The main means by which the power of the image is deployed as rhetoric of images is through advertising. Advertising now saturates cultural space in both the developed and many of the developing countries. The amount of money spent globally on advertising is $1 trillion and in the U.S. advertising and marketing make up almost one fifth of the gross national product. The most powerful advertising medium is television and the television commercial. The power of television as a medium for advertising was recognized early in the 1950s when it was referred to as the “dream machine.” Rosser Reeves, one of the “fathers” of television advertising boasted that "we could take the same advertising campaign from print or radio and put it on TV, and even when there were very few sets, sales would go through the roof (Fifties)." How then are the aged “imagined” in television commercials and is aging “imagined.”

Symbolic Violence: Aging and the Aged in Advertising

The aged are “disappeared” from the utopian world, the world of desire, created by the rhetoric of images of television commercials. They do not drive luxury automobiles on traffic free highways to “nowhere,” dine at restaurants and socialize at bars with the other inhabitants of the utopia. They do not need or enjoy the new technologies of communication and entertainment. And they do not work, so they can not enjoy the playful comradeship and socialization that work in the utopia provides. They have been “cleansed” from the utopia, much like minorities were “cleansed” from early U.S. television (Fifties).

There are two important exceptions. The aged can be found in television commercials for prescription drugs, especially those drugs which have been developed to treat the physical illnesses that are associated with growing older. Examples of these diseases are arthritis, cancer, high blood pressure, diabetes, heart and cardiovascular illness, high cholesterol, and loss of, or problems with, hearing and sight. These drug commercials are more likely to be positioned in television shows whose overall as a higher per cent of aged. Sunday morning news programs, Jeopardy, Wheel of Fortune and early prime time dramas are examples of this. The characters in these commercials are the aged, their illnesses are those associated with aging, and the prescription drugs being advertised cure the illnesses, or at least treat the symptoms of the illness effectively. The aged in the commercial then continue with the activities of their lives of leisured retirement. In the previously mentioned Celebrex commercial, the attractive but arthritic aged, are cured, so that they can do tai chi, row, and scooter.

. The second exception is commercials selling activities associated with the conventional wisdom that the norm for the aged is to enjoy the “golden years.” These commercials are populated by the aged, those apparently without the above health problems, or for whom drugs have provided a cure, and who have sufficient disposable incomes. The golden years is “imagined” in these commercials as an idyllic world of travel and leisure. The best examples of these commercials are the cruise line commercials, populated by elderly people, enjoying the wonders of the cruise ship and the places it visits.

While the aged are disappeared and marginalized in the world of television commercials, aging, or the prevention of aging, is central. The reason is that the rhetoric of images has so successfully defined youth as the norm of the utopia. Commercials that sell products claiming to preserve the image of youth range from beauty products that conceal wrinkles, to hair coloring products that conceal grayness, to skin products that conceal dry and cracking skin, to cosmeseutical drugs that eliminate wrinkles, grow eyelashes, grow hair, and to drugs that will increase sexual performance. Skin, hair, sexuality become stigmas, lived experience, one’s body, is flawed. Images proving the therapeutic capacity of these products to reverse the process of aging is an integral part of the commercial. These commercials introduce another dimension to the utopian world of desire and illusion, magic. Visual techniques show wrinkles disappearing, skin becoming smooth and soft, hair changing color, or just returning.

In sum, the rhetoric of images in television commercials cleanse the utopian of the aged, offers the aged some hope of existing in a “marginalized” world with the therapeutic benefits of prescription drugs. The images in television commercials define aging as a process of physical change only, physical deterioration, and because of that physical change transgresses the norm; it is a process that needs to be resisted. It also reinforces more, consumer subjectivity, the acceptance that aging is as it is defined in advertising, and that the solution to the anxiety that the commercials creates in the consumer can be resolved by buying and using the product. The images that the commercials deploy to define those who have aged is similar. The aged must cope with the pathology of aging; this is inevitable because the diseases are a normal part of aging. And those aged that have money must spend their money actively enjoying their retirement, their golden years. The real power of the image is revealed; it imagines the diseases associated as old age as being the natural result of aging, like physical change, and persuades the aged that prescription drugs, consuming, is the solution. Most diseases that are “imagined” in the commercials are caused not by aging, but by the poor diet of a fast food culture, fat, sugar and salt, lack of exercise because of overwork, when employed, and stress when unemployed, and/or a failed health care system.

Television commercials are embedded in a “world” also and that is the world of the television show, and the “world” of the television show is more and more the world of the upper class. The television show is not “just entertainment,” even entertainment, the main purpose of which is to draw viewers for the advertisement. It is an essential means of deploying the power of the image. In the 1950s, one of the most popular genres on television were situation comedies. The “world” of the comedies was most often the world of the suburban middle class, with the home as the main setting. The narrative with its characters, conflict and humor was fore grounded but it was always taking place in the middle class world of the “Joneses. This is quite different currently. Situation comedies are still an vital genre, but the world in which they are set is an upper class world, a world of the “new Joneses.”

This is the power of the image deployed to reinforce consumerism, but also as symbolic violence. It disappears and marginalizes a certain group because of certain characteristics, which that group may or may not share, and it devalues the experience of aging by defining it simply as physical deterioration, by what it lacks in relation to the norm. Simultaneously, it reinforces consumer subjectivity, its anxieties, and the world of its “desires.” It also reinforces the belief in western society that disease is inevitable, that individuals get diseases, and that drugs cure diseases or control them. This ignores the social factors related to disease, mainly consumerism, and its sedentary life style. imagining of aging, the aged and disease.

"Advertising now compares with such long-standing institutions as the

school and the church in the magnitude of its social influence. It dominates the media, it has vast power in the shaping of popular standards and it is really one of the very limited groups of **institutions which exercise social control."**

A study by Juliet Schorr which she discusses in her book The Overspent American demonstrates the extent to which advertising is successful in creating the consumer psyche.. In her study, two thirds of those surveyed admit that they were always thinking about something they wanted to buy and just under a third of those surveyed acknowledged that they have dreamed, not daydreamed, but dreamed as they slept about something they wanted to buy. The most interesting result though was both the “wish list” which the respondents shared with Schorr, and also the income that they believed was necessary to get what they “needed.” Both the wish list (exotic cars and vacations, second and third vacation homes, and the million dollar swimming pools) and the income reflected an upper class life style; the life style of the top two percent of income earners in the U.S.

As Schorr points out, in the 1950s, advertising was directed at the emerging post-WWII middle class, and the “world” of advertising, the world in which the product that was also being sold, was embedded was a middle class world. The “dreams” and wish lists of the newly constructed consumers of the 1950s were middle class dreams, “keeping up with the Joneses.” However, advertising, at the turn of the century, images products that frequently can only be comfortably afforded by members of the upper class. Also the “world” in which the product is embedded is an upper class world. Hence, the new exotic wish lists, and the drive to keep up with what Schorr calls the “new Jonses.” This is not surprising if one understands that advertising is not just selling things but is selling a “world” and a creating a subjectivity.