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Television and ...

Edited by John Hartley

'Little elves and mind control: advertising and its critics'

Helen Irving

Advertising makes people who can't afford it, buy things they don't want, with money they haven't got.

So says ten year old Joan Blandings to her advertising executive father in the splendid Hollywood comedy of 1948, *Mr Blandings Builds His Dream Home*. Joan's view of the function of advertising sets off a very funny exchange over breakfast in the Blandings household and leads ultimately to the quest for the dream home as well as the advertising slogan that will pay for it that are the subjects of the film.

The Blandings are a 'very grass roots', 'very blueberry pie' American family, yet even before the mass diffusion of TV advertising, their child has understood the role of advertising in a way that continues to characterise left/liberal social analysis over forty years later.

Indeed, precocious little Joan Blandings is just the type of child a recent work, *TV and Your Child*, would like all our children to be. Its author, Carmen Luke, wants to acknowledge the place, even the value, of TV in the lives of children, and on this basis to guide parents towards serious and rational ways of talking to their children about TV content. Luke's discussion includes a section on understanding and evaluating advertisements, teaching children the skills "to make informed decisions about products ... to evaluate a product's utility relative to its cost" and to discern "the difference between fabricated wants and authentic needs". 1

Most critics of advertising in the post-War period have, like Luke, emphasised this contrast, between true and false needs and wants, indeed, most depend on a theory of the creation of needs and wants to explain the 'manipulative', hegemonic power of advertisements. Most critics are also confident, like Luke, that they know the difference between 'true' and 'false' needs and wants themselves.

As with many accounts, Luke's view of authentic needs emerges, by inference, from her rejection of the false values she finds in the discourse of advertising. Authentic needs, it seems, do not include the admiration of one's peers, emotional or symbolic attachment to objects, or the wish for social conformity. To indulge in fantasy associations with a product is to fall into the advertisers' trap: "Next time you pour packaged cereal into your child's breakfast dish, point out that... it doesn't make little elves dance around the cereal bowl". 2 Advertisements enter our minds as children; they distort reality, they create false needs, and they sell useless products. This is Luke's message to us as parents, and the message we ought to get across to our children.

Although this argument concerns children specifically, the analysis differs little from most others. What is so striking in Luke's work, because it is directed at ways of talking to children and is shorn of the sophisticated theoretical discourse intended for adults, is the incredible puritanism, the humourlessness, even priggishness that conservatives have long accused the left of suffering from. Children, Luke suggests, must not be allowed to indulge in fantasy if it attaches to consumer items. They must not desire objects except for their utility. They are unable to recognise the difference between TV make-believe and reality. Their tantrums in supermarkets should be understood as "product demand crises", and the job of responsible adults is to "demystify" advertising, to take the fantasy and magic out of the life of the child-consumer.

What is also striking about this work when looked at among adult critiques of advertising is that although Luke is talking about children, she is literally saying the same things; the adult accounts, as we shall see, talk about consumers as children. The general (assumed) susceptibility to advertising is put down to the type of simple gullibility Luke identifies in children.

Is it impossible to have a left analysis of advertising which does not adopt this puritanical approach? Can we never escape from the legacy of the Frankfurt School which saw the individual in mass capitalist culture as having lost all powers of critical perspective, as moronically equating movies "directly with reality", as betraying personalities which "scarcely signif[y] anything more than shining white teeth and freedom from body odour and emotions".³ There are recent signs of efforts to develop alternative views of the 'power' of advertising, and these will be discussed below. But the Frankfurt School view still continues to dominate in one way or another, as the assumptions in Luke's work indicate. The theoretical sophistication of the Frankfurt School is not always evident in the literature on advertising. But even where it is, much of the discussion of advertising and its impact is speculative, based in most cases on an intuitive (and often literal-minded) assessment and an a priori conviction that advertising is manipulative and dangerous.

Opposition to advertising is not new. Conservative and socialist protest against its aesthetic and moral vulgarisms, attempts to regulate its diffusion and to make it honest, have been around for a couple of centuries. What is new in the post-War period is the use made, more or less explicitly, of the theoretical tools of psychoanalysis in particular, to see through the superficial message of advertisements (which is, after all, always the same: 'buy this product'). It is the widespread conviction that advertising sells more than products, that it enters and manipulates minds and mystifies real social relations. It does all this, the theories tell us, by creating false needs and false wants, without those in whom they are created being aware that this is happening.

Reading these accounts of the sinister power of advertising, I find myself reminded of that great Cold War film of 1956, *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*; only here it is advertising rather than Communism that is the evil, unseen force which takes over the identity of real people. It is the advertising discourse that makes us believe, like the normal, wholesome American people do after their bodies have been 'snatched', that a whole way of thinking and acting and feeling - one that is repugnant to those who have not been 'invaded' - is really the best way, the only way, the way that should not be resisted.

The resemblance is not purely coincidental. The post-War redirection in the critique of advertising should be seen as part of a wider cultural and political movement. The Frankfurt School approach to mass culture in general was influential in intellectual debate. The 1950s were, as well, particularly fascinated with the idea of brainwashing. This can be seen in the indexes of social science journals, as it can in the political discourse and the popular films and writings of the period.

In 1957 Vance Packard's famous expose of "motivational research" in advertising appeared: The

Hidden Persuaders 4 became, and still is, a sort of bible for later critics (although this is hard to believe if you read Packard in the 1990s, given his lack of social theory or even analysis of social structure). Packard 'uncovered' the work of Dr. Ernest Dichter, founder of the Institute for Motivational Research Inc., who employed psychoanalytical insights to advise advertisers on ways to make their products appeal to the unconscious (women, for example, can be persuaded to buy cake mix, by symbolically representing the baking of a cake as the presentation to their family of a new baby).

"Motivational research", Packard tells us, replaced the earlier simple psychological sell of market research advertising (appeals to shame, pride, greed, etc), by appealing directly to the unconscious, irrational impulses in the human psyche. Advertisements became almost exclusively iconic in order to carry symbolised messages. Their phenomenal effectiveness lay in their appeal to unconscious pleasurable associations, especially sexual associations, with the product, and not in the virtues of the product itself. People were persuaded to consume even the most undesirable and useless products, without consciously knowing why they did.

This image of brainwashing, and the Frankfurt School approach to mass culture, appealed directly to the radical humanism of the 1960s and 1970s. Accounts of the sinister role of advertising flourished. The image of manipulation and brainwashing was pushed to its extreme in a fascination with 'subliminal' advertising (remember the episode of Colombo in which a subliminal movie advertisement leads to a murder?). In its lengthy account of the 'subliminal' impact of product use in movies, a recent article in the Independent Monthly 5 indicates the 'subliminal' is a fascination which comes and goes. This belief in the almost effortless effectiveness of unconscious advertising content even persuaded some advertisers, although far from all, to think of their work in this way. Most left analyses continue to assume that all advertisements have been consciously structured along these lines.

In fact, motivational research never really took over. Market research and other techniques, including a good deal of reliance on common sense and feel, continued to inform the advertisers' approach. There is, moreover, little evidence that these techniques are less successful than motivational appeals.

One of the ways in which critiques of advertising have maintained their conviction that the deliberate encoding of messages is actually the dominant technique, is through concentrating on the range of glossy, glamorous, 'sexy' advertisements for luxury items in particular. These advertisements are rich in non-utilitarian imagery, sensuous detail, suggestive postures, and they provide a wealth of examples for the theory that all advertising contains unconscious material. Advertisements selling perfume, cosmetics and lingerie are taken to stand for advertisements in general.

Most advertisements are not like these. Many are positively daggy, unsophisticated, poorly constructed. Moreover, many advertisements, including the very costly, very 'clever' ones, fail. Manufacturers do not rely on advertisements to sell their products.

It is not, however, my main concern in this paper to talk about the development of advertising technique and its relationship to selling as such. This has been examined in detail in Michael Schudson's *Advertising: The Uneasy Persuasion*.⁶ Schudson's extensive research and conclusions, in particular his account of the extent to which advertising is unsuccessful in selling, are, indeed, persuasive. My concern is the theoretical approach of left critics, and their use of the concepts of false and true needs in particular.

There are at the outset, considerable problems in the application of psychoanalytic theory to advertising. This approach (and its critique) assumes that universal symbols can be easily

identified, easily encoded so as to be recognised by the unconscious at the appropriate moment, that they can be 'activated' to lead directly to a predictable response; a response which involves in fact a relatively complex set of actions (buying something you have seen advertised).

Psychoanalytic theory has never assumed that symbols function in this way. The interpretation of symbolic behaviour, language, dreams and associations, involves a complex and subtle process, most effectively directed at the individual, and assumes different, idiosyncratic responses and associations in people, not universally predictable behaviour. Furthermore, responses to unconsciously motivated desires take a symbolic form in order to mask them, because the conscious resists them, refuses them, wants to channel them elsewhere. We dream in symbolic form to avoid acknowledging our unconscious desires. The psychoanalytic 'planning' involved in getting people to buy things by appealing directly to their unconscious through symbols would be truly phenomenal.

Jean Baudrillard's *Le système des objets* 7 applies psychoanalytic theory to advertisements with considerably greater subtlety than most. Baudrillard's work is also remarkable in taking into consideration material which is highly problematic for theories that assume the market-effectiveness of advertising. Baudrillard considers the sort of evidence Schudson looks at in detail which suggests that advertisements are in fact more unsuccessful than successful: that they are unpopular, that any clear effect they may have quickly wanes, that campaigns to change collective behaviour (such as drink-driving) usually fail, that in spite of every effort, advertising discourse dissuades as much as it persuades. The consumer, Baudrillard tells us, has been found to be a relatively 'free' user of advertising messages and will resist attempts to persuade. Advertisements neutralise each other and rapidly reach a saturation level in the consumer's consciousness.

We cannot identify persuasion at the level of advertising rhetoric Baudrillard argues. Nevertheless, consumers are persuaded by something. They don't believe advertisements: but they do believe in advertising. It is "the whole Father Christmas story". The child does not believe the fable but believes rather in the "game of miraculous parental solicitude and the care that the parents take to be accomplices to this fable". Advertising operates in exactly the same way. It is not the rhetorical discourse about the product that has the decisive effect upon the buyer. What the individual is sensitive to is "the latent theme of protection and gratification", the care advertisements take to meet our every need, and "to inform [us] about [our] own desires". 8

This account is certainly more convincing than Packard's. In the end, however, it tells us little other than that advertising makes us feel loved, even though advertisements irritate us and the products they sell in fact frustrate us. We are as children before the advertising Christmas story, not gullible in the sense Luke suggests, but psychologically regressive. We need to pass through this pre-oedipal stage, to find real sources of gratification, to become mature and see through advertisements as Baudrillard and the other critics have done.

Of course the theory of bourgeois hegemony and the part advertising plays in it goes further than this. It is concerned not just with the relation between the unconscious mind and the act of buying, but addresses the ideological function of advertising in a particular set of social relations.

Stewart Ewen's *Captains of Consciousness* 9 is a classic left account of the ideological role of advertising involving deliberate, indeed conspiratorial, decisions by advertisers to use advertisements in this way. Ewen situates the change in advertising technique earlier than Packard; he argues that advertisers in the 1920s decided to employ ads in order to passify a mass industrial workforce which could no longer be kept under control through workshop discipline. Advertisers incorporated into their appeal to consumers the ideological message that consumption equals freedom, that free individuals find their identity and find freedom in the commodities they consume. Through the employment of psychological insights into human nature (especially the

tendency to social conformism) a "self-conscious change in the psychic economy" of capitalism was effected. It was a crucial blow for the success of 20th century bourgeois hegemony. The masses henceforth could no longer recognise their own misery, their lack of true freedom.

Like other critics, Ewen spends much time describing both the manifest and the latent content of advertisements, and he shows that at least some advertisers in the 1920s did try to mould human responses in this way, through the simultaneous 'selling' of both products and capitalism. But also like many critics, Ewen says little about how this was done. He equates the advertisers' psychological 'insights' (many of which now seem hilarious) with the mechanism of manipulation. He assumes that they worked as the psychologists who advised the advertisers told them they would. He takes the advertisers' own accounts of their work as a description of the process.

Other, more theoretically sophisticated, approaches have tried to account for a mechanism of manipulation, and to take psychoanalytic insights further into social analysis. Judith Williamson recognises that audience/consumer responses to ads should at least be measured at some point. However, her influential work, *Decoding Advertisements*, is directed at "what can be seen in advertisements" and not at the "vast sociological research" that would be necessary if we were to measure influence. 10

This is a fair enough division of labour; except that Williamson's analysis of what is seen soon (and probably inevitably) settles down to an account of how the seen is received, and from this to a theory of the general ideological role of the system of advertising. Advertisements, Williamson argues, appeal to a range of real needs: real material needs, the social need for mythology (once fulfilled by art and religion), the psychological desire for the unified self of the pre-symbolic stage. But in doing this, advertisements create false wants: we want consumer items instead of real emotions real social relations, our real selves. Our real wants have been appropriated by the advertising discourse. Not only have we come to speak in clichés we now "feel in clichés". At the social level, "symbolic structures come to replace and confuse our perceptions of the real structure of society". Advertising disguises "the real issues... those relating to work: to jobs and wages and who works for whom".

Real pleasure

What is real and unreal seems so clear in the minds of the critics of advertising: there are real needs or wants in individuals, there are real relations in society. Why do I then find it so hard to see these distinctions as self-evident, as distinctions that apply unproblematically in a critique of advertising? Why is the desire to buy things and the pleasure associated with owning them so much less real than other pleasures? Why do we assume that people who 'consume' believe that advertisements are more real than the social relations of production in the first place?

There are at least two ways to approach these questions. I want to begin with the issue of individual needs and wants, since the critique of these is common to pretty well all left/liberal analyses of advertising. I will then say something about the question of 'unreal' social relations and mystified real ones.

The creation of 'false' needs and wants has been widely assumed to be the principal mechanism of advertising manipulation. In the post-War period it is, of course, Herbert Marcuse whose work is particularly associated with this approach. Marcuse thought Vance Packard of "vital importance". He was concerned with (and he considered Packard to have contributed significantly to the understanding of) the manner in which people came to believe themselves satisfied in an objectively unsatisfying world, with the end result being a state of "euphoria in unhappiness". This process occurred, Marcuse argued, largely because in mass capitalist culture we have our needs created for us, imposed upon us, and these needs are false, contributing in fact to the

individual's repression. They are needs "which perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery and injustice". 12

The type of need created by advertising in capitalist culture, Marcuse tells us, cannot be anything but false. These false needs can be identified above all in the willingness to conform uncritically. Widespread social conformity has been brought about by the elimination or absorption of critical philosophy and critical art under capitalism; advertising has been a central player in the process.

Marcuse does not go much further than this in defining needs. True needs, he suggests, are those which free individuals define for themselves. The question of what true and false needs really are can only be answered by those who have become conscious of, and rejected, their 'servitude'. Mass cultural manipulation, however, has gone so far - entering our very instincts - that it has largely prevented an authentic answer to such questions.

This is clearly a circular argument, with an almost evangelical logic. Only those who experience freedom and release from false values and beliefs can see the light, the true nature of true needs. Only they will experience true happiness. This circularity is not, however, unique to Marcuse's theory.

Much work has been done on 'needs'. Many efforts have been made in particular to understand the true need. Theorists have drawn distinctions, for example, between the 'vital' needs (Marcuse provides a list: "nourishment, clothing, lodging at the attainable level of culture" 13) and the higher level of psychological and emotional needs.

One of the major theorists associated with this project, Abraham Maslow, classified the essential needs into a "hierarchy" where a lower need must be satisfied before the need above it can be met. 14 The top of Maslow's list, the highest and the strongest, is "self-actualisation". The fully 'self-actualised' person, Maslow tells us, is probably less susceptible to the appeals of advertising than those inadequate others who have not yet got to the top of the needs-ladder. Critics of advertising in the 1990s may not express things quite as confidently as this, but when it comes down to it, the thrust of the argument about true and false needs is usually along these lines.

One of the many problems associated with this approach arises because the definition of needs, such as it is, is not theoretically distinguished from the means to their satisfaction. A set of 'universal', true needs is postulated or implied and, following this, the assertion made that a need must be satisfied in a specific way, in order to demonstrate that the need was real in the first place. The fully 'self-actualised' person, for example, cannot really meet his or her needs through consuming advertised commodities. Refusal to conform to the culture of capitalism is an index both of true needs and a true means of satisfying these needs.

It need scarcely be noted that a hierarchy of needs that ends with 'self-actualisation' reflects a particular set of liberal-individualist cultural values. The claim that such needs are essential and universal, and that those who do not manifest them are unfree and unhappy, is a claim operating in much the same terms as the advertising discourse it so profoundly abhors.

Even if this were not a problem, and 'self-actualisation' could be defined in such a way as to be identified as a goal in all cultures, or even if it were fully possible to satisfy our needs purely along individually defined lines, it remains the case that critics confuse two things in then suggesting that certain needs must only be satisfied in an individualistic, socially-critical manner. If, for some of us, the means of satisfying the need for self-actualisation, self-esteem or social-esteem, or even the 'vital' needs such as 'lodging at the attainable level', lie in the consumption of commodities, or in conformity with one's neighbours' lifestyle, why should this be rejected as inauthentic? Who is to say we have not freely chosen this path to the satisfaction of our needs, any

less than the person who engages in political activism or material self-sufficiency, or what ever else it is that is taken to be a true index of 'self-actualisation'?

Other theorists, perhaps less obviously influenced by the cultural values of the period in which they were writing, have tended to concentrate on describing essential human needs in social terms. Williamson, as we saw, identified the social need for mythology and totemism, along with the basic material needs, as common to us all and as having been appropriated by the advertising discourse.

Wolfgang Haug has similarly focussed on the human need, as he sees it, for aesthetic expression. This typically romantic conception of the human essence - as essentially that of the artist - has considerable appeal. But again, Haug's identification of the essential need is followed with the confident assertion that the need may only be pursued or satisfied in a particular way if it is to be considered authentic. We may have a real human need for aesthetic expression, as Haug suggests, but why is it necessarily false to pursue it through the enjoyment of advertising, or the purchase of commodities?

Addressing this question, Haug argues that under capitalism the aesthetic promise made by advertising on behalf of commodities is never fulfilled. How does he know? And even if it is not, how can he be sure that people believe it in the first place? Perhaps, also, the aesthetic pursuit associated with advertising may lie in the enjoyment of the advertisements themselves. Many ads are indeed very beautiful, very rich in aesthetic qualities, amusing, engaging, entertaining. In describing the effect advertisements have on the human needs they identify as authentic, critics also fail to make the distinction between the needs or desires associated with advertisements themselves, and those attached to commodities.

Haug conflates these two responses in his theory of advertising as "capitalist valorisation". This is a fairly common left view of the ideological function of the system of advertising, and it leads to the issue of 'unreal' and 'mystified' social relations. For Haug, capitalist aesthetics appropriate all "human endeavours, longings, instincts and hopes", in order to valorise a necessarily "illusory world", a world which is "diametrically opposed to what people are and want autonomously".¹⁵

Advertising false-consciousness operates, it is argued, through these techniques of appropriation, and through mystifying the true nature of commodity production, depriving the commodity of its history and removing it from its social and economic context. The commodity is depicted as if miraculously conjured up from nowhere into an ideal world of instant gratification.

It is true that advertisements do not refer to the production of the commodity they advertise or to the conditions of the workers who produce it. This does not necessarily mean, however, that the relations of production have been disguised by the advertising rhetoric, nor that they would be openly recognised and their politics pursued, if advertising either did not exist or were made to be 'honest' about the origins of products.

To the extent that the relations of production are mystified under capitalism, advertising reflects this. But it should not be assumed that it is impossible to understand capitalist relations and to enjoy commodities at the same time. Most workers in factories do this. They have a real experience of production; they do not believe that commodities spring fully formed from nowhere, they understand that their wage does not reflect the price of the commodities they produce, and they also enjoy owning things. These things may or may not have been advertised; they may also be 'useless' and ugly. They may be badly made and tasteless. But we cannot assume that aesthetic standards will rise the moment advertising is silenced nor that the people, who have been duped so glibly (unlike the critics who remain so admirably impervious to all this), will throw off the unreal 'reality' of advertising, and will start to create their own, authentic reality.

I do not believe that people do or can create their own 'reality'. This is of course, one of the oldest, perhaps the most fundamental issue in sociology and social theory and the object of much debate in the last two decades of Marxist theory. To follow this issue fully would demand a different sort of paper from the present one. Suffice it to say, the argument that advertising distorts and mystifies reality rests upon a notion of real reality and on the assertion that people can make their own reality spontaneously, autonomously.

This paper works with the opposite argument, that people do not create themselves, that they are born into cultural systems which partly reflect the dominant social and economic relations and partly reflect many other things; they are constituted by the particular cultural and social circumstances they find themselves in, but they do not create these themselves nor has there ever been an 'authentic' (pre-consumerist) period in which they did. There are many reasons for opposing the capitalist system, but to argue or imply that the system must be opposed because its reality has not been autonomously constituted by its subjects, is absurd. There is nothing inherently sinister or unique in the fact that a system involves a pre-constituted culture and therefore an 'imposed' reality (whatever this is, in any case).

In his analysis of what he sees as the standard left position on the ideological role of the electronic media, Hans Magnus Enzensberger addresses this issue. He rejects the left view of media manipulation as a "liberal superstition that such a thing as pure unmanipulated truth can exist". We need to recognise the revolutionary potential of the media, he argues, and not conflate the media as it is used under capitalism with the property relations of capitalism. The point is not to attack manipulation but to take possession of it - to hand the media over to popular control, to "make everyone a manipulator" 16

Whilst he is not concerned with the content of advertising as such Enzensberger's argument has important implications for a theory of advertising. If advertisements are as powerful as critics imply, might their techniques not be turned to desirable things, made the source of desirable change? Perhaps, as David Victoroff 17 suggests, they already fulfil a number of positive functions, including in particular their full-frontal attack on the Protestant Ethic? Perhaps this is one of the reasons the left dislike advertising so much, because it is not grim and serious and puritanical, like so many on the left still believe life should be.

Advertisers happily appropriate anything they imagine will have appeal, including themes drawn from feminism, environmentalism, alternative life-styles, social critique. Why (if it is conceded that advertisements 'sell' more than simply products) are these social alternatives not valorised, if only accidentally, in the images that refer to them? The possibility of the 'good' advertisement can only be rejected in an argument that detaches the system of advertising, paradoxically, from its social context.

The extraordinarily powerful negative agency that is assigned to advertisements by critics frequently involves an almost bizarrely a-social argument. Advertising is assigned the virtual role of independent causal agent, single-handedly manipulating minds, telling lies undetected, shaping tastes, intervening in our social relations, making us do things we would never otherwise do, without any regard for the multiple social and personal influences that surround us.

It will no doubt be suggested that advertising can never provide the terms of a social critique because it is designed to valorise the prevailing system of social and property relations. Any reference it may make to alternatives will only be made in order to turn those alternatives towards the logic of capitalism, towards the message that social and even environmental problems can be solved by buying products.

Certainly, to maintain that advertisers have a genuine interest in promoting social alternatives would be absurd. But, to return to an earlier argument, we need to distinguish the advertising 'message' from its reception; we cannot simply interpret ads as we see them, and assume this is how they are read and understood by everyone. John Fiske 18 has made this point in his distinction between mass and popular culture. Viewers, Fiske argues, appropriate advertisements; they subvert their message, use it for their own purposes and amusement, insert it into their own sub-cultures. Popular culture has a life of its own, and it is a much less gullible and much more socially-critical one than the left like to imagine.

Advertising deals indeed with images of society - not 'false' images, but very real images of social relations. It certainly wants to persuade us, as John Berger argued so influentially in *Ways of Seeing* 19, to define our interests as narrowly as possible. But (what Berger did not recognise), there are many ways to read an ad. We may take pleasure in particular advertisements, but we 'zap' them as efficiently as possible from our video recordings; we may take pleasure in useless consumer items, but this does not mean that we have bought them because we are brainwashed, nor does it result in our being unable to take pleasure in anything else. Consumer items may even give a form of 'meaning' to our lives. Why not? We would certainly recognise as abnormal the person for whom meaning was only derived from commodities, the person who lived only to shop. For most of us, meaning, and pleasure, and value and identity, come from many sources. Even the masses who have not read the left/liberal analyses of the system of advertising know this.

There are many good reasons for opposing the environmentally destructive, wasteful and inequitable production of commodities that occurs in our type of economic system. It is a mistake, however, to target advertising as the principal source of these problems. We should see the system of advertising as a reflection of our social system, complex as it is, dominated indeed in its imagery by the social values of individualism, wealth and success, part of the prevailing structure of social and economic inequalities - "capitalist realism", as Schudson calls it - not as the evil empire of mental manipulation. It is equally absurd to see in advertising the origin of all social conformity. It is perfectly possible to imagine, quite harmlessly, that little elves dance around our cereal bowls and still grow up to be a socialist.

Notes

I would like very warmly to thank John Docker for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

1. Carmen Luke, *TV and Your Child* (Sydney, Angus & Robertson, 1990), pp. 20, 22, 21.
2. *Ibid*, p. 118.
3. Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno, *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), pp. 126, 127.
4. Vance Packard *The Hidden Persuaders* (New York: David McKay, 1957).
5. Mark Crispin Miller, 'Why Hollywood is all Ads', *Independent Monthly* August, 1990. The opus classicus of this approach, W.B. Key's *Subliminal Seduction* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), argued seriously that deliberate, highly subtle photographic distortions, shadows and arrangements of light, forming suggestive 'words' and erotic images, would directly stimulate the sale of ordinary products. The degree of effort and imagination involved in 'spotting' these images, even when they are pointed out to you, is almost reassuring, if one has any genuine anxiety (and not paranoia) about the likely effectiveness of at least this form of 'subliminal' advertising.

6. Michael Schudson, *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion* (New York: Basic Books, 1986). See also Kathy Myers, *Understains - the Sense and Seduction of Advertising* (London: Comedia, 1986).
7. Jean Baudrillard, *Le systeme des objets* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).
8. *Ibid*, pp. 232-4.
9. Stuart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976). 10. Judith Williamson, *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (London: Marion Boyars, 1978).
11. *Ibid*, pp. 95, 47
12. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (London: Abacus/Sphere Books, 1972), pp. 15, 19.
13. *Ibid*. p. 19
14. Abraham Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970).
15. Wolfgang Haug, *Critique of Commodity Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1986), p. 47.
16. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Constituents of a Theory of the Media, *New Left Review*, no. 64 (1970), p. 18.
17. David Victoroff, *La publicite et l'image* (Paris: Denoel/Gonthier, 1978).
18. John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989).
19. John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: BBC/Penguin, 1972). Berger's own 'one-dimensional' and puritanical reading of the advertising 'message' is shown in Jan Bruck and John Docker "Puritanic Rationalism: John Berger's Ways of Seeing and Media and Cultural Studies", *Continuum*, v.2. n.2 (1989). But see also van Leeuwen and Bell's response in this issue of *Continuum*.

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