

## Advertising and the Philosophy of Jean Gebser

Kevin Williams  
Shepherd College

### Preface

This paper is derived from a talk entitled *Mind, Myth and Magic: A Gebserian Critique of Advertising* which I gave at the 1996 meeting of the Jean Gebser Society in Pittsburgh, PA. The paper was conceived at the close of the 1995 meeting when a colleague asked if I was able to use Gebser's thought in the undergraduate classroom. I currently teach media studies, and I do teach Gebser in my *Communication: Advertising and Imagery* class. This paper is meant to outline my use of Gebser's thought in the classroom for the critical analysis of advertising. Because of the nature of this journal, I have presupposed that the reader has at least a moderate familiarity with Gebser's work. (See the Mickunas article earlier in this journal for an introduction to Gebser's work.) I would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Algis Mickunas and Elizabeth Lozano with whom I have spent many hours discussing Gebser's work.

### Advertising and the Philosophy of Jean Gebser

As it is said so often and in so many ways, advertising permeates the contemporary mediascape. Advertising sells us products, services and ideas. Ads differentiate the competition, forge corporate identities, urge product use, expand product distribution, communicate product information, increase brand preference and buyer loyalty. Ads promote social behaviors, such as the use of condoms and anxiety over bad-breath. They also raise awareness of problems associated with drug abuse and sexually transmitted diseases. Ads create and perpetuate a cycle of conspicuous consumption and waste; they attempt to create desires in us that did not previously exist; they attempt to sell us things we do not need. It has even been argued that advertising fulfills socio-cultural functions once met by art and religion (Dyer, 1982; Berger, 1972). Even at a cursory glance we can see that advertisements do not simply sell goods, services and ideas; they communicate values which are tied to economics and politics. You might say that advertisements sell ourselves to us.

The purpose of this paper is to consider advertising in light of the philosophy of Jean Gebser. It is my contention that Gebser's study of the emergence, history and variations of human consciousness reveals a path not taken toward understanding the rhetoric of advertising. More importantly, Gebser's work solves some of the problems that contemporary critics have had when attempting to analyze, decode or understand advertisements. Put in a few words, advertising appeals to magical, mythical and mental consciousness, and provides us with a sign that the mental-rational awareness characteristic of our epoch appears to be giving way to integral consciousness. The explication and implication(s) of these claims will be the focus of this paper. By explicating the correlations between advertising expressivity and Gebser's theories, this critique will also lend itself to the general understanding of what is very broadly being called "media (or visual) literacy."

### Advertising and Mental–Conceptual Consciousness

When asked today what something “really” is, the answer is generally given in scientific terms, most often in the terms of physics and physiology. For example, recently on NPR’s Morning Edition, the question, “why is the sky blue?” was posed to Joel Achenback, writer of the popular *Why Things Are* books. The answer, if I can recall correctly the radio broadcast, had to do with the density of the atmosphere, the scattering of short wavelength components of visible sunlight by air molecules, the curvature of the atmosphere and the absorption and reflection of specific light waves. In other words, to answer the question “why,” an appeal to physics and cyanometry (the study and measurement of the relative blueness of the sky) was made.

However, as I look out my window while typing these lines I cannot help but notice that the sky is not blue, but rather a milky and mottled gray. The idea that the sky is blue is an abstraction; it is a theoretical vision complementary to but removed from concrete experience. To say “the sky is blue” (as Nietzsche would suggest) is less a statement of fact than an interpretation<sup>1</sup>.

Interpretations, it should be noted, are made on the basis of (often unexplicated) assumptions. The statement, “the sky is blue,” assumes at least several important things. First, we are looking at the sky during the day; the night sky is not blue. Second, we are looking at the sky when it is clear; a clouded sky may be bluish, but is not simply blue. Third, we are looking at the sky; the sky can be experienced by senses other than vision and can be referred to in acts of communication such as writing (i.e., the “blue” sky can be signified in black and white). These assumptions are significant because they position our awareness; they define a way of conceiving the sky as opposed to describing an experience of the sky. The statement deals with the sky as an object and not with the sky as phenomenon. Thus, to say “the sky is blue” is to favor a form of thought, or to assume a structure of awareness, and to reveal a particular consciousness of the world. Jean Gebser calls that particular structuring of consciousness the “mental structure.”

The mental structure of consciousness is rational, conceptual, discursive, and historical. According to Gebser (1991), the mental structuring of consciousness emerged as dominant in Western thought around 1250 AD, although adumbrations can be found in the classical Greek theory of knowledge, the Hebrew doctrine of salvation and Roman legal and political theory (p. 74). But the defining sign of the mutation occurred scarcely 500 years ago, during the Renaissance, with the invention of perspective and the dawning awareness of three-dimensional space.

Perspective, as has been noted by many scholars, is itself an awareness of the world. The word perspective, deriving from the Latin term *perspectiva* means “seeing through” or “seeing clearly,” and the intentionality expressed in perspectival painting is a seeing through of space (Gebser, 1991, p. 19; Merleau-Ponty, 1964). More precisely, perspectival painting expresses the emergence of an awareness of space that locates the seeing eye, the object seen, and the distance between them (Panofski, in Gebser, 1991, p.

<sup>1</sup> While it may be argued that the statement, “the sky is blue,” is an oversimplification of the scientific perspective (and, indeed it is), I am interested here in concrete statements – things that people will say – and with how those expressions (even if considered popular as opposed to scientific) will be explained within a specific discourse.

19). By expressing space in a way that locates subject, object and distance across a two-dimensional plane, perspectival painting illuminates a perception of space and subject-object relations (Gebser, 1991, p. 18). Like other forms of expression, however, perspective is an optional way of seeing the world, a way of making sense sensible, a relationship between body and world; it is not a copy, representation or reproduction of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 1964; Berger, 1972).

Perspectival thought, however, has several important implications. First, the awareness of perspectivity makes possible technical drafting as well as what we call "realism" in painting, and is thus a necessary condition for the development of modern, techno-science as well as perspectival art. The use of technical drafting, as a rhetorical device and as a sign of mental-rational consciousness, is common in advertising: Dodge/Chrysler use technical language, blue-prints, and three-dimensional graphs in their ads for the Minivan and Avenger. The "You can't buy a more impressive car for less," ad for the Toyota Corolla also uses the spatializing, linearity of technical drafting and printed text. 3M plastics and Aldus PageMaker desktop publishing software also make use of a similar style and rhetoric in their ads. A television ad for the Pontiac Grand Am also uses the blue-print motif (here in 3-D computer graphics), and makes grandiose claims to technical expertise: The car features a "drive train built to Aerospace standards."

When we find signs of the propensity to measure and spatialize, symbolized in the ads above by the blue-prints, we are within the mental structure. Such rhetoric is not reserved for cars, however. Even an ad for Clarion "Maximum Effects" mascara, which pictures a tape measure under a woman's eye with the caption "get maximum effects: Measurably longer, measurably thicker lashes," appeals to mental-rational consciousness.

Second, note that perspective meant "seeing clearly," and the blue sky, in the example above, is the "clear" sky. Indeed, mental-rational consciousness strives for clarity, even at the expense of conceiving of things in an ideal state – a blue sky. The "real," for mental consciousness, is actually the ideal, the abstract and the conceptual.

Consider the ads for Claritin, a medicine for relief from allergy symptoms. Claritin, as the name implies, makes the connection between clarity of thought, clarity of breath and Claritin medicine. "Claritin," the ads states, "provides clear benefits," "clear relief." "Clarity," Gebser notes, is where there is no further search." Indeed, the ad would have us believe precisely that. There are several pictures used in the Claritin ads. One features a sun in the form of a Claritin pill (symbolizing the dawn) rising up above a green field (symbolizing pollen) into a blue sky with fluffy clouds (symbolizing both clarity of sky and potential rain/allergic reaction). The picture alludes to the dawn, the coming of daylight, the awakening of mental consciousness. Another picture features a woman's face with clear, pronounced forehead – also a symbol of the awakening of mental-rational thought. Adding to the appeal to mental-conceptual consciousness is the inclusion of a large amount of printed text, much of it in highly technical language and in very small print. The fine print is a technical, rational explanation of what the product is (chemically) and what it will do to you (biologically). The ads strives to signify the clear, the ideal, the conceptual.

Third, perspectival seeing demands a certain relationship between three things—a seeing subject, and the space in-between them. Perspectival thought is — a ego-thought; the world seen by an eye that is an I. This I/eye is directed at an object—it sees something from a (singular) position (in time and space). Moreover, it sees this something as separate from itself, as distant. The subject is separate from the object which it (the subject) apprehends and contemplates.

The ego can be signified in ads in several ways. Ads often use people who are recognized as individuals. Macintosh PowerBook and Power Macintosh ads feature celebrities and stars, such as Todd Rundgren, Frances Lear, Tama Janowitz and others, who are known for their innovated and individualistic work. The ego is signified in all pictures and photographs that deploy the signs of the specific moment as seen from a specific point of view. And, ads appeal directly to the ego via language that uses the term "I" to refer to the product or reader, as in Bell Telephone's "I" plan.

Fourth, when considering perspective, it is important to note that the space in-between the subject and object is measurable. The object is, then, apprehended rationally. Rationality is directed, discursive thought. The word rationality is derived from the Latin word ratio which means "to reckon" and "to calculate" in the sense of "to think" and "understand" or "to reason" (Gebser, 1991, p. 74). Rational thought is directed and measured. It is by definition the ability to weigh and measure thought, to be clear and direct in one's thinking. In turn, to be irrational is to lack reason and mental clarity. It is also important to note that the terms rational and irrational both describe types of numbers—measures (as I have described above when considering the common use of technical drafting and blue-prints).

Fifth, mental-rational, perspectival thought also posits in this subject-object-space trinity a specific relationship between "man" and nature. The use of the term man, while politically incorrect, is quite appropriate for this discussion. According to Gebser, the term mental derives from a word-field that opens from the Sanskrit root, ma, from which we derive the Greek word *menis*, also meaning wrath and courage; *menos*, meaning resolve, anger, courage, and power; *mens*, in Latin, meaning intent, anger, thinking, thought, understanding, deliberation, disposition, mentality, imagination; and, "man," in the sense that "man is the measure of all things" (as in Protagoras). All of these ideas are bound, as well, in the expression "man," although they are rendered mute in the scientific, mental-rational description of man for which man is seen biologically. Nature is "out there," it is objective stuff to be used and defined by man because nature is without mind and is therefore dumb—a play of objects and forces.

Take for example an advertisement for Dodge/Chrysler minivans that ran as a pull-out on the back of the cover of Newsweek, October 11, 1993. As you open the magazine the back of the cover has printed in a large white capital letters, "for every car company striving to build the world's safest minivan, we have four words of advice." To read the four words you must pull open the special insert. The text continues from the previous page, and reads, "gentlemen, start your [photo] copiers." The letters are legible (i.e., clear). The words form a directed thought—an appeal to a measurable goal (to build the "safest"). The text thus begins to address an implied reader. While the "real" reader may be anyone who comes across this ad, the reader is addressed as if "he" were an executive at another, less proficient, car company. Of course, few readers will hold such jobs, and the ad is more likely targeting the middle class family market. Moreover, the

verbal appeal interpellates the reader as masculine (although the reader may be male or female) both by the use of the term "gentlemen" and by the use of the phrase, "start your copiers," appropriated obliquely from auto racing (a sport of power, speed and danger; all traditionally coded as masculine; all signs of the masculine bias in mental-rational consciousness).

The printed text is also paternalistic; it speaks down to the implied reader, and it appears as a taunt, an office room "mine is bigger than yours," or a challenge, "I bet you can't. . .". This appeal offers up an air of the board room, of professional challenge and technical ability. It asks us to (rationally) consider if we or our present mode of transportation "measures up."

Moreover, a good father (remember that the rhetoric interpellates the reader from a male subject position) provides for the safety of "his" family; it is the "right," rational thing to do: Gebser notes that "'right' does not simply mean 'to the right' or 'the right side' but also 'correct' and 'direct,' in the sense of leading toward a goal. . . . The right side represents the masculine as well as the wakeful principle — is the emphasis on the paternal aspect inherent in every legislation and act of judgment" (p. 79). The appeals to the codes of masculinity, to directional and rational thought, and to linearity and measurement, are all signs of mental-rational consciousness that are found in many ads.

Another common method of appealing to mental-rational consciousness is using the rhetoric of the supreme achievement of mental-rational consciousness — science. For example, an ad for the Glaxo Institute for Digestive Health opens with the statement, "it's only heartburn, I should learn to live with it.....right?" Below the caption is the picture of a man with grayish hair, a blue-gray sweater over collared shirt; his face is concerned, his brow furled; he appears to be in his fifties or early sixties. It appears that he is the one posing the question above the picture. This arrangement personalizes the ad, as it appeals to an ego (see above). Below the picture is a red box with a survey. The survey itself is a rhetorical device. It appeals to scientific measurement, statistics and other values of mental-rational thought. It is interesting to note that the seven questions on the survey all require either yes or no answers. This requirement, to answer yes or no, splits the possible polar opposition into duality.

"Duality," Gebser notes, is the splitting and tearing apart of [mythical] polarity" (p. 86). The reader respondent must choose one or the other; that is, make a rational, measured selection. The "heartburn sufferer" is then referred to the medical expertise of a doctor, the highly educated, rational expert. Indeed, if one suffers from dis-ease, one best seek expert advice (in the mental structure). And such advice is derived mathematically, statistically, rationally.

Using similar appeals to science are ads for Habitrol anti-smoking patches, the Sensonic toothbrush by Teledyne Water Pik, which claims that the toothbrush is "now available in sonic technology" (will scientific wonders never cease?), and Memorex audio tape made with MRX2 oxide, a trademark pseudo-element, or, as the case may be, just a fancy name for rust. Such claims are also made for health and beauty products such as an ad for Jergen's Skin Care Bars that features the tag: "Jergen's, science you can touch." Pervonia Botanica uses scientific rhetoric to advertise "skin care for him;" the ad features a picture of a man and large clear letters stating "nature and science."

The appeal to the rational nature of science is pushed to the limit in an ad for Ergogenic and Metabolic Consulting Services (E=MCs). This ad opens with the statement: "you'd be surprised what science can uncover..." The ad goes on to discuss its program, "backed by decades of research and based on state-of-the-art laboratory analyses of your blood using precision technology" (a small picture of the gears of a watch are inserted here). The program is called ION (Individualized Optimal Nutrition), and it is for blood analysis. What is striking is less the claims, which nevertheless bring to mind the quackery of early twentieth century advertisers of snake oil and electric belts, but the large image on the right. Just below the words, "you'd be surprised what science can uncover..." is a picture of a woman who on one hand looks and acts like a scientist: She wears black horn rimmed glasses and a white scientist's lab jacket; she is inspecting a beaker of green liquid. On the other hand, she does not look or act like a scientist because she is pulling open her lab coat to expose her lace bikini underwear! Yes, now we know what science can uncover – it is her nearly naked body. The blatant sexual sell is tempered (although not much) by a scientific and rational rhetoric. This is not to suggest that the ad or product is scientific, but that it draws upon the rhetoric of science to appeal to mental-rational consciousness.

The above are just an outline of the ways that advertising can draw on and appeal to mental-rational consciousness. Mental-rational consciousness is perspectival, spatial, and conceptual; it favors duality, rationality, causality and masculinity. Signs of mental-conceptual consciousness include ego positioning, measurement, individuality, spatialization and appeals to science. We, as readers, are interpellated by a structuring of consciousness that we already understand (even if tacitly), and thus the ads that deploy these signs make sense, even when their claims are extraordinary or even downright comical.

However, Gebser points out that while mental-rational consciousness is the presupposed basis of our lives, and while we are expected, as professional critics and lay persons, to criticize advertisements through rational analysis, mental-rational consciousness is only one consciousness structure, and, I might add, it is not the dominant structure of advertising. There is no evidence suggesting that it is a better or more accurate descriptor of the world than any other – it is simply a variation of consciousness. Thus, we will now turn our attention to the mythical structure of consciousness, and to what Gebser's thoughts about myth can teach us about understanding advertisements.

### **Mythical-Imagistic Consciousness**

A prevalent criticism of contemporary advertising hinges on the observation that contemporary ads rely more and more on imagery and less and less on rational statements (see Postman 1985; Ewen 1988; Jhally 1987; Berger 1972). The import of this critique is that mental-rational thought, so clearly manifest in literate, print-based communication, is threatened by the irrationality of imagery. This argument is tied to notions (dating back at least to McLuhan) that culture at large is shifting from logical, print-based communication to the predominately visual and imagistic communication of electronic media.

Postman (1985) suggests that spoken and written statements encourage scrutiny and rational contemplation, and that they engage the subject in rational argumentation and

logical debate. He suggests further that imagery simply appeals to consciousness. Rhetorically speaking, Postman continues, images are faster than arguments; judgment becomes based on look (is it appealing or not?) and not on logic (does it make sense?), on aesthetics (does it catch my eye?) and not on rational argumentation (given this, then what?). Postman suggests that imagery engages the subject in depth, imagery, style, attitude and affective association. That is, images engage the subject in phenomena which, according to Postman, logical criteria do not apply.

The conclusion reached by these and other critics (who argue from within the mental-rational structure) is that our cultural sense of meaning and discourse, our ideas of history, democracy and citizenship, and our notions of beauty and truth are at stake (Moyers, citation in Collins, 1989, p. 2). According to these critics, the contemporary citizen is less a critic and more a consumer, is less a political participant and more an audience waiting to be amused (Postman, 1985).

A reading of Gebser would suggest, however, that the use of imagery in advertising is not a sign of an epistemic shift from rationality to imagery, because imagery would be recalling a (ever-present but often tacit) mythic consciousness. "The mythical structure," Gebser notes, "is distinct from . . . [other structures] in that it bears the stamp of the imagination (*imago*, Latin "image")." "The mythic structure. . . has an imaginary consciousness [emphasis mine], reflected in the imagistic nature of myth and responsive to the soul and sky of the ancient cosmos" (p. 67). Gebser's studies in mythic consciousness provide us with a way to understand the imagistic nature of contemporary advertising.

The idea that advertisements function mythically, however, is not new. Leymore (in Dyer, 1982) notes that, "to the constant nagging dilemmas of the human condition, advertising gives simple solutions. . . [it] simultaneously provokes anxiety and resolves it" (p. 2). Advertisements present stories (i.e., they are a form of utterance) that resolve cultural contradictions and provide clues for living well in a complex and often confusing society (Dyer, 1982).

Apprehended in its own terms, myth is not a false story about the past, but a system of communication, a type of speech, a mode of signification, or way of understanding the world. For Gebser, myth is a structure of consciousness that emerged as dominant in Western history around the second millennium BC, and is still manifest today, although it is often obscured by the mental-conceptual bias of our time.

The relationships between myth and "speech," "polarity" (i.e., problem-solution) and "clues for living" (noted in the Leymore and Dyer citations above), are significant. The word "myth" comes from (Greek) *mythos* meaning "speech," "word," and "report," and *mythonami* meaning "to speak." The root of "myth," however, is the Sanskrit *mu* from which we get the polar oppositions of *mythos* and *mutus* — the speaker and the mute.

Polarity, Gebser notes, is required in any kind of psychic life; polarity emerges with the human awareness of temporality and the rhythmical movement of nature — day and night; and with the latter emerges psyche. From the ambivalent root (*mu*) a depth of silence is announced from which "speaking" or "word" emerges. As Mickunas has noted, there is a silent background in our language even today when we speak, a silent richness of speaking which we never announce: This silence recalls the mythic dimension of consciousness.

The problem-solution formula is a much used technique in advertising. Advertisers advertise products which claim to solve a problem, and in many cases create the problem that must be solved. This creation of a problem forms a silence from which the solution can speak. Zest soap announces that "soap leaves a film you can feel on your skin;" Zest brand soap can alleviate that problem. Likewise, a Jergens soap ad proclaims that "itchy dry skin is out." And, Loreal skin creme notes you can "replenish what's lost by day and wake to revitalized skin by morning." One might argue that all dandruff shampoo ads and products are examples of creating a problem which can be solved by the use of a product. The duality of the mental-rational structure, discussed above, is here giving way to a polarity—a play of oppositions where one does not choose between but recognizes both.

In creating problems that "must" be solved, and can be solved by using the product, ads sell us more than products, services and ideas: They sell us a way of life. "Myths," says Gebser, "are the collective dreams" of a people (p. 68). Myths tell us stories about ourselves; they expose the underlying desires and values of our culture. "The moral imperative of acquisitiveness in contemporary advanced capitalistic societies is manifested in such strongly held values as private property, security, competitiveness, and achievement (often [as Alexis de Toqueville pointed out] at the expense of others). This imperative is evident in children's pecuniary enculturation—teaching them how to grow up to be good consumers" (Himmelstein, 1984, p. 40). By telling us stories, provoking and resolving contradictions, kindling desire and forging dreams, ads function much like myths.

An ad campaign that has been running successfully for many years, and which draws widely on a mythic appeal are the Marlboro cigarette ads. Consider the Marlboro man. We generally find him pictured against the background of nature. He is symbolically defined by nature: He is wild, free, unrestrained by society, and yet he is transcendent of nature. He is, after all, civilized; he is a tamer and controller of nature. The Marlboro Man rides on the polar opposition of nature-culture (so widely discussed by Levi-Strauss and other cultural anthropologists and semioticians).

Gebser notes that "pictorial representations of man's emergent awareness of his enmeshment in nature (which express this by the very fact of depicting it) are . . . illustrative of man's further step out of this enmeshment into the reality of mythical consciousness" (p. 63). The Marlboro ads are effective, in part, precisely because they call the reader out of the mental-rational present and into the dream-image of myth.

Specifically, the Marlboro ads draw on the myths of masculine transcendence, manifest destiny, and the frontier as they recoup the past. This past, however, is not a "real" past (a past of a historical being; that would be the perview of mental-rational consciousness). These are images of a mythical past; a silence that speaks. "Only when the unspoken communicates its silent message," Gebser notes, "does the spoken word convey the depth and polarity that constitute the tension of real life" (p. 68). It is at this mythic level of communication, the speaking silence, that we encounter (using the terms suggested by Postman, above) the depth (of silence), imagery (of the frontier), style (of the cowboy), attitude (of masculine transcendence) and affective association (of manifest destiny) that fly in the face of rationality. Indeed, the Marlboro Man is more mythically poetic than rationally prosaic.

Mythic, dream imagery are present as well in the Schick Tracer FX razor ads in which a woman shaves, "you're the sensitive type? I like that." The image of the "sensitive guy," who is visually silent (i.e., not so common a theme). He appears as well in Liz Claiborne ads. The "sensitive guy" image can be seen along side its polar opposite, the "manly-man," as in the Brute cologne ad, "Men are Back," which features the image of a young boxer. Mythic imagery also provides the rhetorical force for many ads which feature African American men; indeed, a quick glance through men's magazines reveals black men often pictured either as musicians (usually jazz musicians) or sportsmen. The Virginia Slims, You've Come a Long way Baby, ads forge a polar image of women in a mythical then and now. Stolichnaya has drawn on Soviet imagery in Capitalistic clothes to sell vodka: An ad, Freedom of Vodka, playing on the capitalistic rhetoric of "freedom of choice," pictures the V.I. Mukhina's eighty foot high statue, "Worker and Kolkhoz Woman," that stands in Moscow, but instead of hammer and scythe the figures hold flowers and are separated by a bottle of vodka (a metaphor, perhaps, for an escalating divorce rate and its cause?). These images, as implied above, do not function logically or rationally but rather by metaphor and association; in semiotic terms they play more on the vertical, paradigmatic axis of language than the horizontal, synchronic axis. These ads not only tell stories that create and resolve conflict, and forge and foster images, but they work to instill us with the desire to become that image.

The presence of desire in advertising reveals another level of mythic consciousness – the erotic. Eros is, on the one hand, a transitional figure between the mythic-imaginable and mental-rational structures. Eros, as we generally take it to mean today (within the mental structure), is the directed arrow of desire. On the other hand, Campbell (1988) points out that Eros was both the youngest and the oldest of the gods (p. 152). This polarity reveals a mythic dimension of eros. Such an eros would be desire, but not necessarily directed desire. Taken mythically, eros is not a negative desire, that is a directed desire or desire as a need to fill a lack or void (a desire for something) as in Plato and Freud, but a positive desire, an enveloping sensuality and eroticism that floats cultural practices; that reveals the depth of the utterance, the silence with which the utterance speaks.

Perhaps most pervasive, or at least the most discussed and criticized (largely due to the influence and theoretical import of feminism) is imagery of women in ads. Such imagery creates and fosters a mythos of feminine beauty. Indeed, the feminine speaks through silence to such a degree that many ads simply picture a woman and the name of the product or brand, or (as in truck magazines) simply place a woman on their product.

Beauty in ads, however, is reserved for a certain color, shape, size, posture, comportment. Thus, it is not beauty per se that is of interest but a certain variation of theme of beauty. The feminine is, first, the polar opposition of the masculine. The feminine is "soft" (as in ads for Nivea skin care products), and sometimes "strong and soft" (as in ads for Finesse hair spray), "pure" (as in ads for Neutrogena), "simple" (as in Calvin Klein ads), "passionate" (as in ads for Jovan White Musk), "mysterious" (as in the Cover Girl Incognito ads). Several ads incorporate an entire word field that signifies "woman." For example, in an ad for Vanilla Musk perfume by Coty a nude woman, a nude woman

with her back to the viewer, is surrounded by the words, "natural, sensual, innocent, passionate, romantic and mysterious."

Thus, we can begin to see that ads may function mythically on at least two levels. They may call upon a mythic consciousness (i.e., ads can communicate on a level that is not mental-rational but that is mythical-imagistic), and they may refer to specific myths (e.g., the myth of feminine beauty, masculine transcendence, mythos of origin, creativity, progress and so on). An implication of recognizing the interconnection of myth and imagery is that ads that rely on imagery can indeed be "read." Thus, while the critics mentioned above are correct when they assert that imagery is not logical, that it is irrational; they are incorrect in their consideration of imagery as deficient in relation to rationality.

Although it is one of the hardest ideas in Gebser to grasp, a major contribution of Gebser's thought are his attempts to think mythically even while writing a book (a mental-rational endeavor). Gebser is careful throughout his work to caution us as to the pitfalls of such interpretive work. We must be wary, he notes, of reading one structure in the terms of another.

Mythical-imagistic consciousness is dream-like speaking; it favors polarity, undergone experience and imagery. As was the case when considering mental-rational consciousness, we, as cultural participants, are interpellated by a structuring of consciousness that we already understand; even if tacitly, and thus the ads make sense, even when we cannot put our finger (i.e., point to) why they work. If we can grasp the mythic dimension of advertising imagery we do not have to fall prey to its rhetoric. We will be able to see the dream laid out before us, and gain an ability to ask if these are the dreams we want.

### Magical-Emotional Consciousness

Living today, in the twilight of the mental-rational structure, we will find that magic is, in official discourse, completely set aside as irrational. This is, from a mental perspective, correct. And yet, we see in tabloid journals, television talk shows, and in popular news magazines like *Newsweek* and *Time* a preponderance of stories regarding the magical, the mystical and the mysterious – the power of prayer to heal, for example. The interest in such things can be seen as a sign of the ever-presence of a magical structure of consciousness.

It has, in fact, been argued that advertising functions magically (Williams, in During, 1993). Raymond Williams calls advertising "a highly organized and professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions functionally very similar to magical systems in [other] societies but rather strangely co-existent with highly developed scientific technology" (Williams, in Dyer, 1982, p. 185). Inglis (in Dyer, 1982) calls advertisers modern Shaman whose "anonymous vantage in society permits him [sic] to articulate a novel magic which offers to meet the familiar pains of a particular society and history, to soften or sharpen ambition, bitterness, solitude, lust, failure and rapacity" (p. 2). Williams and Ingles are both correct, and their statements are in harmony with Gebser's explication of magic consciousness.

It is hard, however, to specify a set of dates for a magic "epoch." We find traces of magic consciousness from the earliest recorded human expressions (cave paintings) through

contemporary culture. Magic consciousness is, in Gebser's terms, a transition from the sleep-like quality and harmony with nature of the archaic structure (a discussion of which is beyond the scope of this paper) to the dawning of awareness: It is sleep-like in quality, but in it arises the adumbration of waking – the germ of need (and turning a want into a need is a basic tenant of advertising). For magic consciousness, the human is no longer in the world, the human begins to have a world; we see in the magic structure the emergence of self consciousness.

As with mental and mythical consciousness, there is a word-field which provides us with clues concerning the structure of magic consciousness. We derive the term magic from the Indo-European root *mag(h)*, from which we get "make," "mechanism," "machine" and "might" (Gebser, 1991, p. 46). Indeed, "make," as in the power to "make," is a key to understanding the magic structure and its manifestations in advertising: Medicine makes pain go away; a certain shampoo alleviates dandruff; the car makes you sexy.

Take for example the Smirnoff Vodka ad, "Pure Party." The ad pictures a well-to-do urban apartment. There is a picture window revealing a cityscape complete with skyscrapers. The room is furnished with a mahogany table and chairs. A bowl of fruit sits on the table. A vase with arranged flowers sits on the windowsill. There is a chandelier hanging from the ceiling and a portrait of a woman hanging on the wall. In the center of the picture (running vertically) is a large bottle of Smirnoff vodka; its size is disproportionate to the domestic scene.

What I find remarkable in this ad is what happens to the urban domestic scene inside the bottle – within the presence of the vodka. The vodka is a magic agent with the ability to transform. In the presence of the liquor, a yellow table cloth and brightly colored plastic party-ware appear on the table, where none had been before. The wooden bowl of fruit is transformed into a crystal punch bowl. The flower arrangement and the chandelier become bunches of multicolored balloons.

Most significant, in my opinion, is the transformation of the woman in the painting. Outside the bottle, the painting's frame is lavishly detailed – baroque. The woman is brunette, and her hair is tied neatly behind her head. She is without facial makeup. Her expression is demure; her right hand is reservedly crossed in front of her blouse. Her blouse is loose, slightly wrinkled and tied at the elbow. She wears a large dark sash around her waist.

In the presence of the vodka, however, she is completely transformed. Her hair is now blonde; it hangs loose and falls about her shoulders. She is now smiling. She is wearing mascara; she has full red lips. Her left hand is upturned and holds a large drink with lemon wedge (presumably a vodka and tonic). She also appears to have had a bust lift; her breasts are much more full and upturned. The sash is reduced to a thin belt of some sort, and she appears, in general, to have lost some weight. The vodka acts as a magic agent of transformation of the woman's image. She is transformed from ordinary into ideal (within current cultural parameters).

This power to make and transform is a rhetorical device employed often in ads for liquor. Bacardi rum has followed the Smirnoff ads with the "just ad Bacardi" campaign. These ads picture some relatively dry and flat image that is transformed into a hot, wet, exciting space populated with people when and where rum is poured onto the image.

For example, a map of the U.S., becomes a tropical paradise; a winter wilderness becomes a party of sail-boarders; a black-tie formal becomes red-hot disco. The liquor makes the transformation possible.

This appeal to the power to make is also found in ads, such as Natural Touch Soft Contact Lenses that can make your eyes more beautiful and breathtaking, to shoes (such as Nike's) that can make you run faster, become more healthy or relieve stress, to ads for Jockey underwear that makes you perform better (in sports, the ad suggests), to hair coloring, such as Miss Clairol that makes not only your hair but you younger. There are many more examples. Actually, most ads make an appeal to magic consciousness. That is, the product is positioned as a magical element, and you (by consuming the product) become the product and take on its power.

The signs of magic consciousness thus appear at the level of vitality; they are floated by vitality and emotionality; they are totemic: The car bears the power of the car; you purchase the car and you get the status of the car. This is contemporary totemism.

Gebser also notes a correlation between the words "make," "magic" and "machine." This clue helps to explain Williams' observation that the magic systems in tribal societies and in Western machines are indeed connected. The machine is itself magic in its ability to make: The car makes you go faster.

Following from the recognition of an interconnection of magic and making, Gebser notes five "characteristics" of magic consciousness – egolessness, a point-like unity with the world, spacelessness and timelessness, merging with nature, and the reaction to such a merging.

Magic consciousness is a collective consciousness, all members of a community are linked together; it is egoless. This "interconnection between all things" provides a necessary "pathway" for magic to travel and work. Instead of the individual (a mental-rational concept), we have at this level of understanding a group ego or collective: The shamans power is manifest because all share in it; all must believe in it, or it will not work. Our notions of mass (e.g., mass communications, mass audiences), and collective consciousness refer back to magic consciousness.

Ads appeal to this egolessness by providing us with things (totems) that will make us fit in, belong, smell proper, be seen in the right clothes. They sell us notions of belonging, even while provoking a deficient notion of individuality. We can all be individuals in our Nike shoes! We have the freedom to choose between fast food restaurants (which all sell hamburgers and French fries).

This collective (mass) consciousness is expressed "in the visible interchangeability of the real and the symbolic" (Gebser, 1991, p. 48). This is to say that, for magic consciousness, there is a point-like unitary world. Here Gebser provides us with a clue (complementary to the critique provided by Feminism) as to why we see such a proliferation of fragmented body parts in ads – eyes, legs, butts, lips, etc.. "The magic world is . . . a world of *pars pro toto*, in which the part can and does stand for the whole" (Gebser, 1991, p. 46). The lips, the fingers, the hands, the eyes, the face are the whole: The right eye liner makes "you," that is, all of you, beautiful. Impact makeup transforms not only your lips or eyes but your self and soul. Note as well that ads do not inspire you; they do not suggest you work hard to become beautiful, they try to connect you – immediately. You use the product (the magical agent) and you become beautiful. You

wear Madonna brand clothes and you get the power of Madonna; a self transformation takes place. There is no distance or separation between the product and its symbolization. Where we had identity in the mental structure, and polarity in the mythic, we have unity in the magic structure.

Magic works irrespective of time and place — it is Spaceless and Timeless. (I wish to recall here the current discussion of prayer where healings are performed irrespective of the location or time of the prayer). Indeed, spacelessness and timelessness are conditions of point to point unity. Gebser notes, "all magic, even today, occurs in the natural-vital, egoless, spaceless and timeless sphere. This requires — as far as present-day man is concerned — a sacrifice of consciousness; it occurs in the state of trance, or when consciousness dissolves as a result of mass reactions, slogans, or "isms." If we are not aware of this sphere in ourselves, it remains an entry for all kinds of magic influences. It does not matter whether such magic influences emanate knowingly from people or unknowingly from things which, in this sphere, have a vital magic knowledge of their own, or are linked with such vital knowledge" (p. 49).

Not only do Gebser's comments describe the trance-like experience of television viewing in general, and the vacant gaze (when not critically attuned) into the ad in particular, he notes that we are susceptible to magic precisely because the presupposition of rationality obscures it and allows it to pass unacknowledged.

To induce a trance-like state, the form magic takes does not want to be complex but simple, repetitive, lulling: Incantation is a pervasive device of advertising magic: Ray Charles chants "uh, huh," and "it's the right one baby," in Pepsi commercials; people repeat jingles of all kinds; we get jingles "stuck in our heads;" Even presidential candidate George Bush turned to magical rhetoric and incantation by repeating "don't worry be happy," during his successful bid for office.

The "receiver" of an ad (if this term can be used at all) is expected to be moved by the ad without asking why: "Why ask why?" chants the Budweiser commercials. "Why" is, of course, a rational question. Magic, on the other hand, wants us to be in its audial depth, surrounded and enveloped in the spell. To see this, as Gebser notes, requires a suspension of our rational selves. If we are unaware of magic's presence, we are open to all sorts of magic influences (and today's spell casters want you to consume for their financial benefit, not your spiritual well-being).

Where for mental consciousness there is a separation of the human from nature, and in mythic consciousness there is a polar relationship, in magic consciousness there is an audial enmeshment in nature. As sounds surround and engulf all within them, so magic consciousness is enveloped in nature without distance or disconnection. There is a merging with nature, and a reaction to that merging. According to Gebser, magic consciousness produced the earliest attempts to control nature in the ritual of cave painting and the hunt (for examples). Magic provides the necessary power to rule rather than to be ruled. Magic provides the power to make manifest. In this conquest to understand and conquer nature, the human with magical consciousness becomes the maker.

Magical consciousness is vital, emotional and audial; it is timeless and spaceless; it favors unity, and a point to point interconnection of all things, and an enmeshment with nature. "In the final analysis," Gebser (1991) says, "our machines and technology,

[our advertising, and] even our present-day power politics arise from our magic roots: Nature and the surroundings must be ruled so that man is not ruled by them.... Every individual who fails to realize that he must rule himself falls victim to that drive" (p. 51).

Thus, as cultural participants, we are as before interpellated by a structuring of consciousness that we already understand, although this is one that we tend to disregard altogether. Thus ads are able to make sense, and work on us even when their claims are extraordinary and even unbelievable. As in myth, by circumventing the presuppositions of mental-rational consciousness, while expecting us to believe the presuppositions of mental-rational consciousness, magic is given a way, an opening to work on us precisely because we don't expect it.

### Integral Consciousness & Diaphaneity

A guiding thesis of Gebser's *The Ever Present Origin* is that mental-rational consciousness is giving way to a structure of consciousness that he calls "integral." Changes in the structuring of consciousness take place, Gebser notes, when the prevailing consciousness structure proves to be no longer adequate for mastering the world (p. 294), and many have proclaimed that we are living in a time of radical change. Much of *The Ever Present Origin* is dedicated to examining this change; to reading the signs that suggest that the three-dimensional, perspectival world of mental-rational consciousness is giving way to a four-dimensional, aperspectival world of integral consciousness. Gebser asserts that we need a "new form of description and statement" to deal with this change. Such a statement cannot be a mental concept, a mythical image or a magical postulate; a unification of relationships, a theory of correspondence or relativation, or a dualistic or causal dependency would already have been achieved by magical, mythical and mental consciousness. The new form, Gebser suggests, would be one of integration. Where the mode of verition and communication for magic consciousness is vital-emotional, for mythic consciousness is imagistic, and for mental-rational consciousness is rational-conceptual, the mode of verition and communication for integral consciousness would be diaphanous, systatic, or in another word, transparent.

By diaphaneity or transparency Gebser does not mean that truth is simply laid bare for all to see, or that communication or understanding are devoid of mediation. He means, in part, that we will be able to see one structure of consciousness through another. This thesis has tremendous importance for understanding the rhetoric of advertising, and, in turn, implies that advertising is itself a sign of the emergence of integral consciousness—by the very fact that ads deploy signs of magic, mythic and mental consciousness.

Recall the ad for the Dodge/Chrysler minivan that was discussed under the subject of mental-conceptual consciousness. The first page of the ad has a black background. It is dark space, symbolic of night and sleep, the purview of magic consciousness, that is punctuated with the large white letters. The letters are legible (i.e., clear); they are literally a white light emerging from the blackness. The words form a directed thought—an appeal to a measurable goal (to build the "safest"). This minivan, the ad suggests, is safe, useful, and functional (and although the connection here is speculative [and speculation is itself a sign of mental-rational consciousness], functionalism is a

highly successful paradigm within the mental-rational structure). A problem was perceived, a solution was found; a mythical polarity was created.

Also, while I discussed the use of printed text and numerical symbols in the Dodge ad as an appeal to rationality, the use of print here also, and at the same time, forms an image of quality. Print can be used to signify literacy, education, rationality, science, and so on. In fact, one does not have to read the print in order to understand the image it forges.

Moreover, one of the paragraphs of the printed text in the minivan ad reads: "NEW 3.8-LITER HIGH-TORQUE V-6. This is available in our expanded length mini-vans. And it means more power for passing. More power for merging. More power to take quick, evasive action in tight spots. Bottom line: more power to stay out of trouble." The appeal to power is an appeal to magic—a technical, machine-making that gives "you" the power of the engine. Thus, while the appeal to technical ability, which uses numbers to measure the engine's performance is one hand mental-rational, it is also, and simultaneously, mythical and magical.

Likewise, the Claritin ad discussed above also uses a large amount of printed text, much of it in highly technical language and in very small print. The print is there more to be seen than to be read. Indeed, the printed text is so small and full of jargon that it is difficult (or boring) to read. Also feeding the mythic dimension of this ad is the appeal to the tides of breathing, which Gebser relates to soul and mythic consciousness. Moreover, Claritin, as the name implies, makes a connection between clarity of thought (mental-rational), clarity of breath (mythical-imagistic) and Claritin medicine (magical-postulate). The image is further complemented by the magic basis of all drugs. With the drug there is no need to change diet, exercise patterns or lifestyle in general; simply take the pill and be remade, cured, fixed. Drugs are truly magical agents.

The becoming of magic, the ability to become something else through rituals (which are the enactment of myth) such as shaving reveal a mythic dimension to the "sensitive guy" razor ad. And, in the Glaxo ad for heartburn treatment, there is the picture of the man, and the appeal to ego (discussed above). It is both he and "me" (i.e., the reader) who has heartburn. This pictured ego can be via magic "your" ego, as any point may be substituted for any other. The ability to read yourself into an ad is a powerful magic aspect of most advertising.

Likewise, when considering the ads that I discussed as mythical, the Marlboro man, for example, is not simply a mythical image. The use of "man" and masculinity is an appeal to the patriarchal bias of mental-rational thought (whose highest sign was God, the Father). Moreover, the cigarette is itself a magic element; it gives you the power of the cowboy, the spirit of the Wild West.

Likewise, the force of eros is strong in advertising not just because sex sells, but because the erotic component of the utterance works at the levels of mental-rational consciousness and mythic-imagistic consciousness simultaneously. For mental consciousness, eroticism is directed, there is a lack to be filled—"I want my MTV." For mythical consciousness, eroticism floats all advertising—the subject of the ad enters a mythical spatial-temporality, a dream-world of imagery and sensuality; a (pointless) desire for desire's sake (i.e., a desire that is not going anywhere but is pervasive)—as in Calvin Klein's ads for One, Obsession and Calvin Klein jeans.

Finally, in the Smirnoff ad, the apartment pictured has a vantage point looking down on the city; it is, perhaps, a penthouse. In any case, it is an appeal to the high mindedness of the mental rational structure. Note as well the mythic polar opposition of the woman's image when in presence of the vodka. The vodka acts as a magic agent of 's transformation of the woman's mythic image.

By relying on magic postulation and mythical images, as well mental concepts, advertising, knowingly or not, can undercut the rational bias of today, and may in fact be another sign that mental rational consciousness is giving way to integral consciousness.

It is important to point out that when considering the transparency of consciousness structures, they are found not in separate ads, but ads in general that deploy signs of several consciousness structures that can be read through each other simultaneously. In these ads, no one structure is read first. Indeed, my choice in writing about one ad as mental-rational, before finally revealing the other layers of the onion, was itself a rhetorical device necessitated by the linear and logical form of the essay. In experience, magic, myth and mental consciousness will not follow linearly, one after another, but will be present diaphanously – one through the other.

An awareness of integral-diaphanous consciousness provides us with a way to be able to read and make sense of ads, not by rationalizing or criticizing their meaning (although this is an important step in learning how to not be taken in by magical and mythical claims), but by seeing simultaneously the structures of consciousness that ads rely upon. This is important because we are today inundated by advertising, and advertising, as noted in the introduction, is not limited to selling products, but sells us our political leaders as well as "our" values and beliefs. An understanding of how consciousness is expressed in ads is then a form of criticism that is useful for the professional and consumer alike.

Moreover, I have hoped to show that when we want to understand the consciousness of our time we can turn to advertisements just as we can turn to mathematics, physics, biology, psychology, philosophy, legal doctrine, political speech, sociology, economics, music, architecture, music and literature (as Gebser has done). Each of these domains has provided signs of the emergence of an integral consciousness, although it remains, to a great degree, unexplicated and misunderstood. As Dyer (1982) has noted, advertising is the official state-art, or perhaps the state of art of post-industrial societies. Advertising is, as well, an access to understanding human consciousness, its history and its variations.

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