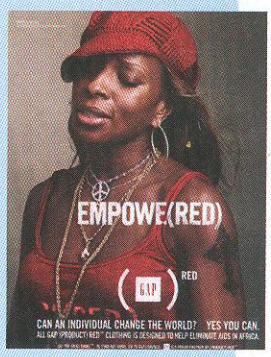
chapter seven



Advertising, Consumer Cultures, and Desire

We are confronted with advertising images constantly through the course of our daily lives, in newspapers and magazines, on television, in movie theaters, on billboards, on public transportation, on clothing, on websites, and in many other contexts in which we may not even notice them. Logos (signs, pictograms, or characters that represent a brand) are ubiquitous. They appear on clothing and shoes, on household objects, cars, knapsacks, computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices. Because consumers are so accustomed to the presence of brands and ads and see so many ads over the course of a typical week, they tune ad messages out. In today's media environment, advertisers and marketers are compelled to constantly reinvent the ways in which they address and hold the attention of increasingly jaded consumers, who are always on the verge of turning the page, hitting the television remote control, fast forwarding on their TiVos, or browsing to a new website.

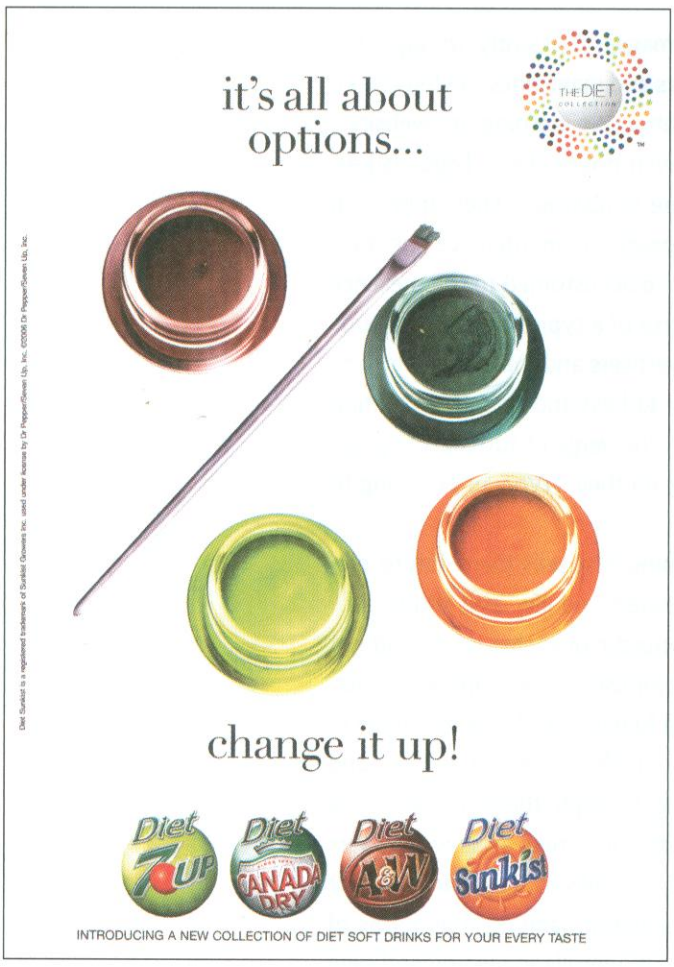
Consumer products and brands and the advertising that sells them aim to present an image of things to be desired, people to be envied, and life "as it should be." Advertisements present an abstract world, often a fantastic one, that is situated not in the present but in an imagined future. Ads make promises—the promise of a better self-image, a better appearance, more prestige, and fulfillment. As we discussed in chapter 2, as viewers we have a range of tactics with which to interpret and respond to the images of advertising, to negotiate meaning through them, or to ignore them. Many contemporary advertisements interpellate consumers as savvy viewers who understand that ads promise more than they can deliver. Some ads present themselves as something other than ads—as art, as culture jams, and as forms of entertainment. Marketers sometimes use techniques of guerrilla marketing and viral

marketing by which they attempt to tap into social networks in which consumers communicate with each other, and have made their messages integral to the online social networking that proliferates today. Consumerism is deeply integrated into the daily life and the visual culture of the societies in which we live, often in ways that we do not even recognize. As we discuss further in this chapter, the boundaries between ads and culture jams, between art and advertising, and between consumer culture and alternative cultures are increasingly blurred and hard to distinguish.

Consumer Societies

Consumer cultures have developed out of the rise of modernity and the historical emergence of capitalism as an economic force throughout the world. Capitalism as a system depends on the production and consumption of large amounts of goods, well beyond those that are necessary for daily living. The concept of consumer choice is central to capitalist consumer cultures. As this ad promotes, the idea of individual choice has a high value in the world of consumerism. Here, the relatively minor option of choosing between different diet sodas is promoted as a special experience—one that the graphic design of the ad equates to a palate of colors that can be used to make art. Individual choice is sometimes proposed in the language of advertising as an enormously important thing, crucial to a person's happiness and to the functioning of a society.

FIG. 7.1
Diet soda ad, 2006



Consumer societies emerged in the context of modernity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the rise of mass production in the wake of the industrial revolution and with the consolidation of populations in major urban centers that took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries throughout much of the industrialized world. In a consumer society, the individual is confronted with and surrounded by a vast assortment of goods. The characteristics of those goods change (or appear to change) constantly. Thus even products that are sold as exemplifying tradition and heritage, such as Quaker Oats cereal, are marketed through constantly changing advertising messages. In a consumer society there are great

social and physical distances between the manufacture of goods and their purchase and use. This means that workers in an automobile factory may live far from where the cars they help build are bought and sold and may never be able to afford to buy one of the cars they make themselves. Increased industrialization and bureaucratization in the late nineteenth century meant a decrease in the number of small entrepreneurs and an increase in large manufacturers; this situation in turn resulted in people traveling longer distances to work. This is in contrast to feudal and rural societies of the past, in which there was proximity between producers and consumers, as in the case of a shoemaker whose shoes were sold to and worn by residents in the village where he worked.

Mobility and concentrations of populations in urban areas are aspects of modernity that have contributed to the rise of consumerism. As urban centers expanded in the nineteenth century and systems of mass transit were built in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, people began to live increasingly mobile lives, traveling by trains to cities and through urban spaces on mass transit systems. As the automobile became a popular mode of transportation in the early twentieth century and highway systems were built throughout many countries after the Second World War, newer kinds of mobility continued to emerge. The world of consumerism is closely tied to the increased mobility of people in their daily lives. As places filled with mobile crowds and mass transit, city streets became forums for advertising.

In a consumer society, there is a constant demand for new products. Old products are sold with a new look, added features, a new design, or simply new slogans and ad campaigns. A capitalist economy is dependent on the overproduction of goods, which requires the production of desire for those goods among consumers who may not truly need them. In a consumer society a large segment of the population must have discretionary income and leisure time, which means that they must be able to afford goods that are not absolutely necessary to daily life but that they may want for an array of reasons, such as style or status.

Consumer societies are integral to modernity. The mass production and marketing of goods depended until the late twentieth century on large sectors of the population living in concentrated areas, so that the distribution, purchase, and advertising of goods had an available audience. The rise of online commerce since the late 1990s has dramatically reconfigured this relationship of consumerism to space. Initially, online consumerism promised to eliminate the necessity of bearing overhead costs of a physical retail space (a store, a mall) for the sale of goods to consumers (while at the same time adding significant amounts for shipping to consumers). Yet it has also emerged simultaneously with the expansion of global chain stores, such as the Gap, Victoria's Secret, Barnes and Noble, and many others, as well as the success of big-box retailers and massive discount stores such as Costco and Wal-Mart. This means that we find many of the same stores in central shopping districts of cities around the world, from Tokyo to London to New York. Global consumerism thus features this kind of homogenization at the same time that it offers a broad array of

media venues to consumers, who can purchase goods online or through exchange networks such as eBay and Craigslist. Many aspects of these patterns of consumption are not wholly new, though; online consumerism recalls the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century practice by which those people living in rural areas relied on mail-order catalogues to purchase many of their goods. For rural children growing up during the early to mid-twentieth century, before the broad expansion of mall culture, the delivery of each season's Montgomery Ward and Sears and Roebuck catalogues was a highly anticipated event. It was one of few sources through which rural consumers could engage in the kind of "window shopping" world of consumer fantasy that urban dwellers could experience in their walks by department stores and that suburban dwellers engaged in through trips to the local mall.

With the emergence of the consumer society of the late nineteenth century, the workplace, the home, and commerce became separated, which in turn had a significant effect on the structure of the family and gender relations. As people moved into urban centers and away from agrarian lifestyles in which all members of the family play crucial roles in production, the distance between the public sphere of work and commerce and the private sphere of the home increased. Women were relegated to the domestic sphere and men were assigned to the public sphere. As the manufacturing industry expanded, women and men were increasingly perceived as two distinct kinds of consumers who could be targeted through different kinds of marketing strategies linked to different sets of goods.

The new experience of urban life and modernity of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has often been characterized as the sensation of standing in a crowd, being surrounded on a daily basis by strangers whom one will never know, and the both giddy and overwhelming feeling of the city as a kind of organism. In this modern context we can see another important aspect of consumer societies: the source of concepts of the self and identity are constituted in a larger realm than the family. It has been argued that in consumer societies people derive their sense of their place in the world and their self-image at least in part through their purchase and use of commodities, which seem to give meaning to their lives in the absence of the meaning derived from a closer-knit community.

The rise of consumerism thus took place within a context of shifting values. One of the fundamental changes in turn-of-the-century European-American societies that was integral to the rise of consumer culture was the emergence of what historian T. J. Jackson Lears calls the "therapeutic ethos."[1] These societies shifted over a period of time from valorizing a Protestant work ethic, civic responsibility, and self-denial to legitimating ideas of leisure, spending, and individual fulfillment. Whereas the religiously influenced ethos of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries affirmed the values of saving and thriftiness, in the late nineteenth century these societies gained a new emphasis on spending and on imagining that the path to betterment was through the increased acquisition of goods. In this constantly changing modern culture, the feeling that life was often troubling and overwhelming prevailed. This

FIG. 7.2
Coca-Cola ad, 1890

allowed the idea to take hold, one promoted by the emerging consumer market, that everyone was potentially inadequate and in need of improvement in some way. Commodities fit the bill as things imagined to aid in self-improvement and promising self-fulfillment.

This therapeutic discourse is an essential element of consumer culture. The idea that consumer products will offer self-fulfillment is crucial to marketing and consumption. Modern advertisements were able increasingly to speak to problems of anxiety and identity crisis and to offer harmony, vitality, and the prospect of self-realization, all values in the emerging modern culture; their products were offered as solutions. In the late nineteenth century, for instance, soda drinks were thought of as health tonics and sold at drugstore soda fountains. This ad participates in the therapeutic ethos by offering to late nineteenth-century consumers the promise of relief for physical and mental exhaustion, what we would call "stress" today. As anxieties about social appearance and personal improvement became more pervasive, many advertisers changed the messages of their products. Lifebuoy soap, which had been sold for its antiseptic properties with a sailor or a nurse as its symbol, was repackaged to be a preventative for "B.O." (body

FIG. 7.3
Lifebuoy ad promising a solution to "BO," 1930s

Lever Brothers' ads for Lifebuoy soap introduced "B.O."—for body odor—into the vernacular.
Courtesy of Unilever HPC.

odor) by the 1920s. In the early twentieth century, many advertisements began to use the comic strip form to tell stories in order to sell products, a form that presages the narrative form of television advertisements.

As the therapeutic ethos that undergirds consumerism emerged in particular ways in North America and in parts of Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as those societies embraced industrial capitalism and consumerism, it would also emerge in the context of other societies that did not have the same traditions of Protestantism. For instance, the emergence of consumerism in postwar Japan was driven by the country's painful emergence from the devastation of World War II and the loss of its imperial monarchy. In China, consumerism, and along with it credit cards, emerged in the late twentieth century hand in hand with a socialist system that maintains values of communal good not unlike those of Protestant affirmations of community. Thus many aspects of contemporary Chinese society embrace values of self-improvement and self-fulfillment through consumerism, even though those values are in conflict with the values of communism that have structured Chinese society since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Consumerism has taken hold quite differently in different societies precisely because of the social values and economic and political systems under which they operate.

FIG. 7.4
Arcade of the Galleria Umberto I in Naples, Italy, 1890s

The rise of consumerism in European-American societies in the late nineteenth century created new kinds of spatial and mobile relationships for citizens in relation to their environments. Shopping was transformed from a mundane task, in which the consumer purchased unbranded bulk goods by standing at a counter and asking a merchant for them, into an activity of leisure and entertainment. Much of this transformation was accomplished through the creation of visually pleasing spaces for shopping in the city. In the early nineteenth century, for instance, shopping arcades began to emerge in European cities such as Paris, Milan, and Berlin. These arcades were covered streets that contained multiple small shops along each side. The arcade anticipates the shopping center by creating a space walled off from nature, a space in which the strolling of the shopper among products is as much part of the experience of

shopping as the actual purchase of goods. In fact, the arcades were known as much for the visual splendor of their spaces—beautiful mosaics, crystalline glass windows and ceilings—as for the individual goods on display and for sale within. Like a theme park of endless consumption, the arcades became a place to go to, to stroll through, as well as to buy things. It is no surprise, then, that when cultural critic Walter Benjamin set out to describe the glittering seductions of commodity capitalism, he concentrated on one city, Paris, and its arcades.[2] The arcades maximized the potential for looking. Benjamin wrote, "both sides of these passageways, which are lighted from above, are lined with the most elegant shops, so that such an arcade is a city, even a world, in miniature."[3] Benjamin, whose major life work was an unfinished, massive study based on the modern street life of the arcade, *The Arcades Project*, saw the shopping arcades as the essence of modernity, in which the street is turned into a kind of interior space and the unruliness of the city is made manageable.

Visual pleasure was an enormous part of the arcades' attraction—it was a place to look at the spectacle of glass and metal structures, the packaging of goods, and fellow strollers. In the late nineteenth century, this kind of visual pleasure in the experience of shopping as entertainment was manifested in the rise of the department store. These enormous "palaces" to consumerism were built in major cities as destinations for citizen-consumers, from residents of the city to visitors from the countryside. The department store announced itself as a site of both commerce and leisure and was constructed in order to display the largest possible number of goods to a consumer, who was imagined as strolling through its aisles. With enormous staircases, luxurious goods on sumptuous display, and elaborate décor, the department store intended to be awe inspiring. For instance, writer Emile Zola called Le Bon Marché, the first department store of Paris, a "cathedral of commerce."[4] The big windows of department stores were designed as forms of spectacle that extended the store onto the street and invited consumers into the store. The idea of displaying goods where roaming consumers would see them from all angles coincided with increased attention to the aesthetics of package and product design.

Window shopping and browsing thus gained a kind of currency with this new consumer environment as mobility emerged as a key aspect of modern life. Window shopping is, in many ways, a modern activity, one that is integral to the modern city that is designed for pedestrians, strolling, and crowds. With the emergence of a consumer culture in the nineteenth century that depended on visual codes for pleasure, philosophers and writers described the figure of the *flâneur*, a man who strolls the streets of cities such as Paris, observing the urban landscape in a detached way while moving through it. The *flâneur*, who was a subject of fascination for poet Charles Baudelaire and later for Walter Benjamin, was, according to Benjamin, at home in the streets of the city, in particular in the shopping arcades of Paris. The *flâneur* is a figure who moves through the city in an anonymous fashion and whose primary activity is looking. Sean Nixon writes that these new contexts—of shopping arcades

FIG. 7.5
A nineteenth-century flâneur, from *Physiologie du flâneur*, 1841

and *flâneurs* and visually appealing goods, in other words of new kinds of cityscapes and shop display—created a new kind of "technology of looking" organized around consumption and leisure.[5]

This visual culture of *flânerie* and window shopping in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was related to the more mobile vision of modernity. As Anne Friedberg writes, evidence of the increased mobility of vision can be seen in the nineteenth-century interest in panoramas (large 360-degree paintings that the spectator viewed while walking past them or turning in the center to see the full image), dioramas (theatrical compositions of objects and images that moved before immobile viewers), and the emergence of photography in the early nineteenth century and motion picture film at its end.[6] In the nineteenth century, *flâneurs* were men, because respectable women were not allowed to stroll alone in the modern streets. As window shopping became an important activity, in particular with the rise of the department store, it allowed what Friedberg calls the *flâneuse*, a female window shopper, to emerge in more contemporary contexts. Friedberg notes that theories of film spectatorship can also help us to understand the broader function of spatial, mobile practices of looking in the consumer culture of the city. There are many kinds of gazes at play in the visual culture of modernity, from the cinematic predecessors such as the panorama to the cinematic gaze to the gazes at work in the urban environment of pedestrians, commerce, and mall display. Thus the new ways of looking in modern society were not limited to shopping but extended into all areas of urban life. David Serlin has argued that in thinking about the figure of the *flâneur* we should consider not only gender but also sensory ability. He discusses a photograph of the famous American blind advocate Helen Keller window shopping in Paris to emphasize that shopping entails not only visual consumption but also tactile and aural pleasures.[7]

These cultures of visuality and mobility continued to change throughout the twentieth century. With the increased distances traveled by people in automobiles in the city and countryside in the early to mid-twentieth century, billboards became a central venue for advertising. Although advertisements had been painted in large scale on city buildings for decades and billboards were a part of the urban landscape, the development of the automobile in the 1910s changed not only the landscape of communities and industries but also the experience of consumerism.

FIG. 7.6
Margaret Bourke-White, African-American flood victims lined up at Red Cross relief station, 1937

Billboards were designed to be seen on the go, and the automobile was increasingly seen as a consumer product connoting freedom and consumer mobility. During the Great Depression in the 1930s in the United States, billboards were sometimes incorporated into documentary photographs to make ironic commentary, contrasting the promise of American consumerism and the reality of joblessness, poverty, and soup kitchens. In this well-known image by the American documentary photographer Margaret Bourke-White, the destitution of victims of a flood, who are lined up by a Red Cross relief station in 1937, during the height of the depression, is juxtaposed with the advertising campaign of the National Association of Manufacturers, which shows a happy white family driving in their car as emblematic of the "American way." Bourke-White's image not only exposes the racial divisions in the United States during that time, with these black citizens waiting with their few possessions overshadowed by the image of untroubled consumer happiness presented in the billboard, but it also uses this juxtaposition to undercut the ideological simplicity of the image and its selling of the idea that the United States has the "highest standard of living."

Billboards were part of a broader trend in which advertisers reenvisioned the viewing practices of consumers. As Catherine Gudis notes in her book *Buyways*, the billboard became an iconic form for the idea of the consumer on the move, for whom advertisers needed to provide design within an "aesthetics of speed." She writes, "as part of this new aesthetics, advertisers refined their use of the trademark,

FIG. 7.7
Carnation canned milk billboard, Los Angeles, 1958

the slogan, and the massed image that allowed for quick impression."[8] Gudis notes that the outdoor advertising industry credited the movies with creating new kinds of viewing strategies and a familiarity with speed (and large-scale images) among consumers. Thus the integration of mobility into the consumer's visual consumption of advertising that began in the urban centers of the nineteenth century expanded exponentially by the mid-twentieth century to the wider landscapes of the interstate and cross-country highway and toll road. Graphic designers of billboard ads often played with point of view and with the frame of the billboard. In this 1958 Carnation billboard, the image is designed to give an overview from the consumer's perspective (the hand indicates that it was targeted at women), with the product magically pouring itself. The visual extension of the saucer beyond the billboard frame creates a visually arresting image for the motorist-consumer who is passing by.

In the postwar period, the consumer embrace of the automobile as a symbol of individualism, freedom, and conspicuous consumption was part of a broader social engagement with consumption as a kind of civic duty. In the United States, consumerism was increasingly associated with citizenship, with the idea that to be a good citizen was to be a good consumer. This gave rise to what historian Lizabeth Cohen calls "a consumers' republic." Cohen defines this "republic" as an economic and cultural context in which the highest social values are equated with the promises of consumerism, so that consumerism is understood by citizens to be the primary avenue to achieving freedom, democracy, and equality.[9] Thus individual consumerism, rather than social policy, was offered beginning in the 1950s in the United States as the means to achieve the promise of social change and prosperity. This resulted, Cohen notes, in more social inequality along racial lines, a decrease in voter participation, and increased social and political segmentation.[10]

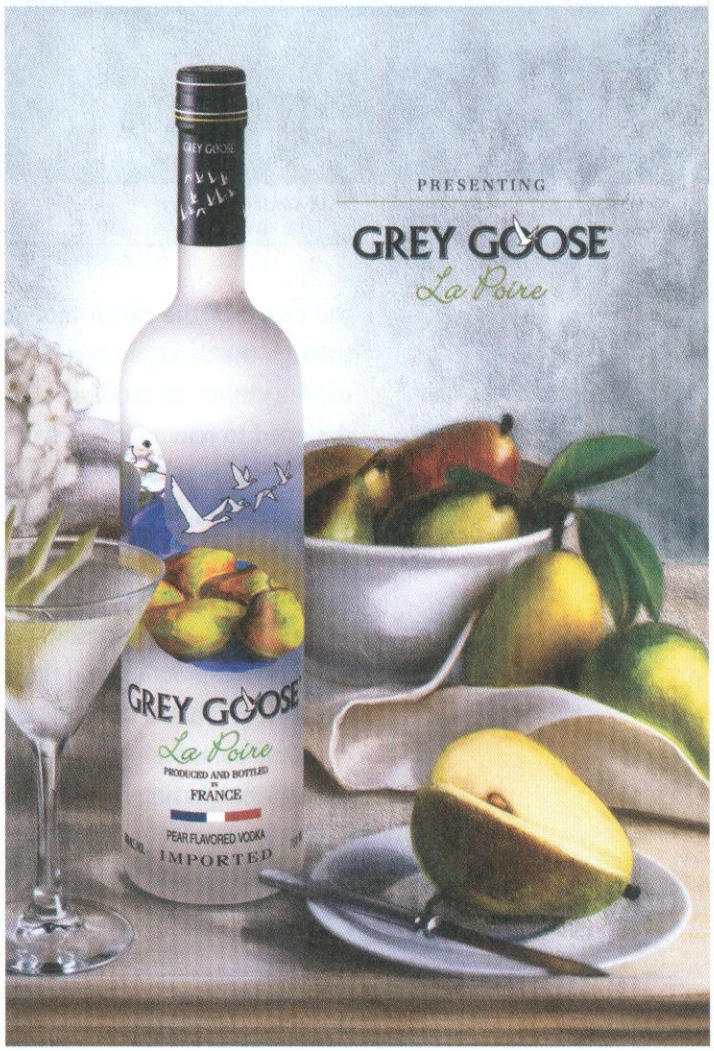
We can see that over a very short period of history, consumerism came to be understood as essential to the economic stability of many societies and has ultimately come to be understood as a primary activity of citizenship and belonging. As we discuss further, our relationships to consumer products can be deep and highly personal, and we construct our identities in part in relationship to brands. All of these changes represent radical shifts from the way in which citizens thought about their identities prior to the late nineteenth century. Today, consumption continues to be thought of as a practice of leisure and pleasure and as a form of therapy. It is commonly understood that commodities fulfill emotional needs. The paradox is that those needs are never truly fulfilled, as the forces of the market lure us into wanting different and more commodities—the newest, the latest, and the best. This is a fundamental aspect of contemporary consumer culture—that it gives us pleasure and

reassurance while tapping into our anxieties and insecurities and that it promises what it can never fulfill.

Envy, Desire, and Belonging

Advertisements speak the language of transformation. They promise consumers, whether explicitly or implicitly, that their lives will change for the better if they buy a particular product or brand. In speaking to viewers/consumers about changing themselves, most advertising is always constructing consumers as dissatisfied in some way with their lifestyles, appearances, jobs, relationships, and so forth. Many ads imply that their product can alleviate this state of dissatisfaction. They often do this by presenting figures of glamour that consumers can envy and wish to emulate, people who are presented as already transformed, and bodies that appear perfect and yet somehow attainable.

FIG. 7.8
Grey Goose La Poire ad, 2007



The attachment of the value of art to a product can give it a connotation of prestige, tradition, and authenticity. Some contemporary advertisements make reference to artworks of the past in order to give their products the connotation of wealth, upscale leisure, and cultural value attributed to works of art. General references to painting style, such as the still-life painterly style of this Grey Goose pear vodka ad, suggest that a product has cultural value through its association with fine art and, here, French culture as well. Ads such as these construct consumers as having cultural knowledge. They offer to consumers a kind of added cultural value—what we call *cultural capital*. The work of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, discussed in chapter 2, can be useful in understanding this process. Bourdieu identified different forms of capital in addition to economic capital (material wealth and access to material goods), including social capital (whom you know, your social networks and the opportunities they provide you), symbolic capital (prestige, celebrity, honors), and cultural capital, which refers to the forms of cultural knowledge that give you social advantages.

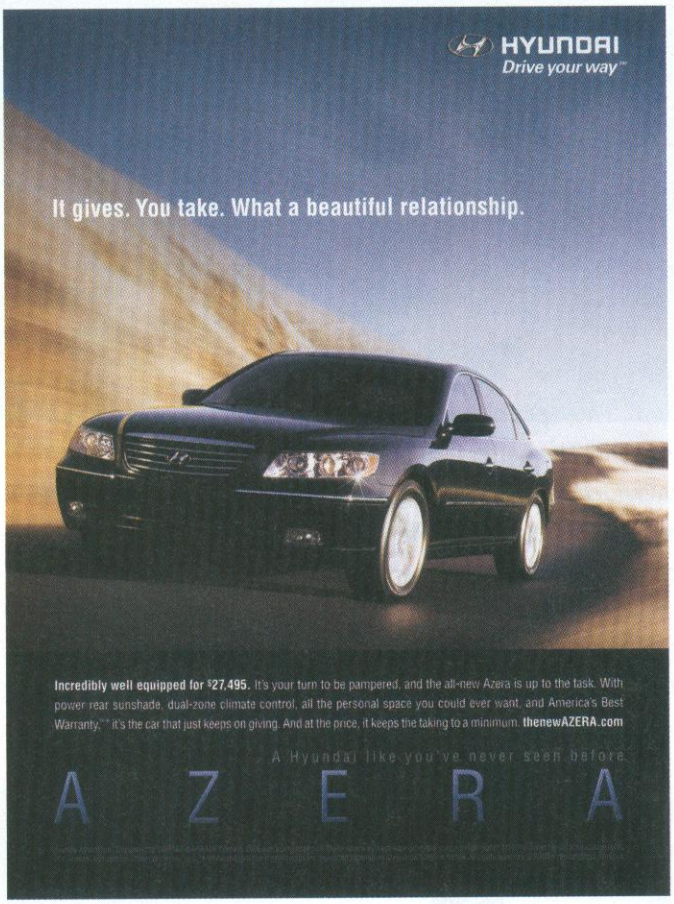


FIG. 7.9
Hyundai ad, 2007

Cultural capital can come in the form of rare taste, connoisseurship, and a competence in deciphering cultural relations and artifacts. It is accumulated, according to Bourdieu, through education, privileged family contexts, and long processes of inculcation.[11] Bourdieu's formulation allows us to see how value is awarded in most capitalist societies not simply through money but through forms of knowledge that are often part of an elite social context and how ads can construct consumers as having different kinds of cultural knowledge—in the case of the Grey Goose ad, of painting styles, French culture, and the still-life genre of painting.

Advertising functions largely to create consumer relationships to brands and to establish brands as familiar, essential, even lovable. Many ads address consumers, then, about their relationship to a brand rather than to a particular product. In this ad, the text promises that the consumer's relationship to the car will be one of affirmation ("It Gives, You Take"), and the image of the car in motion conveys the sense of dynamism. We cannot see through the darkened windows of the car, so it is as if it is driverless, beckoning to us, the viewer, to establish a relationship with it. Such a message is, of course, also designed to remind viewers of their actual, less-than-simple personal relationships, in which such an equation (they give, you take) would be considered inappropriate and certainly not "beautiful."

We can say, then, that advertising asks us not to consume products but to consume signs in the semiotic meaning of the term. Thus this ad is selling the sign: Hyundai as ideal relationship partner. Ads set up particular relationships between the signifier (the product) and the signified (its meaning) to create signs in order to sell not simply products but the connotations we attach to those products. When we consume commodities, we consume them as commodity signs—we aim to acquire, through purchasing a product, the meaning with which the product is encoded. It is also a convention in advertising that ads speak in important terms about products that may in the long run have very little importance. Ads thus operate with a presumption of relevance that allows them to make inflated statements about the necessity of their products. In the real world, the statements of most ads would appear absurd, but in the world of advertising, which integrates fantasy, they make perfect sense because we are aware that when we buy a product as generic as water,

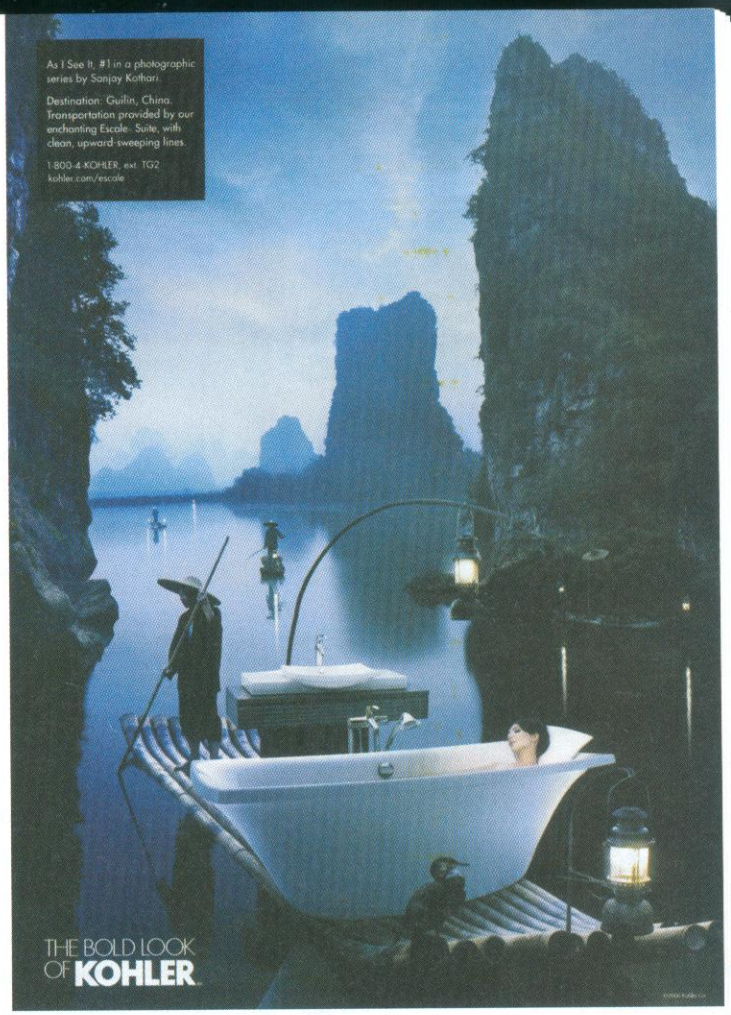


FIG. 7.10
Kohler ad, 2006

we are also in fact buying an image of taste—not in the sense of flavor, but in the sense of style.

Advertising sometimes sells belonging (to a family, community, generation, nation, or special group or class of people), attaching concepts of the nation, community, and democracy to products. Hence the ideological function of many advertisements takes the form of speaking a language of patriotism and nationalism in order to equate the act of purchasing a product with the practices of citizenship. In other words, ads that use an image of America or Britain or other nations to market products are selling the concept that in order to be a good citizen and to properly participate in the nation, one must be an active consumer. Many advertisements depict the family as a site of harmony, warmth, and security, an idealized unit with no problems that cannot be solved by commodities. Indeed, commodities are often presented as the means by which the family is held together, affirmed, and strengthened. Advertisements affirm this meaning that people relate to each other on the most intimate levels through consumerism, depicting commodities as facilitating familial emotion and communication (such as the giving of jewelry or flowers and other commodities to signal affection and value).

In the same way that advertising sells the idea of belonging, it also establishes codes of difference in order to distinguish products. Ads often establish norms by demonstrating things that are different from the norm; this happens through the process of marking and unmarking. As we discussed in chapter 3, the unmarked category is the unquestioned norm, and the marked category is the one seen as "different" or "other." For instance, in ads in the North American and European markets, an apparently white model is unmarked, the normative category, precisely because consumers are not meant to register the fact of his or her whiteness, whereas an apparently nonwhite model is sometimes marked by race, insofar as his or her appearance is intended to connote a racialized meaning. Traditionally, race has been used in advertising to confer to a product a kind of exoticism and foreignness. For example, there has been a long tradition of advertisements that use images of the "islands" and unidentified tropical locales to sell commodities such as cosmetic products and lingerie as exotic and "primitive." In this ad, Kohler sells the experience of its bathtub by suggesting an exotic Chinese locale, complete with natives to push the relaxing consumer on bamboo rafts. The dreamlike fantasy of the image

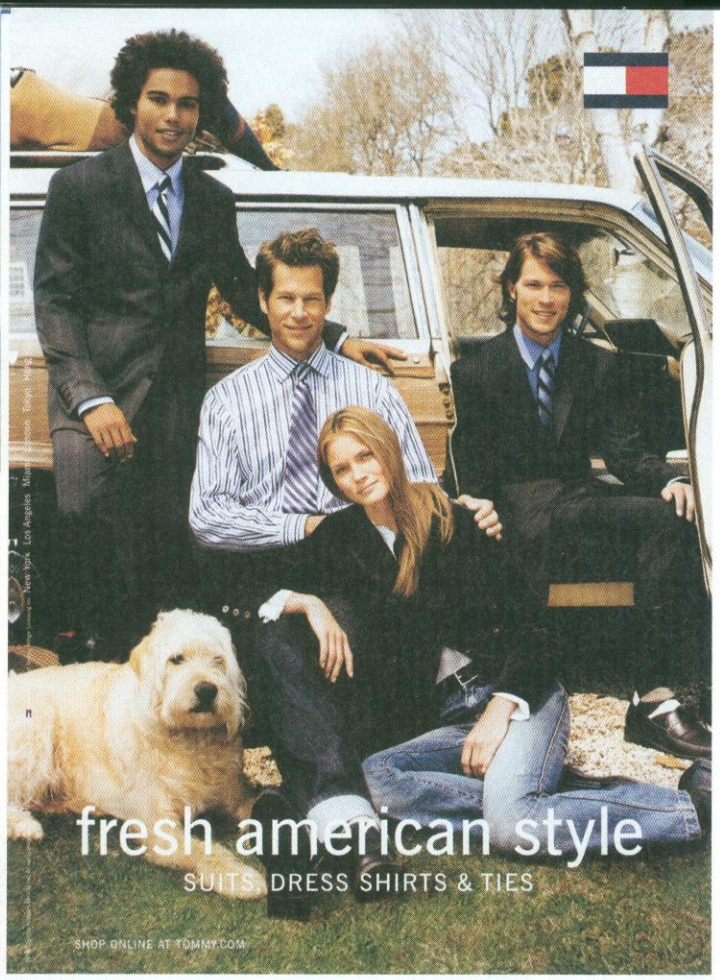


FIG. 7.11
Tommy Hilfiger ad, 2005

makes it clear that the Chinese location is one of mystery, with "boldness" then implied to be a quality of the consumer. Ironically, although these products promise to white consumers the qualities of otherness, commodity culture is in actuality about the denial of difference in that it encourages conformist behavior and sameness through the act of consumption.

Increasingly, markers of ethnicity and race are used in advertisements to demonstrate social or racial awareness and to give a product an element of cultural sophistication. There is an increasing number of ads that use models of many different ethnicities in an attempt both to unmark race and to attach to their products the meaning of social awareness. In this Tommy Hilfiger ad, for instance, the mix of races is intended to connote American multiculturalism, with the models posed almost like a family photograph to signify belonging to the nation. In ads such as these, race is specifically marked to connote multiculturalism and racial harmony. Thus, although these ads aim toward racial inclusiveness, part of their message is also that the product is hip enough to be sensitive to racial difference and diversity.

John Berger wrote that advertising is always situated in the future. He was referring to the way in which the present is depicted in advertising as lacking in some way. It is helpful for us to return to the psychoanalytic theory of Jacques Lacan. He suggests that desire and lack are central motivating forces in our lives. We all experience something missing from our lives that we seek, most often in the form of pursuing another person whom we desire. We try to fill this lack but it is never really satisfied, even when our basic needs are met. Our lives are structured by a sense of lack, Lacan suggests, from the moment that we recognize that we are separate entities from our mothers. This separation, experienced as a splitting, marks the point at which we recognize ourselves as subjects apart from others. In Lacan's terms, we are always searching to return to some state of wholeness that we believe we once had prior to this moment of recognition. We constantly strive, through relationships and activities such as consumerism, to fill that lack. It is this drive to fill our sense of lack that allows advertising to speak to our desires so compellingly. Advertisements often recreate for us fantasies of perfect ego-ideals, facilitating a regression to this childhood phase.

This fundamental lack is always unfulfilled. There is never a moment, in psychoanalytic terms, when lack is replaced by full satisfaction, precisely because of desire's

origins in various stages of infantile and childhood development. This sense of lack is a crucial engine in our psyches, motivating us to keep searching for the things (relationships, material goods, activities, things) that will help us to feel whole, to acquire states of being that we experience as always just out of reach. According to Lacan, this feeling of lack structures our psyches in profound ways, so that dissatisfaction, not only with ourselves but also with the commodities that promise to fulfill but never succeed in fulfilling our lack, is a central aspect of the human subject. In terms of consumer culture, lack provides an explanation for the process by which we feel pleasure in consuming yet always feel that we need more or feel disappointment afterward in what we have purchased.

Commodity Culture and Commodity Fetishism

A consumer culture is a commodity culture—that is, a culture in which commodities are central to cultural meaning. Commodities are defined as things that are bought and sold in a social system of exchange. The concept of commodity culture is intricately allied with the idea that we construct our identities, at least in part, through the consumer products that inhabit our lives. This is what media theorist Stuart Ewen has called the "commodity self," the idea that our selves, indeed our subjectivities, are mediated and constructed in part through our consumption and use of commodities.[12] Clothing, music, cosmetic products, and cars, among other things, are commodities that people use to construct their identities and project them outward to those around them. Advertising encourages consumers to think of commodities as central means through which to convey their personalities. Sometimes advertising speaks to the commodity self by selling the idea that one becomes a particular kind of person through acquiring and using a brand—one might be a Pepsi or Coke person, for instance, or a Puma or Adidas person. Such a tactic sells a kind of pseudoindividuality, which the Frankfurt School theorists defined as a feature of the products of the culture industry, in which a false sense of individuality is sold simultaneously to many people.

The concept of the commodity, in particular the way that commodities are given meaning and value, is crucial to an understanding of consumer cultures. Analyses of commodities and how they function come to us primarily through Marxist theory, which is both a general analysis of the role of economics in human history and an analysis of the ways that capitalism functions. It is precisely because Marxist theory has a critique of capitalism that it can help us to understand how capitalism functions, given that capitalism is a system of values that most of our societies are so familiar with that we rarely examine its underlying assumptions. As we discuss further, Marxist theory is limited in how it can help us understand contemporary consumerism precisely because the complexity of the relationship of culture and consumerism today is something Marx could never have imagined in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, some of the core concepts of Marxist theory remain useful

in thinking about consumerism today. Commodities have both use value, which refers to their particular use in a particular society, and exchange value, which refers to what they cost in a particular system of exchange. Marxist theory critiques the emphasis in capitalism on exchange value over use value, in which things are valued not for what they really do but for what they are worth in abstract, monetary terms. As the Frankfurt School theorists would say, we value the price of the ticket over the experience itself; this would explain why sometimes goods sell more when their prices are raised.

A look at different kinds of products can help us to see how exchange value works. Certain kinds of products have important use value in our society—food and clothing, for instance, that we feel we cannot live without. Yet we can see that within those categories, there is a broad range of exchange values. A loaf of mass-produced bread has a significantly lower exchange value than a loaf of high-end specialty bakery bread, though they both have the same use value. Similarly, a Mossimo shirt made in China and purchased at the local Target will have a significantly lower price tag than a designer shirt (most likely also made in China) by Quicksilver or Roxy and bought at Macy's. Both have the same use value as clothing but different exchange values. But here, of course, we can see how this theory does not take into account other forms of value that are equally meaningful in our society—the designer shirt may seem important to one's sense of style and commodity self, perhaps even to the image one feels is necessary for one's school or workplace. The idea of use value is tricky, because the concepts of what is and is not useful are highly ideological—one could argue endlessly about whether or not certain so-called leisure goods are "useful," and it is difficult to assess the use value of such qualities as pleasure and status.

One of the most useful concepts in understanding how consumerism creates an abstract world of signs and symbols separate from the economic context of commerce and production is the idea of commodity fetishism. This refers to the process by which mass-produced goods are emptied of the meaning of their production (the context in which they were produced and the labor that created them) and then filled with new meanings in ways that both mystify the product and turn it into a fetish object. For instance, a designer shirt does not contain within it the meaning of the context in which it is produced. The consumer is given no information about who sewed it, the factory in which the material was produced, or the society in which it was made. Rather, the product is affixed with logos and linked to advertising images that imbue it with cultural meanings quite apart from those of its specific production conditions and context. This erasure of labor and the means of production has larger social consequences. Not only does it allow the development of a broader social context of devaluing labor, making it hard for workers to take pride in their work, but it also allows consumers (most of whom are also workers) to remain ignorant of working conditions, the consequences of the global outsourcing of labor and the global production of goods, and the relationship of brand image to corporate practices.

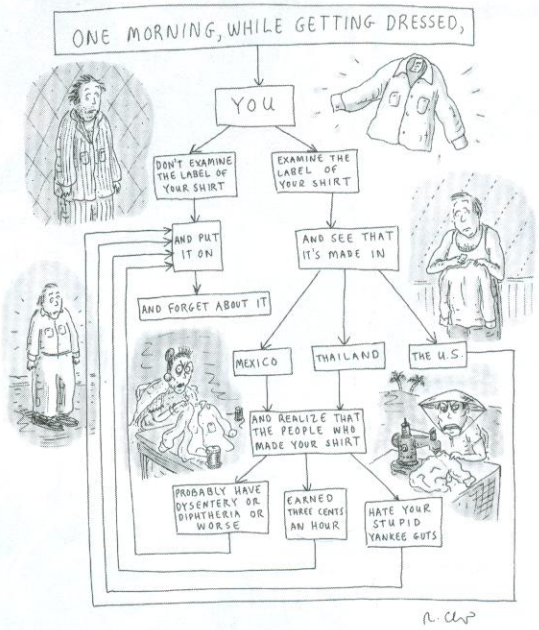
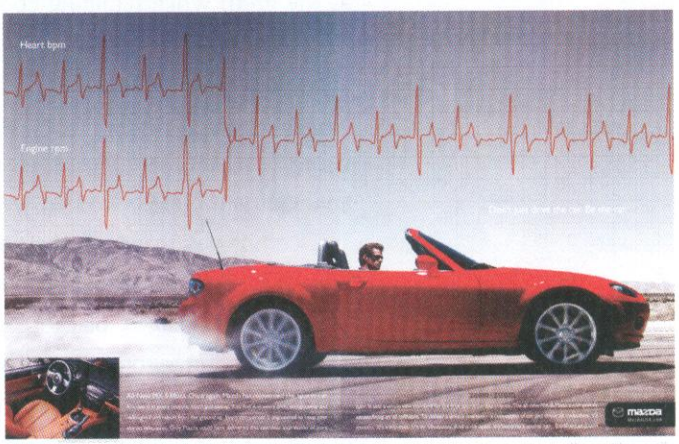


FIG. 7.12
Roz Chast cartoon, 1999

The tensions between consumerism and the role of labor have only become stronger in postindustrial global capitalism, in which the production of goods has been increasingly outsourced from western centers to developing nations around the world. Many products designated "made in the United States" (such as some automobile brands) are in fact assembled in the United States from parts that are made in other places around the world. With the rise of the shipping container in the late twentieth century, goods could be shipped in large metal boxes that are taken directly from ships to tractor-trailers and railway cars for distribution. The price of shipping goods around the world fell significantly, allowing an increased outsourcing of labor. This means that most of the goods produced for developed nations are made by low-paid laborers in developing nations. Thus the distance in global capitalism between the workers who produce commodities and the consumers who purchase them has only grown larger, in both geographic and social terms. For instance, most of the clothing that is sold in North America and Europe is manufactured by low-paid workers in China, Korea, Indonesia, the Philippines, and India. Indeed, only a very small fraction of clothing sold in the United States, one of the world's largest markets for clothes, is made by workers in the United States. Rising oil prices at the end of the decade of the 2000s may impact the cost of shipping goods and that cost may be incorporated into the pricetags of consumer goods, but this situation is unlikely to change the practice of outsourcing labor. The complexity of global outsourcing means that consumers may feel helpless when we do learn of the labor conditions of manufacture because we feel there is little we can do to address them. This cartoon by Roz Chast makes fun of the process that many of us experience when we think about the troubling relationship between labor exploitation and the goods we own and then decide just to wear our clothing anyway.

FIG. 7.13
Miata ad, 2007



Commodity fetishism is the inevitable outcome of mass production, the practices of advertising and marketing, and the distribution of goods to many different consumers. It is essentially a process of mystification that not only empties commodities of the meaning of

FIG. 7.14
Nike ad, 2007

their production but also fills them with new, appealing meanings, such as empowerment, beauty, and sexiness. This fetishization often affirms deeply personal kinds of relationships to commodities. This Miata ad (fig. 7.13) asks the consumer to imagine him- or herself as one with the car ("be the car") by using the graphic chart of heartbeat and rpm merging together, accompanied by the requisite image of the man in the sports car in action, driving through the desert. Such an ad promises masculine affirmation through the fantasy of the car that will extend one's body and commodity self through speed and the fantasy of mastery and control. This mystification of the meaning of the car erases the production context in which the car was made.

It is easiest to see commodity fetishism at work by looking at instances in which it fails. For instance, Nike shoes for women have been promoted as signifiers of female self-empowerment, healthy women's bodies (as opposed to the dangerously thin ones in many fashion ads), feminism, and hip social politics. As this ad shows, Nike is adept at selling empowerment (here, permission to "look like hell" at the gym) while retaining codes of the gaze and appearance management (none of these women even remotely "look like hell"). The text here sells empowerment, independence, and action.

However, in 1992, there was public outcry over the fact that Nike had outsourced the production of their shoes to factories in Indonesia, South Korea, China, and Vietnam, where women were underpaid and working under terrible conditions. The companies to which they outsourced production were not in compliance with Nike's own stated Code of Conduct, which, for example, condemned child labor and mandated fair wages, placed caps on shifts, and mandated implementation of programs benefiting workers' health and safety. When these conditions became known, the process of commodity fetishism was momentarily ruptured. The empowerment of the Nike commodity sign was undermined by revelations about the actual labor

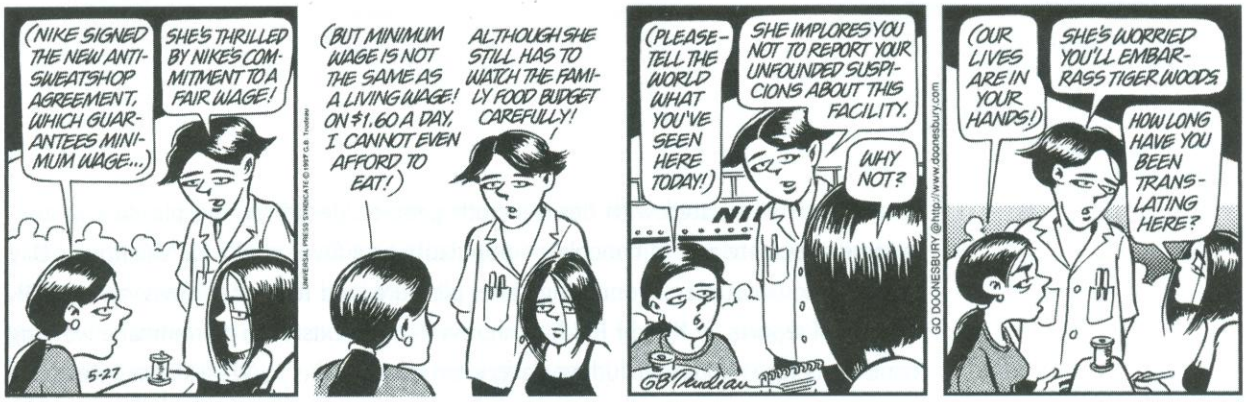


FIG. 7.15
Doonesbury strip on Nike, by Garry Trudeau, 1997

conditions that produced Nike shoes and that were disempowering to the women making them. The shoes could no longer be stripped of the meaning of their conditions of production and "filled" with the signifiers of feminism and women's healthy living. The company had to respond to criticism and to change its practices in an attempt to redeem its image as a company that supports women's health and human rights. Nevertheless, the publicity around Nike and labor is seen by marketers as dramatically affecting its brand status.

In the context of today's blog culture, corporations have been forced to pay much greater attention to consumer critiques and complaints when such comments can create dramatic and immediate negative publicity if they take off on the Web. Brand managers regularly scan the Web for negative comments on a brand, and often respond directly to them. Many corporations have also created extensive policies around the relationship between corporate image and labor practices, sustainability, and civic responsibility. For instance, as the labor practices behind numerous brands and products were exposed, many corporations responded by directly discussing labor. Coca-Cola is one of the many global companies that responded to the potential of negative media attention by devoting a significant portion of its website to information about its labor practices and programs devoted to worker health and education. Maps with dots signifying not only the location of plants but also the worker advocacy and support programs in place at these plants make Coca-Cola appear to play the role of a humanitarian organization in some regions. Transparency coupled with promotion of a brand characterized in part by humanitarian principles has become a prudent marketing strategy among large corporations operating plants in developing nations.

FIG. 7.16
Chocolates as Valentine

We can see many of the issues surrounding commodity fetishism and the erasure of labor in relation to chocolate. As a commodity,

chocolate is associated with desire—both people's desire for and pleasure in consuming chocolate and in chocolate's popularity as a favored gift for Valentine's Day or romantic encounters, connoting taste, pleasure, and romance. However, in 2001, a series of reports by Knight Ridder that revealed the existence of inhumane working conditions for children, including slavery, on cocoa farms in West Africa effectively disrupted the commodity fetishism that surrounds chocolate products. Some sectors of the industry, hoping to avoid a global boycott of their products and more strict government oversight of industry trade, joined ongoing efforts with nonprofits and government agencies to assess the scope of the abuses and to work toward certifying that slavery would be eradicated, as well as to establish on-site monitoring of cocoa farms. A survey funded by the U.S. Labor Department and the chocolate industry placed the number of child laborers (paid workers, as well as those working under conditions of slavery) at 284,000. In some of these cases children as young as age eleven were enticed by the promise of pay to leave their homes for jobs that required twelve-hour workdays with little food, little or no pay, inhumane living conditions, and beatings. These revelations prompted calls to eradicate child slavery in the chocolate industry by 2005 (a goal that was not met). Media publicity about the labor that produces chocolate has escalated to try to chip away at the unreflective commodity fetishism of chocolate (and its association with romance) and to bring attention to the workers who harvest it.

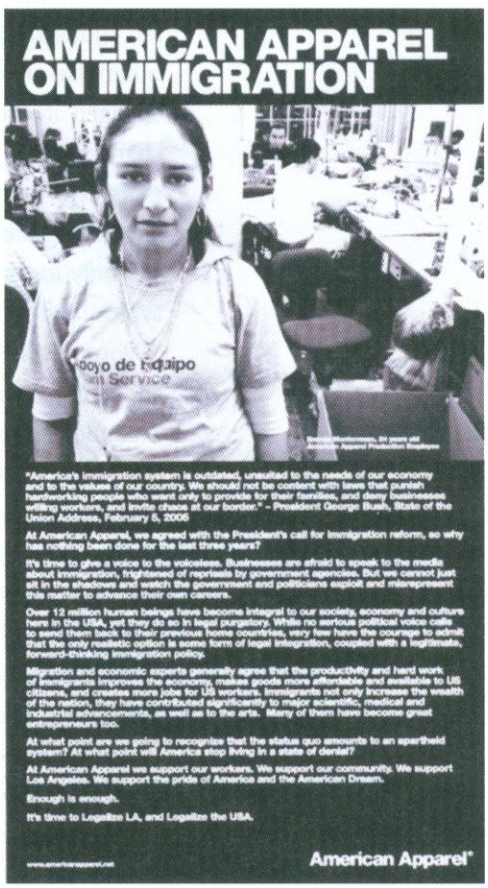
A significant fact about this trend is that it was neither a subculture nor a movement on the margins of the mainstream that brought the issues to mass attention. The chocolate alliance includes mainstream nonprofit organizations such as Catholic Relief Services (through their Fair Trade Web venue), government organizations (U.S. AID and the U.S. Labor Department), and many of the major chocolate companies and professional organizations themselves. Some public schools have used the issue as an example in the social studies curriculum. The situation has, however, most broadly been presented as one that was caused by inhumane practices "over there" (in Africa), supposedly unbeknownst to the companies that benefited from the labor, and that must be "fixed" by more stringent oversight by "our" industry managers and nonprofit human rights observers. This idea of managerial oversight is based on a model of external oversight that looks much like the panopticon model of the gaze described by Foucault, in which guards watch over inmates of a prison (discussed in chapter 3). The prisoners know they are under watch, though they cannot actually see the guards. In effect, the prisoners internalize the gaze of the guards and obey the rules, making it immaterial whether the guards are really at their posts or not. The idea, in the case of the response to cocoa farms, is that the cocoa farm operators need paternalistic oversight to make them change their practices rather than considering the fact that farmers might be facing a much more high-stakes market in which they cannot easily compete. The alliance is, by and large, not addressing the broader economic conditions of global capitalism that are driving crop prices in a more competitive market. At the same time, advocates are making

inroads with consumers through niche advertising and production, making *fair* trade a component of new humanitarian discourse about consumer choice in globalization alongside the more familiar neoliberal buzzword *free* trade. The problem remains that fairly traded goods cost more than conventional goods, making these niche products available only to those with enough income to choose to pay more for their chocolate products. We might ask, Why is "fair trade" a niche mark that we must choose to identify with through the purchase of select, specially marked, and more expensive products and brands, and not simply an unmarked requirement of all industry products?

We might also ask, Why does the obsession with products such as chocolate continue in light of the facts of its production? People love chocolate. Indeed, many characterize themselves jokingly as "chocolate addicts." Yet commodity fetishism is quite powerful as a process of masking the labor that produces goods or of making people feel powerless in the face of even the most stunning information about inhumane labor practices. Because these practices exist far from consumers, the reality may seem abstract and easy to be skeptical about. Yet it is also the case today that consumers are increasingly interested in being informed about where goods are produced in the global economy and under what conditions. Consumer activists have become increasingly skilled in informing consumers about the conditions under which certain consumer products are made and encouraging informed and responsible consumerism. As we see in the case of Coca-Cola, making the conditions of labor an explicit marketing strategy through philanthropic-like corporate worker programs makes good advertising sense.

American Apparel is an example of a clothing company that has refused the outsourcing model, keeping its production local and making its devotion to worker conditions and rights a blatant aspect of the company's brand image in marketing campaigns that have been both embraced for their advocacy of workers and condemned for their allusions to sex and porn. This company has described itself as pioneering standards of social responsibility through the labor practices instituted at its initial Los Angeles factory. The manufacturing of its clothing line is organized around a "sweatshop free" factory environment, inviting the public to pay attention to their practices and even offering the company as a model of successful marketing without outsourcing and exploitation. The labor practices of the clothing line, which has expanded from its original Los Angeles factory to Canada, Japan, and New York, are a key part of their products' brand-name identity. The system is based on a model the company called "vertically

FIG. 7.17
American Apparel ad, 2007



integrated manufacture," in which workers in a given factory, such as the original one in downtown Los Angeles, get company-subsidized affordable health insurance for their families, as well as a living wage (according to the company website, sewers got twice the federal minimum wage in 2008; the minimum was $5.85, and American Apparel sewers in the Los Angeles factory made $12 an hour). American Apparel sells its brand by selling the image of its worker policies, often putting its workers in its ads, and talking about their ethnic identities—situating them, in effect, within global capitalism and advocating for immigrant rights. This ad (fig. 7.17) specifically foregrounds the Mexican identity of the American Apparel workers in order to attach to the brand not only ethnic identity but also a politics of advocacy for immigrant workers. Yet the company is also notorious for using explicitly sexualized imagery to sell clothes, with many ads displaying their subjects in suggestive poses and states of undress, and the company has been the focus of sexual harassment suits. The selling of sexuality is not new, of course. But in the case of American Apparel, it is explicitly linked to social awareness.

There have been numerous public scandals over the use of sexual images in ad campaigns. For example, an Abercrombie and Fitch holiday catalogue prompted a call for boycott of the company's goods in Illinois and led to complaints that the catalogue was unfit for minors. In 2005, Abercrombie and Fitch paid $45 million in settlements to members of a class action suit (*Gonzalez v. Hollister*). More than ten thousand individuals who filed claims (because they were rejected for jobs or otherwise affected by discrimination in the workplace) charged that the company engaged in workplace discrimination by hiring largely white staff. The company changed some of its practices following this settlement, including curtailment of its practice of recruiting from white sororities and fraternities. Abercrombie and Fitch's advertising practices of the late 1990s through the mid-2000s were widely criticized not only for the excessive portrayal of whiteness but also for the company's stereotypical and racist portrayals of Asians in items such as T-shirts bearing the slogan "Wong Brothers T-Shirt Service, Two Wongs Make It White." Following boycotts and protests on college campuses, the T-shirt line was discontinued. Dwight A. McBride, author of *Why I Hate Abercrombie and Fitch*, discusses the implicit marketing of the gay male image as white through the A & F clothing line and its advertising and photographic campaigns prior to the settlement of the lawsuit, linking this nearly all-white image of laid-back male luxury culture to a history of homosocial woodsy sport culture that was a major part of the brand appeal in the early years of the company (it was founded in 1892).[13] Examples such as these make it clear that there is a complex dynamic between commodity fetishism, global outsourcing, and the marketing of cool, which we discuss further.

All of these examples demonstrate both the values and the limitations of Marxist theory for understanding advertising strategies and marketing practices. Throughout the twentieth century, cultural theory has largely been focused on critiques of consumerism. The Frankfurt School theorists, whom we discussed in chapter 6, saw

the escalating role of commodities as a kind of death knell for meaningful social interaction. For these theorists, commodities were "hollowed out" objects that propagated a loss of identity and eroded our sense of history. For them, for instance, to think that a specific consumer item might make one's life meaningful was to engage in a corruption of the truly valuable aspects of existence. In this book, we aim to see the contemporary consumer within a framework that allows us to see the practices of consumers as more complicated than this. Not all consumption practices leave us disempowered.

In contrast, critics who engage with the imagery of consumerism and popular culture have often treated consumption as symbolic of popular culture. Throughout the history of advertising, artists have worked as illustrators within the industry and advertising styles have sometimes paralleled painting and design styles. Conversely, artists have also mined the iconography of brands and logos to make comments on consumer culture, sometimes with a kind of affectionate reference to familiar brands. In this 1921 painting, *Lucky Strike*, American artist Stuart Davis used a cubist style to invoke Lucky Strike cigarettes and their meaning as an American brand. Davis deconstructs the then-familiar colors and shapes of Lucky Strike package and rearranges them in the cubist style that flattens shapes and creates tensions between colors and forms, equating the brand, and the practice of advertising itself, with the new, modern, cutting-edge aesthetic of cubism.

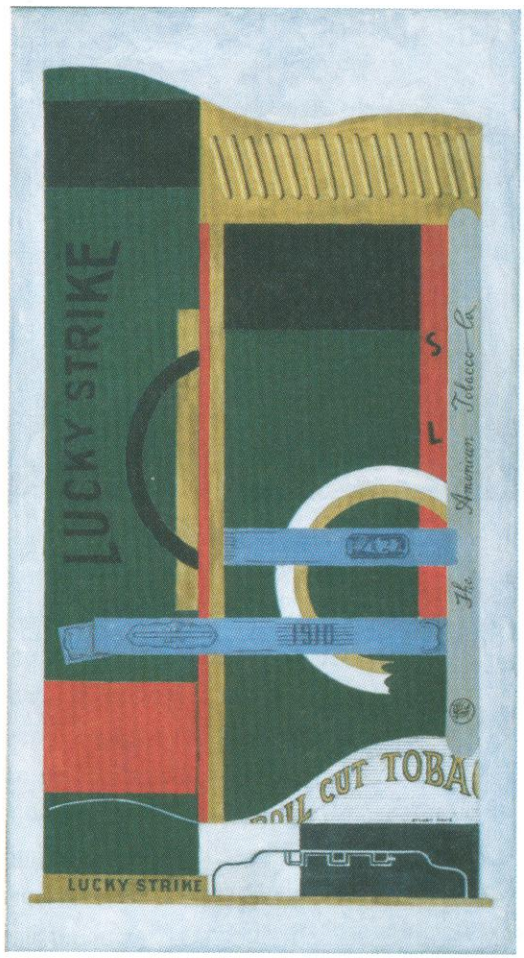


FIG. 7.18
Stuart Davis, *Lucky Strike*, 1921, Art © Stuart Davis/licensed by VAGA, N.Y.

Davis's work prefigures the pop art movement of the 1960s, when a critique of the American obsession with consumption paralleled the rise in production and consumption of consumer goods. During the 1960s, the Frankfurt School writings and ideas of the 1930s were revived in a political and social context in which commercialism was condemned as one of the symptoms of capitalist society gone wrong. During this time, the newly emergent counterculture eschewed notions of material success and commodity culture. Yet, in the art world, pop art engaged with mass culture in a way that did not condemn it. Pop was an attack on distinctions between high and low culture. Pop artists took images from what was considered to be low culture, such as television, the mass media, and comic books, and declared these images to be as socially significant as high art. Pop also engaged playfully with advertisements and commercialism, appropriating design elements and techniques that

FIG. 7.19
Andy Warhol, *Two Hundred Campbell's Soup Cans*, 1962

FIG. 7.20
Roy Lichtenstein, *The Refrigerator*, 1962

were a part of commodity culture and incorporating them into works of fine art to be shown in galleries and museums.

By incorporating television images, advertisements, and commercial products into their work, the artists who produced pop art were responding in a very different manner from the Frankfurt School to the pervasiveness of commodity culture. Rather than condemning mass culture they mined its imagery and techniques, demonstrating their love of and pleasure in popular culture even as they critiqued it. For instance, Andy Warhol painted and printed images of Campbell's soup cans to question the boundaries between art and product design and to celebrate the aesthetic repetition of mass culture. Warhol's painting has a flattening effect that comments simultaneously on the banality of popular culture and mass production and on the familiarity of the Campbell logo. The multiplicity of the soup cans refers to the inundation and overproduction of goods in a commodity culture, in which repetition prevails. Yet at the same time the painting is an affectionate homage to package and ad design, and to a consumer culture that values the familiarity and convenience that reproduction offers.

Other artists turned to "low culture" forms such as comic strips and advertisements. In search of a means to paint an "ugly" picture, Roy Lichtenstein made paintings and prints that drew on the form of the comic strip, referencing not only on the flat surface of the comic form but also the stories that comics tell. Lichtenstein's highly formal works are smooth and pristine, in contrast to the painterly brushstroke style of abstract expressionist painting. Their subject matter is the world of popular culture and consumerism. In their appropriation of

the dotted surface of screen-printed comics, these works are a tribute to this commercial form and to consumer goods. *The Refrigerator*, a painting of 1962, is like a large, oversized comic frame. Lichtenstein blew up the grain of the image so that the viewer can see its dot texture. In this close-up of a woman cleaning a refrigerator, he makes reference to commercial images of housewives typical of 1960s ads, in which they appear smiling while performing boring housework. Here the comic-book form reference is meant both affectionately and as a means of making a social critique of consumer culture and its false promises and stereotypes.

Brands and Their Meanings

The role of the brand has been central to commodity culture. Brands are product names that have meaning attached to them through naming, packaging, advertising, and marketing. Branding originated in the late nineteenth century. Certain kinds of products, such as soap and oats, had previously been sold in bulk out of bins and purchased by consumers by weight. These products were given labeled packaging when companies began to see the advantage of naming products and marking their packaging with meanings that distinguished the qualities of a company and its products from other similar products offered by competitors. Along with packaging and advertising, companies began to promote themselves under brand names. Brands encompass all of the symbolic elements of a company's goods and services. The process of branding may include the look of the packaging, the typeface of package and ad print, and product, packaging and ad design concept and language, as well as the content and form of the product itself. Sometimes, it is a company that becomes a brand and not just the specific product, though certain products may come to embody the meaning and the message of the company brand. The practice of trademarking brands and the design, look, and language linked to particular brands and products as the intellectual property of companies began during this period as a means of protecting companies from infringements on their market by companies making knock-offs meant to be mistaken for the original. Thus bulk oats became Quaker Oats, with the Quaker Oats man signifying moral purity, health, and tradition as qualities of the company contained in their product. Bars of glycerine soap marketed by the Pears Company of England were labeled to clearly designate the product as a specific brand, distinguishing this soap from the similar products marketed alongside it. The company entreated consumers to use soap every day with the new ad slogan, "Have You Used Pears Soap Today?" One of Pears Soap's most famous ads used the painting *Bubbles*

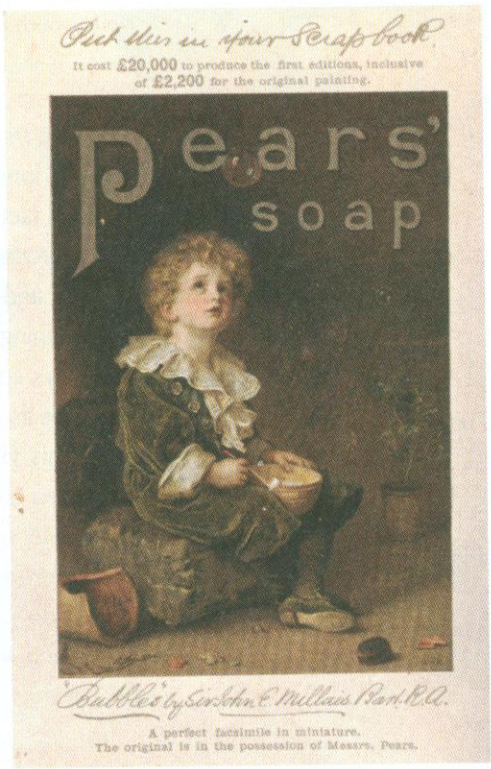


FIG. 7.21
1888 Pears Soap ad using the 1886 painting *Bubbles* by John Everett Millais

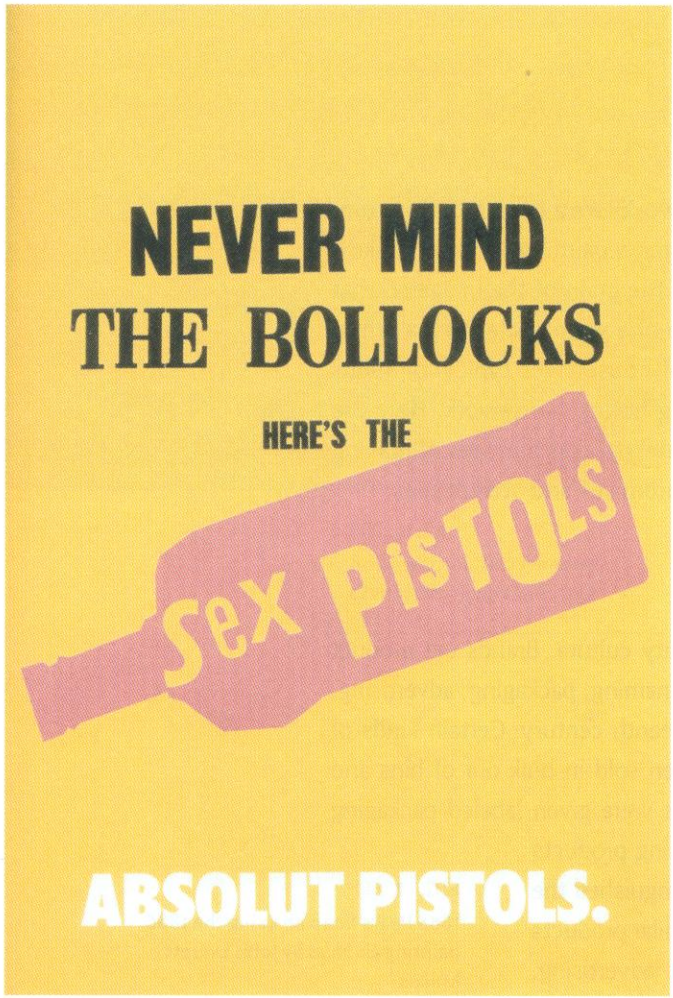


FIG. 7.22
Absolut ad remake of Sex Pistols album cover, 2001

(1886) by well-known British painter John Everett Millais to sell the image of childhood innocence as a sentiment or quality that could be acquired with the use of this soap, which was promoted as being pure and simple. This move toward branding signaled the interrelationship of art and advertising that would follow. Manufacturers and ad agencies today employ artists of all sorts (musicians, photographers, illustrators) to make ads and even present these ads as as works of fine art. In the use of the Millais painting, the Pears Soap company gained a kind of cultural authority, though Millais was criticized by the contemporary art world for allowing the painting to be used to sell soap.[14]

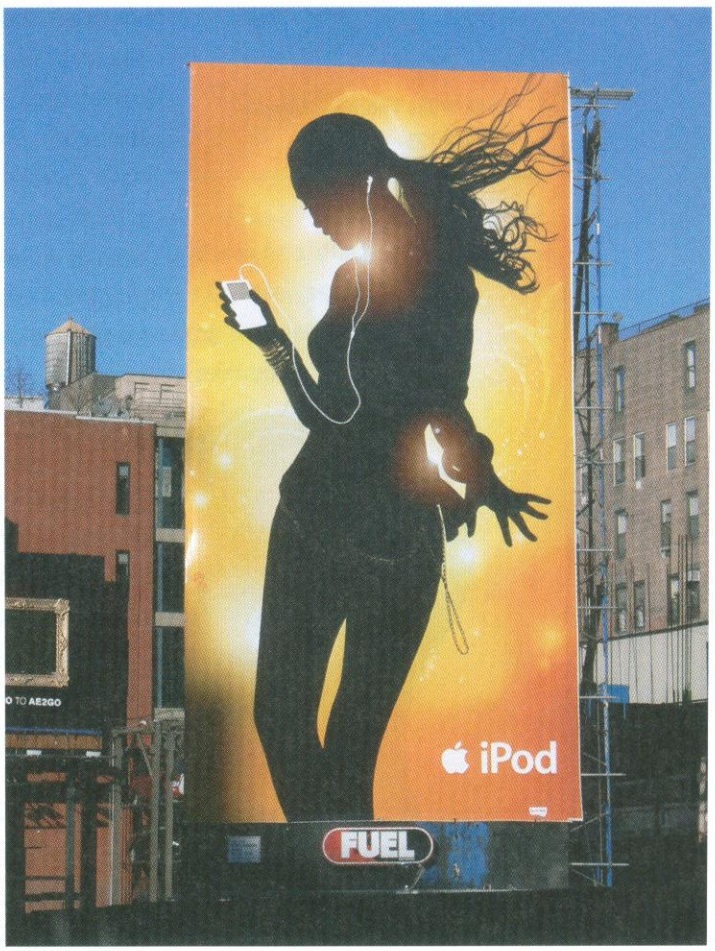
Although the origins of branding in the rise of consumer society can show us how products were turned into brands, the extent of branding culture and the complexity of consumers' relationships to brands today have changed dramatically since that time. As Marcel Danesi writes, "Brands are one of the most important modes of communication in the modern media environment."[15] A brand is a product name that we know about, whether or not we own or ever intend to purchase the product. The refinement of brand meanings can often take place over long periods of time and many advertising campaigns and is influenced by cultural factors beyond the reach of the company and its marketers. Branding is a complex process of naming, marketing, and cultural circulation.

Logos and visual style are crucial to the overall meanings of brands, and often brand meaning is established through the repetition of visual motifs. For instance, Absolut has advertised its vodka for years through a campaign that uses the shape of its bottle as an ongoing motif, often in playful ways. Absolut established its brand through this visual motif and the cleverness with which its ads have riffed on the clear bottle's shape, helping its brand to become instantly recognizable. Even people who have never purchased or tasted Absolut vodka know its brand name. In addition, Absolut has turned its ad campaign into art, not only commissioning ads from famous artists (Andy Warhol, Keith Haring, and Ed Ruscha, among others) but also publishing several coffee-table books specifically about the advertising campaign. The Absolut campaign thus awarded its vodka the value of cultural knowledge, interpellating viewer-consumers who recognize the work of certain artists or who get the joke. Among its many series, Absolut did a number of ads that made reference to famous record

album covers, including the cover of the well-known 1980s punk band the Sex Pistols' album *Never Mind the Bollocks, Here's the Sex Pistols*. This campaign demonstrates the kind of incorporation and appropriation of alternative cultures and cultural resistance that such corporate advertising can accomplish. The Sex Pistols, famous for their anti-establishment stance, are now in an ad selling vodka to a younger generation and, perhaps, to a nostalgic baby boomer generation that wants to remember its former days of cultural resistance. Through this long-term campaign with its repeating visual motif, Absolut has established its brand as arty, original, and culturally informed.

The use of a visual motif can also be seen in the well-known iPod advertising campaign which sets silhouetted dancing figures against brightly colored backgrounds. This campaign, which appeared in the mid-2000s, uses the silhouette form to suggest that anyone could be the iPod listening figures, whose profiles subtly suggest just enough attributes to identify them as certain hip types. We can discern the cut of jeans and the style of hair and shoes—enough to suggest particular cultures and subcultures of coolness, youth, and sometime even racial or ethnic identity. The iPod brand gains specific meaning through these silhouettes of joyful dancing, with the delicate white lines suggesting the iPod headphones leading to the dancer's ears. Thus the iPod ad motif became quickly well known because of these key repeating visual elements—silhouette, bright color backgrounds, and white headphone wires.

FIG. 7.23
iPod billboard, 2008



It is key to the success of products such as the iPod that consumers create deep, sometimes emotional, connections to their brands. The equation of brand, image, and self thus takes hold. This means that identity is no longer the signifier of a product; rather, identity is the pure product that we consume, either as information or as image. This is demonstrated in the way that featured merchandise from films and television shows for children has become more than a secondary set of markets. The commodity sign of these toys now precedes and almost overtakes the "original" source of the movie in revenues and popularity. Thus in the mid-2000s little children might awaken between Frog Princess sheets wearing Bee Movie pajamas and rise to eat breakfast off Horton Hears a Who plates while watching the Rugrats in Pooh

chairs. Corporate conglomerate "authors," such as Disney/Capital Cities/ABC and Nickelodeon, have launched a rich intertextual world populated by myriad logos and trademarked characters. Branding has become not just a way of selling goods but an inescapable mode of everyday communication in the new commodity culture of the twenty-first century.

One of the key stakes in brands is that they are seen as unique and irreplaceable with other brands or products. One manifestation of this function gone awry (from the standpoint of corporations) is the generic use of trademarks. If you were to say that you might "Xerox" pages from this book, you would be using language that takes the brand name for the generic activity of photocopying. Lawyers refer to the way that trademarks become part of public culture as *genericide*. The owner of the mark loses rights to the name if it takes on a meaning for the generic type in the market, rather than for the particular branded product. Manufacturers of Coke and Kleenex are eager to get us to identify their products with quality—and to get us to think of their product each time we desire a facial tissue or a cola. They are not, however, eager to have us kill off their product's difference by using its name for the generic type each time we reach for the competitor's product. To remain profitable, even those brands that go global and seek ubiquity need to retain their distinguishing features and their identity. When the mark of a product gains true universality, its company must invest large sums in ad campaigns to dissuade the public from taking the brand for the type. The brand, into which companies have invested fortunes, must not lose its ability to function as a profit-generating commodity. Companies promoting products such as Kleenex and Xerox may at first spend millions to ensure that their product comes to mind when a consumer has a need for that category of product. But when this mission is successful, some companies such as Xerox have found themselves spending large sums on ad campaigns aimed to stop the use of their product name as a verb. Despite the fact that Xerox has already entered the Oxford English Dictionary as a verb, Xerox corporation has commissioned ads explaining that we photocopy documents, we do not *xerox* them. Ownership of a very valuable label is at stake in this campaign.

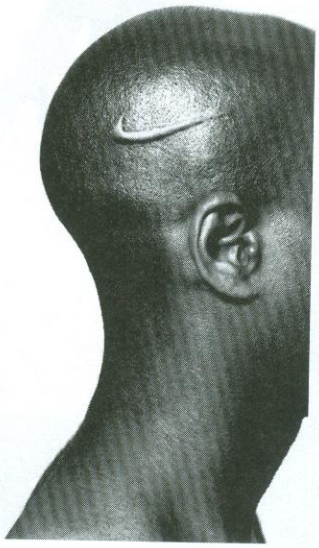


FIG. 7.24
Hank Willis Thomas, *Branded Head*, 2003

Artist Hank Willis Thomas comments on the depths of brand culture in his series *Branded*. He makes connections between the original meaning of branding, which was to mark the flesh of a person or animal, the history of slavery, and the relationship of branding to black culture. In this image, the branding of the Nike logo onto the shaved head of a black man refers not only to the intensity of consumer devotion to brands but also to the violence of such commodification. Willis Thomas refers to the particular

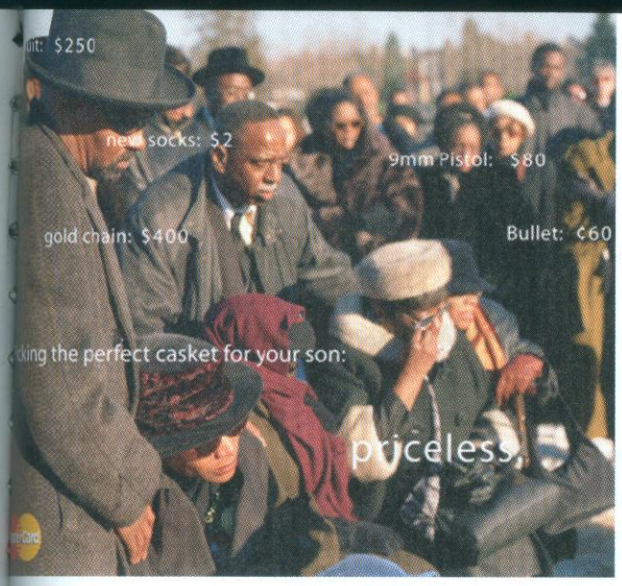


FIG. 7.25
Hank Willis Thomas, *Priceless*, 2004

role that young urban black consumers have played in the marketing of high-end athletic wear and products that want to convey "street cred." In some cases, young black men are cast in advertisements for products marketed to middle-class, white suburban consumers. Thomas also depicts the distance between the world of black urban youth and the language of privilege that dominates consumerism in this image, *Priceless*, which refers to the well-known MasterCard campaign. The original MasterCard campaign sells the idea that products and services (airplane tickets, jewelry, gifts) are quantifiable (and quantifiable on one's MasterCard bill) but that the emotional experiences that they bring are beyond monetary value, hence "priceless." In this work, Thomas shows the tragically quantifiable aspects of the funeral of a young black man. It is precisely Thomas's reference to the original ad campaign that allows this image to make a biting commentary on the relationship of racial identity and disenfranchised lives to commercial commodity culture and to violence associated with street crime linked to gang drug commodity culture.

The Marketing of Coolness

In many modern industrial societies, advertising as a profession underwent a dramatic change in the 1960s, as advertisers and marketers began to see themselves as creative professionals rather than as craftsmen who worked according to scientific rules about how persuasion operates. This occurrence is commonly referred to as a "creative revolution" in advertising. In response to the general social upheaval of the times, with an emerging emphasis on youth culture, and to the fact that consumers were increasingly mobile and (by the 1980s) in possession of television remote control devices, advertisers began to place more emphasis on being entertaining and intriguing. They used humor, parody, and new innovative styles as the rigid hard-sell and rule-bound conventions of selling were rejected and the idea that creativity would sell products began to dominate. Importantly, this change was part of a larger cultural dynamic through which marketers and advertisers began to see youth culture and alternative cultures as sites that could be appropriated to mark commodities as hip and cool. The marketing of coolness, which began in the 1960s, thus defines a much larger social shift in which advertisers and marketers attempted to attach the ever-elusive quality of coolness to an array of consumer products. The attribute of "cool" is usually seen as unique, distinct, and uninfluenced by the marketplace. A young person who is cool, for instance, would commonly be seen as having an

innovative style and not caring what others think, someone that others aspire to be like. As cultural critic Thomas Frank has argued, in the 1960s advertising began to appropriate the language of the counterculture and to aim to make certain brands seem hip and cool. Although the counterculture at that time actually saw itself as rejecting the values of consumerism and going back to nature, Frank argues that not only was the counterculture not as anticonsumerist as it presented itself to be but also those ideals were easily appropriated to sell products. He writes:

> The counterculture seemed to have it all: the unconnectedness that would allow consumers to indulge transitory whims; the irreverence that would allow them to defy moral puritanism, and the contempt for established social rules that would free them from the slow-moving, buttoned-down conformity of their abstemious ancestors. In the counterculture, admen believed that they had found both a perfect model for consumer subjectivity, intelligent and at work with the conformist past, and a cultural machine for turning disgust with consumerism into the very fuel by which consumerism might be accelerated.[16]

This trend has only increased since that time, with many brands being sold through associations with youth culture and with marketers striving to attach coolness to brand names. This embrace of youth culture is really about selling the idea of youth as a "posture" rather than selling youthfulness, with youth signifying innovation and hipness. "Cool" brands, such as iPod and Nike, succeed in retaining coolness through complex strategies of marketing and reinvention. The appropriation of cool markers by marketers requires a constant re-evaluation of what is in style, and a constant turnover of styles and goods. What was cutting-edge cool one month becomes uncool the next when a particular look or item goes mainstream. In the 2000s, the cycle of appropriation and innovation has sped up to the degree that cultures seeing themselves as alternative must constantly reinvent themselves to remain a step ahead of the curve. In some contexts, the marketing of coolness has simply been about using signifiers of coolness, such as hip-hop or alternative music groups, on the soundtrack of advertisements. There are many paradoxes in this shift: the selling of products through values that appear to reject consumer culture; the attachment of youth culture to a range of brands that are marketed to a range of consumers, not just young consumers; the selling of brands through ads that pretend not to be ads; the social embrace of consumerism as a means to project the idea that we are all above consumerist values; and the selling of coolness, an attribute that is supposed to be genuine and difficult to reproduce.

The marketing of coolness is a symptom of a larger cultural phenomenon of the speeding up of trends and a blurring between mainstream and marginal cultures. Mainstream producers, such as fashion designers and athletic shoe manufacturers, pay marketing consultants (known as "cool hunters") to go out into the streets and find out what trendsetting cool kids are wearing and doing.[17] They then use those ideas to make products for mainstream consumers. Once those products become mainstream, they are no longer cool, and the trendsetters who want to remain at the margins of or in defiance of mainstream culture have to come up with new

innovations. This process is only speeded up by technologies such as cell phones, social networking websites, text messaging, and other forms of rapid communication technologies. Marketers interested in charting trends in youth culture have turned more recently to borrowing the modes of social networking behavior to gather data, paying youth consumers to do video diaries or to take a camera out and interview their friends and consumer activities. Such strategies take into account that traditional market research, which relies on surveys and focus groups, is limited in what it can decipher about consumers' desires and essentially ineffectual with savvy young consumers.

Thus cultural trends emerge and fade at rapid speed, and consumer culture, which is racing to catch up to those trends, is also rapidly in flux. Ironically, this speeding up of trends and cultural innovation as mainstream manufacturers appropriate the styles of subcultures on the margins has the same effect as the long history of planned obsolescence in manufacturing, in which products are made not to last too long or consumers are sold the idea (as automobile owners have been since the 1960s) that they have to trade in their models after two years in order to stay current. The makers of computers and electronic technologies, such as the iPod and the iPhone, have capitalized on this trend in selling the idea that these devices become dated within short periods of time, requiring consumers to invest in the latest and newest version. On the day that the new iPhone was released in 2008, consumers lined up the night before outside many Apple stores, with lines extending for blocks by morning, in order to be among the first to own this device. Being among the first to use such a device carries a lot of prestige.

These trends in consumerism also necessitate new forms of address to contemporary consumers. Ads cannot interpellate consumers in traditional ways if consumers are too distracted, knowing, and savvy about ad styles and tactics. Thus some contemporary advertisements speak to consumers in voices that depart from the overbearing narrations of ads in the past that explicitly told consumers what to do. Some ads presume a significant amount of knowledge on the part of consumers about cultural trends and codes. Much of the marketing of coolness can be seen in relation to postmodern styles of advertising and popular culture, with their emphasis on parody and pastiche and their interpellation of a knowing consumer. These advertisements deploy a postmodern style to talk to consumers about their status as ads. This Ketel One ad is from a larger campaign in which each ad consists of a headline and a blank page that says nothing about the product itself. Here the line, "Can you find the subliminal message in this advertisement?" assumes, of course, that the viewer-consumer is familiar with the idea of subliminal advertising, or the

FIG. 7.26
Ketel One ad, 2006

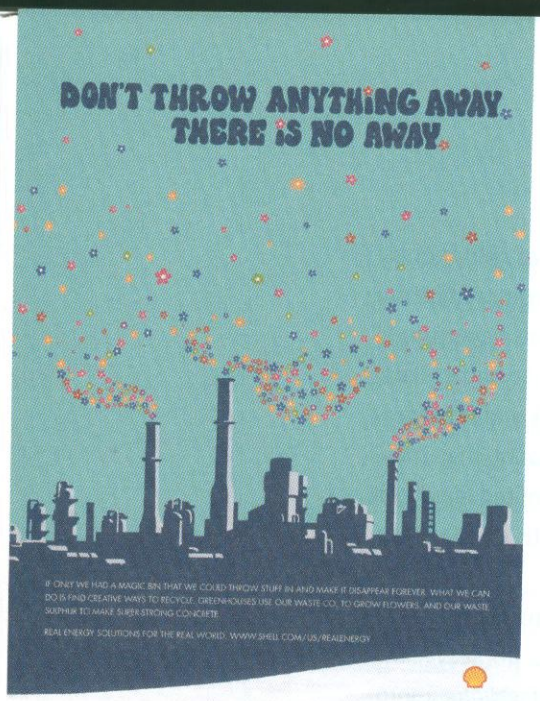


FIG. 7.27
Shell ad, 2007

idea that ads can contain hidden messages within that will appeal to consumer's subconscious. The joke of the ad is multileveled. First, the ad is making a joke about the fact that the "subliminal message" of the ad is in its blank page, thus making fun of the entire concept of subliminal advertising. In so doing, it is interpellating a knowing consumer, who rejects the model of an easily duped consumer. Second, the ad is also pointing to the fact that it is both an ad and an anti-ad simultaneously. Such ads can address the consumer in an obsequious voice, a voice that says, "we know that you know how ads work and that you are not easily fooled. We are not going to condescend to you. We respect your intelligence. We are going to bring you into the process of meaning-making." This is a form of metacommunication, in which the ad speaks to the viewer about the process of viewing the ad. This technique allows advertisers to address jaded consumers in a new way and to potentially get their attention. Such ads acknowledge the banality of simply displaying the product seductively in an era of image and ad saturation. (We discuss postmodern style at length in chapter 8.)

Selling social awareness is another strategy of cool marketing. There has been a trend over the past twenty-five years toward green marketing, through which advertisements equate products with awareness about the environment and a "green" lifestyle. Although much of this marketing is in relation to products that are designed to be less harmful to the environment, commodity fetishism makes it easy for advertisers to equate products that have no environmental benefits with greenness. Chevron oil company, for instance, ran a campaign, People Do, that for many years equated its logo with environmental projects even though its message was about how individuals (rather than corporations) can make a difference. Such ads allowed Chevron, one of the world's worst environmental offenders, to sell itself as a "green" company. A more recent Shell Oil Company ad appropriates 1960s pop style to imagine the emissions from a Shell refinery as flowers and sells the message of individual recycling to help the environment as a kind of neo-hippie Flower Power movement championed this time by the big corporate polluter.

The trend of fashion designers selling social awareness took hold in the 1990s when Benetton, then a very popular youth-oriented line of clothing, did a series of campaigns that equated the Benetton logo with awareness of social problems throughout the world. Other fashion designers, such as Kenneth Cole, have used their ad slogans to sell both their merchandise and the idea

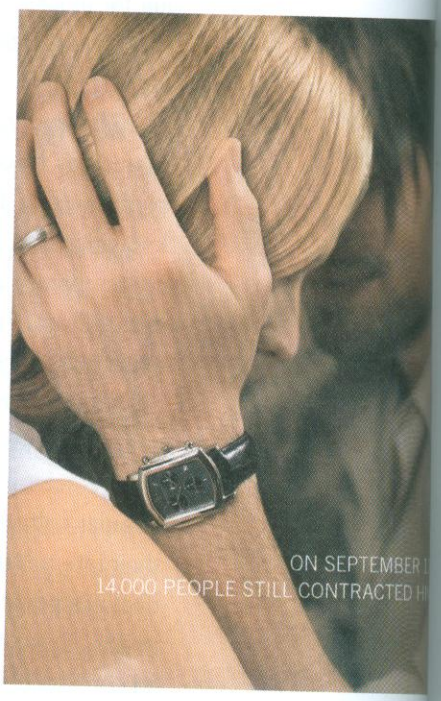


FIG. 7.28
Kenneth Cole ad, 2002

that fashion can relate to social awareness. For instance, in the months after 9/11, when advertisers were attempting to find the proper tone for their ads and to link patriotism to their ads, Kenneth Cole released a campaign that reminded Americans that there were other ongoing crises in the world, with the tag line "On September 12, 14,000 people still contracted HIV." Kenneth Cole ads, often featured on billboards in urban areas such as New York, often play with social messages in clever ways that allow the ad to signal social awareness while appearing not to take it too seriously.

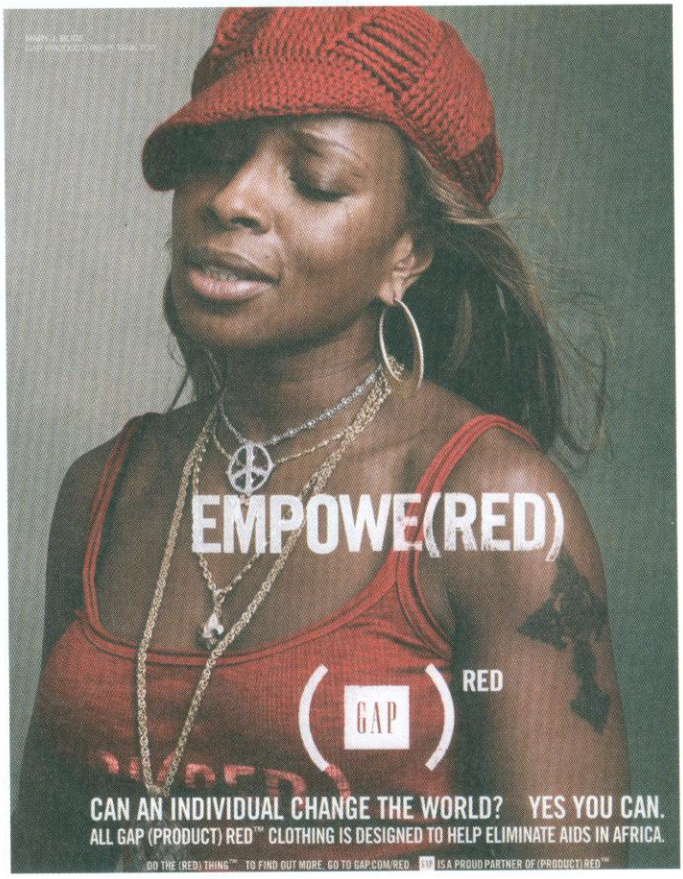


FIG. 7.29
Gap (Product) Red™ ad with Mary J. Blige, 2006

The marketing of social awareness involves creation of signs that equate social awareness with coolness and the attachment of social ideals to particular products. As this trend has increased, philanthropic organizations have created mechanisms to incorporate consumerism into charity contributions, thus selling the idea that certain kinds of purchases can be both philanthropic and pleasurable. (Product) Red, a branded initiative begun by U2 singer Bono to raise funds for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria, works on this premise. Project (Red), which is licensed to companies including American Express, Gap, Apple, and Hallmark, uses celebrities such as singer Mary J. Blige to sell designated goods, with a percentage of sales going to charities. It is important to note that these campaigns, which can effectively raise money for social campaigns, promise not only that the purchase of a product will help social causes but also that the acquiring and wearing of such commodities will advertise one's own social awareness to friends, and will serve as a kind of advertisement about the importance of the social issues linked to the campaign. Some argue, however, that the campaign is not cost-effective, given the significant funds spend by these companies to advertising the brand.

These new trends of social awareness and coolness marketing have emerged along with a broad set of changes in terms of how consumers see ads and the kinds of entertainment media that people are watching. The most fundamental change to the landscape of advertising and marketing has been the role of the Web as a form of entertainment media and a central medium for social networking. As traditional media such as newspaper, magazines, and television and cinema continue to lose audiences (and advertising revenue) and Web media gain a more central role in people's lives, the advertising industry has had to retool its strategies for getting viewer-consumer attention. The increased consumer use of DVRs such as TiVo that

allow viewers to easily bypass ads, the changes in multiplatform media, and the rise of iPod culture have all changed the terrain through which advertisers can achieve the "eyeballs" they need to warrant their cost. Over the last decade, advertisers have used strategies of guerrilla and viral marketing to try to tap into existing social networks and have their ad messages travel through word of mouth. The concept of "guerrilla" marketing borrows its language from the history of political movements that use unconventional warfare and surprise attack to achieve their goals. Guerrilla marketing is "stealth" marketing, in that it tries to present itself as something other than marketing. Guerrilla marketers pay people to recommend drinks while at a bar or to extol the virtues of their cameras while pretending to be tourists. Viral marketing more specifically deploys the viral, meme networks through which people pass on ideas to their friends, most of them involving e-mail and cell phone communication networks.

As marketers become more sophisticated in tapping into social networks such as Facebook and MySpace, they are creating new models for thinking about their relationship to consumers, models that increasingly use information from consumers to influence product design and marketing, and that are designed to create useful activities for consumers. "Utility," rather than coolness, is thus the new buzzword in marketing in the age of Google with its high usage of the Web for information-seeking. Advertisers are thus tapping into pre-existing online communities to create profiles for their brands, and creating products, such as Nike+, that are designed to create communities rather than to just sell material goods. Nike+ is a device that records data about a runner's physique and their route while running, which they can then upload to a website and share with other runners, creating a new communities of runners. The product sold by such branding is actually a community rather than a simple device.

The computer technologies that have created these new forms of entertainment media and dramatic changes in consumer attention have also created the potential for much more consumer monitoring in the form of database gathering on consumer behavior. Consumerism and advertising on the Web create direct data about purchases and ad viewership because the Web itself can be easily designed to create data about user traffic. Retailers and marketers use an array of strategies, including discount cards, membership cards, registration requirements, and so forth, to gather information on consumer purchases and increasingly are targeting consumer messages to niche groups of consumers. In addition, digital technologies allow advertisers to insert different ads into television shows according to different markets. Such strategies move away from the big national advertising campaigns toward fashioning messages for increasingly targeted groups of consumers. At the same time, new technologies have also created increasingly important consumer exchange networks that replicate barter systems, such as eBay and Craigslist, that allow people to sell goods to each other directly, eliminating retailers altogether. Although many stores can use these networks, most of the exchange that takes place on them is

FIG. 7.30
Coca-Cola product placement on *American Idol*, with judges Simon Cowell, Paula Abdul, and Randy Jackson, 2005

through small businesses and individuals who negotiate with each other directly.

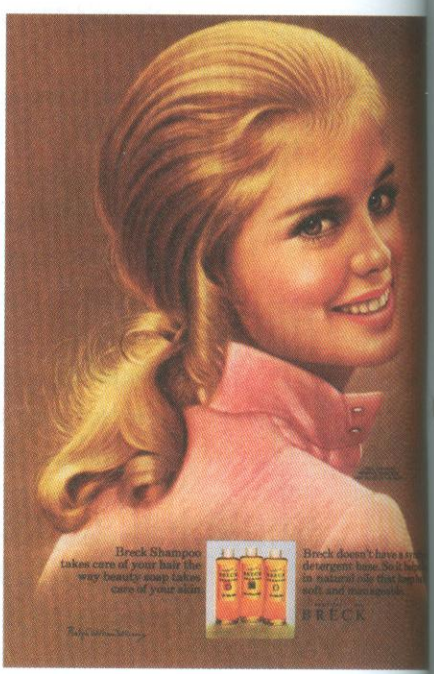
Ironically, one of the primary strategies used by advertisers to counter the rapidly disappearing audience of consumers recalls the beginnings of radio and television in their early years of corporate sponsorship. Product placement is used increasingly in film and television as a means to integrate advertising messages into the programming itself. In the television genres of reality TV and home and personal improvement shows, such product placement is integral to the shows' very premises—the products constitute the "improvement" of the show. So, for instance, a program such as *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, popular in the mid-2000s, integrates product placement by having the five gay male consultants specifically recommend certain brands to the straight guy whose home décor, clothing, and personal maintenance they are aiming to improve. Such a show also sells the idea that people can connect and transcend their differences (including differences in sexual orientation) through the cultures of taste and consumption. Other television programs simply hawk products by putting them noticeably on the screen. Many competition reality shows feature specific and blatant marketing of products as part of the competition contests. Yet, these kinds of product placement can easily incorporate ironic humor. On *American Idol* Coca-Cola's logo is obviously featured on the cups placed before judges, who have jokingly turned the labels to the cameras with deliberate emphasis to suggest their reluctant compliance with product placement mandates, and host Ryan Seacrest has plugged new Apple products such as the iPhone with noticeable irony. In more subtle ways, networks and film companies make elaborate deals to incorporate products into their scripts and put them on display within the narrative. Although such strategies are increasingly commonplace, they risk angering viewers, who may perceive such direct selling as crass commercialism and detrimental to the viewing experience.

FIG. 7.31
Hans Haacke, *The Right to Life*, 1979

Anti-Ads and Culture Jamming

Artists have long used the form of advertisements not only to affirm popular culture and advertising, as the pop artists did, but also to critique it. Artist Hans Haacke, whose work has often focused on the conflicts of interest of the corporate sponsorship of museums, created a whole series of works that use the codes of advertising as forums for political critique. Haacke has consistently produced works that address the workers who are rendered invisible by the process of commodity fetishism and the costs to these workers of their labor. In a 1979 image, Haacke used the famous Breck shampoo campaign of the 1970s that featured the motif of a well-coiffed "Breck girl" to make a political critique of Breck's labor practices. The Breck girl was an icon of 1970s advertising in a campaign that used painted images of models (here, Cybill Shepherd) to create their look. In Haacke's remake, the text refers specifically to the fact that American Cyanamid, Breck's parent company, gave women workers of childbearing age whose jobs posed reproductive health risks the "choice" of losing their jobs, transferring, or being sterilized. Haacke's "ad" is thus not only a play on Breck's campaign, but it is also a political statement about the treatment of workers and the kinds of oppressive practices that corporations are allowed to use against workers. The image marks the absence of the female Breck worker in the original Breck ad and her differences from the idealized Breck girl.

FIG. 7.32
1969 Breck ad of Cybill Shepherd



Haacke's work was ahead of its time. Ad remakes proliferate today. This practice of culture jamming borrows from the legacy of the Situationist group of artists and writers in France in the 1960s, the most famous of whom was Guy Debord, who advocated political interventions at the level of daily life to counter the passivity and alienation of modern life and spectacle. In his manifesto on culture jamming, Kalle Lasn borrows from the Situationist philosophy (discussed in chapter 6) to advocate a kind of jamming of the messages of consumer culture. The term culture jam was coined by the band Negativland in a reference to the citizens' band radio term for jamming someone's broadcast. Lasn writes,

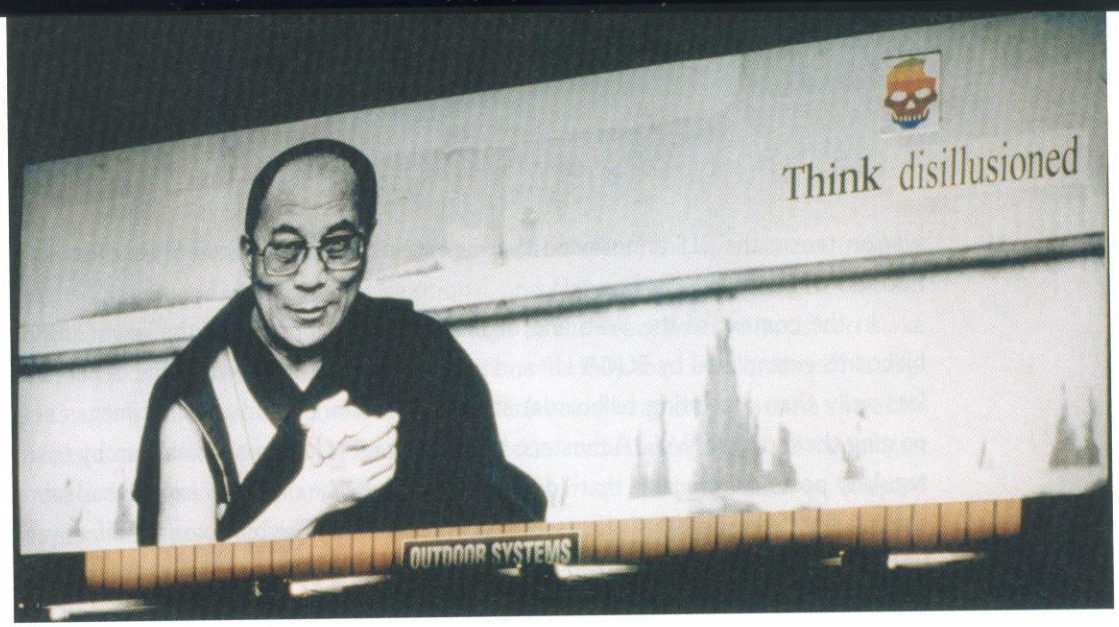


FIG. 7.33
Billboard Liberation Front billboard remake of Apple Think Different ad, 1990s

"culture jamming is, at root, just a metaphor for stopping the flow of spectacle long enough to adjust your set."[18] One of the primary strategies of the Situationists, whose work inspires these culture jammers, was called "détournement," or the rerouting of messages to create new meanings.

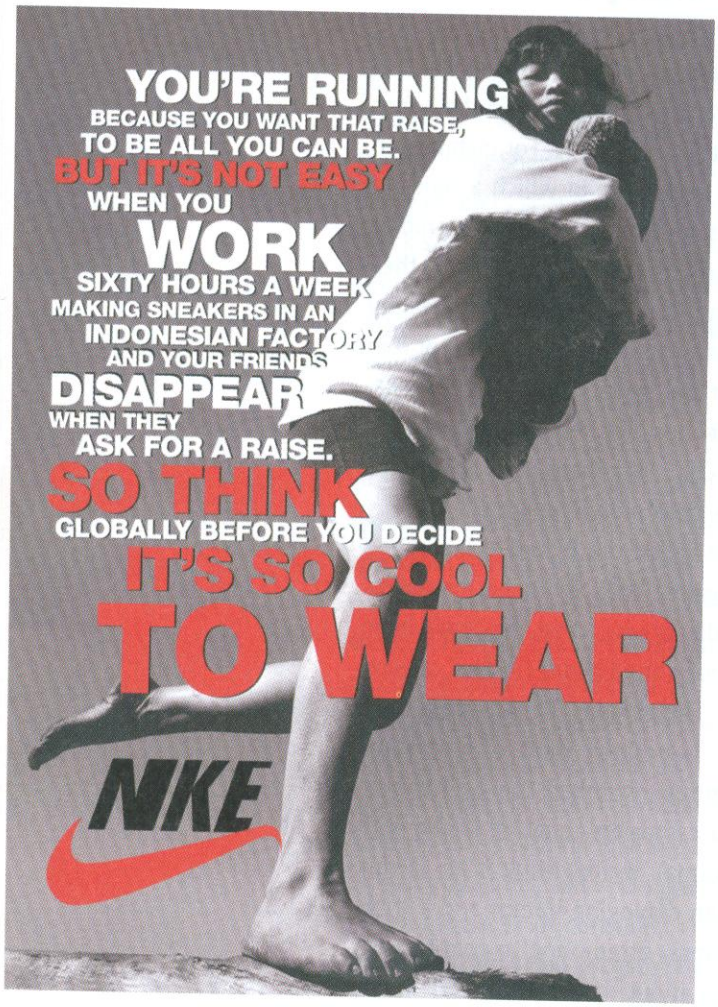
Some of the first culture jams began with the use by activists of spray cans to rewrite the messages of billboard advertisements, changing the slogans in the hopes of startling viewers into thinking about those messages differently. For instance, in Australia in the late 1970s and 1980s, a movement took place in which a series of billboards were "rewritten" or vandalized by activists wielding spray paint. Members of the group (and others who were inspired and just used the name) signed their work "BUGA UP," an acronym for Billboard Utilizing Graffitists Against Unhealthy Promotions, referring to Australian slang that means to screw something up or ruin it.[19] For a period of time, they achieved popularity for their work in changing the messages of ads, in particular ads for cigarettes and alcohol. BUGA UP would change brand names from "Southern Comfort" to "Sump Oil," "Marlboro" to "its a bore" and "Eyewitness News. Always First" to "We are witless nits: always are."

Since the late 1970s, a group in San Francisco called the Billboard Liberation Front (BLF) has also been reworking billboards against their intended messages. The group redesigns billboards so that it is not readily obvious that they have been tampered with. The BLF states that the group is not antibillboard (in fact, several of its members work in the advertising industry). They state, "To Advertise is to Exist. To Exist is to Advertise. Our ultimate goal is nothing short of a personal and singular Billboard for each citizen."[20] The group reworked the well-known Apple Computer "Think Different" slogan, from a campaign equating Apple with many unique figures of history (here the Dalai Lama), by rewriting it as "Think Disillusioned." The BLF continues their work, often deploying humor and a trickster stance, at a time when advertisers are increasingly attempting to coopt styles of anticorporate messages. After a 2008 campaign about the role of AT&T in the

war on terror, the BLF announced that it was leaving the United States for "safe houses" in Europe.

In the context of the Web and digital imaging technologies, the reworking of billboards exemplified by BUGA UP and the BLF has been replaced by the easier (and less risky than repainting billboards) strategy of reworking advertising images and posting them on the Web. Adbusters, the organization (and magazine) run by Lasn, regularly posts culture jams that "détourne" the message of ads to expose bad labor practices and the negative effects of certain products. This culture jam effectively uses the aesthetic of a Nike ad about empowering women to visualize the underpaid Nike worker and her struggles to survive. Such reworkings of images demonstrate the capacity of artists and consumer-viewers to rework commercial images to create new kinds of messages. Today, reworkings of ads, parodies, and remakes abound on websites such as YouTube, many of them without explicit political messages, at the same time that advertisers themselves are deploying new tactics and creating ambiguous brand meanings through postmodern style that often seem quite similar to culture jam tactics. Thus the distinction between ads and anti-ads is increasingly difficult to make.

FIG. 7.34
Culture jam of Nike ad



As we noted in chapter 2, brand cultures have been subject to critique for decades. The use of brands in alternative cultures and new forms of retailing, however, has shifted the relationship among brand culture's consumers and producers. There are many levels at which logos and product signifiers are used by both producers and consumers to create meaning on the streets, on our bodies, and in our chance visual and verbal exchanges in the public spaces of modernity. Branding on the Internet has involved new kinds of consumer relationships with brands that involve visual appeal in the absence of the feel and smell of goods that one experiences in stores. Kelly Mooney and Nita Rollins bring the philosophy of the open source movement to branding in *The Open Brand*, proposing that shopping online is no longer enough. Consumers' desire to have relationships with brands like the relationships we, consumers,

have with each other as people. For Mooney and Rollins, the *open* in open source means On demand, Participatory, Emotional, and Networked. They suggest that old school branding practices should be extended to the Web, where brands can make emotional connections with consumers more powerfully than ever before. This suggests a kind of interactive fetishism in which consumers can engage in the character of the brand rather than simply being subjected to static, mass-circulated campaigns that tell us what to buy and what our products mean.[21] Figures such as Shepard Fairey, whose screened and stenciled street art in the 1980s inspired the offshoot Obey clothing label (a company dedicated to "manufacturing quality dissent since 1989," discussed on pages 61–62), produces T-shirts and personal fashion items, are emblematic of complex relationships of branding and politics that defy simple definitions of branding culture and alternative, counter-hegemonic culture.

The publication of Naomi Klein's popular diatribe against branding, *No Logo*, came on the heels of the 2000 Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization, an event that was subject to vehement protests by activists from around the world on site in Seattle and internationally, making the antiglobalization movement highly visible.[22] Klein's book shows how branding is connected to globalization in multiple ways. Offshore, outsourced industry relies on underpaid labor in sweatshops far from the corporate center. Copyright laws silence critical dissent. Big-name global brands drive out small local businesses unable to compete. Klein's book is an important critique of branding, the rise of multinationals, and the relationship of these to a global economy that is in crisis in the 2000s. The book chronicles the important British legal case in which McDonald's restaurant sued David Morris and Helen Steel, the authors of a pamphlet critiquing the nutrition claims and business practice of the popular global chain. The case, which came to be known as the McLibel suit, was won by Morris and Steel on the grounds of right to freedom of expression and a breach of their right to a fair trial. Klein's book was joined by other critiques of consumerism such as Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation: The Dark Side of an American Meal* and *SUPER SIZE ME*, the 2004 Academy Award-nominated film by Morgan Spurlock who, interested in the wave of obesity in the United States, ate only McDonald's food for thirty days, demonstrating how a fast-food diet puts consumers' health in serious jeopardy. The critique of branding had spawned a movement dedicated to finding

FIG. 7.35
Copyleft symbol

routes that would move beyond the binary of consumerism and the rejection of brands espoused in works such as *No Logo*. Viral licensing is one such approach. In this tactic, the owner of a work marks each copy with a symbol signaling the user's right to make copies. The copyleft symbol is a logo that protects the right of the user to copy with acknowledgement to the author, without the threat of legal action on the basis of intellectual property rights.

Cultures are always in flux and are being constantly reinvented; they are always the site of struggles for meaning. In the culture of late capitalism, when the meanings of coolness and hipness are understood to be central to the exchange of commodities, there is a continuous appropriation of the styles of marginal cultures, which are in turn in a constant state of reinvention. And in the cultural realms of art, politics, and everyday consumer life, mainstream values are constantly questioned and political struggles are waged. As subversions and resistances at the cultural margins are appropriated into the mainstream, new forms of cultural innovation and refusal are found. As new technologies create new environments for social networking and the construction of personal identity, branding cultures have adapted their strategies to create an integral relationship to these online cultures, which in turn have both accommodated and resisted this process. Thus, in late capitalism, the boundary between the mainstream and the margins is always in the process of being renegotiated.

Notes

1. T. J. Jackson Lears, "From Salvation to Self-Realization," in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays of American History 1880–1980*, ed. Richard Wrightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, 3–38 (New York: Pantheon, 1983).
2. Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1999).
3. Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, 36–37 (London: New Left Books, 1973).
4. Emile Zola, quoted on the Le Bon Marche website: www.lebonmarche.fr (accessed March 2008).
5. Sean Nixon, *Hard Looks: Masculinities, Spectatorship and Contemporary Consumption*, 63–69 (London: UCL Press, 1996).
6. Anne Friedberg, *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
7. David Serlin, "Disabling the *Flâneur*," *Journal of Visual Culture* 5.2 (August 2006), 193–208.
8. Catherine Gudis, *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape*, 68 (New York: Routledge, 2004).
9. Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*, 7 (New York: Vintage, 2003).
10. Ibid., 401–10.
11. Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, 80–83 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984).
12. Stuart Ewen, *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1988).
13. Dwight A. McBride, *Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch: Essays on Race and Sexuality* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).
14. http://bubbles.org/html/history/bubbhistory.htm (accessed March 2008).
15. Marcel Danesi, *Brands*, 3 (New York: Routledge, 2006).

16. Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*, 119 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).
17. See Malcolm Gladwell, "The Cool Hunt," and Douglas Rushkoff, *Merchants of Cool*, PBS Frontline documentary.
18. Kalle Lasn, *Culture Jam*, 107 (New York: Quill, 1999).
19. See Simon Chapman, "Civil Disobedience and Tobacco Control: The Case of BUGA UP," *Tobacco Control* 5 (1996), 179–85.
20. Jack Napier and John Thomas, "The BLF Manifesto," http://www.billboardliberation.com/manifesto.html (accessed March 2008).
21. Kelly Mooney and Nita Rollins, *The Open Brand: When Push Comes to Pull in a Web-Made World* (Berkeley, Calif.: New Riders Press, 2008).
22. Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies* (New York: Picador, 1999).

Further Reading

Baudrillard, Jean. *Simulations*. Translated by Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman. New York: Semiotext(e), 1983.

Benjamin, Walter. *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*. London: New Left Books, 1973.

———. *The Arcades Project*. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap, 1999.

Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Books, 1972.

Bollier, David. *Brand Name Bullies: The Quest to Own and Control Culture*. Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley, 2005.

Bordo, Susan. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1984.

Cohen, Lizabeth. *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America*. New York: Vintage, 2003.

Coombe, Rosemary. *The Cultural Life of Intellectual Property: Authorship, Appropriation, and the Law*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1998.

Danesi, Marcel. *Brands*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Ewen, Stuart. *All Consuming Images: The Politics of Style in Contemporary Culture*. New York: Basic Books, 1988.

Frank, Thomas. *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Friedberg, Anne. *Window Shopping: Cinema and the Postmodern*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Gladwell, Malcolm. "The Coolhunt." *New Yorker*, March 17, 1997: 78–88. Reprinted in *The Consumer Society Reader*. Edited by Juliet Schor and Douglas Holt. New York: New Press, 2000, 360–74.

Gladwell, Malcolm. *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*. New York: Little, Brown, 2000.

Goldman, Robert, and Stephen Papson. *Sign Wars: The Cluttered Landscape of Advertising*. New York: Guilford, 1996.

Gudis, Catherine. *Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

Haacke, Hans. "Where the Consciousness Industry Is Concentrated: An Interview with the Artist by Catherine Lord." In *Cultures in Contention*. Edited by Douglas Kahn and Diane Neumaier. Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1985, 204–35.

Hebdige. Dick. *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*. New York: Routledge, 1979.

Hillis, Ken, Michael Petit, Nathan Scott Epley, eds. *Everyday eBay: Culture, Collecting, and Desire*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Horkheimer, Max and Theodor W. Adorno. "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception." In *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr. Translated by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, [1947] 2002.

Jhally, Sut. *The Codes of Advertising: Fetishism and the Political Economy of Meaning in the Consumer Society*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1990.

King, Peter. "The Art of Billboard Utilizing." In *Cultures in Contention*. Edited by Douglas Kahn and Diane Neumaier. Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1985, 198–203.

Klein, Naomi. *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*. New York: Picador, 1999.

Lasn, Kalle. *Culture Jam: How to Reverse America's Suicidal Consumer Binge—and Why We Must*. New York: Quill, 1999.

Lears, T. J. Jackson. "From Salvation to Self-Realization." In *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays of American History 1880–1980*. Edited by Richard Wrightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears. New York: Pantheon, 1983, 3–38.

Lears, T. J. Jackson. *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America*. New York: Basic Books, 1994.

Leiss, William, Stephen Kline, and Sut Jhally. *Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products and Images of Well-Being*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1990.

McBride, Dwight A. *Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch: Essays on Race and Sexuality*. New York: New York University Press, 2005.

Mooney, Kelly, and Nita Rollins. *The Open Brand: When Push Comes to Pull in a Web-Made World*. San Francisco: New Riders Press, 2008.

O'Barr, William M. *Culture and the Ad: Exploring Otherness in the World of Advertising*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1994.

Paterson, Mark. *Consumption and Everyday Life*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

PBS Frontline. *Merchants of Cool*. (2001) http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/cool/.

PBS Frontline. *The Persuaders*. (2003) http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/persuaders/.

Schor, Juliet B., and Douglas Holt. *The Consumer Society Reader*. New York: New Press, 2000.

Schudson, Michael. *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion: Its Dubious Impact on American Society*. New York: Basic Books, 1984.

Sivulka, Juliet. *Sex, Soap, and Cigarettes: A Cultural History of American Advertising*. Boston: Wadsworth, 1997.

Turow, Joseph. *Niche Envy: Marketing Discrimination in the Digital Age*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006.

Walker, Rob. *Buying In: The Secret Dialogue Between What We Buy and Who We Are*. New York: Random House, 2008.

Williamson, Judith. *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*. London: Marion Boyars, 1978.