"Sensual . . . But not too far from Innocence": A Critical Theory of Sexism in Advertising

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This article provides a theoretical framework with which to understand sexism in advertising. Our examples are drawn mainly from magazines aimed at white South African women, but the advertisements we describe will readily be recognised as typical of those on T.V. and in "women's magazines", or the "women's pages" of newspapers, in any Western industrial society. Many attempts have been made to examine the depiction of women in advertising, but those we have encountered (e.g. McClintock, 1978; Goffman, 1979) tend to be merely descriptive. For genuine social change to be at all possible, which is what motivates our concern with this topic, it is not enough for people to realise that they are oppressed. Their undirected rebelliousness will soon be dissipated in the face of the dominant ideology. What is needed is an adequate understanding of how and why the oppressive mechanisms work as they do.

In attempting to meet this need, we shall proceed along the following lines. Firstly we shall interpret Parson's functionalist analysis of capitalist society as a schema which in effect merely reflects its superficial features. We shall concentrate on his characterisation of the family, and particularly the female role, and see how advertisements seemingly corroborate it. Then we shall argue that this schema is ideological. With the help of Marcuse and other theorists we shall explain the purpose and working of this ideology in relation to capitalism. To substantiate our argument we shall identify several conservative mechanisms in advertisements. Finally, we shall consider why this ideology is so pervasive.

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The starting point of Parsonian functionalism was, as the title of his first book made clear (Parsons, 1937), the structure of social action. Society was to be conceived as a vast network of ongoing interlocking unit acts, each of which involved an actor, limited by material conditions and guided by prevailing norms, evaluating competing available means to a chosen goal. This conception obviously raises the question of how, in a plethora of individual deliberations, a coherent society is possible. Parson's answer was to assume a working consensus, supported by appropriate sanctions and rewards, on the norms which guide evaluation. Everyone still decides freely on their goals and how to reach them, but each ego makes particular judgments complementary to those of alter because both have made the prevailing norms their own. On particular issues, disagreements arising from competing norms will of course occur, say between manager and worker or husband and wife: but society can function as a whole because there is substantial agreement on higher values such as, respectively, capitalism or nuclear marriage.

The question that obviously arises next is how individuals' agreement on the central value system is engendered and sustained. Parson's answer, in The Social System (1951), is that individuals are suitably socialised, i.e. the course of their upbringing involves their being brought to internalise the prevailing norms and expectations. Characteristic clusters of norm and expectation are called roles, and sets of complementary roles constitute subsystems of the social system - e.g. husband-wife, parent-child, brother-sister in the nuclear family, teacher-pupil etc. in the school, and so on. Socialization into roles amounts, for Parsons, to a behaviouralised version of the working of the Freudian Superego: "Once internalised, normative culture seems to have the status of a repertoire of behavioural computer programmes, the appropriate one being called up not by the self-reflective thinking individual but by external stimuli in each situation" (Mennell, 1974: 89). If its constituent unit acts are interpreted in terms of stimulus and response, the overall social system can be conceived in the abstract as a system of functionally interrelated variables (Parsons, 1951 453), within which distinct patterns of inter-

relation evidence the existence of the various subsystems interacting in complementary ways to sustain social equilibrium through gradual change. Change may be endogenous to the social system, or introduced exogenously from the other systems making up society as a whole, viz., the physical, cultural, and personality systems. In each of these other systems, prerequisites of the functioning of society are met in particular ways: the need for adaptation in the physical system is met by the economy; for goal attainment and integration in the cultural system by the policy and church respectively; and - which brings us to our present purpose - for latency in the personality system by the family.

Less mysteriously expressed, latency is the problem of *ensuring that individuals help move society towards its goals by participating in the requisite activities in appropriate ways.* The solution to this problem is the prime task of the family, now that it no longer plays a direct part in economic production or the political system. *Since humans are not born with formed personalities, families are necessary as the means whereby the values of the central value system are internalised anew by each generation.* They are "the factories which produce human personalities" (Parsons, 1966p.16).

Within the family, as in society as a whole, the prerequisites of adaptation and goal attainment (instrumental activity) and for integration and latency (expressive activity) must be met. Which parent will do which? The husband and father, it turns out, plays the instrumental role, since society expects him to be the main breadwinner of the family, and establishes the status of the whole family according to his occupation and income (Parsons,p1942: 95; 1943p.191). "The corollary" (Parsons 1943,p.191) of this, given a "utilitarian' division of labour", is that - at least in middle class urban families - the fundamental status of the woman in the marriage becomes "that of her husband's wife, the mother of his children, and traditionally the person responsible for a complex of activities in connection with the management of the household, care of children, etc." (Parsons, 1942p.95).

This arrangement is said to be functional in that it "*eliminates any competition for status, especially as between husband and wife, which might be disruptive of the solidarity of the marriage*" (Parsons, 1943p.192). But it also gives rise to strains. After all, the husband has married his wife because he loves her: she, no less than he, has "a claim to a voice in decisions, *to a certain human dignity*, to be 'taken seriously'". Yet, on the one hand, housework and childcare are comparatively menial tasks, from which the woman reasonably wants to dissociate herself: "Thus advertising continually appeals to such desires as to have hands which one could never tell had washed dishes or scrubbed floors" (Parsons, 1942p.95-6). And on the other hand, she "is debarred from testing or demonstrating her fundamental equality with her husband in competitive occupational achievement" (Parsons, 1943p.193). So Parsons identifies two possibilities other than acquiescing in simple domesticity. One is for the woman to become a "good companion": to specialise in "'good taste', in personal appearance, house furnishings, cultural things like literature and music" (Parsons, 1943p.194); or else to do welfare work (Parsons, 1942p.97).

The other possibility is for the woman to compete in a new realm of her own, "the glamour pattern, with the emphasis on a specifically feminine form of attractiveness which on occasion involves directly sexual patterns of appeal" (Parsons, 1942p.96). These practices - Parsons mentions smoking cosmetics, and some forms of dress - were previously not respectable. In other words, since social arrangements deny you a career, if you want to avoid household drudgery and don't want to go to pottery classes you can now legitimately become a sex object instead. On any of the options, the segregation of sex roles allegedly functional to the social system is emphasised. And all of them have strains in turn: domesticity has low prestige; one ages out of, or is never entirely approved in, the glamour pattern; and good companionship poses bewildering options. So "widespread manifestations (of security) are to be expected in the form of neurotic behaviour" (Parsons, 1942p.99).

As far as the image of women in advertising is concerned, Parsons seems at first blush to offer a plausible account of the middle class urban situation. Consider simple domesticity first. A Stork margarine advertisement quotes a smiling mother saying,

"If you want to know how good new Stork tastes, ask my Eddie". Young Eddie is meanwhile gleefully munching a piece of bread liberally smeared with new Stork. The job of caring for him is shown as the function of the mother alone. And because apparently only she can do it, she is obliged to make a good job of it and it becomes her full-time occupation. Or take the advertisement for Knorr Gravy Mix: "Does your husband have a bit on the side? (If he does, do something saucy.)" The text accompanies a photograph of a tasty-looking meal, with "the husband" twiddling his thumbs and smiling in anticipation. The important point is that the woman isn't even depicted! She is present only through her implicit functions: to feed her hardworking husband, and - at the level of the double entendre - to be sure to keep his sexual appetite whetted through the imaginative performance of her glamour role. There is an advertisement for Dante perfume which provides an excellent illustration of the glamour role per se. It shows a suitably voluptous blonde with a come-and-get-me look, her hair draped strategically over her bare breast, who evidently has no qualms about being a sex object. In fact, the implication is that "you too can be a man's woman" with the aid of the product, "if you dare!"

With this as the proferred alternative, it is no wonder that women will want to dissociate themselves from household chores. The advertisement for a Westpoint dishwasher takes advantage of this, by showing that it will let the woman "hang up her gloves for good", and so, in Parsons' words, "have hands which one could never tell had washed dishes". She is then free to be a Parsonian "good companion" by showing "good taste": as an advertisement for Constantia carpets suggests, the sort of people who buy this furnishing know to own "a dress from Saint Laurent, a necklace from Tiffany's, and a pair of shoes from Gucci". (In what follows, we have concentrated our analysis on the interplay between simple domesticity and the glamour role; but the thrust of a comparable analysis of "good companionship" will be readily evident.)

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So as a description of middle-class urban life, at least as depicted in advertising, Parsons' writings seem accurate enough. But how adequate a theory do they offer? There are several standard fundamental criticisms of the whole apparatus of functionalism: for instance, that it is a trivial and laborious redescription of the obvious (Bottomore, 1975p.34) that it over-emphasises order and consensus at the expense of structured social conflict (Atkinson, 1971); and that it is incapable of explaining real social change (Cohen 1968p.47 ff.). But most important for our purposes is a further criticism, which in addition explains the above weaknesses: it contends that functionalism is ideological.

We are of course drawing here on Marx's account of ideology as a system of beliefs which help sustain an inequitable and exploitative social order by legitimating or rationalising it, characteristically by presenting what is historically transient and contingent as if it were universal, inevitable and desirable. It is precisely in this sense that we believe that Parsons' functionalism is ideological. Gouldner (1971p.331-7) has advanced the case in general. We shall argue it with particular reference to Parsons' account of the role of the woman in the nuclear family, and how it is supposed to follow from the relations of the family to the occupational order under capitalism.

Let us reconsider simple domesticity, the most natural role for the Parsonian married woman to play. Its two basic components are the woman as housewife and the woman as mother. Take housework first. Its most important feature, for Parsons, is that the wife does it while the husband earns. It is thus associated with economic dependence (Oakley, 1974p.2). This implies that the housewife does not herself produce commodities of direct value in the economy. "Her primary economic function is vicarious; by servicing others, she enables them to engage in productive economic activity" (Oakley, 1974p.3).

Seccombe (No. 53p.9) explains the situation further: the husband is (partly) repaid for his labour in the form of a salary. In order for him to continue working efficiently this salary has to be converted into food, clean clothes, a relaxing home environment, etc. The conversion is necessary because "commodities do not walk into

the household and convert themselves into the family's subsistence of their own accord". So, over and above the husband's labour at work "additional labour - namely housework - is necessary in order to convert these commodities to regenerated labour power" (Seccombe, No. 53p.9).

There are two reasons why it is expedient under capitalism that the wife do this work. Firstly, if his wife cooks, shops and washes for him out of the kindness of her well-trained heart, the husband can be paid less than if he had to employ someone to do that job. Secondly, if he had to do it himself it would draw on his working energy and use up valuable hours in which he could work, or recuperate in order to work further. So in Marx's terms, the housewife reproduces her husband's labour power on a daily basis in the cheapest possible way. (And in South Africa, there is often a further tier of exploitation. Many housewives exploit the labour power of a servant to meet their husband's expectations of them).

A similar argument applies to the reproduction of labour on a generational basis, i.e. to the woman as mother, bearing and raising children. In the nineteenth century, families in industrial society were much larger than now. In the middle-class family, the care of the young children was largely entrusted to a nanny, grand-parents helped rear the older children, who in turn helped rear their juniors. So the biological tasks of motherhood, viz., actual reporoduction and lactation - and in some cases a wet-nurse would even relieve the mother of the latter - were a much larger component of motherhood than the subsequent social tasks. Nowadays, however, with the advent of the nuclear family to meet the need of capitalism for a mobile breadwinner, and with the tendency as more children survive for families to have fewer of them, motherhood has come to be understood much more in terms of bringing up the children. "Contemporary society is obsessed by the physical, moral, and sexual problems of childhood and adolescence" (Mitchell, 1972p.119), and the mother is charged with their solution. For, by requiring her in this way to undertake the social as well as the biological tasks, society is saved from having to provide expensive and unprofitable measures to replace cheap servants or the free services of the extended family.

We can now see that the Knorr and Stork advertisements respectively spell out the imperatives working on the woman as housewife and mother, to reproduce labour power on a daily and generational basis. So Parsons may be correct that by her simple domesticity the wife helps to meet particular needs of the system. But why only she has to do so is because such a sexual division of labour is not "utilitarian" but economical, not natural but exploitative.

How is this arrangement legitimated? The form in which ideology in general works under late capitalism has been persuasively analysed by Marcuse (1964) in terms which turn out to be especially telling when applied to sexism in particular. Like Marx before him, Marcuse regards technological advance as a necessary condition of liberation. It decreases necessary labour time, giving individuals more opportunity to fulfil creatively their diverse human potential. Yet, despite the astounding technological advances made this century, this human potential is not being realised. Why?

Marcuse, here supplementing Marx with Freud, argues that in previous times economic scarcity necessitated almost continual work, so that socialisation had to achieve a considerable amount of psycho-sexual repression in each individual, whereby he or she sublimated the requisite libidinal energy into productive activity rather than sexual gratification. However, with the increasing rate of surplus extraction made possible by capital intensive production and scientific expertise, less work and thus less individual repression is actually required to achieve a given level of material well-being. Yet the previous levels of repression have been sustained. So much of it is now surplus to the task of materially reproducing society, and is channelled instead into maintaining the existing order by various processes (MacIntyre, 1970 p.46).

Marcuse's understanding of the existing order hinges on the two concepts of "high culture" and "reality". High culture draws on literature, philosophy and history of social thought for an understanding of what the Greeks called "the good life", i.e., the vision of society in which humans socially fulfilled their intrinsic qualities. Reality, by contrast, describes our present, everyday existence as it is generally understood. What history hitherto involved was successive transformations of reality towards the attainment of high culture, enabled by improving technology. But the process has been stalled in that the ideals of high culture are now prematurely being presented as having been already achieved. This situation was forseen by Aldous Huxley in his Brave New World: "That's the price we have to pay for stability. You've got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We've sacrificed the high art. We have the feelies and the scent organ instead" (1932p.173).

This, then, is what Marcuse means when he claims that society has become one-dimensional: the ideals of high culture have been devoured by everyday reality. Previously even though high culture was restricted to an élite group, it had the important function of preserving "negative thinking". It stood apart from reality and contradicted it, thus keeping some minds open to the ideal. But nowadays literature, and philosophy, like everything else in the capatalist world, are judged by their commodity value rather than by their contribution to high culture.

For example, in the case of literature, profitable publication demands that the author write for a mass audience whose tastes are defined by prevailing reality. So, as Horn (1979p.11) explains, when authors look for a publisher they will realise that "the literary market is not controlled by literary but economic laws, and that their work of art can reach the public only as a consumer product". Much literature is thus no more than "filled-in lines without which printed paper is difficult to sell" (Horn, 1979p.11).

There are two basic processes whereby one-dimensionality is sustained. The first is "repressive desublimation", i.e. the pseudo-gratification of libidinal desires in ways which only strengthen the existing order. Thus, one learns from Playboy and Penthouse that sexuality "ideally" involves guiltless variety, as engaged in by eternally twenty-three year old men and women accoutred - when not posing naked in pictorial foreplay - in expensive clothes and smart sports-cars. It is a desublimation produced from a position of strength on the part of society, which can afford to grant more than before because its interests have become the innermost drives of its citizens, and because the jobs which it grants promote social cohesion and contentment" (Marcuse, 1964p.69); and it is repressive in that it provides a subconscious consolatio for the annihilation of the genuine ideal. The lavish production of goods in the material, quantitative sphere diverts attention from the poverty of existence in the non-material qualitative sphere.

But there are limits as to how much people in their right minds can want. So the second process involves the creation of "false needs ... those which are superimposed on the individual by social interests in his repression" (Marcuse, 1964p.21). Mindless acquisitiveness is encouraged through advertising: discard a workable product in favour of a bigger and better version which differs from its predecessor only in the shape of the knobs or the colour of the box. So the individual is blinded by the spurious gratification of continuous and conspicious consumption, from the insight that the capitalist mode of production cannot cater for, and indeed frustrates, his or her wider non-material needs. The result is what Marcuse calls a "euphoria in unhappiness" (1964p.22). Or as Huxley put it, "people are happy; they get what they want, and they never want what they can't get" (1932p.193).

As far as women are concerned, in each of their married roles the images in everyday reality persuade them that they will have achieved their lives' ideals by finding gratification in suitable purchases. As wife, sex is decorated with fantasy and fantasy fulfilled by clothes and cosmetics. As housekeeper, the menial monotony of her actual chores is concealed behind a "choice" she must make from a vast range of brands of largely identical goods; as Marcuse says, giving a slave a number of

matters to choose from makes her no less of a slave. And as mother, she is shown that only with this or that indispensable product can she meet what are presented as her biological and social tasks.

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We shall now substantiate this line of thought by analysing several conservative mechanisms at work in advertisements directed at women. The first involves the assuaging of resentment or guilt about the housewife's role with a suitable product of technology. For example, the advertisement for Skip washing powder, aimed at the woman as housewife, shows a white-coated "technical-manager" standing next to a washing machine in a clinically clean laboratory environment. He is expounding on the virtues of Skip, and the weight of his professional advice is increased by the technical words he uses: "Formula 2" "washing programme", "regular tests". In analysing this advertisement, we draw on what Langholz (1974p.3) has called the three levels of meaning of advertising. The first obviously enough depicts the product. The second concerns the context of depiction, which in this case suggests that the virtues of Skip are scientifically proven. The third level concerns the implicit meaning of the advertisement, which is in general "to point at certain conflicts and offer a solution to them". In this case the advertisement is offering a repressive pseudo-solution to the problem which Parsons contended was inevitable, i.e. strains that arise when an able female individual tries to reconcile herself to the elementary (if time-consuming) and menial role of being a housewife, in contrast to the intricate and responsible job opportunities which the "utilitarian" division of labour denies her in the scientifically advanced and achievement-orientated society. She feels resentful, and if she has been well enough brought up, feels guilty about her resentment. The pseudo-solution which the advertisement proposes is to domesticate technology, to let the woman feel she is involved in an intricate, technical and therefore rewarding job, without forsaking her situation as a housewife. This is so much more convenient than the re-arrangements that would be involved if her husband and society were to do their share of household drudgery and allow her the genuine satisfaction of realising her particular aptitudes in a career of her choice.

The mechanism further exploits guilt by actually creating it. This kind of advertisement - often in the versions which show Johny's rugby vest, or the kitchen floor, before and after using the product - depicts the housewife as achieving extraordinarily high standards of cleanliness and efficiency. The advertisement thus induces guilt in the more average, real housewifely performer at the very moment it recommends the means assuaging it; it creates and promises to satisfy a false need. In its two aspects, therefore, this mechanism embellishes housework with seeming importance and expands it into a fulltime occupation.

The force of this kind of advertisement is strengthened by having the woman being counselled by a man. In Parson's account of capitalist society, the man, in transferring to his family the status he derives from the degree of his authority at work, is also the figure of authority in the home. As so many legal provisions and employment practices in our society confirm, his wife, hardly less than his children, is his dependent. Advertising uses husbandly figures to take advantage of this fact (and, we shall see later in our analysis of "perpetual puberty", to reinforce it). Komisar (1972 p.312) quotes a bit of advertising know-how: "You can't say anything too fancy to them.... conversations with doves in kitchens, giants coming out of washing machines, crowns magically appearing on heads when a certain margarine is used". So it is that the housewife readily listens to the white-coated mentors who instruct her in the wonders of her technological toys. And when she gets bored because she can't help being proficient, why! then she can graduate to a twin-speed tumble-drier.

Complementary to this use of consumer technology is a second mechanism, in which advertising draws on the image of the country idyll. Davidoff (1976, p.153 ff.) has tried to illuminate the structural situation of women in capitalist society by an analogy with the stable hierarchy of rural, organic societies in pre-industrial Europe. These were patriarchal societies, in which the feudal lord's power over his family and minions, and their power over their families in turn, was absolute. With industrialisation and the migration to the cities, feudal authority dimished, as did

the security one derived from knowing one's place in the great chain of being. As is suggested by the proverb "Every man's home is his castle", the surburban household substitutes for the rural estate, while the wife and children are subordinate to the husband much as his vassals were subordinate to the lord. Similarly, Davidoff argues, the connotations of cleanliness, health and untroubled existence previously attached to rural life are now associated with the house, and with the woman who is responsible for it.

How are these connotations used in advertising? Packard (1957 p.93) has described an advertisement depicting "a small home with two feminine arms stretching out, seemingly beckoning the troubled male reader to the bosom of her hearth". An obvious comtemporary example is the advertisement for Sunshine margarine. A robust slice of homemade wholewheat bread is spread with margarine, and lies next to the open Sunshine packet on a breadboard set against a golden country sunset. The text reads: "There is a goodness in Sunshine that comes from the country". All three of Davidoff's rural connotations are clearly at work here. Firstly, cleanliness is suggested by the very name of the product, in contrast with, say, city gloom and dirt. Secondly, the product is full of healthy country goodness: "Pure vegetable oils...natural things. So, naturally, Sunshine is best". Thirdly, the sunset suggests tranquillity, and also - in implying the end of the day's activities - a return to the peace and security of home.

We have argued earlier that depictions such as these are ideological, in that they disguise the woman's unpaid economic function of converting her husband's wage into the means of subsistence via shopping and cooking. More specifically, the country idyll can also be seen as ideological in Marcusian terms, in that it is an alluring form of repressive desublimation.

Repressive desublimation, we recall, provides consolation for the annihilation of the ideal. In this case the posited ideal is to have a wholesome, tranquil country existence, to escape from the pressures of busy, urban, industrial life. This ideal, at least to the extent that it incorporates all the middle-class comforts, could never become generally available, because our present standard of living depends on a rate of surplus extraction by capital which demands the destruction of large, self-subsistent, rural communities. So the family is provided with a substitute ideal, with the woman playing a central role in the process. In lieu of the benefits of country life, she buys them a product which promises "Country goodness you can taste".

It is a short mental distance from the idyllic to the imaginary. So it is not surprising to find that advertising also harnesses the latter. This is a third conservative mechanism, the subsumption of fantasy by consumerism. Before late capitalism, one's dreams were one's own, a resource with which to discover hopes and uncover fears, a realm to be explored in painting and poetry. As Marcuse puts it, people still possessed "an inner dimension distinguished from and even antagonistic to the external exigincies - an individual consciousness and an individual unconscious apart from public opinion and behaviour" (Marcuse, 1964 p.25).

Today, however, this dimension too has been brought into line. Our imaginations have been invaded by technological reality, and advertising has taken over from "high culture" the presentation of visions. By confining the range of depicted fantasy to the realm of the consumable, advertising limits and directs one's wants to what the system can profitably claim to satisfy.

Thus, in an advert for Badedas bath foam, a woman is shown in her bath, resting her head pensively on her hand. This image is set into the wider image of her fantasy, in which she is being seduced by a stereotypically irrestible male. The whole atmosphere is romantic, with misty violet hues and soft contours. Langholz's schema of problem and solution again applies. The problem is to relieve the tedium of the wife's socially prescribed role. The solution is for her to make herself desirable with consumer products, as if ready to have her humdrum existence replaced by an exciting affair. So the product provides both the fantasy and its pseudo-gratification. Since the permissible range of contentment derives from the powers of the product, the

range must be accordingly narrow: the well-worn stereotype of the lucky lady who gets all the guys.

The fantasies invoked in this way do not always involve sex. But the fact that so many do directs our attention to a fourth mechanism for keeping women contented in their place: superficial liberation. An advertisement for Tramp perfume is a good example. It consists of three photographic frames showing the same woman in different milieux. In each case she is being appreciately eyed by men, while she smiles contentedly at her success. The problem here is simply how to score, how to succeed in Parsons' glamour role; and the solution is, of course, the product.

It is important to note that sexiness is defined by a stereotype so perfect as to be almost unattainable. So sex, although potentially one of humankind's most accessible resources, is made out to be one of the scarcest. In thus persuading people to attach their desires to an eternally elusive "ideal", advertising can ensure the continuous generation of false needs for glamour products (Slater, 1970p.100), and thus help sustain capitalism by inflating the market.

The construction of such stereotypes also contributes to the one-dimensionality which fosters repressive desublimation. The glamour role makes sexuality more acceptable than before, but only so far as it remains within the bounds of the stereotype: aloo admired, feted, but untouched unless en route to a socially acceptable liaison. So the Id is supposedly freed from having to sublimate its demands from sex into work, but such demands are first delimited in a way which even more successfully channels them into the domain of production and consumption. So at the same time as sexuality pervades the everyday working world, it is made to conform as closely to the acceptable patterns as is everything else on the technological conveyor belt.

We may, in retrospect, identify aspects of this theme of quasi-liberation in some of our previous examples. Skip detergent "frees" the woman from some of her household tasks, only so that she may engage in the fantasy substitute of a "liberated" sex life conjured for her by a Badedas bath. In the Tramp advertisement, the theme is more blatant: it will make you "independent", and "just a little wild". The very name has connotations of the tramp as carefree, a hobo, beyond society's control. But even at the level of fantasy the liberation is not genuine. For the word also has the overtones of sexual promiscuity, of women literally as sex objects, "liberated" only to provide men pleasure. The woman wearing Tramp is passively displayed and evaluated as an object in three ways: the men in the pictures appraise her; the use of the film strips reminds us of the intermediate judgements of the photographer and media men; and lastly, she is being looked at by the emulative female reader, who is thereby kept at three removes from the Marcusian ideal of true liberation, in which women would expect to realise their own identities socially in active and constructive interrelations.

The fifth mechanism is an aspect of repressive desublimation identified by Marcuse in written language, which can readily be extended to advertising: the subsumption of the concept by the word (or image). The mechanism works as follows: "The names of things are not only indicative of their manner of functioning, but their (actual) manner of functioning also defines and closes the meaning of the thing, excluding other manners of functioning" (Marcuse 64p.69). In one-dimensional writing, e.g. in Time magazine, a particular noun is characteristically coupled with a particular adjective and repeated in a ritualistic manner. The fusion of the two becomes imprinted on the readers' minds, so that they can envision no alternative use of either In advertisements, the possible meanings are restricted by the pairing of a concept with a particular product. The concept is rendered as a word or image, the meaning of which is then subsumed by the product to which it attaches.

Consider the concept of freedom. High culture tells us, in Rousseau and Marx, that freedom is the glorious antithesis of our present enslavement, the defining goal of our natural inclination to shape our own destiny in disdain of coercion or conformity. The media tells us, in the advertisement for New Freedom sanitary pads, that freedom is women's newly-won ability to conceal an essential fact of the sexual being, i.e.

that they have sexual organs which make their presence felt once a month. And what kinc of freedom is this? A butterfly perched on the packet gives us a clue: women have beer freed to be frivolous, fragile and decorative; hardly conducive to the radical transfor mation of their social situation. Stayfree Pantypads are another such product, the name which is meant to work in an identical way. In both these advertisements, freedom also implies an escape from something. The advertisement for Lilletts tampons makes this clearer, promising the woman that she will never be "caught out". Evidently the suggestion is that in menstruating the woman is committing some sort of offence, which the products are helping her to obviate.

The implicit offence, we suggest, is to be unclean. Millet (1970.p.305) has argued that the degree of differentiation between male and female on which sexism relies inheres in the basic symbolic distinction between clean and dirty, which in turn - depending on one anthropological allegiances - either is the reason for or else derives from the male fea at pollution from contact with female menstrual blood. In drawing on this association between menstruation and dirt, these advertisements rely on and encourage in women a dis taste for their sexual organs. The effect is, as Greer (71p.39) has put it, that "The best thing a cunt can be is small and unobtrusive; the anxiety about the bigness of the penis is only equalled by the anxiety about the smallness of the cunt".

Interestingly, this is in striking contrast to the association on which advertising relies when addressing itself to the woman's social rather than biological tasks. As we saw apropos the country idyll, the woman's housework is identified with cleanliness and purity. So the woman is seen, on successive pages of advertisememnt, as both dirty and clean. The absurdity of the contradiction is the measure of the extent to which such advertising is exploitative. By representing cleaning as a virtue and bleeding as a vice, it helps reconcile women to handling on their own, without help or due allowance, the necessary physical burdens of social reproduction. One of the central deficiencies in Greer's work is that she underestimates the extensive social rearrangements which will be necessary if these tasks are to be equitably executed. She rightly demands that "the cunt must come into its own" (Greer 1971p.318), but is content to heave the housework to an Italian peasant couple imported for the purpose. Rather, nappy changing and dish-washing must equally come into their own in the marital relationship, less pleasurably, but no less importantly.

Individuality and femininity are two further concepts often subsumed in advertisements. For example, in an advertisement for Wonderblush, individuality becomes a sheen you can conveniently apply to your face: "It's a fun, no-colour stick that reacts to your own personal skin and gives you your own personal blush ... you enjoy a deliciously individual glow" (our emphasis). And an advertisement for Felina bras tells you how, whatever your personal qualities, you can simply don femininity: "When feeling feminine is important, you choose Felina". (One wonders what bra the advertisers would suggest for when it is important to feel masculine). In each instance, the concept is defined by the image or description of a product, so dissolving its critical import and confining its connotation to what is presently available in consumable form.

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In sum, our analysis so far has shown how advertising helps to conceal the exploitation inherent in the Parsonian roles of simple domesticity and the glamour pattern, by presenting housework as a worthwhile and virtuous occupation which is fulltime except when the woman legitimately engages her cosmetic identity in fantasy interludes of disembodied sex. The problem now is to explain why people are so gullible, why this pervasive ideology is so successful.

A fruitful approach to an answer is, we believe, to see advertising as a form of legitimating myth. As Langholz (1974 p3) suggests, "If no society exists without some form of myth, then it is hardly surprising that a society based on the economy of mass consumption will evolve its main myth in a commercial form". Myths are conservative in that they reinforce prevailing activity by reviewing all the alternative solutions and "proving that the one which predominates in any given society is, in the given circumstances, the best" (Langholz, 1974p. 4). As we have seen, this is what advertiseme try to achieve by presenting problems in ways that the prevailing pattern of consumerism can neatly solve.

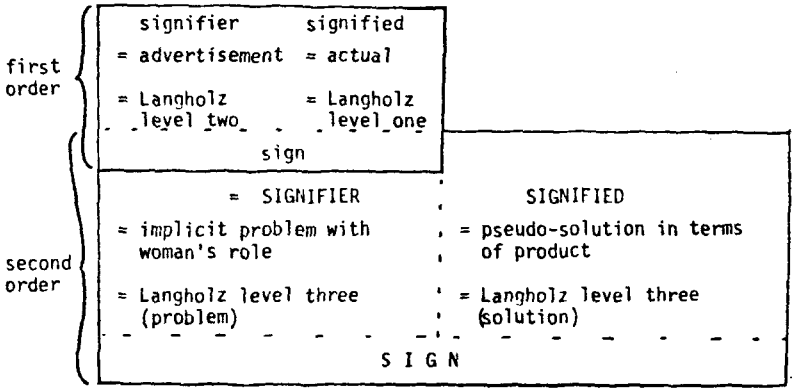
Indeed, Langholz's analysis needs some sophistication, in that it takes too monolithic a view of myth. We have seen that the stereotypes invoked in the consumerist cosmology are not consistent: housework is worth doing fulltime, yet worth being freed from; women are clean in their ability to reproduce the household but dirty in their ability to reproduce the species; technology is the solution but the idyll is the ideal; and so on. Even in "primitive" societies myths have too many facets to be neatly unified. And this is precisely their point. As Levi-Strauss has shown, for example in his famous analysis of the Oedipus legend (1968p.430), the function of myth is to make underlying contradictions in the social order tolerable by repetitively re-presenting them in transmuted mythical forms as juxtaposed dichotomies.

However, our allegations against advertising went further.
It not only reconciles women to the contradictions between their personal individuality and their domestic servitude by juxtaposing symbolic representations of these aspects of their situation, it does so as an ideology, i.e. by distorting the representations to depict as natural and inevitable (as Parsons claimed) what are really historically contingent social arrangements. We capture this extra aspect by drawing on the work of Roland Barthes (1973) who has applied Levi-Strauss' analysis to the cultural phenomena of contemporary soceity. To understand Barthes' contribution, we need to note how Levi-Strauss drew on the structural linguistics of de Saussure. According to de Saussure, a linguistic sign is a dyadic relation between a signifier and what is signified. For example, in spoken language the signifier is the acoustic image, e.g. the sound of the word "cat", and the signified is the concept in the mind of the hearer, a conception of a purring, furry quadruped with whiskers. In Levi-Strauss, fragments of legend are the signifiers, e.g. Oedipus murders his father and marries his mother; the features of the cosmology they refer to are the signified, in this case the underrating and overrating of blood relations; and the interplay between the two as a while constitutes one huge sign. What Barthes does is add another tier of signification. For example, there is a photograph (the signifier) in the magazine Paris-Match of (the signified) a black Algerian in French Army uniform saluting the flag. The two in association form a first-order sign, which then constitutes the signifier corresponding to a second-order signified, which is, say, the loyalty of French imperial subjects. According to Barthes, the photograph acquires its ideological impact by an oscillation between the two orders in the mind of the reader, whereby the first-order naturalness of the representation confers an equal naturalness on what is an arbitrary, in fact a highly contentious, second-order association. By way of an example in advertising, recall the advertisement for Badedas bath foam. At the first order, the signifier is the pictorial image of the product and the signified is the product itself. The association between the two is then the first-order sign, which is the signifier for the second-order signified, i.e. the gratification in fantasy of stereotypically delimited relationships (what Greer calls the "statistically ideal fuck").

In the jargon of linguistics, the relations between signifier and signified is usually arbitrary, in that a given concept could as well have been represented by a different acoustic combination; so the concept of a cat is conjured by the sound "chat" in French. But when the signifier is causally related to the signified, e.g., if red is used to signify blood, the sign is said to be an index. We may then say that, for Barthes, ideology works by indexifying signs, i.e., by representing as natural and causally determined what is actually conventional buy arbitrary. "This process, by which ideological meaning attaches itself apparently naturally to an everyday object or event, Barthes calls 'mythification'. (It works) through a denial or repression of the activity of the signifier, which becomes a transparent window on to the "real" (Laing, 1975p.96-97). This is precisely what we found at work in advertisements. The product is so depicted that the context will confer its naturalness on to the hidden and contentious connotation of the advertisement; the consumer is moved straight from the picture of the product to accept the pseudo-solution to the social problem posited in terms of the product.

Indeed, Langholz's "three levels" of advertising can be more precisely expressed in terms of this schema. What she called the "first level", the product referred to by the advertisement, is on our present analysis the first order signified; her "second level", the context of depiction, is our first-order signifier; her "problem" at the

"third level" is now the first-order sign acting as the second-order signifier; and her "solution" is now the second-order signified, i.e. the recommendation that the reader achieve a pseudo-solution to her problem by consuming the product. The working of the advertisement as a second-order sign thus both draws on and strengthens the woman's place in the social structure as posited by the prevailing ideology. The situation is summarised diagramatically in the figure below.



There is one problem outstanding. Barthes gaily refers to the readers who make interpretations, but fails explicitly to incorporate them into his account. As Schutz (1967p.301) noticed, the sign - which he calls a "symbol" - should be conceived as a triad rather than a dyad, as a relation between signifier, signified, and also, crucially, the mind of the interpreter. If the customary associations between signifier and signified are made, it is because they have been learned. The success of the first-order, literal sign depends on our having learned to read pictures and appreciate graphic conventions. And the very material on which we we are taught - beginning with picture books showing the dog Rover, the authoritative father John and the glamorous and uncomplaining housewife and mother Jane - incorporat the associations which help define the prevailing ideology and let the second- order, figurative signs succeed. Even more subtly, the available written and spoken words, i.e. the existing structures of linguistic signification with which one learns to think and speak at all, carve up the realm of possible conceptualisation in way which by large reflect and help to secure the existing relations of dominance. The child gazing at Paris-Match will as yet only see a black soldier saluting; but the scene will be presented in a stirring way which contributes to the well-socialised adult's subsequent thrill at French imperial glory.

This conceptual manipulation is facilitated, especially in the case of advertising, by the way capitalism engenders "perpetual puberty". Reiche argues that although children are freed from parental authority at a younger age than before, this does not result in their achieving true independence earlier. "In fact the individual's dependence on his/her family is replaced by increasing dependence on other sources of authority" (Reiche, 1968p.85). Young people never finally achieve the goal of adolescence, i.e. the transition to adulthood, and remain in "perpetual puberty". This occurs because technocratic rationality constitutes a very strong, and - through the media - a very pervasive source of external authority which replaces parental authority. Yet it cannot be attached to persons against whom one can successfully rebel, and is thus virtually impossible to resist.

There is thus a vicious circle. According to Marcuse (1964p. 24) the emphasis on consumerism leads to a seeming levelling of class distinctions. At least as far as material goods are concerned, everyone acquires similar goals: "Worker and boss enjoy the same TV programmes and visit the same resorts" (Marcuse, 1964 24). This not only keeps production at a high level, but ensures that conflict is at least contained, even if not eliminated. So the status quo is more readily maintained, and

it incorporates sexism. Conversely, sexism helps maintain capitalism, firstly by legitimating the role of housewife and mother as unpaid reproducer of daily and generational labour; and secondly, through the mechanism of desublimation, by purveying a false sense of material and sexual well-being.

Keenly motivated though we are in the way described at the outset of this paper, we are accordingly sceptical of the possibility of sexual emancipation on any significan scale without a concomitant social transformation. For at least until then, sexist mythification, sustained by the conservative mechanisms we have outlined, is invaluable to the continued success of the capitalist order. And what woman can reasonably be expected to demur when the media authoritatively insist that she has attained liberation without struggle or bloodshed? She has, after all, individuality in her make up, monthly freedom with Lillets, daily sexuality in the foam of her bath, independence in her perfume, and a revolution sowm onto the back pocket of her jeans.

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FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

22nd -25th April: Censorship in South Africa. Dept. of Public Administration, University of Cape Town. Convener: KG Druker, Tel 021 226341

19th-31st May: Fourth Cape Town International Film Festival. 28 Features. 60 Documentaries. Will reflect the best in contemporary world cinema. Education programme will focus on Third World cinema Director: James Polley, Educational Film Unit, c/o Centre for Extra-Mural Education, University of Cape Town, Rondebosch 7700 Cape Town

21st-26th July: Ethnographic Film Festival. Historical material not previously seen will ne screened. Andrew Tracey and Gei Zantzinger's films on the Mbira and their new series on Shona music will be shown and discussed.. The festival will be attended by a number of internationally renowned academics. Organized by the School of Dramatic Art, University of the Witwatersrand. For further information please contact John van Zyl