Advertising

The groundwork for 20th and 21st century style before the arrival of the computer was prepared by the International Typographic Style, New York School, PushPin, and Pop Art movements, themselves based in Jan Tschichold’s Neue Typographie and the Bauhaus practitioners who established themselves in America. As a result visual language and the broad spectrum of visual communications were changed. The abstraction of visual language (logos, conceptualizations, uses of iconographic language for special purposes, such as advertising), globalization, the geometry-based models of design principles and theory (postmodernism) provide everything necessary for the computer-based production. The concept of a toolkit of primitive shapes (recall Cubism and Kandinsky), European schools of graphics specifically for technical and commercial improvement and teaching The Grid, casting creativity, type, layout, color patterns and seemingly all aspects of visual expression onto a two-dimensional Cartesian plane meant the computer could be integrated easily into work flows. The theory of the Other that arose after the 1970s, cultural diversity, and the increasing simplification of using computers, created a theoretical background to justify its use from faster document production to racial differences in education. Today computer applications, programming and scripting languages, OpenSource movement, easier human- and computer-readable data models that emphasize “semantic interoperability”, and a generation or two of technically confident users undeniably have changed the concept of participation in, and expectations of, visual communication.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Output or Result</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Java, C++</td>
<td>Object-oriented programming; Java includes libraries of code for user interfaces. Available free from java.sun.com</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JavaScript, PHP, Python, JSP, and others</td>
<td>Scripting languages easily incorporated into client’s web page or run on the web server</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flash</td>
<td>Using “scenes” similar to a spreadsheet, users can identify and control multiple threads of sound, image, movement by both a scripting language and controlling content in the cells. Built-in XML object support.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adobe Photoshop [part of “Creative Suite”]</td>
<td>Create and manipulate image files of multiple formats (gif, jpg, png, svg)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adobe Illustrator [part of “Creative Suite”]</td>
<td>Create vector graphics (mathematical representations of images and color); output to pdf, svg, eps, and other to share files</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OpenSource projects</td>
<td>Free and reliable web server software (Apache) and relational database software (MySQL) combined with free libraries to communicate between client/server without relying on a programmer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extensible Markup Language</td>
<td>The sibling to HTML, easy to read, relatively easy to master, to create descriptors of data that can be understood by people and processed easily by computer (using other tools, such as Java, and free libraries or techniques, Ajax, SAX, DOM, JSON, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing files on the Internet</td>
<td>Source of inspiration and content, such as YouTube, but also falsehoods, unsubstantiated opinions and rants (countless blogs, wikis).</td>
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These technologies are within reach of any interested person, without a computer science degree or art training - anyone can create, borrow and manipulate, and liberate creativity. This personal, non-expert, and non-professional participation in the agora of commerce, today’s Internet, is not equally supported by a study or general knowledge with the use of visual sign systems. Some fields of work,
especially “information visualization”, are exploring still the uses, benefits and liabilities, and ways to evaluate visual data sources via the Internet, while others, advertising, build on the print tradition of poster and brochure, but convert it to electronic means. Advertising, unlike any other form of communication theory, knowingly treads between honesty and lying, between what is morally acceptable and what is legally permitted, and commit in schools of advertising resources to understanding sign systems. In this section, we review too briefly some of the threads already introduced about signs and consider their intersection with the poster in the field of advertising. Information professionals can profit from a study of the general public’s use of visual and electronic communication channels and the experts’ own understanding of them.

Advertising has been studied from many p.o.v.: the dominant ones being psychology, sociology, economics, publishing, economics, and linguistics. The expansion of semiotics in advertising analysis affects the object of study and the methods. A semiotic approach is a unified framework, taking in verbal and nonverbal code, along with the entire communicative situation in advertising. As a method of investigation, a theory of signs has lead to several different approaches to studying advertising.

Recall Roland Barthes’ work that is more commonly valued as an analysis of the “rhetoric of the picture.” Building on Saussure’s model of sign (signifiant + signifié = signe) and Hjelmlev’s distinction of denotation and connotation, Barthes points out three messages in an advertisement:

- Linguistic: the product name and the commentary about the product
- Uncoded iconic message (in the image) that denotes the “real object”
- Coded iconic, or symbolic message, connotates the picture - the suggestion usually of something affective. The code depends on the “cultural knowledge” of the viewer

The totality of the “connotators” is, to Barthes, an ideology he calls rhetoric. Barthes extracted these from a semiotic analysis of fashion journals.

*Multilayering of messages*

Other researchers study advertising as multilayered system of messages embedded within one another to serve various functions. Peninou believes that advertising forms a separate kind of text with three distinct functions:

1. to introduce a new product,
2. to refer to the existence of a product (“constative”) and
3. to emphasize the value of a product (“predictive”).

Along the way the advertising also contains references to the sender (the advertising agency) and a “connotative message predicting the value of the product.”
Looking at Jakobson’s work applied to advertising, there are several functions of visual language:

1. an appellative function, directed at the audience
2. referential (denoting the product),
3. poetic (effects beyond the semantic level).

Naturally, Eco’s semiotic analysis is an active research area. He sees advertising as codes of “double registers”, one visual, one verbal. One level refers to just to the icons, another level that is based on history or convention of their use, a third level is the rhetorical use of the icon, as a stylistic device, as one applies rhetoric in texts, a topic level (as tools for argumentation) and finally, the actual structure of visual argumentation, the product.

Other researchers, also from language and textual analyses such as A. J. Greimas applying their theories to the plastic arts³ and advertising, see advertising as a mediator between the concrete symbol (the product) and the abstract (symbols). Usually there is a binary opposition of positive properties of the item being sold and the negative properties of competitors. This binary oppositions leads to the conclusion in advertising, as in myth, is connected with finding answers to human universals, such as life/death, happiness/misery, hate/love. But because advertising works with simpler means, it appears as a degenerate form of myth.

Likewise, pragmatist philosopher Charles S. Peirce’s understanding of signs is more complex and the neologisms necessary to express his ideas puts them at a disadvantage. Peirce wrote of signs as the “sign in itself”, something that can be a “qualisign” (e.g., color), a “sinsign” (product sample), “legisign” (a maxim); depending upon its relation to the object, the sign can be an “icon” (a picture of the product), a symbol (the name of the product) or an “index” (pointing to qualities of the product). The advertisement overall can refer to a single word (“rHEME”), an assertion about the product (“dicent sign”), or an argument (in the form of a logical conclusion).

However conceived, there is a visual language of the designer, one of the advertising agency, and the unarticulated but anticipated one of the viewer.

Advertisements to sell...

Nöth³ sees advertisements as having 3 distinctive semantic units in its textual deep structure: (1) the name of the product, (2) reference to its positive qualities, and (3) an appeal to purchase.

In advertisements for mass communication, some products have properties that cannot be visually represented very well, such as beverages and cigarettes, advertisers use a special semiotic strategy of “indexical feature transfer.” The idea here is that some properties of an object (such as “wealth”, “health”, etc.) cannot be directly represented, so they’re represented “in contiguity” with other objects, such as suggesting valuable objects (gold, antiques), being famous (using actors, athletes), or similar
things whose qualities (valuable, famous, etc.) are known. By transferring the meaning from one thing to another, there is a relationship between that which is represented and that which is suggested (in other words, there’s an “index”). To appeal to a mass audience (whose cultural knowledge varies wildly) the symbols are primitive. [It’s believed there’s a stimulus-response chain in advertising, too.]

*The advertisers’ language*

There must be a contiguity between the “representamen” and the object it stands for. Advertisers use their own code system, the selection of units from a repertory and combination of the selected units into a message. Selection is made from a stock of similar units which may be one substituted for the other. Whereas a metaphor is based on substitution of a new but similar unit for a habitual one, a “metonymy” is taking units which are linked by contiguity as indices for each other. Klöpfer emphasize that the discovery of metonymic indexicality between the units of partial systems or entire figural constellations which the advertiser plants into the messages is to many people a fascinating study.

*Hermeneutics - the “science of interpretation”*

There’s a rich and long-standing literature of hermeneutics - how to interpret something systematically, which includes presenting the evidence for the interpretation (which, naturally, requires some framework for analysis).

*Posters*

Posters were an early form of mass advertising. They’re geared to larger reading distances and frequently use eye-catching devices to attract attention. If a combination of text (as symbol) and image (icon) is used two basic types of interaction between symbol and icon may occur. In the first type the symbol is autonomous, that is, understandable without the icon. In that case, the icon may be just something eye-catching, a redundant illustration of a metonymical index representing properties in the text. In the second type, the understanding of the symbol depends, at least in part, on the icon. This is the case if, for instance, an icon is substituted for a symbol in the text (e.g., a picture of a house for the word “house”) or where the icon disambiguates a polysemic text. In the latter technique, the icon is either coupled with a sentence rendered ambiguous, for instance, by a personal pronoun without mentioning the subject (“it’s fun”), or clarifies a double sense in a play of words.

Posters tend to be used in an appallingly way (get the audience’s attention). Circus posters are a common example. Posters not directed towards commercial or political tasks, the more expressive and artistic (aesthetic) the language of the poster becomes. This implies that posters become more experimental as far as the parallelism of typographic and iconic elements are concerned. Icons don’t merely attract attention, but become metaphors; typefaces are not only used to render a message legible, but also as a pretext for moving the intention of the poster towards being understood as a work of art.
Some observations about American advertising:

Historian Daniel Pope believes that the study of advertisements is revealing about society because advertisements don’t proclaim their intent or display the social and cultural context of their creation. The viewer must see through the advertisement, in a way dismissing the 3600 commercial advertisements one sees a day in the US or seeing through the artifice to establish different kinds of meaning.

Advertising attempts to persuade an audience to buy a good or a service. But not all ads do that: some are intended to create a good public reputation without appealing for sales; political ads, well, who knows what they do!

But advertising over all can be read as a subtext to the society where the ad appeared. An obvious example is early ads for the return of escaped slaves, or emphasizing the latest imported goods - before the American Revolution, advertising British products, during Jefferson’s presidency, French ones.

The aesthetic of early ads were limited to uninspired descriptions of products, sometimes woodblock engravings of the object, and aggressive typefaces.

It is only after the 1880s with the ability to mass produce consumer products that mass advertising of those products was possible. Previously, advertisements were small, single-column ads in newspapers or handbills. Mass production and nation-wide delivery of products from department stores (Macy’s, Marshall Fields, Sears Roebuck, Montgomery Ward) brought about a change in advertisements. One change is competition: the appellate function of the ad changed (recall the notion of positive and negative indexicality).

Ethical and social implications of advertising were mixed: Calvin Coolidge (1926) said “Advertising ministers to the spiritual side of trade. it is a great power that has been entrusted to your keeping which charges you with the high responsibility of inspiring and ennobling the commercial world. it is all part of the greater work of regeneration and redemption of mankind.” The purpose of advertising, as you might surmise from earlier discussions of modernism, was to adjust people to “modern life” in a consumerist culture.

Consider, too, the influence of radio and later of (early) television. Imaging an advertisement from the early days of radio: would the ad serve to introduce a product, emphasize the product, or emphasize the value of the product? [Was there any cross-over between mass comm posters and the style of the text.] We see the “feel-good”, poetic use of language in television ads bolstered by feel-good imagery that has no indexical association (at first) with the product. Drug commercials are good examples.

Creating meaning: Co-opting
If an advertisement can cause an affect, especially by co-opting an existing positive feeling in the viewer, before the conscious mind considers the message, then the mission of persuasion is successful. The most famous examples are tobacco and alcohol. “Joe Camel” ads were believed to be successful because the character had sexual elements and was “cool” - an appeal to young people. The Marlboro Man, according to Leo Burnett who introduced him in 1955, claimed the ad was to get people who already smoked to switch brands. But what do smoking and cowboys have in common? He said he designed an ad using rugged cowboys smoking “a cigarette designed for men that women like.” The commercial aim was to sell, but the repetitive use of the ad “short-circuit the conscious.”

*From Homogenization to Segmentation:
In the 1920s, advertising was believed to erase social differences. “We are making a homogeneous people”, said Albert Lasker. “Back when ‘E pluribus unum’ meant something on a social level, advertising found that selling to everyone sold to no one.”

Robert Wiebe (1975) describes how advertising emphasizes “segmentation” by economic, social, cultural, and psychological characteristics. We will see this return in post-modernism’s expression of “diversity” and the use of ads on websites as “mass personalization.”

By the late 1950s, however, advertisers found they could target an audience by segmenting the country and then appealing to that segment’s vanity. “If you’re hip and in the know, then...” Doyle Dane Bernbach’s (1959) ads for Volkswagen turned a “Hitler car” into the car for people who wanted to do something radical. One ad said “Live Below Your Means”, suggesting you have plenty of money (even if you didn’t), so get a Bug anyway.

Even if an ad isn’t that successful in increasing sales, keeping the word out there affects society. Consider how phrases such as “soccer mom” have become terms of denigration; SUVs aren’t big, safe vehicles they’re gas-guzzlers, and so on.

A recognized and early leader in the study of advertising, Roland Marchand¹⁰, points out how the audience for advertisements changed in the 20th century. Advertisements used to try to persuade the reader that the product was valuable. This is predicated on a *reading* audience. By moving more to emotional appeals, advertisers return to manipulating the few graphic equivalents of semantic primitives - color, shape, texture, etc. Although there are reasons based in theory, advertisers rely significantly on empirical evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of an ad (focus groups, every detail is tested), leading people to think about the unethical use of advertising.

The 1960s saw the rise both of psychedelic graphics - as a counter to post-industrial marketing - and the use of social changes in advertisements.

*What ads reveal ... modern interpreters conceal ... about an era?*
The use of stereotypes is typical but not for the immediately obvious reasons. Why, for example, were Blacks, Irish, Italians, Chinese, etc., portrayed as they were in early ads? The postmodern analysis blames racism; alternative interpretation is that in the few seconds that an ad is viewed, the symbols and icons are perceived more than understood. Something that isn’t immediately taken in requires thought and if that affects the intended advertising message then symbol/icon must be demoted.

Other symbols can be stereotypes but the audience doesn’t get it ...

The New Yorker magazine man is a take-off of NY Knickerbocker society, but who today wears a top hat? David Ogilvy created “Commander Whitehead” for “Schweppervescence” - snob appeal sells to the main audience - the middle class. As a counter to “Socialist Realism” that was supposed to glorify the working man, Michael Schudson sees advertising as “Capitalist Realism.”

*How to see through the ad, then?*

The Ad Industry has striven to be taken serious as professionals and since the 1960s is thought to moved closer to the audience it sells to, although this is debatable.

Separated from their original context, an analyst of the ad needs some interpretative framework. An historian might try to reconstruct the social mores and economic climate of the day; a feminist might try to see how an ad dismisses women or women's issues; the various “communities” might view the ad superficially through the lens of its own supposed interests.

Ads on the web are even more difficult to analyze. How should and can one determine themes in an ad? The last question is what fixes visual communication into the stream of post-modernism's struggle with Enlightenment and Rationalist ideals. The reconstruction of historical contexts are necessarily bound to the era that is looking back. We in the twenty-first century might construct websites about an event, or mount a museum, or offer an analysis of “texts”, but it is wrong, the post-modernist contents, to pretend that we approach a truthful reality because our construction is not the same time of the original production - the innumerable host of influences on the day, collected into Mead's life world concept, are lost to us. Our image, however well-intended and researched, is only an image of an image, parading as truth. This is Baudrillard's *simulacra* - the simulation of reality operating as if it were true. The developers and artists behind websites, catalogues raisonnées, educational and informational products need to situate their message and iconography in a context that enables the intended audience to gather the intended message. It is true that the message does become an image of an image - it is inescapable - but a broader contextualization of the message helps situate the viewer and the message as its own event in time. Here the modernist program of self-reflection and with that individualistic interpretation are especially valued. Moreover, the Enlightenment-based themes that situate potential universality within the larger discourse community do yield if not objective truth then the admitted constructed coherent, cohesive reality that makes no further claim.
Even then, historical reviews of advertising history, such as the Library of Congress (US) American Memory website\textsuperscript{11} situates the ads within a context of the LC’s outreach mission.

\textit{Themes or Models:}

Every research, viewer, writer, person has a perspective and subconscious mores. Being a snob isn’t looked upon well, but then again, separating yourself from the crowd (aka tribalism) is partially social\textsuperscript{12}, partially biological. If your perspective is to see something, say something controversial such as racism, you will see it. In a famous book about the history of photography [cite to follow], the [English woman author] sees a photograph of a 19th century British explorer in Africa, with his African wife, and writes an entire chapter how the photograph was used to demonstrate the man’s dominance as a white man over the black woman. [That the woman was his wife seems not to have mattered. Facts have no little value among post-modernists.]

Most advertising from the 1900s has been theory driven: to express the need to sell, or how the ad is pre-tested. The use of scientific techniques (focus groups, etc.) has suggested to many that advertising is deceptive (it is) and that the practitioners’ ethics are questionable. The point is whether an advertisement should literally inform or subconsciously persuade.

By providing context, we have an interpretive framework. In the above example, the historian of photography took a destructive postmodernist stance which necessarily views \textit{all} communication (all narratives) as serving an ideology of suppression. An historian might try to reconstruct the historical environment and influences that shaped the visual language (of the agency, the designer, the purchaser of the ad, and of the audience) but, of course, his/her choice of evidence will shape the contextualizing.

Some advertisements are aimed at “counter-culture.” The pop art scene of the 1960s, on the one hand, was created by highly conservative, wealthy enterprises to simulate being radical (“radical chic”)\textsuperscript{13}. On the other hand, Roy Lichtenstein, Andy Warhol and others took the technical aspect of visual communication and reassigned the interpretations to have fun (this is the “playful pastiche and irony” that adherents of post-modernism enjoy). Some, like Wavy Gravy, who designed the cover art for Janice Joplin, Jimi Hendrix and the like were actually counter-culture artists and friends of the musicians. This is probably one of the few times that art came from the bottom up.

\textit{Segmentation of society:}

Advertisers quickly tailored ads to their original audiences - here, original refers to the original audiences for mass market journals. Among them, \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal, Atlantic Monthly, American Craftsman}, for instance, reflect interest groups. \textit{Ladies’Home Journal}, naturally, had ads that were aimed at both creating an image of the proper middle-class home and an image of what constituted proper home-keeping: in short, what you bought said a lot about you as a valued, competent home maker.
While targeted marketing may increase sales, it bolsters an image of what is right (without debate or even conscious reflection) and establishes the idea before there is even a question.

In 1911 the first ad that the literature on advertising claims relied on sex appeal appeared: Woodbury’s Facial Soap. The ad shows women being admired by dashing young men, although this opinion ignores the appeal of John C. Leyendecker (1874-1951), whose lover Charles Beach, was the model for the Arrow Collar Man⁴.

The question is more complex: connotating luxury and sociability, the women are middle-class, comfortable, and (using the soap) clean and almost touchable. That was the point: “the skin you love to touch.” Some authors argue that the ad suggests a segregation of women’s and men’s worlds to emphasize women as sex objects, but it is interesting how many advertising executives were/are women.⁵

Today’s journals are offered in print and increasingly in online versions, or replacing the print journal entirely. Visual communications are moving away from print towards online sources, so much so that the online site is used as an information source and form of evidence in lieu of the traditional print in television news and newspaper reports. Niche marketing, targeting certain audience through search engines and targeted ad sales, e.g., Google ads, as well as the blurring of traditional formats (from still images to embedded video) will move advertising and journals towards emulating television.

**Ethics**

Business schools and advertising programs teach ethics as part of codes of professional conduct. Religious groups have long questioned public ethics but their influence is an open question. The Roman Catholic Church’s Pontifical Council for Social Communications has an official position⁶ on ethics in advertising. Citing at length the University of Texas site, for instance, we see the major issues taught about advertising ethics. Continue reading this link.] Here is a note from the Advertising Educational Foundation’s *Ethics in Advertising*.

Continue reading these links on the History of Advertising⁷:
1. Getting started: making sense of ads
2. What is the ad trying to do?
3. Who is the intended audience?
4. What strategies are used to sell the product?
   1. What do ads reveal or conceal about an era?
   2. What else do you need to know to analyze an ad?
3. Model Interpretation
4. Advertisements online
5. Annotated Bibliography

Other Sites about Advertising
http://www.adflip.com
http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/wpaposters/wpahome.html
http://www.commercialcloset.org/cgi-bin/iowa/index.html
http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/eaa/
http://www.pmadarchive.com/
http://www.wisc.virginia.edu/history/runaways/

1 Barthes, R. (1967). *Système de la mode.*
2 Grimas, A. J. (year). *Figurative semiotics and the semiotics of the plastic arts.*
3 Nöth, H. *Encyclopedia of semiotics.*
4 Klöpper (1977)
5 Usually mixed with some other field, such as structuralism (Nadin, M., & Seung, T. K., (1987). *Structuralism and hermeneutics*) or within the work of another domain such as library & information science (see Day, R. (xxxx) or Budd, J.).
7 http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/subjects/runaways/
8 http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/coolhtml/coolhome.html
9 Interestingly, the men appearing as rugged, he-man cowboys in the Marlboro ads were gay and died from cancer. Exploratory qualitative research - Ben and Hedges in the Gay Market, PM Feb 1994. http://www.tobacco.org/Documents/dd/ddgaymarlboro.html
11 http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ccmphtml/colahome.html
12 Sukuki, (1998?)
13 See Theodore Rosak’s (b. 1933) *The Making of a Counter Culture* (1968) for a long treatment of the story of how the counter culture of the 1960s grew in reaction to the search for objective reality, technology and the resulting diminishing of experience. The spirit of his work was greatly radicalized by philosopher of science, Paul Feuerabend (1924-1994), and applied by Thomas Kuhn (1922-1996). These and similar works shaped the world of hope and of despair that let post-modernism dominate and which as a result there is a conflict in society that is slowly ending as the generations in which truth and reality were important issues dies and the uncritical, commercially-oriented Gen X and Gen Y come up and thrive in the Internet connected world.
14 Leyendecker worked for Hart, Schaffner & Marx advertising firm and was an immensely popular painter of journal covers, everything from Boys’ Life to US Government war propaganda posters. See more at The National Museum of American Illustration (NMAI), Newport, RI.
17 http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/ads/online.html