

## Theoretical Introduction

Imagine...perceive...visualize...fabricate. Isn't that the idea behind most of our work? What can we form, devise and conceptualize? That's also how advertising works. It's all about completing the pieces. Filling the gaps with our imagination. In other words, what we see isn't always what we get. This idea of receiving pieces and having to create the whole is interesting to me not only because my background is in advertising, but also because my research interests revolve around the area of representations and portrayals (specifically of females) in media. I am intrigued by how meaning is created at the reader-level.

As considered by Judith Williamson in *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertisements*, the first function of an advertisement is to create difference. For example, if we consider items that have essentially the same function, such as soap, we see that there needs to be a difference created in order for a specific brand to stand out in the mind of the consumer. According to Williamson, this difference is created through the use of images. In other words, to create a difference in meaning, the image needs to illustrate that meaning. This seems simple enough. The problem with this creation of difference, however, is that these linkages that are created through differentiation are seen as "natural;" therefore, there is an assumption that ads complete the inevitable and we begin to see the link as part of the way things are. But this is dangerous if we consider the power that these representations can have on the consumer.

In terms of research, throughout my academic and professional career, I have developed an interest in the representation of women in the media, ethical issues in advertising and public relations, the effects of mass communication on society and the vastly changing environment of new media technologies.

Growing up in a world where the media plays a powerful role and greatly distorts the body image perceptions of women, I am passionate about studying the media's perpetuation of unrealistic expectations of ideal female beauty that lead to unhappiness in young girls and young adult women. I also am constantly amazed by the challenges of matching text and image, finding creative and alternative means to distributing messages and working to keep up with a rapidly changing communication environment. I realize that new technologies are created at a phenomenal pace, and believe it is the job of those involved in the communications industry to adapt their strategies to better fit these new forms of communication and to find the most effective means of attracting attention.

That's why the primary motivation behind the pieces in my portfolio is that of discovery – discovery of new media forms, discovery of new areas of interest and discovery of different avenues in my past research areas. Throughout my portfolio, I feel that this discovery is fairly obvious. I dabbled with Flash, video and audio (all three of which were practically new media forms for me); I explored my past interests in both the representation of women in media and the effectiveness of advertising based on the style of text and image used, which I believe are never-ending research areas that I hope to

continue to explore; and, I reached outside of my boundaries to learn more about areas, such as intertextuality, that I had never examined before.

## **Explanation of Work**

### *Container*

When I began thinking about the container that was going to house my e-portfolio, as well as possibly the rest of my professional information that I would use to present to potential employers, clients, etc., I first knew that I wanted more than anything for it to be simple. Not so simple that it would be considered boring, but simple in the sense that it would be easy for people to find the information they were looking for; that it would be clean and visually appealing. My only prior knowledge of website design was from the perspective of a public relations account executive, in which I served as the liaison between my various clients and the creative team that produced the website, or various other collateral materials. I learned a good deal from the designers about the “look and feel” of a website, and the most important takeaway was that “simple is almost always better when it comes to website design.” Therefore, I took this concept and kind of built everything from there.

Occam's razor is the meta-theoretical principle that "entities must not be multiplied beyond necessity" and the conclusion thereof, that the simplest solution is usually the correct one.

Occam's Razor is an intellectual tool that basically states that, given any two solutions to the same problem, the simpler solution will be the best. This applies to the discipline of web design very well:

- Simple, conventional, recognizable layouts that you know work will be more likely to work for your users than complicated, innovative designs
- A simple message will be understood better than a complicated one
- Interactions with simple, clear steps and few instructions will be completed by more people than a long, wordy alternative
- Clear, uncluttered, recognizable visual design will reduce cognitive friction, reduce mistakes, and help visitors succeed

As far as the main images used on each page, I decided to use advertisements that represented the purpose of each page, in a offhanded fashion. As mentioned earlier, Williamson stated that the first function of an advertisement is to create difference. In Williamson's explanation of difference, she mentions that the meaning of the signifier involves the correlation of two things and the significance of one is transferred to the other. The transference requires the reader to make the connection, through one of many ways, including hermeneutics. Williamson describes hermeneutics as “interpreting, but interpreting in the sense of deciphering a code, or translating from one language to

another: it is an interpretation along given channels, which lead away from the interpreted object, to a 'meaning' behind or beyond it – or even 'inside' it" (71). The process of deciphering is about attempting to understand the advertisement; the reader is the discoverer of meaning, and that's what is happening on each page of my site between the advertisement and the page purpose.

#### *Flash, Audio and Video*

For both of the Flash pieces on my website, I truly was just learning and discovering the benefits of Flash. For the video and audio pieces, I had done some surface-level work in my undergraduate program with these media forms, but a lot has changed and this gave me a chance to explore the new programs and technologies available for creating and manipulating both audio and video.

#### *Text*

As mentioned earlier, the various text-based pieces available in my portfolio really explored my past interests in both the representation of women in media and the effectiveness of advertising based on the style of text and image used, while giving me a chance to discover new areas that I have either never considered, or new areas within my current research interests.

### **References**

Williamson, J. (2002). *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising*. New York: Marion Boyars.

Occam's razor. (n.d.). In Merriam-Webster Online. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/occam's%20razor>