



Image and imaginary in the art of advertising

Ilef TRABELSI

E-Mail: ilef.trabelsi@gmail.com

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in particular, we seek answers to certain questions which turn around, mainly, of the bonds and correspondences between the advertising image and the imaginary one. Indeed, our interests relate to the forms of the imaginary one in the advertising image. Through a brief study, we examine how certain brands have revealed the imaginary through works of art or representations of an ancient myth in the advertising discourse of certain brands.

Keywords: Image, imagination, advertising, art, myth

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Abstract

Many image and advertising researchers affirm that the image has existed since the dawn of time. It seems that the image was in the middle of the attentions of the primitive man who was in search of answers for the questions which concerned the world. This can be seen in the traces left by our ancestors in the caves. Thus, the image has occupied man for a long time, thanks to this we can see the great interest of the image and also the importance of the sight in the system of understanding of the primitive man. In order to make the image a common language of the Humanity, the man has always tried to master the images as much as it represents an excellent tool of communication. Through this study on the image and the advertising image

imagination of the receiver. We try in this research to study some forms of imaginary in the publicity in order to develop its relations with the advertising approach.

*** Advertising and the imaginary: meaning and forms**

Certainly, the essential role of the publicity is to seduce the receiver, but with the thought of BARTHES that we knew any visual is carrier of various messages. The meanings of these messages are found around the image, in its rhetoric, between the signified and the signifier of verbal and iconic messages. Advertising is far from being naive, arbitrary or absolute. Indeed, it does not only support the sale of the product or the service, it allows the creation of the direction by leaning on the symbolic dimension of the objects, it is what BARTHES affirms: "*there is probably a true imagination of the sign*"¹, thus, the advertising image does not miss meanings.

To understand the mechanisms of the advertising message, we take support from the article *Le Sacré dans la publicité* (COTTIN, 2011), by COTTIN. The professor identifies four levels of meaning present in the language of advertising. The first is a commercial level, it is about selling a product. The second level is the cultural function of advertising. For the

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*** Image and imaginary in the art of advertising**

Several studies indicate that the imaginary sometimes indicates myth, legend, dream, cultural heritage such as tales or folk tales, etc. Advertising, on several occasions, has also used these aspects of fictions to appeal to the

¹ BARTHES Roland (1985), *L'aventure sémiologique*, Paris, Seuil, p. 255.

can be segmented into sequences or small semantic units (myths) in which a belief is necessarily invested - contrary to the fable or the tale. This narrative implements a logic that escapes the classical principles of the logic of identity.»³ . Thus, we underline that the myth is also defined as a narrative with a "religious" aspect. It also underlines that "myth" and "story" are both classified under the category of the narrative.

On the other hand, Mircea ELIADE thinks that *"the main function of myth is to set the exemplary models of all significant human actions"*⁴. Myth also encompasses and unites a diversity of disciplines (philosophy, anthropology, sociology, science, epistemology and psychology) determined and transmitted by a population. Myth is considered to be the "word" of the community.

What amounts to say that *"the myth will appear as a symbolic theater of the interior and external struggles which delivers the man on the way of his evolution, to the conquest of his personality. It condenses in only one history a multitude of analogous situations; beyond its agitated and coloured images, it makes it possible to*

author, it *"participates in the cultural creation, it makes memory of our classic culture, that it quotes on the world of the parody and the man"*, just like the art. The third level concerns the social function of the publicity, COTTIN affirms that it *"is a formidable mirror of our society: it reflects our behaviors, our desires, our fears and desires"*. Finally, the author names the fourth function of advertising as follows: *"prophetic, messianic or utopian"*, he explains that this function is determined from the moment that advertising creates a new behavior and that it participates in shaping the future of the consumer.

He affirms: *« I do not think that one could reduce the publicity to a simple commercial function. It also has a second symbolic function, insofar as it draws its images and its messages from other images and other messages that constitute the cultural reservoir of our civilization. »*²

*** Mythological aspects in advertising**

According to Gilbert DURAND's definition, *"Myth appears as a narrative (mythical discourse) that stages characters, situations, and settings that are generally non-natural (divine, utopian, surreal, etc.) and that*

Mythocritique » in *Recherches et Travaux, L'Imaginaire*, Université des langues et lettres, Grenoble, bulletin n° 15.

⁴ ELIADE Mircea (1968), *Traité d'histoire des religions*, Payot, Paris, p 385.

² COTTIN Jérôme (2001). *Le sacré dans la publicité, « Autres Temps. Cahiers d'éthique sociale et politique »*, N°69, pp. 83-93, En ligne : <https://doi.org/10.3406/chris.2001.2259>.

³ DURAND Gilbert (1977), « À propos du vocabulaire de l'imaginaire. Mythe, Mythanalyse,

gratuitous dramatic or lyrical inventions, unrelated to the social or political organization, to the ritual, to the law or to the custom; their role is on the contrary to justify all that, to express in images the great ideas which organize and support all that. »⁶

Advertising represents an excellent space for society to reveal its beliefs and present its culture. Thus, it embodies the register of myths in its discourse. Subsequently, the advertising image can become a reference on the effectiveness of mythological devices in the communication, in the society and in the culture of the latter.

The success of this kind of advertising can be explained by an interference between the present moment and the past, in other words, between modernity and myth. This is what GUSDORF underlines: « *The persuasive force is not in the myth; it is in us and awakens under the allusion to take hold of our whole being. The perennality of myths is not due to the prestiges of fabulation, to the magic of literature. It attests to the very permanence of human reality* ». ⁷

For DUMEZIL, « *The function of the particular class of narratives that are the myths is [...] to express*

discover constant types of relations, i.e., structures »⁵.

In this section we try to answer some questions based on examples of advertisements that have borrowed mythologies. The aim is to determine what role mythologies play in the construction of the advertising discourse? Why do advertisers use ancient myths? Does the interference of these myths with the advertising communication allow to develop or to arouse a certain imaginary?

The advertisers find in mythologies a source of inspiration to develop and maintain the discourse of advertising. Moreover, the ancient myths (Greek or Roman) do not represent only a sacred history, however, they inform on the social structure, it is what affirms DUMEZIL. For him, the connection between the myths and the society is fundamental, he expresses: « *Certainly, in these archaic societies, the mythology was very important and it is especially of mythological texts that one has. But the myths do not let themselves be understood if one cuts them off from the life of the men who tell them. Although called early or late, sometimes, as in Greece to a literary career of their own, they are not*

⁶ DUMÉZIL Georges (1968), *Mythe et Épopée I*, Gallimard, Paris, p. 10.

⁷ GUSDORF Georges (1984), *Mythe et Métaphysique*, Flammarion, Paris, p.355

⁵ CHEVALIER Jean & GHEERBRAN Alain (1982), *Le dictionnaire des symboles*, Edition Bouquins, Paris, p16.

Between imaginary discourse and sacred history and symbolic representation, the ancient myths have an important influence on society, for this reason, we find an infinity of examples for the advertisements that have made of the mythology, the main discourse to transmit a certain idea. Therefore, we borrow some examples of advertisements that have used ancient myths in all its forms, characteristics and diversity to represent a certain quality of the product or to show one of the values of the brand.

Therefore, we study, now, some examples in order to determine the relationship between myth and the world of advertising. We try to understand, mainly, the interest of its mythical references.

The advertising world and the ancient myths join in several occasions. It is an interference which is translated through the use of symbols, characters, heroes, names of mythical characters...etc. Indeed, to use myths in the conception of advertising, advertisers are faced with a multitude of choices and a symbolic wealth. Let's take the example of the most famous myth in the world, recognized by the three religions of the book (Judaism,

dramatically the ideology of which the society lives, to maintain in front of its conscience not only the values that it recognizes and the ideals that it pursues from generation to generation, but first of all its being and its very structure, the elements, the connections, the balances, the tensions that constitute it, to justify finally the rules and the traditional practices, without which all in it would be dispersed »⁸

The author adds: « To those who do not have a sense of power, myth brings the certainty of the power of the imagination »⁹. For him: « the imaginary exerts then on the listener a fascination due to the exercise of a power of which he knows very well that he will not be able to benefit, but that he intends to share the time of the only narration »¹⁰.

The myth is an ancient story of fabulous aspect, it represents a figure of the imagination. Its power, diversity and structure frequently fascinate the world of advertising. Because we all have at least one myth in our memory, myth is part of the mental images and cultural universe of the consumer. Because myth can represent common images, it is accessible to everyone and brings them together.

des mythes solaires, Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident, n°7. Le « réel », l'« imaginaire ». pp. 83-92.
¹⁰ *Ibid*

⁸ DUMÉZIL Georges (1996), *Heur et malheur du guerrier : aspects mythiques de la fonction guerrière chez les Indo-Européens*, Flammarion, Paris, p15

⁹ REMY Mathieu (1985). *Note: Images de l'imaginaire dans la mythologie chinoise ancienne:*

Figure 1: Representation of the Garden of Eden myth in advertisements for several brands.

Advertisers find symbolic fields, values and ideas in the collective imagination. Marcel DETIENNE confirms that myth is not an individual invention, because originally it came from words like stories, proverbs and even anecdotes told to small children. This confirms that myth is synonymous with the collective.

« The strategic value and at the same time the astuteness of advertising is precisely to touch each one according to the others, in their desire of reified social prestige. It never addresses the man alone, it aims at him in his differential dimension, and when it seems to catch his "deep" motivations, it always does it in a spectacular way, that is to say that it always summons the close relations, the group, the society, in the process of reading, of interpretation and of making-value that it establishes. »¹¹

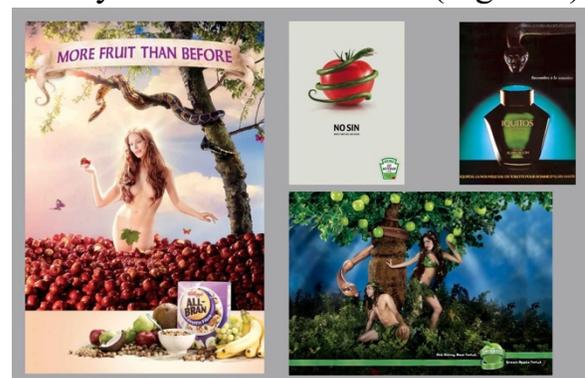
*** Tales in advertising: references of the imagination**

As with ancient myths, fairy tales, fables, grandmother's stories and traditional tales were a real source of inspiration for advertisers. These popular tales have seduced many brands, even luxury brands.

Christianity and Islam), known in all civilizations and all times: the myth of Eve and Adam. This myth has been the center of interest of various artistic practices and in particular, in the world of visual advertising.

The myth of Eve and Adam, the myth of human creation, the myth of the Garden of Eden, the myth of the apple, is a mythical story where advertisers find several elements such as: Tree, Apple, Snake, Man, Woman, Demon ... etc... each element carries a symbol, in fact, it is from the symbolic meanings of these elements and the morality of the myth that advertisers find references to draw inspiration and establish their ideas. These iconic and plastic signs serve as meanings and production of meaning to symbolize this eternal myth.

Below, we represent some examples of advertisements that have put in images the myth of Eve and Adam. (Figure 1)



¹¹ BAUDRILLARD Jean (1986), *La Société de consommation, Ses mythes, ses structures*, Gallimard, Paris, p79.

There are themes, fixed pieces, more or less disassembled from which the storyteller, like the child, cobbles together a new construction. But beyond this functionalism that Propp studied, there is also the necessity of the moment, the imagination of the storyteller, the transmission and the memory: so many elements of a considerable richness. »¹³

These fantastic stories have not ceased to mark the imaginations of human beings in ancient times as in the present. All these works also inspire the world of advertising. « Advertisements are structured like other art forms, borrowing the conventions of literature and art to communicate their messages. »¹⁴ The common culture, the fantastic, the marvelous, the fiction ... etc., all these features make folk tales extremely rich and varied works that do not fail to be adapted by advertising.

Besides, the interferences between folk tale and advertising are extremely numerous. It is difficult to present them in a small development, however, we are interested in this topic in this subsection of the second chapter of the first part of our research, because folk tales, which are sometimes translated into literary works, are part

Fantastic tales were originally oral traditions, then they were certified through writing. In the fifteenth century, the famous Charles PERRAULT was a French man of letters who collected and transcribed the tales of the French oral tradition.

The tale is a « narrative constructed according to the regular succession of the functions mentioned in their different forms, with the absence of some of them in one tale, and the repetition of some in another »¹² The narrative framework of these stories, in all the literate or popular versions, have attracted the cultural world in all its artistic forms, notably, the visual arts. The cinematographic art is the best example, several films have adapted the popular stories. We cite as examples the tales that have been most present in the cinema: Little Red Riding Hood, Cinderella, Beauty and the Beast, Sleeping Beauty, Alice in Wonderland, Puss in Boots, Snow White, Peter Pan, Pinocchio, Tom Thumb, The Princess and the Frog, Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, Aladdin ...etc.

Storytelling is a real advantage for advertisers because it "is like a mechanic's toy in a child's toy box.

¹⁴ SOLOMON Michael (2005), *Comportement du consommateur*, Pearson Education, Paris, p.258.

¹² PROPP Vladimir (1970), *La morphologie du conte*, Seuil, Paris, p.122.

¹³ JEAN Georges (1981), *Le pouvoir des Contes*, Casterman, Paris, p.101.

these stories. The representation of the tale in the advertising field allows the receiver to engage in the plot by identifying with the characters, the wonderful worlds, the imaginary that articulates the meaning of the story. Making the public dream is the main objective of advertising, whereas installing the product or the brand in the charm of the magical universe is simpler and above all more credible.

The story of the popular tale transports the consumer into an imaginary event embodied by magical objects, fairies, orcs, princes and princesses, witches, giants, castles, magical powers, supernatural characters... etc.

We specify that according to our research on the use of references of the imaginary (tales, myths, legends...etc.), we noticed that it is the luxury brands that have more recourse to this kind of adaptation. We present some examples of advertisements that use the world of fairy tales and popular stories, such as Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Snow White... etc. (figure 2)

of the imaginary, our main field of study.

A brand whose objective is to think about the future, to reflect on solutions for the good of the community, will not use tales as a mode of expression. This surpassing of oneself is specific to myths whose heroes transcend their human conditions to advance society. The tales do not integrate this field. They differ from myths on two essential points: the hero of the tale is the main beneficiary of the quest and, if myth invites reflection, the tale is characterized by the presence of a moral allowing the reader to learn from the protagonist's mistakes.

This relationship to oneself, this quest for adventure and transgression is characteristic of the Project field. The brand develops a more intimate discourse, seeks to value the consumer in its construction and transforms its product into a magical object. While the Mission advocates the well-being of all, the Project is oriented towards the self.

Through the use of these collective representations in advertising, it is not a question of presenting these artistic works, but it is a question of persuading the public of the best quality of the product or the brand. Thus, the advertisements allow the public to renew itself with the tales from the symbolic elements that build

meanings already inscribed in the memory of the receiver. Therefore, as long as the receiver can identify the artwork in the advertisement, he can associate certain characteristics of the artwork with the product or brand.

The purpose of using art or artwork in advertising is explained in the seventh essay of the book *Seeing it* (BERGER, 1976), John BERGER determines several points about the use of art in advertising. He explains "any work of art cited by advertising is used for a double purpose. Art is a sign of wealth; it belongs to those who live in high spirits; it is part of the accessories that the world lends to rich and beautiful people. But a work of art is also the sign of a cultural authority, of a form of dignity, even of wisdom, superior to any material interest, proper to the vulgar. Thus, the work of art cited says two almost contradictory things at the same time: it is a sign of wealth and spirituality and it implies that the proposed purchase is both a luxury and an element of cultural value. {...} [Advertising] uses [works of art] to persuade and flatter the viewer-buyer. »¹⁵ . "And then, it must be noted that drawing inspiration from the masterpieces of art is beautiful, inexpensive, and speaks to everyone. »¹⁶.



Figure 2: Representation of stories in advertisements for several brands

*** The work of art: means of seduction and revelation of the imaginary in advertising**

This text is dedicated to the study of the relationship between work of art and advertising. We try to answer these questions: why do advertisers use works of art? In what this last can be interesting in the field of the advertising creation?

The purpose of advertising is essentially to sell a product. This can be done through several means or strategies. Dream is a term closely linked to the world of brands and their advertising universe. Through advertising, advertisers transport their consumers on a dream journey. Therefore, the advertiser's resort to the known work of art in several occasions, it uses it in order to involve the culture and the memory of the public. Moreover, a work of art obviously includes values and

¹⁶ KIEFFER Anne & BENATTAR Michèle (2003), *Mettez de l'art dans votre com*, Editions d'Organisation, Paris, p135

¹⁵ BERGER John (1976), *Op., Cit.*, p 145.

* References

- BARTHES Roland (1985), *L'aventure sémiologique*, Paris, Seuil, p. 255.
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- DUMÉZIL Georges (1996), *Heur et malheur du guerrier : aspects*

We take the example of San Marco coffee, which the authors of this book have mentioned as an example of "an Italian coffee positioned in a brand territory linked to art". This example is interesting in the sense that it embodies not only the relationship of advertising to art, but also to mythical thoughts.

In his work "The Creation of Adam", inspired by the book of Genesis, MICHEL-ANGE illustrated a biblical text which is found in Jewish, Christian and Muslim beliefs. It is a mythological story that also evokes the breaking of the Covenant between God and Adam and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This example shows that « the use of a work of art can also be innovative »¹⁷, because this brand asked the three young artists to give another perspective to the work to create four phone cards, to be discovered in the coffee pack. In fact, the same artwork has been borrowed by the famous cell phone brand Nokia.



Figure 3: Representations of artworks in advertising visuals

¹⁷ Ibid

*mythiques de la fonction
guerrière chez les Indo-
Européens r*, Flammarion,
Paris, p15

REMY Mathieu (1985). *Note: Images
de l'imaginaire dans la
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