PART I: 'ADVERTISING-WORK'

'The *work* which transforms the latent dream into the manifest one is called the *dream-work*. The work which proceeds in the opposite direction, which endeavours to arrive at the latent dream from the manifest one, is our *work of interpretation*. This work of interpretation seeks to undo the dream-work.

The dream-work... consists in transforming thoughts into visual images. ... And so... does the dream work succeed in expressing some of the content of the latent dream-thoughts by peculiarities in the *form* of the manifest dream—by its clarity or obscurity, by its division into several pieces, and so on. Thus the form of dreams is far from being without significance and itself calls for interpretation. ... One cannot give the name of "dream" to anything other than the product of the dream-work—that is to say, the *form* into which the latent thoughts have been translated by the dream-work.'

Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*

Signifier, Signified, Sign

***A* sign** *is quite simply a thing—whether object, word, or picture—which has a particular meaning to a person or group of people. It is neither the thing nor the meaning alone, but the two together.*

The sign consists of the **Signifier**, *the material object, and the* **Signified**, *which is its meaning. These are only divided for analytical purposes: in practice a sign is always thing-plus-meaning.*

Art of persuasion

We can only understand what advertisements mean by finding out *how* they mean, and analysing the way in which they work. What an advertisement 'says' is merely what it *claims* to say; it is part of the deceptive mythology of advertising to believe that an advertisement is simply a transparent vehicle for a 'message' behind it. Certainly a large part of any advertisement *is* this 'message': we are told something about a product, and asked to buy it. The information that we are given is frequently untrue, and even when it is true, we are often being persuaded to buy products which are unnecessary; products manufactured at the cost of damaging the environment and sold to make a profit at the expense of the people who made them. A criticism of advertising on these grounds is valid, and I would support it. However, such a criticism is in many ways the greatest obstacle of all to a true understanding of the role of advertisements in our society, because it is based on the assumption that ads are merely the invisible conveyors of certain undesirable messages, and only sees meaning in the overt 'content' of the ad rather than its 'form'—in other words, ignoring the 'content' of the 'form'.

That a 'content' of 'form' should be such a paradoxical idea draws attention to the assumptions inherent in the use of these words. 'Form' is invisible: a set of relations, a scaffolding to be filled out by 'content', which is seen as substantial, with a solidity of meaning. These connotations make the terms 'form' and 'content' particularly unsuited for my argument, since it is based on the assumption that the conveyors of messages are things—and significant things—in themselves; and that it is messages which exist in the realm of the ideal. So having introduced it only to make this clear at the outset, I am now going to drop the terminology of 'form and content'. Although the *word* 'form' and the *word* 'content' may usefully be used singly, as a pair they constitute a conceptual attitude which I find unhelpful in any attempt to engage with meaning as a process, rather than as the end-result of a process.

The terminology which I will use in place of 'form and content' is that of 'signifier and signified'. This is not a simple replacement, an updating of terms, but involves a total reversal

of emphasis. Signifiers are things, while form is invisible; signifieds are ideas, while content implies materiality. Furthermore, while form and content are usually seen as separable and their conceptual unity is one of opposition (form vs. content), signifier and signified are materially inseparable, since they are bound together in the *sign*, which is their totality. What is *meant* by a sign, the signified, may be talked about separately from what means it, the signifier; but an understanding of this terminology involves the realisation that the two are not *in fact* separated either in time or space: the signified is neither anterior nor exterior to the sign as a whole. Therefore my use of these words has in itself a very particular significance: it emphasises both the materiality and the meaning of the signifier in any communication.

The role played by the signifier in creating meaning is shown very clearly in the following advertisement for tyres:

A1

A1: The ostensible meaning of this advertisement is that Goodyear Tyres have a very good braking performance. The written message states this: 'That set of Supersteels had already done thirty-six thousand miles when I drove onto a jetty at Bridport, Dorset for a test of braking performance. We set our marks only 66 feet apart, and from 50 mph, those Supersteels pulled me up in half the Highway Code stopping distance (125 feet). And on that same jetty they still held a clean, firm line through a slalom—even after 36,000 miles of motoring.'

This is a rational message: it describes actual tests and results and gives a logical argument to show that Goodyear tyres are safe and durable.

Now look at the picture. The jetty is supposedly here as a test of braking power; it provides an element of risk (will the car be able to stop before reaching the end?) in the experiment, a convenient and yet dramatic way of measuring the maximum braking distance. It has a place in a rational 'scientific' proof, and its function thus seems to arise merely from its place in the transmission of the 'signified' in the ad.

However, the significance of the jetty is actually the opposite of risk and danger and it works in a way that is not part of the rational narrative sequence of the verbal ad; it functions in its second role as signifier on a completely different axis from that of the signified and cuts vertically through it. The outside of the jetty resembles the outside of a tyre and the curve is suggestive of its shape: the whole jetty is one big tyre. In case we need a mental nudge to make the connection, there are actually some tyres attached to the outside of the jetty, on the right hand side of the picture. The jetty is tough and strong, it withstands water and erosion and does not wear down: because of the visual resemblance, we assume that this is true of the tyre as well. In the picture the jetty actually encloses the car, protectively surrounding it with solidity in the middle of dangerous water: similarly, the whole safety of the car and driver is wrapped up in the tyre, which stands up to the elements and supports the car. Thus what seemed to be merely a

part of the apparatus for conveying a message about braking speed, turns out to be a message in itself, one that works not on the overt but almost on the unconscious level; and one which involves a connection being made, a correlation between two objects (tyre and jetty) not on a rational basis but by a leap made on the basis of appearance, juxtaposition and connotation.

This advertisement shows how the signifier of the overt meaning in an advertisement has a function of its own, a place in the process of creating another, less obvious meaning. It has already emerged that this 'latent' meaning, unlike the open 'manifest' message, does not simply lie completed in the words, for us to read as a finished statement. There are three crucial points here. In the first place this 'meaning of the signifier' involves a correlation of two things: the significance of one (the jetty) is transferred to the other (the tyre). This correlation is non-sequential; the two things are linked not by the line of an argument or a narrative but by their place in a picture, by its *formal structure*. In the second place this transference of significance does not exist as completed in the ad, but requires us to *make* the connection; it is nowhere stated that the tyre is as strong as the jetty, therefore this meaning does not exist until we complete the transference ourselves. In the third place, the transference is based on the fact that the first object (the jetty) *has* a significance to *be* transferred: the advertisement does not create meaning initially but invites us to make a transaction whereby it is passed from one thing to another. A system of meaning must already exist, in which jetties are seen as strong, and this system is exterior to the ad—which simply *refers* to it, using one of its components as a carrier of value (in the case of A1, strength, durability)—i.e. as a currency.

The systems which provide ads with this basic 'meaning' material—a grist of significance for the ad mill—are what I call '*Referent* Systems': the subject of Part II. They are clearly ideological systems and draw their significance from areas outside advertising. But the way in which this material is used and ordered inside advertisements, and is made to mean, is the subject of this half of the book; in the course of which I hope it will be made clear that this process of meaning, the work of the *signifiers*, is as much a part of ideology and social convention as the more obvious 'signifieds'.

Therefore I have used the term 'advertising-work' deliberately, because of Freud's crucial emphasis, in understanding dreams, on the 'dream-work' that is the *system* of creating meaning.

I intend to start with an investigation of signifiers and their systems in ads.

CHAPTER ONE
A CURRENCY OF SIGNS

'A sign is something which stands to somebody for something else, in some respect or capacity.'

C. S. Peirce[1]

'That which exists for me through the medium of *money*, that which I can pay for, i.e. which money can buy, that *am I*, the possessor of the money.'

Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*

Referent

Saussure says that with the word H-O-R-S-E, where the concept of horse is what is signified, the referent *is what kicks you. Thus the referent always means the actual thing in the real world, to which a word or concept points. The referent is external to the sign, whereas the signified is part of the sign. (However, the external 'reality' referred to by the collection of signs in an advertisement is itself a mythological system, another set of signs. These mythologies I call Referent* Systems: *(cf. Part II.)*

In A1 we saw how two things—an object from the ordinary world (jetty) and a product (tyre)—were connected. The jetty stood for a certain quality (strength), and by making the object and the product interchangeable in terms of this quality, its value adheres to the product. The intermediary object, the jetty, in representing a value which becomes attached to the product, is thus a sort of currency. Currency is something which represents a value and in its interchangeability with other things, gives them their 'value' too. It thus provides a useful metaphor for the transference of meaning; especially as this meaning is so intimately connected with real money transactions.

As a preliminary to this chapter I want to start with a look at colour in visual advertising: it provides an introduction both to my method of analysis, to the way in which most visual adverts function, and to various aspects of the use to which this functioning can be put. Although the colour cannot be reproduced here it is described in the analyses. The next six examples all use colour in a slightly different way, but in each case it is the basis for a connection or connections unstated by the verbal part of the ad, and sometimes quite— apparently— irrelevant to it.

[1]From Collected Papers: quoted by Umberto Eco in 'Social Life as a Sign System' in *Structuralism: An Introduction*, Paladin Press, Oxford 1973.

A2

A3

A2 Colour tells a story: In this picture the colour 'axis' is the triangle of orange-gold, formed by the two glasses of screwdrivers and the sun behind the trees. This connection already suggests a warm, natural, pure, light quality in the drink, since it is linked to the sunlight. This gold colour is echoed in the golden corn which surrounds the couple, also suggesting something natural, ripe, mellow. The other colour connection in this picture is the white of the couple's clothes and of their bag. One would expect this white to be a reminder of the 'White Rum' but in fact it functions differently inside the picture. It helps tell a story, bridging time past and future. The white bag is already full of golden corn; this 'harvesting' is a piece of past consumption that hints at a similar action in the (at present undrunk) golden screwdrivers being placed inside, consumed by, the white couple. This hint is supported by the additional fact that the golden sun is just about to set, to 'go down' just as the drinks will. And so, as sure as the bag is already filled, and the sun is bound to set into the white sky, the drinks will, undoubtedly, end up inside the white people.

This 'story' gives a new meaning to the words beneath. The idea of there being 'still room' now refers less to the environment (although it obviously does this on a simple level—countryside, a field, is shown) than to the fact that there is room inside the people for the drinks. The theme is, in fact, *filling up*, like the corn in the bag—consumption rather than expansion. It is significant that the space shown—the 'room' in the 'intended' sense—is not particularly expansive and is almost entirely taken up with the three white, consuming figures (the man, the woman, and the bag).

In this way there is an almost total reversal of the meaning one might expect, just as it is the people who are white, the consumers, *not* the 'White Rum', which is in fact the thing that is 'going where there's still room'. A basic idea of space and extensiveness has been made to operate through the picture in a way that really '*means*' quite the opposite: enclosure, consumption.

A3 The oral connection: 'Beautiful Blue' is not, in fact, the most important colour in this ad. The blue cigarette packet merges into indistinctness in the blue of the denim, and the blue shopping bag. The colour that *does* stand out, poking through the string bag, is the deep red-purple of the bottle top, that exactly matches the colour of the girl's lips. Significantly, these are all that is shown of her face: nothing else in it matters, only the mouth, the means of oral consumption. The bottle and the mouth are joined by colour as clearly as if there were an arrow from one to the other. There is an obviously sexual suggestion here: however, the connection of bottle and mouth is a parallel for that of cigarette and mouth, which is the subject of the ad. The important word in the ad is 'taste': this is the theme of the *picture* and the crucial element in selling cigarettes.

A4

A4 Connecting an object with an object: This is perfectly simple: the colours of the cigarette packet are exactly those of the cup of coffee—white and maroon; and there is even a hint of gold on the rim of the packet's lid, matching the rim of the cup and saucer. The assumption here is that because the containers are the same (in terms of colour) the products have the same qualities: here, primarily mildness, though also a slight suggestion of richness. The cup of coffee acts as an 'objective correlative' (cf. section b) for the quality invoked.

A5 Connecting an object and a world: Here, the colours—black and white, with a touch of silver—and also the shapes—rectangular, streamlined—connect the cigarette packet to what the ad itself describes as a whole 'world': 'the world of Lambert and Butler'. The visual link between the packet and the world is exaggeratedly apparent: literally everything in the room is black and white and geometrical. However, as the two containers were compared in the last example, here also the correlated objects, packet and world, are in fact containers; the parallel of the cigarettes being, here, not coffee (in matching cup) but people (in matching room). The people are the contents of the room just as are the cigarettes of the packet. Thus the words can be read as relating directly to the people; they are obviously terms usually applied to people and *not* things, yet here, in using them *about* things, they are equating these with people: 'The first of a new generation of distinguished cigarettes [/people]... with a quality and style that sets them apart from other cigarettes [/people].' So here the colour correlation brings explicitly into focus a link between the people and the cigarettes that was implicit in the words chosen. There is, however, another sort of reversal here as the packet of cigarettes is, supposedly, an accessory to the distinguished, stylish world depicted, fitting into it visually by colour and style; yet, in naming the *world* after the *cigarettes* ('the world of Lambert and Butler'), and in greatly exaggerating the features of the cigarette box in this physical world, we see that the world and the people are actually an accessory of the product, and not the other way round. Instead of the product being created out of a need in the world, it creates its own world, an exaggerated reflection of itself.

A5

A6 Connecting the object and a person: The product is a whole kitchen, yet here again, the person – a woman – has been made to match it. Her white clothes immediately link her to the slightly open cupboard, whose interior is the only other patch of white in the room. This gives a suggestion of availability. The woman's skin is precisely the same colour as the eggs. Her hair matches the cupboards. Again, we see that while the kitchen is meant to reflect *her*, she is in fact merely an object in the kitchen like one of the copper pans or the eggs or pieces of French bread. No wonder she looks so uncomfortable in it.

A6

A7

A7 *The retinted world of the advertisement:* Finally, a straightforward example just to illustrate the wide use and significance of colour correlations: the product and the world and the woman (the consumer) are all reduced to just two colours (gold and brown)—a typical manipulation or restatement of the world to link it to the two-dimensionality of advertising. This shows very clearly what has been seen in all these ads: a selecting of certain elements, things or people from the ordinary world, and then a rearranging and altering them in terms of a product's myth to create a new world, the world of the advertisement. This is the essence of all advertising: components of 'real' life, our life, are used to speak a new language, the advertisement's. Its language, its terms (here, gold and brown; the 'bronze lustre' message), *are* the myth; for as we have seen, they are too full of coincidence, of colour co-ordination, to be real. The very means of expression (as shown by colour, in this case) is the myth.

Use of colour is simply a *technique*, used primarily in pictorial advertising, to make correlations between a product and other things. Since this book is based on magazine advertisements which are more easily reproduced than those in the cinema or on TV, I have included analyses of ads A2–A7 simply to alert the reader to this technique. The use of colour is not significant in itself; it is the significance of the correlation it makes that forms the basis of my theory. It is important not to confuse the particular properties of the technological medium with the generic properties of advertisements. On the screen, for example, connections are made by cutting, by the reverse field technique (where facing fields of vision are shown alternately), and so on. There is an advertisement for chocolate in cinema intermissions where a girl jumps upwards into the air, and then there is a cut to a bar of chocolate leaping upwards—so that the *movement* is continuous, although the objects are different. The cutting here fills the same correlating function as colour in the preceding ads; what is important is that ads in all media make these connections, *through formal techniques*, not on the level of the overt signified but via the signifiers.

Having established with these examples that such connections are made, I now embark on my theory of *why* they are made, and the significance of *how* they are made.

(*a*) *Differentiation*

There is very little real difference between brands of product within any category, such as detergents, margarine, paper towels and so on. Therefore it is the first function of an advertisement to *create* a differentiation between one particular product and others in the same category. It does this by providing the product with an 'image'; this image only succeeds in differentiating between products in so far as *it* is part of a system of differences. The identity of anything depends more on what it is *not* than what it is, since boundaries are primarily distinctions: and there are no 'natural' distinctions between most products. This can be seen by the fact that a *group* of products will sometimes be marketed with the same 'image', in a set or 'range' (cf. All)—these usually have names, like 'Maybelline' or 'Spring Bouquet' etc.: the limits of identity are chosen arbitrarily, it is clear, because in other cases two identical products from the very same manufacturer will be given different names and different images. If two different bottles of cleansing milk can have the same name—'Outdoor girl' or suchlike, but a third, apparently similar, can appear with a different name and therefore with supposedly different properties, it immediately becomes apparent that there are no

logical boundaries between most products. Surf and Daz essentially contain the same chemicals. Obviously there *are* products with special qualities or particular uses, but these do not usually need extensive advertising campaigns: the bulk of advertising covers exactly the areas where goods are the same: cigarettes, cornflakes, beer, soap.

I am taking a group of perfume advertisements—two of which come from the same manufacturer: these provide a good example of the creation of 'images' since perfumes *can* have no particular significance. This is a type of ad which can give no real information about the product (what information can be given about a smell?) so that the function of differentiation rests totally on making a connection with an image drawn from outside the ad world.

A8

A8: Catherine Deneuve's face and the Chanel bottle are not linked by any narrative, simply by juxtaposition: but there is not supposed to be any *need* to link them directly, they are as it were in apposition in the grammar of the ad, placed together in terms of an *assumption* that they have the same meaning, although the connection is really a random one. For the face and the bottle are not inherently connected: there is no link between Catherine Deneuve *in herself* and Chanel No. 5: but the link is in terms of what Catherine Deneuve's face *means to us*, for this is what Chanel No. 5 is trying to mean to us, too. The advertisement presents this transference of meaning to us as a *fait accompli*, as though it were simply presenting two objects with the same meaning, but in fact it is only *in* the advertisement that this transference takes place. Chanel No. 5 only has the 'meaning' or image that it shares with Catherine Deneuve by having become associated with Catherine Deneuve through this very advertisement. So what Catherine Deneuve's face means to us in the world of magazines and films, Chanel No. 5 seeks to mean and comes to mean in the world of consumer goods. The ad is using another already existing mythological language or sign system, and appropriating a relationship that exists in that system between signifier (Catherine Deneuve) and signified (glamour, beauty) to speak of its product in terms of the same relationship; so that the perfume can be substituted for Catherine Deneuve's face and can also be made to signify glamour and beauty.

Using the structure of one system in order to give structure to another, or to translate the structure of another, is a process which must involve an intermediate structure, a system of systems or 'meta-system' at the point where the translation takes place: this is the advertisement. Advertisements are constantly translating between systems of meaning, and therefore constitute a vast meta-system where values from different areas of our lives are made interchangeable.

Thus the work of the advertisement is not to invent a meaning for No. 5, but to translate meaning for it by means of a sign system we already know. It is only because Catherine Deneuve has an 'image', a significance in one sign system, that she can be used to create a new

system of significance relating to perfumes. If she were not a film star and famous for her chic type of French beauty, if she did not *mean* something to us, the link made between her face and the perfume would be meaningless. So it is not her face as such, but its position in a system of signs where it signifies flawless French beauty, which makes it useful as a piece of linguistic currency to sell Chanel.

The system of signs from which the product draws its image is a *referent system* in that the sign lifted out of it and placed in the ad (in this case, Catherine Deneuve's face) *refers back to it*. It is not enough simply to know who Catherine Deneuve is: this will not help you to understand the ad. Someone from another culture who knew that Catherine Deneuve was a model and film star would still not understand the significance of her image here, because they would not have access to the referent system as a whole. And it is only by referring back to this system as a system of *differences* that the sign can function: it is hollow of meaning in itself, its signified is only a distinction rather than a 'content'. Only the form and structure of the referent system are appropriated by the advertisement system; it is the relationship and distinction between parts, rather than the parts themselves, that make an already-structured external system so valuable to advertising. The links made between elements from a referent system and products arise from the *place* these elements have in the whole system rather than from their inherent qualities. Thus Catherine Deneuve has significance only in that she is not, for example, Margaux Hemingway.

A9

A9 Babe: The 'image' of this ad derives its impact from the existence of precisely such ads as A8, as it is able to 'kick off' against the more sedate Catherine Deneuve image and others like it. This new perfume, 'Babe', has been launched in a campaign using the new 'discovery' Margaux Hemingway. The significance of her novelty, youth and 'Tomboy' style, which has value only *in relation* to the more typically 'feminine' style usually connected with modelling, is carried over to the perfume: which is thus signified as new and 'fresh', in relation to other established perfumes. There would be no significance at all in the fact that Margaux Hemingway is wearing a karate outfit and has her hair tied back to look almost like a man's, were it not that *other* perfume ads show women wearing pretty dresses and with elaborately styled hair. The meaning is not, however, generated *inside* the advertisement system: there is a meaning in terms of 'women's liberation' and 'breaking conventions' in a model's having a tough, 'liberated' image (in one TV ad for 'Babe', Margaux Hemingway mends the car while her boyfriend watches) rather than a passive, 'feminine' one. In the widest

sphere of meaning which the ad draws on, even outside modelling and images, the meaning still depends on a contrast, since the very idea of women doing karate is only significant because most women do *not* and have not done anything of the sort. (See Chapter 8.)

So this advertisement uses the 'Margaux Hemingway' image, *which itself depends for its significance on not being Catherine Deneuve's image* to give 'Babe' a distinct place in the inventory of perfumes, emphasising its novelty (its *not being like* what has gone before) and its difference from all the others. It uses a contrast made in social terms, 'feminine' vs. 'liberated', as signified by two models, to make a contrast between products.

In the mythological system of fashion and publicity Catherine Deneuve and Margaux Hemingway are mutually differentiated and can only have value as signs in relation to each other: as Saussure says: 'in all cases, then, we discover not *ideas* given in advance but *values* emanating from the system. When we say that these values correspond to concepts, it is understood that these concepts are purely differential, not positively defined by their content but negatively defined by their relation with other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is that they are what the others are not.'[1] Thus with Catherine Deneuve and Margaux Hemingway it is the *difference* between their significances (taking them not as women but as signs, for this is what they are in this context) that makes them valuable in advertising. Advertisements appropriate the formal relations of pre-existing systems of differences. They use distinctions existing in social mythologies to create distinctions between products: this seems like the reverse of 'totemism', where *things* are used to differentiate groups of people: however the differentiating process in advertisements works in both directions simultaneously. I have only unravelled the elements of this process in order to make the discussion of them clearer, focusing here on the differentiating of products, while 'totemism', differentiating between people, is discussed in the next chapter.

[1]Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, quoted in *Saussure* by Jonathan Culler, Fontana, 1976, p. 26.

The basis of advertising's use of differences in other systems is a simple equation of parallel relations: Catherine Deneuve is to Margaux Hemingway as 'No. 5' is to 'Babe'. Thus the original pattern is like this:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{C.D.} & \neq & \text{M.H.} \\ & \downarrow & \\ \text{No. 5} & \not\neq & \text{Babe} \end{array}$$

and the link is in the relationship, the 'is not' itself.

There is even an interesting subdivision within the Chanel range itself.

A10: This image is half-way between Catherine Deneuve's and Margaux Hemingway's. The woman is 'witty, confident' (therefore the *product* is 'outspoken'—a typical piece of anthropomorphism) yet still 'devastatingly feminine'. It is important for Chanel to distinguish between No. 5 and No. 19; and the difference between the 'classical' feminine style of Catherine Deneuve and the outspoken yet 'feminine' (not into karate yet by a long way) model, creates this distinction. Yet at the same time, both Chanel products must be given a different aura from other manufacturers' products, and they are alike in having a 'feminine' very 'French' image, while Margaux Hemingway in the 'Babe' ad is younger, American, more 'way out'.

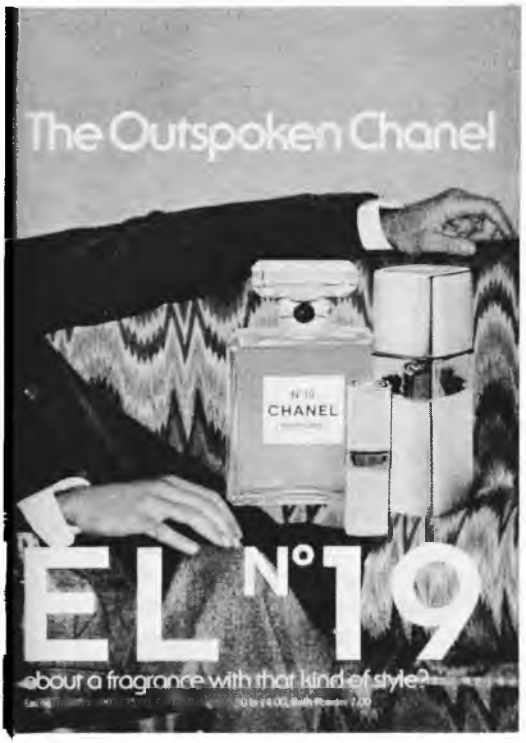
A10

A further feature of the differentiation between products is that as already mentioned, they may be given an identity not only singly but in groups: Catherine Deneuve stands for a whole variety of products, all linked by the name 'No. 5' and her image.

A11: This is a perfect example of reversed 'totemism'; a *person*, Catherine Deneuve (or rather her image, what she signifies) is used as the binding symbol for a group of disparate things. She is the focus of their identity: so the difference between a perfume and a 'milk bath' is dissolved while a distinction between that perfume and another by the same manufacturer, is emphasised. This shows to some extent the arbitrariness of groups of identity in advertising. Things of different *kinds* are given the same meaning here, while similar things, perfumes, are given separate images.

It is the differences which are the connections; however, the ad system did not originally create these differences, but derived them from the structure of the referent system, by connecting the two.

A11



(*b*) *The Finished Connection: An 'Objective Correlative'*

The result of connecting two systems in the way shown above is that the links originally made, or rather whose logical basis exists, in terms of relationships, very soon take on an 'objective' or independent status and exist not as parts within a system but on their own:

C.D. (≒) M.H.
‖ ‖
No. 5 (≒) Babe

Obviously, this 'result' does not take place temporally *after* the first connection as I have implied: I am simply trying to undo the logic of the advertisement's meaning process. And while the *logic* of the system, from which it derives its meaning, lies in the differences only (nobody would bother to find and push an 'image' for a product that was the only one of its kind on the market), the *appearance* of the system is one of 'logical' connections and similarities. After a while, we just start to connect Catherine Deneuve with Chanel and this takes on a sort of inevitability that seems to give the link status in some 'real' or 'natural' order. This is true of all ads but especially in those which claim to be either natural or scientific (in either case = objective), since both 'Nature' and 'Science' have in our society, or rather in its ideology, an objective status. ('Nature' and 'Science' will be discussed under 'Referent Systems' in Part II.) Thus once again we see that the *form* of advertisements is a part of ideology, and involves a false assumption which is the root of all ideology, namely that because things are as they are (in this case, because certain things are *shown* as connected in ads, placed together etc.), this state of affairs is somehow natural, and must 'make sense' simply because it exists. So when advertisements put two things side by side so that they co-exist, we do not question the sense of it. The form of advertisements, and their process of meaning through our acceptance of implications in that form, constitute an important part of ideology. Non-senses (the illogical juxtaposition of, say, a face and a bottle) become invisible—which is why it is important to state what may seem very basic, and once seen, very obvious, in this field; and sense is assumed simply on the basis of *facts*, that magical word whose original meaning is merely 'things already done'. It is certainly a fact that Catherine Deneuve's face *has been connected* with a bottle of scent, but that does not mean that it *is* (logically) connected with it. But the ideology embedded in *form* is the hardest of all to see. This is why it is important to emphasise *process*, as it undoes the *fait accompli*.

Images, ideas or feelings, then, become attached to certain products, by being transferred from signs out of other systems (things or people with 'images') *to* the products, rather than originating in them. This intermediary object or person is bypassed in our perception; although it is what gives the product its meaning, we are supposed to see that meaning as already there, and we rarely notice that the correlating object and the product have no inherent similarity, but are only placed together (hence the significance of form). So a product and an image/emotion become linked in our minds, while the process of this linking is unconscious.

However, a linking of the internal, thoughts and feelings, with something external and 'objective' is a crucial feature in any creation of meaning (a myth) and the need for some such connection is a basic one. It has been the function of art to make this sort of connection, and to bridge the Romantic abyss between subjective and objective, personal and universal: 'art' seems to elevate feelings or ideas that we may have experienced personally, to a plane where they appear to lose their personal quality and take on an 'objective' meaning, independent of any subject. T. S. Eliot describes this 'linking' or correlating aspect of art, as an 'objective correlative': 'The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative": in other words, *a set of objects*, a situation, a chain of events, which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.'[1]

It is now the function of the media to provide us with apparently 'objective' correlatives and 'meanings' (since art has become increasingly preoccupied with its inability to mean): and provide them it does. The formulaic reaction implied in Eliot's lines is shown in countless television rituals; one might think a Crackerjack pencil was the objective correlative for pleasure, by the obligatory shrieks and cheers of delight raised by the audience at each mention of the word 'Crackerjack'. And the moments on 'The Generation Game' when Bruce Forsyth holds his laugh like a 'still' are timeless tributes to an inexplicable 'joy'. Advertising too is based on evoking emotion, but not directly, only through a *promise* of evoking pleasure. In fact the emotional response is worked into the form, since it starts off as a signifier, giving meaning *to* the product, not as a signified.

Advertisements provide 'formulae' for emotions in so far as

[1]T. S. Eliot, 'Hamlet' in *Selected Essays*, Faber and Faber, 1932, p. 145.

the connections between feelings and things, which are actually only based on *differentiations*, come to be taken individually. Isolated from the systems from their place in which they derive their value, these connections gain status as facts, 'natural' or 'objective' correlatives. The technique of advertising is to correlate feelings, moods or attributes to tangible objects, linking possible *un*attainable things with those that *are* attainable, and thus reassuring us that the former are within reach. The myth that happiness or other states of mind may be directly conjured up by certain objects is not at all a new one (cf. Chapter 6, Magic): Eliot sees it as the crux of *all* poetic method, where the correlatives are *sufficient*: what *is* new is that the central rite in this creation of emotions is that of purchase and possession, and is thus displaced from the advertisement, functioning as its referent. It is not the ad that evokes feeling, it simply invokes the *idea* of a feeling; it uses feeling as a sign which points to the product. But then emotion is also promised when you *buy* the product. So the feeling and the product become interchangeable as signifier/signified: but, as with the process of 'differentiations' turning into 'correlatives', this is not a drawn-out process but a two-way process where all the meanings are involved simultaneously. However, just as it was necessary to imply that connections resulting from differentiations *came* (temporally) to be isolated from the differentiating systems, in order to explain the logic of the process, so in the last four sections of this chapter I will make the relationship between the product and the feeling/thing/person attached to it take on a linear form, for the sake of clarity.

(*c*) *Product as Signified*

The product, which initially has no 'meaning', must be given value by a person or object which already has a value to us, i.e., already means. Therefore at this stage something about the product is being signified and the correlating thing or person is the signifier. The following ads are all examples of products being *given* meaning; in A12 and A13 the correlative is simply an object; A14 shows a person as correlative, as with Catherine Deneuve in A8; A15 uses a correlative which becomes significant in its potential absence; A16 shows an example where I think the correlating process has defeated itself, by over-emphasising the product, at the expense of grasping the 'image' of the correlative. But all these ads use the same method of linking two objects (even if one of them is a person): the 'correlative' one acting as an intermediary both for the abstract quality, and for the product (which is the second object and a correlative of the abstract at one remove).

Cigarettes provide a good example of inherently 'meaningless' products:

A12

A12: The John Player ad uses the expensive car as a correlative for luxury and then correlates this to the cigarettes. The matching colours perform most of the connecting function: the beige and black of the cigarette packet are exactly the colours of the car. It is obvious that cigarettes cannot really 'be' or 'mean' luxury on their own. The car is such a classic symbol of luxury that its meaning is unquestioned, and this *signifies* the cigarettes as being luxurious, the car's value carries over on to them.

Notice the lay-out of this ad. It is completely mathematically logical in terms of the process I have just described and illustrates diagrammatically the way meaning is transferred in all ads. The title refers to two different kinds of luxury: those which are easy to enjoy, and those which are harder. It establishes the fact that everything we are to see in the ad is a luxury. This title is outside the two 'frames' of the ad: it refers to them both, links them, establishes their relationship. Therefore it is logical for it not to be within either of them.

Now observe that each of these two identical 'frames' or sections of the ad corresponds to one of the 'luxuries'. The luxury car, the signifying object, is in *apposition* to the Players cigarettes. They are equal and coexistent, given the same spatial weight and placed side by side in the ad.

But the car is leaning out of *its* rectangular frame, *into* the cigarettes' section; the curve of the running board sweeps down and round towards the cigarettes, where this curved movement is continued by the beige curves on the cigarette packet. So the car is also what *connects* the two, it has to push into the space of the cigarettes, just as its meaning is also pushed onto them: the luxury car is carried over both literally and in its value. So the implication is: 'Here's one luxury and here's another, but in case you're not convinced, see how this *known* luxury reaches out to the unknown one.'

Finally, the conclusion, 'John Player Kings—a taste of luxury at 35p' is located *in* the cigarette section, the lower frame, where the movement of the ad has been directed. This also makes sense, as only the general statement was outside both frames; the writing referring to each object separately is located within the appropriate frame.

So we see all of this ad's signifying process embodied in the form, the arrangement of signifiers: why should there be the two frames, and the car spilling from one to the other, if not to transfer its meaning, and why should the colours be the same? The answer does not concern 'aesthetics' or 'lay-out' in themselves, but the interchange of values and significance.

A13

A13: In the Belair ad we are shown foods which we *know* are fresh-tasting, and invited to ride on the accuracy of this information to the assumption that the other oral pleasure invoked, smoking Belair, is also fresh-tasting. How can a *cigarette* really be 'fresh'? Yet it seems to be, because of the dewy drops on the cucumber.

This cigarette ad and A12 and also A4 (where the quality is mildness) use a known correlative—a car for luxury, cucumbers for coolness—to sell us an unknown and unproved correlative. We have to make a leap of credibility and the known-correlative object is our stepping stone. The words in the Belair ad here make no claims: they are positioned close to two things and since we know their relevance to one, why not to the other?

The Sanderson advertisement A14 implies that the product has a meaning which fortunately corresponds to somebody's life-style, but that meaning is only created in the ad:

A14

A14: The Sanderson series of adverts—'Very (name of celebrity), very Sanderson' shows the Romantic tendency to latch personality to something/someone outside the self: ('Nelly, I am Heathcliff!'[1])—an emotional correlative. In the advertisement, Susan Hampshire *is* Sanderson, and Sanderson *is* Susan Hampshire: they are grammatically equated by being placed in apposition. The idea that the product can *be* her, its identity merge with her own, illustrates just how far the 'objective correlative' can go: you see somebody in their wallpaper. But Susan Hampshire is *used as* a correlative to *give* the wallpaper meaning; she is classy, impressive, desirable, a correlative for these qualities: the wallpaper, by connection, is classy, impressive and desirable too. Her 'personality' is the signified; the wallpaper is signified as having 'personality' as well.

However, there is a further implication in the wording of the ad: the fact that it is an achievement for the paper to be both very Susan Hampshire *and* very Sanderson, implies that Sanderson does have an image, a quality of its own, and that by a wonderful compromise, this quality can also suit another image, an individual's personality. Yet it is from this that Sanderson derives its image in the first place. The wording sets up Susan Hampshire and Sanderson as *different*, but *united* in the wallpaper: but in fact they are the same, united by Susan Hampshire since her image is what creates Sanderson's. And this wonderful vehicle of Susan Hampshire's self-expression, is, paradoxically, available to us all for a certain price per yard.

[1] *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Brontë.

And two more complex attempts at transferring meaning:

A15: This ad makes use of *cliché* and its fallibility as a correlative. The ring and the bridal veil stand for marriage, and in each picture the strong male hand stands for 'Promise, Confidence, and Security'. The pictures are clichéd illustrations of these three words, and provide a correlative for the building society's promise of them. But the point of the ad is to undermine the 'Confidence and Security' offered by the man.... 'The future never quite takes care of itself.... Now and then it needs a little help.' The cliché of masculine security and promise is exposed, to show the need for Halifax. Yet simultaneously, the image of the ad, the hand and the ring etc., undermined in its literal sense of marriage-as-security, is used in all its clichédness to represent the promise, confidence and security offered in reparation by Halifax. Despite breaking through the cliché of the signifier on one level, at another the ad uses it fully.

In other words, Security, *signified* by the hand, becomes a *signifier*, in its possible *absence*, of the need for Halifax: it is then returned to its original status of signified through the conduit of the product.

A15a

A15b

A16: The last example of this type shows an attempt at correlation which actually clashes with our perceptions. Portobello Road market is a Trendy Scene, and these people (shopping at the expensive end of it) clearly have a Bohemian but luxurious life-style. Because we like the antique market, or rather, see it as trendy and expensive, we are supposed to like the car, for which it is the correlative: the car is young, bold, elegant, but not too sedate (we assume). But actually the car looks out of place, it clashes with the environment, and is obviously parked in a most inconvenient place and is in everybody's way. (Perhaps this is also indicative of the owner's life-style.) Two very different things are connected, in my view unsuccessfully. The slogan is the connection, as in the Belair ad A13, since it refers to antique spotting on the overt level, though obviously intended to refer to the car. (This ability of language in ads to refer to two things at once is discussed in Chapter 3.)

Thus the signifier, the market, does not succeed in transferring its meaning to the car; the car is too blatant, it is a signifier in itself and does *not* signify quite the same as the market (which is crowded with pedestrians). In this case the only possible meaning the car can derive from the market is by an opposition: by signifying something different from it.

In A16 the product has begun to emerge from its modest place as signified; it is no longer purely the recipient of meaning.

A16

(d) Product as Signifier

The next step, after a product has had meaning transferred to it from another object, is that the product itself comes to *mean*. It may start off as a reflection of something exterior, but will soon come to represent it.

A17 shows a product in the process of changing from a signified to a signifier:

A17

A17: Here, the people are *literally* reflected in the product. It is a correlative for 'quality' (echoes of 'The Quality', i.e. upper class), for a rich way of life. There is however something of a crystal ball element in this reflection since most people will buy the cigarette not to reflect their life-style but to create it. The people could be us, if we had John Player Special to reflect in.

A product may be connected with a way of life through being an accessory to it, but come to signify it, as in the car ad which starts, 'Your way of life demands a lot of a car' and ends by making the car signify the life-style: 'Maxi: more a way of life'.

So the product and the 'real' or human world become linked in the ad, apparently naturally, and the product may and does 'take over' the reality on which it was, at first, dependent for its meaning. As product merges with the sign, its 'correlative' originally used to translate it to us, one absorbs the other and the product becomes the sign itself.

For example, 'Beanz meanz Heinz': the product has taken over a monopoly on the empirical reality of beans, originally used to *explain* the product, 'Heinz': i.e. the Beanz meanz Heinz slogan is a reversal of the first step in the link, which is that Heinz means beans. Once Heinz, the brand name, was *signified* as being beans—'Heinz means beans' places beans as the anterior reality; but now beans, all beans, are completely enclosed by the *signifier*, Heinz. It is the old difference between 'dogs are animals' and 'animals are dogs'. To say that 'beans means Heinz' is the equivalent of the latter; Heinz has appropriated all the meaning that was initially transferred *to* it from the exterior reality of beans as signifiers: but the product ends up as the signifier of reality.

Or there are the Guinness ads: 'As long as a country road', where the signpost reads 'Guinness $\frac{3}{4}$ mile' in one direction, and 'Guinness $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles' in the other. The reality *is* Guinness: what was used or would have been used (it is implied) to provide a meaning in reality for the product, has now been taken over by, and signified by, the product itself. It is Guinness that *means:* it is the sign on the signpost, a signifier of distance. Once, the signpost would have had to signify 'real' distance, to *mean* that Guinness was a long drink: Guinness would be signified. But now it is itself the signifier of length.

(*e*) *Product as Generator*

A product may go from representing an abstract quality or feeling, to generating or *being* that feeling; it may become not only 'sign' but the actual *referent* of that sign. It is one thing for a product to *mean* happiness, it is another for it to *be*, or create happiness. The product is always a sign within the ad: as long as you are not in possession of it or consuming it, it remains a sign and a *potential* referent; but the act of buying/consuming is what releases the referent emotion itself. A bath oil may represent excitement; this is all it *can* do in the advertisement, where it is inevitably a sign, because the referent is the real thing. Yet the ad shows us the product as generator in terms of its internal narrative, and we are promised that the product can *create* the feeling it *represents*; 'Things happen after a Badedas bath'. (This statement has the quality of a truism—how could *nothing* happen after a Badedas bath?—a truism which is disguised by the narrative material of the advertisement.)

To put this more simply: a product may be connected with an emotional referent but in two very different ways: you can go out and buy a box of chocolates *because* you feel happy; or you can feel happy because you have bought a box of chocolates: and these are not the same thing. In the first case the chocolates do

A18

not pretend to be 'more' than a sign; they mean something, but in terms of a feeling which you had anyway. They are a *sign* for a feeling, which is the *referent*. But if the product creates the feeling, it has become more than a sign: it enters the space of the referent, and becomes active in reality. A18 shows how products start giving our feelings a little help.

A18: Babycham sparkles, not just the way she *feels* (reflection) but the way she *wants* to feel. It symbolises the state she desires, and presumably, drinking it helps her to achieve that state. The product, the object, has now started to do more than simply reflect a feeling already there, it stands for a desired feeling and is seen as *totally* identified with it: '*Just* the way I want to feel.' This is a crucial difference because an object reflecting an abstract quality may fairly accurately reflect one facet of it while not attempting to reduce the whole quality or feeling to its own limitations.

Once the product precedes the feeling, as in A18, there is a danger that it will set the bounds for the feeling and the two will become identified as the same. The result is not only speaking, but feeling in clichés. Happiness is shampooed hair, joy is a drink of champagne. There is a sort of Pavlov dog syndrome at work whereby after seeing certain products linked to certain feelings for a long time, by association the products *alone* come to create, to 'be' the feeling. 'Objective correlatives' end up by *being*, through this distortion, the very indefinable qualities they were used to *invoke*: putting everything in material and limited terms. 'Happiness is a cigar called Hamlet'. The connection of a 'thing' and an abstraction can lead them to seem the same, in real life.

The next example, A19, shows both sides of the meaning/generating process together:

A19

A19: This Clairol ad, which deserves very careful reading, functions by a complete reversal of the apparent meaning. 'I found it', she says: and the product is named 'Happiness'. The meaning that one instantly assumes, because of the words, and because of the woman's ecstatic attitude dancing in the street, is that she has found happiness, that the feeling is what 'I found it' refers to. But actually she continues to tell us what she did find, in small print: 'I found the highlights that were missing from my hair'. We are being told, on the grammatical level, that she has found a new hair colour through 'Happiness' (the product). Yet the real message is the reverse: she has found happiness (the feeling) *through* the new hair colour. The product itself, the hair colour, is the means of obtaining something else, and here the connection has been made rather easy for us, as you can find Happiness and happiness at the same time.

Thus the product not only represents an emotional experience, but *becomes* that experience and *produces* it: its roles as sign and referent are collapsed together.

(*f*) *Product as Currency*

A19 showed a product made interchangeable with a feeling. When two things are made interchangeable and hence equal in value, they may be used as currency for one another. Of course, Happiness and happiness are only *seen* as interchangeable. They provide a currency on the level of signs. Yet this exchange value, because it exists in terms of *signifying* (Clairol means happiness/happiness means Clairol) comes to have meaning in terms of real buying and selling. The Happiness hair colour represents *access* to happiness; it is therefore a sort of money that will buy happiness. It provides an intermediary currency between real money and an emotion, because it has a value in terms of both: one, as genuine monetary *price*, and the other, a value as a sign, representing or replacing the feeling of happiness or whatever.

Thus as well as an external object 'buying' status for a product in meaning terms, the product is able literally to buy status in the external world.

A20: The product, face cleanser, is being sold presumably for its use-value. However the cleanser is really being advertised on the grounds of its exchange-value, its capacity to buy something else: in this case, crudely, a boyfriend (or three boyfriends in the case of Anne French cleanser). The product is pushed on one level for its own sake, its usefulness, and simultaneously on another level, not for itself at all, but as a currency to buy things that are intangible or hard to get.

These kinds of ads generate a connection between a product and a second 'product', love, happiness etc. which it will buy. 'Money can't buy you love'—but cleansing milk can (and money can buy cleansing milk).

Products are thus set up as being able to buy things *you* cannot buy. This puts them in a position of *replacing* you; they do things you can't do, for you. There is an ad for frozen vegetables which says 'Birds Eye peas will do anything to attract your husband's attention.' Presumably, *you* would do anything to attract your husband's attention. A woman and a Birds Eye pea are made interchangeable; the peas represent what the woman can't do, they have the same aim: to make her husband notice something at dinner. She must buy the peas and let them buy love for her. They are thus exchangeable both with love, and with her: they mean, and they make her mean.

A20

This chapter has examined signs as a currency in the way meanings are transferred; both through a transaction *within* the ad between an element of a Referent System and a product: and also in a transaction *outside* the ad, buying/consuming. However, since *this* transaction is usually also represented within the ad, it means that a series of transactions is carried on in its form: which takes on the status of a narrative when the transaction is represented in time: 'Things happen *after* a Badedas bath'; and the status of a given logic when the transaction is assumed by a juxtaposition of two objects simultaneously given the same value. In neither case, however, does the formal process take place within the closed world of the advertisement.