

Social conflicts, philosophical accumulation, and advertisements in the 21st century

İncilay Yurdakul *, Department of Graphics, Faculty of Fine Arts, Hacettepe University, Ankara 06800, Turkey.

Suggested Citation:

Yurdakul, İ. (2016). Social conflicts, philosophical accumulation, and advertisements in the 21st century, *Global Journal on Humanities & Social Sciences*. [Online]. 03, pp 68-74. Available from:
<http://sproc.org/ojs/index.php/pntsbs>

Received January 11, 2015; revised March 02, 2015; accepted May 01, 2015.

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Prof. Dr. Milan Matijevic.

©2016 SciencePark Research, Organization & Counseling. All rights reserved.

Abstract

Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Foucault associated the human existence with the power of questioning and action of freedom. Despite the action of freedom of human being as a being with questioning power, the society has become a surveillance community. According to Foucault, these two states are in a delicate balance. Man in a liberation act gets into a state of protesting and becomes rebellious when his/her private life and rights are threatened. The social life turns into a state of resistance and chaos with the rebellions of the poor and the other marginal groups. According to Foucault, the government has to face the new information, organization, and challenge of opinion groups. These views point to the existence of serious contradictions and conflicts in the society while looking at the society with philosophical evaluations. For example, the series of global conferences, TED, which started off with the slogan 'Ideas Worth Spreading', published Ads Worth Spreading list in its 3rd year. These consisted of the most effective 10 advertising films of the previous year. Advertisements provide a large spectrum from social responsibility projects to inspiring projects and from entertaining works to advertisements proposing complex ideas. In these advertisements, properties such as innovation and encouragement, etc. are rewarded.

These advertisements are not the advertisements of the capitalist system which instigate over-consumption, but they are the advertisements which see the social issues, conflicts and contradictions, and emphasize and question those issues. The most powerful, well-known, and successful advertising agencies are in an elite position in these evaluations. For example, we can mention 'Young and Rubicam' and 'Saatchi and Saatchi'. Another view which the advertisements studied in this paper are based on was the post-modern society evaluations of Baudrillard. He proposed the term simulation to show that the post-modern world took the place of the real and concrete as a virtual-reality.

The philosopher emphasized at this point that the post-modern society became a world of *images* and *signs*. According to Baudrillard, revolution and freedom are structures that entrap the individuals in an *array of*

* ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE: **İncilay Yurdakul**, Department of Graphics, Faculty of Fine Arts, Hacettepe University, Ankara, 06800, Turkey. *E-mail address:* incilay@hacettepe.edu.tr / Tel.: +0-312-297-8825

simulation. Noteworthy advertisements of the advertising companies selected by *The Top Consolidated Agency Net Works in 2013 by Estimated World Wide Revenues* will be analyzed according to the views of the contemporary philosophy thinkers.

Evaluations were made in accordance with the conflicts and contradictions in the society by approaching through the windows of concepts, ideas and designs created in the 21st century world by the creative and skilled designers of these companies.

Study: was completed with the review of the literature, watching and analyzing the advertisements, and discussing and examining them through the philosophical accumulation created by the era. In this respect, the views of the expert views as well as the views of the average audience of the consumer society were included in the study.

Conclusion: The study tried to answer the question "In line with the social conflict, contradiction, and changes, can advertisements be extraordinary despite being in the capitalist production system?"

Keywords: Communication, advertising, ads worth spreading, philosophy, critics, show society.

1. Consumption, Creative and Successful Advertisings

The theme of this study is the story of chain reactions transformed into magic by a handful of geniuses; in short, it is the story of advertisements and advertisers. Here, we talk about highly skilled young doyens with creative minds that had their mark in and ruled the perception of the 20th century. These young, intelligent, and experienced advertisers are the magicians who have established the advertising agency network with information network in the post-industrial world (Hegarty, 2011). The advertisers, who are also social illusionists, do something everybody already knows while keeping their fingers on the pulse of society: Telling a story. Advertisers, who act as if they are politicians, make promises to the target audience doing strategic plans for the brand and productions of large companies. They invite people to a dream world, a virtual world together with the media, and showing the illusion created by them.

In the life of the globalized twenty first century, people are surrounded by a social environment, thousands of messages and images for twenty-four hours. This virtual world, flowing with print, message, and motion video, is in a race for the conditions such as happiness, status, a new life promise, satisfaction, and making a difference. It tries to help individuals gain new identities, and offers them new life styles. Advertisements; propose the most exciting, adventurous, and relaxing voyages by stretching the borders of the imaginations; claim that they materialized the most elegant, economic, beautiful, healthy, and safe packaging; emphasize that whoever uses this perfume or that beauty product would be privileged, outstanding, different, and powerful like gods, goddesses, and queens (Yurdakul, 2002).

Today, visual images have much more place in these areas where printed media, information media, mass communication media, face-to-face communication, and electronic communication are also on the agenda.

Advertisements are successful in a competitive environment with successful concept, good media planning, and accurate strategies. The factors producing such effective advertisements are slogans, typographic designs, texts, manuscripts, interesting constructs, visual images creating miraculous transformations, and behind all these are the creative brains who give life to them (Yurdakul, 2002).

These advertisers who govern the world from finance and communication centres continue working day and night at the advertising agencies they established. These advertising agencies working for the advertisement, promotion, and sales of the brands and productions of the biggest companies of the world are; Young and Rubicam, McCann Erickson, DDB Worldwide, BBDO Worldwide (USA), Saatchi & Saatchi, Leo Burnett (USA), TBWA Worldwide (USA), Ogilvy & Mather (USA).

According to Luke Sullivan, advertising is one of the main gears of a very large economic system. It contributes to the life standards of the people. It is the creator of the products that make this possible. Through this, it creates work and industry for the people. Advertising is an important component of a competitive economy. The companies that need advertising own the products and their brands. The advertisers try to develop a strategy describing the main competitive message to be conveyed for the aforementioned brand with a few sentences. In addition to the strategy, they work also on the brand. If a package is the case, brand is not a random name written on a box. It is not something in the box either. Brand is a whole that summarizes all of the feelings, thoughts, images, history, probability, and gossips that exist in the market for a particular company.

According to Mike Destiny, “Many competitive [beer] brands are almost the same in terms of taste, colour, and alcohol content, and even an expert cannot differentiate them after one or one and a half litters. Thus, the consumer actually drinks the advertisement, and the advertisement itself is the brand” (Cited in Sullivan, 2014).

Perfect advertisements arise from the ideas and insights of the perfect advertisers. The world rewards the advertisers for their passion. The area where the crafted configurations –sales story and advertisements- are the most effective is the life itself. When everything is told and done, the thing that sells well is the advertisement. The actual situation is being a part of a team that produces strategies and creative products that are, with Steve Jobs’ words, “madly perfect” (Hughes, 2014).

Luke Sullivan and Sam Bennett, in the book titled “Creating Great Ads”; teach advertisers the suggestions: find the basic humanistic reality about the product starting from finding an idea, restate the strategy emphasizing authenticity, activate your unconscious mind, try something impudent and provocative, carry out your idea in a course and then go to another one, create an activity or an experience instead of doing ads, get the visuals do all the job, explore the extraordinary. Sullivan and Bennett list the products of the most successful global ads agencies. They present the ads and media in their extraordinary powers (Sullivan and Bennet, 2012).

2. The Critics of Advertising

Philosophers and sociologists of the 20th century propose critical views evaluating this virtual world created by the ad agencies and media.

Adorno asserts that the capitalist system directs the masses by using modernism. He emphasizes that it generated hegemony on the masses using the culture venue. Adorno claims that the society, kept under control and inspection, faces a concept of culture imposed from top, and became industrialized in the 20th century. According to him, in the mass culture, the individual consumer is like a king. Thus, the cultural necessities of the target audience are identified in advance by determining and classifying the differences between the Hollywood, commercial radio, and ads and potential consumers. To him, ads have the most significant role in the culture industry to continue to exist, and to increase its domination. Culture and ads are intertwined in the same-day, blindfolded use and consume. Since the legality and prestige to be gained by the products of the system are guaranteed through the ads, Adorno defines ads as the elixir of the culture industry. In his eyes, while the individual of the modern era is stupefied by being subjected to the blinding products of the culture, the culture is transformed into an ad tablet fobbed off on the humanity in flashing lights (Cevizci, 2010).

Armand Mattelart asserts in a way another opposing view in his book “Advertising International: The Privatization of Public Space”. Mattelart emphasizes that the ads globalized as an industry together with the media in the eighties. At that time, the American advertisers acting on their own in the international markets shared their hegemony. In this restructuring period, there are agencies from the countries such as the United States of America, Japan, Great Britain, and France. These global networks spread, as in the past, to the “Communist Block” in the first years of the nineties. Advertising

agencies entered these countries with the new legislations related to media, culture and advertising. According to Mattelart, globalization fact continued to grow stronger by forming local networks with the erosion of the concept of nation. He emphasized differences and similarities describing the large groups formed by the individuals who shared the socio-cultural mindsets, living conditions, values, priorities, and norm systems. He made significant inferences from the examinations such as European Union, the transnational laboratory known as the European Community, Europe styles, life style, social styles etc. Mattelart brought a heading to media and advertisements as a holistic status. He says that the “Advertising paradigm” is on the way to become the only reality by integrating with the communication forms. While advertisements and media become a transnational power by developing their own laws, and continue to evolve according to the speedy flowchart of the capitalist system, the Advertising Age opened its columns to a member of the World Press Freedom Committee in 1980. The author of the article was arguing against the report written by the Nobel Prize winning head of UNESCO on behalf of the Committee. The report of the Irish NOBEL prizewinner author Sean McBride broke out. In 1982, an advertiser, who was the president of the International Advertisement Association (IAA) and CEO of Young and Rubicam Agency, started a debate against the UNESCO report prepared by the commission head McBride claiming that the advertising was wanted to be hampered in the “Third World”. UNESCO and different platforms of the advertising agencies continued to support opposing views about advertisements (Mattelart, 1995).

3. Philosophical approach to criticism of advertising

Derrida claims that “things have no meanings on their own, that the meaning is brought into things by language. Meaning does not come to us through things; they do not have precise and constant meanings. They can only have meaning when the meaning is attached to them. In other words, things to have a meaning of their own happen as a result of us attaching a meaning to them”. Despite the existing meanings of the things in society, advertisements give new meanings to objects and things by assigning new meanings and feelings to those. Guy Debord also objects criticizing with his views the virtual world created by ads and media. He calls this world “Show Society”. According to Debord, the whole world has become a movie theatre in which the people are isolated from each other and from the real world, and as a result, are sentenced to a full passiveness entity.

On the other hand, Foucault uses “genealogy” as an analysis method to analyze the modern power forms. According to him, the modern society is a form of domination and discipline form, and shows a perfect example of power relations, government, and knowledge. Foucault says that the underlying chaotic power struggles for the order and control are the story of chaos and conflict. Foucault, who sees history as a story of domination and subordination, examines how the individuals are created or set up as objects or subjects as the results of the modern government and knowledge within the genealogy project that searches for the roots of the specific institutions and discourse forms in the power struggles (Cevizci, 2010). We can consider media as the most important area where the government and knowledge are converged, whereas, the advertisement courses are the areas where one-day knowledge is processed within the context of objects and in particular within the context of products, and presented to the masses in packages.

The most well-known example of Foucault’s specialized reasoning, that connects knowledge to each other beyond a metaphoric meaning, is his reconsideration of the Panopticon of Jeremy Bentham (his image of jail that is circular, and facing the monitored center)with reference that “factories, schools, military quarters, and hospitals resemble jails” in it. The situation presented by Foucault’s social sciences approach and architectural relationship is in a way an analysis of the government’s eye and state’s monitoring based on the institutions’ spatial organization. In fact, view in the government techniques developed in the modern era has great importance. Here, the perspective is strategic. It does not only describes, it includes the contours and control relationships. As a result, we are invited to see the applications and sciences as the techniques of dominating the self and the others. He emphasizes that it is possible to write the history of feelings, behaviors, and bodies. He also explains

that the history of the west cannot be separated as the producing and recording the truth. Foucault clarified his views about the “relationship problem between reality, self-construction, and problematizing” by declaring that his actual interest was writing a “reality” history in a book printed just before his death (Flynn, 2010; Foucault, 2007).

There is no power relationship that is not concerned with the formation of a knowledge area, neither is there a knowledge that does not necessitate or form power relationships. This obligatory relationship between the government and knowledge emerge in its best form in the nature of the modern state. Accordingly, while the power of the state increases, it tries to develop new forms of discourse to determine the social groups within its borders, plan their numbers, and discipline and control them. However, according to Foucault, this absolute control reflects a state of delicate balance because people may exhibit resistance and evasion to the “Big Brother” when they occasionally find suitable conditions, and exhibit a revolting capacity when their private lives or their rights are under threat. Beyond the apparent peace and control of the modern society, there lies social resistance and chaos potential in the forms of protest demonstrations under the authorities of government, police or teacher, rebels of the poor, and the silent reactions of angry people. According to Foucault, who claims that power and control produces a state of delicate balance between obedience and rebellion because of that, power of the authority is always open to the challenges of the sources of new information and opinion (Cevizci, 2010).

Foucault argues that the government is established through some social practices, and emphasizes that it emerges within an institutional frame. Modern society, in Foucault’s aspect, is really a much disciplined society that is spied on in its entirety. This society has to be the one on which the control and monitoring has increased, and that this increase is not arbitrary, but just the opposite, is the inevitable result of the spreading of technology. Modern society is a society, in which people are forced to control themselves with the fears of being caught and punished, which strengthens the obedience and concordance to the government which sees and knows everything by means of surveillance cameras, speed traps and data banks, and which disciplines itself in a way. He emphasizes that this state of surveillance is practiced intensely through institutions. The best surveillance method in contemporary meaning is all of the courses from mass media to social media. In addition, it is the research and observation centers related to how and to what extent those are monitored. By this means, advertisements gain importance in media (Cevizci, 2010).

According to Foucault, the only real philosopher is Heidegger. The real reason for Foucault placing Heidegger to an exquisite status in the field of philosophy is known as Heidegger’s defining the human being as one who questions. In fact, Heidegger, in his book “Being and Time”, says that human being is the only being who presents himself as a problem, and who can question himself. This questioning skill, as Foucault would also suggest, provides power to human being; there exists power in questioning, especially the questioning of the authority made possible by the liberating transformation. Being able to self-questioning means he has a latent power to free himself from the existing situation. Thus, being who questions himself is the one who frees himself as of his-self. Heidegger defined the concept of human as a being who questions himself with the consideration of a multidimensional reality that is full of opportunities. In fact, Heidegger; who says that a very important part of the being itself remains hidden, enclosed, and even unthought-of, and that there are always some hidden opportunities within the realm of existence; thought that being a real human involved being questioning, creative, and open to opportunities that were not realized before or were not envisioned (Cevizci, 2010).

Foucault says that Heidegger, not only defined the human thought as a questioning being with unlimited opportunities with the consideration of a reality full of multidimensional opportunities, but also objected with a great power the specific and authoritarian systems that aim to put reality into some specific patterns, and points of view that launch themselves as ultimate and absolute views. Heidegger, as another point of interest to Foucault, said that a scientific, object-centered, and quantitative approach to the world may gain a totalitarian, and absolutist quality; extending such an

approach to all areas of life means the same as narrowing the opportunities of man. Heidegger mentioned also the importance of the artistic expression as a way to paraphrase brand new dimensions of the being (Cevizci, 2010).

4. Ads Worth Spreading

Here, the advertisements mentioned are far from the virtual world of Baudrillard created by the images and displays. According to the philosopher, revolution and freedom are the structures that entrap the individuals in a simulation layout in this era. The world of the 21st century contains within itself conflicts and contradictions in many ways. Advertisements can occasionally be out of line within the capitalist production system.

This non-governmental-organization that takes its name from the words Technology-Entertainment-Design, does studies of “Ideas Worth Spreading” with the most important and successful artists, scientists, designers, and entrepreneurs, and organizes conferences and seminars. This opinion-based institution selects and rewards the best advertisements produced in the last three years in the world. In this project, TED identifies and releases/publishes the “Ads worth Spreading”. In 2012, each of the advertisements classified as ‘Talk, Social Good, Cultural Compass, Creative Wonder, Brand Bravery, and Education’ are really inspiring, and worth sharing, flash mob, viral, impressive, emotional, challenging, cheerful, encouraging advertisements that give joy of life. Advertisements provide a wide range from social responsibility campaigns to inspiring projects and from entertaining works to ads proposing complex ideas (<http://www.enleringunlugu.net/yilin-enetkili-10reklam-filmi.html>).

TBWA Worldwide Marketing president Laurrie Coots emphasizes that the selected advertisements converge on the basis of ‘courage and honesty’(<http://www.mediaCatonline.com/tede-gore-dunyayidegistiren-10reklam/>).

These advertisements are not the advertisements of the capitalist system that instigate over consumption but the ones that see, underline, and question the social issues, conflicts and contradictions. The well-known and the most successful advertising agencies take part in this approach.

TED stated; “Our aim to release/publish the advertisements with the ‘Ads worth Spreading’ evaluation is to congratulate the advertisements that communicate the creative ideas through an extraordinary and powerful way”. Creative intelligence and innovation are particularly acclaimed. They say that they actually want to reward the ideas of the ads. TED indicated that they find worthy of consideration that the advertisers made significant connections between cultural areas and ads. The commercial film of the “Let’s Color” campaign, started worldwide by AkzoNobel with the aim to liven up all of the grey and gloomy areas, and run by Marshall won the ‘Ads worth Spreading’ prize. TED organization, which believed in the power of ideas, rewarded the “Let’s Color” campaign of AkzoNobel which is the largest painting and coating company of the world. The slogan of the campaign making a selection from more than one thousand ads film was determined as “Find the good ads you selected to really watch”. The evaluation was done by twenty-four specialists. The ads film that was considered worth the reward, and designed to be shared online is a two-minute film. It was directed by Adam Berg, and designed and shot by the advertising agency Euro RSCG. AkzoNobel provides an adventure to the audience through a painting together activity having the worldwide known brands; Dulux, Dulux Valentin, Coral, and Marshall. It sets the audience out on a journey by fascinating them with ever-changing geography and exotic lives. The film evokes in the audience emotions and thoughts such as willingness to change the world, feelings of adventure and empathy, and joy of life; and it shares the aesthetic styles (<http://www.evdose.com/tur/renk/ren0110.html>); (<http://let'scolorproject.com.tr>).

Another spot produced by Procter and Gamble advertising agency was also selected as ‘Ads worth Spreading’: Thank You Mom / Pick Them Back up: This emotional film, which is about the rugged

struggle of the children who are preparing for the sports games, honors the unsung heroes of the Olympic games. It reminds us the importance of encouraging the child in pain to attend the trainings again. The film livens up the willingness for success emphasizing determination, willpower, and courage instead of failure and disappointment. The child getting ready for the sports games is happy about getting support from his sportswoman mom.

References

- Cevizci, A. (2010). *Felsefe Tarihi*. Istanbul: Say publications II. Baskı.
- Foucault, M. (2007). *Iktidarın Gozu*. (Translation: Isık Erguden). Istanbul: Ayrinti Yayinlari.
- Hegarty, J. (2014). *Hegarty on Advertising*. (Translation: Iclal Buyukdevrim Ozcelik). Istanbul: MediaCat Books.
- Mattelart, A. (1995). *Beyin Igfal Şebekesi*. (Translation: Isın Gurbuz). Istanbul: Ayrinti Yayinlari.
- Sullivan, L., & Bennett, S. (2014). *Guide to Creating Great Ads*. (Translation: Nadir Ozata). Istanbul: MediaCat Books.
- Yurdakul, İ. (2002). *Cumhuriyetimizin Temeli Kulturdur*. İkinci Cilt. Ankara: Kultur Bakanligi Yayini.
- Urhan, V. (2010). *Foucault. Fikir Mimarları Dizisi 24*. Istanbul: Say Yayinlari

Internet Resources

- <http://www.eskop.com/skopbulten/cagdas-estetik-zamanin-yoldaslari/925>
- <http://www.enliringunlugu.net/yilin-en-etkili-10-reklam-filmi.html>
- <http://www.evdose.com/tur/renk/ren0110.html>
- <http://let'scolorproject.com.tr>