

THE DYNAMICS OF SYMBOLS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS IN ADVERTISING

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Abstract. The communication process must include an element by which the signal, which goes from source to receiver, reaches its true meaning, being perceived by both individuals; this element is the code: the channel that conveys signals, the continuum of the expression proposing them.

With the help of objects and symbols, the relationship between people becomes more bearable; they are thus signs of recognition. By means of objects, people bestow a status upon themselves, adhere to a social status; objects allow people to climb the social ladder, one of consumption. Therefore, what matters today is the brand. We cast aside everything else that does not bear this sign, regardless of the level of quality and price of the product, the designer objects. Advertising adds a certain warmth to objects; in other words, it “personalizes” them. This “erotization” of the product that takes place within a game has its purpose in buying.

Keywords: *advertising, symbolic communication, brand, symbol, art.*

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1. Introduction

In order to eliminate the discussions and confusion about the symbol, it is appropriate to relate it to the interpretation effort; or interpretation does not mean “effort”, which is an intentional structure that does not consist of the meaning-to-object relationship, but in an architecture of the meaning, in a meaning-to-meaning relationship, from the secondary to the primary meaning, whether this relationship is analogous or not, or whether the primary meaning dissimulates or reveals the secondary meaning or not.

If aesthetic education would be similar for both the producer and the mediator and receiver of art – as in the case of popular art – the artwork could be decoded unconsciously, spontaneously. However, this has become impossible in the contemporaneous society which is very heterogeneous not only socially but also culturally, a society with a plurality of value systems and possibilities of receiving aesthetics, strongly differentiated between them.

In most cases, advertising is analyzed from the point of view of linguistic communication. But, the advertising communication, as noted by V.S. Dâncu (Dâncu, 1999) is a special type of communication, it is a “symbolic communication”. In this sense, objects communicate symbolically with the world, they offer a range of values to which we adhere and which give us some social status (this also symbolic). Symbolically, we relate to the world through objects.

The sign, as it is understood by U. Eco (Eco, 1982) in “A Theory of Semiotics”, occurs as a result of a physical task, being a broadcasting act. To produce a sign, it is necessary to emit a thing (an object, an image, a gesture) that seeks to communicate something. Thus, this process of emitting a sign occurs in three phases. The first phase is needed to produce the signal, the second is under the patronage of election, and finally there is the identification phase of expressive units, says the Italian semiotician. The communication process must include an element by which the signal, which goes from source to receiver, reaches its true meaning, being perceived by both individuals; this element is the code: the channel that conveys signals, the continuum of the expression proposing them.

Verbal signs (language being in this case the channel through which they are transmitted) are characterized by acoustic parameters; they usually refer to a single parameter. Instead, non-verbal signs are characterized by access to several parameters.

Another way of differentiating signs is that they have as their source either a natural source or a human subject. Differentiating signs can also be done through their semiotic specificity, Eco says. They can be: objects produced to signify, and objects produced to perform certain practical functions.

From the point of view of their practical functionality, signs can again be divided into: signs having as representatives a certain class of objects, and signs that are recognized as forms that allow a certain function (precisely because form implies it).

Semiotician U. Eco gave the most well-known classification of sign types, following on the footsteps of Ch. S. Pierce, who also proposed a classification. Differences between symbols (those arbitrarily linked to their own object), icons (those that are similar to their own object) and indices (those physically correlated with their own object) are distinguished. The sign maker, the illustrator, or designer in our case, has different forms of expression and content at hand. He knows quite clearly what he wants to say, but he gets stuck in the multitude of expressions and forms of content. But until he finds out exactly how to say what he has to say, he must have a type of content. Only now will he manage to make the correlation between what he wants to say and how to say it. At this point, when he possesses and recognizes the type of content, he has to transform the main components into an expressive continuum. The iconic sign, argued Eco, taken as a reasoned and analogous natural sign is the result of a trace that the object leaves on the material continuum of the expression.

By advertising, objects and subjects become functional; this is the ultimate goal of the consumer society: to transform the subject into an object – a functional object consumer.

In advertising, we often encounter the concept of brand. This is a concept of great importance here, as it signals the product. By branding, advertising takes into consideration the conditioning of the consumer, the individual, and awakens in him the desire, which becomes generalized, to adhere to a status, a code. All advertising, says Fr. Brune (Brune, 1996) “refers explicitly to an object as an imperative criterion: You will be judged according to...”

In the case of the brand, the advertising speech fulfills a collective function converting from a code to the “standing” code. This is a universal system of pinpointing social status. It has some positive aspects, on the one hand because it is as arbitrary as any other code. Secondly, it “makes possible the socialization and total secularization of the signs of recognition: it is thus connected with the emancipation, even formal, of social relations”. By objects, the relationship between humans becomes more bearable;

thus they become signs of recognition. Finally, standing is a universal system of signs. Thus, without knowing each other, we know what happens to us and what happens to others. By means of objects, people bestow a status upon themselves, adhere to a social status; objects allow people to climb the social ladder, one of consumption. Therefore, what matters today is the brand. We cast aside everything else that does not bear this sign, regardless of the level of quality and price of the product, the designer objects. The object bearing this label of the brand becomes supreme, depriving the other objects of this privilege, dooming them, making them disappear and be forgotten.

For the most part, under Jung's influence, the last decades have brought a great deal of approaches to research into symbolism, cataloguing the symbolic themes of anthropology, religion, and neuropsychiatry. This inventory, although descriptive, often devoid of systemicity, from V. Dancu's point of view, however, had a special merit: it visualized a series of patterns that repeat in different eras, places or fields.

For Goffman, reality is constituted by the roles system, but in no way determines the dynamics of various forms of mediation. Until recently, in sociology, the central issue was the struggle for the autonomy of the subject with determinations that limited it, this autonomy being considered positive or negative, according to orientation. This struggle has been replaced over the last decades by the play of symbolic mediations. The only contemporary orientation that systematically resumed this issue is the direction initiated by N. Luhmann. He introduced the concept of reducing the complexity, complexity being the world as the opposite of the absolutely determined systems, thus the set of possibilities. Meaning is obtained by condensing a selective order in relation to the exuberance of the possible. The actually achieved possibilities can be different, because they are only the result of choices, with selectivity being the denial of all other unrealized possibilities. What is interesting is the dynamic character of evolution: selectivity and implicit denial have a provisional character, reduction remaining open to other possibilities. Reducing complexity creates a structure, for Luhmann being the stabilization of some levels of complexity achieved by a given system. The subject is a product of meaning co-definition processes.

There is a rather strange phenomenon in the advertising speech. We believe in something that wants to make us believe in the product, although we are distrustful of it. Or this is what advertising is in its core! It's what J. Baudrillard (Baudrillard, 1997) calls "Santa's logic": just as a child will still believe in Santa Claus even when he stops believing in him (and probably because of the gifts he receives), so does advertising work; the individual does not believe in advertising, but he continues to behave as if he had, would have this trust.

Between the cultural conditions favoring the communication crisis between a part of the public and contemporary art, and therefore its orientation towards the immediate and easy accessible forms of kitsch and pseudoart, the current stage of cultural heterogeneity of the society is worth mentioning, in which there is a plurality of the systems and codes of deciphering and appreciating the work of art. Thus, it is no longer possible to spontaneously decode, or understand directly the work of art; this requires a certain level of initiation and a cultural-aesthetic competence, so that the cultural perceptual background of individuals – on the basis of which any reception and appreciation of a work of art occurs – can be about the same.

Advertising adds a certain warmth to objects; in other words, it "personalizes" them. By doing so, we are at the forefront of objects, we are loved by the objects. We are noticed, so we can rise from anonymity. This "erotization" of the product that takes

place within a game has its purpose in buying. Here we meet all the elements of this game we could call “erotic”: advance, competition, obscenity, flirting, etc. All these prove that advertising itself is consumed. The object is a service, it creates a personal connection between society and people. An issue now arises, that of the relation between society and objects, to which J. Baudrillard states that we are divided into categories of people by different categories of objects.

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