be criticized and regulated by public policy?

Of course, not all advertising is objectionable and, obviously, some informative advertising provides genuine benefits to consumers, as well as helping business move its products. Moreover, public interest groups can use advertising techniques to transmit their messages and

positions and to raise consciousness on issues of public importance. The problem is thus not advertising per se, or the rise of an image culture, but capitalist control of advertising for commercial purposes.

Indeed, the current level of expenditure for advertising and its waste of social resources is a national scandal. To begin resolving the problems that the current structure of commercial advertising has produced, the existing tax structure should be modified so that consumers/citizens do not subsidize advertising. This would involve eliminating tax write-offs for advertising and slow its tremendous growth. Current local attempts to tax advertising directly (e.g., Florida) have not proven to be effective and do little to advance the interests of consumers. The additional tax costs are simply passed on to consumers, and place a bigger burden on smaller, local producers who are more likely to use advertising to communicate product information. Thus only national attempts can adequately regulate advertising.

Consequently, we would argue that all national advertising should be taxed, and taxed progressively, as the other "sin industries" (tobacco, alcohol, etc.) are taxed. Currently, advertising is written off as a "legitimate" business expense and in the era of astronomical federal deficits we believe that it is highly irrational to continue the federal tax breaks for advertising. Corporations should pay their fair share of taxes and using advertising tax write-offs as a dodge to pay taxes is a scandal (which, of course, mass media dependent on advertising revenues have not been eager to debate and discuss).

Secondly, advertising should be more strenuously regulated to limit its excesses and harmful effects. To carry through fair and effective regulation, advertising should be regulated according to media and to product type. First, one should distinguish between types and media of advertising, distinguishing between broadcast media (radio and television), print media (magazines and direct mailing), telephone solicitation, and environmental media. The latter (billboards, wall pasting, graffiti) tend to be the most regulated (in many areas at least), and continued efforts must be made to assure that urban and natural environments are not cluttered with offensive commercial "messages." Print advertising is probably the least offensive and least in need of regulation: advertising in some special interest magazines (computers, sports, lifestyles, etc.) is often informative and useful and many readers find it valuable. On the other hand, "stripping" which causes articles to be separated by ads is often annoying and perhaps print media ads could be bunched together to avoid interrupting the content of articles and other print material.

Junk mail is becoming a growing annoyance and burden on the postal system. It is a scandal that bulk advertising mail receives lower rates than regular mail. Commercial bulk mailing rates should be eliminated and advertisers should pay regular first class postal rates for the privilege of mailing their commercial messages. Discount rates could be retained for non-profit groups and public interest organizations and postal rates could even be lower for magazines and other print material if corporations would pay their fair share for commercial mail.

Telephone solicitation is even more intrusive and should be banned outright. Computer generated telephone solicitations are a complete annoyance and there is no reason why they should be allowed. Likewise, it is highly annoying when commercial solicitors telephone and

this growing sector of advertising should be completely eliminated.

Another way to consider public policy toward advertising concerns targeting specific types of advertising for products that are deemed to be harmful (e.g. cigarettes, liquor, firearms), or a luxury item (i.e. perfumes, expensive clothes, etc.). Some advertisers have appealed to first amendment rights to argue for the privilege of advertising anything, anywhere, anytime, to anybody. We believe that just as it is legitimate for the government to prevent the production of harmful products, so too is it justified to limit what products can be legitimately advertised. The federal government has already limited cigarette and alcohol advertising (excluding cigarette and hard liquor advertising from broadcast media) and if products like cigarettes are deemed to be clearly harmful to one's health, then we see no reason for its advertising to be allowed in any media. Furthermore, since such things as drugs are regulated, why shouldn't advertising for drugs be regulated? [7]

Probably the most complicated problem, however, concerns advertising on broadcast media which is clearly intrusive and annoying, but which supports the largely commercial media systems in the United States -- often with arguably harmful effects. We believe that discussion of regulating broadcast advertising is justified for broadcasting is a public resource, supposed to serve "the public interest, convenience, and necessity." Moreover, we believe that a strong case could be made that the astronomical amounts invested in advertising, commercial control of network television, and the growing importance of television advertising in political campaigns does not serve the "public interest" and should be controlled and regulated in the interests of democracy and freedom from the excesses of intrusion, manipulation, and wasteful expenditure. In particular, we would propose that the amount of advertising minutes allowed during a given hour should be limited, as it was before Reagan's efforts at deregulation. Furthermore, concerted efforts should be taken to avoid intrusive interruption of programming. The European system of bunching ads together before and after programs, and in special "magazine formats," seem to us preferable to the annoying interruptions of network television about every ten to twelve minutes for two to three minutes of ads.

In light of the power of advertising on television and power of television in society, the FCC needs to be more active in monitoring the ownership and control of the various mass media to ensure a pluralistic foundation of mass communications whereby numerous interests and views would be presented. Specifically, the accelerated concentration and centralization of media capital must be halted and reversed. It was an absolute scandal that GE was allowed to buy NBC during the Reagan years, reversing several decades of broadcast regulation. Indeed, GE was one of several corporations which formed RCA, NBC's parent corporation, after World War I. Government anti-trust acts forced GE and its corporate allies to divest RCA in 1931 but the Reagan administration allowed GE to take back RCA/NBC in 1986. This was in contrast to an earlier government refusal in the 1960s to allow communications giant IT&T to take-over ABC. That Ronald Reagan was a corporate spokesperson himself for the extremely conservative GE from 1954 to 1962 makes the affair even more scandalous.

The current self-policing of the media in a "free market" arena has harmful consequences for democracy and for the interests of consumers and the public. It is the role of the FCC to see that the mass communications industry is structured to serve the public interest. Furthermore, a

greater investment in public television is needed to provide a genuine alternative to commercially structured broadcasts. Public squalor in the United States is extended to the pitifully low expenditures on public television in contrast to the other Western capitalist democracies.[8] We are aware that the current constellations of social forces are not hospitable to such reforms, and we are aware of the limitations and difficulties of implementing such reforms in the current social situation. During the 1980s, the capitalist class tightened its control over the state apparatus and Congress too was either bought off, afraid to tackle powerful media and corporate interests, or unable to circulate proposals to reform advertising and the media. For Haug, indeed, the issue of reforming advertising under capitalism is not an issue because he sees capitalist societies as beyond reform and believes that only the elimination of capitalist relations of production and the implementation of genuine socialism will eliminate the problems associated with advertising. For Haug, capitalism produces according to exchange value alone, while under socialism production will be governed by use value. Under capitalism, only private profit is crucial in determining what will be produced and how it will be marketed, while under socialism human needs will determine what will be produced and, Haug intimates, under socialism, design, packaging, and marketing will also be fundamentally different, breaking with capitalist manipulations of illusion and providing genuine products that serve real needs discerned by a consciousness oriented toward reality (Haug 1986, pp. 106ff).

Yet to disdain concern with public policy questions of advertising either because it is supposedly impossible to reform the commercial excesses of capitalism or because such reforms allegedly strengthen the system is to fail to see that radical structural change is a long, difficult, and uneven process. Moreover, neglect of reform of advertising itself helps strengthen capitalism by failing to struggle against its attempt to increase hegemony over all areas of life by colonizing culture, sexuality, and even the unconscious of individuals. Advertising stands at the center of the capitalist system of production/consumption and critiques of its excesses thus strike at the heart of capitalism itself. Indeed, we must never forget that the problems with advertising in capitalist societies do not derive from anything inherent in advertising or marketing but from the requirements of the capitalist system of production.

Finally, we also believe that it is legitimate for critical social theory to dream of a world without advertising of the sort that litters contemporary capitalism. In a rational society, information would be made readily available to individuals through data bases concerning any product that might wish to buy. A computerized information system would thus eliminate the need for advertising. In a democratic society, individuals would freely determine their needs and desires and would resist being molded by institutions which mainly wish to manipulate and exploit them. Image production would be so diverse, so inventive, and so exciting that advertising would lose its allure and seductive power and might well wither away. And in a world without advertising perhaps individuals could finally attempt to discover and determine what they really wanted to be and to discern for themselves what kind of a world they wanted.

Acknowledgements

For helpful comments on early drafts we are indebted to Robert Antonio, Steve Best, Bob Goldman, and Steve Papsen.

Notes

1. Recent critical sociological perspectives on advertising -which will be considered in this article -- include the works of Leiss, Kline and Jhally (1986); Jhally (1987); Haug 1986; and Baudrillard (1972 and 1976); although Baudrillard's work was published earlier it only became influential within sociology in the English-speaking world during the 1980s. We also draw on some other previous and contemporary work that supplements or corrects the work examined here.

2. Leiss' earlier work consists of a study of the domination of nature (1972) strongly influenced by Marcuse and the Frankfurt school and a study of needs, commodities, and satisfactions which breaks decisively with Marcuse's notions of false needs and one-dimensional society and which attempts to develop his own critical perspectives (1976). While the latter text contains some important critical material on consumer culture and society the text does not directly pertain to advertising so we shall not examine it here.

3. For analyses of the role of advertising in television which provide insight into domination of entertainment and information by the imperatives of advertising and power of corporate advertisers, see Barnouw 1978 and Kellner 1990.

4. Recent feminist studies of advertising include Brown 198X; Winship 198X; and XX.

5. A week later, *Advertising Age* claimed that total advertising volume in 1988 was \$109.65 billion -- which would indicate a 60/40% ratio in favor of promotion expenses (May 15, 1989). Some months later, however, *Advertising Age* published an article indicating that Robert Coen, "a long-time industry expert on advertising expenditures... says that 1988 estimates...bastly overstate the size of the sales promotion industry. He said his own figures show ad spending outpacing promotion spending by a ratio of better than 8:1. According to Coen, advertising isn't on the short end of a 40%-60% score; it's on the long end of a \$109.65 to \$12.7 billion score" (October 16, 1989, p. 42). Who do you trust? Whatever the figures, we maintain that the advertising/promotion effort is a tremendous waste of resources, time, and talent.

6. Barnouw (1978) argues that the shift from live, dramatic anthology television to episodic series was influenced by advertisers desires for more up-beat, up-scale programming. For live drama in the 1950s often featured lower class or underclass characters while advertisers were coming to prefer more middle class or affluent locales as the context for their advertising messages.

7. Goldman and Montagne examine advertising for drugs in medical journals and point to the predominance of image over information and sloganeering over sound medical information which creates a dangerous situation whereby doctors may prescribe drugs for patients on the basis of suggestive imagery rather than sound medical knowledge; surely, this situation should be examined and regulated.

8. For further analysis of the role of advertising in television and for detailed proposals for producing a more democratic television system, see Kellner 1990).

References

Advertising Age, May 8, 1989; May 15, 1989; and Oct. 16, 1989.

Association of National Advertisers, 1988. *The Role of Advertising in America*. USA.

Baran, Paul and Sweezy, Paul. 1966. *Monopoly Capital*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Barnouw, Erik. 1978. *The Sponsor*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Baudrillard, Jean. 1975. *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*. St. Louis: Telos Press.

Baudrillard, Jean. 1983. *Simulations*. New York: Semiotext(e).

Boorstin, Daniel. 1962. *The Image*. New York: Harper & Row.

Debord, Guy. 1975. *Society of the Spectacle*. Detroit: Black & Red.

Ewen, Stuart. 1976. *Captains of Consciousness*. New York: McGraw-Hill. Ewen, Stuart.

Ewen, Stuart and Ewen, Elizabeth. *Channels of Desire*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Ewen, Stuart. 1988. *All Consuming Images*. New York: McGraw-Hill.

Fox, Richard Wigthman. and Lears, T. J. Jackson 1983. *The Culture of Consumption*. New York: Pantheon.

Goldman, Robert 1984. "We Make Weekends: Leisure and the Commodity Form." *Social Text* 8:84-103.

Goldman, Robert 1984. "Legitimation Ads, Part I: The Story of the Family in Which the Family Saves Capitalism from Itself." Pp. in *Knowledge and Society: Studies in the Sociology of Culture*, edited by Henrika Kuklick and Elizabeth Long, (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press.

Goldman, Robert and Montagne, M. 1986. "Marketing 'Mind Mechanics': Decoding Drug Advertisements in Medical Journals." *Social Science and Medicine* 22, 10: 1047-58.

Goldman, Robert. 1987. "Marketing Fragrances: Advertising and the Production of Commodity Signs." *Theory, Culture & Society*. 4: 691-725.

Goldman, Robert and Papson, Stephen. In press. "Levi's Personal Blues," Goldman, Robert and

Papson, Stephen. In press. "Reebok and the Corporate Over-Soul: the commodity myth of post-modernism,"

Haug, Wolfgang Fritz. 1986. *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Haug, Wolfgang Fritz. 1987. *Commodity Aesthetics, Ideology & Culture*. Paris: International General.

Jhally, Sut. 1987. *Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society*. New York: Saint Martin's.

Kellner, Douglas. 1989a. *Critical Theory, Marxism, and Modernity*. Cambridge and Baltimore: Polity Press and John Hopkins University Press.

Kellner, Douglas. 1989b. *Jean Baudrillard: From Marxism to Postmodernism and Beyond*. Cambridge and Palo Alto: Polity Press and Stanford University Press.

Kellner, D. 1990. *Television and the Crisis of Democracy*. Boulder, Col: Westview Press.

Key, Wilson Bryan. 1972. *Subliminal Seduction*. New York: Signet.

Leiss, William. 1972. *The Domination of Nature*. New York: Braziller.

Leiss, William. 1976. *The Limits to Satisfaction*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Leiss, William, Kline, Stephen and Jhally, Sut 1986. *Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products, and Images of Well-Being*. New York: Methuen.

Leymore, V.L. 1975. *Hidden Myth*. New York: Basic Books.

Packard, Vance. 1960. *The Waste Makers*. Baltimore and London: Penquin.

Schudson, Michael. 1984. *Advertising, The Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact On American Society*. New York: Basic Books.

Williamson, Judith. 1978. *Decoding Advertisements*. London: Marion Boyers.

Winship, Janet. *Inside Women's Magazines*