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*Encounters between theory and practice: Semiotic and pragmatic principles in advertising*

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**SHEFFIELD HALLAM UNIVERSITY**

**Faculty of Development and Society**

**Encounters between Theory and Practice: Semiotic and  
Pragmatic Principles in Advertising**

A Doctoral Thesis

**By**

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Stuart Foster

## Abstract

Advertising has long been of interest to semiotic, linguistics and pragmatic theorists including Barthes (1957; 1977), Williamson (1978), Myers (1994), Cook (2001) and Tanaka (1994). Marketing scholars, including Brierley (2002) and Beaseley (in Beaseley & Danesi, 2002) show a reciprocal interest in the potential for semiotics to advance their discipline, but there is no apparent awareness of theories of pragmatics or its relevance to their field. While semiotics offers a tool in understanding how meaning is conveyed through linguistic and non-linguistic signs, pragmatics focuses upon language, speaker intentions and the interpretation of utterances in context. This study compares these two approaches in understanding the creative processes involved in the design of advertisements. Universities and professional bodies were contacted to ascertain whether these subjects were taught to prospective and practising advertising professionals and, if so, what was the precise content. Considerable variation is found between institutions, ranging from no input to a moderate level of input in semiotics; pragmatics is absent in the syllabus. Where semiotics is taught, it is confined to using theories to deconstruct selected advertisements rather than employing semiotic principles as a design technique. In addition, five copywriters are interviewed to ascertain their awareness of semiotics and, more generally, the creative processes they adopt. While a vague knowledge of the theories is reported, and some appreciation of their possible relevance to the industry, practitioners make no attempt to apply semiotics systematically in their design practices. There is evidence of an awareness of the effects of signification and context which aligns with the theoretical frameworks, although this alignment can be explained more through intuition and job experience than a conscious application of theories. It is recommended that further research should be conducted into the value of teaching semiotics to marketing students, that an applied semiotic method is developed specifically for students of advertising and that consideration is given to incorporating aspects of pragmatics into their training.

**Key Words:** advertising, copywriter, linguistics, marketing, pragmatics, semiotic

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# CHAPTER 1 – THESIS INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

The principle aim of this thesis is to establish a dialogue between linguistic and semiotic theory on the one hand and the practice of advertising design and production on the other. Advertising may be naturally associated with business-oriented disciplines like marketing, but it also has also attracted the interest of scholars within other diverse fields, ranging from modern art (e.g. Flood, 2012; Cairns, 2010) to applied psychology (e.g. Fennis *et al*, 1968; O'Shaughnessy & O'Shaughnessy, 2004). The focus of previous studies into advertising has to date been almost entirely directed towards the finished product of the creators' endeavours, i.e. advertisements that have been published or broadcast, or the cognitive effects achieved by the advertisements, rather than on the processes involved in advertising creation.

As Brierley (2002: p. 2) states:

*“Though there are thousands of academic studies of advertising texts and their interaction with audiences, there are very few that examine the production of advertising from the advertiser’s perspective.”*

The focus of research in this thesis was directed towards addressing this deficiency through examining the relationship between the creative processes involved in the production of advertisements and the treatment of advertising discourse within the theoretical frameworks found in semiotics and pragmatics. Where alignments between theory and practice are identified, the author has investigated whether practitioners consciously applied methods and principles from their knowledge of the theories in their advertising design. Where it was

discovered practitioners were neither aware of, nor consciously applying, the principles, the study attempted to establish whether any correlations identified between theory and practice could be explained by other means, such as through intuition derived from experience, and consequently whether the principles were applied unconsciously. To illustrate this point, in the case of semiotics, an advertising designer interviewed during the course of this research stated:

*"I bet if you broke down our processes ... if you could look into our heads...we'd be using semiotics in some way, but not actively...not explicitly". (Subject B)*

It was further intended that this research would shed light on whether the processes involved in the creation of advertisements tend to support semiotic and pragmatic models and, if so, in what ways and to what degree.

## **1.2 THE CHARACTER OF ADVERTISING DISCOURSE**

Advertising is a distinctive and unique type of discourse for several reasons. It is prevalent in modern society or, as Williamson (1978: p. 11) states, advertisements:

*"are ubiquitous, an inevitable part of everyone's lives: even if you do not read a newspaper or watch television, the images posted over our urban surroundings are inescapable."*

While, according to Dyer (1982), a business that engages in advertising may claim that the purpose is simply to make consumers aware of the ranges of goods and services available within a free market economy, it would be naïve to suppose the purpose is as altruistic as this suggests. The ultimate aim of an advertiser is to modify consumer perceptions, and thereby influence consumer behavior to the advantage of a supplier; in other words, it is to transform receivers of advertisements into customers. Advertisers employ an assortment of methods to capture the attention of potential customers including such as images juxtaposed with captions (as described in subchapter 2.6), presenting a reader or viewer with a riddle or enigma (subchapter 2.10) and personalization (subchapter 3.4). Their success in this respect is contingent upon them possessing some understanding of the interpretive abilities of receivers (i.e. their cognitive processing), and taking account of these in the design of their advertisements. As a genre, advertising shares some of its features with that of literature. It constructs parallel worlds that can be entered and which have similarities with those inhabited by the reader or audience, but are often more glamorous, exotic and exciting than the banality of day-to-day experience. It generates narratives that allude to folklore and popular culture, as exemplified by Beasley and Danesi (2002) where they suggest allusions are made to the Ancient Greek god of wine and carnal pleasures, Dionysus, in a *Versace* advertisement (as described in Subchapter 5.6, below). In some cases, these feature celebrities, such as Halle Berry, who is used to market *Revlon* beauty products (Subchapter 2.6). Sometimes, advertising creates stories, and characters, of its own which it can develop throughout a campaign and a notable example of this is a series of television advertisements for Nescafe Gold Blend instant coffee broadcast in the UK between 1987 and 1993, and this depicts a slowly developing romance between a couple (Armstrong, 1995). To be successful, advertisers have to capture attention, perhaps even overcoming some resistance in the process. In order to engage consumers, advertisers exploit some of the methods favoured by authors and film directors, such as visual stimuli by way of images which may be striking in terms of the photography or graphics used, and through linguistic devices

such as jingles, straplines, enigmatic wording or personalization (as mentioned above)(Brierley, 2002). However, unlike novelists, playwrights and movie directors, advertisers do not invite those who experience them into these worlds primarily to entertain. For them, Dyer (1982) asserts, the entertainment aspect is instead a vehicle used to fulfill an entirely different purpose, namely to promote a product or brand and thereby alter perceptions and, ultimately, behavior with respect to that product or brand. This difference in purpose makes it necessary to view advertisements from a different perspective from that of other genres. Specifically, if the future behaviour of the receiver is not influenced in the precise way intended then, as Bissel (2001) points out, communication may be regarded as unsuccessful, the opportunity as lost and money spent on producing the advertisement as wasted.

### **1.3 ADVERTISING AS AN OBJECT OF STUDY**

As a general rule, commercial and public information advertisements are received unsolicited and attached to other discourses such as television and radio programmes, and periodicals. Nonetheless, research shows that advertising is memorable as the content of advertisements readily comes to mind, such as when shopping (Cobb & Hoyer, 1985; Dalton *et al*, 2013). Commercials are, as noted by Dyer (1982), ubiquitous in modern society and are found in all forms of media (Cook, 2001). To be effective, they must be relevant to the consumers and so efforts are made both to reflect modern lifestyles and, in some cases, present consumers with a projected "*idealized self*" in "*idealized settings*" (Richins, 1991). The effectiveness of advertising has ultimately to be measured in terms of the profit it is able to generate and, as a consequence,

*“advertising theory and practice had to define very early the concept of advertising effectiveness and also the tools to measure this effectiveness” (Pavlu, 2016).*

In order to engage consumers, advertisers exploit a range of modes including imagery, music and language, according to Brierley (2002). When analyzing the artistic elements in advertisements, and the creative practices of those who produce them, their primary purpose of persuasion must not be overlooked.

This study considers the training that advertising practitioners were receiving at the time of the research, but it focuses particularly on the content of some of the textbooks that have been produced offering instruction in the principles and practices of advertising for students and practitioners. In some cases, these refer to conceptual models, such as Lavidge and Steiner’s model (Lavidge & Steiner, 1961), which establishes a hierarchy of effects, shows the operation of persuasion and suggests a series of steps which chart a reader or viewer’s progress from the point of product awareness to purchase. Major figures in the marketing industry, like Ogilvy (2007) and Hegarty (2011), share their experience with the industry by recounting it in books and manuals. In order to establish the effectiveness of advertising, a number of studies were performed which examined the perception of advertisements, some as early as the 1920s (Nixon, 1927). Later, cognitive models of perception and recall were devised (Hornik, 1980). According to Pieters and Wedel (2004), one of the greatest challenges of an advertiser is: *“to cut through the clutter of competing advertisements and editorial messages”* (p. 36). Visual stimuli approaches focus upon the ways to maximize the level of reader attention an advertisement can secure and the extent to which the size of the advertisement, and the elements within, contribute to this. The perceived wisdom has, in the view of Pieters and Wedel (2004), long been that larger advertisements attract a greater degree of attention

Aside from the obvious business perspective, advertising has been a topic of interest to scholars of apparently unrelated disciplines and where the chief

purpose has not been to further the aims of business, but rather to achieve greater understanding within one or other academic fields. Disciplines that have demonstrated an interest in advertising include psychology (e.g. Eighmey & Sar, 2007; Fennis & Stroebe, 2010), sociology (Packard, 1957; Marsland, 1988), social anthropology (Goldman, 1992; Leiss, Kline & Jhally, 1990), philosophy (Spence & Van Heekeren, 2005) and topics falling under the general headings of communication studies and linguistics, as outlined in the next subchapter.

#### **1.4 ADVERTISING AS COMMUNICATION**

Some scholars apply principles from a broad range of theoretical approaches to advertising (e.g. Vestergaard & Schrøder, 1985; Myers, 1994; Cook, 1989 & 2001); others focus on specific aspects such as lexis and syntax (e.g. Leech, 1966); critical discourse analysis (e.g. Williamson, 1978; Mills, 1995; Thornborrow, 1998) and pragmatics (Tanaka, 1994). Examples from advertising provide material for pioneers of cultural semiotics such as Eco (1976), Barthes (1957, 1977) and Bignell (2002) to the extent that it has played a role in the advancement of this field. The same may be said for the development of multimodal approaches (e.g. Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), where advertising comprises a substantial part of the material analysed using this method.

Semiotics suggests ways of understanding the culture of the society in which the signs exist in particular aspects of cultural mythology and the social role of such myths (Bignell, 2002; Turner, 2002). From an advertising standpoint, this offers possibilities for engaging the public, capturing attention and influencing behaviour. It is therefore unsurprising that semiotics, which has previously been of interest mainly to philosophers or linguists, has also attracted the attention of scholars from the field of marketing (e.g. Beasley & Danesi, 2002; Brown & Turley, eds. 1997). As stated above, semiotics has been applied in the analysis of advertisements for several decades and, more recently, a working

knowledge of it has been a requirement for some students undertaking degree courses in marketing and advertising in British universities. However, while the subject is or has been taught in certain courses, the degree to which semiotic tools are systematically used in the everyday work of the advertising industry is one of the matters explored in the course of this research.

The study of signs is an ancient branch of philosophy and can be traced back as far as the Ancient Graeco-Roman period on the third and fourth centuries BCE (Nöth, 1990: pp. 14-15), but a later development is to be found in structuralist semiotics. Since the inception of structuralist semiotics by the pioneering linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, semiotics has been hugely extended in its purview. While many forms of communication exist, the most sophisticated system used by humans is language. This can be studied across many levels, from the most elemental sounds of speech, through the internal meanings of morphemes, words and phrases, and up to the study of complete texts and discourses. The structuralist approach, however, is unable to take account of the fundamental role of context in the production and interpretation of communicational processes and products, a role which has become increasingly recognized since the inception of pragmatics as a distinct discipline from the early and middle of the twentieth century (Biletzki, 1996). Pragmatic approaches such as those suggested by Austin, Grice, and Sperber and Wilson, as described in Subchapters 3.2 to 3.7, focus primarily upon context within spoken interaction. While there have been efforts to extend pragmatic analysis to other communicative situations, these appear to be few in number. Those which do exist, e.g. Geis (1982), tend to be dated and so they do not employ more modern pragmatic frameworks or else they consist of studies which are highly specific in character, such as Tanaka's (1994) contrastive study of the contextual features of British and Japanese advertisements.

## **1.5 STATEMENT OF AIMS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

As mentioned, a substantial body of scholarly work relating to advertising has been produced over several decades and by academics from a wide variety of disciplines; some of these are listed in Subchapters 1.3 and 1.4, above. The two disciplines of interest in this thesis are semiotics and pragmatics, and the particular theoretical constructs and principles from these disciplines that are employed in analyzing examples from advertising. The two chapters following this Introduction comprise a review conducted for the purpose of establishing which particular models are applied, what they contribute to enhancing understanding of the discourse, and how they may shed light on the creative processes involved in producing commercials.

While it may be the case that, among those practitioners who have received training in semantic and/or semiotic principles, these principles guide their creative routines, this cannot be taken for granted. It is conceivable that much of their creativity arises from other sources, such as their life experiences, recollections of previous successes and failures in previous advertising campaigns, and witnessing and emulating the work of other practitioners. By exploring the creative strategies which advertising professionals adopt, it is possible to determine the extent to which their creativity and inspiration arises from these sources, and establishing this was the chief aim of the second major part of the study. Where it is discovered that practitioners draw upon experience and intuition rather than attempting to apply theoretical principles, that is not to be interpreted as meaning that these principles are irrelevant to the process. This study is designed to ascertain whether such creative practices accord with the principles even when they are not consciously applied. A number of in-depth interviews with practitioners were conducted to explore this possibility, and these are outlined and analysed in the sixth chapter.

In addition to exploring this topic from the perspective of advertising, this study considers the implications of the conscious and unconscious application of theoretical models and principles in terms of its contribution to the

understanding of the models and principles themselves. It attempts to establish whether the research undertaken supports or confirms the validity of the theories, or challenges them. Deconstructing advertisements can be insightful, but the insights gained are limited according to the method by which the data analysed is obtained. Theoretically informed analysis of advertisements (Williamson (1978), Vestergaard & Schrøder (1985), Myers (1994) Tanaka (1994) Cook (1989, 2001) and Bignell (2002)) has led to significant insights into the understanding of the genre, and in particular into the role of aspects of context in the interpretation of the textual components of advertisements. At the same time, it remains an open question as to what such theoretically driven research has to offer regarding the creative communicative and cognitive processes that practitioners themselves evince in designing advertisements and advertising campaigns and their explicit knowledge and application of theories in professional practice. Consequently, this dissertation has investigated in detail the character of the communicational expertise in evidence in professional practice, the role in that practice of explicit knowledge in semiotics or pragmatics, the extent and nature of that knowledge and how such knowledge was acquired. To that end, the nature of the training undertaken by advertising professionals is examined with a particular focus on the two disciplines that are of particular interest within this research. It is, of course, possible that theoretical knowledge is acquired outside of formal educational and training environments, a possibility explored in the interviews with practitioners. Where interviewees reveal they have at least some familiarity with theoretical principles, the extent of their knowledge and whether and how they attempt to apply these in their daily work is investigated.

In Chapter 2, the study considers how the creative processes within advertising relate to Barthes's view of cultural myths, the influences exerted on semiotics by Formalism, and especially Shklovsky's theory of defamiliarisation, developments of approaches such as multimodality, and whether these are confirmed or undermined by evidence collected from those who actively create advertisements. Similarly, as pragmatic theories are mainly concerned with dialogue in the form of utterances (Levinson, 1983; Sperber & Wilson, 1995),

Chapter 3 of the study attempts to uncover the degree to which pragmatic principles, and especially those within Relevance Theory, are substantiated by advertising. Advertisements are a markedly different form of communication to that of conversation; advertising is mass communication rather than personal communication and, as such, it is one-way only, with the advertiser being the communicator and there being no expectation that the receiver will respond. It has a purpose which is specific and far narrower than a dialogue; it mostly consists of more than just the linguistic mode and it commonly includes the elements of images, graphics, video, sound and music which contribute to the context through which the spoken or written language is interpreted. This study therefore attempts to ascertain how advertising practitioners generate context in their creative practices and whether their methods conform to particular pragmatic theories that are primarily aimed at explaining context in face-to-face spoken interactions. Accordingly, a further ambition for the study is that, by highlighting points of concordance and divergence between the theories of the disciplines mentioned and advertising practice, the boundaries of knowledge in terms of semiotics and pragmatics are extended to some degree, thus advancing these fields. This obviously relates mainly to advertising, but it also applies to other discourses that are similar in character, such as political speeches and public service announcements. Additionally, recommendations are made which may be informative for individuals responsible for designing the training of future generations of advertising professionals.

The research questions for this thesis are summarized as follows:

1. What have linguistic pragmatics and semiotics contributed to our understanding of advertising discourse? What are the key theoretical constructs and principles which these approaches have brought to bear?
2. To what extent are the specific conceptual frameworks proposed in theories of semiotics and pragmatics valuable in shedding light on the

linguistic and communicative processes involved in the production and operation of advertisements?

3. How familiar are advertising professionals with particular semiotic and pragmatic models of communication and to what extent do they attempt to apply theoretical principles with which they are familiar in their work?
4. To what extent do the communicative insights and principles of professional advertising practice provide support for or conform to the relevant theoretical models?
5. What are the implications for theory from this confrontation between theory and practice, and what implications are there for professional practice and training/education?

## **1.6 SCOPE AND STRUCTURE**

The scope of the research for this study is confined to advertising in the United Kingdom, and the backgrounds, approaches and creative practices of advertising practitioners working in the north of the England at the time of writing. The primary data for this study is described in detail in the Methodology chapter and consists of two main kinds, namely teaching materials used by educators in universities and elsewhere who are concerned with training prospective advertising copywriters and marketers, and interviews with individuals working in these fields. With regard to the first kind mentioned, publications aimed at students and practitioners were examined, and these included required theoretical textbooks and course materials used in relevant university courses for students as well as books written by well-known figures in the industry and in which they share their practical experiences in advertising creation. As with many other aspects of human activity, differences can be found between that which is taught and studied in terms of theory and the daily practices of individuals who routinely undertake the activity. Practitioners themselves were

therefore interviewed to establish the conceptual frameworks they had been using in their advertising designs, consciously or otherwise; how they sought to construct meaning; how they contextualized their messages to capture their intended audience's attention and to ensure that any and all intended interpretations were accessed by their intended audience.

Semiotics and pragmatics share the same objective by virtue of them both being concerned with accounting for the creation and comprehension of meaning. In the case of semiotics, meaning is considered to be embodied in signs, and the semiotic approach considers how these originate or are intentionally generated, how they interact with other signs and how they may be interpreted. The concept of signs in semiotics is so broad as it may be considered to encompass everything that a living entity can detect with any of its sensory faculties. Language is, in semiotic terms, simply a sophisticated system of signs. On the other hand, according to Levinson (1983), pragmatics, is concerned predominantly with language, the intention behind its production and the possibilities for the interpretation of that intention through context. Semiotics is generally unconcerned with context, although it may be argued that there is a considerable overlap between certain concepts within it, and pragmatics, as explained in Subchapter 3.1, below. Peircian semiotics, and Peirce's classification of certain signs as indexical, have been suggested as being closely tied to context, such as in assigning referents to personal pronouns and demonstratives. As Rellstab (2008) points out:

*“...if indexicality prompts the interpreter to look for the specific objects intended, then the sentence can only be interpreted by a mechanism that Dan Sperber and Deidre Wilson, prominent representatives of Relevance Theory, would call computational, or inferential.” (p. 322)*

Similarly, as is explained in Subchapter 3.1, some semioticians, such as Jakobson, recognize the frequently occurring discrepancy between the form of an utterance and the intention that motivates it, and attempts have been made to describe this, including by way of establishing utterance and intention categories.

In spite of interfaces between the two approaches, there are clear differences in the perspectives of semiotics and pragmatics and so the theoretical basis of this study is structured accordingly. The first of the two chapters relating to the theoretical approaches begin by explaining the basic principles of structuralist and cultural semiotics, and how advertising is understood as constituting, and being composed of, signs. Chapter 2 details how semiotic frameworks have been applied as a means by which existing advertisements are deconstructed, either for interest by linguists, or as methods that can be used by learners and practitioners in the advertising industry. Among the topics covered in this section are the basics of Saussurean structuralism, the contributions of Peirce (from Nöth, 1990), Barthes (1957, 1977) and Eco (1976, 1979), as well as pertinent approaches to intertextuality and multimodality as they relate to advertising. The third chapter reviews the basic principles of pragmatics, from work on speech acts by Austin and Searle, through Gricean maxims and thereafter to the latest approaches offered by Relevance Theory. While little work has been done on applying these context-based theories to advertising texts, one scholar in particular, Tanaka (1994), attempts to apply certain principles of pragmatics, as a means of comparing and contrasting advertising language as used in British and Japanese commercials and her study is described. This chapter also discusses stylistic and rhetorical devices such as ambiguity, puns and metaphor, and concludes with an explanation of the two main approaches in advertising suggested by Bernstein (1974) which he terms "*reason*", i.e. persuasion by way of making a logical case for purchasing a product, or to establish or reinforce brand loyalty, and "*tickle*", which is an approach aimed at amusing, entertaining or otherwise engaging a consumer without providing concrete product or brand information. The fourth chapter outlines the methodology by which primary data is captured, recorded, processed and

interpreted. Chapter 5 functions as a link between the theoretical background and the primary data analysis by investigating the training given to students who wish to pursue careers in advertising; the purpose is to describe what kinds and levels of input are provided that relate to semiotics and pragmatics, and to identify the books to which they refer as part of their training. Obtaining this information is deemed necessary in order to provide insights into the pre-existing knowledge that advertising professionals might have in respect of theoretical models prior to commencing interviews with them. The sixth chapter details the most salient parts of the interviews with copywriters, and with a commercial semiotician, and analyses the data they provide in their answers. The wider implications of this study are explored in the penultimate Discussion chapter and the thesis terminates with a Conclusion that reviews the process and the findings, evaluates the study, suggests further research in order to extend understanding of the cognitive and creative processes involved in producing advertisements, and makes recommendations with regard to the training of advertising creators.

# **CHAPTER 2 - ADVERTISING FROM A SEMIOTIC PERSPECTIVE**

## **2.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION**

This chapter discusses the characteristics of signs and their functions in communication by reviewing theoretical approaches from structuralist and cultural semiotics, the tools they provide for analyzing existing examples of advertisements and their application in the advertising industry.

Semioticians including Barthes (1957, 1977) and Williamson (1978) consider advertising in relation to its ideological content and purpose while others (e.g. Bignell, 2002; van Leeuwen, 2005) view it as a genre that offers a means by which semiotic principles and methods can be clearly applied to real world communications and illustrated. Unlike strictly linguistic approaches, semiotics concerns itself with all modes present in communication, including sound, music, imagery, graphics and format, and advertisers seek to maximize their use of modal alternatives to generate and maintain interest in the commercials they produce. Conversely, as this thesis demonstrates, there has been some interest from the field of marketing into the possible applications of semiotics as a means of developing their field and enabling them to produce advertising that is more impactful and better targeted. Semiotics has been integrated into some media and advertising courses at university level, as is discussed in detail below, and the link between semiotics and marketing is now well established, as demonstrated in Chapter 6.7, below.

A number of books have been published that are directed specifically towards individuals working in advertising and who might wish to exploit semiotic theories when designing commercials and even managing brands, and these are outlined in Chapter 4, but Oswald (2012) highlights the relevance of semiotics in effective brand management:

*“By managing brand semiotics at all stages in the development, execution, and communication of the brand, marketers create a code system that structures the consistent and enduring association of the brand with specific icons, language, and symbols in consumers’ minds.” (p. 46)*

The concept of structure, which is the foundation of semiotics, facilitates a process of branding through, for example, marking differences between the brand advertised and its competitors. Oswald (pp. 51 - 56) asserts that brands are “*multidimensional sign systems*” and she lists the dimensions as being the “*material*” (i.e. those signifiers which are distinctive to the brand and intended to be readily recognized, including logos, brand names, jingles, colour schemes and even fonts); “*conventional*” signifiers (i.e. those which are codified by traditions or rules); “*contextual*” signs (i.e. those which are context sensitive and perceived through the cultural and social codes and which would include markers of social status and gender, plus factors relating to connotation) and, lastly, the “*performative*” factor, which is concerned with how the participants use semiotic codes in communication. These codes can be categorized as (i) subject address, such as the voice used and choice of pronouns, and (ii) meaning and reference, which consists of marketing signs that resemble, or substitute for, linguistic signs “*by linking a material signifier to an abstract concept*” (Oswald: p. 55).

As is demonstrated in this thesis, branding operates through signs, regardless of whichever sign dimension is decided most pertinent.

## **2.2 OVERVIEW OF SEMIOTICS**

Philosophers have taken an interest in the nature of signs since the time of Aristotle. St Augustine (AD 354 – 430) considered the differences between

different types of signs, including those that are natural and those which are made by humans, including words:

*“There are other kinds of signs whose whole function is to signify something. Words, for example: nobody uses words except in order to signify something.”* (Augustine, 379: trans. Green 1995: p.15)

In the later part of the 19th and early part of the 20th centuries, a handful of scholars, including Ferdinand de Saussure, Charles Sanders Peirce and Charles William Morris, directed their attention to the nature of signs. Saussure used the term “*semiology*” to denote his particular field of interest but, in more recent times, there has been a reversion to the older name and it is now mostly referred to as “*semiotics*” (Beasley & Danesi: 2002: p. 26). Since then, semiotics has developed and, while retaining its philosophical roots, it also has an applied dimension which is exploited in, for example, the analysis and interpretation of texts. Later semioticians such as Roland Barthes<sup>1</sup> (1957; 1977) considered that signs can operate on more complex, cultural levels and can thereby be associated with strong ideological functions in that they were “*bearers of accepted opinion and ideological trickery*” (Blonsky, 1985: xvii). One example of this phenomenon widely discussed in semiotics is that of the myth (Barthes, 1957; Nöth, 1990).

### **2.3 SAUSSURE**

Harris (1983: p. 157) points out that, according to Saussure, a signification system exists when signs relate to other signs within the same system and generate meaning. The first problem encountered when mentioning meaning is

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<sup>1</sup> Subchapter 2.6, below, discusses Barthes' work in detail.

deciding what is actually meant by *meaning* and especially in relation to *signification*. The word *meaning* has many potential interpretations which are subject to context, including expression of determination (e.g. *I mean to win*), importance (e.g. *her expression of concern really means something to me*) as well as indication (e.g. *thumbs up means you have won*). Semioticians and semanticists distinguish between *denotative* and *connotative* meaning, and between *sense* and *reference*, and these are discussed below. As Sperber and Wilson (1995) note, utterances and texts rarely convey a single and precise meaning that is incapable of misinterpretation through such factors as ambiguity or the mis-assignment of referents. This is, however, a matter that is explored in Chapter 3, below, and the focus at this stage is on the primary, and exclusively human, signification system.

Language, written and spoken, offers a sophisticated human signification system. Every phoneme in any spoken language and every letter in any written language functions in relation to the other phonemes and letters within the same word or adjacent words. Similarly, words function in relation to other words, and the sequences of words produces syntax that, in turn, constructs meaningful utterances. Phonemes, letters and words are only meaningful as part of their system of signification and, in this system, they have an essentially differential quality, i.e an identity rooted in the difference between signs. Saussure states that the “*link between the signal and signification is arbitrary*” (1916: p. 67): signifiers have to be learned and they (mostly) bear no physical or other relation to the concepts they signify. Saussure does not unduly concern himself with the question of degrees of arbitrariness, but he recognizes that some signs may be more arbitrary, or less arbitrary, than others. He identifies signs of politeness as being “*often endowed with a certain natural expressiveness*” (p. 68) but adds, however, that they “*are none the less fixed by rule*” (ibid). Not even what might be considered onomatopoeic words, where the word is designed to imitate whichever acoustic phenomenon it represents, are free from human arbitrary reformulation. To support this contention, he compares the different words used in different languages to represent animal sounds; thus, a dog in French makes the sound “*ouaoua*”, while a German dog’s bark is “*wauwau*” (Saussure,

1916: p. 69). Saussure (1916) considers that the most efficient conveyers of meaning are those signs that are the most arbitrary. This goes some way towards explaining why language is the most widespread of all semiotic systems, that it has existed in various forms for many thousands of years, and is an essential tool of communication used by virtually all human beings across the world.

Saussure argues, in relation to synchronic identity: "*a word can express quite different ideas without compromising its identity*" (1916: p. 107) and he exemplifies this by citing "*the 8.45 (train) from Geneva to Paris, one of which leaves 24-hours after the other*" (ibid). He points out that these two manifestations of "*the 8.45 from Geneva to Paris*" (ibid) are treated linguistically as the same train, even though it is known they might be different physical objects in terms of them being different engines and operated by different staff. By the same token, a signified can usually be denoted by several different signs while, equally, a signifier can have a multiplicity of possible interpretations. For example, a men's toilet can be indicated by a range of stylized graphics, or the words "men", "gentlemen", "gents", "males", or any number of corresponding words in other languages, while the same signifiers may signify a changing area in a public swimming pool or clothing store and the intended meaning has to be recovered, either from the environment or from additional texts with which it is associated. In such cases, the denotational interpretation would be the same so that any sign which was recognized as signaling the location of a men's toilet conveys the same essential information, although the connotations may vary. As an example of this, a facility which uses signs such as "ladies" and "gentlemen" in traditional Roman characters would be addressing readers in a manner which suggests both politeness and formality, whereas an entirely different impression would be conveyed by signs which read "guys" and "gals". In such cases, one might find that the way in which the washroom is designated has little or no effect on customers' success in their primary goal of navigation, although the secondary impression they obtain from such a designation about the establishment's projected identity (and their own relationship to that identity) is a different question.

## 2.4 PEIRCE

An alternative view of signs is offered by Charles Sanders Peirce, an American philosopher who postulates that a sign is anything that denotes an object other than itself, while an *object* was anything, concrete or abstract, that could be thought about or conceptualized. He uses the term *representamen* to refer to the “*perceptible object*” (Nöth, 1990: p. 42) which functions as a sign and which corresponds to Saussure’s *signifier*. The sign for Peirce is, as Nöth (1990) explains, the mental representation of an *object*, whether or not it exists in the real world and he introduces the notion of an *interpretant* to denote its effect in the mind of the interpreter. He proposes a typology of signs consisting of three categories, namely *icons*, *indexes* and *symbols*. An icon, in Peirce’s terms, is a representative which bears a “*similarity*” (Chandler, 2017: p. 1) to its referent in some way; its likeness to the object it represents makes it easier to recognize, even if it has not been learned or encountered previously. Icons on a computer desktop provide a convenient example of Peircean iconicity: a user may readily understand that the image of a waste paper basket on the monitor indicates a means for electronically deleting, and thereby disposing of, unwanted programs and data, while an image which resembles a traditional manila folder represents an electronic “file” of binary data and not physical documents. A petrol pump illustration of the kind seen on roadsides, for example, would be classed as an icon in Peirce’s triad. Similarly, metaphors operate as icons in Peirce’s framework as, while they are mostly conventionalized by their frequent idiomatic use, they function through resemblance in that they suggest parallels between their sources and targets.

In Peirce’s system, an index “*is a sign that encodes spatio-temporal or cause-and-effect relations*” (Beasley & Danesi, 2002: p. 40). Purely natural indexes would parallel the natural signs described by St Augustine, as mentioned previously, and would include, as examples, heavy clouds indicating the likelihood of rain or a fast pulse indicating physical exertion or excitement. The second type of index Peirce describes would include those created by humans as a means of indicating something which has factual significance. Examples of this might include the hands of a clock, a pointing gesture and some familiar road signs

which take the forms of arrows or chevrons. His final category in his triad is symbols, and symbols have a relation to their referent that is entirely arbitrary or conventional in a similar way that Saussure describes his signifier.

Some symbols have culturally founded meanings, such as a thumbs-up gesture (Stone, 1996), indicating the cultural view that positivity and negativity relate to directional indices of up and down; a westerner may recognize a red rose as representing love or the color white as representing purity. Virtually all components of written and spoken language, including phonemes, letters, morphemes and complete words, would be symbols in Peirce's model as they are arbitrary. A further layer of complexity exists in many languages and at a higher level in that they have syntactic rules that also generate meaning through structure. Speakers of English will thus recognize the utterance "Paul has a brother who is a doctor" as meaning that the doctor referred to in the clause is not Paul. This can be contrasted with a very similar utterance, composed of precisely the same words, "Paul, who has a brother, is a doctor", and the utterance "Paul, who is a doctor, has a brother". Other languages constitute alternative semiotic systems and, in addition to their different vocabularies, generally have differences in their syntactic rules, so that the recovery of the full and intended meaning will, to some extent, be contingent upon consciously or intuitively knowing these rules<sup>2</sup>.

## **2.5 STRUCTURALISM AND FORMALISM**

Nöth (1990) describes how Roman Jakobson is a prominent figure both in structuralism and Russian formalism and, in the four decades over which his career spanned, his contribution to the discipline of semiotics, beginning around 1920, has been considerable (pp. 74-76).

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<sup>2</sup> That is not to say that some or all of the intended meaning cannot be recovered from other cognitive resources available to the hearer, such as encyclopaedic knowledge or pragmatic awareness. This will be covered in more detail in Subchapter 3.2, below.

Jakobson constantly refers to Saussure in his work, sometimes developing it and, at other times, criticizing it and claiming to disagree with it<sup>3</sup>. Jakobson is a prominent figure from a school of literary theory that emerged in Russia shortly after the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This school consists of individuals interested in the defining elements of literature and poetry and uncovering, by scientific methods, the nature of what is referred to as “*literaturnost*”, a term coined by Jakobson and generally translated as “literariness”. *Literaturnost* is proposed as the key ingredient in literary writing - the essence of what distinguished the literary from the non-literary. Other leading figures in this school including Victor Shklovsky, Boris Tomashevsky, Vladimir Propp, Yuri Tyraniov, Boris Eichenbaum and Jan Mukařovský, are referred to as the “*Russian Formalists*”. The aim of the Formalists is to:

*“end the methodological confusion prevailing in traditional literary studies and systematize literary scholarship as a distinct and integrated field of intellectual endeavor”* (Erlich, 1965: p. 172).

Jakobson notes that all sign systems have a two-fold character and share the same two axes. He refers to these as the structural axis, the syntagmatic or “*axis of combination*”, and the operational axis, the paradigmatic, otherwise known as the “*axis of selection*”, because it relates to the selection of particular components as opposed to other components. Jakobson supplies an example of this at the phonetic level, with an example from *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*: “*‘Did you say pig or fig?’ said the Cat. ‘I said pig’ replied Alice*” (Carroll, from Jakobson, 2010: p. 72). At the grammatical level, it can be exemplified in the clause: “Does Mary drink wine?”, which is identifiable as an interrogative structure through its syntax, and specifically the order and relationship of the words “Does” and “Mary”. By exchanging the positions of these components in the clause, the

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<sup>3</sup> The caveat ‘claimed’ is the term used by Harris (2003: p. 94) because, to Harris at least, Jakobson appears to have misunderstood Saussure’s points on a number of issues.

speaker affects the syntagmatic relations between these components and thus transforms the question into an assertion, "Mary does drink wine". In contrast, the term "*paradigmatic*" (Nöth, 1990: p. 195) relates to the replaceability of elements with other elements, each of which would be capable of filling "*the same position within the same context*" (ibid). For example, any of the elements in "Does Mary drink wine?" can be replaced with others which fulfill the same grammatical function, "Should Mary drink wine?", "Does Susan drink wine?" "Does Mary make wine?" and "Does Mary drink cider?" As a general rule, the syntagmatic elements are associated by their contiguity while paradigmatic elements are associated by their similarity.

Jakobson (2010) is mindful that language is not always understood simply by adding the meanings of the lexemes used to arrive at a unified meaning: the formula is less than satisfactory in explaining idiomatic language. The example he offers to demonstrate this point is the greeting: "*How do you do*". He notes how connotations are generated through metonymy and metaphor: metonymy is dependent upon contiguity relations while metaphors function through similarity. In addition, Jakobson is one of a number of semioticians who recognize that, in addition to the code that exists within a message, certain pragmatic functions can also be discerned, and he proposes a model to explain these functions. Nöth (1990: pp. 185 - 187) lists Jakobson's six functions, the first of which is the referential function, which is the imparting of information and can describe an object, a situation, an event or a state of mind. The expressive function relates to utterances intended to disclose the state of mind of the addresser and this function is often expressed through interjections. The conative function is intended to influence the behaviour of the addressee and typically consists of the use of imperative structures. The poetic function focuses on conveying the message for its own sake, placing its own form or style as being of equal importance to the content. The phatic function describes how language is used as a means of the opening of, and the keeping open of, communicative channels between individuals, usually for the sake of establishing or reinforcing a relationship between the interactants. Lastly, the metalingual function is concerned with the 'code', i.e. how language is used to

describe or discuss itself and this is an aspect which is further discussed in Subchapter 2.13, below.

The earliest works of Jakobson are founded on the structuralist approach, which he modifies and develops. While critical of much of his thinking<sup>4</sup>, Jakobson credits Saussure's emphasis on the importance of the study of language as a system, but suggests that his approach of considering that system to be "*the exclusive domain of synchrony, and assigning modifications to the sphere of diachrony alone*" (Pomorska & Rudy, 1985: p. 12) should be revised. Jakobson extends some of the structuralist understanding of signs and concepts beyond semiotics and considers their application within the field of literature. He attempts to explain the poetic function, which he refers to as "*poeticity*" (Jakobson, 1981), and the use of figurative language in poetry whereby a signifier represents something beyond its conventional signified. In seeking to explain how poeticity manifests itself, he states:

*"Poeticity is present when the word is felt as a word and not a mere representation of the object being named or an outburst of emotion, when words and their composition, their meaning, their external and inner form acquire a weight and value of their own instead of referring indifferently to reality."* (Jakobson, 1981: p. 750)

Jakobson is here beginning to challenge the perception that a sign and its referent are always understood as correlative. He goes on to explain that:

*"... besides the direct awareness of the identity between the sign and object (A is A1), there is a necessity for the direct awareness of the*

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<sup>4</sup> According to Harris (1983), "*on a number of points, Jakobson misconstrued Saussure's position: he picked out the bits of Saussure's teaching that he liked and rejected or dismissed the rest*" (p. 94) and he even doubted Saussure's principle of arbitrariness (p. 96).

*inadequacy of that identity (A is not A1). The reason this antonymy is essential is that without contradiction there is no mobility of concepts, no mobility of signs, and the relationship between concept and sign becomes automatized. Activity comes to a halt, and the awareness of reality dies out.” (ibid)*

Poets thereby work to overcome the hearer or reader’s inclination to automatize their responses by forcing them to revise their awareness of the relation between signs and their referents. In doing so, the communicative function of poetry diminishes as its expressivity and its ability to convey (e.g. emotion) are maximized. This is achieved through phonological and textural qualities of sound combinations, and by the ability of words used poetically to carry a range of different and possibly previously unimagined, meanings, thus:

*“...words in poetry have the status not simply of vehicles for thoughts, but of objects in their own right, autonomous concrete entities. In Saussure’s terms, then, they cease to be ‘signifiers’ and become ‘signifieds’, and it is the poem’s alienating devices of rhythm, rhyme, metre etc., which enable this structural change to be achieved.”*

(Hawkes, 2003: p. 48)

Jakobson’s interest in poetry arises from a perspective of linguistics rather than of literary criticism. He postulates two main principles which he claims would explain the poetic function of language, the first being polarity, relating back to Saussure and his binary notion of the planes of syntagmatic versus associative relations. The second is his notion of equivalence, which is present in metaphor and metonymy, where one phenomenon or concept acts as a proxy for another. Hawkes (2003) argues:

*“Metaphor... is generally associative in character, and exploits language’s ‘vertical’ relations, where metonymy is generally ‘syntagmatic in character, and exploits language’s ‘horizontal’ relations” (p. 60).*

Jakobson considers imaginative writing as a form of art, referring to it as “*verbal art*” and posing the question: “*What makes a verbal message a work of art?*” (Jakobson, 1981: p. 18). The Formalists focus on literary works as artistic creations and compare them to visual art (Erlich, 1965). Specifically, the imagery within paintings had been equated by previous literary scholars with the images conjured in the mind of a reader of poems. Formalists are less than convinced by this neat parallel and Schlovsky and Jakobson point to its weaknesses, including that of figurative language extending beyond poetic works, and also that some poetry achieves an intended effect without the use of metaphor or other figurative speech (ibid).

In any message, one function is normally the dominant one, but a message may have more than one function and advertising is an apt example of this. On the one hand, it may seem to be a relatively neutral act of communication concerned with the transmission of information (e.g. about a brand, product or service). In advertisements such as classified ads, this is very evidently the main purpose as a buyer may be assumed to know more or less what he or she wants and the advertisement will indicate whether or not the item for sale is what a potential buyer is seeking, or is close enough to what is required, in all respects. However, in view of the pervasiveness of advertising that has existed for many decades, it may be the case that modern, media-savvy consumers of professionally created advertisements are aware that their main purpose extends beyond merely informing; instead, they strive to change the beliefs, attitudes and, ultimately, the behaviour of readers or viewers so as to achieve the aims of those commissioning the advertisement. In Jakobson’s terms, the conative function may be dominant while any information passed, i.e. the referential function, is relegated so as to be of secondary importance. Lastly, the poetic function may

also be present. This is the entertainment aspect mentioned in Subchapter 1.1 and is employed as a means of winning the attention of a reader or viewer. In advertising texts, this often takes the form of literary devices which are found in poetry and literature, and which operate across all levels of language from the phonetic (such as alliteration and rhyme) to the conceptual (such as allusion and metaphor). According to Cook (2001):

*“The poetic function, which Jakobson regarded as of particular importance for the linguistic study of literature, is also relevant to the study of ads. When this function is dominant, each linguistic unit is effective not only for its semantic and pragmatic meaning but also for the patterns it makes – or breaks – in its formal relationships (grammar and sound) to other units.”* (p. 134)

In this way, there is a shift of focus away from the arbitrary meaning that is carried by a signifier, i.e. its informative content, and towards its form instead. Formalists are interested in the relationship between form and content, and it is the form which delivers the reward in the form of pleasure, e.g. of a rhyme, alliteration, or the satisfaction of recognizing an ambiguity or resolving an obscure verbal or visual metaphor or other riddle; therein is to be found the artistry or literariness that Formalists seek to explain.

A fundamental characteristic of literariness is what the Formalists refer to as “*ostranenie*”, which may be translated as “making strange” or “defamiliarization”. This is based on Shklovsky’s (1917) preoccupation with the notion of life as relatively mundane, consisting of a grey backdrop and automatized human behavior against which humans experience distinct and memorable events. One of the means by which this occurs in the reading of texts is where the writer wishes to present a phenomenon or event which is likely to be familiar to the reader, but in a way which is unfamiliar and/or unexpected. The devices that are employed in this respect are intended to

make the understanding of the content more challenging, presenting readers with obstacles to overcome and forcing them to pause before they fully grasp the meaning (ibid). Indeed, the meaning will be at best secondary, and perhaps even entirely unimportant<sup>5</sup>. In doing so, the writer endeavors to enhance, refresh and prolong the aesthetic experience of the reader who is engaging with the text, and has thereby created a work of artistic merit. Shklovsky states:

*“The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object: the object is not important.”*  
(Shklovsky, 1917: p. 5)

An example of this is provided by Auerbach (1968), in which he translates a paragraph from La Bruyere’s *Characters* that presents the appearances and lives of 18<sup>th</sup> century French peasants in a way which is, to us, both original and disturbing:

*“One sees certain ferocious animals, male and female, scattered over the countryside, black and livid and burned by the sun, bound to the soil which they dig and turn over with unconquerable stubbornness; they have a sort of articulate [sic] voice, and when they stand up they exhibit a human face, and in fact they are men. They retire at night to their dens, where they live on black bread, water, and roots ...”* (p. 366)

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<sup>5</sup> An example of this would be a tongue twister.

However, what is unfamiliar will, sooner or later, become familiar and automatization becomes established as exposure to it occurs and is repeated. Just as when the petrol distributor Esso urged motorists to buy their fuel by urging them to *“put a tiger in your tank”* (Exxon, n.d.)(Appendix 4: image 1), this was originally a novel concept and its use across several advertising campaigns established it as iconic of the brand. Tomashevsky explains:

*“devices are born, live, grow old and die. To the extent that their use becomes automatic, they lose their efficacy and cease to be included on the list of acceptable techniques”* (Tomashevsky, B from Harland, 1999: p. 151).

The concept of linguistic foregrounding is attributed to another Russian Formalist scholar, Jan Mukařovský, who reinforces Tomashevsky's claim and explains the value of foregrounding in as much as it is:

*"the opposite of automatization, that is, the deautomatization of an act; the more an act is automatized, the less it is consciously executed; the more it is foregrounded, the more completely conscious does it become"* (Mukařovský, n.d: p. 44).

Foregrounding techniques consist of creating parallels which are unexpected and thereby attract attention, give pleasure or make a message memorable, and can include devices at all levels of language from alliteration and rhyme at the phonological level, to conceptual parallels such as metaphors and deviation. The effect of foregrounding is to intensify the poetic effects of the language to such a degree that its referential purpose is pushed to the background and the act of expression itself is emphasised (ibid). While Mukařovský's primary focus is

Czech poetry, Cook (1992) and Myers (1994) note the use of the kinds of foregrounding techniques described within advertising. Foregrounding is a phenomenon further discussed below in relation to the work of Barthes (Subchapter 2.6), multimodal approaches (Subchapter 2.10) and metaphors (Subchapter 3.6).

## 2.6 BARTHES

Roland Barthes is a notable French philosopher and semiotician, and his writings have been highly influential for academics working in semiotics, linguistics and other disciplines. Students of marketing theory are introduced to Barthes in some university courses and particular emphasis is paid in these courses to his theory of cultural myths, how these are activated with the aid of pictures, and his insights in relation to consumerism, neomania and connotations. This, along with the texts marketing students use which refer to Barthes<sup>6</sup>, are outlined in detail in Chapter 5, below.

Barthes suggests that myths are an everyday aspect of modern culture rather than being simply ancient fables in narrative form. Specifically, he defines a myth as a “message” which “cannot possibly be an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification...” (Barthes, 1957: p 131). He recalls his school days and reading a Latin text which had a sentence containing “*quia ego nominor leo*”. If there is such a thing as literal meaning, then this would be “because my name is lion”, but Barthes recognizes: “the sentence in no way signifies its meaning” and must therefore signify something else (pp. 138-139). Referring to Saussure’s structure of the *sign*, which is composed of the *signifier* and the *signified*, he suggests this notion can be extended so that it is also applicable to cultural

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<sup>6</sup> These include Barthes’s own works, such as *Mythologies* (1957), and *Image, Music, Text* (1977), as well as books written with marketing students in mind, such as Turow & McAllister’s *The Advertising and Consumer Culture Reader* (2009) and Beasley & Danesi’s *Persuasive Signs* (2002).

myths. A further example is given in the form of an image from the magazine *Paris Match*, which has on its cover a photograph of:

“...a young Negro soldier in a French uniform ...saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolor” (ibid). (This image can be viewed in Appendix 4: Image 2)

Barthes describes his own understanding of the myth being presented, specifically that France is a great empire and that the men of that empire are serving faithfully and with pride. The signification here, possibly directed towards the detractors of the French Empire and who accuse it of colonialism and oppression, is that people from across the Empire enjoy the benefits it bestows, are enthusiastic citizens of it and are not subjected to discrimination on the basis of race or skin colour. The medium by which this myth is presented to the viewer is photography. It records a scene which is a “*literal reality*” and therefore “*a message without a code*” (Barthes, 1977: p. 17) as the event occurred as it is depicted. The fact that a photograph captures an actual event makes it a denotative sign. This confers upon it a degree of authority because what is being viewed in the photograph happened and that cannot be denied. However, Barthes points to the fact that a photograph is an object which has been chosen, composed and worked on, and it is: “*treated according to professional, aesthetic or ideological norms which are so many factors of connotation*” (p. 19). It is these intentional factors that, according to Barthes, contain the code and not the photograph itself, and he refers to this as the “*photographic paradox*” (ibid).

Signs, ranging from simple icons to linguistic utterances, can be viewed from a denotative and a connotative perspective. For example, a simple cross might denote the fact that a church is nearby, but that same, simple sign is likely to have substantial, and perhaps divergent and highly subjective, significance for those who view it. Advertisements operate with signs that have both denotative

and connotative interpretations available. This thesis demonstrates in Chapter 6 that, by virtue of their sophistication and ingenuity, advertisers are alert to this, and are at least as much concerned with the connotations of the products they are marketing as with their practical benefits. In his later work, Barthes considers the role of the image and how it can be used rhetorically and to generate desired connotations. His example consists of a printed advertisement for Panzani pasta products bearing a caption juxtaposed with a photographic image of a string bag torn open (Appendix 4: Image 3). The contents, namely vegetables suitable for making pasta dishes, plus Panzani products, are depicted as spilling out. He refers to the French caption and the name “*Panzani*”, and states that this sign: “*is two-fold ...: denotational and connotational*” (Barthes, 1977: p. 33), because it not only informs the reader of the name of the producer, but it sounds Italian phonetically and that carries associations, especially in connection with food. The image is said to comprise “*a series of discontinuous signs*” (p. 34), among which are the fresh vegetables, indicating freshness and naturalness with which this manufactured product is to be associated. He refers to them as “*discontinuous*” (ibid) because there is no syntax: their order is unimportant. The next sign to be recognized, according to Barthes, is to be found in the colours of the vegetables and which he associates with the Italian flag. He coins the term *Italianicity* to describe this phenomenon:

*“its signifier is the bringing together of the tomato, the pepper and the tricoloured hues (yellow, green, red) of the poster; its signified is Italy or rather Italianicity. This sign stands in a relation of redundancy with the connoted sign of the linguistic message (the Italian assonance of the name Panzani) and the knowledge it draws upon is already more particular; it is a specifically French knowledge (an Italian would barely perceive the connotation of the name, no more probably than he would the Italianicity of tomato and pepper), based on a familiarity with certain tourist stereotypes.”* (ibid)

If a photograph of a tomato, or any other of the components mentioned, is to be considered a sign when used in an advertising context, then it may reasonably be assumed that its denotation is simply a representation and fulfills a similar function as the printed or spoken word “tomato”. Its connotative value is, however, likely to encompass all that is known about tomatoes from the viewer’s experience and culture, ranging from its versatility as an ingredient for a range of dishes and perhaps the aroma of this fruit being cultivated in a greenhouse. As with all the vegetables, there may be a connotation with freshness and health properties, too, operating perhaps metonymically as representatives of these qualities. The signs present in the image operate together to “*form a coherent whole*” (Barthes, 1977: p. 35).

It could be said that it is in the interests of advertisers to construct and promulgate certain myths as described in the previous subchapter in order to increase the success of their advertising. Bignell (2002) notes how the Rolls Royce emblem “*is no longer simply denoting a particular type of car, but generating a whole set of connotations which come from our social experience*” (p. 16). In the case of Rolls Royce, it may be taken for granted that these would be luxury, refinement and success and, once the public has moved beyond the simple denotation of the sign, such as a brand of car, and begins to connote it with these qualities of the product, then the myth has been created. A further example might be a perfume advertisement, as it is unlikely to state that the product “smells really nice” even though it is unlikely to be successful if the fragrance is less than pleasing. Many advertisements for such products contain very little referential product information, or even no information whatsoever, relying instead upon an image which depicts a product or brand in some kind of visual context, and an example of this can be seen in the Tommy Hilfiger advertisement shown in below in Appendix 4: Image 4. When an image is read as a sign, its denotation is the foregrounded object or objects, and possibly people, situated against a background and occupying a moment in time as depicted. In the perfume advertisement, the advertiser hopes that the connotations recovered by the reader will have been those which were intentionally intended by them. These could range from simple familiarity with

the appearance of the product (“this is what a bottle of Perfume X looks like”) to a more ambitious set of associations, possibly ones that could be tied to a myth, and which obliquely invite the reader to associate the brand or product with a desirable outcome or lifestyle. The ability to evoke the desired connotations may thus be among the key skills of someone employed to design advertisements.

While advertisements generate their own myths, they also draw on and interact with existing cultural myths, such as the depiction of scenes from the tranquil and ordered vineyards in rural France when selling wines, oriental imagery such as the Taj Mahal and elephants when promoting jars of curry sauce<sup>7</sup> and even the concept of *Italianicity* as it is perceived by non-Italians. Often, these myths arise from, or are linked to, other texts including well-known examples from genres such as literature, TV shows, films and occasionally even other advertising (see Subchapter 2.8, below with regard to intertextuality).

The characterization of the perfection of the human form is also continually reproduced within the medium especially, but not exclusively, when selling clothing, makeup, toiletries and luxury items. This mythical perfection is predominantly represented by the feminine and masculine ideals that are prevalent within the culture. The depictions of these are representations comprising images of professional models who, by virtue of their physical characteristics often enhanced through cosmetics, lighting techniques and photographic retouching, are able to operate as signifiers for these ideals and thus facilitate the construction of an intended meaning. When a person who does not fit this ideal is shown, there is likely to be a reason that can be discerned from the advertisement, such as instances in which some other device is used to attract attention or where physical perfection may look out of place

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<sup>7</sup> Edward Said’s (2003) theory of Orientalism describes the depiction of Middle Eastern and East Asian cultures within Western societies by their media and through their art, and the perception of them by westerners as exotic. While some of these countries may be geographically neighbours of western nations, and/or they may be former colonies of European countries, Said points out they can also be viewed variously as recently wealthy, alien and, in some cases, a potential threat.

and actually detract from the message. It may also be present where the individual shown can be identified as having other desirable attributes, such as a full head of hair in advertisements for baldness treatments, or instances where advertisements exploit certain mythical qualities that may be assumed in respect of famous personalities. Advertisements are able to capitalize on the fame of such people and the causes of their fame such as their acting or singing ability or sporting prowess and success. In addition, advertisers are aware of the public's perceptions of the opulent and jet-setting lifestyles of the rich and famous and their casual associations with other celebrities. Examples of this include well-known film actors to promote beauty products<sup>8</sup> and fragrances<sup>9</sup> and, by contrast, serious and respected former TV presenters and newsreaders to market practical products such as insurance<sup>10</sup>. These celebrities are now seen out of their normal context; by their participation in the discourse, they are addressing viewers individually and offering access, or pretended access, to certain aspects of their lives that are ostensibly unrelated to their fame. In order to make the necessary associations, a receiver must instantly recognize them, recall the reason for their fame and perhaps other aspects of their lives that have been reported in the popular press. In addition to actual and living personalities, advertisers are also able to invoke cultural knowledge that may relate to, for example, long dead historical personalities and the myths surrounding their characters and deeds.

The term "*neomania*" is coined by Barthes (1957) to refer to the craving that exists in consumer societies for goods which are desirable by virtue of their newness in terms of the designs or features they offer. This phenomenon creates its own demand as consumer, who may already own comparable items

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<sup>8</sup> A notable example of this is American actress Halle Berry, whose image has been used to market Revlon's Fabulash mascara (Appendix 4: image 5), and even has a brand of perfume named after her.

<sup>9</sup> Many perfumes are marketed by specific celebrities, even to the extent of being named after them. An example of this includes "Elizabeth Taylor White Diamonds" perfume.

<sup>10</sup> A notable example of this is the veteran TV presenter Sir Michael Parkinson who projects an image of a down-to-earth Yorkshireman, son of a miner who fronted AXA Sun Life Assurance's product called "Parky's Plan for Over 50's"

which perform the same functions, craves being among the first to acquire the latest model. In order to drive this demand, and thus keep themselves in business, manufacturers allegedly build in obsolescence and the same product, with some modifications and perhaps minor improvements, can be repeatedly sold to the same customers, and this phenomenon is noted by Sarver (2006). When this is propelled by a carefully constructed and pervasive myth, the marketing opportunities are prodigious. A modern example of this might be the popularity of the *Apple iPhone* and its later models, the *iPhone 3GS*, *iPhone 4*, *iPhone 4S*, *iPhone 5*, *iPhone 6* and so on; at the time of writing, the *iPhone 7* is due to be released onto the market. Whenever a new model is introduced, this generates excitement in the media and among those more enthusiastic of *iPhone* users, and prompts speculation as to the appearance of the forthcoming model and new its features. On the days on which a new version is launched, it has become usual for the stores to open hours earlier than usual and to have lengthy queues of willing customers waiting outside, many of whom will already own a perfectly functioning device, as observed by Williams (2015). Such is the power of the *iPhone* myth, and the neomania associated with it, that consumers of this product are willing to behave in a way that appears to defy logic, and they have given rise to a new colloquial term, namely "*Apple-fanboy*", to relate to those who are invariably susceptible to the Apple Corporation's marketing strategies (Urban Dictionary, 2010).

The implication of signs and myths as discussed so far seems to present and even define viewers as passive consumers both of the advertisements, and of the products to which their attention is being drawn; advertisers position consumers as such to suit their purpose and they frequently oblige. However, signs, especially images, are polysemous<sup>11</sup> and open to various interpretations. Barthes recognizes this as he describes images as "*a 'floating chain' of signifieds*" (Barthes: 1977: p. 39) from which readers can choose which to accept and which to ignore. Multiplicity of meaning presents advertisers with an opportunity for creativity by, for example, playing with ambiguity, but it can also pose a risk in

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<sup>11</sup> The polysemous nature of images is further discussed later.

that the reader may fail to perceive the message in anything close to the manner intended and thereby frustrate its purpose. It is therefore useful, and perhaps even essential, for the producer of printed advertisements in particular to be able to anchor the message in some way in order to delimit its range of possible interpretations, and inhibit less desired meanings from establishing themselves in the minds of readers. Barthes applies the term "*anchorage*" (p. 38) to describe occasions in press reports and advertisements where words are used in association with images as, for example, captions. This is normally achieved in advertising by the addition of some form of textual component and is often supplemented by another sign, such as a brand name or logo. For example, the widely used tiger image of the Esso brand mentioned in Subchapter 2.5 above may be subject to misunderstanding when it does not appear in its expected context, e.g. on a poster which is not situated at a petrol station. The addition of the associated strapline "*Put a tiger in your tank*" would, for most British readers who are likely to be familiar with the brand, enable the message to be recognized unambiguously as an advertisement for the Esso brand and products sold under it. In this way, the addition of the Esso logo tends to eliminate any other possible readings of the purpose of the image and lead the viewer to that which was intended by its producer. It is thereby apparent that the message is delivered through the action of relating them, i.e. the three components, the image, the text and the logo, "*stand in a complementary relationship*" with each other (p.41).

Tanaka (1994) attempts to account for the operation of advertisements through pragmatic principles rather than semiotic ones, but she begins by describing how semiotics is used for this purpose and Barthes is her starting point. She explains how he does this by the combination of a linguistic message in the form of the caption and any labels associated with the images and their iconic messages. These messages are then divided between those which are coded (denotational, perceptual and literal) and those which are non-coded (connotational, symbolic and capable of being understood through cultural knowledge) and she notes that semiotics does not always provide an adequate explanation as to why only some of these are activated in advertisements (ibid).

Tanaka (1994) finds Barthes's view to be unconvincing, arguing that the distinctions are not so clear-cut because, for example, perception cannot be so easily divorced from cultural knowledge. She also asserts that linguistic messages are polysemous and claims:

*"It is difficult to find any utterance which does not require some degree of disambiguation, reference assignment or enrichment." (p. 61)*

She criticises Barthes for failing to account for linguistic devices commonly found in advertising, such as puns. Tanaka (1994) further questions the validity of Barthes's emphasis on the discontinuity of signs and refers to the signifiers which Barthes claims to be present in the Panzani advertisement. She suggests that the ways in which Barthes groups and divides the signs within the advertisement, and the number of signs attributed by him to the illustration, appear to have been determined by him arbitrarily and without any logic or explanation.

## **2.7 LÉVI-STRAUSS**

Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss is remembered for his application of Saussurean structuralism to his own discipline. The aspects that he writes about in particular are those concerning identity through social behaviour and relations. These relations include kinship, and even cultural cuisine, both of which he views as systems of language (Harris, 2003). As an example of the latter, he contrasts the synchronicity of Chinese meals, served all at once, with the diachronic nature of French cuisine, which is served in courses and this has, according to Harris (2003), attracted the derision of linguists (p. 126). He insists

that myths are composed of codes in a similar way to language, and they have universal structures which are timeless and transcend cultures. Indeed, myths can only exist and be perpetuated because of language and, like language, they consist of a langue (a structure common to all myths) and a parole (the variant contents of a particular myth). He proposes that myths are composed of minimal units which he called “*mythemes*” and that “*function like phonemes in a language*” (Nöth, 1990: p. 375), having been assembled or bundled together into themes that can thus be “*arranged on a syntagmatic or paradigmatic axis*” (ibid) and examples would include heroes, villains, obstacles and solutions. Following the principles of structural linguistics, including “*segmentation*”<sup>12</sup>, “*classification and the search for binary opposition*” (ibid), Lévi-Strauss applies these to features of cultural narratives, e.g. hero versus villain, monster versus human and problem versus solution. This explains the way in which cultures organize their knowledge of the world: the concept of light is understood only because of its relation to and contrast with darkness, male with female, wet with dry and other binary opposites. Binary opposition is, according to Lévi-Strauss, the key to understanding the structure of all myths and he demonstrates his approach by analysing a number of stories and legends from diverse cultures (Nöth, 1990).

Any analysis of a text generally involves breaking it down into its component parts and, where this occurs, it is sometimes possible to see the presence of the kinds of binary oppositions that Lévi-Strauss describes. Many products are made, or at least marketed, on the basis that they solve a problem and, in such cases, the binary opposition is most evident. For several decades and as far back as the 1930s, *Lifebuoy* soap was advertised as protecting the user from “*B.O.*”, or body odour (Unilever, 2017) and an example of such an advertisement can be seen in Appendix 4: Image 6, below. The implication in these advertisements was that readers could choose between using *Lifebuoy* soap or emitting an

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<sup>12</sup> Segmentation is a process discussed by Barthes (1977) which operates in conjunction with classification and relates to the methods by which texts can be rationally divided up so that their elements can be analysed. The same expression used in marketing relates to dividing up populations by selected demographic parameters.

unpleasant smell. This presented the consumer with simple binary opposition: no third alternative was available. More commonly perhaps, the binary opposition is less explicit.

A similar example is to be found in a TV advertisement from the 1970s for *Flora* margarine. It showed a middle-aged man standing outside a supermarket while a woman of around the same age was inside selecting groceries. The man was looking in through the window and he made various attempts to gesture to the woman that he wanted her to buy *Flora*. This was only successful when a bystander, who was a man of a similar age standing nearby, pulled a tub of the product from his own shopping bag and showed her that. The advertisement concluded with a strapline “*The margarine for men*” (a still image can be seen in Appendix 4: image 7). The logo used on this product consists of the outer edge of a sunflower with a heart-shape at its centre, and the marketing of this product has long been associated with its claim to be free of trans fats which were at the time believed to contribute to the risks of coronary heart disease (Kmietowicz, 2015) and that men were claimed to be at greater risk of this condition than women (Nicholson, 1973). Dietary guidelines urging the public to reduce their consumption of dairy fats were prevalent for this reason, as noted by Nestle (1998). A Lévi-Strauss analysis of this advertisement might propose a set of paradigmatic relationships, some visible and others implied, namely:

man - woman

inside – outside

*Flora* – other products

healthy heart – coronary heart disease

The *Flora* advertisement appears to be exploiting this public concern to market a margarine free from trans fats and, as such, the product subtext was offering a compelling life or death binary. *Flora* was thus no longer simply a margarine: it was the key to surviving beyond one’s middle years.

Applying the simple binary opposition alternatives appears straightforward when analyzing advertisements that are predicated on an overarching binary of problem versus solution. However, this method becomes complex when attempting to deconstruct advertisements that are aimed chiefly to entertain or amuse rather than by appealing to reason. A fairly typical full-page advertisement on the back cover of *Vogue* (from August 2014) shows an attractive woman in a leather dress and matching snakeskin boots. Her blond hair is slightly disordered; she is adopting a crouching posture, against a brown and neutral background, and looking into the camera. In the centre of the image, the brand name “GUCCI” appears in large letters and, near the bottom of the page and in much smaller type, “GUCCI.COM”. Binary opposites present in the image, or the image juxtaposed with the brand name, are less than obvious. A reader who is used to performing such analyses may see the tension between the beauty of the young woman and the animalistic elements in terms of her leather and snakeskin attire, or between the primitive versus the sophistication of the Gucci brand. Whether these binaries, or the messages or impressions they were intended to convey, would be apparent to most casual readers of *Vogue* is a matter of conjecture.

## **2.8 INTERTEXTUALITY**

Structuralist semiotics provides tools for analyzing individual utterances and texts and its focus is predominantly on internal structures (Chandler, 2017), yet without major regard to the context or co-texts, or to the factors relating to the speaker/author, all of which may have a bearing on their production and interpretation. Poststructuralist theorists, such as Kristeva (1980) and Genette (1997), attempt to address some of the weaknesses of structuralist semiotics in these regards. They recognize that texts do not exist in isolation: they incorporate and intersect with other texts, either by referring to them directly,

or by implying or alluding to them (Chandler, 2017) and this constitutes the linguistic phenomenon of “*intertextuality*”, a term coined by Kristeva herself, according to Prayer Elmo Raj (2015: p. 77).

Barthes (1977) is clear that texts are more than just transmissions of fully self-contained messages when he describes them as: “...*made up of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialog, parody, contestation*” (p. 148). He proposes that readers construct authors in as much as they are unlikely to know the writers of the texts they are reading, nor what was in their minds at the particular time when their texts were composed. They are thereby forced to generate their own mental conceptions of authors in terms of their character, their purposes for writing and the meanings they intended to be recovered during the reading process, and to mentally frame the text accordingly. The object of study in text analysis thereby shifts from author to reader because, as Barthes explains: “*a text's unity lies not in its origins but its destination*” (ibid).

Kristeva (1980) proposes viewing communication as functioning on two axes: a horizontal axis which connects the communicator with the addressee and a vertical axis in which texts are connected to other texts which exist alongside them (i.e. synchronically), or which preceded them (i.e. diachronically). Communications are composed of chains of signifiers and a receiver of a message is able to construct a meaning from these by selecting some and ignoring others. This process of generating and recovering meaning can only occur, however, by first activating the particular signification systems to which they are anchored, and this activation must itself take place within the context of the connections described. Since introducing the term “*intertextuality*”, it has acquired a wider range of meanings (Prayer Elmo Raj, 2015) and encompasses phenomena beyond those which Kristeva originally conceived. Genette (1979) proposes these include allusion, quotation and plagiarism, both intentional and unintentional and, in the view of Hitchon & Jura (1997), devices such as extended metaphors which exploit a set of equivalents can be added to this

category<sup>13</sup>. The indirectness of intertextual features requires that they must rely upon a receiver's ability to recover the intended meaning through implicature and, in particular, the background knowledge that is activated when the message is received. Theories that attempt to explain this process are described in Chapter 3, below.

Advertising texts are, to a considerable degree, an amalgam and reformulation of texts produced in other times and at other places and mostly for other purposes. Intertextuality is often overt in advertisements and is even employed as a strategy for exploiting a popular myth as a means of generating interest. Bignell (2002) provides an example of this when he cites an advertisement for a new Volkswagen Golf Estate car that depicts three actors who have, at some time in the past, played the role of the fictional time traveller, Doctor Who, in the BBC TV series of the same name. The actors are shown apparently scrutinizing one of these vehicles and the caption reads: "*We've doctored the Golf*" (p. 44). The Doctor Who series is one of the BBC's most successful, and long-running, series (even spawning books, toys, games and other products associated with it) and is so familiar that may now be regarded as embedded in modern British culture. Consequently, a reader of the advertisement would be assumed to recognize the characters as three manifestations of "*The Doctor*" (ibid), as well as cues such as the fact that the vehicle appears to have a new incarnation. This version is, allegedly, more spacious internally than it appears on the outside, just like the so-called "*Tardis*", i.e. the supposed space and time travelling craft used by the Doctor. Conversely, elements from advertising texts are occasionally borrowed and used in other genres. The familiar Esso advertisements mentioned in Subchapter 2.6, above, with the strapline "*put a tiger in your tank*" from the early 1970s, is paraphrased in the chorus of a popular song from 1976 called "*Jeans ON*" and sung by David Dundas:

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<sup>13</sup> Discussed in Chapter 3.6, below.

*“You and me, we'll go motorbike ridin'*

*In the sun and the wind and the rain*

*I got money in my pocket*

*A tiger in my tank*

*And I'm king of the road again”*

The penultimate line of this song can be seen to relate to the Esso commercial which precedes it by several decades. It is also noted that the last line of this song is also the title of a popular song from 1964, sung by the country singer Roger Miller (1936-1992).

Liu and Le (2013) suggest that intertextuality takes three distinct forms in advertising, namely quotation, where expressions or lines from literary works, speeches and other texts are either repeated; allusion, which consists of an explicit or indirect reference to a person, place, event or literary work; and parody, which is a well-established rhetorical device and may involve mimicry, or creating new expressions by innovatively replacing or otherwise paraphrasing other expressions which are already familiar<sup>14</sup>.

## **2.9 ECO**

The Italian novelist, philosopher and semiotician, Umberto Eco makes a number of contributions in terms of developing semiotics as both a theory of codes and of sign production. He attempts to produce a more robust definition of a sign,

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<sup>14</sup> The relation of intertextuality and connotative chains specifically in relation to textbooks on advertising is further discussed in Chapter 5.6, below.

distinguishing signs from non-signs, and proposes what he considers to be a more flexible concept, which he regards as a sign function (Eco, 1976). Semiotics is, in Eco's view, a true science and he justifies this view because science is an autonomous discipline; it produces hypotheses testable with standardized methodological tools; it can make predictions and findings which can change the real states of phenomena in the world (ibid). He acknowledges that work in other disciplines, including semantics and pragmatics, has implications for semiotics which cannot be ignored, including:

*"formal logic, philosophical semantics and the logic of natural languages deal with the problem of truth value of a sentence and with the various sorts of so-called 'speech acts'..."* (Eco, 1976: p. 6)

Eco (1976) also describes the roles of cultural myths as does Barthes (1957), and pays particular attention to fictional heroes with supposed super-human abilities. Superman is portrayed as a modern manifestation of characters from ancient mythology (like Hercules) and more recent literature (like Peter Pan). It is pointed out that, while they have extraordinary powers, these heroes also have a weakness and, in the case of Superman, that is the substance called "*kryptonite*". His vulnerability facilitates the possibility for him to be tested, thereby being the central figure in an adventure and supplying to him the opportunity to show his ingenuity and heroism. In order to derive both the meaning and pleasure from the myth, Eco states the reader must suspend belief in reality and that requires a suspension of his or her usual perception of time (ibid). While Superman has a normal human alter ego, events unfold with little or no heed to the need for planning or other mundane considerations which form a natural part of life for human entities. Eco (1979) refers to Martin Heidegger in proposing that, in order to apply hidden persuasion: "*...a subject is not responsible for his past, nor master of his future, nor even subject to the laws*

*of planning...*<sup>15</sup> (p. 117). He alludes to advertising, as well as propaganda, as genres in which this kind of suspension must be applied in order to convince receivers of some kind of proposition. It is thereby assumed that those who create advertisements will have a conscious or unconscious awareness of the advantages of suspending reality and the means of achieving such a suspension, and this is investigated in the primary research conducted with advertising creators, as described in Chapter 6, below.

Eco (1979) draws a distinction between what he calls “*open texts*”, i.e. those which invite multiple interpretations, and “*closed texts*”, i.e. those which invite a single, intended interpretation. It follows that, with regard to the author, the “*ensemble of codes he relies upon is the same as that shared by his possible reader*” (p. 7) and so he is forced to “*foresee a model of the possible reader*”, whom he refers to as the “*model reader*” (ibid). A model reader of a closed text is perceived as a typical addressee and the interpretation of the text is thereby straightforward. This is contrasted with a model reader of an open text, i.e. an individual capable of navigating through a complex of codes and recover a multiplicity of meanings. He acknowledges the need for what he refers to as “*encyclopaedic competence*” (ibid) which relates to the assumed background knowledge of the reader. This view coincides with almost identical concepts proposed by theorists from other fields such as pragmatics (e.g. “*encyclopaedic memory*”, from Sperber & Wilson, 1995: p. 137) and critical discourse analysis (“*member resources*” from Fairclough, 2001: p. 20). It is pertinent to the research described in this thesis as one of the aims is to establish the ways by which advertisers attempt either to limit possible interpretations, or to offer multiple or infinite interpretations of advertisements. A further aim is to discover whether advertisers attempt to foresee a model of the possible reader and, if so, how this is achieved and how it influences their working practices.

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<sup>15</sup> This relates to Heidegger's philosophical concept of ecstasy, which means to stand outside oneself, or to remove oneself from the realities of earthly existence and into a mythical or mystical plane of existence. Heidegger writes of the “*three ecstasies of time*”, namely past, present and future (Abram, 1997: p. 209).

Additionally, Eco (1979) develops Peirce's trichotomy, specifying two of his three interpretants, namely the "*emotional*", which is the mental/emotional effort involved in interpretation, and the "*energetic*", which is physical effort that has to be expended in interpretation. Readers must, he claims, be persuaded to make such an effort in order to produce a desired emotional response or a change of habit, these being two outcomes. Effort of interpretation is claimed to be a significant factor in terms of the receiver responding to a stimulus, and the likelihood of a receiver judging a message to be sufficiently relevant to be worth processing, as described by Wilson and Sperber (2012) in Chapter 3, below. The implications this has for advertisers in terms of the ways that stimuli are produced by advertisers to attract attention, and the way they seek to invoke desired emotional responses in consumers, are factors examined in the research described in Chapters 6 and 7 of this thesis. Once attention is secured, advertisers have to determine how consumers are incentivized to engage with the content of their commercials for the purpose of changing their habits and behaviour. These aspects are explored in Subchapters 3.3 and 3.7, below. In terms of stimulating interest in advertisements and presenting a cohesive and persuasive message, advertisers have an array of options that can be used alongside language to reinforce the message, and to increase the prospect of producing a desired response; these are discussed in the next subchapter.

## **2.10 MULTIMODALITY**

One development within the field of semiotics that has ramifications for advertising is the theory of multimodal communication and the analytical techniques which are associated with it. Multimodal theorists attempt to explain how messages are created by employing and combining communicative

resources, or "modes" (Bezemer, 2012b), to construct a unified message. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) define multimodality as:

*"the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined"* (p. 20)

Modes take material forms such as sound (including spoken language, music and other sounds), or visual phenomena (like gestures, colours, shapes and patterns) or in forms that can otherwise be detected by the human senses. Kress (2012, in Bezemer, 2012b) states these are socially produced and have become cultural resources used for producing an intended meaning. Generally, they are established, conventionalized and familiar; the community will have used them over a lengthy period of time and will know how to interpret particular signifiers in the way intended (ibid). Some modes, such as icons and images, operate without the need for any kind of grammatical structure and are thereby akin to Barthes's discontinuous signs, as mentioned in Subchapter 2.6, above. However, modes that are grammatical, governed by syntax and rules, offer far greater possibilities in meaning creation. These include, according to Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), abstract meanings, but they also facilitate the production of meta-signs within the same mode.

Advertisements are not monomodal (Cook, 1992), but rather they use a wide array of modes and what he refers to as "*sub-modes*"<sup>16</sup> (p.42) in order to create meanings that persuade readers to purchase items or to instill brand awareness and loyalty. It may thus be argued that multimodal approaches offer those seeking to understand the operation of advertisements an insightful method. In the case of magazine advertisements, for example, advertisers make full use of

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<sup>16</sup> Sub-modes are mentioned by Cook (2001) but not defined.

the modes available to them and have developed techniques to attract attention through these, such as photography, colour and typeface, as well as carefully formulated copy and to “*keep the eye moving over the page*” (Brierley, 2002: p. 180). Readers are likely to encounter advertisements which include an “*interplay of visual and verbal components*” (Hu & Luo, 2016: p. 31). The advertiser is able to make choices as to what particular image or images are to be displayed from an infinite number of possibilities, how that image is processed, filtered, cropped and positioned within the area of the advertisement. Such choices also require decisions to be made with regard to foregrounding, which is a technique described in Subchapter 2.5, deciding which words are foregrounded and which words are not, where they appear on the page and in relation to any images used, as well as their size, colour and font (Brierley, 2002).

In the case of a broadcast advertisement, the choice of music or other sounds may add to meaning, along with aspects of speaker voice, gender, intonation and accent (ibid). Kress (2012, in Bezemer, 2012a) states that a multimodal analyst investigating the composition of such advertisements would attempt to determine the role of each of the modes, whether they had the same or different roles, and this would then give him or her a clear and holistic indication as to how any given advertisement functions. The analyst would illustrate how different semiotic resources or modes offer the producer different possibilities in making meaning. However, the use of more than one mode in an act of communication is not usually just a repetition of exactly the same meaning: instead, the combination of modes allows a far more complex and richer meaning to be transmitted. In addition to identifying the semiotic resources used, multimodality theory considers the communicative practices in each of the modes, including discursive practices, production practices and interpretive practices (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001: p. 111). The term “*discursive practices*” in the linguistic and anthropological sense is a concept generally associated with the work of post-structuralist Michel Foucault, and refers “*to a historically and culturally specific set of rules for organizing and producing*

*different forms of knowledge*" (O'Farrell, 2010<sup>17</sup>)<sup>18</sup>. This has significance in advertising, as there are conventions and rules, largely unwritten, which advertisers follow in order to deliver their intended messages. These might include the ways that have been learned to assign the appropriate referents when pronouns are used<sup>19</sup>, and by which a receiver has learned to relate the main image to any foregrounded text and thus recover a single, unified meaning.

Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) demonstrate the multimodal technique they propose being applied to two magazine advertisements for products, namely items referred to as "*cot toys*" (p. 115) and designed to be used to stimulate babies. The advertisements are for products with similar purposes and therefore have similarities in terms of their functions and discursive features, but there are certain ways in which they diverge that the authors claim to be noteworthy. These hinge upon how the scenario of babies' play is constructed and with different intended outcomes, e.g. the former is concerned entirely with the infant user having fun whereas the latter presents their toys as advancing the child's coordination and mental development (pp. 115-117). The authors attribute the differences in the execution of the presentation to the particular design of the texts, and this is summed up as follows:

*"Design...(1) contextualises, makes it work within the context of a communicative interaction (such as 'giving parental advice', 'telling a story', advertising a product') by, creatively or otherwise, drawing upon semiotic resources such as generic schemas for stories, advertisements etc.; and (2) it selects which modes will be used to*

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<sup>17</sup> O'Farrell's is Foucault's biographer. The quotation is from the website: [michel-foucault.com](http://michel-foucault.com) (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> July 2014). No page numbers are shown.

<sup>18</sup> The terms "*production practices*" and "*interpretive practices*" are not defined by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001), so it can only be assumed they are to be understood in the ordinary, literal sense – i.e. what practices are involved in production and what cognitive practices receivers employ in interpretation

<sup>19</sup> Discussed in detail in Chapter 3.5, below.

*realize which aspects of that communicative interaction, whether by drawing on conventions such as the visual depiction of the satisfaction of the product in full-page magazine advertisements or not.*” (p. 119)

Kress and Van Leeuwen are here claiming that contextualisation is achieved through the particular designs of each of the texts, and these involve mode selection and utilizing what are (presumably) arbitrary conventions. While this may be considered an interesting and persuasive observation, the concept of context appears to be very loose and undefined. No account is offered as to how certain modes are recognised as the dominant while others are merely contextual, nor is the mechanism by which particular modes generate an intended contextual understanding explained. While it may be tempting to imagine that the non-linguistic modes are responsible for providing the context and the linguistic ones exist to relay the core message, it is dangerous to assume this is always the case. The “*semiotic resources such as generic schemas for stories, advertisements etc*” (ibid, and quoted above) is suggestive of intertextual influences, as described in Sunchapter 2.8, above and, in particular, Kristeva's (1980) recognition that texts do not exist in isolation, and Barthes' assertion that messages are made up of “*multiple writings drawn from many cultures*” (Barthes, 1977: p. 148).

Some advertisements contain no words, relying instead on the viewer to recover the intended meaning through pictorial and graphological cues alone. Others use language in a way that is intentionally obscure, perhaps to make the advertisement enigmatic and therefore interesting, or for other reasons. An example of this can be found in some billboard and magazine advertisements for Silk Cut cigarettes in the 1980s and 1990s. These printed commercials have been reported on in a number of studies, including by media scholars (Rozik, 1997), linguists (Cook,

2001), marketing scholars (Wentz, 1988), and from a public health perspective (Hastings & MacFadyen, 2000; Chapman, 1994). They consisted of an image of a piece of silk-like fabric in a particular shade of imperial purple, and the fabric was either cut in some way, or was shown juxtaposed with an image or impression of a bladed instrument such as a pair of scissors or a knife, and an example can be seen in Appendix 4, image 8, below. No words were present, with the exception of the statutory warning, which appeared underneath as to the harmful effects of smoking. To understand this was an advertisement, and to recognize the product being advertised, viewers would have to be familiar with the various non-linguistic signifiers from previous advertising campaigns. This would include the depiction of purple silk fabric, but it is also likely that the absence of any words in such an advertisement, with the exception of the health warning, would have helped make it readily identifiable as one for Silk Cut. During the period when billboards were displaying this advertisement, laws had recently been put into place designed to restrict the methods used in marketing tobacco products in the UK<sup>20</sup>. Consequently, advertisers sought ingenious ways of promoting cigarette brands while staying within the regulations. The Silk Cut advertisements which contained no words, and which showed nothing more than fabric, or fabric and a bladed instrument, were demonstrating such ingenuity and still creating eye-catching and interpretable advertisements.

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<sup>20</sup> The European Union Television without Frontiers Directive, 1989, made guidelines and these were expanded in terms of their scope beyond television and enacted into legislation by the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act, 2002.

## 2.11 LIMITATIONS OF SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF ADVERTISING

One of the limitations of semiotics that has already been intimated is the uncertainty as to what does, and does not, constitute a sign and the theories explored take different views on this. Saussure asserts that signs are essentially arbitrary or, at the very least, they are predominantly arbitrary as, for the most part, they do not possess a natural correspondence with that which they signify. He recognizes, however, that there are “*modes of expression*” (Saussure, 1916: p. 101) which do have a connection, such as mime, along with some non-verbal expressions of politeness. He refers to the term “*symbol*” as designating part of the linguistic sign. This is a term he finds “*awkward*” because symbols are, he maintains, never entirely arbitrary, and he cites the example of scales being the symbol of justice which could not simply be replaced with, for instance, a chariot (ibid). A further example is onomatopoeic words, which are conventionalized within the prevailing culture, although they function as signs only in relation to other signs as part of a signification system. It is difficult, in purely Saussurian terms, to make a case that the image of a tiger in the Esso advert, as a stand-alone element, is a sign in the linguistic sense. An observer can discern the signifier as the tiger image and the signified as the Esso brand and the relation between the tiger and the Esso brand is one that is largely arbitrary. Saussure, is, however, concerned predominantly with linguistic signs and the tiger does not signify a linguistic meaning, but rather a conceptual one approximately along the lines of:

THIS TIGER'S IMAGE = ESSO BRAND

The image is not a constituent element operating within a clearly discernible *system of signification*, nor is the meaning contingent upon its relationship with those other signs within that system, even where it is accompanied by the brand name. Any text that exists alongside the image in the advertisement, such as the

brand name, will be composed of linguistic signs in the form of letters, words and phrases, and this can reinforce the image-brand association.

As described in Subchapter 2.4, above, Peirce asserts that signs fall into three distinct categories, namely indexes, icons and symbols. The first type is not entirely arbitrary as indexes have an observable connection to that which they represent and can be natural or man-made. Iconic signs have a physical, sensory or conceptual resemblance to their respective signifieds and, while they display one or more conventionalized features of their signified, they are still essentially arbitrary in their form. Symbols, on the other hand, are entirely arbitrary under Peirce's theory and they would include linguistic signs. In this respect, they most closely align with Saussure's notion of a sign, except that they can operate in isolation and do not need to belong to a discernible system of signification. It is possible for a sign to have features from more than one of Peirce's categories. For example, a drawing of a heart on a Valentine's card is undoubtedly iconic as it signifies a human heart by virtue of its shape, but the relation between the heart and love is symbolic. Similarly, an illustration of a pointing hand on a street sign to indicate a direction is iconic in that it represents a typical human hand, but its function is indexical.

Advertising uses all three types of sign, most often two or more being present in any given advertisement and its constituents may not fall neatly into any of these categories. Images used in advertising consist of photographs and illustrations; a photograph falls into the index category in Peirce's terms as it points to the existence of a phenomenon in a particular location in space at a particular moment in time, i.e. the place and time the photograph was taken. Peirce writes that photographs "*are very instructive, because we know that in certain respects they are exactly like the objects they represent*" (Peirce, 2.281 from Baker-Finch n.d.). However, an argument can be made that a photograph used in an advertisement can also function as an icon under Peirce's triadic typology. This would apply where the image shown has a metaphorical association with something else and usually something abstract. An image of a rosebud in an advertisement for perfume may serve as a metaphor in the non-linguistic sense, conveying the qualities of love, beauty or youth, while the image

of Esso's tiger might be designed to invoke power and freedom. On that basis, returning to Barthes's advertisement of a string bag breaking open and the contents spilling out, it may be considered whether the main image, or any parts of it, constitute a sign. On its own, in Saussure's terms, the entirety of the image would not and nor would the individual contents, as they do not form part of a signification system. Nevertheless, Barthes describes the image as "*a series of discontinuous signs*" in that "*they are not linear*" (Barthes, 1977: p. 34); he asserts the literal image to be denoted while the symbolism it generates operates through connotation (p. 37). The producer of advertisements has to make a calculation based on aspects such as the likely cultural knowledge of the viewers and readers, and any advertisement is dependent upon some or all of the connotations, including metaphorical signifiers, being recovered if it is to be successful. This is, however, a speculative undertaking as an advertiser cannot be certain precisely what knowledge is present or what conceptual domains<sup>21</sup> are available to be activated or whether the desired connections will be made by the receiver. As a result, receivers are left to decide for themselves precisely what, if anything, is being represented by an image of a rosebud in a perfume advertisement, a fighter aircraft in an advertisement for a man's wristwatch, or a picture of a tiger at a petrol station.

Again, recalling Peirce's view: "*nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign*" (Nöth, 1990: p. 42), a definition of sign is proposed which is oriented squarely upon the receiver rather than the transmitter. Logically, then, unheard speech and unread texts do not conform to this definition and it must surely also follow that the sign constitutes only that which is positively understood by the receiver. Where an image of a tiger is recognized as advertising breakfast cereal then it is, in Peirce's terms, a sign of breakfast cereal regardless of the intention of the transmitter to advertise petrol. If this is doubted, it can be argued that Peirce appears to reinforce the perception by his choice of negative polarity (i.e. "nothing"). Rather than saying, for example, "everything is a sign if it is

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<sup>21</sup> The term *conceptual domain* is used in cognitive linguistics to refer to the way metaphors are used to relate and understand one experience in terms of another. This will be discussed later in the thesis and in the section related specifically to metaphor.

interpreted as a sign”, he rejects considering something to be a sign based on whatever was intended by the transmitter.

The limitations of semiotics become apparent when attempting to explain the recovery of meaning in advertisements by following a simple process of decoding and without taking into account other linguistic and contextual factors including lexical and syntactic choices, rhetorical devices and inferencing. With the slogan “*put a tiger in your tank*”, the syntax is structured as an imperative as the clause begins with a verb in its base form. No vocative is present and this invites the reader to assume the position of addressee<sup>22</sup> (Leech, 1983). “Put” has a broad meaning and there are many ways it is possible to *put* something, both physically and metaphorically. The verb “put” is transitive and so it must be followed by an object. This particular verb further requires an obligatory adverbial which, in this instance, takes the form of a prepositional phrase. In addition, it provides an opportunity for the creator to personalize the advertisement with a possessive determiner directed to the reader (“your”) and to add an element of alliteration (“tiger” and “tank”). The entire utterance is predicated on a set of presuppositions, such as that the reader has a motor vehicle with a fuel tank in which to put the metaphorical tiger, and the reader’s tank is other than full, and the reader has the means to pay for the fuel. The reader will recognise that the tiger referred to is an allusion to *Esso* petrol, although the name alone would achieve that. Semiotics does not generally attempt to account for factors like personalisation, the stylistic devices such as alliteration, presupposition or allusion, or what the advertiser might be aiming to achieve by complementing a straightforward linguistic message with an ingenious slogan or pun. Traditional semiotic approaches thus concern themselves with uncovering meanings that are represented either at the surface level by decoding simple signifiers, or at a more sophisticated level and, consciously or otherwise, relating them to cultural phenomena such as myths. Arguably, the greatest criticism of applying semiotic approaches in any kind of

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<sup>22</sup> More recent scholars have noted that a number of subjects are possible in English imperatives, e.g. where a vocative, or an indefinite pronoun is used (Rupp, 1999).

analysis is that they are concerned with the forms and codes while failing to account satisfactorily for current social practices, human relationships or societal structures. They pay little heed to the participants in any interaction, or their motivations, but instead focus on the forms and structures of signs, and how they convey overt and covert meanings.

Advertising may be considered artistic or entertaining, even to the extent of being the subject of television programmes which are devoted to broadcasting humorous or otherwise ingenious advertisements from across the globe for the amusement of audiences. Yet, unlike other forms of art and entertainment, advertisements exist for a particular purpose that is distinct from their creative merits and artistic appreciation. Mostly, the aesthetic element is the stimulus through which attention is garnered and for the overall persuasive function to take effect. The overriding purpose of advertisements is to influence the perceptions, beliefs and future behaviour of those who are exposed to them in a way desired by those who have commissioned them. Consequently, their existence is contingent upon other, real world, phenomena outside of the text, specifically the products to which they are attempting to direct the viewers' attention. Hodge and Kress (1988) challenge Saussure's approach and advocate that "*culture, society and politics (are) intrinsic to semiotics*" (p. 18). They propose a "*higher level control mechanism*", which they call a "*logonomic system*" (p. 4) which consists of:

*"a set of rules prescribing the conditions for production and reception of meanings; which specify who can claim to initiate (produce, communicate) or receive (know, understand) meanings about what topics under what circumstances and with what modalities (how, when, why)" (ibid).*

Advertising is a practice that projects a world in which social identity is determined not so much by who someone is, or what they do, but by what they

consume, thus positioning everyone as consumers and those working in marketing as parties who know their needs and wants, and are able and willing to satisfy them. Not all semioticians or philosophers are willing to draw such a sharp distinction between the two worlds. If advertisements are to be viewed as signs in the widest sense, and to accept Saussure's view that the signifier and signified are, to use his metaphor, two sides of the same piece of paper, then the question as to the extent to which advertisements can be perceived as being separate and removed from the commodities they are advertising becomes more complex.

## **2.12 METALANGUAGE**

Metalinguage is variously defined as "*a language used to describe language*" (Lyons, 1995: p. 7) and "*a system for describing a language that does not rely on itself*" (Lynne Murphy, 2010: p. 45). The original focus of metalanguage was to describe aspects of, and make judgments about, other languages, but it is now more widely used to refer to language concepts in everyday use and also as a special register used in the discourses of linguists, philosophers, scientists and others. In some instances, metalanguages are distinct from the languages they describe. Others, however, are reflexive, meaning they are able to talk about themselves in terms that are, or are near to, ordinary language and, as such, may be less precise and thereby open to a wider range of interpretations. Preston (2004) claims linguists extend the notion of metalanguage "*to refer simply to mention of talk itself*" (p. 85) and that expressions such as "*in other words*" and "*do you understand me*" constitute a kind of metalanguage. Analysing the metalanguage that advertising practitioners employ is likely to be insightful for this thesis in explaining their own professional communicational practice, including how such terminology contributes to the formulation and development of ideas.

Like most specialized fields, advertising has its own vocabulary which consists of words and phrases, often metaphorical, and which would be incomprehensible to someone unfamiliar with this field, although this varies between individuals. Some terms, such as “caption”, “promotion” and “voice over” may be widely understood, while others, such as “copy”, “segmentation” and “scamps” would be obscure. This is complicated by the fact that some terms are used exclusively in advertising, others are used in marketing generally which includes advertising and others still have a more general business application. Examples of metalanguage are examined in this study as they arise and where they are deemed to be relevant in investigating the processes of generating and developing ideas and discussing the processes in the creation of advertisements.

Semiotic approaches, especially the kind suggested by such as Barthes (1957), appear to offer a means by which the codes can be interpreted to reveal most subtle, culturally-based subtexts and they are thus appropriate for understanding the operation of purely brand-based advertisements such as the glossy magazine kind mentioned. They encompass all theories of communication as opposed to just language using, for example, multimodality, to account for the effects achieved by juxtaposing language with imagery, and the syntagmatic sequencing that occurs in sequenced advertising campaigns. More general criticisms of semiotics as an analytic method include the claims that: *“semioticians present their analyses as if they were purely objective ‘scientific’ accounts rather than subjective interpretations”* (Chandler, 2014: p. 1) and *“semiotic analysis is loosely impressionistic and highly unsystematic”* (ibid). Criticisms that may relate more specifically to the analysis of advertising include those by Tanaka (1994), who points out that interpreting advertisements as simply decoding signs cannot account for linguistic messages which are intentionally polysemous. It would, for example, be difficult to see how any semiotic approach could satisfactorily explain why a reader or viewer might find an intentional ambiguity or pun used in an advertisement entertaining and thereby stimulate interest in a brand or product. Leiss *et al* (1990) make particular criticism of *“semiology”* (p. 198) as an analytical method for

advertisers when they accuse semiotic analysts of being inclined to be highly subjective and “*dependent upon the skill of the individual analyst*” (p. 214) and to select advertisements which prove a particular point they are trying to make which carries “*the danger of self-confirming results*” (ibid). While it may be apposite to do this when compiling a semiotics textbook to be used on marketing courses such as the books mentioned in Chapter 5 of this thesis and in order to explain theories, selecting illustrative examples would be of only limited value in empirical research.

While semiotics considers communication to consist of the encoding and decoding of messages, the next chapter considers a different approach to communication in terms of how messages are created and meaning is recovered having regard to context, and the implications of context to advertising texts.

## CHAPTER 3 - ADVERTISING FROM A PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

### 3.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

As is clear in the thesis questions, a key purpose of this study is to establish how producers of advertisements work to ensure readers' and viewers' attention is drawn to a printed advertisement and the process by which a sufficient degree of understanding is achieved in order to fulfill its purpose, or to encourage the reader to investigate the advertisement further. While the previous chapter outlines approaches that explain the understanding from a semiotic perspective and the role played by signifiers, this chapter explores how more recent theoretical approaches from the field of pragmatics are applied in order to uncover whether such meanings may be better understood as being conveyed through implicature<sup>23</sup>. It considers certain stylistic and rhetorical devices that are accounted for semantically or contextually, including intentional ambiguity, metaphors and puns. Lastly, the distinction between hard and soft advertising approaches is discussed and this is based primarily on Bernstein's (1974) differentiation of "reason" and "tickle" strategies.

Pragmatics, like semiotics, has philosophical antecedents that can be traced back to ancient Greece, according to Hanke (1990). However, most modern pragmatic theories are more recent and, according to Levinson (1983), many of them overlap with other sub-disciplines within linguistics. At its most basic level, semiotics is simply the study of signs (Harris, 1996: p. 112; Bignell, 2002: p. 5; Chandler, 2009: p. 1), although this definition may be considered an oversimplification in view of the developments within the field since its inception in the early part of the twentieth century. Pragmatics, meanwhile, is described as the "*relation of signs to interpreters*" (Morris, 1938, pp. 6-7, from

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<sup>23</sup> "Implicature" a term coined by H P Grice and which refers to an indirect or implicit speech act in which what a speaker means in an utterance is not part of what is explicitly stated. This will be further described in 2.2.2, below.

Levinson, 1983; p.1), while Levinson offers his own, somewhat fuller definition as: *“the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized or encoded in the structure of a language”* [p. 9]

As discussed in Subchapter 2.5, above, Roman Jakobson, who is generally regarded as a semiotician, suggests some functions of language from a pragmatic perspective by focusing on the intention or purpose of any particular utterance. While this contributes to understanding language, the degree to which it explains language through context is limited to aspects such as the purpose of the communication.

Semantics, in the linguistic sense, is a study of meaning which intersects with semiotics, pragmatics and other disciplines related to communication and, according to Palmer (1981: pp. 83-85), to logic. As a consequence, it will almost inevitably feature in any examination of texts that seek to explain the creation and comprehension of meaning. Whereas semantics is concerned with the relations between signs and the phenomena to which they refer, pragmatics considers the context of the communication, and this has to be achieved by analysing factors external to the texts within which these signs exist, but which determine or influence meaning. However, the boundary between semantics and pragmatics is not always a sharp one. Strawson (1952) points to a difference between speaker meaning and linguistic meaning; this is developed by Grice (1989), who identifies a distinction between what is said and what is implicated. Pragmatics was initially concerned with exchanges in the form of interaction between interlocutors, as can be seen from some of its key theories such as Austin’s speech act theory (as subsequently developed by Searle), and Grice’s cooperative principle. However, more recent scholars have made tentative efforts to extend pragmatic approaches beyond immediate, or face-to-face, dialogue and into the realm of mass communication, including advertising (e.g. Pateman, 1983; Tanaka, 1994).

In this chapter, the main principles relating to the theories proposed by Austin and Grice are outlined first, and then a detailed examination of the work by linguists who have utilised pragmatic theories and models in explaining how

advertisements seek to contextualise themselves is made, and the ways by which advertisers are able to invoke the encyclopaedic knowledge<sup>24</sup> of their readers is considered. Works studied include those by Myers (1994), Cook (1992) Tanaka (1994) and Simpson (2000).

### 3.2 OVERVIEW OF THEORIES OF IMPLICATURE

The lectures and papers of Oxford philosopher John Langshaw Austin are the precursors of what is now regarded as modern pragmatics, an avenue of study that investigates the distinctions between what is said and what is meant (Levinson, 1983: pp. 226-227). Among his best-known works is *How to Do Things with Words*, published in 1962. In an effort to address the apparent inadequacies in the field of truth-conditional semantics and, in particular, their inability to explain all utterance types, Austin proposes that many such utterances cannot be assigned a simple truth value (Grundy, 2008: p. 71). Some declarative statements, such as: “*the present King of France is bald*” are capable of being uttered, yet they are meaningless, as they appear to contain a false premise, namely that there is such an entity as the present king of France, while other statements contain internal contradictions. Austin discerns a distinction between a “*locutionary act*” (Levinson, 1983: p. 236) and an “*illocutionary act*” (ibid), and the former is explained by Levinson (1983) as: “*the utterance of a sentence with determinate sense and reference*” (ibid). Illocutionary acts describe what a speaker does when performing a locutionary act, such as whether he or she is commanding, promising, threatening and so on, and the speaker’s intention when producing the utterance is known as the “*illocutionary force*” (ibid). These should then be assessed not in terms of truth conditionality, but in

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<sup>24</sup> The term “*encyclopedic knowledge*” is used by Tanaka (1994: p. 27) to describe pre-existing knowledge. This is not explained by Tanaka but, for the purpose of this study, it will be assumed that it approximately equates with Fairclough’s (2000) notion of “*Member Resources*” (MR), which he defines as being “*what people have in their heads and draw upon when they produce and interpret texts*” (p.20). This is also a concept extensively used in Relevance Theory and will be described in detail in Chapter 2.2.3, below.

terms of their success or failure, i.e. the effect their acts have upon the receiver, which he refers to as the “*perlocutionary act*” (ibid) and which may, in turn, give rise to a response on the part of the hearer which he refers to as the “*perlocutionary effect*” (p. 237). The majority of illocutionary acts are implicit rather than explicit because they do not involve the use of one of a limited range of performative verbs that signal the act. This can be demonstrated by contrasting:

(implicit) *This meeting is over.*

(explicit) *I (hereby) declare this meeting closed.*

The latter involves the use of a first person singular verb, the (usually) optional adverb “hereby” and a performative verb. The particular utterance that closes the meeting also depends upon the existence of certain conditions in order to achieve the intended perlocution. One of these is that the person uttering the performative has some recognised authority to do so; another is that the situation in which the speech act occurs is appropriate while a third requires that certain performative verbs are used. Austin’s theory was revised and modified several times during his lifetime, but its weaknesses gradually became evident (Levinson, 1983). Among the weaknesses identified in this theory are the difficulties in distinguishing a clear set of verbs which are performative from those which are not, and those which are performative can be used in other ways; this is the concept familiar to linguists and grammarians and mentioned in Subchapter 2.5, above, namely that form does not always equal function (p. 239).

One of Austin’s colleagues at Oxford in the 1940s and 1950s working on language philosophy was Paul Grice, who formulated a hugely influential theory within the field of pragmatics which, like speech act theory, is aimed at distinguishing the literal meaning of what is said from “*what is meant*” (Grandy & Warner, 2014: p. 1). Grice proposes that, in utterances in which there is a

layer of literal meaning that can be identified as being distinct from the other layers of meaning, there are two possible types of implicature and he names these “*conventional implicature*” and “*conversational implicature*”. Conventional implicature occurs where certain grammatical forms, such as conjunctions, are used, for instance *but, yet, still* and *therefore* (Levinson, 1983: pp. 127-128). In the utterance: “*She is poor, but she is honest*”, the use of *but* is contrastive and so carries an implication that the honesty of the subject of the clauses would otherwise be questioned because of her poverty, although this is not explicated. Similarly, with: “*She used to work at the Savoy, therefore we can expect her food to be good*”, the word *therefore* implies that the subject’s previous employment can be regarded as a guarantee of her culinary skills. However, this seemingly straightforward concept is not beyond challenge. Bach (1999: p. 365) claims there is no such thing as conventional implicature, and reminds readers that even Grice accepted that it needed to be examined before becoming widely used. While his contribution offers some clarity with regard to the supposed boundary that may divide what is said (the semantics) from what is implicated (the pragmatics), Bach takes the view that the phenomena Grice claims to be conventional implicature should be regarded as “*examples of something else*” (p. 365) and nothing more than part of what is said. Bach provides an example of this with the utterance: “*Shaq is huge but he is agile*” (Bach, 1999: p. 327). This is differentiated from “*Shaq is huge and he is agile*” (Ibid) by virtue of the conventional meaning of the conjunction *but* being contrastive rather than merely additive, as is the case with *and*.

The second type of implicature Grice proposes is conversational implicature, which is predicated on a belief that, when engaging in conversation, human beings cooperate by means of an unspoken understanding as to the rules<sup>25</sup> of their interaction. There is an underlying assumption that all parties will adhere to these rules, but subject to certain mutually understood exceptions. The rules exist under an overarching principle which he worded as follows:

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<sup>25</sup> It should be noted that, in spite of the imperative form used by Grice, these “rules” are intended to be used to describe the process of communication and its cooperative nature and should not be regarded as prescriptive or even advisory.

*“Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.” (Levinson, 1983: p. 101)*

Subordinate to this broad principle, Grice proposes four *conversational maxims* that enable participants to generate and interpret implicature and these are:

*Maxim of Quantity: Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange). Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. (ibid)*

*Maxim of Quality: Try to make your contribution one that is true. Do not say what you believe to be false. Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. (Levinson, 1983: p. 101)*

*Maxim of Relation: Be relevant. (Levinson, 1983: p. 102)*

*Maxim of Manner: Avoid obscurity of expression.*

*Avoid ambiguity.*

*Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).*

*Be orderly. (ibid)*

It is suggested that, for the most part, speakers adhere to these and assume their interlocutors are doing the same, even if they are not conscious of doing so.

However, one may also fail to observe a maxim for various reasons. This may be by infringing a maxim, which can occur where the failure is unintentional and there is no attempt to generate an implicature at all. In the below example, a small child is attempting to cooperate by answering the question, but perhaps also infringing the quantity maxim by being more informative than was required:

*Teacher*        *“Did your daddy bring you to school today?”*

*Child*            *“No, that wasn’t my daddy. He is in prison.”*

The type of non-observance of maxims which is most heavily dependent upon implicature is that which is blatant, i.e. where the speaker understands the implicit rules, expects that the hearer also understands them, will recognize the non-observance and draw an implicature from that. This is known as “*flouting*” (Grundy, 2008: pp. 97-98) one or more of the maxims and, in this case, there is no intention to deceive or mislead the hearer. Instead, the intention is to invite the listener to follow a process of reasoning and to arrive at an intended interpretation through implicature. In the case of quantity, for example, a speaker might flout a maxim as a way of hinting, or being economical with words, as in the case of both speakers, below:

*Speaker A. There’s quite a bit of washing up this evening.*

*Speaker B. I washed up after lunch.*

Speaker A’s utterance consists of a simple declarative sentence and may be interpreted as such, or as a hint that Speaker A believes that Speaker B should undertake or assist in the washing up. While there are several possible interpretations of Speaker B’s meaning, among them is that he/she is implicating

his/her unwillingness to wash up on the basis that she has done so previously the same day. However, this also illustrates some of the problems with Grice's theory. In the above example, there is a range of possible interpretations available from the flouting of the quantity maxim, all of which are defeasible, e.g.

Speaker B. *I washed up after lunch, so there should only be a few dishes to wash from supper.*

Or:

Speaker B. *I washed up after lunch. Today is my day for doing the washing up.*

The concepts of "loose talk" and "faithfulness", which stem from Grice's maxim of quality, carry assumptions that the truthfulness and detail necessary for any interaction is a matter of degree, according to its nature and purpose. This is discussed in detail in Subchapter 3.6, but the example below is a quotation of a British newspaper headline which precedes a story published in 2014:

*"Canterbury Cathedral's girls' choir to break 1,000 years of all-male tradition" (Anon: 2014)*

In this case, the figure cited of 1,000-years may have been precise – the tradition may have existed since the year AD 1014. However, it seems more likely that it would have been an approximation, and that most readers would have interpreted it as such. This perception is supported by the sub-headline of the same story, which reads:

*“Tonight a 900-year tradition of male-only choirs at Canterbury Cathedral will come to an end, when the brand-new Canterbury Cathedral Girls’ Choir makes its debut at Sung Evensong” [Ibid]*

In contrast, Canterbury Cathedral’s own website provided far more specific information as to dates, presumably because readers who had an interest in history were presumed to prefer exact dates:

*“1070-1077 Cathedral rebuilt by Archbishop Lanfranc*

*1098-1130 New Quire built over a Crypt (present Western Crypt)*

*1170 Thomas Becket murdered in the Cathedral”*

(Canterbury Cathedral web site)

One of the limitations of using Grice’s approach in analyzing an utterance or text is that there is no systematic method or protocol for determining which of the possible interpretations is the intended one. Another is that there is sometimes an overlap in terms of which maxim is being flouted, as in Speaker B’s utterance *“I washed up after lunch”*, where a different meaning could be recovered depending upon whether the hearer had calculated it as a flouting of quantity or of relation.

Cook, whose works on the discourse of advertising, published in 1992 and 2001, offers a wide-ranging examination of the genre of advertising on television and in print and he provides perspectives based on models from several linguistic

sub-disciplines. However, pragmatic approaches do not feature prominently in his works and are little used in his analysis of actual advertisements. He alludes to the two conversational principles, namely Grice's co-operative principle, as described above, and Geoffrey Leech's politeness principle, which includes the maxims of avoiding imposition, making the hearer feel good and giving the hearer options. Cook (2001) points out that the latter are mainly phatic, i.e. concerned with establishing and maintaining social relationships and that, as with Grice's maxims, Leech's may at times appear to conflict with one another. He acknowledges that the two conversational principles may be culturally universal<sup>26</sup>, but argues:

*"they are not equally applicable to all genres. They belong very much to the spoken phatic discourse in which relationships are neither of unequal power nor of great intimacy.... Neither advertising nor literature can be easily accounted for in terms of conversational principles." (p. 154)*

Cook (2001) goes on to propose that there is a gulf between the purpose of phatic discourses and those of literature – the relationship between the addressee and addresser being one of extreme distance, as is the case in advertising. Modern advertising methods, he asserts, are no more concerned with conveying truth than are works of fiction. Cook (2001) maintains that, owing to legal and other constraints, advertisers shy away from factual claims for which they can be held responsible and so they adopt other strategies.

Without rejecting his views out of hand, it must be acknowledged that many advertisements are designed to mimic face-to-face conversation. The modes of address, grammatical aspects (such as personal and possessive pronoun use),

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<sup>26</sup> This seems odd, as there have been many studies (e.g. Huang, 2008; Spencer-Oatey & Jiang, 2003) which describe the problems with the conversational principles in cross-cultural communication.

use of imperative and interrogative structures, statements which express empathy, solidarity and even intimacy with the reader, emulate features of conversation and are thus, subject to certain limitations, amenable to analysis by use of the conversational principles proposed by both Grice and Leech. This is especially the case when it comes to the foregrounded texts used to capture and sustain the interest of a reader and the flouting of Grice's maxims is a much-favoured strategy for achieving this. The *Tommy Hilfiger* advertisement mentioned in Subchapter 2.6, above, demonstrates how advertisements may flout the maxim of quantity as they consist of nothing more than a carefully constructed image with the product or brand name strategically placed. They may use a text which is obscure<sup>27</sup> or, upon first reading, nonsensical<sup>28</sup>, again flouting maxims such as quantity and relevance, and perhaps also the maxim of manner as they fail to be perspicuous. In some cases, they invite more than one interpretation<sup>29</sup> and so flout the maxim of manner by virtue of their ambiguity. As advertisements in magazines have to compete with journalistic content and other advertisements for reader attention, they must also make themselves both conspicuous and relevant to the reader more or less immediately if they are to avoid being passed over.

With regard to Grice, Tanaka (1994) considers Geis's (1982) contribution in his work on the pragmatics of television advertising. He advances and develops Grice's notion that inferencing as described by Grice attempts to offer a more robust explanation as to how such texts are understood, and he then reformulates the maxims to some extent for that purpose. He increases the number of maxims to six, ostensibly by dividing Grice's *Quantity* into two maxims which he calls *Strength* (say no less than is necessary) and *Parsimony* (say no more than is necessary) and he reassigns *Quality* as two maxims, namely *Truth* (do not say what you believe to be false) and *Evidence* (do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence). He offers a way of establishing whether a

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<sup>27</sup> As in the *Audi* car advertisement described in Subchapter 3.5, below.

<sup>28</sup> As in the *Boddington's* beer advertisement described in Subchapter 3.6, below.

<sup>29</sup> As in the *Player's* cigarettes advertisement described in Subchapter 3.7, below.

sentence conversationally implies a proposition in that it can be achieved only if the literal meaning is understood, general conversational principles are observed, the context is known and there is a common background knowledge shared between the speakers. He proposes that there is a hierarchy of maxims which operates where two or more conversational maxims occur in opposition, with *Relation* seemingly being superior in the interpreter's mind (ibid).

Geis (1982) also notes that those who design advertisements are inclined to make the strongest claims they can in favour of their products, but using short statements that are unprovable, largely by use of hedging expressions and with words indicating only probability, such as modal verbs (Geis, 1982, from Tanaka, 1994). Tanaka (1994) highlights what she claims to be a weakness in this approach, to wit, that it is too heavily dependent upon rigid rules and, as with semiotic approaches, it fails to account for context.

### **3.3 LIMITATIONS OF GRICE / RELEVANCE THEORY**

Critics of Grice (e.g. Thomas, 1995; Sperber and Wilson, 1995) argue that his attempt to explain the process of implicature is incomplete and vague. Grice's explanation is suggested to appeal mainly to intuition as opposed to offering a fully reasoned or testable explanation as to how utterances are understood. Sperber and Wilson (1995) offer their alternative proposal, known as "*Relevance Theory*", and which advances the notion that relevance is the key to attracting attention to a particular stimulus. This is, they claim, achieved through an act of ostensive communication:

*"an act of ostensive communication must attract the audience's attention. In that sense, an act of ostension is a request for attention. Someone who asks you to behave in a certain way, either physically*

*or cognitively, suggests that he has good reason to think that it might be in your own interests, as well as his, to comply with his request” (p. 155].*

Where an act of ostensive-inferential communication occurs, the communicator intends that it will be relevant to the hearer and that the hearer will recognise the speaker’s intention and that the speaker believes it is worth the hearer’s attention (Sperber & Wilson, 1995). However, the effort needed both to generate a stimulus on the part of the speaker, and the effort needed to process it by the hearer, are also important considerations. It is the speaker’s responsibility to select the most efficient and economical stimuli for the purpose and there must be a presumption of this if the hearer is to be reasonably expected to make the effort required to process the utterance, while the hearer simply has to recover the intended meaning aided by the principle of relevance. Wilson and Sperber (2012: p. 65) call this mutual understanding “*the presumption of optimal relevance*”; it is communicated by every act of ostensive communication and “*every utterance conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance*” (ibid).

Sperber and Wilson (1995) raise the questions as to whether context is given or chosen and how the particular assumptions used in interpretation of a particular message are selected. Context may be understood simply as the result of whatever utterances preceded it, assuming there were any such utterances, or a combination of the utterances together with any implicatures. Sperber and Wilson (1995) recognise this to be an inadequate explanation to account for all situations, such as where an assumption must be predicated on knowledge stored in the memory in the form of an “*encyclopaedic entry*” (p. 86). For instance, alluding to *Napoleon* would instantaneously activate a set of assumptions about that historical figure, assuming the hearer had some knowledge of him, and such entries are added to the context to explain the operation of the implicature. Then, further layers of such entries would be attached to the concepts mentioned until the context, consisting entirely of

encyclopaedic memory, becomes vast. The task of processing would be enormous were it not for the mental mechanism by which speakers are able to access those precise aspects that are needed while disregarding those which are not (ibid).

As relevance decreases with the degree of effort needed to process information, Sperber and Wilson (1995) assert that it gradually becomes less possible to achieve more than minimal relevance, eventually causing the notion to be rejected. On that basis, they maintain that context is created either prior to the comprehension process commencing, or as a preliminary stage in the process, and so the possibility remains that choices and revisions may be available in context formation. These choices are, however, limited by the “*organisation of the individual’s encyclopaedic memory, and the mental activity in which he is engaged*” (p. 137) and processing the information according to the principle of relevance may be dependent upon the hearer’s ability to add to the initial context. What is added is information recovered from short-term memory (e.g. utterances immediately prior to the proposition), longer-term memory (including encyclopaedic knowledge) or perception. In turn, any inability by the hearer to process these may limit the extent to which the communication will succeed. Mutually shared knowledge is not always essential as the contextual implication could be derived in another way, such as where a reply contains an assumption from which the hearer can make a deduction, as in the following example:

*a Tim: Would you like a doughnut?*

*b Bill: I’ve just been diagnosed as having gluten intolerance*

Tim would be able to process Bill’s reply and, by drawing inferences, deduce its relevance as a response to the particular question asked. He would derive the contextual implication that Bill’s diagnosis means he is probably precluded from eating foods such as doughnuts. Relevance Theory explains how, through

deductive inferencing, appropriate referents are identified and possible ambiguities are resolved, thus filling the gap between the encoded utterance and its ultimate interpretation. Grundy (2008) offers an example with the possible interpretations of the utterance “*Have you seen my book?*” (p. 139). Among a range of possible meanings from this could include an indirect question as to whether the addressee has actually borrowed the speaker’s book without permission, or whether the addressee has read or had sight of a book that was written by the speaker. As is the case with all other utterances, the question “*have you seen my book?*” is made:

- with a guarantee of its own relevance
- on the basis of a belief by the speaker as to the cognitive abilities and contextual resources of the hearer
- in a way that is radically under-determined, with a wide range of logical and semantic relations.

Thus, the addressee, with the aid of his or her own contextual and encyclopaedic resources, is able to recover the intended meaning only if he or she has followed a process of deductive inferencing. There is, however, no guarantee that the hearer’s interpretation will exactly, or even approximately, mirror speaker intention and misunderstanding can thus occur. Sperber and Wilson (1995) attempt to look beyond what they regard as simplistic and empirically unsupported notions of mutual knowledge and shared information by describing the “*cognitive environment*” (p. 38). They describe how each individual lives in a physical world in which he or she acquires information and constructs mental representations, and they argue that his or her cognitive environment consists of the accumulation of information that is manifest to that person. For a fact to be manifest, it must be perceptible or inferable:

*“if, and only if he is capable at that time of representing it mentally and accepting its representation as true or probably true.” [p. 39]*

While a speaker has no direct control over the knowledge and thought processes of his interlocutor, he or she may have some degree of control over his cognitive environment and this may indirectly affect his thoughts. Sperber and Wilson (1995) distinguish between informative and communicative intentions in both overt and covert communication and how they are used in fundamentally different ways. The informative intention is simply to inform the audience of something, while the communicative intention describes the intention to inform the audience of the informative intention. Achieving this requires the production of an appropriate stimulus, and one that bears a guarantee of its own relevance. This aspect has particular significance in advertising and is discussed further in Subchapter 3.5 below.

### **3.4 DEIXIS AND PRONOUNS**

Myers (1994) describes sentence types and structures used in advertising, including how and why advertisers are inclined to use imperatives or interrogatives in preference to indicatives, and that words or strings of words which do not constitute complete grammatical sentences are often punctuated as sentences. He begins by making five key points (pp. 3 – 10), the first being that advertisements “*are made up of patterns of textual choices*”, and he exemplifies this with poetic effects employed in some catchphrases used in the marketing of *Aero* chocolate bars. His second point adduces the presence of intertextual features and how these are interpreted in relation to other texts, and he directs the reader to a TV advertisement for breakfast cereal depicting the familiar characters from the Robin Hood folk tale. Myers’ third point proposes that advertisements are “*stereotypical acts of communication*” (ibid) and thus constitute a genre in their own right. In this respect, he compares advertisements to literary genres where, for example, murder-mystery stories

follow certain lines, but distinguish themselves at some point by presenting the reader with something which deviates from their expectation and which makes the experience entertaining. He develops this argument by relating how the cereal advertisement mentioned portrays a humorous situation in which the product helps the familiar hero (Robin Hood) defeat the villain. This view aligns with Cook's (2003) description of advertising as being a distinctive discourse. The fourth point of Myers' (1994) points is that an advertisement "*constructs positions for the audience*" (p. 6). He substantiates this firstly by considering the referent of the pronoun "you" in the *Aero* advertisement, and then highlights how a TV viewer watching a series of commercials is positioned several times in rapid succession as a chocolate eater (*Aero*), a cat owner (*Whiskas* cat food), a parent (*Fairy* washing-up liquid) an adolescent (acne medication) and a yuppie (*Ferrero Rocher* chocolates). What Myers (1994) does not explore to any great extent in this argument is the existence of advertisements aimed at a purchaser who is not a consumer. There is clearly an element of this with the cat food example, but there are advertisements that are aimed at parents who may buy products for their children<sup>30</sup>, and those buying gifts<sup>31</sup>. Lastly, Myers reminds readers of how "*audiences reconstruct ads in diverse ways*" (p. 7). He explains this by relating how his own daughter, as a child, watched an advertisement portraying the character Robin Hood who was, at the time, running away. The explanation she gave him of her understanding of why Robin Hood was fleeing (presumably from the Sheriff of Nottingham), was that he did not like the breakfast cereal being marketed in the advertisement. This was almost certainly not the meaning intended by the producers of the commercial, but Myers' daughter would perhaps have been too young to be familiar with the genre of advertising, or to have remembered the original TV programme that the advertisement parodied (ibid).

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<sup>30</sup> One example of this is the television advertisement by Cadbury's in the 1980s that used a jingle: "*A finger of fudge is just enough to give your kids a treat*".

<sup>31</sup> An advertisement created in the 1960s for Arpège perfume had the tagline "*Promise her anything, but give her Arpège*." This can be seen in Appendix 4: Image 18.

Myers (1994) suggests that the use of pronouns<sup>32</sup> in advertising is a favoured approach because advertisements are attempting to reproduce some of the functions and methods of salespeople, demonstrating empathy and solidarity, an awareness of the audience or readers' concerns, and thus winning the trust of the potential customer. Precisely what constitutes the particular concerns which each human being considers to be important and even most intimate is, of course, wholly subjective. The fact that advertisements are mostly indiscriminate in terms of who is addressed means that a proportion of them will have no concerns that are of relevance to the purchaser/consumer. Obvious examples might include advertisements for male shaving products when viewed by women, or female cosmetics when viewed by men. Cook's (2001) notion of the projection of the self in other genres might offer some insights into how addressees respond to such advertisements and he refers to an example of a traditional folk song in which the "I" is the female addresser and the "you" the male addressee, who is her lover. He suggests that there are various ways in which the specific reference for these pronouns in the song can be achieved, generally assuming that there will be a correlation between the genders of the singer/hearer and the addressees. Consequently, a woman hearing the song will adopt the position of singer, while a male listener will position himself as the one being serenaded. While this seems rational at first glance, the claim is questionable as it is both overly simplistic and close to impossible to prove. The same must surely be said for advertisements. The parallel is unsatisfactory for other reasons, too, owing to the fact that, while advertising replicates some of the features of other genres such as folk songs and literature, it has entirely different aims. If a woman sees an advertisement for a man's electric razor, it may be asked how is she positioning herself. Firstly, the advertisement would have to make manifest to her its own relevance; if it were unable to do so, then it may be logically assumed that it would be disregarded. In cases where a female reader's attention is captured beyond mere curiosity, she may consider buying the razor for a particular man, such as a partner, adult son or elderly male relative. The advertisement serves as a

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<sup>32</sup> The use of pronouns in advertising is discussed further in Subchapter 3.5 below.

reminder of a need for a product of this type, or conveyer of information about such a product, but it is not addressing her as it would a potential consumer and so the mechanism by which the advertisement works is only partially activated. Where an advertisement is clearly and specifically directed at a male reader, it is difficult to maintain that a woman reader is positioned in any role that bears similarities to that of a literary text.

Myers (1994) claims that the way people define themselves as being like other people, and yet retaining distinctiveness and individuality, operates differently in advertising, depending upon the gender of the audience. He exemplifies this with one advertisement for an off-road car in which a man dressed as a successful executive says:

*"It's Not Everyone's Choice of Company Car But It's Mine."* [p. 84].

He argues this is aimed at men, and suggests that the reader may take the man to be a city executive, perhaps with a home in the countryside where such a vehicle might be necessary. It is not clear why he regards this as being tied to gender, as a female executive might also have a desire or need for such a vehicle.

A contrast is provided in the form of another advertisement Myers (1994) cites, this time for *Champion* athletic clothing. It shows a passive young man, with a woman perched on a sofa and dressed in sports clothing. The male is apparently contemplating her running shoes and the caption reads: *"He's my comfort, my inspiration, my life. But I am captain of my soul"* (p. 84). This is aimed at women, and Myers invites the reader to imagine a reversal of the sexes of those depicted in this advertisement. He deliberates upon how the response of the viewer might differ if man were to claim that, for example, his running shorts allowed him to be captain of his soul. While claiming this as evidence of the gender specific nature of the positions the advertisement offers the reader, he does not elaborate upon why the reversal would be harder to conceive.

Both Myers (1994) and Cook (2001) consider the employment of pronouns, especially but not exclusively in questions and imperative structures in advertisements, and these are considered in turn. Myers (1994) explains how the use and selection of pronouns in addressing receivers forces them to construct both the person and the imagined addressee, and also to form a mental impression of the social world that that person inhabits (pp. 78-79). In doing so, the audience is implicitly invited to step into the position constructed for them by the advertisement<sup>33</sup>. The advantages of second person pronouns are that they address the reader in a personal way that corresponds to normal human interaction, while not specifying whom the particular receiver is. However, Myers (1994) contrasts two different effects that can be generated by the use of *you* by two captions quoted from war posters: “*Daddy, what did you do in the Great War?*” (Appendix 4: image 9) and “*I WANT YOU FOR THE U.S. ARMY*” (Appendix 4: image 10). In the first, the caption sits below a poster showing a pensive-looking man seated in an armchair with a little girl perched on his lap and a little boy playing close by. Myers proposes that the implicature recovered when viewing this image is that it allows a reader:

*“to see himself (and it must be himself) in this position, not as a male of draftable age but as a father of the future. He joins, not because his country tells him to, but because of the threat of a very private shame.”*  
(p. 80)

To adopt this subject position, some degree of empathetic identification must take place and thereby the advertisement achieves its purpose. However, the advertisement will clearly be viewed by those towards whom it is not directed, including those not of the requisite age, sex, state of health and citizenship, and

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<sup>33</sup> Myers (1994) develops a point here about how this strategy can be used to carry assumptions, e.g. on aspects related to gender, class and nation.

also to those who are already serving in the military. In order for the intended viewers to engage with the advertisement, they would have to imagine a situation several years in the future and to identify their future selves with the man depicted. They may ask themselves how their self-image and the respect of their loved ones would be impacted by the fact they failed to respond when their country needed them<sup>34</sup>. The second shows an illustration of a stern-looking American 'Uncle Sam' caricature looking and pointing directly at the reader and the text is capitalised for emphasis. It can be assumed that some degree of processing occurs so the reader recognises either that they belong, or they do not belong, to the applicable group. To achieve this recognition, the viewer would have to rely upon existing (i.e. encyclopaedic) knowledge resources. In this case, having regard to the particular time in history, it would be understood that the US Army was looking to recruit physically able young men to fight in a war and the fictional character Uncle Sam, the quintessence of American identity and patriotism, was appealing to them to recognise this and to volunteer. If a viewer does fit this profile, then the advertisement is addressing them directly and the main intention of the advertisement has the possibility of being fulfilled. Where the viewer does not fit the profile, then understanding is still likely to be achieved as the same encyclopaedic knowledge resources are available to them, too, but the response is likely to differ, as they know they are ineligible to volunteer. They are not, as in the first example, confronted by a hypothetical future event in the form of a question being posed by a child who has not yet even been conceived.

Fairclough (2001) discusses a phenomenon he calls "*synthetic personalisation*", which he defines as "*a compensatory tendency to give the impression of treating each of the people 'handled' en masse as an individual*" (p. 52). He later explains how "you" is widely used in mass communication as an indefinite pronoun,

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<sup>34</sup> The tactic of pointing out the risk of shame to young men as a means of encouraging them into military service was far from new even when this poster was designed. It is perhaps reminiscent of the words from a well-known Shakespeare's play, *King Henry V: And gentlemen in England, now a-bed, Shall think themselves accursed they were not here, And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks, That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.*

where the identities of the addressees are unknown, and he cites an example of the wording from a Bachelor's soup advertisement: "*The cream of the crop, wherever you shop*" (p. 107). He claims this use of the pronoun simulates a personal address and this is helpful in avoiding impersonality. Some Germanic languages, such as Dutch, Swedish and Danish are unable to use "you" as indefinite pronouns in this way as they are always personal pronouns and used to refer to specific individuals. Consequently, they generally choose the impersonal *men/man/mand* respectively, which approximates to the English indefinite pronoun "one" in conversational and formal situations, although the intimate personal pronoun "du" seems to be the preferred choice in advertising. Similarly, in English advertising texts, using "one" in this way would be unusual. As Fairclough (2000) points out:

*"Firstly, one undermines the meaning of 'people in general' because people in general don't use the word – it is, roughly, a middle-class pronoun; it is therefore difficult to make an effective claim to 'ordinary people' about the common experience or 'ordinary' people using one. You, on the other hand, is used to register solidarity and commonality of experience in working-class speech."* [p. 149]

With regard to *we* and *our*, English speakers are generally conscious of the fact that the plural first person pronoun refers both inclusively and exclusively, and this is mentioned by Myers (1994: p. 81). Thus, the *we* pronoun can demonstrate an advertiser's empathy and solidarity with the reader, as in: "*We are constantly being attacked*". The context indicates that the agent attacking the inclusive *us* is germs. Fairclough (1989) notes how this pronoun is used by newspapers and cites a headline in the *Daily Mail* on 4<sup>th</sup> May 1987 in an editorial during the Falklands War which began: "*We can not let our troops lose their edge...*" (p. 127). He points out that editorials often use the inclusive *we*, as though they were speaking for their readers and all supposedly right-minded British citizens (p.128). Myers (1994) notes that the first person pronoun is also

used as a way of referring to the advertiser specifically, as in: “*At McDonald’s, we do it all for you.*” (p. 82). The first person singular in advertising captions can refer to what Myers calls the “*salespeople*” (ibid), by which he appears to mean a real or constructed entity pictured or mentioned in the advertisement. He cites as an example Shari Belafonte, an actress who was commissioned to act as a spokesperson during the 1990s for the diet supplement *Slim-Fast*, and is shown in a TV commercial saying: “*If I can do it, trust me, you can*” (Myers, 1994: p. 83). Myers (1994) finally considers third person pronouns and views these as referring to people already mentioned or visually depicted in the advertisement or “*taken for granted as part of the reader’s life*” (p.85). Among the examples Myers offers is one directed at parents from the Department for Education bearing an image or images of a uniformed schoolgirl’s legs. The girl has one knee sock fitting properly and the other sliding down, with the caption: “*The sooner you can spot where she’s falling down, the sooner you can lend a hand*” (ibid). Assuming all the metaphors in this sentence are interpretable, it can be seen that it contains an assumption that *you* (the reader) has a school-age child and, if so, that child is the referent for the pronoun *she* and it is also implicit that *you* would wish to assist that child. Myers (1994) argues that, unlike with the first person pronoun, the gender aspect is not of primary interest to the advertiser and, on that basis, a reader could just as easily position him/herself as the parent of a boy in the same situation.

Myers (1994) makes little mention of pragmatic theories in his entire work, and does not appear to be applying any of these within his analyses. With regard to the use of pronouns and how readers understand and relate to them, it may be considered that, in neglecting these theories, he pays insufficient attention to the way that the context is generated through implicature. In the case of personal pronouns, the identification of referents is only possible through such implicature, as can be seen in the last two examples:

*“If I can do it, trust me, you can”*

*“The sooner you can spot where she’s falling down, the sooner you can lend a hand.”*

While Myers (1994) notes that these advertisements are associated with images, he does not explain the process by which the reader is expected to use these in identifying their referents. Additionally, he does not take into account the advertisers’ dependence on a viewer’s familiarity with the genre of advertising in order to achieve the desired understanding. For example, the word “I” in an advertisement could conceivably refer to any number of possible entities, including the reader, the owner of the company marketing the product, the editor of the publication in which the advertisement appears or someone else entirely. The general familiarity with advertising ensures that referents of such as non-specific nouns, pronouns and determiners, are identified as intended. A foregrounded “I” pronoun, which is accompanied by an image of a human being, is readily understood as a personal address by the individual depicted to the reader. In the case of: *“If I can do it, trust me, you can”* the referent of “I” is understood to be the person in the image, in this case Shari Belafonte, and the “you” entity is the reader.

Sperber and Wilson (1995) propose that receivers have a tendency to pick out the most relevant stimuli in the cognitive environment and process them so as to maximise their relevance, and that this environment consists of those facts which are made manifest<sup>35</sup>. When attempting to understand the process by which a reader assigns referents to pronouns in advertisements, it would seem logical to apply this principle by identifying the cognitive environment in which they appear. This environment comprises the genre, the specific text, any associated cotexts and also the non-verbal components of the advertisements – these being the facts that are being made manifest. Similarly, readers are likely to have familiarity both with the kind of products being marketed, often the specific brands themselves, and also the nature and commonly used strategies of

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<sup>35</sup> This is explained in further detail in this Subchapter below.

advertising, and this must surely be regarded as part of encyclopaedic knowledge. As a consequence, the combination of the environmental features and encyclopaedic knowledge described enables the reader to enrich the text mentally and thereby recover sufficient clues so that the intended referents of any pronouns would become manifest to them.

Cook (2001) also considers the use of pronouns in advertising. The expressions he mentions are personal, possessive and reflexive pronouns, and he explores the ways that advertisers use these, the meanings attached to them and the intended effects. As with Myers (1994), Cook (2001) argues that first person pronouns encourage the reader, having calculated the implicature, to identify with the character depicted in the advertisement; that character may or may not be represented by a photograph or graphic which accompanies the text. His example is an advertisement for the Philips cordless phone (pp. 160 – 161), which has the photograph of a conventionally attractive and elegantly dressed young woman in the foreground along with the caption: *“Suddenly, everything seems so much clearer”* (p. 160). The smaller text at the bottom of the page consists of a full paragraph of text and begins with the first person singular pronoun: *“I understand that the Philips Onis 2 range of cordless telephones...”* (ibid). The pronoun used in this advertisement requires the reader to determine the referent or referents implied by it and one way this is achieved is by considering deictic projection, which occurs conversationally, and so may also be possible in non-personal, written texts. The term *“deictic projection”* is coined by Lyons (1977a) to describe a situation in which a speaker is enabled *“to project himself into a deictic context centred on the addressee”* (p. 579). Levinson (1983) expands this notion by describing how *“deictic expressions are used in ways that shift this deictic centre to other participants, or indeed to protagonists in narratives”* (p. 64). The referent of the pronoun in the advertisement cited can be assumed to be the character in the photograph, but a reader is then able to project that deictic identity to themselves, or to toggle between the identities mentally. Cook (2001) proposes that advertisements exploit the human experience of projection of the self in other genres, such as songs and literature

and that they employ strategies to persuade using direct addresses and expressing interest in the most intimate concerns of consumers.

In terms of second and third person pronoun use, Cook (2001) reproduces an advertisement for *Clearasil* facewash. It shows a photograph of a conventionally good looking and muscular young man and the captions at the top and bottom of the image read, "*your ideal man*" and "*your ideal facewash*" (p. 162). Cook informs the reader that this advertisement appears in a magazine aimed at teenage girls and, if a working assumption is made that they consist predominantly of heterosexual girls, then this time the second person pronoun use suggests that the reader does not identify with the character depicted. The ideal man of the reader can be assumed to be the persona in the mind of the reader as projected into it by the image. Cook points out that the reader arrives at an understanding as to whom the addressee is because the young man "*would not be so vain as to describe himself as 'the ideal man', surely*" [p. 163].

On this occasion, the reader, who is assumed to be a member of the opposite sex from the model shown, is not "I", but "you", and this is reinforced by smaller text at the bottom of the advertisement: "*Our microbeads will gently exfoliate your skin, while you'll be left feeling fresh and clean*" (Cook, 2001: p. 162). In addition, at each side of the model sits further captions, and these say: "*Gentle soft on the skin like his kiss*" and "*Power, tough on spots, like his arms*" (ibid). The referent third person pronoun here, "*his*", may be assigned both to "*your ideal man*" and/or the character depicted in the photograph.

### **3.5 OSTENSIVE INFERENTIAL AND COVERT COMMUNICATION**

The basic aspects of the principle of relevance have been explained in Subchapter 3.3, above and this subchapter considers two further aspects, namely ostensive inferential and covert communication. According to Sperber and Wilson (1995), ostensive communication occurs where there is an utterance

which “*provides evidence of one’s thoughts*” (p. 50) and Wilson and Sperber (2012) claim that such an utterance: “*conveys a presumption of its own optimal relevance*” (p. 65). Other contextual elements must be identified and processed if the relevance is to be recognised and recovered. Typical among these non-linguistic stimuli are food and sex. Sperber and Wilson (1995) claim these are:

*“...probably innately determined: for instance, the automatic attention paid to all sudden loud noises ... (and are) presumably an outcome of natural selection. Other types of phenomena pre-empt attention as a result of some form of learning.”* (pp. 151-152)

They supply examples of such stimuli:

*“The crying of a particular baby, even if barely audible, pre-empts the attention of the parents. A smell of gas pre-empts the attention of gas users.”* [p. 152]

Ostension in terms of intentional communication, such as deliberate gestures and speech, mostly requires that the intention of the speaker is manifest to the receiver if the desired interpretation of the message is to be recovered in full (Sperber and Wilson, 1995). This operates in tandem with the knowledge that human beings maximise their cognitive efficiency by applying a mental device that automatically pre-empts attention towards stimuli which are likely to be relevant and filters out those which are not. The stimulus which is the most relevant is that which provides the first accessible interpretation (ibid).

In terms of advertising, Tanaka (1994) suggests that receivers gain pleasure from processing certain stimuli and that advertisers exploit this by including visual images, often ones which have no obvious connection to the core message, in order to “*reward*” (p. 36) their processing effort. She points to a further

situation where covert communication is appropriate for social situations and how this relates to advertising. There are occasions when a speaker makes clear that an informative intention may frustrate its objective rather than aid its fulfillment; the example she cites is self-praise, as this will more probably convey a negative impression of the speaker. Similarly, she maintains that advertisers are unlikely to verbalise that the purpose of an advertisement is to maximise sales. Rather, they use covert communication strategies by, on the one hand, obscuring the purpose of the advertisement so that its main function, selling something, is not at the forefront of the reader's mind when viewing it. This can be done, she claims, through emulating the house style of the publication in which it is printed, and to achieve this, the advertiser avoids making the identity of the speaker mutually manifest. Secondly, covert communication is used: *"to avoid taking responsibility for the social consequences of certain implications arising from advertisements"* (p. 44) and that this may apply where, for example, advertisers seek to include subliminal aspects of sexuality. Tanaka (1994) distinguishes covert communication within advertising from ostensive communication, where the intention of the speaker is to alter the mutual cognitive environment of both of the interlocutors. With covert communication, the speaker seeks only to alter the cognitive environment of the hearer and without making this intention mutually manifest. Tanaka (1994) claims this is the main strategy employed by advertisers, and she begins by reflecting upon the purpose and character of advertising and takes a rather narrow view that

*"the advertiser does not inform for the sake of improving the addressee's knowledge of the world, but only to sell a product"* (p. 36).

She emphasises this point, claiming the advertiser would be content even if this meant imparting no knowledge at all, so long as the purpose, namely selling the product, were to be accomplished<sup>36</sup>.

The kind of covert communication described may be especially effective in advertisements for goods which aim to convey exclusivity. Advertisements for the higher end of the perfume market may comprise simply a photograph of a conventionally beautiful woman and the brand name, but with no other linguistic element. In such a case, the reader is left to speculate on the intention of the advertisement, and this will likely be based on their previous experience of the advertising genre and their awareness of the strategies of marketeers. Covert communication can also be achieved where there are words present, but they do not yield enough in terms of their semantic properties for the intention of the communication to be made manifest to the receiver, such as where they are cryptic in some way. Examples of this might include the *Audi* slogan *Vorsprung durch Technik*, mentioned by Petty *et al* (2010: p. 482) and shown used in an advertisement in Appendix 4: image 11, and which is a German phrase which translates as “progress through technology”. This slogan was used in the United Kingdom in spite of the fact that German is not widely understood, but the use of an incomprehensible strapline that would be recognized as German, and contained a German/English cognate “technic”, helped to generate an impression that the cars were products manufactured according to the highly respected German engineering standards.

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<sup>36</sup> While this may be true in many cases, it can be argued this does not offer a fully complete and satisfactory picture. As outlined in Chapters 1, 2 and 7, advertising has a much more sophisticated purpose in the modern era than merely persuading potential customers to buy specific items, focusing instead on brand image. This may have occurred for a number of reasons. Firstly, the advancement of technology in manufacturing, especially in developing countries, has resulted in increased production and lower prices, and consumers enjoy far greater choice than was available previously. Along with this, in spite of intermittent economic downturns, westerners may be growing wealthier and are thus able to choose the products they prefer and are less constrained by what they can afford. Brand then becomes associated with concepts of image and status, with society moving to a situation in which personal identities are, to a greater or lesser extent, created and reinforced by what is consumed.

Sperber and Wilson (1995) illustrate how a hearer's recognition of a speaker's intention may influence what that hearer actually believes and that the mere act of expressing something reveals the intention. They exemplify this with a prison warden who, by merely notifying the inmates of his intention to make them fear him will, without further utterances or actions, make them fear him and an act of ostensive communication has thereby occurred. A hearer who trusts that a speaker's utterance is sincere may aid this process even where, as in the example, the trust is negative in character: it is not essential to instill belief, but rather it is simply part of the general context. Covert communication, on the other hand, seeks to conceal the intention of a speaker (ibid). As stated, an advertiser will normally have an objective which relates either to a desire by a trader to increase sales of a specific product, or else to raise the profile of a brand, but rarely is this expressly stated.

Tanaka (1994) claims that an informative intention in advertising tends to be covert as the advertiser seeks to "*make the addressee forget that he is trying to sell her something*" (p. 43). This claim is, however, debateable. It seems unlikely that an advertiser would have in the forefront of his mind when designing a commercial that he must make the reader or viewer forget his true intention. Even if this were his intention, it may be reasonably assumed that the overwhelming majority of those encountering the advertisement would have instantly recognized it as such by virtue of its location, form and features, and the presence of images of products, brand names and trade marks in prominent positions. Further, the reading and viewing public are likely to be so familiar with the genre that the primary purpose of the advertisement occupies a place in their minds for the duration of their engagement with it. Having recognized an advertisement for what it is, some level of skepticism or resistance is thereby activated automatically in the mind of the receiver as it would when other kinds of communicative intention are perceived to be motivated by pecuniary interest. In spite of this, advertisers have to operate on the assumption that readers and viewers do, nevertheless, engage with their work otherwise producing advertisements would be futile. A blanket assertion that every commercial is motivated wholly and exclusively by an aim to maximize the profits of the client

company would constitute an oversimplification. When a work of art such as a sculpture or musical composition is experienced, it is entirely possible that the work in question was originally commissioned by an individual or organisation for, for example, the purposes of enhancing their prestige, or for political reasons. Where this is the case, it would not usually inspire resistance in terms of engaging with or enjoying the artwork, nor would it generally be seen as detracting from its artistic merits. On that basis, when Tanaka (1994) proposes that the advertiser is simply trying to sell something and so the communicative intention is covert, this could be said to be likening it to a conjurer using misdirection rather than a skilled artist working in a commercial field, but still producing something which has aesthetic value.

### **3.6 LOOSE TALK AND METAPHORS**

This subchapter describes the phenomenon of “*loose talk*” (Sperber & Wilson, 1995: pp. 233 - 237), and the associated concept of “*loose understanding*” (ibid), although it is notable that Wilson and Sperber (2012: p. 19) and Clark (2013: p. 205) appear to have replaced both terms with a single expression, “*loose use*”. A similar concept described by Lakoff (1975) concerned the meaning boundaries of individual words, and where the meaning had some degree of fuzziness or impreciseness. This phenomenon is known in legal arguments, such as where a resident on an open-plan housing development plants row of shrubs while his neighbour alleges it constitutes a hedge and therefore the resident in question should have sought permission before planting them. Laws designed to protect children must define terms such as “child” and “guardian”, otherwise the degree of fuzziness of meaning can lead to uncertainty. Fuzziness can occur in semantic phenomena such as colours, e.g. whether a particular shade is blue or green, or orange or brown, and so forth. This can be contrasted with examples in which word definitions are determined by virtue of specific semantic properties that

must be present for the word to be applicable, and an example of this might be the word “mare”, where the referent must be both equine and female to qualify as such. Sperber and Wilson (1995) point to the concept of prototypes in which:

*“the meaning of a word is determined not by a set of logical properties, but by a mental model of the thing the word is used to refer to<sup>37</sup>.”* (p. 91)

There are limits to the extent to which words can be stretched and that the degree of extension permissible is dependent upon the concept/s associated with it. The term “child”, for instance, could be applied to a 17-year-old, but it is hard to imagine it ever being said of a 30-year-old, other than figuratively. Concepts are psychological objects and are generally considered to be abstract rather than concrete phenomena, and Sperber and Wilson (1995) propose that these exist in three distinct types. The first of these is logical, meaning that which is deducible through the application of a set of logical rules. The second is encyclopaedic, which is information stored in the mind about the concept in terms of its origins and associations, and that gives rise to a set of assumptions. The distinctions between logical and encyclopaedic concepts are generally clear:

*“Encyclopaedic assumptions vary across speakers and times...Logical entries, by contrast, are small, finite and relatively constant across speakers and times “(p. 88)*

The last type of concept is the lexical entry that: *“contains information about the natural-language lexical item used to express it”* (p. 90). With regard to

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<sup>37</sup> A similarity may be noted here between this description of a prototype, and Saussure’s idea of a “signified” in that both are mental representations.

advertising, Tanaka (1994) considers that characteristics such as intelligence and individualism may be regarded as fuzzy or imprecise concepts, and she contrasts these notions, and the ways in which the meanings are extended, and offers examples from Japanese advertisements.

Metaphors have, according to Kirby (1997), been a subject of curiosity and examination since the time of Aristotle, and their purpose is to convey a thought through analogy. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) point out that metaphors are not merely devices to create poetic or rhetorical flourishes, but are pervasive in everyday life. They view metaphors as primarily mental phenomena, enabling language users to think in terms of abstract concepts by relating them to the physical world and create and to visualise models through which they can reason. The ability to create and interpret metaphors also makes it possible to relay even the most abstract thoughts to others with great precision and economy of words.

Myers (1994: pp. 122 – 134) describes the use of metaphor in advertising and begins by explaining what metaphors are, and how they carry risks that certain parallels could be recovered that were never intended. He maintains that metaphor is a type of figurative language and earlier studies of it were generally confined to poetry and rhetoric. More recently, however, there has been a greater awareness of the extent and use of metaphor in everyday conversations and texts, and Myers illustrates this with a paragraph in an advertisement published in a magazine aimed at the advertising industry itself and which is replete with metaphors. He further proposes that advertisements “*never really die*” (p. 125) and that they “*can bring the deadest of metaphors back to life in the right circumstances*” (ibid). He offers examples from the advertising world of metaphors, similes, synecdoche and metonymy, and explains the differences between these devices and how they are used within the genre. Similes are not, according to Myers (1994), often the preferred device in advertising as they do not impose a processing demand on the audience to make the desired connection, or else they are too hesitant in their claims. Citing the caption in an advertisement for Miller beer, *Miller: The Champagne of Bottled Beers* (as can be seen in Appendix 4: image 12), Myers invites the reader to consider what might

be regarded as a rather feeble alternative with a simile: *Miller beer is like champagne*. (p. 127). In this case, the metaphor operates not by likening the taste of the beer to champagne, but by implicating that *Miller* beer is to other beers what champagne is to other wines. An association which is probably less desired would be the relative cost of champagne compared to ordinary wines.

Myers (1994) suggests that one reason metonyms are useful in certain types of advertisements is that, whereas metaphors are foregrounded and require mental processing to recover the parallel between the target and source, metonyms, especially visual metonyms, are used in advertisements to portray such associations as being natural. The example he gives of this is an advertisement for a less expensive brand of whisky and it consists of a photograph of a ring mark made by a glass on a table napkin. He suggests there is a parallel between the concepts of *impression*, in terms both of the mark of the glass and that of personality, and points to the paradox that higher status consumers have nothing to prove: those who are successful “*need not project an image through consumer choices*” (p. 128).

Lakoff and Johnson (1980) categorize metaphors as being structural, orientational or ontological. Structural metaphors occur where “*one concept is metaphorically structured in terms of another*” (p. 14) as when argument is correlated with war: “*He shot down all my arguments*” (p. 4). Orientational metaphors orient abstract concepts with spatial position or direction. The notion, for example, that the happy emotion is “up” while unhappiness is “down” can be seen in expressions like “perked up” and “feeling low”. Ontological metaphors, on the other hand, provide a means of relating abstract experiences in terms of objects and substances, as in: “*Inflation is backing us into a corner*” (p. 26).

Grice views metaphors as constituting non-conformity to the truth maxim in that the proposition expressed by a speaker is not identical to his belief. The speaker instead relies upon the hearer to recognise the metaphor for what it is and then to recover the meaning from context. A weakness of this view is that it envisages the hearer recovering the one, specific and intended meaning where

there are likely to be other metaphorical meanings available; there may also be a literal meaning available, too. An example may be that of mother of a child telling the child's father: "*Thomas is getting too big for his boots*", which relate to the child's attitude, or that he is growing out of his footwear. Context may be evident to the hearer which resolves the uncertainty of interpretation, and that might consist of previous conversations about the child's clothing needs, or it may follow on from an incident in which the child exhibited insolence, but it is entirely possible that no such contextual elements are present at the time, or shortly before, the utterance is made. Applying Grice's approach, the mother would flout the quality maxim if she were using the expression metaphorically but, even if this premise is accepted, the cooperative principle appears to fall short in terms of satisfactorily accounting for the recovery of the intended meaning or the true intention of the speaker. Sperber and Wilson's (1995) principle of relevance, as described in Subchapters 3.3 and 3.5 above, may provide a more complete framework for establishing speaker meaning. For relevance theorists, metaphors are like loose use and hyperbole in as much as they provide other means by which optimal relevance is achieved and, as such, they do not stand apart from the non-metaphorical utterances around them. Levinson (1983) points to other problems with Grice's claim that metaphors constitute a flouting of the maxim of quality and that this is invariably the process by which the implicatures are calculated. A metaphor can be both literally true and metaphorical at the same time, offering the example of: "*Freud lived here*". (p. 157). This utterance can be taken to mean that Freud inhabited the place referred to by the pronoun, or else Freud's theories were kept alive after his death in that place, or both simultaneously. Another problem occurs where the metaphor is manifestly true, such as when it is used as a negation of a proposition, and Pilkington (2000) exemplifies this with: "*No man is an island*" (p. 86). The propositions metaphors express are obviously not identical to their literal meaning and some degree of inferencing may be needed in order to recognize the parallels and recover their intended meaning. This is especially the case where metaphors are original or poetic. Dead metaphors, i.e. those so firmly established by frequency of use, may be decoded in a similar way to the ordinary decoding of literal expressions. By virtue of their varied nature and

potential for uncertainty, and the fact that the exact contents of implicatures are not fully determined by the utterances in which they are present, they may be regarded as another type of loose talk, as discussed above. Sperber and Wilson (1995) describe how metaphors operate within a range, from the most standardised at one end to the more creative ones at the opposite end. They suggest the utterance "*this room is a pigsty*" (p. 236) exemplifies one which is standardised as it is recognised that a pigsty is the cultural stereotype of a place which is filthy and untidy and so provides the hearer with a strong implicature. However, as Pilkington (2000: p. 93) points out with a similar example, the utterance will activate in the hearer certain assumptions about pigsties that are stored as encyclopaedic entries, but not others. In the case of a bedroom, the general untidiness, perhaps with items of clothing strewn across the floor, would be implicated, even though one is unlikely to find such a situation in a real pigsty. Sperber and Wilson (1995) offer a more creative example with: "*Robert is a bulldozer*" (p. 236). This, they maintain, offers a wider range of possible contextual implications, although the favoured one is likely to relate to Robert's persistence, obstinacy, insensitivity and unwillingness to be deflected rather than that he is made of metal or that he moves large quantities of earth and rocks around. At the farthest end of the scale, they cite a remark made about the poet Leconte de Lisle by Gustave Flaubert: "*his ink is pale*" (p. 237). The weakness and wide range of the possible implicatures available from this utterance mean that the hearer must process his encyclopaedic knowledge in order to establish sufficient context to recover the intended meaning.

Metaphors offer a range of implicatures instead of just one, or a fixed set (Sperber & Wilson, 1995: pp. 230 - 231). The receiver is able to recover at least some of these implicatures and the first one accessed would not normally be the literal one because of the mutual awareness of the context by the interlocutors. Later relevance theory approaches suggest a slightly different explanation for the interpretation of both metaphorical expression and loose talk in the form of *ad hoc* concepts. These assume that any concept uttered is cognitively adjusted, perhaps involving a degree of narrowing or broadening, as it is accessed in context (Wilson & Sperber, 2012; Clark, 2013). This is illustrated with the

words such as “*princess*” and “*flat*” (Clark, 2013: pp. 250 – 251). “Princess” is used in its most literal sense, to communicate a female member of a royal family, and it comes with certain properties shared by princesses, such as that the person referred to is important and that others are expected to treat them with a degree of deference. However, depending upon the context in which the term is used, other properties may be implied, perhaps including one which suggests that the individual is spoiled or demanding, even though not all princesses may share these characteristics. As to whether or not these negative properties are inferred is dependent upon the hearer being “*guided by the relevance-guided comprehension heuristic and the mutual adjustment process with the most easily accessible implications derived first*” (Clark, 2013: p. 250).

The word “flat” is used by Wilson and Sperber (2012) to demonstrate *ad hoc* concepts with relation to loose talk. They invite the reader to consider the possible meanings that could be derived from the word “flat” by envisaging two fictional interlocutors, Peter and Mary, discussing a cycling trip. Peter states that he is feeling unfit and Mary replies: “*We could go to Holland. Holland is flat*” (pp. 72-74). Peter’s expectation of optimal relevance will cause him to initiate a process of backward inferencing, enriching the content to carry certain implications. He would recall his previous utterance was that he was feeling unfit, and he knows that cycling uphill is more strenuous and therefore less enjoyable. Consequently, the meaning of “flat” in the sense of cycling would be the most relevant, while other possible meanings for “flat” (such as the kind of flatness implied with “flat-screen TV”, or with “flat tyre”) are never activated and Mary’s intended meaning is readily understood (*ibid*).

In the case of conceptual metaphors, some degree of shared knowledge is assumed and essential for the intended interpretation to be recovered. For example, certain politicians have earned the nickname “*Teflon*” (Haq, 2015), which functions as a metaphor. To recognize the metaphor, the hearer must be equipped with the knowledge that the chief property of that material is that it can be used as a coating for cooking implements that enables them to avoid foodstuffs sticking to them and thereby making cleaning them far easier. In the case of politicians, it is not food residue that they are able to avoid “sticking” to

them, but rather they are able to escape adverse consequences from losing their position to damage to their reputation when they have made calamitous decisions or become embroiled in scandals. The use of a metaphor for a brand or product in this way could be said to be to the brand's advantage, as it embeds the notion of the property into the mind of consumers to such a degree that the concepts become inseparable. In this case, by virtue of the brand's name being applied to entities who have no obvious connection to cooking implements, a meaning arises which makes the association between the ultimate in non-stick qualities (of utensils and people) and the brand of *Teflon*<sup>™</sup>, appear entirely natural. This represents a serious challenge for the brand's competitors.

Metaphors are invaluable in marketing as they can make a point both effectively and succinctly, and are also memorable (Leech, 1966; Leiss *et al*, 1990; Myers, 1994; Cook, 2001; Aaker, 2010). An example of this can be found with the brand name of a toiletries company that specializes in shaving products and is called "*King of Shaves*". The use of the word "king" implies this firm is unsurpassed in terms of status, and may invite other associations, such as the fact that this is a traditional British company rather than one of its better-known American rivals. Scholars have noted the widespread use of metaphors in marketing and among them are Myers (1994), who cites the slogan of the *Boddington's* beer company as "*The Cream of Manchester*" (p. 122) and used in several advertisements which show a link between their beer and cream or ice-cream, an example of which can be seen in Appendix 4: image 13, and Cook (2001), who comments on the choice of name for the perfume *Opium* which, he claims, invokes connotations of "*the Orient, dreams, Romantic poetry and bohemian illegality*" (pp. 108-109).

Metaphors of the all the kinds described by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) can be found in advertising. Ontological metaphors are commonplace; these require more cognitive processing and a greater dependence on encyclopaedic knowledge. For instance, advertisements by a pork sausage manufacturer for the product *Peperami* have used the strapline "*a bit of an animal*" (Brierley, 2002: p. 185). This has the advantage of offering both a literal meaning and a metaphorical one. The former simply states the reality that the product is manufactured from animal flesh, although it is difficult to envisage a consumer

not realizing this was the case when buying a pork sausage. Consequently, the informative value in this regard is minimal and so the second, metaphorical meaning, is foregrounded. This second meaning only becomes apparent when the words are connected with the visual elements of the commercial that personalize the sausage as maniacal character. Brierley (2002) explains the metaphorical point of the advertisement as emphasizing: *“the meatiness of the brand, challenging the health-conscious vegetarian lobby and appealing to consumers who enjoy meat”* (p. 185).

Oriental metaphors occur in ordinary conversations and are so pervasive in language that they are often not recognized as metaphors. Nevertheless, Tanaka (1994) offers an example from the finance company, Save and Prosper: *“Regular savings build up to a big sum.”* (p. 91).

The value of nostalgia in advertising is well recognized and is readily observable in commercials for products like tea, certain other foodstuffs, and some products associated with cultural occasions like weddings and Christmas (Cartwright, *et al*, 2016). Often, this is invoked using imagery depicting former times, but Tanaka (1994) demonstrates how metaphors can be used for this purpose with an advertisement for a perfume called *“Trésor”*<sup>38</sup>. It bears the caption *“Le parfum des instants précieux”* (p. 100) (Appendix 4: image 14) which, she believes, is close enough to its English equivalent to be intelligible to what she regards as the typical British consumer who would also understand the meaning of the name of the product, i.e. “treasure”. Moreover, she suggests that this consumer might recover from the caption: *“...an association with Marcel Proust’s famous novel, ‘In Search of Lost Time’”* (ibid). Tanaka (1994) is perhaps overestimating the ability of her typical British consumer. While it is conceivable that such an English-speaking reader would recognize enough of the cognates to be able to translate and arrive at a meaning which approximates to “the perfume of precious moments”, the likelihood of them being familiar with (i.e. having installed in their encyclopaedic memory) the title of a novel which may be regarded as highbrow French classical literature seems small.

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<sup>38</sup> This is a perfume produced by Lancôme of Paris.

Relevance Theory has developed over three decades at the time of writing, with some concepts being refined and new concepts being proposed, such as explaining inferencing through modules (Wilson, 2004), and *ad hoc* concepts (Wilson & Sperber, 2012). While some scholars have applied the theory to other types of communication, such as newspaper headlines (Ifantidou, 2009), children's literature (Zhao & Jiang, 2013), television commercials (Martínez-Camino & Pérez-Saiz, 2012) and advertising generally (Tanaka 1994), its originators, Sperber and Wilson, appear to direct their interest almost exclusively to analyzing spoken interactions. Rather than purporting to be a general theory of communication, Relevance Theory is concerned with the use and interpretation of utterances and how a communicator "*modifies the physical environment of the other*" (Sperber & Wilson, 1995: p. 1) by their use of language. There is little in Relevance Theory which seeks to account for non-linguistic modes such as the construction of images, or understanding language use through culture or ideology.

### **3.7 AMBIGUITY, PUNS AND POLYSEMES**

Myers (1994) discusses the use of puns and how advertisers use homonymy and polysemy to generate them. He refers to an early example from a series of cigarette advertisements which were commonly situated outside newsagents from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century; one of these can be viewed in Appendix 4: image 15. It consisted of just two words, generally juxtaposed with various images and each depicting some aspect of British life. The words in question were "*Player's Please*" and, aside from the obvious alliterative quality of the expression, it is a pun which can be read as a statement of fact (*Player's* are pleasing) or a request from a customer to a shopkeeper ("I would like a packet of *Player's* please"). For some reason, Myers neglects to inform the reader that the strapline in these advertisements was normally accompanied by the images, and that these images provided additional context which enriched the meanings. As can be seen in

Appendix 4, one of these portrayed a bearded, Royal Navy rating in his uniform. This was shown possibly in order to invoke particular connotations in relation to the Britishness of the brand, having regard to the fact that the advertisement was first displayed around 1916, during the First World War, and around the time of the Battle of Jutland which resulted in the loss of many British sailors (BBC Nottingham). Other *Player's* advertisements bearing this caption showed people either competing in traditional sports, such as cricket or tennis, or engaging in other outdoor recreation, adding yet a further layer of possible meanings (Alamy, 2017).

Myers (1994) offers a similar example with the caption: *Sunlight is best* (p. 64), and this can be seen in Appendix 4: image 16. This is an advertisement for *Sunlight* soap from the 1890s that exploits the common strategy of advertisers in using the fact that a product name or brand often has a standard, common meaning too. Among his other examples is a caption on a poster displayed at railway stations for *Penguin* books: *Book at any station* (p. 65). The pun here amuses the reader by exploiting the polysemy of the word “book” whereby it can function as a verb relating to planning a railway journey, and also as a noun inviting the interpretation that the reader can buy a book at any station. He further describes an advertisement for the homeless charity, *Shelter*, which presents an image of a young woman with the caption: “*When Emma told us she’s been abused, we put her into a special home. Her own*” (p. 67). In this case, *Shelter* uses the different senses of the words “special” and “home” to generate two possible readings. Myers (1994) offers a rationale for this: “*the advertiser wants to make us reflect on our own reasons for our first response, as in many ads for charities*” (p. 67). This may be the case, but a more likely explanation is that the expression, in the context of the sentence, is intended to implicate that Emma was accommodated in some soulless institution and this is undesirable. However, this interpretation is immediately cancelled with the phrase which followed, “her own”, and the reader is thus encouraged to extend the meaning into “her own home”, which exploits the more positive connotations of both “special” and “home”.

Myers (1994) distinguishes ambiguity from vagueness, which is characterised by certain favoured advertising words such as 'quality' and 'style' and these are used for practical or cultural reasons, such as for 'feminine hygiene', where the precise function of the product is not stated explicitly. Advertisers tend to use comparative adjectives in a vague way and words such as 'smoother' and 'richer' are used to assign certain qualities, but without further explanation (ibid). It is not made clear precisely with what they are comparing their products, and it is left to the receiver to make whatever inferences seem to be natural. The words 'smoother' and 'richer', for instance, are likely to invite contrasts with other, unspecified, rival products. He proceeds to consider word associations as they arise from the culture, and the lexical choices advertisers make and describes how advertisers make use of associations which, although he does not say this specifically, draw upon what, from a Relevance Theory perspective, might be regarded as a reader's encyclopaedic knowledge. Among his examples of this is a caption from a holiday advertisement that applies an extended metaphor relating to clothing and suggests Spain as a destination: "*Tailor-made beaches with off-the-peg sunshine*" (Myers, 1994: p. 74). He cites a further example from a whisky advertisement: "*William dropped by, so we left the black and sunk the yellow*" (Grant's Scotch) (ibid). Myers (1994) states that he believes the advertisement's wording is "from snooker", and he argues that it forces the reader to identify the referents for *black* and *yellow*, which are treated as nouns rather than adjectives. In addition to the fact that these are the colours of two of the balls used in snooker, the verbs 'sunk' and 'left' would also be recognised by a player as snooker metalanguage describing actions within the game. These enable the metaphor to be extended when the possible alternative interpretation of 'sunk the yellow' could cancel the snooker interpretation and be understood to mean to have drunk the yellow liquid, namely Grant's whisky<sup>39</sup>. Myers states:

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<sup>39</sup> Myers (1994) offers no corresponding alternative referent for 'the black', although one possibility might be a rival brand of up-market blended whisky available at the time called *Johnnie Walker Black Label*.

*“It is not always clear that the advertiser wants all the associations that the register calls up: a scotch may want to be associated with the relaxation and skill of snooker, but there is no particular advantage to a resort being associated with clothes.” (ibid)*

Myers (1994) thus describes the advertisers’ parallels in terms of scotch and snooker, and between holidays and clothing, but he makes no attempt to explain why it is necessary or even advantageous to create such parallels. In other words, one might ask whether it would not be simpler, and require less processing effort on the part of the reader, to describe scotch in terms of scotch and holidays in terms of holidays.

While some see the advantages of puns in advertising, there are critics within literary studies who dismiss them as “*the lowest form of wit*” (Nobus, 2004: p. 195) while Hopkins (1917, from Redfern 1982) claims that neither humour nor frivolity have any place in advertising as customers would not buy from “*clowns*” (p. 269) Redfern himself rejects this, asserting that, while some advertisers may hold a low opinion of humour in general, the arguments for the usefulness of wordplay are stronger than the doubts expressed. Tanaka (1994) also rejects Hopkins’ (1917) view, pointing out that it is contradicted by, among many other examples, the ubiquitous and widely recognised clown figure in advertisements for the McDonald’s hamburger chain (Tanaka, 1994: p. 60).

Much human communication could be said to be potentially ambiguous and the ambiguity is resolved through context or rather, according to some observers, through the process of contextualization. Harris (2010), for example, asserts that contexts are not so much given as they are constructed by the participants within particular interactions and, as such, they are not able to be resolved unproblematically; they thus give rise to differences of interpretation. Where ambiguity facilitates a pun, it has first to be recognised that it is ambiguous and the available interpretations have to be mutually manifest if it is to succeed. The advertiser utilises devices such as homonymy and homophony (Cook, 2001), in order to capture attention in the knowledge that recognising and resolving the

ambiguities requires extra processing effort which, when successful, confers a small degree of self-satisfaction on the part of the receiver. This stimulates interest and is memorable, thus achieving a goal of the advertiser.

The operation of puns can be explained through Relevance Theory whereby a single utterance is open to multiple interpretations and the speaker intends the hearer to notice this possibility if the pun is to be successful. Tanaka (1994) considers puns used in advertising as existing within four categories, accepting that the boundaries between these may not always be entirely clear, and exemplifies them with instances of each. The first is the nonsensical pun, where the initial meaning makes no sense at first sight and within the context in which it appears and the reader must search for another interpretation, while the second type depends heavily on contextual effects. Put simply, this occurs where the rejected interpretation contributes to the intended interpretation and is dependent upon the reader's encyclopaedic knowledge for the alternative interpretation to be achieved. The third type of pun which Tanaka (1994) proposes contains sexual innuendo, although one might query why she believes this requires its own category and the only examples of this kind of pun she offers are Japanese ones which do not appear to be applicable to examples found within English advertising. Lastly, Tanaka (1994) proposes there are puns that have two communicated meanings, each with some direct relevance as a statement and there is therefore no reason to reject either. She cites an advertisement for *Mazda* cars from 1986 bearing the caption "*The perfect car for a long drive*" [p. 79]. The operative word in this case is "*drive*", where the copywriter has been able to exploit this polyseme in terms of meaning to drive a long distance, or having a long driveway. Myers (1994) supplies a similar polysemic pun with an advertisement caption for Boots cosmetics, "*Face the world*" (p. 65).

### 3.8 REASON/TICKLE AND HARD/SOFT SELL DISTINCTIONS

Simpson (2001) refers to the many approaches that have been used in previous studies of advertising and which have viewed the participants from the positions of idealised receivers, in the form of readers, viewers and listeners (RVLs) and this, he claims, isolates the receivers of advertisements from the processes which govern their production. As stated in the introductory chapter, advertisers employ a diverse range of methods in order to stimulate the interest and capture the attention of potential consumers. To be successful, however, they must possess some understanding of the interpretive strategies (cognitive processes) of receivers and have regard for these in their advertising design. A major interest of this study is to explore how advertisers approach this and to uncover how it influences and directs their working practices. Simpson (2001) provides a detailed analysis of certain advertising strategies based upon the binary of 'reason' and 'tickle' which Bernstein (1974) proposes. Cook (2001) makes a distinction between what he calls "*product ads*" (p. 15), which are those for commercially supplied goods and services, and "*non-product ads*" (ibid), which include those for charities and political parties. Similarly, he distinguishes them by technique, where he claims there is a well-established distinction between "*hard sell*" and "*soft sell*" (ibid); the former occurs where there is a direct appeal to buy while the latter operates through mood or alluding to desirable lifestyles (ibid).

Cook (2001: p. 15) also mentions the similar distinction of "*reason*" and "*tickle*", as defined by Bernstein (1974). According to Simpson (2001), the reason approach is designed to appeal to the logical mind of the receiver. It follows the direct route of informing them of the particular qualities of a product and by foregrounding the advantages of purchasing it and, as such, the advertisement is easy to comprehend. A common feature of reason is that it makes use of a limited and specific set of "*conjunctive adjuncts*" (p. 595 from Halliday, 1994: p. 36) which are recognised in systemic functional linguistics as expounding the

textual metafunction<sup>40</sup>. These expressions are used in presenting the advertisement as operating on a specific proposition, and often with an element of cause and effect, as in the below advertisement for a brand of painkiller: “*If pain strikes, then hit back with Solpadeine*” (ibid).

Tickle, on the other hand, is calculated to appeal to the RVL obliquely, and through emotion and imaginative inputs that therefore require more mental effort to process. An example of tickle cited by Simpson (2001) for Bushmills (Irish) whiskey has, curiously, a very similar grammatical and syntactic structure: “*If you want to drink whiskey, drink whiskey*” (p. 599). As can be seen, this is also a proposition with a conditional adjunct, yet operates through an expectation that the reader will seek further contextual information through exploring the other elements of the advertisement. In doing so, a further layer of meaning is revealed beyond simply telling the reader to do something they want to do. This involves the reader assigning a slightly different meaning to the second instance of the word “whiskey” by a process of inferencing. While the first iteration of “whiskey” relates to Irish whiskey generally, the second iteration is intended to denote specifically “Bushmills whiskey”, perhaps as a representative of “proper whiskey” or “good whiskey”. The author/s of this wording have used the repetition of “drink whiskey” as the rhetorical device known as “epizeuxis”, which occurs where a word or phrase is repeated two or more times in succession in order to generate a desired effect. Sperber and Wilson (1995) note that, while epizeuxis is used for emphasis, the precise effects generated by such repetition are not constant. An example they cite is: “*We went for a long, long walk*” (p. 219). They state that it could be assumed that the speaker, in accordance with the principle of relevance, wanted to emphasise that the walk mentioned was longer than might have been expressed had they simply

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<sup>40</sup> Halliday (1994, in Simpson, 2001) identifies four major types of conjunctive adjuncts, namely additive (adjuncts linked with *and, also*), adversative (adjuncts linked with *but, however*), conditional (linked by expressions such as *in the event if, otherwise*) and causal (such as *so, then, because*).

described it as “a long walk”<sup>41</sup>. However, this explanation does not satisfactorily account for the Bushmills example because the repetition is as much for its rhetorical quality as to create its own implicature. The choice of wording “*If you want to drink whiskey, drink whiskey*” operates through its grammatical structure, namely that the wording begins with a conditional subordinating clause in which the non-finite verb phrase, “(to) drink whiskey”, takes the same form as the verb phrase in the main clause, which is an imperative “drink whiskey”. The author is able to exploit the fact that, in English, the verb form in infinitives is identical to its form in imperatives<sup>42</sup> and facilitates the production of a parallel in which the deviation is structural rather than paradigmatic.

Simpson (2001) likens this process to the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes from Jakobson’s structuralist theory and which is described in the previous chapter. The syntagmatic axis, which Simpson refers to as the “*structural*” (p. 592) axis, represents discourse as a linear sequence or chain of units while the paradigmatic axis, which Simpson calls the “*strategic*” (ibid) axis, consists of the range of options available at each point along the syntagmatic axis. Both of these axes are interdependent, and also dependent upon context. Simpson assigns terms for the poles on the strategy axis as “*direct*” and “*oblique*” (ibid). He draws a parallel with Grice’s “*maximal efficiency*” (ibid) for the direct pole as it conforms to all four conversational maxims, while the oblique strategy involves flouting one or more of the maxims. Advertisements at the extreme end of directness thus make explicit reference to the goods and services they are marketing and consequently require minimal cognitive processing. Conversely, those at the extreme end of obliqueness require the addressee to extend the context so that they enable him or her to achieve the desired interpretation through the principle of relevance. Simpson (2001) also recognises, however,

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<sup>41</sup> An alternative, yet entirely plausible explanation for this use of epizeuxis could be suggested from a Peircean semiotic perspective, namely that it is iconic – the elongation of the phrase by virtue of repetition parallels the elongation of a “long walk” into a “long, long walk”.

<sup>42</sup> This is not the case in other Germanic languages. For example, in Danish and Swedish, languages very close to English, this would not work because the infinitive forms of the verb “drink” (*drikke* and *dricka*) are different from the imperatives (*drik* and *drick*).

that there is the potential for a kind of halfway house that displays “*conventionalised indirectness*” (p. 593). As a consequence, while some advertisements are designed to appeal predominantly either to reason or to tickle, they invariably contain at least some element of both, and this suggests a gradation, or cline, with reason at one extremity and tickle on the other, and in which any given advertisement could, in theory at least, be positioned.

The previous chapter surveyed the theoretical fields of semiotics, including the basis of linguistic structuralism as outlined by Saussure and the philosophical perspective of signs and their typology, as advocated by Peirce. Later theories of cultural semiotics as proposed by Barthes, Levi-Strauss and Eco, have also been discussed as well as the methods of analyzing texts through multimodal frameworks of Kress and van Leeuwen. This chapter has outlined the approaches suggested within pragmatics, including Grice's maxims, Relevance Theory, the role of deixis and pronouns, ambiguity, metaphor and puns. In addition to covering the substance of the original theories, the means and extent to which subsequent scholars have attempted to apply them to examples from the field of advertising have also been discussed. The thesis now proceeds to describe the methodology for author's primary research, which comprises a brief examination of the input advertising practitioners receive in their professional education in terms of semiotics and pragmatics and an overview of the texts used or referred to by students of advertising as well as by those already employed in the industry. This is followed by a summary of a series of interviews which were conducted for the purpose of establishing the creative processes and working practices involved in advertising design, and how these can be related to conscious and unconscious applications of semiotic and pragmatic principles.

## **CHAPTER 4 - METHODOLOGY**

### **4.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION**

As indicated by the thesis questions listed in the Introduction, this research has been designed to establish how advertisers construct relevant and appealing words and images and their combinations; the models of communication, meaning and understanding that appear to be implied by this discourse; how ambiguities, alternative interpretations, implicit meanings and the role of context in understanding are addressed (if at all) in these discourses; the specific terminology or conceptual frameworks used by practitioners and how these terminologies and frameworks can be related to semiotic and pragmatic theories. In order to discover the communicational principles and considerations which advertisers are guided by, and explicitly appeal to, in their daily practice, a number of advertising practitioners have been interviewed, as described in Subchapter 4.3 below. Accordingly, it was judged necessary first to obtain some indication as to what theoretical input practitioners may have received during their training and so some preliminary research was conducted to investigate this. The first element of the research relates to the teaching of semiotics and pragmatics in advertising courses offered at universities and by professional bodies. This had to be, as a matter of practicality and as is explained in Subchapter 4.2 below, an improvised and largely quantitative straw poll survey aimed at discovering whether these institutions incorporate aspects of semiotics or pragmatics in the education they provide and, if so, the titles of the texts used.

In relation to the main aspect of the research, namely interviews with practitioners, a number of alternative approaches were considered before undertaking this part of the research, in particular in relation to the question of whether the data elicited should be analysed through quantitative or qualitative methods. It was decided, in keeping with the nature of the primary research questions, that the latter would provide more insightful information from which

to answer the thesis questions and draw conclusions. A qualitative approach was viewed as better suited for achieving this for two reasons: a) because of the limited size of the sample, i.e., the small number of interviewees taking part, and the unsystematic procedure through which the sample was assembled, and b) the type of information to be sought, relating to their individual backgrounds, education and professional training and their personal daily work routines. This choice of methodology accords with Silverman's view, according to which : "*if you are concerned with exploring people's life histories or everyday behavior, then qualitative methods may be favoured*" (2013: p. 11). Another consideration in choosing a qualitative method was the intended focus on particular examples of advertising products with a view to understanding, from the point of view of the relevant qualitative analytical frameworks, how and perhaps why they were created by the professionals concerned. Silverman (2013) contends that exclusively quantitative research is inclined towards the use of rigid operational definitions and, as such, it risks losing sight of "*the way that social phenomena become what they are in particular contexts and sequences of actions*" (p. 97). The use of qualitative data, on the other hand, sheds light upon "*the normative, ideological, historical, linguistic and socioeconomic influences on the beliefs, objectives, expectations and talk of all participants*" (Yardley, 2000: p. 220). Accounting for these influences is essential if the creative processes of those designing advertisements are to be appropriately investigated.

#### **4.2 RESEARCH - ADVERTISING EDUCATION**

At the time this part of the research commenced, there were around 160 universities and higher educational establishments in the UK and a high proportion of them offering business and media-related courses and, in addition, numerous further education colleges were running a range of diverse courses that included aspects of advertising. To have undertaken a full survey of all establishments that provided advertising training plus all individual courses offered did not turn out to be feasible for this study whereas it was possible to

gain at least some impression of what is taught by selecting and contacting a sufficient number of them as a sample. This sample comprised universities, and also the professional bodies that also deliver training. It was appreciated that the preferences of individual teachers within institutions would likely vary, and so the source material for this aspect of the research was confined to course books, specifically those used by UK universities and professional bodies as part of courses for prospective or existing advertising practitioners, or those studying marketing with an advertising component, at Bachelor's or Master's level. Works with substantial linguistics content were considered of particular interest, but more general books were also referred to where they have been found to cover associated linguistic phenomena.

Thirty institutions<sup>43</sup> from among these were selected on the basis of criteria that aimed to ensure variation in terms of their location (England, Wales and Scotland) and status, e.g. Russell Group universities and former polytechnics. At least one course at Master's level was included. Universities were contacted first by telephone and tentative enquiries made, and then these were followed up with emails where applicable. The success of this limb of the research hinged upon the willingness of staff working in these establishments to cooperate and provide the information requested. In addition, the professional bodies for advertising professionals were contacted and invited to provide information as described where course books were used. This part of the research was predicated on an assumption that all or most of those working in this field would have pursued at least some formal training in advertising at educational establishments or through professional bodies. At this stage, it was by no means certain that this assumption was justified and that was something which became clearer as the research progressed.

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<sup>43</sup> See Appendix 1 for full list

### **4.3 RESEARCH – ADVERTISING PRACTICES**

As stated in the Introduction, most research conducted on the topic of advertising is focused upon examining advertisements that have been published or broadcast at some point in time, and researchers are left to speculate as to what was the purpose or intention of the designer when they were created. This thesis aims to remedy this by asking those who produce advertisements to describe their 'creative process', i.e. their cognitive processes and professional routines. As part of this investigation, it is also necessary to establish how they were formally trained, whether that training included a semiotics component, and the degree to which they currently and knowingly apply semiotic principles in their work. It is also the aim to determine the degree to which their cognitive processes as described by them align with explicit theoretical frameworks which are concerned with context, namely those which are to be found within pragmatics.

Initial contact with advertising agencies was made through a series of telephone calls to agencies listed in Internet telephone directories. Around 30 agencies in total were called, but it was not believed to be feasible in terms of the time and resources available to conduct that number of interviews even if sufficient volunteers had been willing to make themselves available to answer questions. In view of the in-depth and qualitative nature of the interviews to be conducted, it was judged that five interviewees would be sufficient for the purposes of this study. An effort was made to obtain some diversity of interviewees in terms of the size of agencies, and also the types of work that these agencies undertook. For practical reasons, all the agencies were located in the north of England, leaving open the question as to how representative this particular sample might be of wider professional practice and experience.

Interviews of the copywriters/creative directors were conducted face-to-face at the premises of their respective agencies. These were electronically recorded and with the aid of a pre-prepared questionnaire (see Appendix 2). The questionnaire was designed in accordance with principles of qualitative research, as described in Subchapter 4.1, and following the guidance outlined in

Silverman (2013). The interviews were designed to be semi-structured rather than structured, as described by Smith (2014) and, consequently, questions were selected and worded so that they followed closely the aims of the research as defined in the thesis questions, having regard to previous knowledge and research, and the data was limited accordingly. They were, nevertheless, constructed to be open-ended so far as possible and flexible enough to change direction if the data suggested it was necessary to adjust the focus, as recommended by Smith (2014). The structure of the questionnaire was such as to ensure consistency in terms of the sequence of the questions asked; with this in mind, it was divided into four parts, each of which has a specific function that relates directly to the aims of the research. The first part comprised five questions intended to probe the backgrounds, training and experience of the interviewees, their awareness of semiotic theories and which, if any, texts they had used to guide them in their job of designing advertisements for their clients. The second part focused on the creative processes themselves, how ideas arise, and whether practitioners viewed the promotion of brands differently from advertising specific products. The third part related to specific work they had undertaken in the past, or which they happened to be working on at the time of the interview and its purpose was to establish the day-to-day working practices of the interviewees, including converting their creative ideas into completed advertisements to be published, distributed or broadcasted. The last part of the questionnaire consisted of three questions designed to extract as much additional information as possible as to the application of techniques that could be linked to semiotic or pragmatic theories. It was hoped that this part would inform the study as to the degree and means by which their practices accorded with the theoretical approaches described in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 above.

#### **4.4 ADDITIONAL INTERVIEW**

It was known that a handful of highly specialised companies existed which had the specific purpose of using semiotic theories to assist major international

companies, and the prestigious advertising agencies that they commissioned to advertise for them, with brand creation, re-branding and aspects of other design factors including products, trademarks, packaging and logos. In the United Kingdom, these were all to be found in London at the time of writing. It was considered that it would be informative to conduct an additional interview with a specialist commercial semiotician to discover the potential that expertise in semiotics might be able to offer the wider advertising industry, and how methods that are predicated expressly on semiotic theories could be used to influence marketing strategies at the higher end of the commercial world.

An additional interview was therefore arranged and conducted with a specialist semiotician who worked exclusively in marketing. It was envisaged that this would be unlike those with copywriters and graphic artists as the subject would not be a creator of advertisements, but rather an advisor on strategic approaches related to brand creation and management. For that reason, the questions put to this subject were somewhat different from those asked of the other interviewees and consequently the questionnaire mentioned above was regarded as inappropriate for this interview. As this role is hugely specialized, with only a handful of practitioners nationally, it was decided to interview this subject on an *ad hoc* basis rather than basing it on pre-set questions. This made it possible to establish the precise nature of his job, the specific semiotic theories he applied and how he applied them in a real commercial environment. It also gave him maximum scope to elaborate where he believed he could share useful insights, to expand upon points as he wished, and for the interviewer to ask further probing questions as the interview progressed.

#### **4.5 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

All interviewees were contacted in advance by email. The purpose of the study was explained to them; they were asked if they would be willing to participate in this study and they replied by email that they were willing to do so. They are educated to graduate or post-graduate level; all are experienced professionals in

their field and none of the questions asked were of a sensitive nature. In order to extract the most comprehensive and accurate data, all participants were encouraged to speak freely and to use language as they saw fit, including esoteric and colloquial expressions. While the interviews were structured, with particular questions occurring at particular points in the dialogue, it was regarded as important that this did not constrain the speaker or inhibit the flow in the dialogue.

Two related aspects concerning confidentiality and privacy were considered and the first of these was anonymity. Prior to the process commencing, interviewees were assured that they would not be referred to by name, but rather they would be anonymized, i.e. referred to as Subjects A to F. It was a consideration that, in such a relaxed discussion, interviewees might reveal information about themselves or their agency that would make them identifiable to anyone who had sight of this thesis and was intent upon investigating them. This consideration was explained to each of them individually and their views and permission sought in respect of disclosing information that could indicate their respective identities and/or agencies. Prior to interviews taking place, they were informed that, while they would not be named as individuals, nor would their respective agencies be named, other information including direct and potentially identifiable quotations from their web pages may appear in this research and this might make it possible for them or their companies to be recognized or discovered by a determined individual. Their participation in the interviews was on the basis of that understanding and all acknowledged this in writing.

The interviews were conducted in accordance with Sheffield Hallam University Research Ethics Policy (6<sup>th</sup> Edition).

#### **4.6 INTERVIEWS - DATA HANDLING**

Interviews mentioned in Subchapters 4.4 and 4.5 above were recorded using a dictation device, stored electronically and retained for future reference. They were subsequently transcribed and the transcriptions are shown at the end of this thesis as Appendices. The results are summarized and analysed in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, and then the wider implications of the findings are discussed in Chapter 7.

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## **CHAPTER 5 – TEXTS USED IN ADVERTISING EDUCATION**

### **5.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION**

This chapter describes research conducted with the intention of securing background information with regard to the training given to advertising practitioners prior to conducting interviews with them. This is done in order to establish their awareness of semiotics and pragmatics that arises from their formal training and, from that, determine whether the theoretical approaches suggested within these disciplines are likely to be relevant to them. It initially provides an overview of the training available at the time of the research to those wishing to enter the occupations within the field of advertising; the opportunities in respect of that training which are delivered by institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom; published texts and course materials used in advertising and marketing courses and the possibilities for entering advertising without having first undertaken such training. It then examines a selection of the texts identified in the course of the research to establish content relevant to this study specifically in terms of semiotics and subjects related to linguistics, and how these are applied to advertising.

### **5.2 PROFESSIONAL BODIES**

The development of advertising as a business discipline in its own right came some time around the 1920s and this development was signaled by a number of publications, including Claude Hopkin's *Scientific Advertising* (referred to in Brierley, 2002: p. 25) and Harry Tipper's *The Principles of Advertising* (1923). In the UK, social trend has been observed since the 1990s towards "professionalizing" certain occupations, both to enhance their status and, more importantly, to raise standards to the benefit of the wider public and this often

involved the establishment of regulatory and/or professional bodies<sup>44</sup>. In some cases, these bodies would have responsibilities and even legal powers that included setting professional and ethical standards, disciplinary codes, determining or influencing training and the encouragement and monitoring of continuing professional development (CPD). Advertising did not escape this trend, although while the bodies established were concerned with working practices, ethics and training of practitioners, they had no statutory status.

The Institute for Practitioners in Advertising, known as the IPA was established in 1917, although its original purpose was to assist the government in designing recruitment and propaganda materials (IPA, 2014). Since then, its purpose had changed and its website described the organization as “*the professional body for advertising, media and marketing communications agencies in the United Kingdom*” (ibid). Like many similar organisations, the IPA was found to offer various training opportunities, accreditation for both agencies and individuals, and a continuing professional development programme. The IPA's stated its pinnacle qualification as its Excellence Diploma, described as being:

*“designed to cater for people with 3-5 years of experience in the advertising industry and who want to develop a broader perspective on how brands work and create value for clients”*  
(ibid).

In addition to the IPA, an organization with even older antecedents was found to exist, namely the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers (known simply as “ISBA”). This organization was established in 1920, but derived from an earlier one, the Advertisers’ Protection Society, that was founded two decades earlier (IBSA, 2017). Its website claimed the ISBA worked for the interests of

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<sup>44</sup> This has included adult education (Brown, et al 2002), nursing (O'Connor, et al 2003), the Civil Service (Rutter, 2017) and policing (Bampton, 2017).

advertisers generally and, unlike the IPA, it did not restrict its membership to agencies. Like the IPA, it offered training in the form of courses and workshops, and also accredited training that was recognized as part of CPD and by the professional body, the Chartered Institute of Marketing (ibid). For these reasons, both the IPA and ISBA were originally considered potential sources of information for the research described in this thesis. However, both organisations were contacted by the author and stated that there no semiotic or pragmatic content were included in any of their training materials and they were unwilling to share any of these for the purposes of this research.

At the time of writing, no single procedure was laid down for those who had chosen to pursue a career in advertising and they were able to access the field in a number of ways. Ogilvy (1983: p. 31) suggests four points of entry into the industry and the first of these is to join an organization which is indirectly involved in advertising, namely journalism, retail or manufacturing, and the last being to join an advertising agency. While Ogilvy is speaking from a 1980s American perspective, the current position in the UK was found to be similar, especially with regard to his fourth point of entry. The IPA website mentioned the possibilities of taking up a “*modern apprenticeship*” (IPA: 2014) in advertising with an agency as a school leaver, but it acknowledged that a more usual way into the field was entering as an undergraduate or recent graduate on an agency’s graduate entry scheme.

### **5.3 UNIVERSITIES**

Many UK universities were found to offer undergraduate courses in advertising or marketing as a possible route into the industry while aspects of advertising was sometimes covered in courses in Business Studies, Media Studies or Communication Studies. In the case of the University of Birmingham, advertising was incorporated into a module forming part of a business studies degree at Bachelor level. Other universities, such as University of the Arts, London, Edge

Hill University, University of Chester and Aberystwyth University, offered Bachelor level degrees specifically in advertising, while many, including Lancaster University, combined advertising with marketing. Leeds University (School of Design), Hull University and Southampton University provided specific advertising courses at Master's level. In addition, many colleges of further education ran courses in media, business studies and marketing, up to and including degree level courses and in which advertising had featured. The qualifications obtained would facilitate access to students wishing to pursue careers in advertising, or to other aspects of marketing.

In spite of contacting 30 universities in Scotland, England and Wales which stated on their university websites that they offered courses in advertising and/or marketing, it was disappointing that only a handful were willing to assist with this research. Frequently, calls were made with unfulfilled promises to call back, and emails were sent to lecturers and directors of studies who simply did not respond. Several universities, including Brunel University, did reply, but reported that no aspect of communication theory (such as semiotics), or topics related to linguistics (such as pragmatics) was taught as part of their advertising or marketing courses and no books were used that would be relevant to this study. In other cases, course books were mentioned but which it was discovered, on examination, made just a cursory mention of semiotics. While the subject of context in advertising was broached, and could be found in the books' respective indices, it was invariably mentioned in a general sense and without reference to any theory, pragmatic or otherwise. Similarly, concepts familiar to semioticians and linguists, such as the use of metaphors in advertising, were referred to, although such mentions tended to occur without being defined, or else they were explained loosely or superficially and thus not in precise semiotic or linguistic terms.

One text that was used at a number of UK universities was a book called *Persuasive Signs: The Semiotics of Advertising* (2002) and was listed as a course book for students at Bachelor level students of advertising and/or marketing at the universities of Aberystwyth, Chester and Leeds. While advertising is the primary focus of this book, it deals with more general cultural/social issues that

relate to semiotics and marketing, such as why women wear high heel shoes, as discussed in the next subchapter. It is also concerned with aspects of the marketing process which precedes the design of specific advertisements, namely branding, selecting and designing brand marks, product naming and aspects of product design, and how these are informed by semiotic approaches. This book is a rare example of one which was co-authored by writers from two apparently divergent disciplines, namely a professional marketer, Ron Beasley,<sup>45</sup> and an academic anthropologist with a known interest in semiotics, Marcel Danesi<sup>46</sup>. The authors indicate that the work does not intend to conduct detailed analyses of particular advertisements, as many books on this subject do, nor does the book aim to be an instruction manual for copywriters. They state:

*“the point of this textbook is simply to put on display the techniques of semiotic analysis, not to provide a series of critical interpretations of ads and commercials.”* (p. 31)

This book comprises just four chapters and begins with a general overview of advertising, its history and its entrenchment in social discourse. It moves on to providing a summary of semiotic theories and principles including signification and the cultural aspects of semiotics, and it briefly outlines the role semiotics plays in modern advertising approaches. The second chapter, entitled *“Creating recognizability for the product”*, instructs readers how to use insights from semiotics, such as signification systems, iconicity and myths, in designing advertisements. The third chapter, titled *“Creating textuality”*, discusses techniques in copywriting using semiotic concepts. The final chapter,

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<sup>45</sup> Ron Beasley is, at the time of writing, the President of ABM, a market research company which conducts qualitative research in key global markets to provide direction for the custodians of global brands when they are developing marketing and communications strategies. Their major clients are companies like AB-InBev (producers of Stella Artois, Budweiser, Corona), Burger King, Brasil Foods, PepsiCo, Kellogg's and Unilever. (Pers. 2014)

<sup>46</sup> Marcel Danesi is professor of anthropology at the University of Toronto. He is best known for his work in semiotics and youth culture (University of Toronto web page, n.d).

*“Advertising and culture”*, outlines more a sophisticated view of signification systems, and moves on to proposing the implications of using semiotic advertising methods in the industry, for promoting consumerism and considers advertising as an art form. Beasley and Danesi (2002) do not offer any comment regarding how effective any particular advertisements are in persuading viewers to purchase the products they are promoting.

Inquiries with those universities where there was agreement to cooperate with this study revealed that, while semiotics was sometimes included in the syllabi for advertising and marketing courses, linguistics-related subjects did not feature in any respect. When asked about pragmatics, it became clear that there was a complete lack of awareness among teachers and course administrators of what this subject was about or what it encompassed. None of the textbooks or course materials examined were found to make any reference to pragmatics and the term is not mentioned in their indices. The remainder of this chapter therefore comprises a summary of the content of the books mentioned by universities where they explain semiotic principles, or where they make reference to linguistic phenomena (such as metaphors). This is in order to identify any theoretical frameworks relevant to this study with which advertising practitioners may have been familiar, having been introduced to them during their training.

#### **5.4 SIGNIFICATION**

Beasley and Danesi (2002) consider the use of signifiers by advertisers, although not in specific advertisements. They refer to the name chosen for a range of cars produced by the Japanese manufacturers, Honda. These vehicles were marketed under the brand *Acura* and this name, they assert, combines an array of associations, or signifieds, namely:

- Accuracy: the link is, they claim, self-evident
- Japanese technology: the common view that Japan is at the cutting edge of technology
- Italian language: regarded as attractive and thus the language of love, poetry and song, but also art, romance and style
- Femininity: the *-a* suffix indicates feminine in Italian grammar

Consequently, a signification system is generated by the name *Acura* which presents the car in question as one which is manufactured with Japanese technology, and is therefore accurate, yet it is also Italian and therefore melodious, beautiful, poetic, artistic and romantic. It is not possible to establish whether all of the associations included in Beasley and Danesi's list were in the mind of the individuals who devised and approved this name at the time. Certainly, the phonetic similarity between the name *Acura* and the adjective *accuracy* is undeniable and the probability of a link is strong; there is room for doubt that all of the other claimed signifieds were intended, or would be universally identified. In particular, the claim: "*the signifier has been constructed at the same time to be imitative of the structure of an Italian word*" (p. 23) appears to be intuitive and, as such, is less convincing. It should be noted that this is a Japanese product, and both Japanese and Italian nouns can end in the *-a* phoneme with brands like *Honda*, *Nomura* and *Yamaha*, but it is only in the Romance languages, such as Italian, that it functions morphologically to denote the feminine. This raises questions as to both the degree to which this would be known by potential readers, and whether this was intended in the advertisement's design. Beasley and Danesi (2002) appear to assume that the sensory representation of the name *Acura* automatically results in certain connotations being transmitted, regardless of any cultural knowledge.

Another example they mention in relation to the generation of systems of signification is that of advertisements for high heel shoes, which they claim occur almost weekly in thousands of magazines across the world. They point

out that the original purpose of shoes would have been to protect the feet even when walking on difficult terrain. On that basis, shoes ought to be viewed as functional and so comfort and protection would be the chief considerations when selecting them. In spite of them being both uncomfortable and potentially hazardous, high-heel shoes have become hugely popular among women<sup>47</sup>. The authors attribute this phenomenon, and the success of such advertisements, to the underlying signification system in which certain types of garb are associated with sexuality. High-heel shoes are, according to Beasley and Danesi (2002), fetishes and they claim that a fetish is a sign that evokes devotion to itself (p. 30). They suggest that putting on high-heel shoes is associated with putting on stockings and that the act of doing this is itself erotic, so they appear to be implying that the “signified” of high-heel shoes is sexual potency.

This is unconvincing for a number of reasons. First, the claim that advertisements for high-heel shoes are prevalent does not appear to be true<sup>48</sup>. A perusal through a handful of popular women’s magazines undertaken by the writer of this thesis uncovered zero examples of advertisements specifically for high-heel shoes. This perception is confirmed by the advertising executive for the popular women’s journal *Marie Claire*, Angela Rawstorne, who states that, while some brand marketing may occur for top end advertising, such as Jimmy Choo and Manolo Blahnik, or general advertising for shoe manufacturers and retailers such as Clark’s and Russell and Bromley, it would be unusual to make an advertisement specifically for high-heel shoes (Rawstorne, pers. 2014). Secondly, while it may be commonplace for women depicted in eroticized contexts to be wearing certain styles of shoes with very high heels, it could be disputed that the correlation between these and eroticism is straightforward or inevitable. It is

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<sup>47</sup> This applies to modern times in western cultures. High-heel shoes have been worn by both sexes in previous centuries and in other cultures.

<sup>48</sup> It appears to be untrue at the time and location of writing. It has to be remembered that Beasley and Danesi’s (2002) book was published twelve years before this thesis – and in a different country (Canada).

taken for granted in western cultures that there is an association between eroticism and high heels and research exists that suggests this relates to sexual dimorphism and perceptions of desired feminine traits (Wouters, 2010; Clark, *et al.* 2012). One of the traits considered is small feet or, at least, the impression of small feet that wearing high heels can convey (Fessler *et al.*, 2005). Other commentators (e.g. Morris *et al.*, 2012; Young, 2013; Guéguen, 2015) report that through emphasizing such traits as small feet and an altered gait, high heels are associated with attractiveness. While it may be argued that a link exists between eroticization and attractiveness, they are far from being entirely equivalent. Reasons even more remote from eroticization may also exist for wearing high heels, such as being required to conform to a certain standard of formality (Wendt, 1996) or to show conformity to current fashions (Parmentier, 2016). If this is the case, then the reasons for wearing high heels are more complex than proposed by the claim that they are nothing more than signifiers of sexual potency. It could therefore be advantageous for advertisers to realize that eroticism may not be the only, or even foremost, consideration in a woman's mind when choosing her footwear.

Advertisements designed to engender connotations such as eroticism in the minds of consumers are amenable to semiotic analysis as associated signifiers, signifieds and signification systems are readily identifiable. However, neglecting the contextual dimension is likely to produce at best an incomplete and, at worst, a wholly incorrect, analysis. This is because the analyst may not be able to avoid projecting his or her own cultural knowledge upon the elements individually and in combination, as might well have happened in this instance. It also highlights the possibility of a disconnect between the producer of an advertisement and the receiver, as the intention behind the signs may be something other than what is perceived. Advertisers have to operate within narrow confines in terms both of the physical space available to them in the advertisement (e.g. the page or the billboard) and the expected attention that a viewer is likely to afford them. That means they inevitably underdetermine the signifiers and hope

that a reader still recovers all the denotative (information) input, plus much of the connotative (persuasion) input, and therefore it will still be effective. Any advertisement that is not understood, or that does not prompt closer attention, would have missed its opportunity to fulfill its purpose.

### **5.5 DENOTATION, CONNOTATION AND MYTHS**

Beasley and Danesi (2002) consider choices of brand names and show how they are constructed to generate specific signification system types. They claim that ones which are founded on established manufacturer or company names are able to capitalize on certain qualities such as tradition, reliability or sophistication and cite as examples *Armani* and *Gillette* (pp. 53 - 54). Other names may appertain to a fictitious personality, e.g. the Ronald McDonald clown character; some to a geographical location or area, e.g. *Southern Bell*; some to nature, e.g. *Surf*, or an activity in the natural environment, e.g. *Ford Explorer*; some are hyperbolic, e.g. *SuperFresh*; some are blend words, e.g. *Fruitopia*; many are designed to say what the product can do or can be accomplished by it, e.g. *Easy Wipe* and *Air Fresh* (ibid). While these names have largely denotative meanings, i.e. by denoting the products to which they refer at a practical and informational level, generating connotative meanings is a conscious brand strategy, as with words that are associated with nature or a fictitious personality and thus, according to Beasley and Danesi (2002):

*“It creates a semiotically-powerful signification system for it that can be used or reused for various advertising purposes.”* (p. 56).

Aaker (2010) supplies an early example of using fictitious characters for branding with an example of the *Kodak* camera. This US company had developed

cameras aimed for the first time at amateurs with little knowledge of the science of photography and which, in 1888, bore the caption “*You press the button, we do the rest*” (p. 4) and a similar example can be seen in Appendix 4: image 17, below. It went on to introduce two characters, the Brownie boy and the Kodak girl, and they showed scenes especially of families, children, dogs and friends. The clear intention here was to generate signs to remind those who see them that, thanks to Kodak’s simple camera system, even a child could operate, important and memorable moments could be captured for posterity. The use here of characters associated with a brand is commonplace in brand building. Aaker (2010) mentions the Pillsbury Doughboy and consumers are also likely to be familiar with fictitious, yet likable, characters who are used in branding such as the Michelin man (used to advertise *Michelin* tyres) or even real personalities, especially those who are regarded as the founders of organisations, such as the late Colonel Harland Davis Sanders (*Kentucky Fried Chicken*) and Steve Jobs (*Apple Corporation*).

Connotation through brand character also relates to designer and aspirational products. *Gucci* and *Ferrari* are, in terms of their denotation, simply brand names, but this is extended through connotation to the kinds of people who readers may associate with them and their impressions of the lifestyles they enjoy. Such connotations are not invoked by nameless brands: a high quality handbag might be available from a supermarket as an own brand name, but it will not invoke the same connotations as one bearing the *Hermes* label, regardless of its style and quality. Myths are largely created with the aid of signification systems and Beasley and Danesi (2002: p. 59) consider the signifiers for *Gucci* high-heel shoes. The denotation is, they state, that the brand name allows readers to identify the product for shopping purposes. This is extended into what they refer to as “*extensional connotation*” (p. 59) and, in the case of *Gucci*’s shoes, this means the brand name allows the reader to feel she is buying a “*work of shoe art*” (ibid). Lastly, they offer a further extension which they call the “*social connotation*” (ibid) and this would be erotic perceptions invoked by the high-heel shoes.

Beasley and Danesi (2002) discuss text and textuality in advertising. They remind the reader that the word “text” in semiotic theory refers to the putting together of signifiers in order to produce a message and they describe textuality in advertisements as being the modes by which they are made on the basis of the signification systems that have been generated for them by the advertiser. Textuality is altered and renewed in advertisements in order to perpetuate neomania, i.e. the cravings for new products (see Subchapter 2.6). Generating this depends not just upon adding or changing product features, but also on the constant updating of the signifiers. It can be reinforced by friendly or humorous slogans and jingles, as in the one for *Alka Seltzer*. “*Plop plop, fizz, fizz*”, the choice of music (in TV and radio commercials) and the creation of characters, such as Ronald McDonald (*McDonald’s*). Apart from neomania, using these features over a period of time can be helpful in securing brand loyalty by constructing a stable product personality (Aaker, 2010). The implication is that, for advertising to be successful, copywriters must work on public perceptions, constantly renewing public awareness and promoting loyalty by changing the signifiers that refer to the same signifieds so that they are seen afresh. While not mentioned by Beasley and Danesi (2002), this concept is reminiscent of a notion within literary theory, namely “*automatization*”, as mentioned in Subchapter 2.5 above, and this is explained by Crawford (1994) in his critique of Shklovsky’s theory of defamiliarization:

*“Perception is the center of aesthetic experience, and perception can only be established by effecting a (textual) difference: to break down the indifferent recognition of automatization.” (p. 210)*

With the exception of classified ads and certain specialized or trade advertisements, it could be assumed that those looking at advertisements in magazines are mostly, and at least to some degree, open to aesthetic experiences as they would be with literature. This can also account for the

use of artistic (imagery and graphological) and literary devices in advertising texts.

## 5.6 INTERTEXTUALITY AND CONNOTATIVE CHAINS

A subtext that exists within a text is a meaning which is encoded through connotations which the producer intends the receiver to recover: where the only intended meaning is the literal one, there is no subtext. As mentioned, almost all advertisements, with the possible exception of classified advertisements, aim to be stimulating to some degree and rhetorical devices including puns, ambiguity and metaphor, are tools copywriters can employ. Beasley and Danesi (2002) exemplify this with a *Budweiser* beer advertisement showing two young men who are:

*“Hanging out together, performing bizarre male bonding rituals and generally expressing culturally based notions of male sexuality. The subtext in these ads is: You’re one of the guys, bud” (p 70)*

Intercodality occurs where a subtext is created by combining several codes in tandem. This notion is illustrated by Beasley and Danesi (2002: pp 70-73) by way of an advertisement in which the text is encoded in three segments; these are the product name, which has been carefully selected to generate desired connotations, the art code, which includes logos and trademarks, and the music code, which would include the composition of jingles. The maker and interpreter of an advertisement must have access to the same codes if it is to be successfully decoded (interpreted). Beasley and Danesi (2002) continue with a detailed description of an advertisement for *Iron* cologne, which appeared in *Cosmopolitan* magazine during the 1990s. In this advertisement, a man is

depicted in a passionate embrace of a woman and this image is accompanied by another showing the bottle spraying some of its contents. Alongside sits the capitalized text “PUMP SOME IRON”. They claim that, “*at the denotative level*” (p. 72), the message appears to be urging the reader to enjoy an energetic and satisfying sex life through “*pumping iron*”, and by either using the cologne or buying it for a male partner. From the elements present in the advertisement, they draw a series of inferences which point to sexual connotations, including suggesting that the spray functions as a metaphor for ejaculation and the reference to pumping iron insinuates masturbation (p. 73).

A possible criticism which may be leveled at Beasley and Danesi (2002), and others who attempt to account for the reasoning processes advertisers, is that they consist of assumptions derived from their analysis of the advertisements and the elements from which they are composed. These assumptions relate to meanings beyond those which are present at the surface level. The subtexts suggested by Beasley and Danesi (2002) for both the *Budweiser* and the *Iron* cologne advertisements may or may not reflect the intentions of the advertiser and the interpretation of the receiver. This cannot reasonably be established and it is not within the aims of this thesis to attempt to do so. It can, however, be proposed that it is entirely possible that these authors have over-interpreted their texts, that they have misidentified metaphors and recovered layers of meaning that were never intended. From the point of view of the receiver, no attempt is made to explain the process by which (a) the message of solidarity in the *Budweiser* advertisement and (b) the supposed additional sexual meanings in the *Iron* cologne advertisement, which are claimed to be subtexts, are actually recovered, or the role played by any pre-existing knowledge in achieving the intended understanding.

While intertextuality is a topic referred to by many authors of advertising texts, its presence in advertising is described in the context of theory rather than taught as a technique. Beasley and Danesi (2002) relate how this is used in a couple of advertisements and the first of these is for a sparkling wine called *Marilyn Peach*. This, they claim, has an obvious subtext relating to the Biblical notion of temptation, with signifiers present including a background which

includes a Garden of Eden scene, Eve tempting Adam and a serpent in the form of a bracelet. The second describes a TV advertisement for *Miller* beer in which a young man in a bar sees a young woman who may be considered attractive and heads for her, blocking a possible rival in the process. There is a voice-over during this commercial which provides commentary on the action in the style of an American football announcer and ending with the message “*Love is a game*” appearing on the screen. The viewer is thus invited to draw the parallels and recognize the intertext between winning a sexual contest and winning in sport; this applies not just in terms of the real world, i.e. the behaviours such as moving and blocking, but also linguistically, as sports metaphors can be used in sexual contexts, as in “making a play” and “scoring”. In addition to this, there is a further intertext between the love and sport themes, and the genre of television sports commentary (ibid).

Connotation and subtexts are further discussed by Beasley and Danesi (2002) in an attempt to explain how advertisements are able to tap into what is called the “*buying motive*” (p. 96). They distinguish between the surface level of advertising texts, namely the techniques such as characters and jingles, and the underlying subtext in which the signification system is structured around connotative signifieds. Thereafter, they attempt to demonstrate the role played by textuality through decoding a selected advertisement, identifying its connotative structure of subtexts and examining the verbal and nonverbal elements used in constructing these subtexts. The advertisement analysed illustrated the use of a range of techniques including its layout and design, and the use of ambiguity. It was a printed advertisement which was dominated by an image of a group of young men in black, yet casual, attire with open collars, and was for a cologne by *Versace* called *Versus*. In the analysis, the authors highlight ranges of connotations achieved through signification and among these is opposition. The name of the cologne, *Versus*, which crosses over the entire advertisement, implies this opposition. It is speculated by Beasley and Danesi (2002) that, as the young men are able to afford fashionable clothing and an exclusive brand of cologne, they are likely to be affluent. As such, the men depicted probably wear business suits during the day, but they cross over into a

mysterious and somewhat darker realm in their leisure time, signaled by their sartorial choices and a dash of *Versus*, and are able to access an underworld of carnal pleasures. Beasley and Danesi (2002: p. 99) propose further, yet hidden, signifiers and signifieds associated with the advertisement should be considered, including the prevalence of the letter “V” and its shape. Aside from the words *Versus* and *Versace* both beginning with this letter, the shape of it is also evident in other elements, such as the open-necked shirts of the models. It has the possibility of connoting a fissure or cleft that conjures a mental relation to female sexual anatomy, and reminding the reader that the word “vagina” also begins with a “v”. On the other hand, they suggest the presence of male models only, one model wearing a black leather hat and another a black leather jacket, may be understood to imply homoerotic gratification, especially if the viewer recalls that the late Gianni Versace was a declared homosexual. A number of allusions are made to the Ancient Greek god of wine and carnal pleasures, Dionysus, and parallels are drawn between the carefree and shameless lifestyle of the imagined characters as portrayed by the models, and this mythical deity (ibid). The authors intimate that perfume and cologne bottles are most often designed to be little artistic tokens, sometimes even sculptured and with meanings embedded that suggest the personality the manufacturer intends for the product, and that this facilitates these meanings being textualised in their advertising. A more recent example of this phenomenon can be seen with the male and female body shapes used in perfume bottles by Jean Paul Gaultier. For perfume and other products, the distinctive design of bottles and other kinds of packaging may be a central feature of the signification system the manufacturer has devised. Beasley and Danesi (2002: p. 100) refer to the classic bottle shapes of *Coca-Cola* and *Chanel*, while British readers may be equally familiar with those of *HP Sauce*, *Marmite* and *Dimple* whisky. They go on to claim that the multiplicity of possible interpretations of advertisements, e.g. the ambiguity of the *Versus* advertisement and its potential to be read from a heterosexual or homosexual perspective, imparts “a high connotative index to the product’s textuality” (p. 102) and thus the opportunity to repeatedly use the same signifiers in future advertisements and achieve the same effects. They claim:

*“The more interpretations there are, the more the more the product can be shielded from having its signification system ‘unmasked’. Because the various connotative meanings generated by the subtext are interconnected to the other networks of meanings that are present in a culture, the ad’s signification system is, ipso facto, intertextual, linking its viewer to this network...” (ibid)*

This assertion in respect of the *Versus* advertisement is less than compelling for reasons that are explained. Allen points out that modern theorists regard the act of reading as plunging the reader into a network of textual relations. The interpretation of a text thus involves tracing those relations and moving between texts (Allen, 2000: p. 1). Fairclough (1992) draws a distinction between manifest and constitutive intertextuality. Manifest intertextuality refers to that which is often signified by quotation marks, and can take forms such as parody and negation. Constitutive intertextuality, on the other hand, is a far broader concept which: “refers to the complex relation of genres or discourse types’ conventions” and is “the configuration of discourse types when the text produced” (p. 85). Clearly, the former does not apply in the *Versus* example as no direct or indirect quotations or even allusions are made. The claim for constitutive intertextuality is also tenuous. Beasley and Danesi (2002) assume the existence of a dialogue between this text, the advertisement, and other texts yet they are obviously unable to specify which texts they are as they vary from reader to reader<sup>49</sup>.

The *Versus* advertisement is re-examined by Beasley and Danesi (2002) from the aspect of connotation and suggested cognitive processes. These processes, which consist of similarity, difference, contiguity, intensity and association, are

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<sup>49</sup> From a pragmatic perspective, the range of interpretations available due to the 'indirectness' used in such advertising provides the possibility of deniability, especially where innuendo is present (Tanaka, 1994).

said to work in tandem in order to generate cognitive chains as the human mind is disposed to link meanings together according to its own culture-specific logic. The first chain suggested is explicated as follows:

*“V-shape = femininity = sexuality = forbidden pleasures = sado-Masochistic eroticism = etc”* (p. 104).

The Dionysus allusion, which is supposedly present in the subtext of the *Versus* advertisement, is mentioned again as part of the connotative process in that *Versus* is a means to fulfill Dionysian urges (ibid). Beasley and Danesi (2002) supplement this by describing a number of other advertisements that they have found in popular lifestyle magazines in the late 1990s. These include themes and images relating to:

- The story of Narcissus (*Dooney and Burke*, manufacturer of bags and fashion accessories)
- The presence of a satyr, of which the authors claim “in Greek mythology was a minor woodland deity, attendant on Bacchus”<sup>50</sup> (*Remy Martin* cognac).
- Hermes, son of the Roman god, Zeus, and who was reputedly heroic, cunning and “an embodiment of extreme mobility” (ibid). (*FTD Florist*)
- Aphrodite, Greek goddess of love and beauty (*Givenchy*)
- Apollo, the Greek god of music and poetry, and Daphne, the nymph with whom Apollo was infatuated (*Genny Boutique*)
- The Greek goddess Gaia, who was the personification of the earth (*Prada*) (pp. 105-107)

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<sup>50</sup> This may be an error by the authors. Bacchus was, in fact, a god of the Ancient Romans, although he was equated with Dionysus. Satyrs were a feature of Greek mythology.

Beasley and Danesi (2002) claim the power of the artworks which provide the narratives for these advertisements is to be found through “*evoking the connotative chains that myths invariably generate*” (p. 107).

The choice of the word “invariably” by Beasley and Danesi (2002) is optimistic. Evoking the desired connotative chains must surely depend upon the existence of the necessary encyclopaedic knowledge in the mind of the reader: without such knowledge, the allusions are wasted and any connotative chain is broken. This might not be an issue for a reader who has benefitted from a classical education, but whether characters such as Dionysus, Daphne or Gaia, and the legends associated with them, would be recognized by a typical reader, or as Eco (1979) refers to such an individual, a “*model reader*” (see Subchapter 2.9, above), if such an entity exists, is a moot point. The possibilities for the ranges of meanings offered, along with intentional ambivalences, by intertextuality and connotative chains can, in theory at least, be exploited by producers of texts who are able to design them so as to offer different interpretations to different readers. They are, however, reliant upon assumed pre-existing knowledge, including knowledge of other texts. With a genre such as advertising, where there are very specific and practical goals in terms of changing reader behaviour, it is surely dangerous for analysts to make such assumptions about readers, let alone present these to students as anything other than conjecture. Beasley and Danesi (2002) may have been entirely correct when they identified the intended subtexts and multiple meanings available, and their mapping of the connotative chains in the *Versus* advertisement. On the other hand, some of the intertextuality and connotations perceived by Beasley and Danesi (2002) may not have ever entered the minds of their producers. What is perhaps more significant is that one cannot fully ascertain the extent of understanding or the variations of interpretations of those who have viewed this advertisement. Arguably, this highlights a limitation that applies to all semiotic and linguistic theories to varying degrees as well as the advantages of undertaking practical research to test and validate, or refute, theoretical approaches. There can thus be no true science of

advertising, since it is ultimately dependent upon the vagaries of the interpretative capacities and propensities of both practitioners and consumers. Theories (both semiotic and pragmatic) which attempt to account for the interpretative processes are, as a consequence, themselves characterized by vagueness and lack of corroboration or verification.

## 5.7 PRODUCT AND BRAND NAMES

One of the ways by which textuality is created in any text is by the use of figurative language. Beasley and Danesi (2002) consider two other perfume advertisements, beginning with *Volupté*, by Oscar de la Renta. They note the name, which they claim is the French word for “*voluptuousness*” (p. 113), the shape of the bottle and the phrase “*Trust your senses*” (ibid) positioned below the image of the bottle. They also claim the shape of the bottle cap: “*is highly suggestive of an aroused nipple – a sign of successful sexual foreplay*”<sup>51</sup> (p. 114). This association is reinforced by the multiple interpretations of the phrase from the one which is more literal, i.e. encouraging the reader to trust her olfactory sense in confirming the high quality of the product, to a looser set of meanings that encompass all the senses and the sensuality which is associated with voluptuousness. The *Volupté* advertisement is contrasted with one for a fragrance called *L’Effleur*, and which focuses instead on romance and love rather than sexuality. It uses visual signifiers including flowers, butterflies, angels, a little girl and a model in a white dress, to create an image of idyllic love and this is reinforced metaphorically by the presence of a short love poem at the bottom (ibid). The poem uses metaphors, such as mentioning that love is “*fragrant*” and refers to “*the one who gave us yesterdays*”. Beasley and Danesi (2002) note how brand names can also operate metaphorically, and in which the denotative

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<sup>51</sup> This author has noted that the bottle shape appears to have altered since Beasley and Danesi’s book and believes the new, straighter shape is much less likely to invoke such an association.

meanings are intended to be ignored, whereas a range of connotations associated with that name are invoked and these convey information or impressions of the product. Among the examples given are *Poison* perfume and, in this example, the receiver is not expected to believe that the product is a lethal substance, but rather they are designed to elicit more glamorous, and particularly culture-specific, connotations, such as mystery and sorcery (ibid). They show how this strategy is used to convey specific and desired conceptions of car models within certain categories. They include those which are suggestive of movement and exploration with product names like *Probe* and *Range Rover*; those with social connotations related to animals such as *Beetle*, *Colt* and *Mustang*; those which suggest the car is a friend or helper such as *Escort*; those which imply a lifestyle, like *Metro*; artistic connotations such as *Sonata* and *Prelude*; those with chic or exotic connotations like *Cavalier* and *Grand Prix* and, lastly, those which invite thoughts of nature or tribal-mythical primordiality, such as *Firebird* and *Sundance* (pp. 116-119).

It can be seen that many product names for cars, and other commodities, are words which have a pre-existing linguistic meaning semantically unrelated to the product and Beasley and Danesi (2002) say this poses a semiotic dilemma. For example, a *Rabbit*<sup>52</sup> is a word which denotes a type of car as well as an animal so, they argue, the word “rabbit” has two referents rather than just one. It is, therefore, asserted by Beasley and Danesi (2002) that the product name functions in a similar way to a metaphor, where the denotation of the word remains unaltered, but certain desired connotations are transferred from that meaning to another referent. A typical denotation for “metaphor” as a linguistic phenomenon is offered by McGregor (2009) “...the sense of an expression is extended to another on the basis of a resemblance” (p. 131). However, in general parlance, this is further extended beyond expressions to, for example, physical objects, as Brierley (2002) notes:

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<sup>52</sup> The *Rabbit* car is manufactured by Volkswagen and is marketed in European countries as the *Golf*.

*“Advertisers also try to establish their products and brands as metaphors. A high performance car can become a metaphor for success. Advertisers try to make their brands omnipotent. In doing so advertisers try not only to attach meanings to their brands, but to attach brands to meanings...” (p. 144)*

In the case of the *Rabbit* car, the denotation of the word “rabbit” remains that of a large rodent, but the human mind automatically looks for interconnectedness where one referent is named after another. Lakoff and Johnson (1980) illustrate how the human conceptual system is attuned towards finding experiential similarities and a relation can be quickly identified between the qualities of a rabbit and those of a small yet sprightly car. Taking for granted the intended associations between the car and the animal, whether Beasley and Danesi (2002) are correct in claiming that product names such as this are metaphorical is perhaps stretching the definition of metaphor too far. In exploring this assumption, another technological object named after an animal, namely a computer mouse, can be considered. The device does share certain characteristics with its namesake in terms of its size, rounded shape and its cable, the latter could be perceived as similar to a tail. However, it could not be claimed that “mouse”, when used to refer to a computer peripheral, is metaphorical. While it could be said there is a difference in that the (car) *Rabbit* is a branded product while a (computer) mouse is now a generic product, that does not impact upon what a metaphor is, i.e. it is a concept which plays a role in how humans understand abstract realities. It seems fair to assume that, when a computer mouse is used, no thought is generally given to the animal from which it takes its name: the word “mouse” functions in a similar way to a homonym and any parallels which were imagined when this device was endowed with its name are no longer readily apparent. It may be the case that a prospective buyer of a *Rabbit* car would never direct their minds towards the somewhat larger rodent from which the vehicle’s name derives, but the possibility that such an association is made, and that this in some way influences the purchasing decision, cannot be completely discounted.

Metaphor functions in the same way as analogy, i.e. making parallels between two otherwise unrelated phenomena, whereas metonyms offer a kind of verbal shorthand by which one phenomenon can be substituted for another, this time related, phenomenon. The relationship can be the substitution of effect for cause, object for user, substance for form and numerous others (Chandler, 2009). Metonyms, and their use in advertising, are described by Brierley (2002) although his examples are far narrower and, arguably, confusing. They raise doubts as to whether he has fully understood the potential of metonymy as a linguistic phenomenon. One of his examples is from an advertisement which appeared in the late 1990s or early 2000s for the newspaper *The Sunday Times*: “*The Sunday Times is the Sunday papers*” (Brierley, 2002: p. 147). He states that this statement seeks to establish the brand by using metonymy, so that the reader or hearer associates this one newspaper with the entire product group. While this is valid, it could be contended that consumers most commonly apply metonymy to brands and products through coinage, as occurs with proprietary names such as *aspirin*, *heroin* and *Kleenex*, and through eponymy with examples such as *hoover* and *leopard*. Some of these examples are old, but advertisers appear to be aware of the benefits of using metonymy to associate their brand with all products or services in the same line. More recent examples might include:

“*You can do it when you B & Q it*” (B&Q Stores advertisement, 1987)

“*It all starts with a Nescafé*” (Nescafé coffee advertisement – 2015)

## 5.8 RHETORICAL DEVICES

Texts which describe the methods employed by advertisers (e.g. Dyer 1982; Vestergaard & Schrøder; 1985; Myers, 1986; Myers, 1994) generally devote

some space to discussing the use of rhetorical devices such as jingles, rhyme, alliteration and parallelism, and Beasley and Danesi's (2002) *Persuasive Signs* is no exception. Beasley and Danesi (2002: pp 120 – 121) point out that jingles and slogans reinforce the recognisability of brand names. Imperatives, they claim, give the impression of an unseen authoritative voice<sup>53</sup>, while formulas, as in “*Triumph has a bra for the way you are*” (p. 120) make meaningless statements that sound convincing. Alliteration and parallelism are mentioned separately, which is perhaps surprising as the former is a manifestation of the latter at a phonetic level. Absence of language is also mentioned:

*“Some ads strategically avoid the use of any language whatsoever, suggesting, by implication, that the product speaks for itself.”* (ibid)

A reader may recall seeing advertisements, especially in glossy magazines, which consist of little more than very carefully crafted, enhanced and retouched photographs depicting particular products, and usually accompanied by one or more human models. This strategy is generally employed for products associated with lifestyle or glamour (Martínez-Camino & Pérez-Saiz, 2012), and is clearly at the far end of the tickle cline, as described in Subchapter 3.8 above, as they make no appeal to reason. Instead, they are calculated to attract the interest of the receiver obliquely, through such as emotional appeal and aesthetic appreciation, and to achieve this with minimal informative content requires that the viewer is already familiar with the specific product or brand, and the imagery simply brings these to mind. They also maximise the potential for the viewer to access an almost infinite range of possible interpretations and perhaps select one or more that he or she finds the most relevant or inspiring. Unsurprisingly, this strategy seems to be favoured for those kinds of advertising

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<sup>53</sup> Imperatives are also used in an attempt at friendly or even intimate persuasion, as in a TV advertisement for Bailey's Irish Cream (2009) which urged viewers “Treat yourself tonight”.

that are heavily or exclusively brand oriented, such as the *Gucci* advertisements mentioned in Subchapter 2.8 above.

## 5.9 RATIONAL AND NON-RATIONAL ADVERTISING

Beasley and Danesi (2002: pp. 10-11 ) note the distinction between what they call *rational* advertising, i.e. that which appeals to the objective and therefore rational mind, and *non-rational* advertising that appeals to the emotions and which they claim is more associated with electronic media such as radio, television and the internet. They further claim that this distinction has been disappearing as more and more advertisements are designed to operate almost exclusively through emotions, the focus being on product personality and aspects of lifestyle associated with the product. There is some correlation here with Bernstein's (1974) notion of *reason* and *tickle*, or *direct* and *oblique* advertising, as mentioned in Subchapter 3.5 above. That is not to say there is a perfect alignment between them because that is not the case. First, while the notion of *rational* advertising seems identical to *reason*, there is a less than perfect match between *non-rational* and *tickle*. While *non-rational* is simply any advertisement that appeals to emotion rather than reason, the obliqueness of *tickle* involves the addressee extending the context which enables them to achieve the desired interpretation through the principle of relevance. A further difference is that Beasley and Danesi refer to the "*dichotomy*" (Beasley and Danesi, 2002: p. 11) of rational and non-rational advertising approaches. This appears to correspond loosely with Simpson (2001), who considers reason and tickle to be a cline in which the process is likened to the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes from Jakobson's structuralist theory and therefore offers the possibility of a halfway house. While Simpson is a linguistics scholar and has not been found mentioned in advertising training texts, his reason and tickle distinction originates from the work of Bernstein (1974), who was an advertising executive.

## 5.10 BRAND BUILDING AND BRAND RECOGNITION

Brands act as signifiers in the semiotic sense, with both a denotation and a range of possible connotations. They invoke contexts, relying upon consumers' encyclopaedic knowledge as Sperber and Wilson (1995) describe in terms of previous experience of, or encounters with, their products and/or recognition of previous advertising and brand reputation. Once established, brands have a value of their own; this value is an asset belonging to the company or individual who owns it and has monetary value in the same way as physical assets (Aaker, 2014). Taking a well-known example, a substantial part of the value of the Apple Corporation is in the form of the brand name and the trademarks associated with it. It is therefore in the interests of companies and their shareholders to create strong brands and maintain their power as signifiers, and this is achieved by developing brand strategies. Brands have the advantage that they can operate across a range of products usually of similar or associated types and the signification and context are thus transferable. In the case of *Apple*, their range extends across electronic goods such as computers, notebooks, tablets and mobile telephones. There are, however, brands with even more diverse ranges of products and services and their brand signification is thereby expansive. A notable example of this is the *Virgin Group*, which markets a wide array of products and services such as recorded music, other media including a radio station, air travel and holidays, hotels, trains, wines and soft drinks – all under the same brand name and logo (Finkle, 2011).

One aspect of brand building discussed is brand personality, and this occurs where an attempt is made to associate a brand with a set of consistent and desired human traits (Aaker, 2010). This enables a brand to establish a kind of remote relationship with customers, inviting desired connotations and increasing its brand equity at the same time. The website *Investopedia* offers examples of these traits:

*Excitement: carefree, spirited, youthful*

*Sincerity: genuine, kind, family-oriented, thoughtful*

*Ruggedness: rough, tough, outdoors, athletic*

*Competence: successful, accomplished, influential, a leader*

*Sophistication: elegant, prestigious, pretentious* (Investopedia, 2014)

Aaker (2010) points to the *Pepsi* brand as seeking to portray itself as spirited and young, and so relating to the “Excitement” category, while the *Marlboro* cigarette brand depicts its users as rugged, outdoor types and *Lexus* cars as a sophisticated and prestigious brand. While Aaker (2010) does not say this, these categories may be seen to some extent as aspirational in terms of lifestyle and the advertising that is produced which advances these personalities is highly dependent upon carefully chosen signifiers in order to invoke specific cultural myths<sup>54</sup>. Another manifestation of brand personality comes in the form of a quest to make brands appear to be a sincere and trustworthy friend of the consumer. In other words, the natural suspicion that consumers have of the motives of advertisers and the veracity of claims they make can be overcome where the relationship between brand and customer imitates that of personal friendships. This is perhaps explainable to a point because of the way consumerism has evolved over recent generations, as noted by Cross (in Turow & McAllister, 2009). Sainsbury (1973) notes that, until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, shopping for daily provisions and consumer durables was mostly something undertaken with people known to the consumer to some degree, such as “family grocers”. Supermarkets and department stores were unknown to all but large city dwellers and so foodstuffs were purchased from local shops, bakeries, butchers and hardware shops, and also from markets. Traders, whose products were judged to be overpriced, or below par in terms of quality, or the trade services they provided were unreliable or inflexible, would earn a poor reputation and be forced to mend their ways or go out of business. Those traders who were successful generally built up their regular customer base over many years, and even generations, and were known personally to all members in any community and were integral parts of such communities (ibid). This

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<sup>54</sup> Further discussed below.

degree of mutual trust is likely to occur to a far lesser extent with impersonal supermarkets and retail chains. Consequently, brand advertising is used to compensate for this by creating an artificial relationship between brand and consumer and this is known as “*brand relationship quality*” (Aaker, 2010). In order to activate consumer recollection of brand personality, brand owners often use icons and symbols which are readily identified with the brand, and which are suggestive of one or more of the personality traits. Aaker (2010: pp. 167-168) gives examples of these and which are very evident in their long-term advertising strategies; among them are the Michelin man’s enthusiasm, strength and energy, and the Energizer battery’s rabbit, which is both upbeat and indefatigable and these could be said to be generating the kinds of cultural myths described by Barthes (1957) as described in Subchapter 2.6, above.

Aaker (2010: pp. 170-173) also argues that a brand’s personality as characterized in advertising may, or may not, be designed to coincide with user imagery. *Nike*, for example, often depicts both professional and amateur athletes and sportsmen and women using or wearing their products in the way that consumers would, and thereby the reader or viewer is encouraged to identify with the model by virtue of them participating in the same activity and in similar surroundings. On the other hand, the differences between the imagery used in projecting brand personality and the consumer may also be exploited. The example related by Aaker (2010: p. 170) is that of advertisements for Levi’s jeans and showing them being worn by miners and by cowboys as signifying that these are tough and durable garments. The expectation is, however, that buyers are more likely to be fashion conscious teenagers of both sexes and the high quality, resilience and durability is both guaranteed and amplified. Some of the attributes in terms of the brand reputation in terms of the quality, authenticity and resources (they tend to be more expensive), are conferred from the product and onto the perceived image of the wearer.

Companies may wish to transmit that they have certain organizational values which are intrinsic to the brand and connoted by it, and which the customer will interpret and buy into when purchasing their products. One example can be found in Aaker (2010), where he devotes a chapter to describing the

development by the *General Motors Company* of Saturn cars in the United States in the mid 1980s. The brand was created in large part to compete with foreign manufacturers who had been dominating the small car market. One of the key marketing strategies adopted by Saturn cars was the fact that these were made in America by Americans for Americans to drive and the brand thus carries with it associations of patriotism.

Aaker (2010) notes the distinction between product and brand (pp. 72-73), and that a brand is more than just a product. Product characteristics can include what it is made from and the processes involved in its production or manufacture (for example, that it is natural, or produced in an environmentally friendly way), its attributes (such as *Volvo*, which markets its cars with an emphasis on safety), the quality of the item, its value for money and its versatility (such as *Subaru*, which markets vehicles expressly designed to be driven safely on snow and ice). However, as Aaker (2010: p. 73) notes, a brand invites a recollection of many more, and wider, connotations, such as the type of person who is depicted as a typical user of the product and the lifestyle they supposedly enjoy (e.g. the woman who uses a particular perfume), the country of origin (e.g. a car advertisement suggesting the vehicle has the benefit of German engineering) and emotional benefits. With regard to emotional benefits, an example of this might include an advertisement for shower gel which includes signifiers or contextual cues suggesting it will make the wearer feel fresh and alert. Another example involves invoking nostalgic associations that rely heavily upon encyclopaedic memory. A television advertisement for *Hovis* from 1973, described by Billen (1986), depicts a boy in early 20<sup>th</sup> century clothing struggling to wheel his bicycle up a particularly steep, cobbled hill in a rural village to deliver the brand's wholemeal bread. The advantage of the nostalgia here is that it invites the viewer to make an association between the bread being marketed and a time when bread was made by local bakers from natural, and therefore healthy and tasty, ingredients; they might also contrast that with the factory-made bread offered by their competitors.

This chapter has considered the training offered to students and practitioners of advertising chiefly through texts published, and from some of the earliest

attempts to expound the principles of advertising as far back as the 1920s, up to the modern day. Research found that, at the time it was undertaken, universities varied enormously in terms of whether they were teaching this topic at all, or whether it was taught as a component of a broader syllabus of marketing or business studies, or as part of courses in communication studies or media studies. Some publications were regarded as textbooks for this purpose as they were listed as required course books, yet they mainly focus on principles formulated on the basis of experience of practitioners, including those of famous figures in the industry, rather than on theoretical frameworks.

As described above, others works have been identified that are based upon theoretical approaches and these explain the operation of advertisements specifically through semiotics. One work of this nature stands out in particular as it was widely used in universities; this book is *Persuasive Signs: The Semiotics of Advertising* (2002) by Ron Beasley and Marcel Danesi and it is deemed particularly relevant to this study. The co-authors of this publication consist of an advertising practitioner and an academic semiotician and so the approach and contents of the book have been explored in some detail in this chapter. As branding and brand recognition are seen as key aspects of advertising and are mentioned throughout this thesis, another work familiar to the industry which covers this topic, Aaker's (2010) *Building Strong Brands*, is also discussed.

This chapter has briefly examined the education of advertising practitioners in terms of semiotics and pragmatics, and it has reviewed the some of the key texts used or referred to by students and practitioners in terms of these disciplines. The next chapter describes and analyses primary data in the form of recorded interviews with individuals working as creators of advertisements and discusses how these may be related to conscious and unconscious applications of semiotic and pragmatic principles.

## **CHAPTER 6 – INTERVIEWS - RESULTS AND ANALYSIS**

### **6.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION**

As explained in Chapter 4, it was decided to obtain data in the form of recorded interviews from practitioners who produced advertisements and the main purpose was to investigate the extent to which the theoretical models of communication correlate with the actual creative processes and working practices of advertising professionals. Where such a correlation was found to exist, the author has attempted to ascertain whether this is a conscious process of applying the theories brought about as a result of their awareness of them through their training, or else an unconscious process which occurred more through combination of intuition and experience.

Around 30 agencies were called and a handful responded while others were less willing or able to help. It was ultimately possible to arrange a total of five interviews with copywriters. A pre-designed questionnaire was used to prompt the questions and this can be seen in Appendix 2; the questionnaire was intended to be used loosely rather than strictly and it was thereby hoped to avoid constraining the questions asked or to interrupt the interviewee's flow. The questionnaire consisted of eighteen questions in total, and these were divided into four sections which were headed:

- Interviewee Background. This section included questions about the interviewee's route into the advertising industry and any formal training they had received. It also sought to establish what, if any, awareness they had of semiotic theories, with which theories they were familiar, and from where they had gained their knowledge.
- Forming Ideas. This section explored the formation of ideas which led the subjects to creating advertisements, and inquired whether semiotics played a role in this.

- Strategy – Your Last Advertisement. This section was intended to encourage the interviewees to recall their last advertisement, and the questions were designed to elicit information about their actual processes involved from idea to completed advertisement, including how the reader or viewer would be expected to make sense of it.
- More Generally. This section considered the use of semiotic concepts consciously or unconsciously used, including symbolism, stereotyping and folklore, and contextual factors, such as encyclopaedic knowledge and relevance to the consumer.

The previous chapter explained how semiotics was a subject that was being formally taught to some students of marketing and advertising, and which is also covered to some degree in many advertising textbooks. Interviewees were therefore asked directly about their knowledge of semiotic theories and frameworks. It also makes clear that pragmatics does not, at the time of writing, feature in any part of marketing education or the textbooks used, and that individuals consulted prior to the interviews, including senior figures in the professional bodies, were entirely unfamiliar with the term “pragmatics” or the field to which it relates. Having established this, it was decided not to include the term directly in the questionnaire, but instead there would be questions included that related expressly to the subjects’ awareness of context. The interviewer was alert to any responses from subjects which indicated either a formally acquired, or intuitive, knowledge of pragmatic theories, which were further probed as and when they surfaced.

One of the chief aims of the interviews was to explore how ideas originated in the minds of practitioners and whether this process involved a conscious application of semiotic theories. It may be useful at this point to mention what is meant by “ideas” in the context of this study before moving on to discuss how they are formed. For the purpose of this study, ideas are the potential associations and implications that occur to the

practitioner and from which they can select the most propitious advertising angles, the words and images they may use, the way in which a product is presented and described, and how their chosen approach is designed to invite or elicit particular desired responses in the consumer.

Interviews were recorded using dictation equipment and full transcripts of the interviews with copywriters are to be found in Appendix 3, below. Some diversity in terms of the size and types of agencies which formed part of this study was achieved: one consisted of a sole operator, two were partnership-type companies and the remaining two were large and established companies in their own right. All the agencies were located in the north of England and Subchapter 6.2 below discusses the agencies concerned. Subchapter 6.3 describes answers supplied in relation to the interviewees' background in terms of higher education, specialized training and experience in advertising or related fields. It also sought to establish whether the interviewees had any knowledge of semiotics and, if so, its extent and how it was acquired. Subchapter 6.4 describes responses to questions concerning the interviewees' approach to creativity and sources of inspiration. Subchapter 6.5 follows this by inquiring into the actual processes of advertising design, both conscious and unconscious, whether and how semiotics was considered and applied and how these practitioners factored context into their work.

An additional interview was conducted with a London-based specialist who described himself as a "*commercial semiotician*". The interviewee, referred to as Subject F, had founded and was managing a business specifically designed to apply semiotic approaches to create, develop and enhance brands, and to resolve branding-related problems for major companies and public sector organisations. The interview with him was intended to elicit information that would make it possible to ascertain the range of possible applications for semiotics in marketing and advertising as viewed by a specialist working in that particular and narrow field. Subject F provided written material which supplements his answers and this forms part of this analysis and can be seen in Subchapter 6.6, below.

## 6.2 ADVERTISERS - AGENCY

It was intended that some diversification would be obtained in terms of the type of agencies investigated and the work undertaken in order to make the research applicable across the advertising industry and thereby more representative of it. This subchapter outlines the nature of the agencies where the interviewees work and the information was obtained from their respective agency websites, as well as from answers given in interviews.

### 6.2.1 SUBJECT A

Subject A ran a small advertising agency in Doncaster, South Yorkshire. The firm's website said of the business:

*"We're a mix of curious, creative and somewhat nerdy minds and we all have our own talents and skills to contribute. We certainly don't fit the marketing 'norm'. We look at things differently, love discovering new things and we don't take ourselves too seriously."*<sup>55</sup>

While he was not a "one man band", those he employed were in supporting roles only. This means the advertising design processes were something he undertook alone and this had implications for the way he formulated his ideas and executed his briefs, as is explained in this subchapter. His work was business-to-business, encompassing technical equipment, components and business resources and services, rather than being directed at the wider public. It was almost entirely print-based, mainly appearing in trade journals, although he had been commissioned to produce poster campaigns and also online advertising. He did not undertake television or radio advertising briefs.

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<sup>55</sup> Company website- accessed 17.6.2015

### 6.2.2 SUBJECT B

The second copywriter interviewed, Subject B, worked for a small marketing company employing six personnel in an industrial area on the outskirts of Sheffield. Its website provided a profile which stated:

*“We help brands sell more. And we mean that in the broadest sense: selling products, launching or reinvigorating brands, creating behaviour change or altering attitudes.*

*We work across a wide range of projects from complex, multi stakeholder campaigns to ad hoc, low budget tasks that still require creative excellence along with speedy and efficient delivery. Many projects we work on are multifaceted combining brand development with campaign development, design and digital integration”.*<sup>56</sup>

It also boasted that it could:

*“deliver creative advertising that is second to none, offer a full range of integrated services, project manage both efficiently and effectively whilst providing a positive, friendly and fruitful working relationship.”* (ibid)

### 6.2.3 SUBJECT C

The third interviewee, Subject C, was a copywriter and the creative director for a small marketing company close to the centre of Leeds. Its website provided a

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<sup>56</sup> Company website- accessed 1.7.2015

profile which stated the firm was established in 2009 and, when viewed for this research, its website claimed that it had:

*“grown into an agency with a reputation for developing creative content which never loses focus on achieving your businesses (sic) aims.”<sup>57</sup>*

It provided further description as follows:

*“Our content can be fun, inspiring, cool, imaginative or downright surreal but it is always clear, eloquent and effective in communicating your message.” (ibid)*

The website named Subject C as responsible for ensuring that the creative output of the agency met the company’s standards for innovation, imagination, impact and clarity while his strong client relationships demonstrated his *“hands-on approach”* to delivering creative content that fit the client’s needs and delivered value.

#### **6.2.4 SUBJECT D**

Subject D was the creative director for sizable agency which formed part of a marketing group of companies based in Yorkshire and London. This well-known and long-established firm offered complete digital marketing strategies, online campaigns plus a full range of multi-channel services and had a subsidiary market research company. Its website stated:

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<sup>57</sup> Company website- accessed 6.7.2015

*“We combine the best in digital thinking and delivery with specialist skills in research, advertising, design, PR, shopper and promotional marketing. Clients come to us for new insight, fresh thinking, compelling strategy and brilliant delivery. We take leaps. But not in the dark.”*<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, the company proudly pointed out its successes in winning a number of prominent industry awards.

### **6.2.5 SUBJECT E**

Subject E was the chief executive of a large and advertising agency close to the centre of Manchester and that had been in existence for around twenty years at the time of the interview. This firm undertook advertising commissions for a number of major corporations that were household names in Britain and abroad. The agency had its own strapline “The Power of Simple” and its website described its approach as follows:

*“In our fast-paced world, catching someone’s attention is hard. That’s why brands can’t afford to over complicate their message – it just gets lost in all the noise. With simplicity at our heart, we don’t stop until we find the clear, engaging and distinct truth that sets a brand apart. Only then will consumers know what a brand stands for and why it’s relevant to them. We’ve transformed the fortunes of some of the UK’s leading brands by uncovering simple, powerful messages and communicating them persuasively whatever the channel.”*<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Company website- accessed 17.7.2015

<sup>59</sup> Company website- accessed 22.7.2015

It explained its strategies in terms of branding, advertising and design thus:

*“ (Brand) is our starting point for all our new clients. We use our Brand DNA tool in order to map the brand strategy on a single chart. Once the DNA is cracked we develop strikingly simple ideas and spread them across the right channels in order to make them famous.... our work today shows that we still know how to grab the public’s attention. There has never been a time when mastery of the simple but engaging message has been more important than the 21st century when cut-through content is so valuable...We have a team of specialists who are passionate about Graphic Design. Their work – covering packaging, literature, corporate identity, posters and digital – is based on a core thought and is brought to life through their craftsmanship and attention to detail.”*

Among the many metaphors used in this text is an expression that is worthy of particular consideration, namely *“our brand DNA tool”*. The association of commercial brands and DNA is not particular to this instance of it. A book was published in 2010 entitled *“Brand DNA: Uncover Your Organization’s Genetic Code for Competitive Advantage”* by Carol Chapman and Suzanne Tulien, and there are numerous other examples of this association that can be found in marketing-related texts and often appearing alongside terms like *“brand personality”*. As the agency’s self-description (cited above) was taken from its own website’s home page, it could be safely assumed it was aimed at potential clients. This was a prestigious agency situated in the heart of a major city and it accepted briefs for medium-sized and larger companies and public sector organisations that generally had their own marketing departments that were responsible for commissioning their advertising. The expression *“DNA tool”* may thus be viewed as metalanguage in relation to marketing, with an interpretation that would be specific to professionals in that field, and which

facilitated both internal cognitive processes and also communication between practitioners. On the other hand, this allusion to DNA may also be considered as a poetic metaphor, and one that can be recovered by the normal processes of implicature. Processing the term “DNA” in search of relevance elicits the recollection in the receiver that it refers to the molecular code that determines the characteristics of every living entity, and is thus unique. This reading of the term, along with expressions such as “*brand personality*”, and the metaphor in the final sentence in which the agency described how their work was “*brought to life*” (such as by artistry and craftsmanship), appear to illustrate a strong tendency to personalize brands, and the parallel is expressed systematically through metaphor. Consequently, an impression was conveyed that applying a metaphorical “tool” provided an in-depth understanding of each and every feature of the brand that would enable the agency to construct the bespoke type of advertising which accorded with the supposed uniqueness of the client’s brand.

### **6.3 INTERVIEWEE BACKGROUND**

This subchapter focuses the answers supplied in Part A of the questionnaire, and primarily on the individual interviewee's background, training and work experience.

#### **6.3.1 SUBJECT A**

While he worked primarily as a copywriter, Subject A stated that he had not studied either advertising or marketing in tertiary education. His background was originally public relations (PR) after studying at Bournemouth University, and it had been his intention eventually to work in journalism. This career path did not materialise for him and, after a period working in PR, he found employment with a major advertising agency in Leeds. He was assigned to a PR role on a campaign for a multi-national industrial manufacturing client, but reported that he worked closely with a copywriter and found there was some crossover between their respective functions. Having decided that he preferred copywriting work to PR, Subject A decided to leave the agency and set up business on his own. He had by this time established a relationship with the

client mentioned and was able to take that client with him, along with dealers who also sold the products for them, when he left the employment. In his daily work routine, while copywriting was central to his business, he performed a wider range of activities related to marketing. Although he was open to producing any type of advertising, at the time of the interview his work consisted of print commercials, particularly specialist trade journals, brochures, posters and flyers, and his work combined images and copy.

In terms of his formal education, he graduated at Bournemouth University and his degree was a Bachelor's in Communication. This course introduced students to editing and publishing, and was associated with the journalism degrees also offered at that university. The syllabus of his degree included some aspects of advertising and he was able to recall using certain texts in his studies, some of which he still owned. Among these was *Effective Use of Advertising Media*<sup>60</sup>. Semiotics was, he stated, a minor part of his studies, though his recollections of the theories at the time of the interview were somewhat vague. Nonetheless, it did occur to him that they included aspects of language and also some elements of literature. He mentioned that the works of Noam Chomsky were discussed and, in one lecture, an amusing story was related which showed how a railway warning light signal was misinterpreted. While the names of Saussure and Barthes were not recognized by him, he was familiar with the notion of cultural myths as described by Barthes, although he stated that he “*only touched on*” this (07.09 – 07.25).

He was clear that he did not refer to these theories or texts in his current work and he attributed this to the fact that he operated in a small, provincial town, namely Doncaster, and only with and for certain types of businesses. This was interpreted as meaning his approach had to be perceived by clients as down-to-earth and predicated on practical experience and common sense as opposed to applying what might be considered to be “*exotic*” theories. However, he later disclosed that he had recently used a particular book called *The A – Z of Visual Ideas: How to Solve any Creative Brief* by John Ingledew as a source of ideas.

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<sup>60</sup> This book is *Effective Use of Advertising Media: A Practical Approach* (1992) by Martyn P Davis

### **6.3.2 SUBJECT B**

Subject B entered advertising obliquely, having first worked in administration. One of his first jobs was for a major nationalized industry which was in the process of being privatized and it had set up a fledgling marketing department which interested him. This prompted him to enrol for evening classes, where he took his Chartered Institute of Marketing qualification and this enabled him to gain the move he craved in the new department. He worked in the field of marketing for a decade, including in the computer video games industry. After this period, he switched jobs and began working for an advertising agency group, initially as an account director. It was while working in this employment that he met his current business partner. The two finally agreed to leave and establish the firm they ran at the time of the interview. He did not hold any qualifications that specifically related to advertising, and he stated that advertising was not covered at all in his professional marketing courses. As a result of this, he had never studied any formal texts relating to advertising theory or practices and he was entirely unfamiliar with semiotics.

At the time of the interview, though, Subject B stated he was writing a Master's dissertation and this related to the creative decision-making processes involved in constructing advertisements. He had also been involved in teaching the advertising module for students taking a degree in marketing at a local university.

### **6.3.3 SUBJECT C**

Subject C explained that he had always cultivated an interest in art and decided from an early age to work in graphic design. Upon leaving school, he enrolled at college for a foundation course in art. After completing his college course, he

studied at the University of Humberside where he commenced a degree course in graphic design and, on graduation, he entered the advertising industry as a graphic designer, although with leanings towards being an art director as he considered this offered more scope for original and creative work. In this employment, he had no responsibility for writing copy. He recalled reading Roland Barthes' work *Mythologies* during his studies and, while most of the course work related to graphic design, 20% or so involved writing:

*"on the theory of graphic design and write about that kind of like mythologies style, sort of thinking."* (39.29 – 39.35)

He stated that he completed his final thesis on the language and visual themes used in election advertising. It was written just prior to the 1992 General Election, and he cited examples of his application of cultural myths, including how the Labour Party relied upon their perceived devotion to the National Health Service while the Conservatives exploited the perception that they could be trusted on matters such as defence. Another work he used was called *Understains* by Kathy Myers, and which he said was regarded as a seminal work by his tutors and widely referred to in his course<sup>61</sup>.

Subsequently, he started his own business in graphic design and ran that for about a year before he decided to find jobs in advertising agencies. The first of these jobs lasted only a few months before the business ceased operating and the second he describes as "*quite a well-known agency in Leeds*" and which was

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<sup>61</sup> *Understains* by Kathy Myers (1986) has long been out of print, but a copy has been obtained for the purpose of this study. A small section is included in the book entitled *Semiology: inside the fantasy factory*. This offers a critique of advertising from a critical discourse analysis perspective, and it focuses on imagery directed by government and corporations at the public. It also discusses hegemony and the power, and makes reference to the works of Marx and Althusser. In view of its particular focus, as well as the facts that this work is no longer currently used and has not, so far as it is possible to tell, been used as part of a course in marketing or advertising, it was decided not to include it within the literature review of this thesis.

the first time he worked in what he called “*a professional agency environment*” (05.51 – 06.07). In this job, he began to appreciate the difference between advertising copy and design; he believed he had a natural aptitude for writing copy and his abilities in this came to the notice of his managers. He progressed from there to working as a designer for a major national marketing communications agency, based in Manchester. This was the first time he encountered professional copywriters whose role was just to write copy and nothing else. In this employment, he was deployed as a designer in a small team that was assigned particular briefs and his team included such a copywriter. The team worked on a fashion catalogue, revised and reprinted twice a year, and which consisted of the design aspect of the catalogue plus various marketing functions, including TV advertising and direct mail.

After a period with this employer, he returned to Leeds and was offered a position with a direct marketing company with several branches across the UK. This firm appeared to ride the wave of popularity of direct marketing in the 1980s, and which tailed off towards the end of the 20th century as the internet superseded it. Subject C’s job title was art director and his main responsibility was to draw layouts in rough form (called “scamps” in the advertising jargon – see Subchapter 6.8) which he would then give to an art worker with instructions on details, such as colours. Again, he found himself as one among a creative team, this time of around ten individuals which included copywriters and art directors. He described how copywriters had different strengths, styles and expertise. One of the copywriters he mentioned was a specialist in financial services advertising who would write lengthy and dense copy including for headlines, and Subject C would reduce the wording down for him to make it “snappier” (24.38 – 25.10). Another colleague he mentioned was a copywriter who he described as brilliant at his job and that was because: “*He had a total ability to cut through all the bullshit around a brief*” (29.53 – 30.03). He elaborated that briefs could be several pages long and one of the skills of a

copywriter was to decipher briefs and identify the key message<sup>62</sup>. After some years with the Leeds agency, the subject had risen through the ranks and been promoted to head of art, after which he was headhunted by the same firm he had worked for previously in Manchester, but this time at their Leeds branch, and was appointed creative director. One of the memorable copywriters he managed in this role had a particular disposition towards writing advertising copy in a conversational and empathetic, even intimate, style. Around three years later, he established his first business with a partner and found himself having to perform all the aspects of designing advertisements himself, including copywriting. Following a couple of false starts, he set up his third and final business which he had been running for approaching six years at the time of the interview.

#### **6.3.4 SUBJECT D**

Subject D was introduced to advertising as a Higher National Diploma course in a college of further education. In this course, he studied a great deal of art history but was also immersed in the conspicuous commercials of that era, including advertisements for Häagen Dazs ice-cream and Boddingtons beer. These were very much his inspiration and he wanted to be like the people who produced them. He recalled certain texts that he used at the time and still held in some esteem, including David Ogilvy's popular work *Ogilvy on Advertising*, and books by Sir John Hegarty, one of the founders of the major international agency Bartle Bogle Hegarty, and the renowned American advertising creator, Bill Bernbach. Upon completion of his studies, he was top of his year in advertising graphics and also won an industry student award for his work.

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<sup>62</sup> It was noted that this same sentiment was expressed by other interviewees, and this will be discussed in the next chapter.

Going on to university was an option at that point, but he was advised against this by his lecturer who instead advised him to capitalize on the accolade that accompanied the award he had won and to use that to launch a career. He pointed out: *“No-one will ever ask you what grades you got in my line of work.”* (07.49 – 07.54)

In preference to academic grades, he claimed, those in the industry would advance their careers and achieve their reputations through their portfolios of work. What mattered most of all, he said, was having *“a great mind”*, and he likened creative departments to football teams in terms of having eclectic skill sets as different people with their own diverse range of skills play different roles. Having identified his own strengths in this respect, he had obtained his first position with a multinational advertising company by the age of 21.

He had been taught some basic aspects of semiotics in his formal studies, but stated he had learned more about this subject over the years in the course of his work. He could not recall specific theorists, but explained his understanding and application of semiotic principles as follows:

*“I think...individual, cultural ..the way people are, the way they react, ...how cultural references can ...impact on those...the different trends which are coming through. All those need to inform how you actually go about talking to people in a certain way...sometimes no one message strikes everybody”* (11.43 – 12.21)

After more than twenty years of experience, Subject D stated he no longer referred to texts to help him in designing advertisements, but instead he was

able to tap into his experience. However, he went on to say “*the D&Ads<sup>63</sup> of this world have been my Bible*”. (13.10)

### 6.3.5 SUBJECT E

Having gained a PhD in Ancient Greek from Edinburgh University, Subject E realized there were not many career openings from that subject, so it occurred to him that working in advertising would afford him a different kind of opportunity to work with words. He had not received any formal specialized higher education in either advertising or marketing, although he had learned about some aspects of linguistics, including semiotics, during his undergraduate studies many years previously. He explained his understanding of semiotics as follows:

*“I may have got this completely wrong but, to me, semiotics is the linguistics of images and pictures and signs... for example ...I remember...’The Name of the Rose<sup>64</sup>’ – I thought that was a wonderful book...Umberto Eco” (3.07 - 4.06)*

Subject E would not state that he had formally studied semiotics as a subject, but he was certainly aware of it and, when cultural myths were mentioned, he recalled that he may have read some works by Roland Barthes, perhaps while working on his doctorate. Once the basic concept of a Barthes myth had been explained to him, it made sense to him in the advertising context, but it was not

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<sup>63</sup> The “D&ADs” refers to an awarding organisation for the advertising industry – it has been described as akin to the Oscars for advertisers. “D&AD” was formerly known as the “Design and Art Direction”, but this term is no longer used.

<sup>64</sup> While Eco was, among other things, a semiotician, his book *The Name of the Rose* is a mystery novel. In this book, Eco draws upon his knowledge of semiotics, the Bible and literary theories in order to create a story which has an intellectual appeal.

something he mentally retained for use in his work. In terms of advertising texts, he stated that he had read a number of authors including *Ogilvy on Advertising*, and essays and articles by copywriters whose names he did not mention. He was interested in what they were writing in their copy as opposed to their comments on advertising generally, although he expressed the view that each advertiser should try to create their own style. As such, when designing advertisements, he tended not to refer to the work of others, but would go his own way.

When it came to recruiting staff, Subject E also explained that his company often chose not to employ applicants who had a degree in advertising or marketing unless they were otherwise outstanding in terms of their personality and intelligence. As a rule, he preferred those who had studied fields such as history or geography because he believed these were generally of a higher calibre. Having said that, anyone wishing to enter his company's Creative Department would be required to have been awarded a degree in a creative discipline as he saw this as essential for staff who were employed specifically to generate fresh ideas.

## **6.4 FORMING IDEAS**

This aspect of the research considers the sources of inspiration, and the practical and cognitive processes which the interviewees pursued in order to generate creative and effective advertisements. It relates mainly to answers supplied to questions in Part C of the questionnaire.

### **6.4.1 SUBJECT A**

Subject A stated that he did take an interest in texts on advertising (e.g. *Ogilvy*) and read them from time-to-time, but his approach in formulating

advertisements was inherently practical and he would not normally refer to or otherwise consider theoretical texts as part of the process. He then talked through the stages of creating ideas, beginning with the brief from the client, and this he explained as an attempt to “*boil down the essence of the ad as much as possible*”. One way of achieving this was to come up with a core message or strapline (10.17 – 10.53). He believed he was at his most creative when he was unconsciously processing the message, immersing himself in the detail, but without “*trying to force it too much*” (10.59 – 11.04). A “*key theme*” would then emerge and the layout and other components, including wording, would flow almost naturally from that. This would not have succeeded unless he had been cognizant of the brand values and he ensured they were expressed. He said it would, for example, have been inappropriate to use terms like “*good, old fashioned service*” for a company that sought to project itself as at the technical cutting edge. The look and feel of the final advertisement would have to reflect these values (11.40 – 11.57). Several versions of any proposed advertisement would be produced for the client once the “message” had been distilled and refined and these were presented in an acceptable format.

Subject A regarded designing an advertisement as a building process rather than something which was visualised from the start, although sometimes his ideas seemed to arise in a fully-formed state. As an example, he described the development of an advertisement for a forklift trucks manufacturer called *Doosan* and the theme was around the idea of “*doing more*”, with emphasis on the syllable “do”, which was the first syllable of the brand name (12.45 – 13.51). This was the exception, though, as producing an advertisement was mostly the process of “chipping away” and “shaping” until a result was achieved that “looks right” (13.53 – 13.59).

Subject A described another campaign for an engineering company that began locally, but had evolved into a larger operation with branches across the UK.

The company's owners stated they understood local businesses because that was how they started and they viewed their localism as central to their brand. Thumbing through a book on creative ideas<sup>65</sup>, Subject A thought of a strategy to depict the staff as being people with strong connections to the locality, and this prompted the tagline of "*local service nationwide*". Graphics were produced for the campaign, and these consisted of a UK map adorned with a montage of many photographs of the firm's staff alongside, or in front of, well-known landmarks in their locale. He explained it thus:

*"We understand local businesses because we are one....We tried to make heroes of the people in the different ...parts of the world and put them in front of ....something that was symbolic of that part of the world, so the guy from Nottingham was stood in front of the statue in Nottingham of Robin Hood; the guy from Hull was stood under the Humber Bridge..." (14.32 – 15.01)*

In moving from being a small, local operator which had established relationships and trust with a sector of business in one locality, the client regarded this as a valuable asset which should not be lost in the process of the company's expansion. The strapline could be viewed as being ambiguous, depending upon whether the word "*nationwide*" was interpreted as an adjective, as in "we are now a nationwide operator as opposed to merely a local operator", or else as an adverb as in "we are still a local operator, but now we are operating nationwide". The implication with the latter is that, in spite of the company operating nationwide, it had not abandoned its local values. Customers could be confident that the staff employed at any branch would have local knowledge and an interest in the area. A range of further implicatures may be recoverable even though these were not explicated and one example is that, as staff were locals,

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<sup>65</sup> This was the book *The A – Z of Visual Ideas: How to Solve any Creative Brief* (2011) by John Ingledew

they had a stake in the prosperity of the area and the success of their customers' businesses. Consequently, the impression was conveyed that the service provided was likely to be friendly and efficient.

Next, Subject A was asked how his approach differed according to whether an advertisement was to focus on brand or product. He responded by stating that he had always tended to push his clients towards promoting brand rather than product. This was for a particular reason, namely that most of his clients were effectively dealers who offered a wide range of different products, some of which are technical and/or specialised. This also applied when working for a manufacturer, such as the Doosan fork lift company, as they were primarily competing with other, and better known, manufacturers. Where a client insisted on promoting a particular product, the process was broadly similar except that, instead of trying to promote the core values of a brand, in this case it was the core features and benefits of the product which were in focus. He contended, however, that brand advertising could be more sophisticated, and would make a better impression than a product advertisement, and this was because a product changes over time, unless there were features of it which were static and highly distinctive, like special prices (16.59 - 18.53). When forming ideas, Subject A admitted he did not consciously look to theories of semiotics to assist him. He explained that he would seek a practical answer to a problem and his mind did not consciously turn to semiotic theories for that answer, regardless of whether he was advertising a brand or a product. If, however, he thought that re-visiting the theories he had learned in the distant past would help him find the answer, he would refer to them. Nevertheless, as becomes evident when examining his strategy in the next subchapter, Subject A had an unconscious awareness of the value of certain semiotic phenomena in his work such as symbolism, paradigmatic choices and invoking cultural myths, as well as a recognition of the need to generate desired and recoverable implicatures.

#### 6.4.2 SUBJECT B

Subject B's mentioning of his dissertation prompted him to describe how the initial ideas for an advertising campaign begin by his firm following what he called a "*creative briefing process*" which he described as a "*well-worn route*" and which he had discerned from textbooks and examples therein (03.15 – 03.38). These ideas were formed by first determining who the audience was, who the competition was, the purpose of the advertising and the specific requirements contained within the commission. When combined, they provided the insight necessary for the starting point of the creative process. In addition, there may have been some practical considerations in relation to, for example, budgets or media. He pointed out that, while these were mentioned in textbooks, they were not derived from academic studies, but rather they originated within the industry and were suggested by the Institute for Advertising Practitioners.

The development process was not mapped out beyond this, but was rather regarded as a "*blank piece of paper*", and Subject B was asked how he would complete this in terms of advancing the project. He responded by citing an example of a brief from a discount supermarket chain for which his firm had been responsible for all the press advertising and digital advertising. More recently, they had been asked to review the company's television advertising, as they wanted to make some substantial changes. He described the existing advertising style as "*entry level*", meaning their advertisements consisted of nothing more than presenting current offers aided by a voice-over and:

*"a nice bit of music, and here is a tin of baked beans and this is how much we're selling it for"* (05.39 – 05.45).

The new brief was to move towards advertising that was more emotive, and that would build the brand and be more engaging. Unfortunately, this led to a difference of view between Subject B and the client, as the former believed the

aim should be to make customers want to visit this particular supermarket as a “*shopping experience*”, while the latter intended the focus to be on selling specific products. One of the chief reasons the client was keen to push the product was that the manufacturer had paid the client to advertise it on television. When something like this occurred, the ideal way of approaching the advertising design would be for the account handler to write a creative brief based on the client brief and this would give due consideration to whom the audience were, what the objectives were and what was proposed. That proposition would then be checked by Subject B personally. In the specific case mentioned, the brief was summarized in a meeting by the whole agency and ideas were sought to determine “*how can we bring that to life?*” (0709 – 07.13). They then engaged in an activity he referred to as “*leapfrogging*”, which he explained as follows:

*“...we don’t discuss the quality of the ideas: there is a phrase that we use and it’s called ‘getting the shit out’. You have to say the most obvious and the most banal stuff. You’ve just got to get it out because if you don’t, then it doesn’t lead to anything else. So someone might say something that’s really crap and very poor and we’d never discuss it with a client, but that’s fine because without removing that barrier, it doesn’t open the floodgates” (07.19 – 07.42)*

Subject B here described a creative process of in which the employees were encouraged to pull raw ideas, which he referred to as “*the shit*”, from their minds and express them without any serious consideration as to their feasibility. Ultimately, most of these ideas would be dismissed and those remaining would be explored, modified in a number of ways, combined with other ideas and honed until they resembled something which could, in due course, had fulfilled the requirements of the brief. Subject B was asked if his “*leapfrogging*” technique was akin to

brainstorming and he confirmed that it was as it involved “*throwing around*” ideas. During this process, they might have used the internet and those present might have suggested looking at the work of other advertisers in order to stimulate the thinking. After following a number of such ideas, many of which he described as “*cul-de-sacs*”, he said they would progress onto “*mind-mapping and writing ideas down on bits of paper with pencils*” and then they would be able to build up a “*flow*”, probably ending up with about twelve “*routes*”, which he described as “*very high concepts*” (08.02 - 08.23). It was evident that Subject B’s conceptualisation processes were highly dependent upon ontological metaphors, with expressions such as “*leapfrogging*”, “*getting the shit out*”, “*removing that barrier*”, “*open the floodgates*”, “*throwing around*” (ideas), “*routes*”, and “*very high concepts*”. How much these could be regarded as specialized metalanguage used in advertising, or marketing, or even can be considered as general business jargon, appears to vary. It is suggested, however, that all could be readily understood in the context in which they occur, unlike expressions that are found in more technical specialisms such as medicine and electronics. Of those cited, the orientational metaphor “*high concepts*” is of particular interest as it appears to originate from literary and film studies. Kaire (2016) suggests the defining features of high concept include a pitch that is original and unique, has mass audience appeal and has some kind of storyline narrative at its core.

Experience had taught Subject B that some ideas would be expensive, others would be cheap to produce and some would be enormously challenging. Similarly, he would be aware that some of these ideas had been done before by someone else, perhaps for a different market, and that offered possibilities of borrowing them and applying them in his own brief. Eventually, the ideas would be distilled down to about five or six options which would, at that point, be presented to the client. The brief was then left alone and all staff moved on to work on something else; this was done in order to let the ideas “*settle*” and “*sit in your brain*”, and they could later be revisited with fresh eyes. The directors

returned to them after a suitable interval, selected those which he said had “legs” (i.e. they believed had potential to be realized as viable advertisements) and then would begin the processes of design including scriptwriting, copywriting and visual research. They may have decided to refer to a production company about the costs of the various alternatives and afterwards they would be in a position to discuss the ideas with the client.

### 6.4.3 SUBJECT C

Asked about his creative approach when he received a brief from a client, Subject C stated that these were rarely in written form as that was not how his current business worked. Instead, he would speak directly to his clients and:

*“drag a brief out of them ...just using my experience, really, but I think there’s always...a point to a brief and it’s about finding what is relevant to the customer or the prospect or the client” (43.56 – 44.43)*

He explained that there were probably a handful of agencies in London who produced all the “*clever headline-driven, high concept, multi-million pound budget stuff*” and then there was the rest, of which his business was a part. Many of his commissions were from business-to-business clients, and were often international, so any advertising that was too obtuse with language, or too dependent upon one particular culture as its frame of reference, was at risk of not being understood. He reiterated a more general point he had made earlier, stating:

*“Most clients have great difficulty in condensing what they do into a simple statement, and I see that as my job...For me, a brief is always a process of simplifying something to its basic, broadest terms”*  
(46.05 – 46.40)

The simplification Subject C described in this case involved reframing the brief by identifying those aspects which were considered the most crucial and directing the focus onto those, arguably by representing them through a process of signification. He went on to say he would rarely attempt to “*do anything clever with language*” in his advertising and that was because his clients did not want that; his work in terms of language consisted of short statements instead of the “*intellectual spins*” which he knew, from experience, his clients would not appreciate. Rather than the concept driven methods of the high-end, high-value agencies, his method was to:

*“deliver the message to (consumers) in a very straightforward, clear way...I think it’s a process of actually stripping away all the bullshit around a brief, drawing it down to brass tacks and trying to get in the shoes of a consumer and understanding what their motivation will be to make the purchase ... or buy that service...”* (47.54 – 48.18)

As seen with other interviewees, Subject C demonstrated that his conceptual thinking was aided by metaphors such as “*stripping away*”, “*the bullshit*”, “*brass tacks*” and “*get in the shoes of a consumer*”. These are, for the most part, recognizable as popular idioms rather than specialized jargon, but they facilitate a ready means of imagining and relating a complex process. Individual features

of the process are represented by metaphors which interact with each other with varying degrees of systemacity. The process he described is again largely the same as outlined by both Subject A and Subject B, in that it began by selecting the core requirements and discarding peripheral details. Part of this process involved attempting to understand the consumer, their concerns, needs and preferences, in order to produce an advertisement which was thereby relevant to them.

Creating advertisements was not, in Subject C's view, a building process as he was mostly able to visualize the completed commission quite quickly because he had undertaken such work several times in the past. Each commission essentially followed the same procedure, but for a different client or different product. He expanded upon this in some detail, citing an example of work his firm was currently undertaking for an international shipping consultancy. His agency had rebranded this client in the previous year, designed them a new website and had prepared an email advertisement to be sent out on the very morning of the interview. When this company gave his agency a brief, he claimed they would say they wanted their advertisement to discuss, for example, pre-purchase vessel inspections, dry-docking, flag administration, the fact that they had a presence in various ports and a host of other aspects. Subject C repeated his point that, while a client or account handler would want to cover many bases with their communication, one of his jobs was to condense down the message and this was crucial where the promotion was by email:

*"...someone's going to read an email. At best, they're going to glance at it in the way that people will glance at that letter, that direct mail letter, and there's a lot of similarities between what direct mail did and the skills I learned then, and what happens now in online comms" (54.35 – 54.50)*

With the email, the recipient would first see “*a visual*” which would tell them what the theme was, along with a headline and sub-headlines within that communication that they could quickly scan. With this in mind, instead of simply relating a series of facts about the brand or service, the focus would be on one key aspect and that was on the basis that the viewer was only going to devote a few seconds to looking at it and deciding whether to delete it, or instead to pursue it further and, hopefully, press on a link. Subject C believed it was only possible to write (in the sense of copywriting) well on a single attribute for the message to maximize its effect and so selecting that attribute was the primary task and one which he had to help to identify. In doing this, Subject C’s approach was required to tie closely with Sperber and Wilson’s (1995) theory as it is apparent that he was attempting to produce a stimulus that conveyed a presumption of optimal relevance, that stimulus was relevant enough to make it worthwhile for the receiver to process it, and it was the most relevant one compatible with the communicator’s abilities and preferences (p. 270).

He briefly described how he accomplished this:

*“...it’s a process of saying this is who you are; this is what you’re good at; this is what you do; this is what you want the client to do ...and it’s one thing” (56.24 – 56.32)*

Subject C observed that his approach differed according to whether he was promoting a brand or a specific product and he explained one of the main reasons for this was that, when advertising a product, much of the focus would inevitably fall on the service which was offered around that product. This answer is perhaps best understood when it is remembered that his advertising was mainly business-to-business, and the example he supplied illustrates this.

He described a brief for advertising software to control technical equipment for the baking industry and the machine required for inserting jam into tarts. The

jam had to be at precisely the right temperature: if it had been too cool then it would not set, but if it were too hot then it would burn the pastry. Suppliers of such software could simply deliver it and then forget about it; it was imperative that ongoing support was provided to the customer. The advertising had to convince prospective purchasers that such support, and training, would be on hand and efficient because their business depended upon it. Indeed, in relation to products aimed at businesses, they tended to be defined not so much by the physical items they supplied, but by the level of support offered around them. He likened this to UK supermarket chains whereby one would have prices significantly higher, but their checkouts had more staff, stores would be cleaner and tidier and staff more helpful; conversely, the alternative supermarket would be cheaper, but queues at checkouts would be longer and customer service was almost non-existent. On the other hand, focus on product rather than brand could be approached differently when the target audience was the general public. Another commission was cited to illustrate the contrast, this time for a client who was a large furniture retailer in the north of England:

*“...when we do work for them, it’s all about product. Sofas, basically. And it’s all about this sofa, at that price, that’s how much you save and isn’t this a great sofa? Like, the other concerns around their service levels and their shops being this standard or that standard is irrelevant to them...” (1.02.20 - 1.02.40)*

He stated that his agency had encouraged this company to engage in brand building, but they had been uninterested in this approach as they had “*a sales mentality*” and any attempt to persuade them to deliver a branded campaign with “*intellectual content*” had proved futile.

This interviewee mostly did not think directly about semiotic theories when designing advertising, but he described how he considered them as being present in his mind intuitively. This was perhaps due to his previous reading on

the subject and his experience in the business rather than consciously attempting to apply the theories in his creative processes. He was also conscious that most of his clients wanted a simple approach which they could understand: *“I think very, very few clients want a sort of clever semiotic kind of approach to what they do.”* (1:04:57 – 1:05:02)

He seemed here to be making a distinction between what he regarded as the practical aspects of advertising that his clients wanted, and what he considered to be *“clever semiotic”* advertising. One interpretation of this is that he had misunderstood precisely what semiotics is but, in view of his previously expressed knowledge of this field, a more likely explanation is that he was referring to the type of advertising he had previously called *“high concept”*.

#### **6.4.4 SUBJECT D**

In the process of forming ideas for advertising, Subject D outlined his general philosophy as constantly striving to be better, not believing he knew all the answers and looking away from his computer and finding out what was happening in the real world. He gave the example of checking out what his children were doing, how they were interacting with their friends and trying to experience the world from their perspective. His constant endeavors to improve what he did and to learn required him to be open-minded and to be willing to learn from anyone.

The process of visualizing ideas varied in terms of how spontaneously the ideas had arisen. Sometimes he was able to generate his ideas very rapidly, but he recalled someone making what he regarded as an extremely valid observation:

*“The difference between someone off the street and someone professional in the business we’re in is that someone off the street can come up with something genius - or nothing; someone professional would come up with something genius – or something.”*  
(15.56 - 16.10)

While an advertiser sought to find the genius with every brief, this was not always feasible for a number of reasons including the types of briefs, certain constraints on that brief, budgetary considerations, time factors, the complexity of the brief and having several propositions rather than just one. The simpler the brief, he said, the more quickly the ideas would form and the more scope there would be for creative work. He noted that, with modern briefs, there was a tendency for clients to over-think them and he preferred those clients who understood that the brief is “*a springboard – a catalyst for the creative imagination*”. The complexity and quality of a brief ultimately dictated the outcome and the final product that is delivered to the client. From the agency’s side, a brief’s “*brilliance*” required extensive work in terms of:

“...*strategy, insight, distilling all the client information, looking at the semiotics*<sup>66</sup> ... *looking at all the things out there; being culturally aware; being aware of the landscape of the competitors...*” (17.01 - 17.13)

A “*great brief*” was, he said, the to key success in generating the necessary creative thinking for the agency to produce the quality advertising. Clients, he claimed, sometimes made briefs convoluted because they were not willing to let go of aspects they had in mind and this hindered the distillation process necessary to reveal the critical core message.

Subject D discussed how he called upon the expertise of different members of his team according to whether he was promoting a brand or advertising a specific product. He regarded having these resources as one of the advantages

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<sup>66</sup> The subject’s use of the term “semiotics” in this case was taken to refer to his general impression of the company and its products rather than as suggesting the application of specific theories within the field of semiotics. In hindsight, it may have been revealing to have probed his use of “semiotics” further in relation to this context.

of working in a large agency and it enabled him to “*build the dream team*” to address any particular task. Nevertheless, the thought processes and approaches adopted in brand versus product advertising had many similarities. Both types of advertising required the advertisers to immerse themselves in the client’s brief, to understand the brand and the competition. In the case of a new product launch, such as a new chocolate bar, the manufacturer would already have their own way of carrying this out, such as highlighting the enjoyment of consuming such products while, in the case of a high-end fashion brand, it would then be necessary to tune-in to the world of fashion. They both required a clear awareness of what exactly any advertising was intended to achieve, but it was also fundamental to determine who the audience was and how to engage with them. In that respect, each advertising commission had its own particular features and requirements to which the end product of the agency had to be tailored. He did not believe it was feasible to market something in his work without the involvement of branding to some degree:

*“People buying a brand buy into something. ..Whether that brand is established, like a Cadbury, or a start-up that needs to have voice. You need to stand for something...” (22.38 - 22.50)*

What a brand stands for might be value, or it might be its premium nature. He gave the example of *Dove* products which, he claimed, had “*reinvented*” some of the notions around natural beauty that defined its position in the market and how it was distinguished from other brands:

*“We have to cleverly work out where you sit and what market place, who you are talking to, what demographic...” (23.47 – 23.54)*

From that, it would be possible to work out the appropriate strategy, and what the agency could “*unravel*” for the client. Another example he cited was advertising for car manufacturer *Skoda*, and he recalled the question asked in their advertisements as to why there was a waiting list for *Skoda*’s vehicles<sup>67</sup>. This was, he believed, remarkable as it signaled a complete re-invention of the brand from one which had been regarded as cheap and inferior to one that was respectable and desirable. Brand could not, in Subject D’s mind, be disregarded even where the focus of a particular campaign was on the product:

*“There’s not one client that comes through the door that isn’t a brand in some way, shape or form. They might not believe they are, but they are a brand because that is what we do...”* (24.34 – 24.44)

Whether a brand was a product or a service, it was of paramount importance that the advertiser was able to construe and define the brand’s nature and features. A brand’s chief strength may have been that it was cost-effective, or efficient, or it may have had qualities such as being “*super-tasty*” or “*cheeky and lovable*”. While product advertising was an element of his work, this interviewee regarded brand presentation and promotion as the key to success.

The challenges Subject D most relished started with “*looking at a blank piece of paper*” and moving on from there to stimulate his creative instincts. His inspiration, which he repeatedly referred to as “*the magic*”, may have come from spending time searching pages on the internet, looking over past works and, as mentioned, having the “*great brief*” from the client. As ideas came, he said he “*push(ed)*” them and “*squeez(ed)*” them until he reached a point at which he

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<sup>67</sup> The allusion here is that *Skoda* had, for several decades, occupied a market position at the very bottom. Their cars are claimed to have massively improved in quality and performance and the brand image enhanced accordingly. According to Murden (2001): “A product or service can live or die by its brand image, though the example of *Skoda* - which now has a waiting list for its *Fabia* estate - proves that new life can be breathed into seemingly lost causes.”

stopped, and being able to recognise when that had occurred was also a critical factor. The metaphors Subject D chose here are interesting and it may be suggested that, following the exhausting and perhaps painful process of “*pushing*” and “*squeezing*”, a viable idea is born.

#### **6.4.5 SUBJECT E**

Upon receiving a new advertising brief, Subject E stated his first thought would probably be to ascertain what the public’s existing perception of the particular product or service, and what was happening in their life which could have significance to that. From there, he would attempt to discern “*some sort of truth*” with which the man or woman in the street would identify and say “*that’s me*”. Sometimes this would suggest coming up with some kind of word play; this may have fit well with the product, but the interviewee said he tended not to do that because it failed to take account of the people themselves, i.e. those he was trying to persuade. Nevertheless, he did use language which aimed to intrigue the receiver and this was illustrated by him with an example from about twenty years earlier when his agency received a commission to promote a golf training course and which culminated in a golf magazine carrying the advertisement bearing the headline “*play less golf*”. The headline was intended to surprise readers who were clearly players of the sport and one would assume wanted to play more golf. The idea was that this would stimulate sufficient curiosity to investigate the advertisement further and thus extract the full meaning, which he explained thus:

*“Of course you do actually want to play less golf. You want to go round in 72 shots rather than 82 shots.” (10.45 – 10.50)*

From that headline, the skill of the copywriter was manifest in the ability to communicate the cleverly obscured key message, in this case that the product, i.e. the course, would enable a player to play the game with greater accuracy and

success. In order to be certain that the reader would understand the message, and relate it to the product, the headline was accompanied by explanatory text and by a recognisable logo. Subject E believed that the “*play less golf*” line was of a kind that was enduring and could be used in future advertising.

Approaches to design varied according to whether the advertising formed part of a campaign, perhaps where a client wished to point out more than just one main facet or attribute. Where this was the case, he would attempt at an early stage to determine what he considered to be the appropriate “*tone of voice*”, including whether seriousness was needed, or an optimistic or lively tone would be more suited. With some briefs, the ideas came very quickly:

*“You think about the person you are trying to persuade...you put yourself in their shoes if you can and ... you are writing and you get up, walk to the loo and by the time you’ve come back you have solved it because you have moved away from your seat. I find that happens a lot.” (14.23 – 14.52)*

One tactic this interviewee used to arouse ideas was to make himself listen to music which he believes had the same “tone” as the message he aimed to reproduce. For example, if he wanted to inspire a mood that is aggressive, he would listen to, for example, *Mars – the Bringer of War* from Gustav Holst’s suite *The Planets*. He found this to be a successful way of installing the requisite thoughts and attitudes in his mind. Conversely, there may have been occasions where he wanted to cultivate a “sweet” mood and he said he might have turned to something like the *Pastoral Symphony*<sup>68</sup>. Another method he employed to generate ideas was to write on, for example, yellow paper as the colour of the paper somehow made him “*feel differently*”. By deviating from white paper, and

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<sup>68</sup> The writer assumes the interviewee was referring to Beethoven’s Sixth Symphony, otherwise known as the *Pastoral Symphony*, although this was not explicitly confirmed.

perhaps having some music in the background, he was taking his mind away from the usual and mundane<sup>69</sup>:

*"It might just ... take you out of the humdrum; take you out of the ...what you're used to. That's of course what I'm always trying to do. Get out of where I usually am and put myself somewhere else"*  
(16.24 - 16.39)

The next part of the interview inquired into the different approaches adopted according to whether Subject E was aiming to promote a brand or a product. He confirmed that, while this was contingent upon precisely what the brand or products were, the normal answer to that would be:

*"the brand one would be more emotionally biased and the product one would be more rationally biased."* (17.25 - 17.32)

He elaborated that, when devising an advertisement where the emphasis was on the former, the aim was to cause the audience to form some kind of *"emotional attachment"* to that brand in question to the extent that it occupied *"a privileged position"* in the reader or hearer's mental repository of brands. This was an example of pure relational marketing as opposed to the transactional marketing<sup>70</sup> whereby the only aim was to convince a customer to buy a specific product at a particular time. Where this this type of marketing was successful, the outcome would be the achievement of the much desired phenomenon of

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<sup>69</sup> This behaviour could be related to Shklovsky's concept of "defamiliarisation", in that Subject E is trying to propagate original ideas and inspiration by removing his mind from the mundane, and from automatized responses, as described in Subchapter 2.5, above.

<sup>70</sup> The transactional versus relational marketing distinction, and the semiotics of it, is discussed further in Subchapter 6.7.3, below.

brand loyalty and this was, he said, essentially an emotional response. That is not to say there was no rational element to brand loyalty: consumers generally used their own experience of particular brands and decided which performed to their liking. In the case of advertising a product, Subject E would perceive the audience as needing details of the product and as being:

*“in a different mode, where they have got a problem that needs solving, and this solves it...in that...it delivers” (18.52 - 19.04)*

He followed this with an example of himself having recently purchased a rucksack which was suitable for commuting. Were he to have advertised this, he would, he insisted, have made a point of listing the excellent product benefits and features. In so doing, he imagined that an interested reader would, after reading of these attributes, have appreciated that the rucksack they were currently using was inferior to the one he was promoting. Subject E commented that he agreed with Bernstein's (1974) view that there were probably some advertisements which were completely devoid of emotion and others that were equally devoid of reason, but most consisted of a mixture of emotion and reason.

## **6.5 STRATEGY**

This subchapter relates to questions which inquired into the practical activities and protocols undertaken in the interviewees' advertising design, and it summarises answers supplied to questions asked in Part C and Part D of the questionnaire.

### 6.5.1 SUBJECT A

Once Subject A had received a brief, he stated his first step would be as follows:

*“...You would probably try and put down on paper, or at least get settled in your mind, all the different angles of what we’re looking at...you try to come at it from a different approach and often you would throw out lots of ideas...”* (20.04 – 20.26)

In his circumstances at the time of the interview, he formulated his ideas (as defined in the previous subchapter) on advertising designs mainly on his own, which he said affected this process. He added that he was not convinced that brainstorming was an effective way of forming ideas, but he did collect as many ideas as possible, manipulated these in his head, allowed them to “*settle*” and then tried to arrive at conclusions as to which ones would work and which would not. After this, he would attempt to visualise these ideas and present the client with a range of possibilities in a visual format to consider (20.20 – 21.42). An advertisement he had been working on prior to the interview consisted of a photograph showing discarded electronic equipment piled up; it was alluding to a scrappage scheme that was approaching ten years old. The photograph had superimposed in large print the phrase “*End of the decayed*” and any reader here would have to follow a process in order to recover a relevant meaning. This process would begin with an expectation that the viewer, aided by the photograph, would recognise the near homophony of decayed/decade, accrue the mental reward for solving the pun and then be motivated to look for a more general relevance. Next, as this advertisement appeared in a trade journal, it was predicted that the viewer would recognise that relevance specifically in relation to their own business.

Subject A related details of another major campaign he had been commissioned to undertake and that was for a Swiss company which he described as one marketing “*solutions*” rather than particular products. This kind of enterprise

would normally be approached by businesses or public sector organisations that had a particular problem or project and offered design services, technical expertise and advice as a package. The issue for him in this case was that the client explained they wanted to “boil down” their core and brand values. After some difficulties in clarifying what was needed, he eventually proposed an alliterative company strapline of “*Design, Develop, Deliver*” which was the essence of what the company did and its ethos (24.35 – 25.39). The choice of words was sufficiently non-specific so that they could be relevant to virtually any organisational process in which their client was engaged. Similarly, the order of these verbs was certainly not random, but rather they suggested a logical progression from drawing board to finished article. It was also noticed that the word “deliver” had a range of meanings, the most literal of which was the physical act of bringing something to some person or place. At the metaphorical level, one of the more colloquial interpretations of “deliver”, used intransitively, connoted with success and satisfaction.

The next aspect considered related to how Subject A formulated his advertising so that it was accurately directed to the intended target audience. He pointed out that his experience in working with business-to-business marketing had taught him that such advertising had to address personnel at multiple levels within a business. The individual ordering a technical item, the end user of that item and the person paying for it, were likely to be different entities. To a large extent, appropriate branding alleviated some of the issues which stemmed from this and the technical publications in which the advertisements appeared were mostly aimed at such people as logistics managers, managing directors, financial directors and specifiers (25.51 – 26.44). In the case of technical journals, these were pitched at a very specific sector and an advertiser would identify that sector and select the most appropriate publication. It would, he said, be improvident to invest in costly advertising in a mass publication, such as *Radio Times*, when aiming at such a specialist market; one aim of advertisers was to ensure least wastage. This explained why he produced relatively few billboard type advertisements as these were less efficient at targeting. He was prompted

to recall a possible exception to this where he produced advertising designed to promote awareness of a particular event, such as an exhibition (26.45 – 28.40).

The use of symbolism and folklore were discussed. Subject A asserted that he deliberately used these and that the example of the Robin Hood statue in Nottingham as a cultural symbol of that city demonstrated this<sup>71</sup>:

*“...the symbolism of the local areas, I guess...we tried to use it as a short cut to saying ‘we’re in your patch’ ” (34.21 – 34.39)*

It may be assumed here that the expression “*symbolism*” was not specifically intended to correspond with a particular semiotic theory such as how symbols are defined by Saussure or Peirce, but was instead used in a general sense, or in a sense which is commonly understood within marketing. Aaker (2010), for example, proposes that symbols constitute a “*key ingredient of brand development*” (p. 84) and advocates “*elevating symbols*” (ibid) so that they form part of the identity which reflects the potential power of brands. While not defining symbols as such, Aaker (2010) suggests they fall into three categories for the purpose of branding, specifically visual imagery, metaphors and the brand heritage. Visual imagery consists of images that are memorable and powerful, capture the brand’s identity and have been established over time (ibid). Subject A’s mention of symbolism did, however, indicate his appreciation of the semiotic value of a recognizable image of the locality and thereby demonstrated the use of a kind of semiotic metalanguage in describing and conceptualizing his working methods. His choice to use symbolism as “*a short cut*”, which told the viewer “*we’re in your patch*”, reinforced this point. The symbol in this instance was the means of conveying a message in a way whereby

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<sup>71</sup> The character of Robin Hood is, of course, internationally known. While the legend claims he lived in Sherwood Forest, just to the north of Nottingham, the statue is situated within the city and adjacent to Nottingham Castle’s walls. The use of this figure in the advertising is predicated on an assumption that viewers of it across the UK will recognise his association with Nottinghamshire or with the city.

the signifier would bear no obvious similarity with that which it represented, and yet it was entirely non-linguistic. In addition, comprehending the message required the viewer to follow the cognitive process of assuming relevance, drawing upon encyclopaedic knowledge and recovering the implicatures.

Subject A stated that other people he knew who worked in advertising did not generally think with a high level of sophistication and this differentiated the service he offered from that of others. As an illustration, he described a series of advertisements he was shown when he was studying at college where “*women were shown as bits*”. The most memorable and, in his view, worst, example his lecturer could find was an advertisement for carpet underlay which depicted a woman in just her underwear and the words “*What matters is what you’ve got underneath*”. He regarded this as “*such a tenuous link*” to the product marketed, and went on:

*“One of the things I often say to the clients ...because it’s quite a narrow field but...you don’t want to look like everybody else. The whole point is to stand out.” (33.40 – 34.16)*

As with the image of the Robin Hood statue, it was evident that Subject A appreciated how a link between a signifier and that which it represented had to be understood if the message were to be successfully transmitted. Imagery was one of the modes employed in the advertisement and certain paradigmatic choices were made by the producer; among these were the fact that the model would be a female of a particular age and appearance, her attire, and the pose she adopted and the backdrop. The image provided a stimulus in that it attracted attention by virtue of the model being clad only in her underwear. It also initiated the process of conveying the substantive message of the advertisement, namely that high quality underlay is essential for good carpeting. For this aim to be achieved, the image had to be accompanied by links that were less tenuous in terms of

their relation to the product being marketed. In this case, it consisted of a linguistic element in the form of a caption which was made deliberately ambiguous, i.e. that it could be referring to a woman's state of dress as well as to carpets. While it was not specified, other product or brand links may have been present in the commercial, including text and/or trade marks, which would have ensured that the message relating to the advertised underlay would have emerged as the most prominent. Other messages, such those which might have occurred from the sexually suggestive imagery, would have been relegated in the mind of the viewer. Subject A explained that "*looking like everybody else*" related to the common practice at the time for showing all products in association with suggestive or sexualised parts of women's bodies and using those to attract attention to the advertisement. It was notable that he regarded this approach, widely used in the industry at the time, as being so commonplace as to lose its effect as a stimulus and that, in order to "*stand out*", an advertiser had to apply originality when designing the foregrounded elements of advertisements<sup>72</sup>.

The final question inquired how, when marketing, Subject A attempted to draw upon the reader's pre-existing knowledge. He found that a rather difficult question to answer and pointed out that the aim was more likely to seek to challenge what was already known although, to achieve this, it would be necessary to confirm what that knowledge consisted of. He gave an example of the forklift industry and advertising copy he produced for a Korean manufacturer, including a photograph of the capital of Korea accompanied by the strapline: "*Seoul . Like Tokyo, only cheaper*" (35.47 - 35.59). While this particular advertisement was never published, it was based on assumptions that potential customers would know that:

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<sup>72</sup> A contemporary reader may recoil at the representation of gender here and wonder why this was not mentioned as an objection. However, it should be remembered that the interviewee would have been undergoing this education in the early 1980s, a time when such advertising methods were commonplace and so unremarkable.

- Tokyo is the capital of Japan and Japanese products were high quality and brand leaders.
- Seoul is the capital of South Korea, and Korean technology and manufacturing was expanding.

From that understanding, it would be possible to interpret the metonymic use of the respective capitals as representing technological products, in this case forklift trucks and, with the aid of other elements present, namely the context, (including the particular publication, images and signifiers such as recognizable company logos) an enriched meaning would have become manifest to the reader. When it came to promoting a product, an activity which he did not believe could be detached from brand promotion, he repeated his ethos mentioned earlier of “*boiling down*” the core message and crafting this into a memorable strapline. One he devised for a forklift manufacturer became widely recognized throughout the industry by dealers and end-users as the essence of the brand and its products was “*Simple, Powerful, Performance*”. This strapline was conceived approximately ten years previously and was still being utilized at the time of the interview.

### **6.5.2 SUBJECT B**

Subject B was emphatic that his strategy did not differ according to whether he was marketing a brand or a product; his company’s approach was always to “*tell a story*”. Products and brands had, so far as he was concerned, the same attributes, including a “*personality*”, and they had to take the consumer through the AIDA process of awareness, interest, desire and action. “AIDA” is an acronym for a behavioural model used in advertising and marketing and that attempts to show the list of events that would ideally occur when an advertisement is viewed by a consumer. This is not a model based on any specific theory, but rather one which evolved from early approaches to

advertising practice going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and has been modified and refined by practitioners into the four-part model shown below:

*“A – attention (awareness): attract the attention of the customer.*

*I – inform the customer.*

*D – direct benefit: convince customers that they want and desire the product or service and that it will satisfy their needs.*

*A – action: lead customers towards taking action and/or purchasing.”* (Brierley, 2002: p. 151).

This model has a clear structure, or syntagmatic character, which illustrates a process of actions that must follow a specific sequence. The “*attention*” aspect is to be achieved by means of a sign or series of signs acting as the stimulus, prompting the consumer to engage with the advertisement. It may also serve to ensure the consumer recognizes it as such rather than as some other kind of text. To achieve this, the advertisement may utilize a linguistic sign (foregrounded copy) or non-linguistic sign (such as an image, the layout, music or sound), or a combination. Informing the customer means relating sufficient facts about the brand or product, or reminding them of those facts, or at least conveying a desired impression, sufficient for the initial aim of the advertisement to be achieved. A more compelling case for buying the product is made out with the third element of AIDA while the action component is intended to change the viewer’s or hearer’s behavior in a concrete way.

Subject B cited an example of an ongoing campaign to promote tourism at a local castle. Among the attractions at the castle were a wall walk, a Victorian prison and a collection of valuable artefacts stored in a vault; every one of these

attractions he viewed as an individual product. The creative development process was applied to each product while the brand aspect was that of the castle itself. There may, he said, have been a shift of emphasis with regard to brand versus product advertising as the former avoided discussing aspects such as price or place, but rather the focus shifted to encouraging the customer to engage with the brand. This he described as a “*craft difference*”, as in using marketing skills to execute a particular idea, and he distinguished the craft aspect from the creative process. It was suggested to him that there must be radically different creative approaches employed when, for example, a brief was to produce advertising for technical components in a trade journal, with all the details of the product including specification, price and delivery, as compared to a lifestyle brand such as *Versace*, where the accent was not placed on specific products, but purely on the brand personality. Subject B discounted this and argued that, while the motivation varied enormously, the process of creation was still the same, but delivered in a different way. The Versace advertisement “*may not obviously say anything but actually by not doing that, it is saying quite a lot as well*” (14.23 - 14.31). A seemingly inappropriate approach, e.g. trying to design a trade advertisement in the same way as a lifestyle advertisement for a lifestyle brand, would raise the question as to whether the audience had been properly understood. However, that did not mean it would necessarily be amiss to use the lifestyle branding method for a technical advertisement. It may, for instance, be employed to highlight a point of difference, generating attention (as proposed by the AIDA model) and thereby encourage the viewer to engage with it for that reason. Subject B confirmed that semiotic theories did not play a part in his thinking when designing an advertisement, because this has not formed any part of his education in marketing. However, when the basic notions of signs, symbols, cultural myths and folklore, were explained, he insisted that these did play an implicit role and this would be intuitive, arising from his existing awareness of the prevailing culture.

This is of particular interest for the purpose of this study as it implies that the relevance of at least some of the theories of semiotics, and especially those that are included in the training of marketing and advertising practitioners, can be

tested. It also indicates the degree to which the creative processes, the conceptualisations that occur and how these are discussed among members of advertising teams, depend heavily upon a shared metalanguage.

Near the end of the interview, he said:

*"I bet if you broke down our processes ... if you could look into our heads...we'd be using semiotics in some way, but not actively...not explicitly" (27.47 – 27.59)*

In support of this, he produced an advertisement designed a few months previously for an automotive company. The headline text read "*First Aid for cars*" and it was juxtaposed with an image of a car wired to a diagnostic machine. Parallels, including the choice of words (*First Aid*) and the image of an item of technical equipment wired to the internal workings of a vehicle, invited the viewer to recognize similarities between vehicle diagnostic equipment and a heart monitor. They suggested, according to Subject B, that the wires were producing data about "*the heart of the car, almost*" (30.04 – 30.06). He viewed this as symbolism, although it could be argued that the parallels were implicated rather than made manifest. A further noteworthy point was that, as seen in the previous subchapter, Subject B made extensive use of metaphors in explaining his own processes and in this example he was using conceptual metaphors directly in his advertising when he referred to "*first aid*" and "*the heart of the car*"<sup>73</sup>.

The nature and degree of detail in briefs from clients varied considerably and depended upon the relationship he had with his clients. Subject B stated that, with most clients, a great deal of time was invested in attempting to shape how

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<sup>73</sup> This example is discussed further in Chapter 7.4 below in terms of the use of metaphors in advertising by all interviewees.

the client thought in terms of how they should be briefed and what the agencies required from them. One of the first key matters about which they had to reach early agreement was to establish what the objectives of the advertisement were. This then led to further questions so that the audience could be identified and it could be ascertained how well the client understood the audience. This interviewee also said he aimed to discover whether the client had in mind a positioning of themselves as a brand that they wanted to reinforce (18.31 – 18.40). It was usually easier with those clients with whom his firm had worked over time. They would generally begin briefing the agency on their main goals; they would be clear as to what they were trying to achieve, and whether they wanted a new approach or just more of the same. Normally, a client expected the creative aspect to come from the agency rather than instructing them as to exactly how the advertisement was to appear.

One function of a brief, as mentioned, was to discuss who were the target audience and, to some extent, that could be contrived. An example of this was occurring at the time of the interview and concerned the discount supermarket mentioned. They had commissioned a series of radio advertisements to promote lines where they were strong and wanted to expand sales specifically in barbecue meats, sauces, and also alcohol products. It was suggested that it could be propitious to direct advertisements specifically at male buyers and to do so on radio stations that they knew had a predominantly male audience.

Subject B stated:

*“we put together a very male-orientated ad that was very tongue-in-cheek about barbecue meats and stuff like that, and alcohol, and so we identified the audience very clearly” (22.40 – 22.52)*

Something similar could also be achieved when advertising with national media, including newspapers, as they often had a lifestyle or a food section that Subject B believed would have appealed more to women, or in the main part of the

newspaper where it would have reached all demographic categories equally. When advertising to the general public, segmentation<sup>74</sup> of an audience has limitations; an advertisement aimed at women is essentially directed at all women or, more specifically, all women who shop for families. In the case of men, those men who like watching sport may be the target. To achieve any kind of fine segmentation invariably involves stereotyping<sup>75</sup> or, to use another of his metaphors, “*taking broad brushstrokes*” (22.36).

Efforts were made to test the consumers’ understanding of proposed or ongoing advertisements by various means. Subject B stated he sometimes undertook what he referred to as a “*test creative*”, which was conducted through focus groups. He gave an example again with the supermarket advertising he had described previously and was in progress at the time of the interview. A specialist company had been commissioned to investigate and report on the client’s marketing. This included analysing their advertising’s effectiveness from several angles, including audience comprehension and brand relevance, and was to be conducted online with 100 to 150 test subjects. Conducting such research was contingent upon the client’s budget being large enough, and also whether it was considered worthwhile:

*“So if you’re spending half a million pounds on media, then it’s probably worth doing some testing. If you are spending a million pounds over a year, then it’s probably worth doing some testing”.*  
(26.40 – 26.48)

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<sup>74</sup> Segmentation is defined by Barthes (see Chapter 2.8 above). The term has also been adopted as metalanguage relating to marketing and refers to the categorising consumers into types in order that advertising and other marketing practices can be more accurately directed to potential customers (Brierley, 2002).

<sup>75</sup> Stereotyping has been mentioned directly or indirectly by more than one interviewee during the research and this aspect will be further explored in the next chapter.

He then referred back to the castle brief that was mentioned previously. In a case like that, where the advertising was wholly new and innovative, and the budgets tended to be far more restrictive, then no such research was feasible and assessing comprehension had to be a judgment which was based upon the client's views (including by simply testing it out on staff) and also relying on the agency's "craft" experience. He considered this method of assessing understanding to be equally valid, even if it was not as robust as the formalized research. Subject B said he relied heavily on a client's knowledge of their market, their customers and the ability of customers to recognize products, along with any perceived problems with the product image.

### **6.5.3 SUBJECT C**

Subject C had previously summarised his background as being mainly concerned with direct marketing and much of his present work was through this channel. The methods he had learned and employed are described in more detail below, but he found this medium of advertising especially insightful. He stated that he regarded it as a craft rather than an artistic pursuit, although his job was "*to overlay a sheen or a brand over it*" (23.22 - 23.29). He viewed this method as an "*almost scientific process*" and described how it could work using different strategies and testing them among different groups. Sometimes the variations were offer-based (e.g. discount vouchers, gifts or other incentives) while at other times they would try language-based differences. He explained the latter in some detail, beginning with the first impression created upon receiving direct mail, namely the envelope. If the envelope failed to capture the attention of the recipient, it would be immediately discarded, and the first barrier was to ensure the receiver would open it. Having opened it, the next step would be for the recipient to discover that it contained one or perhaps two leaflets along with a letter personalised to them and with their name on it which, he emphasized, was spelled correctly. This ensured it was personal to them, adding to its apparent

relevance and thereby ensuring the recipient will continue engaging with it. He described the receiver's assumed behaviour at this point:

*...what they would then do is scan the letter. So what they would typically do is scan the headlines and sub-heads and think 'is this relevant. If it isn't – bin. If it was, then they would read further. At that point, they would put down the letter and take up the leaflet and read the leaflet." (21.21 - 21.40)*

Leaflets were now personalized and their purpose was largely reinforcement, to re-present the same information as the letter, but in a different format, and perhaps in a more visual way. The logic of this was that, once the receiver had begun to scan the leaflet, they would look again at the letter and read its contents. Letters were produced in two basic forms: one was a lengthy and detailed letter which described the benefits of the product and often ran into two pages while the other form was shorter and punchier, perhaps with more “*visuals*” on it. These would be produced simultaneously and tested for comparison to determine which was the most effective. The aspect of the opening, or discarding without opening, of direct mail was, according to Subject C, a much tested and researched area within marketing. It is also, however, one which appears to have been neglected by semioticians.

It is observed that what is occurring here is a fully linked-up communication approach which includes all aspects of the material design (materiality) of the relevant signs and their temporal succession. Each communication reveals a set of paradigmatic choices made by the producer and these include aspects of the design of the letter in terms of the modes employed including words and graphics, the type of paper, and even down to ensuring the correct spelling of the recipient's name. In addition, each communication occupies a position along a syntagm consisting of a series of such letters individually crafted and dispatched at specific intervals. The function of each letter is thus integrative in

that it seeks to combine the recipient's present experience (i.e. of receiving a correspondence) with both their past experience and also with anticipated or possible future experience (Harris, 2010) and maximum effect is thereby generated through a sophisticated process of semiosis.

Subject C elaborated on the details of the campaign he had been working on that day as follows:

*"The email that went out today is the first of a five-stage email communication. So one is an email going out once a week for the next five weeks and that... programme is going to build up a story of all the things they do and work as a kind of drip-feed in terms of all of the fifteen things they do are going to be encapsulated into all of these emails, but not all at the same time." (56.49 – 57.17).*

As with the letters, the composition of a subject line with email communication was seen as critical in determining whether it was opened or discarded on sight. There were certain practical factors that had to be considered when wording these such as the use of trigger words that are popular with advertisers, but which had to be avoided with email shots. These included words such as "*free*" and "*sex*", and they elicit an "*automatized*" response (see Subchapter 2.5, above) in the minds of readers based on assumptions that they were of high relevance and immediately interpretable. However, in email shots to companies, the presence of these words is likely to result in the email in which they were included being filtered out and deposited into the spam inbox, and so the email in question would likely never be opened.

Identifying and targeting an audience, or what he referred to as "*data selection*", appeared straightforward for the kind of direct mail advertising, particularly business-to-business, that Subject C's firm undertook. This work was aimed towards senior decision-makers, such as at director level, in companies in certain sectors and of a certain size. When it came to direct mail to the wider

public, such as the furniture retailer mentioned previously, this consisted of identifying particular demographics including people within predetermined age bands, at a certain income level, certain house types and sizes in certain geographical locations, and within certain “*drive times*” of the stores that were being promoted. There was no question of assessing the recipients’ intellectual capacities, e.g. by trying to establish the kinds of newspapers they were likely to read. Instead, assumptions of their educational level were made on the basis of the demographics mentioned in order to categorise them in terms of their likely lifestyle and decide whether they were “*the type of person who buys furniture from this store*” (1.13.23 – 1.13.28). Another means he mentioned which was employed as data selection was social media and, specifically, *Facebook*. He explained this as follows:

*“Now, if you do Facebook advertising, you can select very specific age groups and audiences. So we’re, at the moment, doing a campaign that is proving to be very successful, very effective, for a university who do a certain type of vocational degree based around music and the entertainment industry... we are targeting 17 to 18-year olds who’ve got interests in music in certain geographic locations....You won’t see these ads if you are 22; if you’re 18 you will.”* (1.14.24 – 1.16.07)

*Facebook* is attractive to advertisers precisely because it can direct its advertising to its intended audience with huge precision. In order to achieve this, Subject C had to ensure the advertisement was written in such a way that its significance to the reader would be readily apparent and potential candidates would be thus encouraged to enrol for the degree courses offered. The advertisement was built around a slogan that the education being offered would lead to careers that were “*anything but ordinary*”. In other words, young adults were offered the prospect of taking a degree that would enable them to gain a position as a stage manager, touring the world and meeting popular

artists and rock stars and celebrities and tapping into their aspirations for a well-paid and varied career, and not ending up in a mundane job such as in an office or supermarket. He regarded his work as a matter of, to use his metaphor, “*boiling down*” (1.19.01) the core message. Conveying the essence of the message through simplicity was his key strategy in this advertisement and consequently audience comprehension would not be a major concern.

In terms of the use of semiotics, Subject C recalled Barthes’ “*Italianicity*” notion and how he had used that to explain the concept of cultural myths to his business partner. He then gave his own example of how he had applied a similar myth, i.e. that of the notion of five stars representing the ultimate in efficiency and luxury, in the commission for the shipping consultancy that he related earlier in the interview:

*“There’s five points why their service is better than everyone else’s, and I wrapped it up as a five-star guarantee. So the opening line was ‘guaranteed by (company name)’. And then I’d got five stars. So I am using visual language to reinforce .....and I very much doubt anyone will read through the five points but they’ll see a five-star guarantee and five lovely bright silver stars looking nice and classy.”*  
(1.20.56 - 1.21.22)

The signification of the star icons combined with the word “guarantee” would, he said, be interpreted as indicating that this company could be trusted. He went on to say: “*When it gets visual, and combines with language, that’s when it’s at its most powerful*” (1.24.28 - 1.24.28). This echoes some of the claims of Barthes (1957, as described in Subchapter 2.7) in terms of combining imagery with words in that the signifieds of the former, which are polysemous, have their meaning *anchored* to some extent by the text in the form of a caption.

It is notable that Subject C was familiar with Barthes and, while this cannot be established with any certainty how much he had been influenced by Barthes’

work, it appears to be the case that the interviewee has been unconsciously applying at least some aspects of the theory.

Subject C expressed his belief that there had been a radical shift in the nature of advertising in recent years which had, he said, become “*brainless*” while more sophisticated approaches had become less common. He explained the implications for his work as follows:

*“Whereas it used to be an industry full of professionals, I would say now I would say it is an industry that has professionals at various levels, but it is full ... of people who don’t really know what they are doing....so I think the industry has been de-skilled and de-intellectualised ...and the content is almost becoming less impressive ...and that’s why I think my skills are actually becoming more relevant”.* (1.06.32 – 1.07.42)

He perceived that there was now a lack of application of academic rigour informing marketing methods and that the internet had exacerbated this. Anyone, he claimed, could put together a website and call themselves a designer even where they had almost no professional education or training in art or design. The ability to be able to produce websites was now achieved through familiarity with instant web design tools such as *Word Press*, and even the specialist software that his firm operated had become simpler. The industry had thus been massively de-skilled and, with the exception of the prestigious agencies working with major brands, there had been a move towards businesses creating their own advertising in-house. Consequently, firms such as his were only able to charge about half of what they used to charge a decade earlier for their work and the standard of much of the advertising produced had become dismally low.

Lastly, Subject C was asked how, when designing advertising, he tried to ascertain and work with his audience’s background knowledge, how he checked

that knowledge out and what assumptions he made. He replied that it was mostly a “*gut feel thing*”, whereas sometimes an advertisement also involved educating the audience. He exemplified this by referring to some advertising his firm had devised for a cutting edge health supplements company which worked alongside medical professionals. In this case, some supplements would be entirely unfamiliar to consumers, so the advertising had to be instructive as well as persuasive. A product supplied by this company was based on fish oils and the nutrient omega 3. While most consumers would have a vague idea that this would be good for them, they may not be entirely sure why, and so when they did buy it, they would often purchase the cheapest product available. He claimed, however, that the cheaper products consisted mostly of fish fat rather than omega 3 and his task was to educate consumers as to the difference between these and the premium product which his client was marketing and which was far more expensive. In addition, the advantages of taking this product would be very long-term and varied, and this would be difficult to transmit in advertisements. An advertising challenge of this kind would, he suggested, best be achieved “*in a staged way*”, but unfortunately the client was not able to afford such a comprehensive campaign in spite of the excellence of his products.

#### **6.5.4 SUBJECT D**

Upon receiving a new brief, Subject D would first clear all other matters from his head. He believed he had trained himself to “*departmentalise*” his mind so that other concerns, including family matters, could be put aside when he arrived at work and he could devote his energies to his job. Once he had read and absorbed himself in a brief, he believed he was mentally “*in a different zone*”. Any uncertainties with the brief would be discussed at an early stage with the account managers and then he would begin the

process of immersing himself in the brand. This could consist of online research, delving into the activities and performance of both competitors and other sectors who may have been doing something similar. He believed this was the first stage in his creative process and the seeds of ideas would begin to germinate as he became exposed to images, words or phrases he found online. Accepting that some of his colleagues found it necessary to “*bounce ideas around*” or “*talk and talk and talk*”, he stated that he needed some mental space to develop his ideas before he would begin discussions about them. He described one technique that he applied:

*“always do an overnight test on an idea, because what you might think is a great idea at the end of play when you are tired and your brain’s probably had a bit of a ... highs, lows, peak of the day, my best thinking is always done mid-morning” (31.03 – 31.16)*

If an idea still seemed promising the following morning, when he was at his mental peak, then he would have confidence in it. Subject D emphasised the importance of having many breaks during the thinking phases; this included brainstorming discussions when these ideas were being explored and, when these were held, he was always mindful that the attention span of participants would be limited and so they were kept brief. One method favoured by Japanese businesses which he believed was beneficial for ensuring focus in meetings was to hold them in rooms which had no chairs, and in which distractions such as mobile phones were prohibited. At the time of the interview, Subject D was working on a number of commissions. One of these was for a cake company which was promoting a competition which related to a current movie that was due to be released, while another was for a charity linked to a local professional sports team. He was making a number of TV commercials and was also involved in making a film.

Subject D next explained the methods by which advertisements were directed towards specific audiences. There were already established categories of people and he alluded to the socio-economic groups used by governments, market research organisations and others, and which classify the public as falling into groups A, B, C1, C2, D and E. Within these groups, he had to target people more closely and he supported this with an example of a major client that is a university. He said of them:

*“They have to position themselves in the right way. They’re not Oxford nor Cambridge. They have to ... sell to ....their strengths and place their strengths in that area. They still have very bright people but just wanting more of a vocational approach.” (35.05 - 35.18)*

The kinds of words that were selected in order to reach a particular audience depended upon pinpointing that audience with precision, and understanding what media they used and how they used and interacted with it:

*“To talk to a Sun reader, who’s a brickie, who’s 23-years old is different from talking to a guy who’s a consultant ... neurosurgeon. You’ve got to recognise how people react....But the words you use have to be considered and representative of the people you’re talking to.” (35.49 - 36.11)*

Although Subject D appreciated that word play such as puns have a place in advertising, they were not a tool he generally chose to use. The “crafting” of the words was, nevertheless, important to him and he recalled winning a copywriting award for an advertisement he had produced for a

restaurant that had opened in premises that were formerly an old police station and the line he produced was “*rhubarb and custardy*”.

In terms of symbolism and cultural mythologies, he was aware of their significance for some advertising strategists, but they were not something he chose to exploit:

*“I personally don’t get that deep into mythology and symbolism and things like that. I think there are certain people that believe that it works..I personally don’t use it very much as a technique... I think what you find in advertising...that.. photography, styles, typefaces, colours, techniques, animation, illustration, icons – they all go in cycles...”* (37.49 - 38.18)

As was evident when he mentioned “*a Sun reader*” and “*brickie*”, stereotyping played a role in Subject D’s approach. While he stated he tried to avoid it, he claimed this was not always practicable if he was working to achieve a particular aim; it was, and he believed always would be, an inherent feature of advertising. He supplied an example of a current campaign by the *Carlsberg* beer company which prides itself on being “*probably the best in the world*” and the concept of this strapline has been extended in an ongoing TV commercial (Beenstock, 1998). This depicts a hypothetical Carlsberg supermarket, showing it to be a stereotypical male utopia and all the customers being men. The use of a stereotype, or a cultural myth, enables an advertiser instantly to activate a set of memories and mental resources in the mind of the viewer and says “*sometimes it helps you to connect A to B quicker*”. Similarly, the audience’s existing knowledge of, and perceptions about, the client’s products and brand reputation can be highlighted. This he exemplified with what he regarded as the public’s belief and faith in *Volkswagen* in terms of their vehicles’ quality of build and reliability.

His agency had an association with a market research company which was part of the same group and Subject D confirmed this was used to check upon the effectiveness of the words and other elements in their advertisements. It frequently used both quantitative and qualitative research in order to inform the agency's advertising practices.

### 6.5.5 SUBJECT E

Subject E was asked to explain his strategic approach with a campaign on which he was currently working. He supplied an example of a client who was marketing an innovative product, namely a new form of instant noodles. These noodles were, he said, "*excellent*"; they were very different from the usual kind of microwavable noodles owing to a new technique in the way they were processed. He explained them as follows:

*"If I served you them up now, even though they take 90 seconds in the microwave, you'd think 'wow!' How could microwaved noodles be as good as that?" (23.29 - 23.39)*

The question which was in the forefront of the minds of Subject E and his team centred around how they could overcome the stigma associated with microwavable food and instant noodles. A particular phrase was eventually devised which was intended to highlight the difference and this was "*Wok quality noodles*" and he likened this to a similar phrase used in an earlier campaign for *Garnier* hair products which was "*Salon beautiful hair*"<sup>76</sup>. The hope was that this would encourage an audience to infer that these were

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<sup>76</sup> It has not been possible to verify this particular phrase being used in advertising Garnier products. However, the similarity in terms of the grammatical structure of "*wok quality noodles*" and "*salon beautiful hair*" is striking. While this grammatical aspect was not mentioned expressly by the interviewee, his recognition of the general similarity was apparent.

microwavable but, at the same time, having the same taste qualities as if they had been cooked in a wok and he continued that this phrase incorporated: “*a little bit of the rational and possibly a bit of the pragmatic*”. It was vital that, as this was aimed at what he called “*the snacking market*”, the audience would have to be convinced that the product tasted good and was therefore worthy of trying. To ensure consumers’ full engagement with the advertising and that they would take notice, he believed it was also important to instil a brand character. He recalled the branding style of the snack sausage product *Pepperami*, and the way that it was portrayed as having an “*attitude*”. The belief was that the consumer would buy into this capricious personality at the same time as being tempted by the product’s more rational characteristics in terms of being easy to prepare and enjoyable. Eventually, it was decided that the advertising would be based on the proposition that, owing to the convenience of these “*wok quality*” microwavable noodles, consumers would no longer have any use for their woks. This then progressed into a further idea of inviting consumers to consider what they might want to do with this redundant piece of kitchen equipment. Some humorous ideas as to how they might recycle their woks for another purpose occurred to them and a neologism was created for this, namely “*wok cycle*”. Videos were made to show these ideas including depicting people playing tennis with woks, and using one as a “*dog chariot*”, i.e. one with wheels fitted to it and being used to transport a small dog. The hope was that this would capture the audience’s imagination and viewers might invent their own possible uses for this utensil.

Identifying a particular audience was, according to Subject E, more a matter for the client, the account manager and media specialists, than for the copywriter. Technology has been able to offer sophisticated methods of segmentation, especially for online advertising:

*“Particularly now, in this very digital age, it is easier to work out who is consuming what type of ads or products.” (28.35 – 28.46)*

He mentioned a new concept called “*programmatics*” which uses advanced computer software in order to automate the targeting of particular subsets of consumers by following them around the digital environment. This system collates vast quantities of data on consumers which is processed, and the results are used to deliver advertising tailored to individuals.

Subject E explained how the most fundamental questions that his creative staff had to address when considering the audience were exactly what were they trying to sell, and what was the best way of selling it. This brought clarity to the process as his staff were provided with the simplest and most accurate way of perceiving the audience. It informed them of the best means to address the audience even where other parties had to be considered in the wider process, such as the client, the media company and the account handler. Hence, he claimed a good copywriter would be able to reduce the message to its simplest, paring back the brief to “*what is my key message, and who am I saying to?*” and to envisage the intended target customer. Subject E recalled how briefs were written in sections and “*Point 4*” asked what was the key thing the client wanted the advertisement to say, and he would read that first. Having explained that, he offered as an example work for a specific client which was a well-known sportswear manufacturer. At the time, the late 1990s, footballer Michael Owen was at the peak of his career and the player wore this manufacturer’s boots while the client was trying to promote a range with a name he could not remember, but was something like “*velocity*”. He recounted seeing Point 4 on the brief as written by the account handler. This was about three sentences long, but he believed he could have replaced all those sentences with a simple statement to the effect that “*Michael Owen is lightning fast*”. The aim was thereby to create advertising copy which exploited the public knowledge of Owen’s amazing speed and to associate them with the boots.

*“We wanted to say these are the boots that you need for ... Michael Owen. He’s lightning fast and we’re saying they’re really light and things like that so... if you’re a good footballer and you would like to*

*be as fast as Michael Owen, at least you can wear the same boots as him” (32.38 - 32.52)*

The copywriter had then formed a clear impression of the core message in terms of what had to be conveyed and he said that, in this case, it could be summed up in a single word: “*speed*”.

Audience comprehension for any new advertisement had to be carefully considered and, where possible, tested. One way the interviewee could check how their work was likely to be interpreted, and the degree of lucidity of the core message, would be to apply an in-house method which was named after a former employee and he described her as not being “*the brightest tool in the box*”. This was something he claimed she recognised in herself and made a joke of it. She was delighted to act as kind of guinea pig for messages in proposed advertisements as staff would show her them and ask her what she thought they meant in order to assess what meaning she had recovered. If this employee understood it, they knew the majority of the audience would also understand it; if she had not understood it, or at least been sufficiently intrigued to read further into it, then they would investigate why, and ask whether “*it was too clever for its own good*” and that obscured the message. Since that employee left the company, they had been using other employees whom they regarded as suitable to fulfill this role. The ethos of the agency, expressed in its own motto, “*the power of simple*” which was displayed in the offices, on the website and stationery, also influenced the approaches it adopted with any brief. More formal testing also took place in some cases, including the use of focus groups.

Subject E was asked about the use of symbols and icons in designing advertisements and he confirmed that these were a tool to provide “*a shortcut for what you want to say*”. He expanded on this as follows:

*“There is a well-known technique in advertising, and a well used technique in advertising where you combine two symbols to help*

*you get across what it is you want to communicate and this has been going on for as long as I have been in advertising and it is one that I think works well because you do get quite a lot ....enjoyment out of seeing it.” (41.13 – 41.47)*

He mentioned a specific example of an ongoing campaign his agency was working on at the time of interview for a major client, a manufacturer of beds, and the advertisements were designed to promote the latest “*memory foam*” latex mattress. In this case, the main selling feature of these mattresses was that, when used in summer, they were designed to be cool. The contrived image used to convey this message was a mattress on a lollipop stick and it was accompanied by text which assisted the reader first in making sense of the image and then relating it to the product. At first glance, the image would just be perceived as a lollipop and the fact that a mattress had been substituted for the confectionery part would become apparent on closer inspection. He mentioned that merging visual components in this way to generate a combined meaning was a common device employed by his own agency and many others.

The use of images such as this in advertising is well documented in marketing studies and referred to as “*visual rhetoric*” and “*visual metaphors*” (e.g. Philips, 1997; Philips & McQuarry, 2004; van Mulken et al, 2014). The lollipop example described by Subject E appears to conform to a type which van Mulken et al (2014: p. 334) refer to as “*fusion*” metaphors and these occur where two or more objects are combined and the result is a single object which is not complete in its own right and in the expected context. The image mentioned by Subject E consisted of fusing a lollipop with a mattress; the result was a hypothetical object which borrowed the attribute of coolness from the former (the lollipop) and bestowed them on the latter (the mattress).

The final question related to the degree to which he would rely or draw upon an audience’s pre-existing knowledge in order to make sense of the advertising he produced. Subject E’s first thought was in relation to promoting goods or brands to consumers who had some kind of special interest and thereby such

knowledge could, to a large degree, be taken for granted. He recalled some advertising in the past for a manufacturer of upmarket outdoor clothing and mountaineering wear and equipment. He commented about this audience:

*“The last thing you would do is give them Janet and John advertising...these people know more about the outdoors than we’ll ever know” (46.43 – 46.56)*

When producing these advertisements, the interviewee stated that he always showed them to his friends in the British Mountaineering Council before they were used to ensure they would be informative, yet not so much as to be perceived as patronising. While he personally enjoyed some outdoor activities, he recognised that his own expertise in this was limited and it was important to him that his advertisements looked as though they had been written “*by mountaineers for mountaineers*”. Car manufacturers were mentioned, and he agreed they often had a long brand heritage in terms of their advertising; this would be safety in the case of *Volvo*; *Volkswagen* would rely on its name for reliability while *BMW* would capitalise on its reputation for excellence in engineering quality and design. Accordingly, when receiving briefs for established brands such as these, the copywriter would have to be cognizant of such reputations and past advertising and this could influence interpretation and comprehension in new advertising.

## **6.6 COMMERCIAL SEMIOTICIAN INTERVIEW**

The interviewee for the case study mentioned was Subject F. This individual was not an advertising copywriter but, having studied semiotics formally under

Marcel Danesi<sup>77</sup>, he had a close understanding of the principles of semiotic theories and their relevance to the commercial world.

### 6.6.1 AGENCY

Subject F was the owner of a small, London based agency called *Creative Semiotics*, which specialized in the use of semiotics for branding. The firm's website described their business as follows:

*"Creative Semiotics is a boutique consultancy, which uses semiotics as a fuel for driving strategic direction and creative innovation."*<sup>78</sup>

He had worked for a range of companies, agencies and brand consultancies<sup>79</sup> and had, shortly before the interview, been accepted onto the BBC roster as a potential service provider to them. His work consisted of preparing reports and "visuals" (graphic presentations) as "*inspiration documents*" to give companies ideas, and an independent view on how they could move forward with their brands. This was intended to make their advertising agencies more effective in communicating and promoting their respective brands. He mentioned the logo for the Olympic Games as an example of having to design the branding perfectly. This logo would be used millions of times across the world, have to last for many years and yet retain recognition and appeal to a wide range of stakeholders, shareholders, the press and other interested parties.

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<sup>77</sup> Co-author of *Persuasive Signs*, a widely used textbook mentioned extensively in previous chapters.

<sup>78</sup> <http://www.creativesemiotics.co.uk/> - accessed 17.6.2015

<sup>79</sup> "Brand consultancies" are a phenomenon which started in the 1990s which Subject F likens to political "spin doctors" from around the same time.

This brief case study consists of a summary of his background and training, his methods and rationale in applying semiotics as informed primarily by a recorded interview and also by a paper he wrote on this and which is was, at the time, unpublished. Citations appear in parentheses showing either the time from the recording, or the page from his unpublished paper.

### 6.6.1 PERSPECTIVE OF A COMMERCIAL SEMIOTICIAN

In his paper (page 2), Subject F summarises the scope of commercial semiotics as including brand creation, making a brand appeal to a particular sector or demographic; advertisement proposition development, which involves situating a brand, having regard to the existing brand or product awareness relative to the culture, and also aspects of product design, logo design and packaging. A framework that he relies on is Greimas's narrative model and the four modalities which he lists as "*wanting-to-do, having-to-do*", "*knowing-how-to-do*" and "*being-able-to-do*". He specifies "*knowing-how-to-do*" as the core competence of a commercial semiotician, "*being-able-to-do*" as the latent aptitude and "*wanting-to-do*" as the motivation. In the case of the latter, he points to the "*pleasure of decoding*" and how this "*fosters a craving to be freshly conjoined with more pleasurable texts*" (page 4). While he expresses this in terms of his own passion for semiotics, his perception might have inadvertently offered an insight into motivations and understanding of the viewer and, indirectly, the encoding processes undertaken by the semiotician. In other words, it is pertinent to ask whether a viewer of an advertisement also experiences the "*pleasure of decoding*", whether through signs or through implicature. If so, it is reasonable to suppose that the designer of the advertisement intends this pleasure to operate as a motivator to engage with the advertisement.

In the interview, while recognizing that an in-depth grasp of applied semiotics was needed to work in the field of commercial semiotics, Subject F accepted that

much of the training advertising practitioners received at university was something they had to go through in order to obtain the particular desired qualification. He took the view that practitioners already in the field would have forgotten the semiotics and instead “*freestyle*” (04.44 - 05.21), i.e. generate meaning intuitively. Their approach might later be justified retrospectively with theories, even though their actual engagement with them at the time had been superficial. He reported having encountered active resistance to the referencing of semiotic theories. A recent instance of this involved a “*fairly junior research person*” working for a client who, having heard his proposal for a brief, was:

*“Why are you mentioning Roland Barthes in your proposal? That scares people that you are going to come up with all this academic verbiage we can’t understand” (07.54 08.07).*

This he saw as illustrative of the anti-academic and anti-intellectual attitudes he encountered in business. Nevertheless, he understood how this attitude had arisen. In some instances, semiotic methods had been tried but without success and this was due to laziness, a lack of knowledge or the application of rigour, and has resulted in them, or their clients, being “burnt”; he supported this by referring to a paper by Mick (in Brown & Turley, eds. 1997: p. 249) which he claimed shows how semiotics is not properly understood or used rigorously enough in the commercial world.

## **6.6.2 EDUCATION AND CERTIFICATION**

In terms of semiotic education, he mentioned in the interview that there was only a handful of places that are dedicated to the study and teaching of semiotics, Aarhus University in Denmark being one. While establishments taught all main

strands of semiotics, each tended to gravitate towards one particular theory or approach. He stated that, in the case of Aarhus University, the focus was mainly on Peirce and this he believed was due to the “*continental philosophical*” tradition, and also to the Scandinavian regard for “*design thinking*” (06.40 – 06.57). Peirce, he believed, offered a useful way to think around design issues, with his notions of iconicity and indexicality, and how the perception of an object relates to meaning.

In his paper (page 9), Subject F indicates the routes into a career in commercial semiotics. They generally involve some training in social sciences and critical theory, and also the rare possibility of apprenticeship through which training and experience can be passed on, also arise. Qualification for the specific role of commercial semiotician does not appear, at the moment, to have been formalized, although he states that Greimas suggested qualifying tests for those wishing to undertake this role. As a consequence, Subject F reports that it is the track record of individuals in this field which enables them to be fairly evaluated:

*“...the atomized nature of commercial work means that commercial success is more important: satisfied clients, recommissioned projects and glowing testimonials. Competence is often assumed so long as the work helps give the inspiration or the direction the client needs.”*

(Subject F)

While a sound grasp of theory is a prerequisite for a commercial semiotician, Subject F expressed in the interview a belief that that aspect should not be over-emphasized and that self-awareness and an ongoing process of questioning one’s competence and aiming for self-improvement are equally crucial.

### 6.6.3 BRANDING

Subject F stated that, while marketing and branding were different activities, marketing had become more like branding over the years as there had been a shift from transactional to relational marketing (00.12 – 00.24). Where transactional marketing focused on persuading customers to make a particular purchase, relational marketing was concerned with building relationships with customers and, consequently, there were likely to be differences when it came to the choices of signifiers used. It is perhaps worth noting here that this appears to accord with notions mentioned previously in this thesis that distinguish between selling product utility versus selling brand image and reputation.

Branding was, he said, “*more subtle and emotional*” than marketing, but he did not think it was possible to create a “*cut-and-dried binary opposition between the two*” (15.21 – 15.32). However, as a general rule, marketing was more transactional in its approach whereas branding was more relational<sup>80</sup>. He described the way connotative indexes were among the techniques often used in marketing and referred to the familiar Obama logo used in the US presidential campaign in 2008. Connotative indexes were, according to Subject F, “*different propositions, different associations packed into a very small area*” (14.40 – 14.49). The Obama logo consisted of an image in the “O” shape, the inner part of which could be interpreted as the sun, with wavy lines along the bottom suggestive of cultivated farmland, but in the colours of the United States flag. Connotations that he suggested were associated with this included the New Deal in American politics<sup>81</sup> but, even for those Americans who did not associate their own politics with this era, the logo and its connotations would still resonate with them, offering “*a time of hope, prosperity and affluence for baby-boomers at a time when America was suffering*” (15.07 – 15.12). Luxury goods like perfumes were more

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<sup>80</sup> This distinction is further discussed in Chapter 7.6, below.

<sup>81</sup> The “New Deal” was the term which related to President F D Roosevelt’s domestic programs (1933 and beyond, following the consequences of World War 1 and in response to the Great Depression). These focused on what were later referred to as the “three Rs”, i.e. Relief, Recovery, and Reform.

dependent upon generating a range of connotation in this way whereas products like insurance, banking and classified ads, were more inclined to be explicitly informative. The branding process for mundane products required less density of meaning as they appealed more to the rational mind. Subject F expounded the view that the key indicator of the semiotic difference between marketing and branding was the reliance on the use of connotations in branding.

## CHAPTER 7 – DISCUSSION

### 7.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION

Semiotics offers a set of analytical tools by which linguistic and non-linguistic elements found within examples of advertising, and their intended interpretation, can be understood. Barthes (1957) explains how cultural myths can be invoked in advertising even when their presence is not immediately apparent, while multimodality accounts for the effects achieved by juxtaposing language with imagery. Nevertheless, as described in Subchapter 2.12, above, semiotic analysis is generally unsystematic and must inevitably involve loose and subjective interpretations while failing to account for the range of semantic, stylistic and contextual features contained within sophisticated texts such as modern, professionally crafted advertisements. Pragmatic approaches such as those suggested by Relevance Theory, on the other hand, originates from semantics and theories which relate to truth-conditions (Levinson, 1983: pp. 12-15), and they offer a cognitive system of interpretation which appeals to the rational mind through, for instance highlighting the unique selling points (USPs) of products or brands. Relevance Theory seems to mirror human consciousness in that people experience phenomena through the sensory organs, and the sensations are then related to memory in a particular order so that the conscious mind can make sense of them. Attention is paid to them, and those phenomena which are deemed the most relevant to survival, well-being and desires, are prioritized while those which have less relevance, or no relevance, are de-prioritized or filtered out altogether. Advertising is experienced in the same way: advertisers have to be cognizant of how consumers tend to experience and respond to advertising and they design their work accordingly. While some attempts have been made to analyse written texts and broadcasted communications using pragmatic approaches (e.g. Tanaka, 1994; Simpson, 2001; Martínez-Camino & Pérez-Saiz, 2012), the main focus of pragmatics has been exchanges between individuals present in conversations. Non-linguistic components such as images, sound and music feature heavily in advertising and

attempts to account for these using pragmatic frameworks have so far been limited.

The main purpose of this chapter is to explore the wider implications of the research in terms of what it reveals about how ideas originate among advertisers; the role of the brief in shaping advertising; the degree and value of input of semiotic theories in the training of advertising professionals; the conscious and intuitive application of semiotic principles by those already working in the industry; the cognitive aspects of calculating and exploiting context when designing advertisements and how these relate to some of the theoretical approaches suggested in pragmatics and, lastly, how the code versus context dichotomy corresponds with the choices advertisers make in terms of product versus brand advertising. The findings as they relate to the individual thesis questions is summarized in the last subchapter.

## **7.2. LINGUISTIC CONTENT IN ADVERTISING EDUCATION**

It can be stated at the outset that no academic establishment or professional body investigated included teaching for undergraduates or practitioners any aspect of the subject of pragmatics. A large number of textbooks designated as formal course books or reading material were also examined and not a single reference to any pragmatic theory was found. Occasional mentions of linguistic phenomena, such as metaphor, were found in advertising and marketing textbooks. In the interviews, it was established that none of the practitioners had any knowledge of pragmatic theories although, as is discussed, all were acutely aware of context and were able to explain how they contextualized their advertising copy.

Semiotics is referred to in some marketing textbooks and journals in relation to signs and their meanings, but with rarely any mention of any of the key theories, or of its pioneers and scholars such as Saussure, Peirce, Barthes, Lévi-Strauss and Eco (e.g. Ogilvy, 1983; Brierley, 2002; Aaker, 2010). If it is to be accepted

that the definition is something akin to “*a general theory of signs*” (Nöth, 1990: p. 13), then there is no reason to quarrel with their use of the term. For the purpose of this thesis, however, the term is used only within the context of specific theories, namely those which appear to offer either systematic approaches or tools by which the use of signs as fundamental units for encoding and decoding messages can be understood.

Structuralist semiotics is vulnerable to the criticism that it focuses on structure of messages, referred to by Saussure (1916) as the “*langue*” (Subchapter 2.3, above) and appears to have little concern with their motivation or production, or the context in which they occur. In advertising, however, the aim is to persuade and so more complex factors which underlie the intention of the communicator, and also cultural aspects which may influence interpretation, have to be taken into account. Social semioticians, such as Barthes, extend the concept of the sign beyond the linguistic sign proposed by Saussure. The only semiotician mentioned in most textbooks, and the one known by most of the advertising professionals interviewed, was Roland Barthes. It has to be pointed out, however, that Barthes views signs through a political lens and regards them as the means by which powerful institutions construct their own realities, and that includes false realities where it is in their interests to do so. Such institutions include corporations trying to sell their goods and services, as well as the advertising and marketing firms that work on their behalf. One way they seek to achieve their aim is, he proposes, through the creation of myths which project what appears to be a natural order, yet which serve the interests of a capitalist society, and these myths function as a kind of code through which the world can be understood. Such an approach could be said to be limiting in the sense that the underlying intention of the communicator, in this case the advertiser, is identified as working in the interests of capitalism through presenting not merely a product or brand in a favorable light, but a major distortion of reality. While such distortions do indeed occur and have been described in this thesis, any notion that they are inevitable would be at best unreasonable. In some cases, what is presented is sufficiently factual and close to reality that no distortion is either present or intended while, in other cases,

the distortion is designed as nothing more than a stimulus and is intentionally so extreme as to be viewed as surreal or even comedic. Similarly, there is no question in Barthes' (1957) mythology theory of the receiver having the capacity for independent thought or the ability to evaluate what is presented; instead, he or she is assumed to be a passive consumer of myths. Nevertheless, it is easy to appreciate why the possibility that an alternative reality can be generated, as well as the ability to cause a consumer to access a whole narrative with which they are familiar (i.e. a myth, in Barthes' terms) instantly through a brief glimpse of a single image, expression or tune, would be appealing to advertisers.

Most of the universities contacted in the UK that took the trouble to respond when asked about this (the vast majority did not respond) stated that they did not include a component of semiotics in their courses for marketing. This may have been the case because course directors who had entered teaching on the basis of their experience in the industry rather than through a purely academic route regarded the subject as either irrelevant, or too theoretical, and therefore remote from the practicalities of marketing in a business environment. This mindset was suggested by several of the interviewees, including the commercial semiotician, Subject F. None of the three UK bodies that purported to represent and train professionals in marketing and advertising (the Institute for Practitioners in Advertising, the Incorporated Society of British Advertisers and the Chartered Institute of Marketing) included semiotics in any aspect of their training.

There were universities that did include some semiotic content in their advertising and marketing courses, and the more advanced aspects, which encompassed cultural semiotics, featured at Bachelor's and Masters' level, and these have been described in the previous chapter. The course books in marketing and advertising that were examined varied enormously in terms of semiotic content. Where semiotics was taught as a course component, a book found to be widely used was Beasley and Danesi's, *Persuasive Signs* (2002). This book is not an instruction manual for copywriters so much as a work which offers insights into the way advertisements can be deconstructed using semiotic tools. In other words, Beasley and Danesi have authored a book that analyses

existing advertisements from a semiotic perspective in the way some linguistic textbooks explain theories through real-world examples of texts and thus facilitate a deeper awareness by students of the cognitive processes involved in interpreting an advertisement. For a prospective copywriter to utilize this book when constructing advertisements, he or she would have to apply a kind of reverse engineering, considering the creations of other advertisers, using these to grasp a semiotic point, and then employing this as a kind of thought tool when designing a new advertisement. Other textbooks were mentioned by the interviewees in the research. Subject C, for example, stated that advertising was a module within his degree in communication and the course book, *Understains* (1986), does contain a subchapter entitled *Semiology: Inside the Fantasy Factory*, which discusses notions of signification with a critical discourse analysis angle and how advertising signs relate to consumerism. This work is a commentary on advertising and cannot be regarded as any kind of manual for the design of advertisements.

Another standard text used in many institutions is Brearley's *The Advertising Handbook* (1995). As the title suggests, this is a book which provides a broad overview of advertising, exploring why businesses engage in it, the various roles of those who work in the industry and it even discusses certain legal and regulatory aspects. Much of the book is concerned with the practicalities of producing advertising including the principles of persuasion and the appropriate use of style, formats and language. Semiotics is very briefly discussed, but this is limited to a couple of sentences. Some of the techniques suggested could be obliquely related to semiotic theories, but the theories are not specified and any such relation would have to be recognized by a reader who is already familiar with them. It was noted in the interviews that only one of the copywriters had received any formal education specifically in advertising, while the others had either studied related subjects, namely communication, graphic design or marketing generally or, in one case, a wholly unrelated subject, namely Ancient Greek. Some knowledge of semiotics was evident among all but one of the interviewees, although it tended to be cursory and incomplete, was sometimes self-taught, and required them to challenge their memories in order

to recall what they knew. Even where it was not expressly stated, it was apparent the interviewees did not consciously apply theoretical semiotic principles in their advertising creation process. That does not mean to say, however, that the interviewees who had learned semiotics in higher education had derived no benefits from so doing. Subject A related how his class had been shown an advertisement which reduced women to body parts which had, in his view, made only a weak association with the product being marketed. That left an impression on him and it was clear that would not be an approach he would favour in his own work.

### **7.3 THE BRIEF**

One aspect that was mentioned consistently in the research was the brief and how that was prepared and used. All the interviewees emphasized the importance of distilling the brief down to a core message before ideas could be formulated, although there was some variation in how they achieved that. It was noted how the interviewees identified the key signifiers which stemmed from the brief. It appeared that the brief guided their choice and use of metaphors and metalanguage in both their conversation and design, and in how they attempted to contextualize their message. Even where the commissioning firm wanted to convey a complex message, or one that had numerous elements, the interviewees expressed a determination to reduce it down, simplifying it and keeping it to a single, core element. It was stressed by several of the interviewees that the quality of the finished advertising was determined to a considerable extent by the quality of the brief they were given. One interviewee, Subject C, used a series of metaphors to explain this process as consisting of *“stripping away all the bullshit”* and *“drawing it down to brass tacks”* and *“trying to get in the shoes of a consumer”*. Subject A explained how he would attempt to *“boil down the essence”* of a brief and to settle in his mind, and perhaps put on paper all relevant angles and as many ideas as he could muster from the brief while working with and trying to express the particular brand’s values. He

found it helpful to reduce a brief down to a single strapline, often with word play, e.g. his alliterative motto for the Swiss problem-solving company which read “*Design, Develop, Deliver*”, and the one he devised for the fork-lift truck manufacturer which read “*Simple, Powerful, Performance*”.

Subject B was less emphatic on this aspect, but he did stress that an early part of the process was to clearly define the client’s main objectives for the advertising. Subject C stated that briefs could be several pages long and one of the skills of a copywriter was to decipher briefs and identify the core message; this involved simplifying it to its most basic form and cutting away everything else. He related how most of his briefs were oral rather than written, and that sometimes he had to “*drag*” a brief out of a client. Where a brief had been provided or elicited, he commented that the simpler a brief was, the more quickly ideas would emerge and the more scope there would be for creativity. A brief, for him, was a “*springboard*” and as a “*catalyst*” which would stimulate the creative imagination, but he regretted the tendency by some clients to overthink them. Subject D mentioned how the interpretation of the brief involved a process of distillation in order to find the key message upon which advertising was to be created. He went on to explain how his agency handled briefs, and how this might have included optimizing the quality of the brief through a collaborative process between the client and the agency rather than the agency simply receiving the brief as a fully-formed assignment from the start. Like the others, Subject E described how he would seek to “*pare*” the brief down, removing the extraneous aspects, in order to pick out the “*key message*”.

Two of the interviewees made connections between the public perception of the products or brands with those of rival firms, and initiating the creative process at the point of receiving the brief. Subject B stressed the way in which his agency followed the industry’s “*creative briefing process*”, having regard to whom the target audience was, the competition, the aims of the advertising and other relevant factors. Where there was no alignment of view between the requirements of the client and the usual strategy of the agency in this regard (such as where the client wanted to direct attention expressly towards a specific product as opposed to a brand), then the advertising design would be prepared

by the account handler based on the client brief. For Subject E, receiving a brief would trigger a process of consideration and research which explored the public's pre-existing perception of the product or service to be marketed, and any other current factors in society, or relating to those types of consumers, which could be significant, thus enabling him to identify these consumers in his mind and generate a kind of empathy with them. The link between the brief and the creative process could be over-emphasised. A brief was the inspiration that gave rise to ideas while poorly considered briefs, or constraints placed on briefs by clients, would inhibit the scope for creativity by the advertiser.

The main constraints discussed include budgetary limits, especially where the client was a small business, and where a client had a very firm idea that they wanted simply a promotion based on their low prices.

#### **7.4 APPLICATION OF SEMIOTIC PRINCIPLES IN ADVERTISING**

The most revealing statement from any of the interviewees came from Subject B, who stated:

*"I bet if you broke down our processes ... if you could look into our heads...we'd be using semiotics in some way, but not actively...not explicitly" (27.47 – 27.59)*

This subchapter, as well as Subchapter 7.7 below, discusses the extent to which the above statement is echoed by the other interviewees and verified by the findings. The validity of semiotic theory as a tool for advertisers in terms of generating and developing ideas is tested by exploring whether their creative

processes are amenable to explanation in recognizable, i.e. theory-based, terms and this subchapter begins by considering theorists mentioned in Chapter 2.

Saussure's (1916) model offers an insight from which to understand language through the concept of the linguistic sign, describing the sign being mostly arbitrary, that it coexists alongside and contrasts with other signs within a particular system, and that system is manifest as a code. Knowledge of such a code is essential for anyone wishing to use it as a means of communication. Williamson (1978) invites readers to view products as both signifieds as they are objects referred to in advertising, but also as signifiers in that they are depicted as representing a particular quality, as in a way of life or membership of a particular group. While Saussure's emphasis upon structure is a useful starting point, it does not account for all the complexities of human communication. Cook (2001) warns that an overreliance on decoding techniques to recover meaning may cause an analyst to:

*“...jettison all consideration of what is particular to the surface of the discourse, or a particular signifier, and thus miss much of the complexity, skill and humour” (p. 68):*

Saussure's (1916) work has also given rise to more sophisticated ideas, leading to the cultural semiotics of such as the works of Barthes (1957, 1977) and Eco (1976, 1979) and, from these, a range of methods have been developed which can be applied to speech and text, and also to other phenomena which can have a role in communication, such as images and music. Peircean semiotics, as described by Nöth (1990), advances ways of viewing an advertisement and it is possible to identify and categorise elements from advertisements as being icons, indexes and symbols in his triadic typology. Peirce famously declares: *“nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign”* (Nöth, 1990: p. 42) and this understanding of a sign is oriented towards the receiver rather than the producer of a sign. Subject F, a commercial semiotician, stated that he regarded

Peirce as offering useful perspectives in terms such as iconicity and indexicality. In his view, Peirce's theories had practical applications in industrial design issues, branding, and the wider aspects of marketing of which advertising constitutes a small part.

Both Cook (2001) and Bignell (2002) point to the distinction which must be made in any semiotic analysis of an advertisement between the syntagmatic and paradigmatic selection. Whereas language operates by creating meaning in a linear way and so the syntagmatic aspect is a fundamental aspect of the message, non-linguistic components of printed advertisements, namely images, may work without such need for continuity, i.e. what Barthes (1977) refers to as "*discontinuous signs*" (explained in Subchapter 2.6, above), and the focus is predominantly on the selection aspect, i.e. the paradigmatic choices. This study has uncovered how linguistic and non-linguistic signs can be used at a higher-level syntagmatically as part of a campaign strategy and an illustration of this was provided by Subject C, where he described the process of engaging potential customers through a series of emails or mail shots. Each email or letter sent had a slightly different function to the previous one as a sequence of activities, or signs, to produce a particular cognitive effect by virtue of their order and relation to the others within a series. The first of these may have been no more ambitious than to open an envelope, or to read below a headline, while the final one was likely to consist of an encouragement to make contact with the client with a view ultimately to placing an order for goods or services.

Bignell (2002) finds that advertisements rarely use signs simply for denoting something, preferring instead to invoke connotations through meanings which are culturally derived. This, it could be argued, provides the advertising practitioner with the opportunity to exercise their creative talents and, as the interviews show, yields some degree of job satisfaction for the effort expended and talents employed. Subject A demonstrated this when he stated that the formulation of ideas begins with "*a blank piece of paper*" and he explained the contemplation process through a series of metaphors i.e. "*all the different angles of what we are looking at*"; "*come at it from a different approach*" and "*throw out lots of ideas*". In spite of his claim that he did not consciously apply semiotic

principles in his creative practices, these suggest that he searched his mind for connotations that he could incorporate into his advertising and that viewers would recognize. An example from his work would be the Robin Hood statue in the city of Nottingham, where the legendary character is associated with the county of Nottinghamshire. Eco (1968: p. 108, from Nöth, 1990: p. 102) regards connotations as specific types of cultural unit and they “*are institutionally associated in the receiver’s mind with the signifier*” (ibid). Connotations are often invoked by symbols and, in respect of this advertisement, Subject A referred to these when he alluded to “*the symbolism of the local areas*” and how this could be used “*as a short cut to saying ‘we’re in your patch’*” (Subchapter 6.5.1).

In some instances, clients have little interest in invoking connotations as agencies are briefed to produce commercials whereby the interpretation is as denotative as possible. Subchapter 6.4.2 reported Subject B referring to advertising for a discount supermarket that was chain seeking to promote cans of baked beans slightly cheaper than their competitors as “*entry level*” while urging them instead to build their own brand as a supermarket by stressing the “*shopping experience*”. This accorded with the view expressed by Subject C, who was frustrated by what he referred to as a “*sales mentality*” in the case of a furniture retail client who simply wanted to draw the public’s attention to a “*great sofa*” at an exceptionally low price, while any attempt on his part to suggest a branded campaign with “*intellectual content*” proved futile. It can therefore be suggested that advertising which focuses on product, especially where it stresses a low price, is likely to have a higher denotative content than advertising which is more concerned with brand. This might not, however, be as straightforward as it first appears. Subject B’s description of an advertisement for tins of beans seems, on the face of it, to be nothing more than an advertisement for a single product, but the client was a supermarket chain and not a manufacturer of canned foods and they would be unlikely to recoup the cost of the advertisement from increased sales of beans alone. Also, it is surely unlikely that a shopper would be expected to travel to a particular supermarket just to save a couple of pence on one or two cans of beans. On that basis, it can be assumed the advertisement has a wider purpose than purveying just this

product and the viewer of the advertisement would automatically regard the price of the beans as being an exemplar of other deals on offer. In other words, the beans were the paradigmatic selection and could have been replaced in another advertisement elsewhere, or at some future date, with deals on bottles of lemonade, jars of pickle or boxes of soap powder. It was thus informing the readers that the supermarket concerned was committed to offering its products at a price that was so competitive that it would be worth their while making a journey to one of their outlets and thereby making significant savings on a trolley full of varied groceries. Similarly, the sofa that was mentioned at an exceptionally low price invited the viewer to consider the retailer as being worth a visit, even if they were looking for a different kind of sofa, or a dining table, or a bed. It could therefore be deduced that these were connotations which were intended to be drawn concerning the brand rather than the specific product and it accords with Subject D's claim: *"There's not one client that comes through the door that isn't a brand in some way, shape or form"* (Subchapter 6.4.4).

Subject C bemoaned his clients' negative attitudes towards what he referred to as *"intellectual content"* and *"intellectual spins"* (Subchapter 6.4.3), and the de-professionalisation of his function as a creator of advertising owing to his industry having been de-skilled and de-intellectualised, with the resulting decline in the quality of advertising. He attributed this, at least in part, to the existence of widely available and inexpensive software that enabled firms to produce their own advertising in-house and so save on the costs of commissioning an agency or even having to employ specialist staff such as graphic artists and copywriters. With the software mentioned, and a modicum of skill, it would be possible to produce elegant, professional-looking advertising incorporating enhanced and retouched photographic images, photographs and illustrations from a picture library, a huge variety of fonts and other layout possibilities. However, those producing this advertising may have received no training in marketing or advertising and may have possessed few, if any, artistic skills and the result of their efforts would likely have been product-oriented and unsophisticated, and with little intellectual content. Another reason for this that is apparent to the author is the decline of traditional media, namely television

and printed newspapers and magazines, in favour of the internet as a source of entertainment and news. Internet advertising, and the nature of a viewer's engagement with it, are likely to be different from that of other media, although research beyond the scope of this thesis would be needed to determine whether this is the case. Subject C's concern about the de-intellectualisation of advertising was shared by Subject F, who described the anti-intellectual attitudes he encountered in business, as well as the lack of knowledge and rigour which, in some cases, had caused advertising to fail. This is pertinent when considering the theoretical underpinning of advertising design, and has implications in terms of both the training of practitioners and for their subsequent professional practice. It also highlights fundamental questions as to the purpose of advertising and its relation to science and academia, specifically in terms of advertising as a means of manipulating the public and the ethical questions arising from that. One could reasonably suppose that using sophisticated linguistic tools that have been devised over many years by theorists for reasons of scientific inquiry to discourage people from smoking, or to encourage safe driving, is ethically justifiable. Such justification would not, however, be available to those applying these techniques when urging consumers to spend their limited financial resources on the latest model of a smartphone that they do not need to the financial advantage of an electronics manufacturer. Nevertheless, the interviewees who mentioned the intellectual aspect were among those who were familiar with semiotics and, in particular, the work of Barthes and it may be the case that Barthes' ideas about consumerism, neomania, connotations and cultural myths, do indeed offer some kind of an intellectual backdrop for their work. Advertising design is thereby elevated in their minds from being merely a mechanical, money-oriented activity towards one that is to be regarded as artistic and professional, and consequently deserving of respect. A similar argument could be made with regard to theories of pragmatics, and this is outlined in Subchapter 7.5, below.

Returning to the application of semiotic approaches in advertising, the interviews revealed how creators actively and deliberately use a combination of pictures and text in the way suggested by Barthes (1977) when he explains how

images are polysemous and their meaning is then anchored by the linguistic element adding essential meaning and banishing any unintended signifieds, although often this consists of little more than a relatively meaningless headline and a brand name. Subject A gave the example of displaying “*doing more*” to accompany images of Doosan forklift trucks. In this instance, it is hard to see how the strapline was in any way informative beyond being a pun, as it would surely have been unlikely to cause a potential customer to commit to a belief that they could do more work with a Doosan truck than any other brand of forklift such as Caterpillar or Yale. If there had been anchorage as Barthes (1977: pp. 38-41) describes, then it would have been to enable the reader to identify the text as an advertisement rather than as simply a photograph being shown for some other purpose, and that it was specifically an advertisement for Doosan. Where enigmatic wordings have been used, such as in the case of the advertisement headline “*play less golf*”, mentioned by Subject E, another function was to intrigue the reader sufficiently to impel them to read the small print which would firmly anchor the image to a single meaning while, at the same time, facilitate an understanding of the verbal puzzle juxtaposed with the image.

Barthes (1957) attributes connotations within advertisements to a basic human tendency towards making sense of the world through cultural myths, and he claims that these myths play a role in enabling humans to define themselves and the groups to which they belong. In accessing a cultural myth, people are able to grasp an entire narrative from a relatively small number of signifiers through the process of connotation. Subject D, who had also studied basic semiotics in his training for the advertising industry, was reminded of Barthes’s notion of cultural myths and stated that, while he personally did not attempt to apply the theories of cultural mythology, he was aware that some other advertisers did that. Subject C, was also acquainted with cultural myths as he recalled reading Barthes’ classic work *Mythologies* while he was a student. Although he did not say he actively referred to this work as a source of inspiration when creating advertisements, the possibility that it formed part of his mental toolset when he engaged in his creative processes would have been significant and his awareness of cultural mythology may well have influenced him subliminally even if this

cannot be proved from the present study. It has to be said that there was no evidence among any of the interviewees of the level of sophistication in constructing advertising based on such as “*the Dionysian underworld of carnality*” as described by Beasley and Danesi (2002: p. 74)<sup>82</sup>. Subject E, who was aware of semiotics, but had never studied any aspect of it formally prior to entering the advertising industry, disclosed a behavior he engaged in as a way to germinate ideas when given a brief. This involved listening to music which he was convinced captured something of the mood or essence of what he wanted to market, and he mentioned both *Mars*, from Holst’s Planet Suite and Beethoven’s “*Pastoral*” symphony. The former is very evidently based upon a myth in terms of a Roman god, and the association with the military, masculinity and violence. The latter conjures the ideal of arcadian existence, with connotations of tranquility, the change of seasons and closeness to nature. Whether or not this interviewee actually exploited cultural myths by invoking them in his advertising, it is of some interest that he gathered inspiration from them and it seems fair to assume that his finished work was at least influenced by them.

Subject D pointed out that “*people buying a brand buy into something*” (Subchapter 6.4.4) and that “something” could certainly be regarded as dependent upon a myth which the brand sought to establish and reinforce. He cited the example of *Dove* products and how this brand associated itself with a natural rather than artificial beauty through signifiers such as whiteness, and an absence of perfumes. In Subchapter 6.5.4, in discussing myths, Subject D listed some of the signifiers he used in his advertising as “*photography, styles, typefaces, colours, techniques, animation, illustration, icons*”. It was notable that the interviewees relied on the existence and awareness of what Barthes would have regarded as cultural myths not just for brands and products strongly associated with brands, but also for product promotion where brand seemed hardly relevant. An example of this can be seen where Subject C explained an advertising campaign he designed through *Facebook* for a university course which invited young people to undertake a degree course that would, it was

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<sup>82</sup> Explained in Subchapter 5.5

implied, lead to a career in the rock music industry. The aim of the advertisement was to recruit students by tapping into a cultural myth, in this case the public's perception of the glamorous life of a stage manager or technician for a rock group and all that entailed including travelling the world and mixing with celebrities, all while earning a high salary. Whether this reflected the reality of the life of a 'roadie' would be a different proposition, as is whether all the students who had completed the course would have had a realistic prospect of finding full-time employment with a successful band once they had graduated.

The potential for invoking a myth in the mind of a viewer is well-established and almost certainly recognized by many consumers when it occurs. It is exploited in the traditional sense with folk tales which seem to recur in advertising. One of these is the tale of Robin Hood, referred to by Myers (1994)<sup>83</sup> and it was fortuitously mentioned by Subject A, where a statue of the legendary outlaw was used as a signifier for the city of Nottingham owing to his association with the city and surrounding area. In other cases, this particular character may be used with a greater degree of intertextuality<sup>84</sup> to denote other qualities relating to his life, his friends and exploits, along with the belief that he stole from the rich to give to the poor, or his romantic involvement with Maid Marion, although these particular aspects were less relevant in Subject A's campaign. A more contemporary example can be seen in Subchapter 5.9, above, where it was mentioned that sportswear manufacturers depicted athletes wearing their products, thus encouraging a reader to identify with an individual shown engaging in a particular physical activity. Where the athlete shown had celebrity status owing to their reputation in the sport, that individual's depiction activated a myth as to their special talents, and perhaps also their imagined lifestyle in view of their wealth. Subject E reported how he "*boiled down*" a brief to advertise football boots which exploited the public knowledge of footballer

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<sup>83</sup> See Subchapter 3.4 above.

<sup>84</sup> Intertextuality is explained in Subchapter 2.9 above.

Michael Owen and, in particular, his breathtaking speed, by showing him either wearing them or endorsing them. A viewer assimilating such a myth into their consciousness might be persuaded to regard them as a factor in Owen's success and that, by purchasing the boots, some of what Owen enjoys in terms of his footballing achievements, and the perhaps his supposed (mythical) glamorous sports star lifestyle, would be made accessible to them.

Myers (1994), Cook (2001), Bignell (2002) and van Leeuwen (2005) are among those who use semiotics as a tool in interpreting selected advertisements, yet none have, so far as can be ascertained, consulted the producers of these commercials in order to confirm the thought processes which they suppose led to their creation. The degree to which the interviewees tended to apply creative approaches and methods which could conceivably be regarded as aligning with semiotic principles is considered in this subchapter. It can first be stated that none of the interviewees who worked as designers of advertisements suggested they ever made a conscious decision to apply these principles, or that they relied upon them in generating or developing ideas; it was clear that they instead relied upon their experience and intuition. Subject F reinforced this when he pointed out that semiotics was a topic covered superficially in some university courses. He recognized that, where semiotics had been part of their syllabus, advertisers regarded knowledge of this subject as something necessary to pass their degree courses rather than a tool they could apply in their daily work. Rather than attempting to make use of such theories, he said, advertisers preferred to "*freestyle*", by which he meant working intuitively and basing their approach on experience.

Consequently, it may be considered whether, and if so, how, concepts related to semiotics such as signification and connotation are applied unconsciously from the answers the interviewees have given and this very point was expressed by Subject B, as shown at the top of this subchapter. When deconstructing an advertisement in order to understand its operation and its ingenuity, it cannot be automatically concluded that its creator has heavily engaged with and applied semiotic principles, even if that impression is given in textbooks. Similarly, in the case of advertising practitioners who have received some training in

semiotics, or read aspects of it outside of formal education, the evidence in the interviews shows it is unlikely that they would commence the task of creating advertisements by referring to such theoretical frameworks, or that they actively consider applying them during the process of development. The fact that advertising professionals do not seem to be expressly applying semiotic methods in their work may be accounted for in a number of ways. On the one hand, practitioners are found to receive little, if any, training in the subject and that which they do receive tends to be based on the retrospective analysis of past advertisements rather than tutoring in the practicalities of advertising design. It would be far from the truth, however, to view such education as of no value. For novices, this intuition has to come from somewhere and it may be the case that examining advertisements and conducting semiotic analyses of them enables students to acquire some kind of feeling or impression for how advertising can work through signification and thus some form of learning occurs subliminally, in a similar way to learning a craft. Performing analyses can aid students in understanding how meaning should not be understood as static or inert, but rather it is dynamic, multi-faceted and complex, and its interpretation has to be negotiated. Conducting these analyses may aid students in appreciating the possibilities which are available for them to utilize their creative talents. For example, modern advertisers make use of media in all its forms, and the various modes which exist within each medium (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001) and semiotics offers a *“unifying conceptual framework and a set of methods and terms for use across the full range of signifying practices”* (Chandler, 2014: p. 15). Semiotic theories offer insights into how signs refer to reality, but they also suggest the ways by which signs can frame and even construct their own realities, and this is a distinct advantage for producers of messages aimed at persuading people to believe something or behave in a particular way.

All the interviewees were clearly aware of the concept of metaphors in the general sense and it became apparent that they used them in their advertising, even where they did not mention the expression. These were sometimes employed for their potential in enabling two or more signifieds to be

represented by just one signifier, and this was made possible by virtue of them sharing a particular characteristic. Among the examples of this were Subject A's expression "*deliver*", which could be interpreted as physical delivery as well as operating as an ontological metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980: pp. 25-29) meaning to fulfill a promise. Another way metaphor was used creatively by the interviewees was to construct an analogy in an advertisement by drawing parallels, but presenting them as reality. An example of this can be seen in Subject B's advertisement designed for an automotive company where the headline text read "*First Aid for cars*", and this text was juxtaposed with an image of a car wired to a diagnostic machine. Understanding the advertisement required the viewer to be able to recognize the parallel and draw a set of desired inferences from them, perhaps including the notion that the car was like a living creature, that it was consequently complex and in need of the kind of care normally extended to human beings. This advertisement facilitated the exploitation of another, closely associated metaphor, but this time one based on the polysemic quality of the word "heart" in "*the heart of the car*". Subject B referred to this as "*symbolism*", although one might reasonably wonder if it is more likely to be comprehended through pragmatic awareness based on the viewer's encyclopaedic knowledge of what first aid is, the function of the heart, some degree of recognition of medical and automotive diagnostic equipment, and linguistic memory in terms of the literal and figurative meanings of "*heart*".

As with established metaphors, metonyms are such a fundamental part of everyday language that speakers and writers are largely oblivious to their existence or understand how they differ from the literal use of language. It was therefore unsurprising that the expression "*metonymy*" was not mentioned by any of the interviewees. Nevertheless, a couple of the interviewees signaled an unconscious awareness of how metonyms could be used to convey an advertising message economically with words, and how to associate an entire product line with the brand they were marketing. An example of this was Subject A's proposed headline "*Seoul. Like Tokyo, only cheaper*". A theme raised by a couple of the interviewees was that of stereotyping, and it was accepted by them that they did practise stereotyping in some of their advertising messages.

Stereotypes and archetypes offer the convenience of an immediate frame of reference for characters and situations and activating these conveys a host of assumptions instantaneously. This can be highly advantageous in advertising, where the amount of time and effort a viewer will devote to looking at an advertisement is often minimal. Stereotypes can be activated by combining particular signifiers, as in a single image such as a photograph, and the option exists to bolster the likelihood of its recognition with a word, phrase or sentence. An example of this can be seen in a television advertisement (pub. "MrMadman", 2009) in which a well-known footballer, Vinny Jones, is seen driving along a remote country road with a young girl passenger who is wearing an elaborate fairy costume, and his car breaks down. Jones is depicted as a stereotypical father dutifully transporting his female child to an event and, almost instantly, the viewers comprehend the scenario and may even relate to it from their own life experience in being a child or caring for a child. Nowhere in the advertisement does it state that she is his daughter, nor that he is taking her to an event: these are assumptions to be recovered by the viewer who may readily identify with the situation and consequently "*fill in the gaps*". One possible explanation for how such gap filling is achieved is suggested by an ethnomethodological approach used within conversation analysis and known as "*membership categorization analysis*" (MCA); this is advanced by Sacks (1972, from Bilmes, 2008) in explaining the use of categories in conversation. A well-known illustration of this is to be found in Sack's analysis of the phrase "*The baby cried. The mommy picked it up*". Unless a hearer is told otherwise, they will naturally assume the "mommy" is the mother of that child and not, for example, a kidnapper. The obvious relation of "*baby*" and "*mommy*", including the fact both are hyponyms of "*family member*", would lead a hearer who is a native speaker within the same culture towards making that assumption.

While MCA may go some way towards explaining stereotypes in conversation, exploiting them, especially in media, can be controversial and risks encountering disapproval. For example, an advertisement which portrayed a young black man as a drug dealer, or one showing a man who is supposedly gay exhibiting overtly feminine mannerisms, would almost inevitably attract criticism and complaint

and so advertisers may be inclined to be cautious and use stereotypes judiciously, ensuring they are always able to offer some justification if they are challenged for so doing. Subject B pointed out that clearly defining market segments and aiming advertising towards them invariably involves stereotyping, which he described as “*taking broad brushstrokes*”. In the modern era, as Furnham and Paltzer (2010) and Olson (2013) note, objections are made to the portrayal of a woman doing the laundry in an advertisement for washing powder as it allegedly reinforces stereotypes of women. If, however, market research shows that 80% of washing powder is sold to women, then this may be a depiction of reality and some basis of justification for it can be claimed. Subject B’s own examples of this included a campaign for selling barbecue meats, sauces, and also alcohol products, with advertisements specifically directed at male buyers on radio stations that they knew had a predominantly male audience. The supposition here, arguably predicated on a cultural myth, was that barbecuing was predominantly a masculine activity. Subject D expressed a similarly ambivalent view of stereotyping when he admitted that it played a role in his advertising and was, to some extent, unavoidable in spite of his efforts to resist it. He supplied the example of the Carlsberg utopian world in which all the customers were men, and were being offered goods and services that men stereotypically want; these were the signifiers of adult maleness that a viewer would quickly assimilate. In this case, the stereotyping worked not just, as Subject D said, to help the viewer “*to connect A to B quicker*”, but was actually the driver of the humour. In other words, the degree of stereotyping as manifested by the number, range and selection, of signifiers was so extreme as to constitute a parody of reality and hence be comedic. The implication of this is that, if the viewer is a man, then the goods and services shown represent perfect happiness for that viewer, and Carlsberg beer is one among these.

Certain inadequacies in using semiotic analysis as a means of interpreting advertisements have been suggested and some of these is outlined below. This begins by considering an advertisement created by Subject E and it is recalled that the interviewee marketed what he referred to as “*wok quality*” microwavable noodles and the angle chosen was that consumers would no

longer have any use for their woks. Viewers were invited to consider what they otherwise might do with their now redundant woks when they had no further use for them in making noodles. They were presented with humorous images, including depicting people playing tennis with their woks or adapting them as a kind of “*dog chariot*”. In order for the advertisement to work as intended, a viewer would have to construct a mental bridge, whereby a logical connection could be found between playing tennis with woks and buying microwavable noodles and some mental effort must be undertaken to achieve this. One may deconstruct this advertisement using semiotic methods, identifying and classifying signifiers, connotations and denotations that are present, the types of message claimed by Barthes, namely the coded iconic message, the non-coded iconic message and the verbal component in the form of foregrounded captions, product names and labels, and any smaller printed texts (Barthes, 1977). There are, however, shortcomings with this approach when it comes to offering a comprehensive understanding of the mental processes involved in the actual production of this advertisement. One image depicted people playing tennis with woks and it was accompanied by the caption which may have read something like: “*the future of your wok*<sup>85</sup>”. Barthes (1977) contends that messages like this have a two-fold denotation and connotation distinction but, as Tanaka (1994) points out, this distinction is not always clear cut. In this case, a denotation could only be retrieved by adding words to create a propositional speech act in the form of the grammatical structure of an indicative sentence, something like: this is the future of your wok. Syntactically incomplete linguistic items are commonplace in advertising and their incompleteness offers the reader wider interpretative choices than would otherwise be the case. Aside from being economical with words, which is an advantage for advertisers as it facilitates snappy messages, they also avoid the limitations imposed by truth conditionality. In other words, they cannot be contradicted, so they are simply offered as ideas which are “out there” for the reader to perceive and contemplate. Another problem with Barthes’ (1977) thesis on the

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<sup>85</sup> It is not claimed this was the actual caption used as this is not known. The wording here is a suggested caption for the purpose of providing an example.

connotation/denotation distinction is, as Tanaka (1994) points out “*perceptual knowledge is not independent of cultural knowledge*” (p. 23). If the caption is interpreted as a factual statement when juxtaposed with the image, i.e. “*This is the future of your wok*”, there is an immediate realisation that the denotation has no serious validity. The advertiser is not expecting the reader to hold any serious belief that what is depicted is a representation of any reality. In order to understand that this advertisement is intended as humour, let alone to be able to process it further and understand the link between, on the one hand the linguistic and non-linguistic elements and, on the other, the underlying message of the advertisement, a significant amount of cultural knowledge on the part of the receiver has to be accessible.

It is further possible to recover an unlimited number of possible meanings from the image of the people playing tennis with woks, and these might include, for example, that this is a new version of tennis, or that woks are more efficient than raquets for playing tennis. Barthes (1977) claims that images are thereby polysemous and the words which juxtapose an image in an advertisement “*anchor*” the interpretation to a single and desired meaning (see Subchapter 2.7 above). While this may narrow the range of interpretations, it certainly does not completely preclude others as words and phrases used are also polysemic, and can be ambiguous or pose uncertainties over issues like reference assignment. The image and the caption together do not tell the reader even that this is an advertisement, let alone what is being advertised, so there is a reliance on the presence of other signifiers, usually in the form of a product image, a trade mark or an accompanying text, in order to ensure the advertising format is recognised and the purpose of the advertisement is achieved. Nevertheless, even when all these are present, Barthes (1977) still does not account for the visual humour, how it works, why it attracts the viewer or the generation of meaning by the association of wok tennis and microwavable noodles.

A similar example was shown in which Subject A described an advertisement for a scrappage scheme consisting of a photograph of derelict electronic equipment and which had superimposed upon it in large print the phrase “*End of the decayed*”. This exploited the near homophones “*decayed*” and “*decade*” to

create a pun. As with the previous example, some of Barthes' anchorage can be said to be occurring whereby the range of potential meanings that can be recovered from the polysemous image is limited by the caption, but nothing from within his theory explains the operation of puns or how they attract a reader's attention. As a further point, in *Mythologies* (1957), Barthes is mainly concerned with those advertisements which connect images and text, and how the juxtaposing of the two elements facilitates a particular and desired reading. Many advertisements, however, do not function in this way as they consist of nothing more than an image and perhaps a trademark, while others are purely linguistic in content.

To sum up, those who devise advertisements rely partially at least on pre-existing bodies of knowledge which are shared by both the producers and consumers of advertisements. The interviews show that at least some practitioners are aware of the work of Barthes (1957) concerning cultural myths. Nevertheless, they do not refer to Barthes in their creative processes and this may be because they have a conscious or unconscious awareness of the limitations of relying solely upon signifiers, including sophisticated ones such as cultural myths. Semiotic approaches so not, for example, account for the appreciation of the humour in Subject E's image of people playing tennis with woks, let alone explain how encountering such a commercial would be likely to impel a customer to buy a certain brand of noodles. Nor do they sufficiently explain many of the other comedic, stylistic or rhetorical strategies that the interviewees have chosen to use in their work.

## **7.5 APPLICATION OF PRAGMATIC PRINCIPLES IN ADVERTISING**

In this subchapter, it is proposed that the research described in this thesis demonstrates how contextual features that are not readily explainable by semiotic principles are constituent parts of modern advertisements; that an advertiser's awareness of context, including the environment in which the

advertisement appears, co-texts, and encyclopaedic knowledge, are heavily and intuitively applied in the construction of advertising texts; that the cognitive processes involved in the creation of advertisements align with recent developments in pragmatics, and therefore that pragmatic theories may be as relevant to prospective and practising advertising professionals as semiotic theories.

The distinction between semiotics and pragmatics is not always entirely clear-cut and there are overlaps between the two approaches. This section begins by referring to the work of another semiotician, Roman Jakobson, and his attempt to classify the functions of language, as described in Subchapter 2.5, and which describes how Jakobson proposes six functions of verbal signs, namely the referential, the expressive, the conative, the phatic, the poetic and the metalingual (Nöth, 1990: pp. 185-187). More than one function can be, and often is, present in any communicative act but, when this occurs, there is a hierarchy whereby one function is dominant. Different genres tend to rank certain functions above others so that in poetry, for example, the poetic function is dominant. If the premise is accepted that the prevailing intention of an advertisement is to persuade a reader or viewer to purchase a product or service, or to be loyal to a brand, then the dominant function in advertising may be argued to be the conative. The conative function addresses or appeals to the addressee and is, according to Serban (2012), defined in terms of its effects on their behaviour; if this is accepted, then any other of Jakobson's functions are subordinated to this. Subject A's agency website described how his company "*help(s) brands sell more*", while Subject B's agency asserted that they worked towards "*creating behavior change or altering attitudes*" (see Subchapter 6.2.2). Similarly, on their website, Subject E's agency claimed their approach involved "*uncovering simple, powerful messages and communicating them persuasively*". In the interviews, it was evident that practitioners were less keen on promoting goods using what Subject B referred to as "*entry level*" advertising and his example of a supermarket promoting tins of beans where the only selling point was the price. While the conative function of advertising is likely to feature in their motivation, this function appears less likely to be foregrounded. In other

words, the conative function may be implicit, but it is a covert part of the communication and the stimulus is more likely to be designed to operate through one of Jakobson's other functions, specifically the phatic, poetic and referential. Even with simple classified ads composed by ordinary members of the public, such as for houses, cars and second-hand goods, this may still apply. Mostly, these are ostensibly designed to convey factual information and so their appearance is referential in spite of the underlying conative function. Several interviewees explained how they made use of imaginative metaphors and stylistic devices such as alliteration as their chosen vehicles of persuasion and these may thereby be regarded as utilizing the poetic function as they are literary in character. Examples include Subject A's parallelism in the "*doing more*" strapline for Doosan trucks and his homophony in "*end of the decayed*". The semantic devices mentioned would include Subject A's "*local service nationwide*", where the antonymy between "*local*" and "*nationwide*" was foregrounded, and Subject E's enigmatic "*play less golf*". It may also be argued that the choice of personal pronouns can add some degree of phatic function to an advertisement. The use of "we" and "you" is suggestive of a simulated personal, empathetic and sometimes even intimate, relationship between the advertiser or, perhaps more accurately, the advertiser's client, and the consumer. Subject A mentioned an old advertisement for carpet underlay which bore the headline: "*What matters is what you've got underneath*" (Subchapter 6.5.1) and which depicted a woman in her underwear. Viewers could thus assign the "you" to the model or to themselves. Where the latter operated, they were able to select a preferred meaning between the benefits of good quality under-garments, the benefits of a high quality carpet underlay, or both.

Austin's speech act theory, described in Subchapter 3.2, offers categorisations of utterances first into locutionary and illocutionary acts, and defines these as being understood in terms of their perlocutionary effects. The first of these, locutionary acts, consists of assembling a string of encoded signs in the form of phonemes, letters and words, to produce an expression in terms of, for example, ensuring the referents are accurately identified and deictic meanings can be resolved. Selected syntactic structures in English can be indicative when

establishing a type of locutionary act, so the line “*play less golf*” is readily comprehended as an instruction by virtue of it being a grammatical imperative. It is common for foregrounded texts in advertising to be structured as imperatives, and these frequently begin with one from a fairly limited set of single-syllable words which engage the consumer and perhaps even convey urgency, such as “*buy*”, “*choose*” and “*get*” (Leech, 1966: p. 154).

Another commonly used locutionary structure found in advertising is the grammatical interrogative, where the advertiser hails the consumer with a foregrounded question, such as “*Are you paying too much for your car insurance?*” Clearly, the entity asking the question is not anticipating an answer and so the question may be regarded as rhetorical: its purpose can only be to engage with the consumer and stimulate a thinking process desired by the advertiser, or a desired behavior such as reading further into the advertisement. Its purpose, in this case the intended effect of the question as described, would be its illocution. Searle (1976, in Levinson 1983: p. 240) proposes a typology of five illocutionary acts and he lists these as: representatives, which commit the speaker to the truth of a proposition; directives, which attempt to make the addressee respond in a desired way; commissives, which commit the speaker to doing something; expressives, which express a psychological state and declarations, which are intended to change a state of affairs formally and by means of the utterance. Foregrounded advertising texts consisting of imperatives or interrogatives may be regarded as directives within Searle’s typology. Alternatively, ones which are grammatical declaratives (e.g. “*We can’t be beaten on price*”) may be viewed as representatives, as they can be assessed in terms of truth conditionality, or as commissives, as they are making a promise which is perhaps underpinned by some kind of guarantee.

A notable stratagem applied by copywriters, and which is mentioned in the previous subchapter, is the use of non-grammatical forms in advertising texts or, at least, forms which do not conform to formal and complete English sentence structure. They occur mainly, but not exclusively, in the foregrounded text and they can consist of anything from a single word, or a phrase, or a full subordinating clause. A single word may be a brand name where it is juxtaposed

along with an image, usually showing a product that relates to the brand. It may, on the other hand, consist of a popular advertiser's buzzword, like "Sale" or "Now". These isolated linguistic particles have certain advantages for the advertiser: they express a proposition with maximum economy of words, enabling the copywriter to, as several of the interviewees put it, "*boil down*" a core message, but while not committing the advertiser's client to the proposition's truth. They also supply scope for linguistic play and stylistic creativity to attract attention to the advertisement and offer flexibility in interpretation. This enables the receiver to choose the most rational or preferred meaning, or mentally toggle between possible alternative meanings. Among the examples of these are Subject A, when he used the phrase "*doing more*" for Doosan forklift trucks and which became the brand's strapline, his line "*local service nationwide*" for the engineering company client and his punning line "*end of the decayed*". These are phrases and not clauses: they have no subject-verb structure and so make no literal claim, forcing the viewer to negotiate their own meaning through a process of mental enrichment. The expectation of such enrichment occurring is evident in the mind of the copywriter as can be seen with Subject B's example with the discount furniture retailer marketing a sofa and he stated:

*"And it's all about this sofa, at that price, that's how much you save and isn't this a great sofa?"* (Subchapter 6.4.3).

It is unlikely these were the words used in the advertisement, but they were probably the message he expected the reader to receive when seeing a picture of a sofa and its price. In such examples, there was a clear gap, or an under-determination, occurring between what was encoded by the words and the meaning the producer intended to convey. This would inevitably occur irrespective of the presence of an associated image of the kind that Barthes (1977) claims anchors the meaning, and this applies even if more linguistic coding is added. Transmitters and receivers of such messages must thereby rely

upon another faculty human beings possess, namely their ability to consider messages in context, and to draw conclusions about a communicator's intentions through the process of inferencing.

In order to analyse the inferencing process, the line "*doing more*" when advertising Doosan forklifts again provides an example and it can be concluded that the phrase contained little meaning when standing alone. In the case of a full-page advertisement in a periodical, the context is provided by a number of signifiers and these include the image and a recognizable trade name. Other essential cues that add to context would be those that signal to the reader that the text relates to an advertisement as opposed to, for example, a journalistic article; these cues may have included the layout of the page, the placement of trade names, the typefaces used and the style of the image. However, even with all these, the phrase "*doing more*" was oblique in that it had a limitless range of possible meanings and the best that analyzing through implicature could achieve would have been to suggest those which are most likely to be accessed. While the aim of a spoken utterance is predominantly to deliver a single and coherent meaning, advertisers are able to exploit ambiguity to invite one or more desired inferences. Possible meanings recoverable from "*doing more*" might include:

*"We (Doosan) trucks are doing more for our customers"*

*"The people depicted driving the trucks are doing more work because they are using Doosan trucks"*

*"You could be doing more business if you were using Doosan trucks"*

The lack of a full declarative sentence contributed to both the vagueness and ambiguity of the phrase and this might be construed as the copywriter having failed to abide by Grice's maxims of quantity (*Make your contribution as informative as is required for the current purposes of the exchange*) and/or manner (*avoid ambiguity*). Where this is done blatantly, i.e. in such a way that the failure to abide by the maxims is purposely made manifest to the receiver,

and the reason was to generate some further implicatures, such as those suggested then, in Grice's theory of conversational implicature, these maxims have been flouted. If the copywriter had instead used one of the suggested lines above, however, the approach would have been direct rather than oblique, and the maxims observed. Flouting quantity in this case signaled to the receiver that more than one interpretation was available and he or she could select the one which is most applicable to them, mentally toggle between them, or even mentally hold all three as meaningful and relevant to their interests.

As explained in Subchapter 3.3. above, Sperber and Wilson (1995: pp. 36-38) point out what they regard as deficiencies in Grice's theory and offer in its place an alternative explanation for implicature through Relevance Theory. In their first major work in which they outline their theory, they begin by posing the following question:

*"How can a physical stimulus bring about the required similarity of thoughts, when there is no similarity whatsoever between the stimulus and the thoughts it brings into correspondence?" (p. 2)*

The theory they go on to develop is replete with examples of spoken communication in the form of isolated utterances and brief exchanges, but it requires little imagination to relate their notion of physical stimulus to an advertisement and bringing thoughts into correspondence as the desired effect. One of the principles of Relevance Theory relates to what is referred to as "*ostentive inferential communication*" (Sperber & Wilson, 1995: p. 50). Under this principle, a stimulus is produced which is intended to "*make manifest or more manifest a set of assumptions*" (p. 63) while not excluding the situation whereby the stimulus is intended only to inform. They offer by way of example someone feigning a yawn to communicate they are tired. A distinction is made between

informative intention<sup>86</sup> and communicative intention in that, while the former is intended to make manifest certain assumptions, such as relating facts, the latter intends to make the receiver aware of the speaker's aim to communicate something, specifically by making manifest their intention.

Accordingly, a speaker initiating an act of ostensive communication has to secure the attention of a hearer and so, according to Sperber and Wilson (1995: p. 155), an act of ostension is also a request for attention and, by such action, the utterance carries with it a guarantee of its own relevance. This is clearly applicable to an advertisement where its first purpose is to attract attention to itself; if it fails in this regard, the costs and effort expended in designing it and publishing or broadcasting it are wasted. Every advertisement seeks attention and is, by definition, an "*act of ostension*". A copywriter knows he must make any advertisement he is producing relevant to targeted individuals such that the receivers will recognize it is worthy of their attention and their effort in interpreting it. To this end, the advertiser must generate an appropriate stimulus, and one that can compete with other stimuli present in the environment so as to attract and sustain the target audience's attention and convince them that their effort in processing the information is worthwhile by virtue of some reward. As Clarke (2013) explains:

*"Cognitive resources are precious and we do not want to waste them in paying attention to phenomena which will not reward us with enough cognitive effects". (p. 108)*

Success is thus contingent upon the application of effort by, and the skill of, the advertiser in selecting and transmitting the most efficient and economical stimuli for the desired purpose.

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<sup>86</sup> A detailed account of informative intention is provided below in this subchapter.

The processing effort required in order to produce a desired cognitive effect, that is to achieve optimal relevance, is a key consideration in advertising. Living creatures are continually receiving new stimuli from various sources in the form of phenomena detected within their environment and by their physical senses. These are then related to existing knowledge, including immediate and short-term memory (e.g. what has just been experienced, seen, read or heard) and longer-term memory (e.g. what is believed to be factual information). This process must occur in humans in order to be able to interpret utterances in a conversation or broadcast advertisement, or an advertising text in a newspaper or magazine. Sperber and Wilson (1995) state:

*“Someone who wants to achieve a specific cognitive effect must therefore try to produce a stimulus which, when optimally processed, will achieve just the intended effect”.* (p. 153)

In a later work, the same authors define what is optimally relevant as their *“second principle of relevance”*. They explain this as follows:

*“An utterance is optimally relevant to the hearer if:*

- a. It is relevant enough to be worth the hearer’s processing effort;*
- b. It is the most relevant one compatible with the speaker’s abilities and preferences.”* (Wilson & Sperber, 2012: p. 65)

The application of Relevance Theory requires that implicature is calculated through factors that are mutually manifest between the transmitter and receiver of a message. These factors include phenomena detectable in the environment in which a communication occurs, and a shared resource of encyclopaedic knowledge. It must first be established what the features of that environment

are as they relate to what is said. This includes resolving how referents, including pronouns and deictics, are assigned and ambiguities are clarified by virtue of what is manifest to the receiver. As an example in conversation, where two strangers are standing at a bus stop and one says: "I just saw one going the other way", all elements of a meaningful statement may be present so the receiver understands the the speaker's intention and the message he or she intends to relay. In the case described, the environment is a bus stop and those standing at that location are known to be (generally) waiting for a bus to arrive. The speaker assumes the receiver possesses the necessary encyclopaedic knowledge from which to identify the referent "one", i.e. a bus, and from the words "going the other way" as an intention to inform them of a relevant fact. That new knowledge will, when added to existing encyclopaedic knowledge, equip the receiver to make an estimate as to how long it will be before the awaited bus arrives. The environment in advertising can consist of the location of an advertisement (e.g. magazine, newspaper, flyer, radio advertisement, television commercial or Internet advertisement), the time it is published or broadcast and any events known to be occurring at that time, and any associated co-text present with or close to the advertisement in question. When Subject E mentioned the advertisement for golfing courses which had the headline "*play less golf*", the fact that this was published in a golfing magazine was crucial for it to invoke the required type of relevance. Had it appeared in a magazine for, for example, competition cyclists, not only would it have generated less interest, i.e. it would have been a less effective stimulus, but the message may have been misinterpreted, perhaps as something like: "playing golf can interfere with your cycling". Mutuality of knowledge is a key requirement for this advertisement to generate the required implicature, and this means:

- those advertising in it would have known that the readers like playing golf
- readers would have known that advertisers are well aware that the readers like playing golf
- advertisers know that readers know that they know this, and so on

In addition, the readers would almost certainly have recognized the text as an advertisement as the advertiser intended. Accordingly, rather than relying upon making the message such that it would require minimal effort to be comprehended, Subject E presented the reader with a riddle to be solved. A reader could assume from experience of such texts that the message carried with it a guarantee of its own relevance and there was therefore an expectation that the extra effort required to interpret it would provide some kind of mental reward. Consequently, in this case, the additional processing effort made the message more relevant rather than less.

In some situations, context is predicated on knowledge stored in the memory in the form of an encyclopaedic entry in the memory of, and accessible to, the reader or viewer, and advertisers have to make assumptions about what they are likely to know or think they should know. This can relate to short-term or long-term memory, and to general as well as specialized knowledge. Advertisers routinely rely on the public's familiarity with brand names, well-established products, trademarks, straplines and even previous advertising campaigns, and this applies to their own product plus those of competitors. They have expectations as to the reader or viewer's general knowledge, awareness of major and recent historical developments and current affairs, recognition of celebrity names and faces and, in some cases, more specialized knowledge and terminology. Viewers and readers are presumed to have a lifetime's experience of encountering and processing advertisements that they can draw upon to facilitate a desired interpretation. Several interviewees gave clear examples of this. One was Subject A's proposed headline "*Seoul. Like Tokyo, only cheaper*". This relied upon a supposed set of encyclopaedic entries consisting of factual knowledge, such as that Seoul is the capital of Korea and Tokyo is the capital of Japan, which would be shared by the advertiser and the reader, and it also relied on certain shared assumptions about these, perhaps including the belief that Japanese goods are high quality, but tend to be expensive. Secondly, Subject E provided an example with his advertisement for football boots depicting footballer Michael Owen and his "*lightning fast*" skills; the target consumer here would have likely been especially aware of Owen and the advertisement was

most relevant to such an individual on the basis of them possessing such knowledge. Thirdly, Subject C described how matters such as pre-purchase vessel inspections, dry-docking and flag administration, were matters of interest to shipping firms, while these issues, and the terms used with regard to them, would be little understood by most people who did not work in that industry or associated fields. Lastly, Subject D described advertisements for Skoda cars and the fact that there was a waiting list for them, the significance of which would only register if the reader were already aware of the brand's former reputation for producing vehicles that were cheap and undesirable.

As shown above, under-determination may occur between what is explicitly encoded and the meaning the advertiser intends to convey through implicature. With any advertisement, a range of implicatures can be generated, some inadvertently, and some are strong while others are weak as they have moved further from the explicature and require more processing. The interviews provide evidence that this is a phenomenon practitioners intuitively understood and of which they were mindful when constructing advertisements. An example of this can be seen in Subject A's commercial depicting the staff in an engineering firm as being people with firm connections to the locality by virtue of them standing alongside well-known local landmarks with the tagline of "*Local service nationwide*". Some degree of explicature could be derived from the tagline emphasizing that service can be accessed locally, and this was available across the country. Strong implicated conclusions might have included the fact that the company was offering assistance no matter where in the UK the customer was located, and that the client's staff were local people and familiar with their customers' area. However, it was notable that Subject A went further than this: he said the aim was to "*make heroes*" of the people, and showing images of real human beings alongside local landmarks suggested they had local interests and a personal stake in their area. These latter conclusions that he hoped viewers of the advertisement would reach have high degrees of indeterminacy and were thus weak. Subject A nevertheless hoped that they would be successful, and this required that his intended implicatures would be

selected over others on the basis of them being relevant. As Wilson and Sperber (2012) explain:

*“The greater the range of alternatives, the weaker the implicatures, and the more responsibility the hearer has to take for the particular choices he makes.” (p. 16)*

Subject B and Subject D described the somewhat tortuous process their respective agencies undertook when developing ideas and devising stimuli in an effort to make their advertisements eye-catching and effective. This consisted of techniques which triggered what is sometimes referred to as “*outside the box*” or “*blue sky thinking*” while, at the same time, they had to be prepared to borrow ideas from previous advertisements. Subject E mentioned that he attempted to empathise with consumers by discerning “*some sort of truth*” with which ordinary people could identify and say, “*that’s me*”. Philosophers and psychologists attempting to explain human creativity may consider that aspect has been touched upon in Subchapter 2.5 above, where formalist concepts such as defamiliarization are briefly explained. The copywriters interviewed were clearly trying to ensure their work was noticed; their stimuli were appropriate and effective in producing the desired cognitive effects by presenting what was likely to be familiar to the reader, but in a way which is unfamiliar and/or unexpected. The creativity element could not, however, be their only consideration. Aside from the practical aspects such as client brief, budgets and legal constraints, they also had to make the advertisements relevant to the lives of their consumers by displaying some appreciation of, and indeed drawing upon, their own knowledge, experience and lifestyle, in order to make them relevant in the broadest possible sense.

Grice’s conversational principles are mentioned above in this subchapter with reference to his maxims of quantity and manner. The second of his maxims is that of quality, and this relates to the speaker stating only what he believes to be

true, and has evidence to support that belief. It may be supposed that advertisers make only representations that adhere to truthfulness, and they can supply evidence to verify their claims if needed, in order to protect themselves from legal consequences such as criminal deception<sup>87</sup>, false advertising<sup>88</sup>, action by the regulatory body, the Advertising Standards Authority, or breach of contract, or even the adverse repercussions of being publicly exposed as untrustworthy. While this is no doubt accurate in terms of intentionally misleading representations being presented as factual, many of the words and phrases used in advertisements fall short of making explicit statements, perhaps for the reasons suggested. In addition, examples can be seen within advertising of the use of such as puns, hyperbole and poetic elements, which are not meant to be taken literally. Sperber and Wilson (2012) reject Grice's view regarding the quality maxim that a failure to communicate a literal truth is "*a departure from the norms of communication*" (p. 219). They argue instead that there are two discrete forms of representation, namely "*descriptive*" and "*interpretive*" (p. 218). The former represents a state of affairs, as in a supermarket advertisement stating "X Beans – now only 48 pence"; the latter, on the other hand, represents a thought which it only resembles in terms of content and this resemblance is context-dependent. When an advertisement for Red Bull energy drink claimed it would "*give you wings*" (Duggan, 2012), and one for soft drink Irn-Bru claimed their product was "*made from girders*" (Hodge 2016), these were never intended to be interpreted as truthful or statements of fact, but were rather examples of the advertisers attempting humour through the loose use of language and imagery. Similarly, when Subject E described an example of a campaign to promote the latest memory foam latex mattress and to illustrate how they were designed to be cool, the contrived image of a mattress on a lollipop stick, it was not the aim of the copywriter to imply that the item looked like a lollipop, was edible or would be anything like as cold as a lollipop. Rather, the graphic artist was conveying an idea rather than a descriptive

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<sup>87</sup> In England and Wales, this is covered by section 15 of the Theft Act 1968

<sup>88</sup> For example, the Trade Descriptions Acts of 1968 and 1972, and the Business Protection from Misleading Marketing Regulations 2008

representation. In this case, this consisted of a proposition that the mattress had certain specific properties of a lollipop in terms of being able to cool one down when at risk of overheating owing to warm weather.

More general texts aimed at students of advertising are found to attempt to explain metaphors. An example of this is Brierley's *The Advertiser's Handbook* (2002), a book which is widely used in training and as a reference for advertisers states that metaphors are: "*part of our everyday speech*" (p. 144). Brierley goes on to include, as examples of metaphors, red roses sent as a sign of love and driving a high performance car as representing success; this indicates a possible conflation of metaphor, which is a phenomenon based on making or invoking parallels, and symbolism<sup>89</sup>. Metaphors and loose language are described in the previous subchapter from a semiotic perspective but, as explained in Chapter 3, pragmatic theories also offer explanations for these. Grice views metaphors as offering a kind of implicature which arises "*from the exploitation or flouting of the maxims*" (Levinson, 1983: p. 147). The main maxim exploited or flouted might be assumed to be quality, as the message is not literally true, and a series of mental steps is suggested to account for how the meaning is deduced. This is unconvincing. If one imagines two patients in a hospital ward and one says to the other: "The nurse on duty today is a witch", it is difficult to believe the hearer would entertain an initial belief at any point that the speaker genuinely believes, and wishes the hearer to believe, the nurse in question practises witchcraft, only for him or her to reject that belief and then eventually arrive at a more likely interpretation, such as that the speaker was simply intimating she was a deeply unpleasant character. Relevance Theory offers a more plausible explanation by replacing the notion of truthfulness with faithfulness – that is, what is said is guaranteed by the speaker to be a faithful representation of a thought which he wishes to communicate (Wilson & Sperber, 2012). Consequently, it treats metaphor as just another type of loose use of language which is entirely context dependent, creating relevance by:

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<sup>89</sup> As defined by Peirce, who described symbols as "*arbitrary and conventional signs*" (Nöth, 1990: p. 45)

*“a wide array of weak implicatures which are themselves weakly implicated” and are consequently identifiable as what they refer to as ‘poetic effects’” (p. 118).*

Conventional metaphors occur in advertising as they do in natural conversation; as they become established, little processing effort is required and they would not be regarded as poetic and their value in engaging a hearer or reader would be minimal. By contrast, metaphors which are original present the reader with conceptual parallels that require more effort and there are, thereby, greater rewards for resolving them; Subject B’s *“First aid for cars”* exemplifies this. Other manifestations of loose language use described by Wilson and Sperber (2012) and mentioned in Subchapter 3.6 above, occur in *ad hoc* concepts, which are sufficiently broad to enable a range of interpretations to be made and inferences to be drawn. Subject C’s Facebook advertisement for a university course for rock group road managers used the tagline *“careers less ordinary”*. Aside from the supposition within the phrase that other careers were ordinary, the interpretation of that expression is left to the reader. One reader may, for instance, have drawn a meaning from “ordinary” as synonymous with “boring” and lacking excitement, perhaps comparing the career with that of working in a supermarket or a clerical job. Another reader may have viewed “ordinary” as meaning a conventional job, i.e. something several people he or she knows does. This left open the question of the degree of ordinariness; the job of a hair stylist in a city salon may have seemed like an exciting career to some, while to others it would be little more than a means of earning a living. In one respect, the advertisement presented the reader with a dichotomy of excitement versus banality, both of which were contingent to some degree at least upon invoking myths, i.e. the myth of the glamorous life of the roadie for a successful rock group and the myth of the drudgery of spending one’s life in a mundane and modestly-paid job. Myths such as these, which offer a clear binary, constitute a set of paradigmatic relationships above as proposed by Lévi-Strauss

(Subchapter 2.7 above) and as exemplified by the suggested analysis of the *Flora* advertisement. In this case, the choice presented was that between signing up for the course offered and ending up in a boring job. There was no third option.

It is suggested above that the main function of advertisements is, in Jakobson's terms (as described in Nöth, 1990: p. 187), conative, i.e. to persuade consumers to behave in a desired way, but this intention is initially concealed. The strategic use of carefully composed imagery is a favourite method for advertisers to conceal their purpose and is thus a kind of covert communication. Sometimes, the image alone conveys as much as the advertiser needs to transmit to fulfill its purpose. The receiver simply views an image and naturally recovers whatever implicatures come into their minds, although these may relate to their own, individual wants, needs, aspirations and lifestyle. In this way, the advertisement functions with the ultimate level of covertness. The potential of this kind of advertising was noted by Subject B when he referred to *Versace* advertisements which "*may not obviously say anything but actually by not doing that, it is saying quite a lot as well*" (Subchapter 6.5.1). Precisely what was meant by "*quite a lot*" is unclear, and this means it would vary from viewer to viewer and any attempt to analyse such a commercial risks being subjectively reported as perceived from the intuitive viewpoint of the analyst, as suggested by Leiss *et al* (1990). When juxtaposed with a caption, the range of implicatures an image transmits may be reduced, but the intention behind the image is likely to become clearer. Turning again to Subject E and his imaginative uses for woks being depicted in an advertisement for microwavable noodles, the covert communication occurred whereby the informative intention was not made manifest by the foregrounded picture and text. Instead, the stimuli consisted of a series of pictures and the reward for processing these was to be found in the humour, and in the puzzle of relating them to the caption and then the product. The reader was thereby distracted from the main purpose of the advertisement almost as a means of drawing the reader's attention to it. Awareness of the item being marketed, the fulfillment of the main, i.e. conative, function, was achieved ostensibly as a by-product.

As explained in Chapter 3, David Bernstein was a copywriter who published a book in 1974 in which he makes a distinction between two strategies of advertising which he refers to as “*reason*” and “*tickle*”, and this distinction is a tool he used in his daily work of designing advertisements. Simpson (2001) refers to Bernstein’s reason and tickle hypothesis and attempts to relate this to theoretical models from linguistics. He evaluates Bernstein’s distinction from two main perspectives, namely the Hallidayan systemic-functional linguistics method as well as a broadly pragmatic one and draws a number of conclusions in relation to the distinction. He proposes that so-called “*reason*” advertisements prioritise certain motivations for buying the product and the wording tends to be formulaic, i.e. by using “*a specific and restricted set of conjunctive adjuncts*” (p. 603). “*Tickle*” advertisements, by contrast, require “*a greater expenditure of processing effort*” (ibid) by the reader, listener or viewer, whom he refers to as the “*RVL*”, and they bring with them the problem of being “*specific about inferencing pathways for all RVLs*” (ibid). This means that, having recognized the communication as an advertisement, the RVL will at some point have to identify the actual selling proposition in order to achieve a full comprehension.

Reason “*equals fact, clinical truth, needs*” (Bernstein, 1974: p. 119) and, as it is concerned with relating information to the reader or viewer, the content would be predominantly referential in terms of Jakobson’s functions. Reason might incline towards abiding by Gricean maxims or, in Relevance Theory terms, as the degree of relevance is in inverse proportion to the amount of processing effort required to recover the intended meaning, it has strong relevance. Subject B’s supermarket advertisement promoting an offer for tins of baked beans, and Subject C’s advertisement for a furniture retailer offering a sofa, are two examples of this. Both of these might be assumed to be wholly reason-based as they focus on price, but Bernstein (p. 118) claims this does not occur in any advertisement. He states that, while some advertisements are almost all reason and others are almost all tickle, no advertisement can be a hundred percent one or the other: there are proportions of both ingredients in every advertisement. The tickle element in what might be regarded as a predominantly reason-based advertisement may centre upon generating a sense of excitement about a low

price and saving money. This is something that can be seen with advertisements for such as those for end of season and closing down sales, or those promoting 'buy one get one free' (BOGOF) deals. With regard to Subject C and his sofa commercial, this was apparent in the attempt by his client to make the deal offered appear outstandingly good:

*“And it’s all about this sofa, at that price, that’s how much you save and isn’t this a great sofa?”* (Subchapter 6.4.3)

One might suppose that business-to-business advertisements would be heavily oriented toward reason as they are aimed at hard-headed merchants and business people. This does not, however, appear to be the case. Subject C’s shipping consultancy advertisement appealed to tickle by way of emotion when he said their service was: *“a five-star guarantee and five lovely bright silver stars looking nice and classy”* (Subchapter 6.5.3). Similarly, Subject A’s agency was concerned almost entirely with business-to-business marketing, and yet he applied poetics in straplines like *“doing more”* (with Doosan) and *“Design, Develop, Deliver”* for that type of specialist company. Conversely, tickle advertising is oblique and uses indirect approaches as it aims to appeal to the emotions. As such, tickle advertisements are more likely to be expressions of Jakobson’s phatic or poetic functions rather than the referential function, although all are ultimately deployed in the service of the conative function. In view of the indirectness mentioned, it is proposed that advertisements which make heavy use of tickle strategies are more likely to operate through generating implicatures and therefore flout Gricean maxims. From a Relevance Theory perspective, a greater degree of effort is required to process a tickle element, so the implicatures generated are weak.

Subchapter 7.4, above, discusses the loss of theoretical underpinning in advertising and two of the interviewees, Subjects C and F, expressed concern

with regard to this and, by extension, to the loss of intellectual content and sophistication in modern advertisements. A similar argument to that made for the inclusion of semiotic theories can also be made with regard to pragmatic theories in terms of their potential value in training of practitioners and the development of their professional skills. Advertisers may find Relevance Theory insightful in that it provides a model that accounts for how a speaker's intended meaning is understood from evidence present or provided in the form of observable phenomena and memories. It could be argued that, as a general rule, those aiming to have their occupation credited for having intellectual substance, and therefore held in professional esteem, have to be cognizant of current academic thinking that is relevant to their profession. Whether or not one accepts that Relevance Theory offers a comprehensive and irrefutable explanation for the recovery of meaning through implicature, this theory focuses in practice specifically on linguistic interpretation in context and, as such, it is able to illuminate aspects of linguistic communication of which this research indicates advertising professionals are clearly not aware. From that point of view, such an explicit linguistic/pragmatic focus may well be useful and interesting in their professional work, encouraging creators to devise more intellectually stimulating, and thereby more relevant, advertising that operates within the context of the lives, and has regard to the values and concerns of those who experience it.

## **7.6 PRODUCT VERSUS BRAND**

It is perhaps unsurprising that there is an apparent dissimilarity between the way advertising is presented in linguistics textbooks and the perceptions of advertising held by those who work in the industry. In the case of the former, existing advertisements are deconstructed and their operation and interpretation explained using semiotics or linguistic theories. Advertising texts are thus a source of data to illustrate or demonstrate theories and the application of these theories and the analytical tools associated with them. In

the case of the latter, advertising is a commercial activity and advertisers are in the business of producing a product, namely advertisements for publication or broadcast, in order to enable their clients to sell their own goods and services. This disconnect is especially evident when comparing advertisements which focus entirely on brand recognition against those which aim primarily to market a specific product.

A striking difference was noted in relation to brands and branding between the textbooks which dealt with advertising from one or more communicative or linguistic perspectives, and general advertising textbooks. In the case of the former, works such as Vestergaard & Schrøder (1985), Myers (1994), Tanaka (1994), Cook (2001), Bignell (2001) and van Leeuwen (2005) mostly make some mention of brands, but almost as though they are incidental to the advertising message. With regard to the latter, with works such as Bernstein (1974), Ogilvy (1983) Brierley (2002) and Aaker (2010), branding is a factor which sits at the very core of the advertising message<sup>90</sup>. This accords with the interviews as brand promotion was viewed as the primary function of copywriters, unless they are directed by their clients to focus on a product. Some of the interviewees, such as Subject A, were clear that they would try to “push” clients towards promoting brands over products, while others were disparaging about product oriented advertising being, as Subject B put it, “entry level”. In some cases, however, a brand may be less established with the public and focusing on the unique selling proposition (USP) of specific products may be the only effective, or most effective, advertising strategy. Examples of product USPs would include Subject C’s client wanting to market Omega 3 fish oil tablets and Subject E’s microwavable noodles. The latter example could certainly not be described as entry level and demonstrates that highly imaginative approaches can be used where a brand is unknown or viewed as being of less importance.

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<sup>90</sup> A notable exception to this general observation is Beasley & Danesi’s *Persuasive Signs* (2002) which devotes about twenty pages to brands, brand names and co-branding. This book functions as an authentic interdisciplinary work with the first author being an eminent advertising specialist and the latter a professor of semiotics. It can be further noted that there are books which focus exclusively on brands, such as Aaker (2010).

It is tempting to view branding as, for the main part, invoking connotations which the marketer believes reside within the conscious mind of the consumer. This becomes evident when looking at full-page advertisements in glossy magazines and where they comprise a photograph and a brand name or mark, and no other content. Such advertising depends not just upon brand recognition, but also upon a more vague impression of the brand which may have emotional or otherwise affective significance to consumers. Subject F confirmed this when he discussed the transactional versus relational aspect and that can be seen operating when comparing the kinds of signifiers selected for different kinds of advertisements, with the former type directing attention towards specific products, emphasizing reasons to buy them and to close the deal, while those in the latter category operate through affective appeal, seeking to attract desire and loyalty through signifiers which point to lifestyle. He pointed out how luxury and glamour related products, those generally marketed relationally, are positioned more highly in the connotative index as they tend to be marketed less explicitly, but with the focus on branding. An alternative understanding for this is offered by pragmatics and, in particular, by Relevance Theory (Sperber & Wilson, 1995; Wilson & Sperber, 2012), whereby the communicator relies on the encyclopaedic knowledge of the receiver to enrich the message.

While the interviewees mostly acknowledged a clear distinction between brand and product advertising, all gave examples which contained both kinds simultaneously and there was some interdependence between these which could be detected in advertising. Obvious examples of this are to be found where established brands market new products, such as the Umbro football boots mentioned by Subject D, where the brand was a key feature. Conversely, when Subject E's point about car manufacturer BMW seeking "*to capitalise on its reputation for excellence in engineering quality and design*" (Subchapter 6.5.5) is considered, it would be rational to assume that its brand reputation was built over a period of time. *BMW* began its business with no reputation and, as a result of its products, the reputation it holds today was earned over time. This, in turn, would suggest advertisers may believe they have to begin marketing a new brand by being informative, with strong denotation and making the product

relevant, and then being able to access connotations and cultural myths as the brand becomes established.

## **7.7 FINDINGS AS THEY RELATE TO THESIS QUESTIONS**

This thesis set out to answer five questions and this subchapter is intended to provide summarized answers for each of these based upon the research findings.

1. What have semiotics and linguistic pragmatics contributed to our understanding of advertising discourse? What are the key theoretical constructs and principles that these approaches have brought to bear?

The research has shown that the approaches to semiotics developed Barthes, Lévi-Strauss and Eco offer tools by which the workings of advertisements can be understood. The features of their models include the relation of and interaction between denotation and connotation, characterization or classification of the signifiers present, their relation to their signifieds and how signifiers and signifieds function together to produce intended meanings. Barthes (1957) proposes the existence of cultural myths in advertising (as well as other genres) and he illustrates how these are used to signify, and thus invoke, embedded cultural meanings in the mind of the consumer. Semiotics accounts for the power of signifiers in the form of connotations and this goes some way to explaining the workings of brands including brand distinctiveness and brand values.

Regarding pragmatic theories, traditionally these have been concerned for the most part with spoken interactions (often invented) between two or more speakers and with attempts to explain how meaning is generated and recovered through context. Advertisements are not dialogical, so they have to generate their own context to varying degrees in order to situate the consumer mentally in such a way that they recognize the relevance, and are thus susceptible to the

influence the advertiser seeks to exert. This does not mean to say that pragmatic principles cannot be applied to monological utterances, audio and video recordings or the printed word, and a number of scholars have done this, as explained in Subchapter 7.1, above. Where there is a spatial and/or temporal distance between the speaker and the hearer/reader, however, the burden of providing relevant context is likely to be greater. As an example, the utterance “it is raining” by one individual to another inside a building is likely to give rise to a belief in the mind of the hearer that rain is falling immediately outside that building at the precise time the utterance is delivered. Assuming this was indeed the intended meaning, it would be recovered instantaneously and unproblematically by the receiver. This would not, however, be the case if the same phrase appeared as a foregrounded text in a magazine article, or printed advertisement. In order to recover meaning, the principle of relevance as described by Relevance Theory is insightful. Relevance theorists explain how a reader of a text may still need to contextualize the statement, and this can occur through the presence of other cues. Such cues may, according to theorists such as Tanaka (1994), consist of phenomena in the immediate reading environment, e.g. accompanying text or pictorial content in the same part of the same text, or that which can be relied upon to be in the encyclopaedic memory of the reader. The context provided may be exceedingly simple, as with Subject C’s advertisement for a sofa where the retailer’s name was prominent along with the price, and perhaps juxtaposed with recognizable advertising buzzwords such as “sale” or “now only”. On the other hand, a reader may be forced to search for the context in cases where the advertiser aims to make the wording cryptic in order to stimulate interest, as with the example of the advertisement in a golfing magazine urging readers to “*play less golf*”. An image can also be cryptic and thus invite viewers to construct their own meaning. This is the case with the *Versace* advertisement discussed with Subject B, which contained no language beyond the brand name. In other cases, an image has accompanying text which is needed in order to make sense of the message the advertiser is generating, as with Subject E’s example of the pictures showing bizarre uses for woks, as used to promote instant noodles. To an extent, it may be suggested that there is some degree of correlation between advertisements in the way context is produced

and the reason and tickle distinctions as proposed by Bernstein (1974). Those advertisements which are more reason oriented are likely to take the form of overt communication and be designed to give the impression that their purpose is informative. Conversely, an advertisement which is predominantly tickle is more likely to be covert; no informative intention is made manifest and the strategy used is designed to attract interest to the advertisement by the artistry involved in creating the stimulus.

2. To what extent are the specific conceptual frameworks proposed in theories of semiotics and pragmatics valuable in shedding light on the linguistic and communicative processes involved in the production and operation of advertisements?

At a philosophical level, it is true to say that, while signs exist independently of their referents, human beings experience reality and interact with the world through signs detected by sensory organs and interpreted by the brain with the aid of memory and intellect. Advertisements are signs and combinations of signs, and semiotics constitutes a model of human communication which regards them as such. As the interviews revealed, practitioners use these signs in an attempt to make a link between a need, want or desire on the part of a consumer which a merchant aims to satisfy. At the most basic level, signs operate as signifiers of the existence of these goods and services and they may convey other information about their quality, reliability, availability and price. At a more sophisticated level, they seek to associate their products not merely with their utility, but rather to present the brands and products in such a way as to connect with or invoke deeper human desires, and especially those relating to lifestyle, social status and sexual success. While practitioners may or may not be familiar with the relevant theoretical meta-language, semiotic concepts such as connotation and signification provide a basis for understanding the creative processes by which meanings are encoded and thus they play a role in the creative process. It was evident from the interviews that there was also a clear recognition, albeit an unconscious one, of the power of connotation to make particular signifiers more significant and thus the message of the advertisement becomes more potent. This was confirmed by Subject B's comment quoted in

Subchapter 1.1 above that “*I bet if you broke down our processes ... if you could look into our heads...we’d be using semiotics in some way, but not actively...not explicitly*”. From a pragmatic perspective, it has long been recognised how personal deictic terms such as personal pronouns (e.g. us, we, you) and informal kinship terms (e.g. mum, kids) can be used to generate impressions of intimacy and empathy while, at the same time, distracting the consumer from the profit motive of the advertiser, as noted by Myers (1991) and Cook (2001). Some work on the application of Relevance Theory (e.g. Tanaka, 1994) accounts for features of advertising including the use of metaphor, loose use and *ad hoc* concepts, puns, cryptic messages, the way advertisements make themselves relevant to the consumer through the choice of particular stimuli, and how they rely upon assumed mutual knowledge in order for intended meanings to be conveyed. The interviews show that, while advertisers were unacquainted with pragmatic theories, they were certainly aware of context, and Subject B's claim about semiotics being used in some way, but not explicitly, could also be said to apply to pragmatics.

3. How familiar are advertising professionals with particular semiotic and pragmatic models of communication and to what extent do they attempt to apply theoretical principles with which they are familiar in their work?

It is clear that while many, if not a majority, of universities do not provide any input on semiotic theories in their advertising and marketing courses, and none of the professional bodies do, copywriters tended to have some degree of awareness of semiotics either from other training they have received, e.g. in courses in communications or graphic art, or from general reading. Where semiotic input was found to constitute part of university courses, it generally relied upon textbooks that use selected semiotic tools to deconstruct selected advertisements and the practical value of such input cannot be confirmed with any certainty. On the one hand, it may be argued that these textbooks are more useful for students of semiotics in explaining and illustrating the theories they are attempting to comprehend than in offering an instruction manual for trainee advertising practitioners in creating commercials. On the other hand, exposure to the theories could have an effect of heightening students' awareness of factors

such as signification and cultural myth, and this awareness helps establish a foundation upon which professional expertise is built through experience. It would be difficult to establish and measure any of the suggested benefits that accrue from including semiotics in the training of advertisers. The research has shown that some practitioners lament the way in which advertising has become de-intellectualised and accordingly their counterparts in other agencies are becoming less skilled. It was discovered that expertise in the application of semiotics exists, as was evident from the interview with the commercial semiotician, but this is employed at the highest end of marketing more broadly, and is making little impact upon the professional knowledge and methods of provincial advertising agencies. It became apparent in the interviews that practitioners were acutely aware of context. They were able to empathise with their audience's interests, needs and wants, employ a host of creative strategies to ensure that desired meanings were conveyed through the generation of implicatures and test audiences' likely ability to be able to recover these scientifically by market research and focus groups, and by off-the-cuff methods such as Subject E's "*Rachel test*"<sup>91</sup>. There was a complete absence of any awareness of pragmatic theories and concepts on the part of practitioners and so any ability to contextualize their copy was entirely based on a combination of intuition and experience.

The research revealed that, even where the interviewees had expressed some familiarity with certain semiotic principles, they did not make a conscious decision to apply these. It may be supposed that this applies across the advertising industry, at least with regard to small and medium-sized provincial agencies in the United Kingdom. This was the perception expressed by Subject F, the commercial semiotician, whose experience led him to conclude that copywriters' theoretical knowledge was often inadequate when it came to applying semiotics, that they had little idea how to apply semiotic principles and were afraid to use semiotic terms as they could intimidate clients. Instead, they preferred to work intuitively, basing their work decisions on their experience or,

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<sup>91</sup> See Appendix 3, below

as it was explained, they “*freestyle*”. Some awareness of cultural myths as described by Barthes was discovered, albeit that copywriters would not have Barthes’s theory in mind when creating advertisements. There was also some level of awareness of metaphors, and invoking parallels, but these appeared to be more based on general knowledge combined with extensive work experience in the field.

The practitioners interviewed were acutely aware that their primary function was marketing goods and services and so their ultimate purpose was to persuade consumers to behave in a particular way, even if their strategy was to distract from this by concealing their primary intention behind some other apparent function such as amusing, entertaining, perplexing or empathising. They fully appreciated the need to provide a stimulus in order to attract attention to their commercials; this stimulus was generally the starting point and the element of the advertisement towards which they directed the majority of their creative efforts. Simply capturing attention was not sufficient, though, to achieve the aims of the advertisement. A link had to be made between the initial stimulus and the key message for which the advertisement was commissioned, and the recognition of relevance by the receiver must not become lost at any point. In terms of Relevance Theory, the stimulus and other aspects of the advertisement carry guarantees of their own relevance to the consumer and that it is worth their effort in processing each of the elements of it as their attention shifts between them. Contextualisation was generated by copywriters in a number of ways. At the most abstract level, and where they were afforded creative licence to apply tickle strategies, they mentally played around with thoughts surrounding brands and products, relating them to other phenomena (such as music) or aspects of their own lives and trying to find an “*essence*”<sup>92</sup>. This enabled them to make out patterns and parallels that could then be applied at a more concrete level, where they were seeking to construct and position a message which would provide a meaningful stimulus to attract the desired

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<sup>92</sup> “Essence” was a term used by Subject A.

attention to the advertisement and persuade the reader or viewer of its relevance.

4. To what extent do the communicative insights and principles of professional advertising practice provide support for or conform to the relevant theoretical models?

A number of attempts have been made over the past century to provide a definitive compendium of the principles of advertising, but the dynamic natures of culture, consumerism and media, would make this a huge task. The practice has evolved mainly through experience, although several academic disciplines have contributed to its development and the broader field of marketing is now an established academic discipline in its own right. Some texts used in courses and referred to by practitioners, including some of those interviewed in this study, (e.g. Bernstein, 1974; Ogilvy, 1983; Hegarty, 2011) are largely experiential in character while others (e.g. Brierley, 2002) have approached the topic aided by scientific understanding of marketing techniques supported by cited research. It has become clear during this research that there is no single method that is universally advocated within all texts in terms of constructing advertisements or inducing the creative processes through which they are constructed. There are merely factors to be considered, and approaches that have been successful or unsuccessful, giving rise to a series of generalized rules of thumb for practitioners. As for the practitioners interviewed for this study, certain themes emerged, beginning with the way the agencies described themselves. The first of these is a common emphasis on original thinking, with Subject A's description of his company as comprising "*curious, creative and somewhat nerdy minds*" and claiming that they "*look at things differently*" and that they "*don't take themselves too seriously*". Subject C described his company's advertising content as "*fun, inspiring, cool, imaginative or downright surreal*", while Subject D talked about "*fresh thinking*". This suggests an element of literariness in the approach of the agencies and it accords with notions found in Formalist theories such as Schlovsky's that the technique is to make the objects, in this case the advertisements produced by these agencies, unfamiliar. There

were examples of this occurring in advertisements produced, including the unfamiliar use of woks in the commercial for instant noodles. While it is evident Subject E did not have Schlovsky's theory in mind when he produced the advertisement, he appeared in this advertisement to be attempting:

*“to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged” (Schlovsky, 1917).*

Agencies appreciated they were operating in the business environment and that their artistic inclinations had to be tempered with commercial pragmatism. On their respective website home pages, their self-descriptions incorporated expressions which informed potential clients of this awareness, for example Subject B: *“speedy and efficient delivery”*; Subject C: *“achieving your business aims”* and *“always clear, eloquent and effective in communicating your message”* and it was subtly implied in Subject D's self-description: *“We take leaps. But not in the dark”*. As explained in Subchapter 7.5 above, practitioners were mindful of the primary purpose of their advertisements, and that persuading audiences to behave in a desired way, e.g. by purchasing products, was the chief consideration even though this was rarely made explicit; the more tickle (Bernstein, 1974) strategies were applied, the more covert this function became. While the covert aim is persuasion, the strategy to achieve this can be by use of stylistic and poetic devices such as alliteration, homophony and puns, or phatic approaches such as by using personal pronouns and informal speech or trying to show an empathetic awareness of the reader or viewer's life, or simply informative, such as by showing a product alongside what is claimed to be a remarkably low price. Provincial advertisers may not invoke classical figures such as Dionysus, as cited by Beasley and Danesi (2002)<sup>93</sup> or French intellectual

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<sup>93</sup> Mentioned in Chapter 5.6

novels like Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, as mentioned by Tanaka (1994)<sup>94</sup>, perhaps because they are less likely to be familiar to all readers or viewers, but those interviewed were certainly cognizant of the potential for applying better known cultural myths, such as the tale of Robin Hood, and more modern mythologies (in Barthes' terms) such as the speed of footballer Michael Owen.

It is undeniable that advertisers seek to achieve a specific cognitive effect and, in order to do that, produce an appropriate stimulus as described by Sperber and Wilson (1995), i.e. one which will achieve the intended effect when processed. In the case of advertising, however, the stimulus is frequently not one that is directly connected to the chief aim of the advertiser. It may be argued, for instance, that an advertisement with a tickle element may have two distinct conative aims. The first of these is that of attracting and sustaining attention to the advertisement itself or, as Subject E's agency website explained it, "*grab the public's attention*". This is accomplished using content which, on the surface, appears distant from its main aim, specifically to encourage the consumer to buy the advertised product. Accordingly, the ambition of a practitioner when confronted with a brief would be to apply his or her creative skills primarily to the task of designing an effective stimulus, and this stimulus could be pictorial, such as a "*wok chariot*" for dogs (Subject E), linguistic, as in "*Rhubarb and Custody*" (Subject E) or cryptic as in "*Play less golf*" (Subject E). As outlined above, practitioners also depended heavily upon the encyclopaedic knowledge of consumers to make sense of the advertising they produced. Advertisers were aware of the advantages of combining images with language and how this combination boosted the message; one interviewee, Subject C, stated this explicitly as shown in Chapter 6.5.3. Barthes (1957) demonstrates how images invoke cultural myths reference to "*a young Negro soldier in a French uniform ...saluting*" (Subchapter 2.7) and the bag of Panzani products which project the notion he called "*Italianicity*" (ibid) just as Subject A saw this possibility by utilizing a statue of Robin Hood. Images may be used as a means to provide context, in some cases to achieve little more than to indicate to a reader of a

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<sup>94</sup> Mentioned in Chapter 3.6

magazine that they are looking at a commercial and not journalism, or to reduce the reading burden on the viewer and thereby make the message effortless and instantaneous, such as picture of a sofa with the words “now only £499!”.

Alternatively, an image may itself constitute the tickle, acting as the stimulus as described by Sperber and Wilson (1995) by depicting something amazing, or comical such as people playing tennis with woks, or familiar, such as the face of a well-known footballer.

5. What are the implications for theory from this confrontation between theory and practice, and what implications are there for professional practice and training/education?

From the perspective of theoretical and academic semioticians, advertising offers an almost inexhaustible bank of data that illustrate cultural semiotic principles. Barthes (1957) himself uses several examples of advertising in his works and some of these were known to the interviewees in this study.

Multimodal approaches, such as those advocated by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) and van Leeuwen (2005), are illustrated with examples from advertising. More general semiotic textbooks aimed at students of media studies, communication or philosophy also explain principles with the aid of advertisements.

Modern advertising operates at a high level of sophistication and applies an array of techniques to convey messages which range from detailed and specific to loose and impressionistic, while making full use of literary and psychological devices to achieve its aims. Semiotic approaches are certainly insightful, but they are bound to fall short in terms of being able to account for all of these, and so other frameworks must also be considered to achieve a complete understanding of the communicative and cognitive processes involved. Pragmatics arguably offers a more modern approach and one that has developed considerably since its inception as a specific discipline around the middle of the twentieth century. It accounts for the generation and comprehension of communicative acts having regard to context, i.e. those factors outside of the utterance or text such as

speaker intention, aspects related to the immediate environment and the assumed shared knowledge of participants. This study has argued that Relevance Theory, with its distinctive concepts of informative intention and communicative intention, and its conception of the role of encyclopaedic knowledge, may offer an especially insightful framework for explaining the process involved in meaning creation and recovery in advertising.

However, the research described in this thesis suggests that these theoretical models are less successful at accounting for the creative processes involved in the production of advertisements by ordinary provincial advertisers. These models may be instructive in understanding unconscious influences in the formation of ideas in advertising, but they were designed for the deconstruction of messages rather than for their construction; they are essentially tools for analyzing rather than synthesizing signs and this is how they are used in textbooks. Consequently, the teaching of semiotics to advertising practitioners is limited to close examinations of existing and selected instantiations of advertising, identifying certain features present and deducing or speculating on their intended interpretations. If semiotics and/or pragmatics are to feature in the training of students of advertising and marketing, and if it is suggested that the principles contained within these disciplines should be adopted by practitioners in their creative processes, the benefits to the industry must be clear. While it was revealed in the interviews that practitioners managed their processes without any consideration of theories, preferring instead to rely upon their professional instincts and life experience, a concern was expressed that the industry was becoming de-skilled as clients were more willing to produce their own advertising in-house, thereby saving the cost of commissioning agencies. That said, evidence emerged which indicated efforts to professionalise both marketing and advertising through training offered in higher education, up to and including Master's level, and accreditation through professional bodies such as the Institute of Marketing and the Institute of Practitioners of Advertising. Subject F, the commercial semiotician, also provided evidence that there is scope to apply semiotics in the creative processes of designing advertising. Indeed, the insights and techniques of individuals like Subject F could form the basis of a

practical subdiscipline of semiotic advertising that would incorporate a method and process particular to that field. Some recommendations on how this could be achieved, and how the field of pragmatics could be developed to have practical applications in advertising design, are presented in the next and final chapter.

## **CHAPTER 8 – CONCLUSION**

### **8.1 CHAPTER INTRODUCTION**

This final chapter begins by reviewing the process of the research underpinning this thesis including the primary and secondary data collection. It briefly describes the method of data collection, followed by an assessment of the process of research in terms of its efficiency and the validity of the findings, including any limitations of, and shortcomings arising from, the method. The value of the findings to the relevant disciplines is also assessed. Suggestions for future research are made, along with recommendations in respect of the advertising industry, and the thesis ends with some concluding remarks.

### **8.2 REVIEW OF RESEARCH PROCESS**

The research questions listed in the Introduction of this thesis were formulated to describe and delimit an examination of the creative processes involved in advertising from two different perspectives. The first of these, explained in Chapter 2, was based on the assumption that designing advertisements is essentially a matter of coding - selecting and composing signifiers to produce desired denotations and connotations that will generate an effect in those who encounter them, and this is done for the purpose of modifying their behaviour. Advertisements are synthetic signs, composed of continuous linguistic signifiers operating at all levels of language and these are mostly juxtaposed with non-linguistic modes, such as selected images, typefaces, colours, music and sound, depending on the medium through which they are delivered. At the cultural level, these signs summon cultural myths, ancient and modern, into the mind of the receiver. This perspective arises from the field of semiotics and there is an established acknowledgement of an association between semiotics and advertising. The second perspective, discussed in Chapter 3, considers

advertising as consisting of communicative acts which depend upon, generate and manipulate, context. It examined prevailing pragmatic theories that attempt to explain context in communication generally and considers how these have, in the past, been applied in the deconstruction of advertising. Having compiled a summary of the broader theories and hypotheses from semiotics and pragmatics, the fourth chapter outlined a methodology by which research was undertaken to establish what aspects of semiotics and pragmatics were taught to students of advertising and marketing, and the content of semiotics and pragmatics in advertising textbooks. Thereafter, a second limb of this research consisted of a small number of advertising copywriters being interviewed and their knowledge of semiotics, their creative processes and other aspects of their working practices and experience, being recorded and analysed. Research as described was conducted and the results subjected to a close analysis as outlined in Chapters 5 and 6. In Chapter 7, the implications of the research are directly compared to and contrasted with the theoretical approaches from semiotics and pragmatics. Broader conclusions as to the role of both disciplines in advertising were suggested and a summary of findings as they related to the thesis questions were produced at the end of this penultimate chapter.

### **8.3 RESEARCH EVALUATION**

The extent to which the research questions have been successfully addressed has been outlined in Subchapter 7.7 above, so this subchapter explores the limitations of the research according to the perceptions of the author and the possible value of the study to the advertising industry, to those training future practitioners and to academics with interests in the theoretical fields mentioned.

To complete the research underlying this thesis, it was necessary to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to some extent. Two related, but discrete, areas relating to communication and language use have been investigated and applied

in relation to advertising, namely the code/sign based approach of semiotics and the context/inference approach offered by pragmatics. This was essential in order to compare the two and answer the research questions. In addition, marketing and advertising are specialized fields with which the author had no previous training or experience and so it was necessary to become acquainted with these, and their respective terminology, to at least a basic level, in order to conduct the study. It would have been beneficial to have performed this research in partnership with a scholar of marketing who was able to provide insights at an early stage as it would likely have saved time and enabled the study to be more finely focused. Such a partner could have assisted in explaining the terms used, the various roles of individuals (e.g. copywriter, graphic artist, art director and creative director) and devising the questionnaire at the design stage of the research. This would have made the research process more efficient. He or she may also have contributed to knowledge about the training of those working in advertising and marketing, so that initial assumptions that all working in these fields have received formal marketing education would have been dispelled at an early stage; the interviews showed some of the initial assumptions were incorrect.

With regard to the aspect which investigated the training of advertising practitioners, the difficulty in obtaining information from universities and professional bodies was under-estimated. In the case of the former, out of thirty universities contacted, only ten at most could be described as in any way helpful. There was a tendency for those called to either 'pass the buck', by naming another colleague who they said might be able to help, or making promises to respond to emails and failing to keep them. In some cases, an off-the-cuff and non-committal answer was given such as "I am not aware that we cover semiotics", and this gave rise to the suspicion that the respondent did not know for certain and it would be too much trouble for them to find out. In hindsight, and with the benefit of the experience from the present study, this aspect of the research would have been more successfully completed by making appointments to meet university teachers and directors of study in the flesh and to have interviewed them with a pre-prepared questionnaire as occurred with

the copywriters. It would then have been possible to have obtained from each of them comprehensive literature lists, and thereafter to have made a detailed inspection of all the works mentioned. This would, however, have been immensely time-consuming and not feasible as, aside from the five face-to-face interviews with the copywriters, the research for this thesis was conducted in Sweden and not in the UK. It should also be noted that many of the universities did not cover anything related to this study and in such cases the interviews would have proved fruitless and so time would have been wasted. Although a more systematic study as described would have supplied more robust data in this respect, the one conducted served a purpose of providing at least a notional insight into the training of students of marketing and advertising and was adequately informative in terms of designing the questionnaire.

A further limitation in terms of the scope of the study is identified as being the small number of copywriters interviewed even for a qualitative study such as this. While the interviewees worked within agencies of very different sizes, ranging from Subject A, a sole operator, to Subject E, a director of a medium-sized company with subsidiaries and employees numbering in dozens, and they were diverse in terms of the kind of advertising commissions they undertook, they were all male, and all have their businesses in towns and cities in the north of England. It may or may not be significant that none were female; it is known that there are some women working in advertising at all levels and the possibility that their creative approach may differ from that of men cannot be discounted. Further, it must be noted that none of the interviewees, aside from Subject F, the commercial semiotician, were from the prestigious agencies in London, with their multi-million pound budgets and "*high concept*" approaches.

The research undertaken for this thesis commenced with a review of the training of advertisers and the input they receive on semiotics and pragmatics. It then presented original data which comprised a snapshot of the work of a small number of advertising professionals in terms of their backgrounds, training and approaches, as they explained them in pre-arranged and recorded interviews. It was discovered that practitioners who have no formal training in advertising or marketing were commonplace and are apparently operating

successfully in the industry. Indeed, as was revealed in the interviews, an applicant who possessed such training may not have been the first choice when agencies were looking to recruit the next generation of copywriters. Owing to the range of practitioners in terms of their respective ages and varied educational and career backgrounds, and the fact that some have gained knowledge of the theories through other kinds of training, or even general interest reading, further research into the content of advertising courses would not yield a reliable assessment of the knowledge of practitioners of theoretical frameworks.

In spite of the limitations mentioned, it is expected that this study would be of interest to those working in the field of advertising, to those responsible for designing and delivering training to advertisers and also to academics in disciplines related to communication and linguistic analysis. Copywriters and others who are employed in designing advertisements are invariably aware of the need to stimulate and retain the interest of consumers and to convey desired messages if their work is to be effective, and this thesis has, perhaps for the first time, shone a theoretical light on the creative process of the advertising practitioner. It compared and contrasted semiotic ideas, of which they may already have at least some superficial knowledge, with a modern cognitive approach to understanding how intended meaning is recovered, and how a consumer's existing knowledge and memories are invoked in communication and could thereby be efficiently exploited in constructing and relaying messages. It provided a broad overview of what is taught in a sample of universities' advertising and marketing courses in terms of semiotics and the course materials used, highlighting issues such as the lack of consistency as to what aspects of this theoretical topic are taught and to what level. It has further suggested an approach from pragmatics which may offer valuable insights into how advertising messages are made relevant to consumers and understood as intended. The findings outlined in this thesis may be of interest to, and of practical use to, students and academics of media or semiotics as it adds to the existing body of work in this field by scholars mentioned in Chapter 2. Researchers who have an interest in developments within pragmatics and, in

particular, how Relevance Theory can be applied in understanding the cognitive processes involved in producing published and broadcast texts, may find some aspects of this research useful, especially as it examines the creative aspects of communication from the perspective of the producer rather than the receiver.

#### **8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

When entering any profession that requires a period of training in an institution that is remote from the final workplace, there is a risk that a disparity may emerge between what is taught in the former and what actually happens in the latter. This has been observed in occupations as diverse as sports medicine (Reider, 2011) and educational research (Al Hijji & Fadlallah, 2013) and it has previously been discussed in the context of marketing education (Tregear, 2010). As has been outlined in this thesis, advertisers were not always trained in this field beforehand within universities and colleges, but often entered the profession obliquely, having studied subjects in higher education that had little or even no obvious relevance to their daily work. This is not to diminish the value of their previous studies as these may well have equipped them with broader transferable skills that they were able to apply when working as copywriters, art directors and creative directors. Such skills might have included research methods, critical thinking and problem solving, creative thinking, presentation, and knowledge of business practices and finance. For what appears to be the minority of practitioners who had completed specific advertising courses at a university, the theoretical content may or may not have included semiotics and, when it had, the texts used would have tended to outline some semiotic theories and deconstructed selected past advertisements to illustrate these. Professional bodies appeared to have no interest in semiotics. However, this does not mean that copywriters were ignorant of theoretical principles and did not ever apply them in their work; the research has shown

that there were some practitioners who were at least vaguely familiar with the theories of semiotics, although none has said they made a deliberate attempt to apply them systematically in their work. The research also revealed that the advertising professionals were keenly aware of the culture, values and lifestyles of those to whom their advertisements were directed and they were able to invoke these as part of their design practices. Similarly, while pragmatic principles did not feature in any aspect of the training of the practitioners, and there was no apparent awareness of theoretical pragmatics, they appeared to have an innate or experience-based understanding of context, its key role in communication and how their messages could be contextualized by relying heavily on empathy and encyclopaedic knowledge.

Looking to the future, a more expansive study of a similar nature to this one, but involving a greater number of practitioners from across all parts of the United Kingdom, and especially the capital, would be of value. Such a study would only be meaningful if it were to be confined to two groups; both groups would consist of practitioners who had studied advertising or marketing at university, but one would include only those who had received input on semiotics while the other would include students who had not studied semiotics. On that basis, a judgment could be made as to the role an understanding of semiotics plays in the creative processes, depending upon whether an individual had been explicitly trained in it or not. A future study ought perhaps to be undertaken by one or more semioticians and linguists working alongside one or more marketing specialists. It would also be advantageous to complement the data obtained during the interviews with observation of the practitioners in their normal daily work, e.g. during the period when they are attempting to formulate ideas, discussing them with colleagues, designing strategies and performing other work in relation to them. This would occur where a researcher could witness and record the entire process of advertising campaigns from inception to completion, or be present at certain points in campaigns when advertising strategies are being considered and decisions made. A close dissection of such observational data would tend to confirm, or possibly contradict, that which is obtained through interviews and enable processes to be observed of which the

interviewees are not consciously aware. Whether access to the deliberations and conversations in advertising agencies and company marketing departments would be permitted is uncertain owing to factors such as commercial confidentiality, or simply because such practitioners have other priorities and the presence of researchers on their premises would be a distraction.

Studying advertising from theoretical perspectives may be beneficial in that it offers frameworks that can be exploited by advertisers themselves in advancing their craft. Such an outcome could only be achieved, however, if the insights gained were to be translated into working principles that could be readily understood, and from which methodologies could be developed and applied. It cannot be rational to teach students semiotic theories and demonstrate how they can be used to deconstruct selected instantiations of pre-existing advertisements in the hope that, in doing so, they will somehow be able to construct advertisements of their own using semiotic principles. It is therefore recommended that a more systematic approach should be designed, possibly based on the knowledge and expertise of commercial semioticians such as Subject F. From this, a body of knowledge could be collated and which could form the basis of a consistent set of processes by which those training to work in advertising would be equipped to start the process of idea-forming from the perspective of theory. In other words, the “*blue-sky thinking*” and “*blank piece of paper*” approaches, as described by the interviewees, would have at the very least the advantage of a theoretical starting point.

For any advertisement to be comprehended as intended, the context must be indicated or embodied within it, otherwise the necessary implicatures may not be drawn, causing it to fail in its purpose. As shown in this thesis, such implicatures can be narrow and specific, as when a product is being promoted at an exceptionally low price, implicating that this is typical of the deals the retailer offers. Alternatively, implicatures can be vague and uncertain in order, for example, to convey a general impression of a brand image and the lifestyle associated with it. Advertisements must also secure the attention of the receiver by way of a stimulus; that must take the form of a foregrounded element which has relevance to them, and convinces them that it is worth their effort to engage

with the commercial in question and recover the core message. It is therefore further recommended that the education of those entering advertising should include at least some elementary instruction in pragmatics in order to increase awareness of factors such as context and implicature, and how these can be generated in advertising to produce the desired cognitive effects.

Applied pragmatics is currently limited in its scope. There have been attempts to make practical use of pragmatic theories in the fields of speech therapy, especially in terms of devising strategies for treating aphasia (Marangolo *et al*, 2013) and the pedagogical aspects of second language acquisition (e.g. Barron, 2011). It is recommended that, if the teaching of pragmatics were to be introduced into training courses for prospective advertising copywriters and creators, those responsible for designing courses should begin by drawing upon the experience of specialists working in the fields mentioned. The teaching of pragmatics to students of advertising should consist of more than just pragmatic deconstructions of advertisements made by others. Instead, it must align theoretical principles with practical procedures and in such a way that students would see their relevance and identify applications in their work. A course of this type might include aspects of Relevance Theory, exploring the possibilities offered by the process of enrichment as described by Wilson and Sperber (2012). A unified pragmatic/semiotic approach could conceivably be adopted by which the enrichment is viewed as operating in tandem with the semiotic theory of cultural myths. Complex and multi-faceted meanings can thereby be transmitted and interpreted as intended almost instantaneously by the appropriate choice and combination of signifiers and stimuli. Students could be made aware of how advertisements which rely upon encyclopaedic knowledge that a receiver does not possess, or environmental factors which are not readily manifest, are unlikely to achieve their goal and may even antagonize consumers, and how such potentially costly errors could be avoided. In the course of time, it would be possible to conduct research and collate data which would indicate whether an awareness of pragmatic theories and frameworks might aid the creative processes, and if so how, and a systematic pragmatic method for practitioners of advertising would eventually emerge.

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## **Appendix 1**

### **List of UK universities contacted in connection with this thesis:**

Aberystwyth University  
Anglia Ruskin University  
Aston University  
Birmingham City University  
Bournemouth University  
Brunel University  
Buckinghamshire New University  
Cardiff University  
City University London  
Coventry University  
De Montfort University  
Edge Hill University  
Heriot-Watt University  
Keele University  
Lancaster University  
Loughborough University  
Nottingham Trent University  
Sheffield Hallam University  
The University of Hull  
The University of Nottingham  
The University of Sheffield  
The University of Warwick  
The University of York  
University of Aberdeen  
University of Birmingham  
University of Bristol  
University of Chester  
University of East Anglia  
University of Leeds  
University of Southampton

## Appendix 2

### QUESTIONNAIRE

#### Part A – Interviewee Background;

1. By what route did you enter the advertising industry?
2. Did you study advertising at university? If so, which one?
3. What texts do you recall using when training in your field?
4. To what extent did you learn about semiotics, including cultural semiotics such as myths etc? **(Will explain this further if necessary)**
5. What, if any, texts do you refer to now in your work when constructing ads?

#### Part B – Forming Ideas

6. Explain the process of forming ideas for a new ad. Please briefly describe your general creative approach/philosophy daily work technique when you have to devise ads.
7. When devising an ad, do you visualize the completed ad from the start, or is this a building process?
8. To what extent does your approach differ according to whether you are promoting a brand or advertising a specific product?
9. How do you see the role that semiotics plays in your own process of forming ideas in designing advertisements? **(if it does play a role. Explain if necessary and probe)**

#### Part C – Strategy - Your Last Advertisement

10. Describe in detail the routine and/or process by which the last advertisement was devised and say whether you were working alone or working in collaboration with a colleague or other people.
11. Give as much information as you can about where the advertisement was to appear (e.g. magazine, newspaper etc), its size and distribution (geographic and numerical)
12. What did you aim to do? What was your brief? Was there a creative brief from a client, or did you have a free hand?
13. To whom was your advertising directed (e.g. a particular group of people)? How did you identify them?

14. Summarise what else went on during the design process. What were the main considerations?
15. How did you ensure a reader/viewer would readily understand/make sense of the advertisement? What thought/elements went into ensuring this aspect would be successful?

Part D – More Generally

16. Describe how, if at all, you try to use symbolism and icons in your advertising.
17. Describe how, if at all, you try to use cultural phenomena, stereotyping or aspects of folklore in your advertising.
18. If you are advertising a specific product, how do you try to appeal to the audience's pre-existing knowledge? How do you ensure it is immediately relevant to your target audience? '

## **Appendix 3**

### **Transcripts of interviews with copywriters.**

**(NOTE: Preliminary introductions often occur before the recording begins and the interviewee may appear to start the explanation unprompted):**

#### **SUBJECT A**

**So the first question I have got is, [0.10] well I have got them all in a kind of an order so everybody gets asked the same question. The first one is by what route did you enter the advertising industry, what was your way in?**

**SUBJECT A :**Well PR. And I went, I did a degree in communication at Bournemouth University, erm... and my original intention was to do journalism, and I did a little bit of journalism work experience and at the time, erm... the journalists were getting these press releases, and they didn't even have a PC they had a keyboard with a tiny little strip and they would just type up these press releases, and I thought well this is not what I imagined journalism to be like, where are these press releases coming from. And that got me into think about PR, erm... after a little bit of toing and froing and trying to [0.58] voluntary work and things like that I eventually worked for a Bradford PR agency. I did a bit of everything, and within 6 months I had left there and gone to a bigger Leeds agency, and then I was there for a couple of years as a PR guy and then erm... then I went to Brahm and eventually what happened was I was working on a Toyota their industrial equipment division and most of the agencies I worked at were full service agencies so they would do PR and advertising, and there would always be a little bit of crossover, erm... I was thinking in preparation for today actually I was thinking one of the, a guy who erm... I used to work with he was a copywriter that was his sort of all his job, and he said that his job was to take the bullshit and condense it and mine was to go the other way. And he erm... as a result of working on Toyota's advertising campaign the agency, they asked me to get involved with the PR, in order so they could get both sides of the business, when I left the agency I told the client, the client said well we can't make any guarantees but we would like to go where you go, which was very flattering. So I ended up travelling to different places and as a result of working on that particular client, they had a dealer structure, and I would do work for the main company but also for their dealers and the dealers would say to me erm... would you do some work for us, and then I decided, they were saying if you worked for yourself we would give you some work so that is what I did. I went to work for myself and then it was their requirement of doing other things, design work, web work, advertising work, that kind of not forced me, but led me to go, to sort of become all different things so all marketing. So my core is I am a PR guy but actually over the years that has sort of taken a bit more of a back seat and I do a mixture of everything now.

**Right,**

**Subject A:** That's a good answer.

**Yes so my next question really you sort of half pre-empted it because I asked you did you study advertising at university and that you told me Bournemouth and you studied communication studies?**

**Subject A:** No it was just, not communication studies, it is actually communication, without the s. There is a subtle difference in that it included things like erm... erm... editing and publishing, it was sort of more akin to the journalism degrees that they did and that there was advertising involved in that but it wasn't advertising or a PR course actually it was a bit, it was sort of a bit of everything and nothing you know. It was just broad enough to get, catch a lot of other people who were, the PR courses there the media production courses there were very popular and I think they started this communication degree to catch some of the other people and sorry you can't have, we are not giving you the PR course but we will offer you this and that's how a lot of people from different backgrounds went into it. My friends, ended on the same course some went into IT, some went into journalism you know it was a bit of a broad mix.

**Ok, do you recall using any particular text relating to advertising when you were studying that aspect of your degree?**

**Subject A:** Yes I have still got some of them actually. Erm...

**Do you remember which ones they were?**

**Subject A:** Effective use of advertising media I think is one of them. And all about erm...which it seems like a reference book now but it is all to do with you know production details with sort of billboard sizes and you know all that kind of stuff. And I think what I learnt, well what I feel I learnt from working with advertising people you know and media production people and that kind of thing was that often the erm... the things that the textbooks will tell you about the effectiveness of advertising, and where to place advertising all that kind of stuff, is fine and I am sure at some levels it is very important but the client's opinion often over rules it and so you know if you are, for example, (05.00) choosing a lot of the work that I have done over the years have been

involved in the materials handling trade, so [05.08] and trade press and there are two or three magazines that are very similar, some think that one is the magazine to be in, some think that the other is the magazine to be in and they have very strong opinions either way. Don't let the facts stand in the way of a good story. So the, you know those kind of books and references and things like that, have helped but only so far.

**So far, yes I can relate to that. The next question is to what extent did you learn about semiotics including cultural semiotics when you were training.**

**Subject A:** Yes it was part of erm...what I did. Erm...at least I think it was. It is a long time ago ((laughs)). Erm... I remember we did things on Chomsky and all that kind of language use of language and particularly erm... things like erm... I still tell people about this, but I was told in a lecture that erm... signpost went up at a railway crossing in Yorkshire that said wait here while lights flashing and the Yorkshire guy drives up, waits until the lights flash and then goes and gets hit by a train. Erm... and I remember at the time, me being a northerner on the south coast, everybody there was quite you know well off compared to me and they would go I don't think I have an accent, I don't have an accent and I would be the one who would go, listen at you, you know ((laughs)) so it did come into it, but I don't remember a great deal of detail about it to be fair.

**You mentioned Chomsky I am a just curious because really it wouldn't come under semiotics, what would you, what Chomsky do you remember?**

**Subject A:** It is a long time ago now, but I just remember, I remember that a section of the degree course was involved in the kind of I am sure it was semiotics and like language and literature and all that kind of stuff was put into it because it was, such a broad you know there was elements of English literature in it as well so, erm... I forget now.

**Did you talk about for example Saussure?**

**Subject A:** No

**Or Barthes**

**Subject A:** No

**Roland Barthes or any of that cultural myths?**

**Subject A:** Yes, yes some of that. Some of that erm... only touched on it though I think. Yes. I mean we are talking 20 odd years ago now.

**I appreciate...**

**Subject A:** ((laughs)).

**Do you actually refer to those texts now when you do ads or is it just...**

**Subject A:** No because I think, I think I would look at myself as from the outside looking in I would look at myself as probably more erm... the work that I do is based in, the people that I work with or work for they are very much down to earth, I am from Doncaster. I am based in Doncaster, I am not, I did grow my business where I had 5 staff at one point but now I have cut back and erm... I have worked in bigger agencies. I felt that unless I moved to London then I was always going to have a certain type of people that I was going to work for. There is only certain types of businesses based in our area, who would be willing to work with somebody like me. So, I very much look at the work that I do as sort of a practical, on a practical level and it is not that sort of, I feel anyway, it is not sort of that refined level where I would probably refer to a text like that.

**Ok no that is...**

**Subject A:** If anybody does.

**((laughs)) that's ok. Erm... so you wouldn't pick up a book by Ogilvy or one of the big shots?**

**Subject A:** I would erm... for my own interest and it would come out every now and again you know erm... and I would probably refer back to them every now and again and I do take an interest in that sort of stuff, particularly seen as I do feel as though I am a bit of an imposter in that way because I have got a PR you know background and I

moved into sort of doing this. But erm... I know I have worked with some very sort of erm... some good advertising people, I have had a good broad background, you know which has stood me in good stead, I think and I respect some of the things that I have learnt over the years, and but at the same time you know, I do recall being in big agencies and going to people and saying I can't believe this advertising is running you know how terrible is this ad, what's the agency like that produces this sort of work, and the bosses saying you can only do as well as the client will let you. It is a good cop-out.

**It is yes,**

**Subject A:** ((laughs))

**[09.38] Just imagine you have got a new ad, you had to form an idea from the question is please briefly describe your general creative approach or philosophy for daily work technique, when you have to devise a new ad from scratch.**

**Subject A:** Erm... well you, on a technical level or practical level you probably want a brief, you would want to start with the brief and try (10.00) and interpret the brief in the best way that you possibly could. But, that doesn't always happen you know and people will be aware of an ad or they will be rerunning an ad and you will say look, you know I need to, I think you need to improve on this and do something different. And erm... my take on it is, I want to try and boil down the essence of the ad as much as possible and actually sometimes in the work that I do, because of erm... PR and design and web work and all that kind of stuff, is a little bit more, there is more detail to it, focussing on an ad and coming up with straplines and a, and a core message is sometimes a good way of trying to demonstrate to a client who is not overly bothered about advertising or perhaps hasn't asked for that, it is a good way to try and demonstrate what the main message is. So I would, I am a great believer in that erm... I think you are at your most creative when you are probably subconsciously processing these things and you sort of try and immerse yourself in the detail but not try and force it too much. Ironically with PR I find sometimes the opposite works, is that you force yourself into writing, you might begin something and it is not quite right but carry on and then come back to it, that's a good way. Erm... so I would, I would tend to try and boil down to its essence, and try and get a key theme across and then everything that the layout, the layout the design, the way it looks should in some way, it should follow on from the message that you are trying to do. So, and it sounds petty simplistic, but you know I often I would say to somebody, you want the core values of the brand across you don't want to say, if you are a modern company good old fashioned service, if you are trying to be a technologically advanced or something like that and you would expect that the look and feel of the ad to reflect those themes as well, so, erm... It is, I would say it is different every time, but I would probably, maybe the processes I go through are

the same I would try and come up with some messages, focus on the message that it's putting across and then do different versions of that, that message.

**Ok, so you half answered my next question. I mean, when devising an ad do you visualise the completed ad from start or is it a building process?**

**Subject A:** That is a great question. Erm... I think it's definitely, I think it's a building process on the whole. I think you may have a concept that you consider erm... for example, I used to do a lot of, I had Doosan forklift trucks are a work line and they do trade magazine advertising, and I came up with an idea for some ads which were basically around the theme of erm... doing more, the companies name is Doosan and it was do more. And the theme basically was erm... like somebody with a fishing line catching a giant squid or just, and ironically I have seen a car company since then, I see a lot of my ideas ((laughs)) I am just recycling other people's ideas, but I see a lot of ideas that I think, I had that idea. And erm... I have seen like a TV ad with a woman watering a garden with a giant hose, and you know everything is gigantic, and that, that came as a sort of fully erm... formed idea. Ironically when I put that down on paper and looked at it, I didn't think it did it justice. It didn't seem to match, probably my graphic design skills mightn't have been up to it, or you know the way that I visualised it didn't look so, erm... occasionally that happens but, I would say most of the time it is a building, you are chipping away at it, you are trying to shape it into something that looks right, and I would say one of the ads that I done at the moment, one that is running at the moment, is erm... this company has now got branches across the country. At the point when I started to think about this ad, they didn't but they had an aspiration to do that. And I kind of, we focussed, I say we because there was more than me then, erm... we focussed upon a phrase that they came out with when we were talking to them on the previous ad campaign to this, which was they said, erm... we understand local businesses because we are one. And we actually used that as the line. And so, the ad campaign before this, was we tried to make heroes of the people in the different parts of the world, and put them in front of erm... something that was symbolic of that part of the world. So, the guy from Nottingham was stood in front of the statue in Nottingham of Robin Hood, the guy from Hull was stood under the Humber Bridge (15.00) we were doing that to sort of have the local element. But then they become a little bit bigger and we wanted to express this as a, as a nationwide thing. So, this ad came together as me just sort of experimenting with erm... the UK and coming up with all the pictures are made up of their work obviously and that idea, came from me looking, thumbing through a book on creative ideas and it was one of the ideas was maps. And that, I know for a fact that that is where that idea first came from in my mind.

**Can you remember what book that was?**

**Subject A:** I have got the book. That's it.

**Thank you. So the A-Z of visual how to solve any creative brief by John Ingledew.**

**Subject A:** It is actually the A-Z of Visual Ideas. ((laughs)) Failed on that one hasn't it.

**Thank you. That's great.**

**Subject A:** Yes just... it is A to Z and I was only flicking through it, erm... and there is a great thing about maps, kind of struck a chord with me and that's where that idea came from. It seems, it seems like a copy now but ((laughs))

**No, no you have got the contrasting words local and nationwide, as well.**

**Subject A:** Well yes I mean that, that erm... was something local service nationwide was the tag that I kind of came up with, at the same time and I was trying to come up with a visual representation of that, that idea hence the...

**Hence the... yes.**

**Subject A:** Hence the [16.47]

**Great stuff. And erm... to what extent then does your approach differ according to whether you are promoting a brand or you are advertising a specific product.**

**Subject A:** Another good question. I think erm... over the years that I have been involved in the companies that I have done advertising for, I have tended to try and push them towards brand than product. Erm... because erm... in the work that I do, the sector is erm...there are lots of different products, within a forklift truck company for example, within their range, they have lots of products erm... and then dealers, of this type, would offer multiple brands. Erm... whilst I was doing the advertising for the manufacturer erm... we tried to, I tried to take out the push the brand name because erm... they are competing against other well-known brand names so Toyota, is a

competitor in the forklift truck market, erm... Mitsubishi, Nissan, these were well known names, and we wanted to raise the profile of the brand so I had actually advised them against promoting a particular product. I think if they were insistent on that, on doing a particular product then you would, you would automatically go through a similar process, I think to try and whereas the company you are trying to identify the core values of the brand, on a product you are trying to identify the core features and benefits of the product, and promote it in the same sort of way. But my I feel that branded advertising is... can be more sophisticated and make a better impression than a product ad, personally that's my, my feel on it. Because I think products change all the time, and unless you are just doing a straightforward you know, it is 99p or it's £100 or whatever then the product is going to change and people are going to, take a slightly different view on it, as opposed to a brand. And all the time that I have been involved in this work I have always encouraged people to try and talk up their brand, as opposed to you know focus on the product.

**That is interesting. How do you see the role that semiotics plays in your own process in forming ideas if it does play a role? Does your mind go to semiotics thinking or not?**

**Subject A:** I would say no actually I would say no. Unless I do it without realising ((laughs)) you know it's not a, as I said to begin with I am, I am looking for a practical answer to a problem. If it helped me get to the answer then I would do it.

**Oh that makes sense. Erm... you work on your own most of the time?**

**Subject A:** Most of the time now.

**Ok what is the sort of daily routine then if you get a, if you get a contract from a client what would be the first thing you would do?**

**Subject A:** ((laughs)) erm... try and get on a massive fee ((laughs)). Erm... in from an advertising perspective or...

**No just your daily routine what would you do, you have got a commission to do an advert, for something you talked it over with your client, and you walk through the door what is your next step?**

**Subject A:** Erm... (20.00) I think you probably try and put down on paper or at least get settled in your mind, about all the different angles of what we are looking at. You are trying to come at it from a different approach and often you will throw out lots of ideas or throw you know, you just, it's probably more relevant when working with other people to be fair but you know I am not 100% bought in by the idea of brainstorming, but sometimes you just want to dump all the ideas down as much as you can and try and get as many different ideas for it and then just give yourself a bit of space and time to try and let them settle and see which ones work and which ones don't. Erm... from that point of view, then I want to try and visualise them. In the old days it would be scamps you know there would be people there that would be, their drawing would be fantastic, you know. Now people don't make a distinction at least with me, between erm... creative work which is an idea, and the finished article. So they kind of want to see it. In the old days you could get away with when I worked on the Toyota stuff I remember taking them into rooms where we would have 100s of different drawings around the room, very basic piece of white paper and you basically dumped all the ideas in front of them, and gone there you go what do you think. And we will work up the ones that you like. Erm... now that just doesn't it doesn't work and you have got to try and get as many of, although having said that you know I have got, this was an old, I have just realised that I have still got these, these were different ideas around the same thought processes where I did exactly that but it was obviously finished and we put them in front of the client, presented them and said you know what do you think. Here is one, that concept started with the idea a play on words, because erm... it was a scrappage scheme, 10 years old, the equipment or more, and we were coming up to the end of the decade, so we used...

**Used a homophone decade decayed yes.**

**Subject A:** And that's where that idea came from and then as a result of that layout and that design we went and shot the image.

**Clever.**

**Subject A:** This is one that I done a long time ago and it was all trying to really erm... square the circle a little bit with the client's erm... preference on product features and benefits where you are trying to push a brand, you know. So here we have got a list of sort of features, which are hopefully some benefit and picking them out and trying to sort of use that. I have seen this actually since, ((laughs)) I have seen this done, by Ford as a similar sort of TV ad where they have got a list of and I think that is probably the same sort of idea as you are trying to push the brand but satisfy the client's desire to get across, well we have got, you know we have got lights, big deal ((laughs)) we have got brakes. So...

**Thank you that is interesting. Erm... I take it then you only do, you tend to do printouts you don't do anything on TV, radio, internet?**

**Subject A:** No I have not really, that's, no I have done, I do some erm... on-line ads but it is more of an extension of print. I have done, I have done a poster campaign, erm... but you know I think, it is, led by the sector that I am in or predominantly in. You know I do some other work for a, erm... a Swiss company and they are sort of related to forklift trucks but they are, it's erm... automated handling so it is kind of taking the trucks out and doing everything with robots. So that is a similar, and I have done a bit with those but yes, it tends to be, it... depends on your interpretation of it because some of the things that I do I consider to be sort of on the fringes of advertising, like erm... say a PDF which is intended to be sent you know over e-mail, but it is presenting messages almost like an ad, an interactive ad, almost like that. It is on the fringes of it.

**It is persuasive as well as informative?**

**Subject A:** Yes it is not yes it is not... yes it is intended to give a sort of a mix, of you know getting people interested and then giving them the detail.

**Yes so then you are going down the product line to some extent aren't you?**

**Subject A:** Erm... yes, yes I guess so but it has been, I have done that for erm... trying to sell, well if I give Swisslog as an example, this Swiss company. They, they sell solutions really or they see it as selling solutions. Erm... because they don't manufacture a product, they put it together, with they have designers and advisors and technical service people and they put it all together (25.00) erm... and they are very successful, very big at it and so they came to me and said we are trying to boil down our brand values, you know our core values and that was a pig of a job because they just couldn't, they were unclear about what they wanted it took forever. But I settled on design, develop, deliver, as an idea and so this is what we do, design, develop, deliver which they liked erm... and then we produced work in order to put that across. So it wasn't specifically about a particular product or a particular service it was about the whole...

**Ethos.**

**Subject A:** Yes the whole ethos, like a corporate brochure almost.

**Yes. In your case now I am asking this question to whom is your advertising directed. Is it a particular group of people and how do you identify them?**

**Subject A:** Good one. Erm... well, the because I am in business to business stuff, erm... we, always my experience working with bigger agencies, or at bigger agencies, really taught me that we are talking to more than one level of people. Erm... and because of, in the case of a [26.09] handling equipment you want to attract the guy who is using the kit but often he is not the guy who is specifying the kit. And often he is not the guy who is paying for the kit so you are trying to attract, aim your message at multiple levels. Hence partly my branding sort of ethos with that and I think that erm... we, we have very specific trade press designed that they are aiming at those kind of people, the logistics managers and erm...managing directors and financial directors and specifiers. But, then you will have a swathe of erm.. publications which are specifically intended for a sector and you would quite simply just look at it and say, well what sector is using SIC data I guess, what sectors use erm... forklift trucks in this instance, more than others and which erm... magazines should we go for. Now, I remember erm... working at a company called Charles Walls in Leeds and we, they did an exercise for Toyota, precisely to say to them, at the end of it, if you want to reach the most number of your target market, you would go in Radio Times or Sky magazine you know which would be ridiculous to have an ad it would cost them a fortune. So it was all about targeting and boiling down and deciding which one has the least wastage, rather than the most effective I guess. Erm... I think that's probably why the amount of billboard ads I have done is limited because it has huge wastage but it is done for the tactical purpose. I say once, I have done it a few times now I am thinking about other billboards that I have done. Erm... yes like for Doosan and Daewoo as was I did billboard ads to support exhibitions. So, you are expecting the people driving in to see the ad and that's, you know they are going to an invent which is intended for them, erm... then window display ads as well which I have done for them erm... and again it's all tied around an event so you are expecting them to be the right people. Yes as I said to begin with it is difficult to get clients interested in you know the nuances of who is going to see it as opposed,

[28.35]

**Subject A:** Their minds are made up, [28.38]

**Oh right. Ok, Erm... next question is to summarise what else went on in the design processes, is there any other considerations that you would like to mention when you are actually doing the design process?**

**Subject A:** Erm... well obviously the actual medium itself takes a, is a very important... will dictate, how you produce the ads and erm... you know I would tend to look at full page advertising because that is where you want to push your client into having the impact or even double page spreads. Erm... and that, that in itself, sort of dictates some of the way in which you would approach it. Erm... then there is things like erm... a belly wrap which was as an example we once did a, an ad in a plastics pipe magazine or something, and it had a belly wrap around the middle of the magazine, which was a pipe and it stuck to a double page spread within the magazine, so you opened up it up at that ad. And so that would obviously, the whole design of that was, was came about, the whole concept came about because of the design and I daresay that the whole idea came about because (30.00) the magazine said we can now do this. So sometimes you, sometimes you look at the idea and look for the right place for it to go and sometimes you look at what is available and what is possible. And that helps you push, the idea. You know. Did a mock-up of a flier once erm... a mailer in the design of a paper aeroplane, you know erm... because I knew it was possible, that kind of thing.

**Yes, the art of the possible. Do you actually think in terms of, I think you have already answered this one or partly answered this one [30.33] it says here can you descry how if at all if you try to use symbolism and icons in your advertising. Do you think in terms of symbolic...**

**Subject A:** Yes well I would say I do yes. I would say erm... I am very much aware of themes in advertising and erm... because I guess my degree course, because of the work that I have seen I see, I was very disparaging when I was working in big agencies about advertising, because erm...working with PR at the time, it was very much segmented. So I was in a PR part of Brahm erm...and I would just say it's just an ad, a picture and a witty bit of copy that's all it is. There is not much more to it than that and obviously there is but, you know I did a presentation, as part of my training, you know ads are bad, including this one, and presented an ad and just explained why it was, that I felt that advertising wasn't as good as PR. Erm...and I think that, erm... I use advertising as a way to leverage PR editorial coverage in a way that probably somebody whose background was more advertising will probably do the opposite they would do an ad campaign and want to leverage it for PR. Erm... I do tell my clients often that if, or perspective new client I say if you go to a PR agency and ask them, tell them that you have got a problem, the answer will be PR, if you go to an advertising agency the answer will be advertising. And if the only erm... if the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail.

**That's right, exactly. One of these areas I am looking at relates to how much do you use cultural phenomena, stereotyping folklore, now I mean...**

**Subject A:** The ad campaign where we did erm... like tried to use erm... local symbolism it kind of, it kind of rubbed off on that erm...

### **Robin Hood statue and...**

**Subject A:** Robin Hood statue, the Bull in the Bull Ring, it's trying to represent the place where they are coming from. It was a very deliberate attempt to do that but erm... I think on the whole, the people that I've, you will be able to ask them yourself, but the people that I know, that work in advertising, I don't think they think that sophisticatedly and I think back to this furore over the erm... the woman's body, the beach body ad that has just been, you know are you a beach body...

**Yes**

**Subject A:** And I can visualise how that ad came about and I am almost certain that they probably didn't think it was going to cause a big fuss and as soon as it did they probably think that's the best thing ever you know.

### **Yes publicity**

**Subject A:** It was just done automatically but I think back yes, because there is no such thing as bad publicity, the old thing. But erm... you know I think back to again at college I remember it very well, them being shown advertising where women were shown as bits, you know so you don't see the head or you know and erm... and showing the worst example the lecturer could find was erm... an advertisement for carpet underlay with a woman in underwear and it said, because what matters is what you have got underneath and it is such a tenuous link, and also you know it just seemed pointless. And I think, I am aware of all those things and I try, one of the things that I often say to the clients because it is quite a narrow field but, you know you don't want to look like everybody else, the whole point is to stand so don't look at what everybody else is doing, try and avoid those kind of things but the symbolism of the local areas I guess we try to use as a short cut to saying, we are in your patch sort of thing.

**Oh that is pure semiotic isn't it?**

**Subject A:** Yes

**Absolutely.**

**Subject A:** If you say so ((laughs)).

**The last question really is if you are advertising a specific product, if that's the case you have got the brief this is the product, not forget the brand tell us about the product, how would you try to appeal to the audiences' existing knowledge, how do you ensure it is immediately relevant to their, to your target audience?**

**Subject A:** Erm... that's a difficult one because I think oftentimes you are trying to challenge their existing knowledge (35.00) or challenge their perception of what they already know because, erm... they will have made up their minds. Erm... and I can give you an example of an ad that erm... I did that didn't get chosen, and actually when I look at it now I think I can understand why it didn't get chosen but at the time coming fresh to an account erm... the company Doosan took over Daewoo and Daewoo were well known erm... in the UK at least, for going bust erm... their car company side of it. This was a different side of the business they had an electric forklift truck that they wanted to launch, they told us to do an ad campaign on it and one of the things that I came back to them with was erm... a picture of erm... Seoul, and it said Seoul like Tokyo only cheaper. Now they were frightened to death of anything to do with money and it steered them away but my idea there was to say that the brand leaders in that sector were Japanese forklift truck manufacturers, and I was trying to say to them we were as good as them but cheaper erm... they didn't like it ((laughs)) they didn't do it. Erm... but there were a whole series of them based around that kind of idea of challenging erm... what the people's... and one of the campaigns that I did run a poster campaign said Be Surprised. And, this was again the Korean they have sometimes a small chip on their, probably a chip on both shoulders, that you know we are as good as the Japanese but you know we don't get the respect, and people see Japanese companies and think they are brilliant and people see Samsung and LG and think they are Japanese and they are not. So, erm... one of the things that I did there was to have a theme of being surprised and then years later, Kia a Korean forklift truck they have a very similar strapline of you know let's surprise you all it's similar and I think I wonder if they are coming at it from the same standpoint. In terms of actually trying to sort of erm... confirm what people would think I don't know how you would probably do that so much other than I don't really know.

**No, not surprising.**

**Subject A :**It would be an interesting exercise be asking the client why would they want to do that, why, you know if they already think that why are you advertising at all you know to try and confirm their point of view.

**Ok yes**

**Subject A :**Unless I guess, unless you are McDonalds or Ford or you know erm...

**I think a particular product, a very specific one where you have got something you know we know the brand, but now we want you to promote this particular thing. It might be the Samsung S6 phone the latest one that has just come out, you know everyone knows who Samsung is, but how are you going to sell this phone to people that know what Samsung is, they know what an iPhone is what is going to make you buy that Samsung that particular model. Not the S5, but the S6.**

**Subject A:** Well funnily enough erm... again harking back to my Doosan work but erm... what I did there when I first started with them is I went and surveyed the employees, the erm... their dealer network and I did this with Toyota as well actually and originally with the Toyota guys I did the trade press as well I had the editors I went and questionnaired them and said to them what do they know. Erm... one of the things that came back to me with Daewoo at the time they were building equipment for Caterpillar years ago, and erm... one of the guys said to me if we had everything the same, if we had the same equipment, the same price, the same support, but we just took off the Daewoo badge and put Caterpillar on it, we would sell more. I said well if that is not a branding issue, I don't know what is and so, I talked to them about what they wanted and what they liked and there were three things that I focussed on. One was the equipment in that market was simple compared to other people's, because there is an issue regarding the complexity of engines, anything with an engine now it needs a management system on it, which probably means you need a diagnostics tool, a laptop to fix it, theirs were very simple, and they were known for that. They had big engines in them so they were, a bit of grunt you know, that is what people are looking for in this sector so they were powerful. And I said everybody wants to, it was a bit of an aspiration for them at the time because they did have some technical issues, but everybody wants a performance out of it, so I came up with simple, powerful performance and that was the strapline and everything that I tried to do, was focussed (40.00) on delivering that message. Simple, Powerful Performance. It was in all the things. The Koreans struggle with Ps ((laughs)) so actually saying it would be difficult but when you started to hear people say it back to you, erm... then you knew that you had probably started to hit a chord, strike a chord with it. And they are still using it now it is like 10 years on, erm... and I think erm... one of the things that I noticed about that was that, we were able to use the advertising in

trade press, to deliver a message that although on the surface was aimed at an end user was actually in the dealer structure, was probably more effective with the dealers and they started to believe it, and that helped the company to erm... have gain confidence, gain the confidence of their distributors, and I often used to say to them unless you have got a million pounds to spend on a massive ad campaign you are not going to be able to get across the messages that the likes of Toyota because they have got such a way ahead start, so you need to get it at the grassroots level and the only way you are going to do that is by getting the buy-in of your distributors and so this messaging, this sort of focussing on that, was a way of us saying to the distributors oh look how much we are doing, we are doing all this, but actually it was as much for their benefit as anybody else's. You know selling to them. Does that answer your question?

**It does, no it does thank you for that. I am going to stop the interview there if that is alright with you.**

## **SUBJECT B**

**Can I ask you by what route did you enter advertising the industry?**

**Subject B:** Erm... my first jobs were in administration. And, I erm... the company I worked for which was British Coal at the time, was going through privatisation so the early 90s, and they setup a fledgling marketing department and I was interested in doing that because it was different to what I was doing, just looked more interesting. So I went to night school and did my Chartered Institute of Marketing qualifications, got a job in the marketing department and from that then went, worked for 10 years in marketing on client side, so I worked mostly in the games industry after that initial job at British Coal. So, the computer and video games industry, and then erm... then I made the switch to erm... working for an advertising agency group called Media Square, which was a PLC which no longer exists in that form, erm... and so that is, and that's how I got to work in advertising I was basically taken on as an account director from working client side as a marketing manager, taken on as an account director erm... and then met my business partner here, who is the creative director and as with many agencies we ran away and setup this company. That was 10 years ago.

**Right. So, I mean the next question really [02.12] I am saying did you study any advertising at university level?**

**Subject B:** No. I did my marketing qualifications were at college. I don't know what level they are at, they are professional qualifications by the Chartered Institute of Marketing, so I originally had the certificate and the Advanced certificate they were called then. But advertising wasn't actually covered in that at all.

**Ok, that is interesting. So if you didn't cover any advertising at all then you will have covered no text that involved advertising?**

**Subject B:** No

**Right ok. [02.45] I take it on that basis then you have never learned or tell me if I am wrong about semiotics.**

**Subject B:** No. No. I haven't been no. Not at all.

**Right ok. Do you use any, when you are constructing ads do you actually refer to any texts, any textbooks or manuals or anything like that to guide you?**

**Subject B:** This is interesting because this is what I am doing my Masters dissertation on. Not on the creative development process but on a very small part of it, the creative decision making process. Erm... we follow erm... a kind of creative erm... briefing process, how do we get to the point where we are ready to start talking about the creative, it is this kind of well-worn route. Erm... I would have to refer to the textbooks but you can find textbook examples of how you develop the creative erm... brief if you like, making sure that you are covering who the audience is, erm... covering who the competition is, what is the purpose of the advertising erm...and then what the proposition is. And that is basically the culmination of an insight that brings all those things together. And from that, that creates the very small starting point for what the creative ideas could be. And then there might be some other considerations that, there might be some practical considerations about budget or media that you need to be aware of. So yes we follow that process and that's, it is not really an academic process it is an industry process and if you look at say, the IPA, that is a process that they suggest. If you look at the textbooks I can't remember the name of the authors which is terrible, because I have been teaching it this year, on the advertising module, as part of the marketing degree at Hallam. Erm... that process is referred to in more or less the same detail, in some of the textbooks, that you use there as well so we follow that process. The actual development, creative development process we don't map out any further than that. So it is then a blank piece of paper and it's how do we want it to develop from there.

**Right ok that will lead to some more questions at the moment because that is quite interesting thing you mentioned there. Erm... so, (05.00) you mentioned the blank piece of paper. So you have a blank piece of paper, you have a brief, from a client what sort of just talk me through the process that you go through to generate the ideas for the ad.**

**Subject B:** Ok, it depends on the, it depends on the project. But if it was say for example, I will give you an example of a client. One of our clients is Costcutter the supermarket group, and they, we do all their press advertising, their digital advertising. And they have asked us to look at their TV advertising. So they want to make a, they want to make a step change in how they do things. At the moment they do things at a very entry level, so they present their offers and that is it. Voice over and a nice bit of music, and here is the tin of baked beans and this is how much we are selling it for. They want to move towards advertising that is more emotive, that builds the brand, has more engagement with it, and from our point of view, we want to make people want to go to Costcutter as a shopping experience rather than go there just because of the products. So that is our starting point, so we are over here with we want to make people go to Costcutter, the client is over here with the brief saying we need to sell these Heinz baked beans because they paid us to put it on TV. And then, the starting point is somewhere in the middle of that. So how we approached it on this occasion it is not always like this, but this would be the ideal occasion, is for the account handler to write the creative brief based on the client brief. And so that covers the things I mentioned before. Who the audience is, what the objects are, what the proposition is, and that proposition is then checked, by me so. Now I wrote the brief and I was checking it as well, so sometimes there is a crossover, so the brief is checked before it gets chucked in with the creative team. But what we did in this case, because it was a new client with a new opportunity, the whole of the agency, and it is not a big agency, there is only 6 of us, all sat round the table behind you, and we went right this is the brief, and in very short, in very short time we summarised the brief. This is what we want people to do and how we want them to feel, how can we bring that to life and then we discussed ideas and we chucked them round and we did what we call leapfrogging, which is we don't discuss the quality of the ideas. There is a phrase that we use and it's called getting the shit out, so you have to say the most obvious and the most banal stuff you have just got to get it out, because if you don't then it doesn't lead to anything else. So someone might say something that is really crap, and very poor and we would never discuss in front of a client but that is fine because without removing that barrier it doesn't open the floodgates. So we use this rather crass term getting the shit out.

**A bit like brainstorming that kind of...**

**Subject B:** It is like brainstorming yes, it is throwing ideas around and then someone picking up on a word that someone has said, well what about if we did this, and then we might be plugged into the internet, we might look at what Sainsbury's are doing, did anyone see that John Lewis ad, and jump around and then and by going up different cul-de-sacs and kind of mind mapping and writing ideas down, on bits of paper with pencils, we will start building up a flow and we will find that we will probably have, we ended up with probably about 12 routes, 12 ideas, 12 very high concepts of what we could do with it. And we know from experience that certain things would be very expensive, certain things will be very cheap, certain things will be very challenging, certain things were... had been done before but maybe by someone else in a different market, so you are borrowing ideas or stealing ideas if you like from other people but that is the process. And then it is filtered down, and we probably want to get to about 5 or 6 that we will present to the client, and so we will leave that, and we will then, there is a, just to be academic about it, the process that we have there is a kind of a messy nature to creative development. There is an area where you don't know whether you have got it right, so what we do is create those ideas then we leave it we walk away from it, we go and work on something else. And then the lead team so that is me and Chris the creative director on this project, will then come back and review all those 12 / 15 ideas and we will go no, no, yes that has got legs, no, no so we let them settle and let the ideas develop and sit in your brain, because you are working on it without thinking about it as well. And then from that we will then develop the ideas more, we will do a little bit of script writing, bit of copywriting, do some visual research, we might speak to a production company about cost if we are suggesting something erm... that might be quite costly. We might have a chat with a few suppliers, and then from that we would present the concepts to the client.

**Right, the next one really you have answered already for me because I am saying when devising an ad do you visual the completed ad from the start or is it a building process. What you are telling me it is clearly a building process in a series of stages isn't it?**

**Subject B:** Yes because otherwise you get caught up in the craft, (10.00) and the craft is different to the concept. Erm... and what you were talking about earlier about erm... we don't have artists in the same way that we used to, we used to have commercial artists, who had craft who could do an amazing of someone riding a bike for Raleigh and it would be like a piece of art but it would be to sell a product, commercial craft. Now the first thing you have got to do is decide erm... what is the scene with the bicycle in, what does the person look like, why are they riding and tell that story, make sure that you are comfortable with that, and that you can sell it as well it has to be appropriate. And if the appropriateness box is ticked can we sell it, can we afford it, erm... do we want to do it as well that is important, erm... because there is a lot of pain in advertising so you have got to be motivated to want to make it happen. Then once those boxes are ticked then you end up with a short list and then they are further refined. And further refined. And further refined as you go through the kind of client engagement process.

**Right. The next one really again you have partly answered it, but I would like to get your comments on this one. I am asking you to what extent does your approach differ according to whether you are promoting a brand, you are brand advertising or just a particular product.**

**Subject B:** It doesn't at all. It doesn't in the slightest. That is our approach. Our approach is we are always trying to tell a story, which is the kind of language that you will hear a lot. But for example, erm... I am just trying to think of, erm... some advertising that we have done recently. We have just launched Lincoln Castle. Lincoln Castle has just spent £22 million, on a development and it has got certain products. The products are they have got a wall walk you can walk round the medieval walks, you can go to a Magna Carta exhibition they have got a Magna Carta and it is in a vault, they have got a Victorian Prison. They are products and Lincoln Castle is the brand that brings those altogether. We have the same creative development approach whether we are talking about visit Lincoln Castle, or we are talking about visit the Magna Carta. So it is exactly the same creative development process. There is no difference for us between a brand and a product because they have the same attributes. They have to have some personality, they have to talk in a certain way, in terms of advertising they have to take you through the same process, if you use the AIDA process, attention Interest, Desire, Action you have still got to take them through that process to get someone to engage and then act based on the advertising so it makes no difference at all. Although people will refer to brand advertising versus say a product advertising, and it might be a brand advertising, it might not talk about price or place, it will talk more about we want you to want to buy this brand or engage with this brand and maybe the price isn't that important at that point. That will be the only difference, but that is a craft difference, executional difference it is not a creative development difference.

**I see. Yes I was erm.... one of the things I had in mind was if I look at a Versace ad, it is not telling me anything, it is not giving me any information whatsoever. When I contrast that with something I see in trade journals, very, very, very, very detailed, in terms of what they are selling for what kind of price. But what you are telling me it is still the same process that you are following through?**

**Subject B:** Well if you go right back to the beginning on how you develop the creative brief, and if you have understood the audience and you have understood what the purpose is of the brief, and then you have developed the proposition, if a trade ad is talking to a specialist audience, who knows that they are going to buy this widget this electrical pump then their interest is about what is the voltage, what is the wattage how many have you got in stock, can I get it tomorrow, how do I fit it, have you got the technical plans because that is their motivation. With Versace the motivation is does it make me look good, does it make me feel good erm... does it reflect how I want other

people to perceive me it is still a tick box, of things it is still the same process, it might be delivered in a different way, erm... and it may well not obviously say anything but actually by not doing that it is saying quite a lot, quite a lot as well. So in terms of the process, there is very little difference. And if someone was to come along and do a trade ad that was like a Versace ad, then you could argue well have you understood the audience properly for that. But you may well do a Versace ad as a trade ad because you go well that gives us a point of difference. That creates the attention part of the AIDA model and makes it stand out, makes someone engage with it and maybe will then push them out to the website for that detail. So they are the kind of considerations it is not, it is not black and white. (15.00) But I can see why, why a trade ad might be seen as more working, more average it is because the audience, that is what the audience want to consume to make them react to it.

**Yes. Thank you that is interesting. The next one I don't think you will be able to answer because I am saying to you what role does semiotics play in your process of forming ideas by the sound of it, it doesn't really because you have not engaged with semiotics you come from a different background to some of my other interviewees so unless you have got any comments to make on that.**

**Subject B:** Well you just, well just explore it a bit further what do you mean by semiotics then in terms of advertising.

**The notion of signification, I am going back to some of the theory stuff that some of the advertisers have done on marketing and advertising courses. Where they are looking at structuralism, they are looking at erm... Saussure's notion of what constitutes a sign, going up to engaging with cultural myths folklore and so on. I am guessing that that is not something that you think about particularly?**

**Subject B:** Well we might do without realising it. And I think probably people do engage with semiotics and symbolism and add colours but without actively thinking about it. There is a lot of implicit processes in creative developments, that aren't made explicit. But in terms of process no, we don't go, this is a red advert because it signifies this. We might make it a red advert because deep down culturally that works for us and so wouldn't in Indonesia or somewhere like that where it means something else. So, so yes and no to that answer I wouldn't, I think if you were to dig deep I bet you would be able to find, if there is a truth about that subject area if there is an underlying truth that it exists, naturally then I bet we do in some ways.

**But it is intuitive rather than following some kind of technical...**

**Subject B:** Exactly yes.

**That is more what I would expect. Yes. Erm... you told me a little bit about your processes what was the last advertisement that you did, do you remember what it was? Or have you got several ongoing at one time.**

**Subject B:** Yes we have got loads going on. We have just placed some ads for Costcutter, for some of their barbeque products meats and stuff like that, and sauces and stuff. Press advertising. And we have just placed a radio ad for them as well. Erm... once again it is entering barbeque season but that was a completely different approach because it was a different audience. It was on Talksport Radio erm... and we have just placed a load of ads for Lincoln Castle as well, so there is, there is a number going on at the moment.

**Right, erm... when you get briefs from clients, I take it, I mean what is the sort of variation in that then from the client are they very specific as to what they want or do you get a lot of freedom to come up with what you feel like coming up with or is it somewhere in-between or does it vary?**

**Subject B:** It varies. It depends on the relationship you have got with the client. Most clients we spend a lot of time in trying to shape how they think about how they brief us and what we require. What we require from the client and these are the conversations that we have with them is things simply around what are the objectives of the adverts, and then we work backwards from that and ask questions. Who is the audience. Do you understand the audience. Do you have any insight for the audience. Do you currently have a positioning for yourselves that you want to reinforce, and some people do and some people don't and so you are, you are creating that so it is very different. Some clients will send you, this is a slight exaggeration for effect but they will send you a 10 page brief, that is useless and the conversation that you have with them in the corridor is the most useful conversation that you have as you are leaving the briefing meeting. Other clients will just ring up, we did some for an automotive company called Ring Automotive before Christmas, they rang up 3 days before Christmas to say we need some ads, and this is what we are trying to do. And we did the ads and it was done and that works just as well. Because whatever they chuck at us we go through our process, so it doesn't matter how it starts we break it down into our creative briefing process. So it is a real mix but those clients who we work with over time, start briefing us on the objectives, the tone, the theme, this is what we are trying to achieve, this is what we want to do differently, or we want more of the same so we try and make it really simple. I haven't had a client say to me I want an ad that looks like this and does that and this is the headline.

**You haven't had that? No.**

**Subject B:** I was going to say not for a long time. I remember when I was a young product manager, that was in my early 20s and I was briefing agencies, then which was 20 years ago, erm... (20.00) then probably that was when a lot of that happened and I was probably doing that where you would go this is the product, this is what it looks like, can you put it together for us. Erm... but I can't remember the last time that passed my desk someone doing that. But that might be because of how we initially engage with clients and we are very upfront about how we work and it is important that we work like this way. Maybe that is what attracts clients to appoint us and when they are looking at the work that we have done in our credentials and they say well how did you do that and we explain then they go oh ok well we will back off then and we will give you what you need to achieve that. So yes that hasn't happened for a fairly long time so the briefing is, just to go back to try and answer the question more clearly, the briefing is quite wide ranging in how it happens but it is very rare that people tell us what to do. We try and get them to tell us what they want it to do.

**And then they trust you to come up with something that you think is going to work?**

**Subject B:** Yes and normally erm... if we are entering new ground, or it is a new client we will do multiple options we will investigate different areas, we will go to the extreme, of either end we will go safe, we will go somewhere in the middle just to show that we have covered the ground. Erm... if we are in a very strong relationship with the client where we can read each other's minds, we can brief without talking, then we might just turn it round very quickly and go there you go and because we know where we are, erm... so it all depends on the client relationship and the needs of their business.

**Right, erm... you have already answered a large part of this one. I am saying to you to whom is your advertising directed and of course your case you are dealing with Costcutter then obviously it is the general public as opposed to any particular audience, or am I wrong about that. Do you actually, are you able to identify a particular audience and think we are aiming this at you as opposed to someone else?**

**Subject B:** Yes, yes once again there is subtleties within that for example we have just done some radio advertising for Costcutter, and we have got, they have a very strong erm... alcohol and barbeque meat offer at the moment so that says to us in broad

brushstrokes that could apply to men, appeal to men. It could equally apply to women planning food as well. The media buyer who is a separate organisation went well why don't we look at some erm... male radio stations like Talksport. Well that is a great idea, the client said yes let's do that. So we put together a very male orientated ad that was very tongue in cheek, about barbeque meats and stuff like that and alcohol. And so we identified the audience very clearly. And you can do that if you have got a route to that very clear audience. If for example if we are advertising in the tabloids or broadsheets the Daily Mail or the Daily Mirror or something like that you can pick sections of that where you might go into a lifestyle or a food section, so you might be appealing more to women, erm... you could go into the sports pages or you could go run of paper, where it is to everyone. And so, on one level yes you can identify the audience, but you are not identifying the audience in a very granular way it is really it is men ((laughs)) women, women who shop for a family then it becomes a bit more detailed. Men who like sport with their mates so it becomes a bit more detailed. And occasionally say if we are working say with erm... we do work with Destinations as well, like Visit Peak District, you may well go well we are going to talk to families with young children under 6, who need a certain type of accommodation. Or want to feel as though there is something for them to do if it rains, it becomes more detailed then and then we might write pen portraits which aren't scientific, sometimes they are pseudoscientific in that there is organisations that identify different audiences and what makes them up, and we might use those and then rewrite those pen portraits so that we can just get into the mind of the consumer. But a lot of that is about showing the client that we have understood what their needs are, rather than just the consumer. Erm... so, once again to answer your question do we have a particular audiences in mind yes, sometimes they are very broad men, sometimes they get a bit more detailed. Erm... yes.

**Yes I mean so clearly then it's I suppose unavoidable that you will have to engage in some degree of stereotyping of people because...**

**Subject B:** Oh absolutely yes. Yes I mean the whole purpose of marketing is mass communication, because you can't sell directly because there isn't the time (25.00) or the money for me to sit down with you and find out what you really want and how you want to be sold this product so I have to take broad brush strokes. And that is the way that the communication channels are developed as well. We are acutely aware of that, and you have to be careful sometimes about how you create your stereotypes in your own mind, but we have always got the consumer in our mind and we are always discussing and arguing about well would housewives, and it is terrible word, housewives like that, what do you mean by a housewife. Well someone who is shopping for the family, ok might not be a woman then, might be a man, it could be anyway so yes it can become quite complicated.

**Ok obviously you are using images and you are using words, how do you ensure that what steps do you take to make sure that what you are doing is actually understood, they are getting it, what you are saying?**

**Subject B:** Ok in terms of comprehension. Well sometimes we test creative so we do focus groups. At the moment we have got erm... erm... a piece of research being done by Costcutter on our current campaign that is running with an organisation called Millwood Brown who do a lot of consumer testing. And they test for everything from comprehension, through to brand relevance and lots and lots of different details and they do this on-line with 100 – 150 different people looking at the advertising. Previously with campaigns say last year we did some focus group testing, not just of the campaigns but just to get a greater understanding and use the campaigns as a mirror to hold up to that audience, so that is when there is the budget to do it and it is worth doing it as well. So if you are spending half a million pounds, on media then it is probably worth doing some testing. Erm.. if you are spending a million pounds over year then it is probably worth doing some testing. Erm... if for example say with Lincoln Castle who don't have such large budgets, the creativity we did for them was new and innovative for them, then we just work with the client to make sure that the comprehension was there and people within the client team and we knew from our craft not the concept, about how an ad should work properly and how it is comprehended and so it is a real mix again between people spending £20,000 on research to people going up and down the corridor with it and asking people what they think. And both are, both are equally as valid, if not as robust.

**Yes, Ok. I have asked this is one of these again, it is a semiotics one I was I saying how if at all do you use symbolism and icons I think you have already sort of pretty well covered that for me.**

**Subject B:** Good if that has. I, I... I bet if you broke down our processes and our if you could look into our heads I bet we would be using semiotics, in some way but not actively. Or not explicitly.

**I will give you an example of one I spoke to yesterday he is a chap in Doncaster, he was a trade advertiser. And he was doing a, was preparing an ad about from a local firm that actually now covers nationwide, and so he shoved in pictures of the statue of Robin Hood in Nottingham, of the Humber Bridge, of Trafalgar Square showing different parts of the country all made into a collage shaped like the map of the UK. So that was his attempt at using symbolism to show the national nature of it all. So that is the kind of thing, and I would imagine that you would go for a similar...**

**Subject B:** If you want to hold on for a second I will just get someone to grab an ad and I will show you, and I think that will just, just hold on one second.

I will just show you off our website. I said earlier we did some advertising just before Christmas for an automotive company, and... this was a very quick turnaround but we went through erm... we went through our creative process, there you go. Right,

**First Aid for cars (30.00) and there we have a diagnostic machine wired up to a car.**

**Subject B:** The heart of a car almost.

**Yes, yes.**

**Subject B:** And so you can see that we are using this kind of symbolism to show the importance of this product, but we are not going through a process where we are actively engaged with that so we are using in this instance anyway symbolism very, very strongly.

**Yes you have got a parallel there which is [30.23] interesting thank you for that yes.**

**Subject B:** So hopefully that's shown where from what you say I think we do do it but we are not, we are not kind of breaking it down and using it explicitly.

**No I can't see how you can't use it but anyway. Last question of all if you are advertising a specific product you told me that you don't tend to do that so much, erm... how do you tap into people's pre-existing knowledge of the product or even of the brand is there any way that you can, do you think to yourself they already know this, how do you know what they know and how do you tap into that?**

**Subject B:** Well either from the client telling us that this is how the product is received, and is understood and is comprehended, and sometimes they tell us what the problems

are with it and that might be derived from their own research or it might be derived just from their own experience so we get told that. Erm... so say for example with this, erm... I can't, that is a poor example. So we either get told it or we make assumptions that the product is, or the type of product, the product category is understood. And if it is a brand new erm... product that has never been seen before, then that would be a different problem to solve than if it is just another product within a category that is well understood. So I think we are just making assumptions as to how people understand it unless we are told differently.

**Yes. Right erm... I think you have pretty much answered all my questions and thank you for that.**

**Subject B:** Good.

### **SUBJECT C**

**So my first then is I want to move sequentially the first part is about you personally, what route did you enter the advertising industry?**

**Subject C:** Well I did, erm... I suppose erm... the first point was being good at art at school really so, erm... in terms of copywriting I have come through an indirect route in a sense, erm... and I studied the, my A levels were English, literature and art and history. So, I always intended to do erm... to do art and I intended at quite an early age I guess to go into graphic design. Erm... which I then went to erm... college and did a foundation course, an art foundation course, kind of specialised in graphic design, then I went to the University of Humberside, and did a degree in graphic design. Erm... at that point, I entered the industry in so this is erm... kind of 1993, I entered the industry erm... as a graphic designer so in a sense I had absolutely no responsibility for copy if that makes sense. Erm... through that I erm... started my own business because there was no jobs at that point, very much like now in many ways, although I think it is harder now than it was then. Erm... and quite, I suppose quite quickly and as being a graphic designer, was always about what it was, what the message was, for me so I wasn't, I wouldn't say I was a pure graphic designer actually I was always more of an art director if you understand the difference between an art director and a graphic designer.

**Can you explain it for me do you mind?**

**Subject C:** Yes, a graphic designer I would say the remit of a designer is to make things look pretty and make them look legible and adhere to whatever style, form, however it needs to conform to whatever style. I am not being very clear here.

### **Is that through the brief?**

**Subject C:** I would say a designer is given a set of copy erm... a brief around how it needs to look and what the audience is and then they would design a piece accordingly. Whereas an art director would, would be more about setting the style, and an art director would be more concerned about the piece as a communication rather than just a visual style kind of, as a flat piece of paper it would, an art director would be more concerned about how that kind of communicates to an audience. So, I would say from the very start I was more of a, I had leanings towards being a graphic, an art director, than a graphic designer. And one of my first jobs actually I was asked that question by the creative director, are you a designer or an art director, and I didn't really understand the difference at that stage but, and I think there is a lot of overlap in that as well erm... but I think yes I would say, designer is purely, is a visual artist, a visual crafts person whereas I think an art director is much more around the message and how that works as an advertising communication if that makes sense.

### **It does yes.**

**Subject C:** So, erm... so I mean in terms of my progression I started as a graphic designer, I worked my first, I setup my own business, worked in that for about a year and then I got a job which was always the intention. My first job actually was on erm... a listings magazine, a What's On magazine, which erm... which was again established from scratch so I did all the identity and all of the visual of it, erm... and it was called Brag Magazine ((laughs)) and it existed for about a year before the parent company ran out of money basically, but it kind of, it developed quite a good name and a reputation in the year (5.00) that it existed and ironically it become, it got to the point where it was at least covering its expenses by the time it was closed down but it had incurred so much, so many losses in getting there, the parent company didn't have deep enough pockets and didn't understand the magazine world enough really to go into as a venture, but they learnt from that mistake by going bust basically. So from that point I then entered the agency world, my first job was in a cowboy outfit quite frankly, erm... and I think I was there 3 or 4 months and that went under as well. Erm... but I jumped ship quite successfully and I was very much a designer there I would say. And then I jumped ship erm... and I joined quite a well, quite a well-known agency in Leeds called Outside the Box, and that, that was the first point actually where I went into an environment that I would consider a professional agency environment. And there was a distinction between copy and design and what we were doing as designers and art workers as such

and I would like to think I have always personally, I have always had erm... an eye or a nose for copy and being able to write copy and write headlines and then actually write the job as it goes through. And, it was noticed quite quickly when I got to Outside the Box that erm... I think the studio manager once quipped she said oh it doesn't really matter if you are not much of a designer or art worker because you can write, and I was like oh that is quite a nice thing to say but I always considered myself a, a designer art director first and a writer second. So at that agency so I think this is, I think this is probably kind of quite indicative of how copy is treated in the provinces as such, so we didn't, that agency which was quite a big agency at the time, and still is quite a name in Leeds, erm... sort of 20 years later they didn't employ a copywriter, it was kind of cobbled together quite frankly by the account managers and the client. And the fact that I would then actually sort of look at the copy and try and dissect it and make recommendations, was almost a revelation at that point. Erm... again, in the early part of my career I flitted around a lot, and sought other, other better opportunities, and quite quickly I think I only stayed there 6 months and the creative director got headhunted to go and work at McCann Ericson in Manchester so I followed him about a month later and got a job there. And now, that, that obviously McCann Ericson Manchester, I don't know I you know, but I mean they were at the time and I think they probably still are the biggest agency outside London. So, based over in Prestbury just south of Manchester, I think there were like 300 people there at the time, and I am not sure what the numbers are now but I think it is quite similar to be honest. And at that point, that was my, that was the first time as a designer because I was still a designer then I would say that I encountered copywriters who just wrote copy. And, erm... we were, I don't know, if I am going into too much detail do forgive me.

**No it's fine. Please carry on.**

**Subject C:** At that point, erm... I went into a kind of, a self-contained unit really, so there was the creative director who I followed over, there was a copywriter who was of a senior level, and then there was me as the sort of, designer kind of art director and then we had erm... a design junior, who was kind of under me as such and then erm... there was a team of art workers, and a proof reader actually, which was interesting. The proof reader served a lot of different units if that makes sense but we worked with a proof reader for the first time and a proper copywriter for the first time. And at that point, having always used to being given copy and cobbling it together, at that point I started to work with what I would call a proper copywriter who gave, who thought about the job and the communication piece and gave you copy. And then my, it was my job to make it look pretty and communicate effectively what the point of the actual piece was. And we worked on erm... we worked on a fashion catalogue, which was like a young ladies fashion piece, and erm... and it was a quite structured (10.00) kind of communication sort of programme that we sort of fit into really, so I did it for about, and there was a catalogue every 6 months so you went through a cycle for 6 months so you effectively designed the catalogue but we only did the front bit and the very end bit which was the call to action and the rest of it was done by people doing that to be

honest. Erm... so we were like the agency doing the kind of clever bits at the front and the end if that makes sense. And, erm... and the catalogue went out and we did so we worked on press, within that, we worked on TV within that but then we also worked on quite a, quite a comprehensive erm... sort of direct mail programme erm... combined with monthly statement mailings. So if you bought, if you got a catalogue you got a statement every month, and if you ordered from the catalogue you went into a certain mailing cycle and if you didn't order from the catalogue you would go into another mailing cycle, so it was quite kind of carefully plotted and thought out and it had been developed as a system over many, many years. Erm... and a way of getting the optimum out of the investment of doing the catalogue and sending it out to someone because you know it would cost maybe £10 to print and post that catalogue out. So it was about kind of pulling the investment out of that as such.

I did that once, quite enjoyed it. I did it again thought ok I am treading on water now, I have, I mean I was 26 at this point so I was going through these cycles of learning and so I did the first one enjoyed it, did the second one erm... enjoyed it less asked for a kind of move, because I didn't really want to go through another cycle having done it for year, asked for a move to another kind of department in the agency and they didn't move very quickly so I again I left ((laughs)). I came back over to Leeds, missed home actually so I came back to Leeds, and erm... then joined a company called WWAV North. Now there is WWAV were a big name in direct marketing at the time, and WWAV north I think were the biggest direct marketing agency outside of London. So based in Leeds don't exist now, completely fallen over. I think WWAV still exist in London, it was WWAV Wardle di di Arnold di di and quite a kind of, well at the time I would say a biggish name in, well very big name in direct marketing and a reasonable agency name in London. So there was WWAV, I worked in WWAV Leeds, erm... then there was WWAV there was like the London office, there was an Edinburgh office, a Bristol office and a Leeds office, so it was quite a big agency sort of network really at that time. Erm...and it was very much, it was very much around the sort of the big burst in direct marketing that kind of happened in the sort of I guess in the mid-80s and then tailed out towards the 2000s and then the internet sort of took over really. Erm... but, so I guess if I am, if I sit in front of you today and you say well what is your background I would say well it is direct mail really, direct marketing. And I mean I don't know if you know, a lot about direct marketing in terms of how it works and stuff like that, but erm... it is quite the scientific almost process. So I will give you, I suppose it is interesting in language terms and I wish I had a copy to show you now actually. But what we would do is so I went to WWAV North. Now I would say WWAV North were more scientific about the work that we were doing, in terms of direct marketing, than we were on a kind of, in Manchester at a bigger agency. But I think WWAV were more invested in direct marketing as a concept and as a sort of, as a skill set really. So we worked for erm... they did, they were built on the Gratton business, the Gratton catalogue and erm... did a lot of sort of, a lot of the catalogues within the Gratton group so I was, when I joined WWAV North I came and worked on Gratton's version of the young fashion catalogue that I had worked on in Manchester. So, I dropped straight into that account. And that was my role was to sort of service that account. So as a for instance, we talk (15.00) about catalogue goes out 6

month cycle, catalogue goes out, bunch of follow-up mailings to sort of basically get the recipient of the catalogue to purchase. So a lot of the mailings were about getting the erm... the person, getting the customer to kind of go look back into the catalogue on a monthly basis because it would sit there and get put in a bunch of newspapers and...

### **Remind them it's there and...**

**Subject C:** Yes exactly, yes. And as part of this whole campaign, so we did the erm... there was, there was the, sorry there is names for it, there was activation which was getting them to kind of go back into the catalogue, and then there was recruitment essentially so it was prospecting and getting new customers. So we did a lot of direct mail in terms of you know sending it to kind of identifying audiences, buying data, sending mailings out, to that audience, enticing trying to get them to take a catalogue on basically. So as part of the process was concerned, now I think you will find this interesting and I am probably getting going like that too much.

### **It's alright.**

**Subject C:** What we would do is we would have a, we would have a sell mailing, and then there would be a test against it. So there would be a mailing that was like the best performing mailing for that particular erm... brief so it might be, it might be take a catalogue or look back at the catalogue or whatever the brief was, so there would be a sell that was like the best performing mailing. So quite often what I would get, is I would get there would be a sell mailing and I would get a brief to beat that mailing. And then that mailing would my treatment and the original sell would go out to an A/B split audience and that would perform at like 0.5 or .5% and that would well it was like that would perform at like 1.12% and that one would, if that one came in at 1.15% that then became the sell. So you were in a constant process of test and refine. And it was, and a lot, sometimes it was offer based, sometimes it was language based and quite often it could be like, erm... like weird little things that you would just try and put in there. So there was a lot of testing on like did an alarm clock work better than a towel incentive. Did money off work better than a percentage off etc, etc. So there was a lot of testing of that kind of thing going on as well. Erm... so, you know as you would expect an alarm clock, which was a high or a toaster which is a higher perceived value than a towel would work better, but money would always work better than any kind of like material incentive. Erm... so even if you had something that was worth £50 it worked, offering £10 off would work better than a higher perceived value item if that makes sense. And money hard cash always worked better than percentage. And we worked out that the average order value per say the average order value per erm... order was £100 we tested things like giving them a £10 off voucher or giving them a 15% off voucher, and £10 always worked better than 15%. And £10 always worked better than 20% as well.

You had to kind of escalate it massively and we couldn't work out whether just people just value the idea of hard cash more, or they didn't work out that they are actually ordering £100 therefore 20% voucher was better, so there was a lot of, I don't know if that is interesting you from a linguistics perspective. But I mean people, we wondered whether people could find it easier to take £10 off their order than work out what a 15% off was even though 15% might equate to like 30 quid, etc, etc. But quite a lot of tests that we did were based around language as well in the sense that, erm... in a direct mail piece and you will have received direct mail, sometimes the theory is that if you are interested in a subject. Sorry I will go back. So the first thing is the outer envelope and normally there will be something on that outer envelope that will entice you in. Now, that's the first barrier for a direct mail piece, if that envelope puts you off for whatever reason, it goes straight into the bin so it doesn't even get opened so the first barrier is to sort of get them to open the envelope and sometimes, (20.00) depending on how erm... what the perception around the brand is, if it is a kind of low grade brand you don't feature it but if it is a high grade brand you would feature it, if that makes sense. Erm...but quite often we would do tests on envelopes around you know £15 off voucher inside, 15% voucher off inside and things like, test things like that. And then, there was a very sort of almost, erm... quite a strict kind of rationale around how people opened direct mail and how they read it. And this was formulised by Procter and Gamble as well. I later worked on Procter and Gamble, in another agency. And ((laughs)) if you have got time I will you about that as well.

**Yes**

**Subject C:** But erm... essentially, so you get your mail piece, you have got maybe 3 or 4 seconds for someone to look at it and decide whether to open it or not, it either gets binned or it gets opened. So the first thing they do is they will look at the letter, and normally in a mail pack there will be, there would be a letter and at least one leaflet and maybe 2 leaflets. And the first thing they do is they will look at the letter and see if it is addressed to them. So if it is personalised to them and it has spelt their name correctly, what they would then do is erm.. scan the letter so what they would typically do is scan the headlines and the subheads and think is this relevant if it isn't, bin if it was, then they would read further. At that point they would put down the letter, and take up the leaflet. And read the leaflet. Now, normally at that stage you wouldn't have normally personalised the leaflets but now, a technique we use and the artwork I was just sending, was a mail pack actually which we don't do a great deal of anymore but it was a simple letter mailing with a message on the outer, a personalised letter, but then the leaflet is personalised as well. And the job of the leaflet in terms of was reinforcement in terms of what the point of the mailing was. So the letter would outline what we want you to do and what the subject is, and the leaflet simply regurgitates that in a slightly different format but perhaps in a more visual way as well. And, and the train of thought was that once they have got the leaflet in their hand they would look at the leaflet and scan the leaflet and take a visual message from it, and then if they were still interested they would go back and read the letter. Now, there was obviously, there was different

theories of letters as well in terms of there was a long letter, there were long letter treatments which were like 2 pages of dense copy talking in intricate detail about the benefit of this gizmo whatever it was. Or you could do a short letter which was punchier and maybe had more visuals on it, so we would test long letter treatments to short letter treatments as well. So it was quite erm... in terms of discipline, it is as far away from the kind of arty designer piece as you can imagine really but that sort of thing really appealed to me and really, I really found it quite interesting. And it was very much a craft rather than an artistic pursuit in a sense, although my job was to overlay a sheen and a brand over it etc, etc. You know so, yes I kind of moved to WWAV North and got involved in direct mail in that respect.

Now at this point I had worked with, I had worked with a number of copywriters so there was a creative team of about 10 generally speaking there was a creative director, there was erm... probably there was the creative director had a kind of Mac guy who did his Mac work, because he didn't want to work on Macs at that time, and then there were like 5 art directors and 5 erm... copywriters generally. So everyone had a copywriter. I was like the junior member of the team at that point, I was by far the least experienced, and I didn't, I wasn't really assigned a copywriter I got to work with maybe 2 or 3 copywriters on a regular basis, which was actually really good because I learnt different things from different copywriters and learnt their skill and learnt what their individual strengths was. One guy I worked with was erm... he would, his headlines would be 30 words long and I would come in and rewrite his headlines and he didn't mind that because he knew I was snappier than he was. But he wrote long dense copy and he was almost like a financial services expert, and we had a lot of financial services clients, at that point (25.00) and he was almost like the, he was like the financial guy so when I worked on a financial client he would get assigned as the copywriter to that. So there were different copywriters with different strengths and different styles. And erm... and I mean at that point I was an art director at that point, so I understood the difference, and I knew I wanted, in Manchester I knew I wanted to be an art director, not a designer anymore and that was a job where I was an art director, and that was my job title. And I wasn't even required to use a Mac at that point which was incredible for me, because I had grown up, or I was like the first generation of using Apple Macs, to design on and at that point, erm... I could if I wanted to just sit and scamp and just provide scamps, and then art direct designers and Mac operators.

### **What is a scamp?**

**Subject C:** Scamp is a drawing of the layout.

**Ok**

**Subject C:** So I would draw out a layout and mark it up in terms of I want that colour there, this image here and I provide a negative of the image, and I would give it to an art worker and they would construct it and then I would get it, make my amends. And, that was quite novel to me. But that was old practice that was old practice which has died out completely now. Whereas I wasn't, I was the new breed who was very Mac literate compared to everyone else. And I kind of, was quick, to be honest I was quicker and I was at least as good as the other art directors at art directing at that point. So erm... yes I mean without being too I kind of rose through the ranks of the art directors very, very quickly actually and I mean these were guys who were like 15 years senior to me so I was, I made that was at, at that point I was like hot property as a sort of an art director if that makes sense. Apologies if that sounds boastful but...

**No, no**

**Subject C:** But it was, I was like the new breed coming in who was, I was quicker, I was I had had, I was just, I was probably quicker, I was probably more ambitious, and I worked harder, and erm...

**You got noticed.**

**Subject C:** I got noticed and I quickly became the art director that all the account directors wanted on their account. Erm... and, I was, quite a, I was quite a firebrand at that point actually I was, I could be very, very difficult and very argumentative, and quite egotistical at times, but they put up with it because they knew I would do the work and I would do it to my best, the best of my abilities and take it very, very seriously where a couple of the other art directors were a bit more time served and a bit more sort of like blasé and they would let, they would let themselves be led by the account directors where I never would. But the account directors respected that I think and it was very interesting at that point, because at that point after being there a year or two I wanted to be a creative director, I had come from a designer to an art director and now I wanted to be a creative director. I am a creative director me. And I think at that point, I started, there was very much a, a them and us thing about creative studio and the account and the department. You know, we were the arty types, who were arsy and got in late and you know blah, blah, blah and they were the tight arsed suits, they were the bag carriers for our work kind of thing but I think at that point I almost kind of started to develop relationships with account people in a way that the studio people didn't really and I think that was the bridge for me actually then to become a creative director and then sort of go on as such so. But yes so I mean I suppose at that point that was it, that period for me was a real intense period of learning and I worked with some very dour copywriters and boring copywriters but very thorough copywriters. But I worked with one guy erm... who completely opened my mind at one point and he was about the

same age as me, he wasn't trained, hadn't gone to university he just had a pure, he had a pure knack for copy and he was probably the closest I have come to brilliance in copywriting in terms of other people I have worked with. And erm... I mean he was worse than me, if I was difficult he was a nightmare to be honest but he was brilliant and I only worked with him for about maybe 6 months and he came in, I was given him we were joined up as a team, so he was like my first proper copywriter, who was like my copywriter and unfortunately he got headhunted after about 6 months to go and be a creative director somewhere else, but he had a total ability to cut through all the bullshit (30.00) around a brief because like in those days we would be given a brief which may be like 5 or 6 pages long for a job and actually you would read the brief and you would think I have got no idea what you want me to do and you would read it again and actually it was a skill. It was a skillset was deciphering a brief and picking out the points that were relevant and he had a great skill at cutting through all of the bullshit, and he wasn't one for like writing long letters he was like punchy and he was short and he was abrasive and he was very direct and kind of subversive in what he did in terms of his copy. And I mean at that point we were all working, I suppose I was working 12 hour days generally speaking, it would be like I would get there at 9, leave at 9 literally and his guy would piss off at like 5.30, but no one could touch him because he was so good. So I kind of like, he made me look at what I was doing and the work I was doing quite kind of carefully and I suppose in a weird way I have, I have taken a lot of his style and tried to replicate that. And I think if I, I mean I write a lot of copy now and funnily enough, copy is becoming ever more important in terms of the explosion of the internet. Erm.. because it is all about content now again, it has turned round to content. And I am finding actually I thought my skillset was slipping out of relevance quite frankly but actually I am coming to the conclusion that it is becoming more relevant than ever because I have got the training and the experience that a lot of people haven't and, and I think so in terms of copy he was a real kind of, he was like a blast, he was an icy blast on a warm beach I mean his impact was incredible on me. But he was, he was basically he was never going to, he was never going to have old bones this guy and I think he died in his mid-30s so and that is probably like 10 years ago now. So, I mean he drank, he smoked, he drugged, he fucked he did everything and erm... and I think it was very interesting actually he wasn't, he was from Leeds, he was a sort of Leeds lad, he had never been to uni, but he had this incredible intuition for copy and I mean, subsequently I mean he used to sit there talking about all kind of rude things and women he was seeing and stuff like that, and basically 3 or 4 years later he came out as being gay and completely turned his life around and lived in a different way and actually died while out jogging in winter and had a heart attack and slipped into a gutter and died from exposure.

So but he was a very kind of artistic character who obviously was hugely conflicted at that point but it made for brilliant work. And I found him fascinating really and he was a real sort of influence on me. So yes...

To cut a long story short I rose through the ranks at WWAV I was made head of art, which was underneath the art director, I think I was there 3.5 years in all I was made head of art, erm... became a bit of a player, I would be the one who worked on all the pictures, did all of that and I had a record of winning pictures at that point as well which was, I was kind of hot property. I got headhunted them at that point, erm... and I went and worked for McCann Ericson in Leeds this time as creative director, so at this point I had kind of like, I had got my creative director's job I wanted and erm... and so I went and worked there. It was a less well run agency, it was a smaller department, at that point I was responsible for recruiting copywriters to work with me, and so I probably went through about 4 or 5. I was there about 3 years I think and I went through 4 or 5 people freelancers and permanent appointments, and again had the opportunity to work with a really brilliant copywriter who emigrated to Australia and is quite a big gun in Sydney or somewhere like that. And again, quality of what she did really sort of opened my eyes not necessarily in terms of the headline punch but more in the sort of quality of the actual body copy, and actually developing (35.00) a style and a... it was almost like instead of writing copy that was selling she brought in a dialogue kind of style is the only way I can describe it and it was like a personal conversation with me and you and it was persuasive and you know had empathy and it wasn't it wasn't harsh and direct it was kind of persuasive.

### **Intimate?**

**Subject C:** It was intimate yes in a way that I had never really seen copy written before, erm... so she was a brilliant sort of, she was a brilliant copywriter all round. I had this sparky guy who was like abrasive and very concept driven and very sort of headline driven but she was more of the kind of total package, she wasn't quite as sparky as he was but she kind of almost like rounded it off for me in terms of working with people. And I mean I worked at McCann's for about 3 years and then I set up my own business with an account handler basically and at that point, it was a 2 man outfit and at that point I started having to write all the copy myself, so I went from being a creative director with studio people, with copywriters, etc I started my own business and had to do everything myself. So at that point I really started to sort of do a lot with copy and work with it in a more kind of ingrained way, and now, I can't separate the process really and I can't, I can't imagine working with a copywriter in some ways because I would rather do it all myself because it's a clear and cohesive piece. And I have essentially run my own business now, this is the third business, I was in one for 5 years, left, took half the client base with me started again, with another guy that lasted a year, I walked out he was a nutter and I started this business and it will be 6 years old in September. So again like being in business yourself and in the agency world in the middle of various slumps and credit crunches it's been whoa like that and we are at our lowest ebb now there is 3 of us now at the moment. Erm... but there is reasons for that but erm... I mean at the height I had copywriters, and we have gone down again and I have written copy again and it is now at the point, I am at the point where I am the

copywriter for the business again in a serious way. So erm... so yes. That is my background ((laughs)).

**Ok. Was it Humberside you said you were at university?**

**Subject C:** University of Humberside yes. It was Hull college of higher education when I applied, it was Humberside Polytechnic for the first year or 2 I was there and I graduated from the University of Humberside and it was at that point so this was like 90-93 when all the polys were becoming unis basically and the college of higher education became unis as well or further education or whatever it was. So yes I actually it did have 3 different names while I was, and I think it is the University of East Lincolnshire now or whatever it is not the University of Humberside anymore.

**I didn't realise that. Do you recall any particular texts that you studied that deal with, I don't suppose you did did you from what you have told me... that deal with advertising or...**

**Subject C:** I did I mean erm... I was, I read Roland Barthes mythologies. And I read oh there was a superb book and I wish I should have reminded myself of it, Washing Stains by Jackie it was a seminal kind of book around the use of language in advertising it was something to do with washing it was like, it was the idea of like how do you sell washing powder which essentially washes your clothes and how do you talk about it and make it seem different to the other washing powders.

**Is it called Washing Stains?**

**Subject C:** I think it is called Washing Stains I will have to look it up I will,

**If you could just drop me an e-mail that would be great, that would be super.**

**Subject C:** I will do yes, yes. So I mean as part of my degree I think 20% of it was, 80% was practical like doing graphic design and the other part of it was like you had to basically write on the theory of erm... graphic design and write about that kind of like mythologies style sort of thinking. So I did my thesis, my final thesis on erm... the on the language and the language and visual (40.00) themes used in election advertising so talking about how they kind of write, the right of politics parties spoke and what

language they used and what labour did and things like that and how the Americans have sort of set the scene and advertising in America in the 50s, had set the scene for stuff that was happening over here in the 80s etc, etc and that so it was all about all the kind of language around all of those sorts of posters and I mean and this was just after the 1992 election, so I don't know if you remember it there was erm... one of the Tory posters was labour's policy on arms and it was a soldier like in surrender like that, and so stuff like that really intrigued me at the time and I was quite political at various points and it sort of intrigued me that whole language and I think it's you know it's those barriers have now been eroded really in the sense that we always, we understood labour supported the NHS because that was part of the mythology around it wasn't it, semiotic kind of language. Whereas now you know, the Tories you know you could argue the Tories have done good things for the NHS but because they are perceived not to care about the NHS everyone thinks they don't care and they are doing it, and probably the truth is somewhere in the middle isn't it but, erm... so it was very much around the point like it wasn't worth labour talking about defence because they could never win because the Tories were perceived to be the...

### **The party of defence and law and order and all that.**

**Subject C:** Exactly and, it was erm... it was almost like well, you know how could labour ever kind of walk that, how could labour ever talk about economic policy or defence, because they weren't perceived to be their strong points so yes it was all about that really so, so yes there was a part where we had kind of a, we had a class, we had a kind of weekly class that talked about all of this kind of erm... you know the semiotics around advertising language and things like that.

### **Social semiotics.**

**Subject C:** Yes, yes. Not very many people took it very seriously in my class I have to say.

### **Really.**

**Subject C:** But I was one of the few who did and erm... yes, but I think they were designers you see and I was an art director and there was a difference there so,

**Do you now today, do you refer to any text any theoretical text in this area, in your work or is this stuff in the past you know it and you get on with your job?**

**Subject C:** I think for me there was like a huge kind of erm... shock actually, a cultural shock, there was a cultural shock where,

### **An epiphany?**

**Subject C:** Yes well you kind of, you go to Uni and everyone is talking about the hip designers and these you know these writers and these cultural things that are all going on, and then you go and get a job, and everyone is talking about football and fighting and porn and like brawling and birds and it is, and that kind of like cultural intellectual aspect of life just doesn't exist in agencies in the way that it did at university which is sort of obvious I think but, you know I mean as a point of interest, when discussing your appointment, my business partner who is an intelligent, rationale degree university educated man, sort of said he asked me what semiotics was and I am like don't you know, he was like no because he is not from, he doesn't have that kind of capacity, he doesn't have that background or learning. It is not that he is not capable of understanding what it is. But it is just not part of his training or consideration really. So,

**Could you just talk me through the process, when you get a brief for a new ad and you have got a lot of leeway to do what you want, can you just talk to me briefly about your creative approach, your philosophy and what goes through your mind when you get the brief? Start from the beginning of it.**

**Subject C:** I think, I mean I talked about how you kind of cope with a brief, erm... I mean I rarely get briefs now because we are not that kind of business, but what I will do is I will speak to a client, and drag a brief out of them, ((laughs)) just using my experience really. But I think there is always, there is always a point to a brief, and it is about finding what is relevant to the customer or the prospect or the client erm... I mean we do you know a lot of what we do isn't I would say how can I put this, there is probably 4 or 5 agencies (45.00) in London doing all the kind of really clever headline driven, high concept sort of multi-million pound budget stuff and then there is everyone else we are part of that everyone else mix. I mean a lot of our clients are business to business clients, so we work for erm... we work for a theatre and drape business, who are actually I mean they are in the top 5 of that type of company in the world but when we do work for them and we have just redone their catalogue and rebranded them and created a new website from scratch and it is very much an international facing things so you can't afford to be too clever and too sort of obtuse with your language or you can't play on cultural sort of references too much because someone in Shanghai probably won't understand what you are trying to get at. But I mean I think, I think erm... most clients have great difficulty in condensing what they do into a simple statement. And I see that as my job. I always say, I need to know your business the client's business enough, I

need to know it just enough to understand how I need to express it to someone who doesn't understand it. If that makes sense. So for me, a brief is always a process of simplifying something to its basic broadest terms, but actually that is not an easy thing to do and especially for a client, who can't see the wood for the trees. And usually there is, a brief there is a point to a brief in the sense that it might be I want to sell more yards of fabric or I want to do erm... a theatre refit, here or something of that ilk. Whereas erm... you know actually getting across what they do in very basic terms and erm... wrapping that round into a sort of short statement is actually what, that's what I do really. So I think very, very rarely will I try to do anything clever with language on any of my clients. Because clients don't, don't want that. In my experience. Probably at this highfaluting kind of international coca cola account level, although the language in coca cola is very straight forward as well isn't it to be fair, erm... you know, people don't, clients don't tend to want intellectual spins on things in terms of language, and in terms of concepts. So some clients just don't want concept driven work at all and you just deliver it, you deliver the message for them in a very straightforward clear way. So, I don't know if that has answered your question but I think it is a process of actually stripping away all the bullshit around a brief, drawing it down to brass tacks and trying to get into the shoes of a consumer and understanding what their motivation will be to make a purchase, or buy that service or whatever the point of the actual brief is. So it is very, very kind of erm... action driven. My mind is action driven it is like well who are you, what do you sell, what is the benefit of that, and what do you want me to do. So I think there is, I go through that process and come out with something at the end.

**Right that is interesting because my next question I want to come to, you will start to see where I am going with it in a minute, but something that you sort of mainly answered I think for me, when you are devising an advert, and visualise it, is it sort of is your mental concept, once you get your brief, is it a completed process from the start or is it a building process requiring a lot of changes and refinement over time? Or do you see it from the start?**

**Subject C:** Erm... I think, I think I would say most things I can see quite quickly because I have done them before like several times and it is a different spin on a slightly different product or different company etc, etc. So I tend to know what I am doing quite quickly.

**So you have a mental template in place?**

**Subject C:** Yes

**And it varies according to the particular...**

**Subject C:** I have kind of, yes. I have done, I mean I remember going to WWAV the company in Leeds and being given a brief, a financial services brief and I remember being in this brief and being utterly, utterly confused one of the first jobs I ever did at WWAV and I thought whoa way out of my depth here, I have not got a clue what they are talking about and it was fine because the copywriter went oh yes (50.00) I know what that is. Went away and wrote it, gave me the copy and I took the copy and looked at the brief again and thought, oh yes that is what they mean. And the copywriter had done that job and I was, as an inexperienced art director at that point I was like ... and it took me about 6 months to kind of get what that process was and then start doing it for myself but I was very grateful to these very experienced copywriters that they showed me the way in many ways. And I think it is really interesting like, people at that point, people were anyone, everyone can write can't they, everyone I mean in my experience now everyone is a designer, everyone can do design, no you can't. Erm... but everyone can write so a copywriter would quite often produce a really nicely crafted piece of copy, and then the account handlers would come over and make a load of amends, and then the client would do the same and the copywriters were hugely, hugely abused in my opinion and I couldn't believe that the copywriters didn't stand up for their work more as I did in graphic design terms at that point. So I think, like, and that was probably the type of company where I was at that the time of direct marketing very sort of like scientific and kind of crafted and focussed, and the copy was almost the bit that everyone could have a bit of fun on, who weren't in the creative department because everyone can write can't they. And normally at best it would be like you say potato I say potato they just write it in a slightly different way, but normally they would make it kind of significantly worse ((laughs)) and I think erm... copy what I mean certainly my experience was abused by meddlers, mad meddlers a lot but it tended to be the sort of more the body copy rather than the headline stuff. They would leave me alone actually to a level but then really stick the boot in with the copywriters ((laughs)) and change it, what was your question I can't remember your question.

**Yes whether you see it as a completed from the start or whether it is a building process.**

**Subject C:** Yes so I suppose what I was saying was at that point I took that brief I was out of my depth, I needed the copy to show, I needed the copywriter to show me. Now if you gave me that brief I have probably done it, I have probably done I mean I have got 20 I would have graduated 23 years I think in September or no round about now isn't it actually when you graduate, graduated in 93, no 22 years so I have probably seen that brief before, at some point because I have never, I have never taken a break from this sector I have always worked in this job. So, the process now is I have always got something to reference that I have done previously so that kind of working out that that copywriter had to do for me, I already kind of know that in my head.

**That working out that you have just mentioned there, what does it actually entail, that is what I am trying to sort of really dig into.**

**Subject C:** I think it is what as I said before it is like stripping away all the bullshit.

**To the real purpose of it?**

**Subject C:** Yes,

**Was the creative process [53.30]**

**Subject C:** Quite often with a client, I am trying to think of a good example of a client we have got, they might, so we work with a shipping consultancy, at the moment who are an international outfit, and again we rebranded them last year and erm... we did their website and we have just actually when I was on the phone, we have just done an e-mail communication this morning out to their database which has gone out which I wrote and designed. And, erm... interestingly if they give you a brief they will say I want to do a communication to my database and I want to talk about pre-purchase vessel inspections and I want to talk about dry docking and I want to talk about flag administration and I want to talk about, and I want to talk about, and I want to talk about and don't forget to mention this. And we are in Shanghai and in Dubai and it is like whoa, and I think part of my job again is to say actually if someone is going to read an e-mail, at best they are going to glance at it, in the way that people glance at that letter, that direct mail letter and there is a lot of similarities between what direct mail did on the skills I learnt then and what happens now in on-line comms. People at best will see a visual, that will hopefully tell them what the theme is, they will see a headline that will set it and there will be some subheads within that letter that they can scan, (55.00) and then they will delete it or they will go to something else. If they are really interested they will then read that letter and press on a link and it is about you know a client and account handlers generally will want to do something but they will want to talk about 20 things, it is my job to say no, no you need to speak about 1 thing, you need to be really, really focussed about one aspect of that communication and get across one point on the basis that someone is only going to take 3 seconds to look at it. So on e-mail for instance, as a communication platform the subject line is really, really important. I mean obviously there are, if you use free sex chocolate kind of, if you use the word free or sex or any kind of overtly salesy language in a subject line it will just go into a spam box so you have got to be careful about what you say but that line can really, really affect whether that e-mail is deleted or opened. So, there is, it is, so language is like vitally important to the success of a communication on-line in the e-mail sense and I think, and that is again like you can only write well about one thing I would say, and it is

a process of saying well this is who you are, this is what you are good at, this is what you do, this is what you want the client to do, and it is one thing and it is a sort of, but a client will naturally want to talk about all 15 things they do. And so, it is almost like a corralling, it is a job of corralling the information and using the right sort of thing. So the programme we are doing, there is, the e-mail that went out today, is the first of a 5 stage e-mail, communication. So there is an e-mail going out, once a week for the next 5 weeks, and that programme is going to build up a story of all the things they do. And work as a kind of drip feed in terms of all of the 15 things they do are going to be encapsulated in all of these e-mails but not at the same time.

**So what do you headline then?**

**Subject C:** What's what?

**Going back to your headline then, you have got one shot really to make that immediately relevant, to the reader.**

**Subject C:** Yes

**And if it is not relevant to them it goes in the bin.**

**Subject C:** Yes that is direct mail yes, which is the same with...

**That is very interesting to my work, that is very interesting. I will speak more about that later.**

**Subject C:** Ok

**The next one really and again it is a generic question for all advertisers I don't know if it applies to you, it possibly does do, to what extent does your approach differ according to whether you are promoting a brand, that is your main issue, getting your brand known or advertising a specific product.**

**Subject C:** Yes erm...

### **Is there a difference?**

**Subject C:** There is erm... yes there is a difference yes. Erm... because quite often, erm... quite often you know products will be defined by service around it, regardless of how good or not that product is. We have one client actually who, this is more a branding thing, we have one client who we did a research piece around erm... it was about 2 years ago now. We had more staff then. Erm... and essentially they're a business who are reseller for a really well known software product, in industrial automation boring subject but basically if you have got a production line, and you are making jam tarts the jam that pops into the middle of the tart has to be 56% Fahrenheit hot, if it is 45 it won't set properly, if it is too hot it will burn the pastry underneath it, so their software automates all the processes in an industrial process. So, that, see I have explained that to you in 20 seconds, they couldn't explain it in those terms, so my job is to understand what they do and tell it to you in a really simple way. The difference is, with them is that they are often talking to kind of process engineers who understand all the ins and outs of it, but and I still don't really understand what they do, but I understand it enough to tell you what they do ((laughs)) which is, which is the process that I had to go through. But they would struggle to tell you that in those terms.

So to go back to it, so they are a business based in Manchester, sort of 20 million pound turnover business, work internationally, erm... got this really, really well known piece of software which is like the industry standard in many ways, or it is one of the industry standards. It is not quite, it is not quite a coca cola, it is not pepsi (1:00:00) but it is probably a virgin cola type in terms of analogy. They are actually defined by that product. Now that product is a software, it is a piece of software, and it will do certain things, but what they do is they provide the support and the kind of training, to deliver this product. That that makes it is like that product buy that product from us, we do all of this around it. Products is a great, product there is lots of other products that are great products, there is lots of other businesses who will sell you those products, but the reason you buy that product from us is the service level around it. So, it can vary, but and that was an example of when they have to be connected because sometimes, it is like, it is like shopping at Lidl, isn't it. Shopping at Tesco I don't know if you have shopped at Lidl and Tesco, in the UK recently you go into Tesco everything is probably 30% more expensive, and but there is lots of staff on the checkouts so you don't have to wait very long and they are usually like quite tidy and clean and polite and you walk out having paid 30% more. You go to Lidl it is a lot cheaper but there is one cashier on, there is a massive queue, got to pay for your own carrier bags, like, service customer service is like non-existent almost but you accept it because you are paying a lot less for it. So, I think, I think there is a very clear difference between what you are selling, and what those products are. And then, and then the company who deliver that. So I don't know if that has answered your question.

**Yes, I was just, how your approach as advertiser would differ if you were... you were there to support a brand, we want to get out brand known to the public out there versus well we have [01.01.52] new baked beans with a chilli sauce on them, they are really nice and we want to get those out to the people, want people to go and taste them.**

**Subject C:** I think it varies from client to client to be honest. I mean we work for a furniture retailer who are erm... again, they are not, there is the big 5 furniture retailers in the UK like DFS, SCS and people like that they are number 6 in the UK. So they are a big outfit but not nationally known they are very regionalised. And when we do work for them it is all about product. So it is sofas basically, and it is all about this sofa at that price, and that is how much you save, and isn't this a great sofa. Like the other concerns around their service levels and their shops being this standard or that standard is irrelevant, to them in that advertising.

**So they are transmitting information really. That is what they are doing.**

**Subject C:** Basically and it isn't and we have, we have attempted to sort of do brand building things with them and we have attempted to kind of you know why would you go and buy a sofa from Laura Ashley, because it is Laura Ashley. Why do you go to Ikea, because it is cheap you don't brag to your mates you have got an Ikea sofa, do you and we have attempted to do an amount of brand work with them, and they are like they have got like a sales mentality, they are not interested at all. So any attempt to kind of deliver a branded campaign with intellectual content it is like, a picture of a sofa, picture of a sofa, a price point and a saving point and isn't this a great sofa. It is made of this type of leather, and it has got this protractible bit, isn't it great for this price, bang that is it. So it can vary very much but I mean interestingly the erm... the marine shipping consultancy I mentioned earlier, they are all about quality of the service, you know there is other people who do what they do, but it is thoroughness of what they do and actually their big selling point is the clarity of the reporting around what they do. So speaking to people in layman's terms. So they will do this big complex technical ship inspection, but they were, their position is that they work for a lot of like financial entities, so they need to speak to the finance, these people in charge of these financial entities in a certain way not in a kind of technical way it is using layman's language as such so laymen's terms. So but they are all about the service, about the kind of standards that they kind of get over.

**Right you have answered that question thank you. Do you actually consciously think about semiotics when you are actually designing ads now or does it occur to**

**you, do you reflect back to what you were taught? Or is it now just second nature and instinctive and intuitive and so on?**

**Subject C:** I think, I think it would be intuitive, really erm... I think, I think at the level we work, I think very, very few clients want a sort of clever (1:05:00) semiotic kind of approach to what they do.

**You don't pull out Barthes or**

**Subject C:** No I think that erm...it's, obviously this is anonymous isn't it as such.

**Of course it is yes.**

**Subject C:** Yes I mean I think the ((laughs)) I am turning round just in case the marketing manager who works here is in here, erm... I think, I don't know if this is just me getting old and getting cynical, and becoming bitter I don't think it is. I think the level of intellectual, marketing used to be an expensive thing to do and be in. Like in my WWAV days in Leeds in the sort of late to mid 90s, mid to late 90s like you know we were doing print runs of half a million, on a DM piece. You know we would maybe charge 10 grand per mailing, for the creative it was big, it was big cost, it was big print runs there was big stakes, erm... I mean my erm... my record in terms of a print run is 22.5 million. I mean I would say I haven't done a print run bigger than 1000 for quite some time now. So your entry level is vastly different to what it was, so whereas it used to be an industry full of professionals, I would say now it is an industry that has professionals at various levels but is full, is full of people who don't really know what they are doing and that, so I think the industry has been deskilled, de-intellectualised, and the content is almost becoming less impressive and that is why I think my skills are actually becoming more relevant because I know, I have done, Barthes, I have got Barthes I have done... Jackie Walsh, I will seek it out and I will e-mail you. Erm... and I think the intellectual content, marketing has become kind of it is almost like I am going to sound really, really patronising now, but it has become the kind of choice of people who aren't hugely academic who want a bit of fluff around what they do and it's kind of like there is a lack of, there is a real lack of, of professional rigour within marketing as a, and if anything on-line has made it worse. Anyone can put up a website, anyone can call themselves a website designer now they don't have to be, I can call myself a designer because I went to university and I have done the job for 20 years, but I will be up against some kid who has never been to art college or never done a degree in design, he will be like oh yes I am a website designer and what he does is knows how to use WordPress.

## **Semi-skilled.**

**Subject C:** He is semi-skilled. So I think the industry has been massively, massively deskilled. And, erm... as a, as a for instance, and this is like life in the regions I guess I mean, I am, we are probably able to charge about half what we were able to charge 10 years ago for our time, so I mean don't get me wrong it is still an interesting job and it is still engaging in a way that working in a supermarket isn't but, whereas you know I would say there is still a lot of money in it for the big firms doing that highfaluting stuff, and driving the work with big brands, but there has been a real move to kind of in-house services now. So even the software that we use has become easier to use and, the level of knowledge to operate the software has become deskilled anyone can like knock-out a double sided flier now it is, so the work we tend to get is actually more complicated, intelligent stuff now thankfully and doing that brochure churn, anyone can use word, you can insert a picture into word and type stuff in, people kind of almost think that is design now. So I don't know if you think that, or I don't know if it is just me being bitter...

**No, no when you look at some of the adverts I see in the newspaper from like Asda, I look at those and think I could have written that and I have no experience whatever, I could have done that.**

**Subject C:** So I think your question about semiotics is interesting actually because I think it is becoming like, more brainless to be honest as a business and as an industry and I think you know there will always be that real top echelon of stuff going on, (1:10:00) but I think there is a lot, a lot of shite goes on, a lot of shite and erm... yes that is my professional opinion yes which sounds very bitter I know but there we are.

**No that is only truth. The next one you have answered for me so I won't ask you that one again. Erm... we have talked about that one so I am moving down quicker now erm... if you are advertising to group of people how do you actually identify your target audience, what work do you do for that or is it part of the brief or how does that work?**

**Subject C:** A lot of it is around erm... it is very, very, very relevant and I think a lot of it is around erm...we do a lot of, when we do direct mail a lot of it is around data selection and selecting the right type of data. We tend to do more business to business stuff, so for instance I put a data brief out the other day for something, and it will tend to be around senior decision makers, so director level people in certain sectors, in businesses

of a certain size, in a certain geography and that is the selection so that's from a business to business perspective.

Yes, yes well actually that is probably getting, what we probably do is say we want to start to speak to facilities direct managers and operations directors in these sectors, in these geographies and what is the data count please type thing. If you are doing kind of more erm... consumer stuff, I will go back to our furniture client actually when we did a big, the last big mailing actually which was probably about 4 years ago, 3 years ago that we did was for them and I think it was like, it might have been a couple of 100 thousand or maybe half a million or something like that, it was the last big job we did, and it was basically it was basically a sales leaflet like a double, well a little booklet I guess and it was sent out to a specific audience. So the sofa, furniture client, it is kind of like it is not Laura Ashley, it is not M&S but neither is it sort of bargain basement they are kind of like a middle ground. They are affiliated to the co-op so that gives you an idea. They are not too, they are not too much that, they are very, they are actually right in the middle now I think about it. So their, the data selection around them, was about identifying people of a certain age, or certain age band, of a certain sort of erm... a certain income level, living in certain geographies, so certain drive times of the various stores that we were kind of promoting, so it was more it was less about the kind of intellectual kind of, it wasn't about do they read the Guardian, or do they read the Sun it was more about well if they live in that kind of area, and they are in that kind of house, probably educated to that kind of level, and they are probably the type of person who buys furniture from this store, so it was more around lifestyle and sort of those kinds of indicators rather than being kind of more micro in the kind of cultural sense in terms of you know like lifestyle choices and stuff like that, it wasn't that. But it is to the point where, you know there will be a street there who has a house, houses of a certain sort of size and you know you want 3, you want houses with 2 bedrooms etc because that indicates family blah, blah, blah in certain areas but the street next to it might be a row of council houses for instance. And you wouldn't necessarily mail that street even though it is next to that one, even though they are in the same sort of area. So it is down to that kind of level really.

**Right. Erm...**

**Subject C:** But sorry I will give you another example of stuff we are doing at the moment and this is really interesting and it is again it is about language, well it is about audience. So one of the best platforms at the moment, one of the best platforms on-line in terms of like advertising, is Facebook. How do Facebook make their money

**I haven't got a clue.**

**Subject C:** Ok Facebook ok, so I am on Facebook. So Facebook knows that I am 44 years old, yes I am 44 yes. I had to think about that. So Facebook knows I am 44 years old, it knows (1:15:00) I have got an interest in cricket, in literature, in film, in di, di di di di, and it knows I live where I live as well so, Facebook is very good at profiling who you are. Now if you do Facebook advertising you can select very specific age groups and audiences, so we are at the moment doing a campaign which is proving to be very successful and very effective for a university who do a certain type of vocational degree based around the music and entertainment industry basically. And so what we are doing at the moment is we are targeting 17 to 18 year olds, who have got interests in music, in certain geographic locations, who erm... who are probably going to go to, are thinking about higher education, further education. So we are doing a very targeting campaign so you won't see these ads, if you are 22 if you are 18 you will. So we have located an age group, in certain geographies around where this university is, but also gone into what their kind of cultural interests are, because we know they need to be quite technical because it is like it is basically like erm... stage management, visual productions type things. So they need to be a bit arty, they need to be a little bit technical as well they are probably going to be interested in music, and entertainment and film and things like that, and we know they need to be the right age in this, and we know that they need to be kind of looking to go to university and stuff like that as well. Which, you know, we are funnelling this campaign to that very, very small sort of distinct audience and that campaign is working like [01.16.56] the sign-ups are going very, very well. So, and that is a very, that is like direct marketing so that is about like writing the right kind of ad, and we have come up with a campaign concept. It is one of the nicest bits of work we have done actually in terms of concept driven stuff and it is all about erm...the campaign is called, it is # because it is all online now. #careerslessordinary. And it is all about them doing, taking a degree that will end up in a job where they will be a stage manager for a touring concert that tours the world. So it is very much around what their aspirations are. It is a career less ordinary it is not an office job, it is going to be on the road, it is not going to be 9 - 5, it is going to, you are going to meet popular artists and rock stars and roadies and all that kind of thing, you are a roadie you can be a roadie you know as a result of doing this degree. So and it is very much about tapping into kind of that audiences' sort of aspiration sort of like I don't want to work at Tesco, I don't want to work in a 9-5 job, I want to do something that is going to earn me like a good amount of cash and be an interesting varied career, so I think that is, and encapsulating careers less ordinary as a concept theme, the client bought it absolutely bought it straight away it was like me telling them what their campaign concept is and it was like and I presented it, in a pitch it was one of the first ideas I had, oh yes #careerslessordinary, bang, that is what that is and it was about and they bought it, like they didn't even discuss it they bought it there and then. So, so that is the bit that, that is what...

**That's as specific as you can get is it... yes. So a quick question about this, could you just tell me how do you, what steps do you take to make sure that you, the**

**intended recipient of the advert actually understands it and gets the full point of what you are saying?**

**Subject C:** I just think it's about, again like I said boiling it down to a simple statement that you can understand really quickly. I talk about that, industrial automation software provider what do you do, well ((laughs)) you could sit here for 2 hours, a technical guy would sit here for 2 hours and tell you what they do but if I say oh they control the temperature of the jam that goes in the tarts in an industrial automation process, the software they provide does that, you get it don't you. And I think it is about that is what an ad is isn't it, it is like saying well what do we do, what is the benefit of dealing with us, what how are we going to make your life easier or better or how are we going to make it more interesting and it is almost like, boiling down to that very basic core desire, you know. All these 17 - 18 year old kids what is their core desire, it is to have a really great time at work and earn loads of cash. It is a career less ordinary. And...

**I was thinking back to your mythologies which is what you mentioned there(1:20:00) I mean one of the examples that Barthes gives is erm... Italianicity I don't know if you recall that one.**

**Subject C:** Yes, yes

**Where ...**

**Subject C:** Using red, yellow and green.

**Italian colours this kind of thing for the pasta.**

**Subject C:** Yes do you know that is interesting I remembered that from mythologies and I used it to explain the concept of erm... semiotics to my business partner. I couldn't remember the term Italianicity but I used it as a sort of example.

**Yes it is what he came up with isn't it, and one does wonder, I wonder to some extent is do people see that Italianicity in that advert. Are they getting it that message? It is very cleverly crafted but are they getting it?**

**Subject C:** Yes, yes I think it is interesting isn't it, it is not just through language is it, it is through visual language as well, and I mean this, the e-mail I did this morning for the shipping consultancy it has got, erm... a 5 point, there is 5 points why their service is better than anyone else's, and I wrapped it up as a 5 star guarantee, so the opening line was guaranteed by [01.21.07] the company and then I have got 5 stars so I am using visual language to reinforce...

### **Signify what Barthes...**

**Subject C:** Yes and I very much doubt whether anyone will read through the 5 points but they will see 5 star guarantee, and 5 lovely like silver stars looking nice and classy, and they will go oh yes, yes. Oh yes they must be good because they guarantee it. What do they guarantee well we never actually say really ((laughs)) but it is just getting the, it's just getting across really quickly that they are someone who can be trusted. That's basically it is like are you going to make me look stupid in front of my boss, is often a core kind of concern for people buying professional services. You know it is the IBM thing, you know no one gets fired for buying IBM do they and it is like you have to almost position your client as the IBM of whatever their world is, so. But as I say it is like I say it is through visual language as much as erm... as words and I think that's where you know, a graphic designer would just think visually I think and I think an art director or a creative director would think about how that visual can combine with a message to make it more powerful and work harder and be clearer.

**Do you make a particular point of using icons in fact you have just told me you have, haven't you, you have used some icons in your stars. Obviously you have a mental collection of these that you can call upon and...**

**Subject C:** I think yes, I think you know if you can make, if you can visualise something and make it clear, I think people will always look at visuals first, and then they will look at words second, so if you can combine an apt visual with the right kind of language then you are doing your job very quickly.

**So you make an association between the visual, and a word or two or a phrase or something like that?**

**Subject C:** Yes, yes.

**And the two operates as a combine unit to create a combined meaning?**

**Subject C:** Yes so whereas I think like I go back to my old days of working with copywriters they would, some of them would think visually and the guy who was brilliant but burnt out was very, very visual in terms of the way he thought but a copywriter some copywriters would just write what the brief was but not visualise it in any way. One copywriter I used to work with actually erm... did, really he would always provide a scamp, a drawing of the way he would think it would work visually, not necessarily in terms of styling but in terms of hierarchy, and he would, he was a stick... he did stick men drawings and they were hilarious really but he, he would seek to visualise what he was trying to get across through these really rubbish drawings but they actually once I saw them and saw his copy that I knew instantly what he was after and he was the guy who was in that original the example where I didn't know what the job was, and he gave me the copy and I understood it. He was the first good copywriter I worked with, he really taught me a lot of the ropes and yes. So yes when, when it is like the Italian stuff isn't it, when it gets visual and combines with [01.24.31] that is when it is at its most powerful.

**The last question really then, because I think you have answered everything else erm... do you, I think you even have answered this, I am just it is a question really about pre-existing knowledge of the customer. And how many assumptions, what kind of assumptions do you make about that and how do you verify those assumptions are correct, because they must have some knowledge otherwise they are not going to understand your ads surely.**

**Subject C:** About the end consumer?

**Yes**

**Subject C:** Sorry just repeat the question.

**Yes I am looking at the area I was thinking,(1:25:00) in order to make sense of your adverts you must assume some pre-existing knowledge.**

**Subject C:** Yes

**And how do you sort of check that out or do you, or what assumptions do you make about that?**

**Subject C:** I think that is a gut feel thing really. I think erm... I think, sometimes, sometimes it is not just a selling job, it is an education job as well and erm... we have done a lot of work with a health supplement business, over the years and erm... and they are not the Boots end of supplements, they are not like you know 3 packs for a fiver sort of end they do some very sort of, very they work with doctors to put quite kind of sophisticated products together for very specific kind of health concerns and issues. And, often the issues we will come up with when he does something, is that no one knows about the product, no one knows about why you should, there isn't any inherent knowledge in the market of the product. He is a trail blazer, he will put this new product together, and everyone is going why the fuck do I need that, I don't understand why I need that. And, and when I do work for him, there is often an education job to go with it, which means you can't do it as a complete sell, sell, sell because you have got to educate an audience about the particular product first. So he works in, he does a lot of erm... like erm... so he works in the field of fish oils and omega 3, and it is like you might understand what omega 3 is and why it is important or not but most people have a vague sense that fish and fish oil is good for them but they don't know why, and they will go to Boots and buy 3 tubs for a quid or whatever it is, and what they are taking is more fish fat than omega 3, but they don't really understand what bit of the omega, what bit of the fish they need or the fish oil they need. So that is an educational process erm... but to do, to get that across and then sell is really hard, because you have got to kind of, you have got to do it in a staged way and unfortunately, this client his pockets aren't deep enough to do that job quite frankly. Even though he has, he has created a set of products that are absolutely brilliant really, but he just it is just too difficult to get it across.

**Market it effectively.**

**Subject C:** Yes

**Can't afford to market it.**

**Subject C:** Exactly so, I mean his fish oil, a tub of his fish oil will be like £25 but it will be, it will be like an individual capsule might be 10 times more effective than the rubbish that you buy at Boots but everyone sees £25 tub, 3 tubs for a fiver, what are you going to buy. So, yes that is an instance when that you have to do the education bit before you start selling and it is, that is difficult that. And it is that is really hard to do. And erm... and quite often as well, there is, like the benefits of taking fish oil are so long and varied,

that it is not an easy concept to get across, very quickly either, so I mean I would like to think I have done some good stuff for him over the years, but it is really very, he actually values what I do, because I can kind of my job is to simplify him, is to simplify the benefits of his products. And the doctor who is connected with that brand he actually called me a genius at one point, and I am like I am not a genius you are a genius and this doctor is as clever as hell, and he is like he deals with like treatments for addicts, that are kind of beyond the understanding of most GPs, and therefore he is like he is on the verge of being struck off half the time because he is so advanced in his thinking, and he thinks I am a genius because I can kind of boil down the products that they are making, into simple terms whereas he had got the 28 reasons why you should do it in his head, while I say no you can talk about all this. And I am not a genius what I am doing is going through that mental process of simplification and condensing it into a paragraph but it appears genius because he can't think like that ((laughs)) in that sense. So yes.

**Thank you that's been absolutely marvellous, I have got lots of...**

## **SUBJECT D**

**Subject D:** So the thought processes is quite an interesting one. Everyone has got, I don't think there is a particular right or wrong way of doing it, for a start point. I mean my erm... old lecturer erm... very inspiring chap who literally used to see shadows on the wall, and shapes and things like that and suddenly go oh if we did that, his, he opened your mind to the potential that could be there. So I think the key thing is, what I have learnt from that was that actually ideas can come from anywhere at any point. You have to just be open enough to accept that there is an idea there or that park it in your head, write it down, somehow record it and make a mental note of it, that then will actually come to life at some point. And that might be at some point in 6 months, a year, 6 years you just don't know and I think you know your mind, what I do now with the purpose of the digital world I used to always keep a scrapbook because a scrapbook was just my, my things that inspire me ads that I thought were fantastic, lines, imagery, colours, typography, all worlds of different forms of inspiration erm... that eventually unravel themselves at some point whether that was conscious or subconscious which I think the subconscious mind is playing an awful lot to do what we do. Erm... you can actually I have caught myself doing once or twice where you come with an idea you think it is completely original and then maybe what you have done subconsciously you have seen something two weeks prior to that on a programme, caught 5 seconds of it, and that has registered in your head. I think you need to be mindful of what is going on, in the world, you need to be on trend and if not trying to keep ahead of trend, erm... you need to keep yourself up to speed and always never think at whatever stage you are at, this is what I have always erm... taught myself that, you never know all the answers, erm... there is always probably a better way to do something, surround yourself by a

mixture of youth, energy, experience and individuals from all different walks of life, erm... and that lends itself to a beautiful mix of different thoughts coming into play. Don't always think you are right, that is a crucial thing is, sometimes your gut feeling is right, and that has proved me very successful through the course of time. But also I have been wise enough to understand when to actually step back and recognise that even though my idea is on the table, a better idea is done by a guy over here or a girl over, it is just being open minded enough to that particular thought. And that idea actually what I try to say to people is you can think one mind can think well, 2 minds always thinks better, 3 minds always thinks better again, if you bounce the ideas around it is a bit like a nurturing machine within the brain to try and find this holy grail of a beautiful idea. To do that sometimes it is actually then knowing when to stop and I think that's, that is a secret and a tip within itself is don't overbake the cake. Don't keep going and going and going and if we did, it is knowing that that point the skill is to recognise when the idea is perfect, it's peaked. This is it guys don't procrastinate any more, now it is a case of let's be decisive let's go ok, we all know, the good thing is everyone has got excited by this idea here, let's now we have got an idea here, that we have got like an excellent sort of start point, now let's execute with excellence, so it is pointless having a beautiful idea that then you don't craft and execute as well as you possibly can do. So again you have people with the different skill sets to come in and then build that beautiful idea to convey the on brand message for what people see in magazines, on-line, on TV commercials or anything like that. But it is a lot of recognising points and I think that is the crucial part that a lot of people are capable of erm... coming up with a genius idea, but half the time they don't realise they are doing it or saying it, it is actually just having that, that sort of like confidence in yourself to actually know well what you said there, not the other bits I think if you go back one step and what you said there about that, that little insight that observation, that was really beautiful what we did there, if we take that insight and observation and then we actually apply it over here and do a little bit of a twist almost like mirroring it around then you have got something really original and fresh. And I think a lot of that is just the point being there, there is no set way of actually coming up with an idea in my head I think there is a number of different processes, sometimes you can be in the middle of watching a movie in the cinema relaxing lost in the moment and then you see something or something just comes in your head and then you think wow, that's it I need to remember that or that, that point there, that, that transition, that sort of way that the way the light hit that person there the way that colour ways, that animation sequence well we could apply that to the campaign I am working on right now. So it is being mindful of all those different touch points that you could just be at any point it could be interacting with your child (05.00) it could be playing a game it could be just the moment when you are probably most responsive to great thinking is actually when you relax and when you are actually let your mind unwind. If you actually sit in a room and think I have got to think of something I have got to think of something I don't think you will, I think you need to handle that pressure that moment and train your mind to be susceptible to open it is like it's a giant sponge it is a sponge of light that has been immersed in thousands, millions of images, of words, of sounds, of colours and it is just knowing when to sort of like how you actually get that sort of like all going and mixing in the right way. And to do that you need, you need a very clear brief, you need to understand the brand or the, the service you are trying to bring to life. Erm... you need to sort of have and be

surrounded by people who are like minded, in many ways but at the same time different. And I think that is the key is you need the differences in the people, you need people who are open and respectful of one another, bouncing those ideas around is really critical and a lot of people erm... people say there is no such thing as a bad idea, I think unfortunately there are some bad ideas, but I think, I think it is the way you respond to that and you actually don't highlight that. You know there might not be a great idea in that but what you said that wording there that led you immediately to something else, so it's all little gentle stepping stones in the mind that lead you to the actual great point in the end.

**Right. Thanks for that yes.**

**Subject D:** Does that make sense?

**It does indeed, yes. I have got a little bit of a questionnaire, [06.34] not miss anything out and also for consistency of good research so I ask everyone the same questions. Some of them you will have perhaps already answered or half answered.**

**Subject D:** No, no, no I have literally just said it as my mind sort of goes.

**That fine. I will let you free flow, [06.49] I can pick the bones out of that later on.**

**Subject D:** Well hopefully there is one or two nuggets in there.

**Definitely yes, yes. I will start off with, I have got a questionnaire, I will start off with the questions about you personally if that is alright. My first question is by what route did you enter the advertising industry what is your background?**

**Subject D:** Oh my background I was top of year in advertising graphics, erm... and I just won a national advertising student award, erm... so I was encouraged by my lecturer at 20 years old to not go on and do a BA ironically even though I probably academically I wanted to get a BA behind me, he said what you need to do right now is while you have got this footprint into London and you have got the big guys taking notice, you have been judged by some very big names on the jury of like and they have awarded you a very, very good, very high end student accolade go now, use that as a start point as a

catalyst for your career and believe me unfortunately as hard as it is for a lecturer to say this, no one will ever ask you what grade you got in my line of work, I know it is slightly different if you are a nuclear physicist or something like that, but in the line of work we do, your way forward [08.04] the thing that formulates any job is your portfolio of work. Your portfolio of work can be done, I have seen it be done by some erm... not necessarily very educated people high end degree sort of, but they have got a great mind. And they have got a great way of actually coming into, and the department the creative department is made up like a football team, of different people with different skill sets you need people to play different roles at different times, and I think you know that, that traditional way in of a lot of jobs where you need a law degree, you need this degree, so that is absolutely appropriate and right for those careers but what I was advised by the guy who headed the course was right now you are top of your course, you are getting a distinction, you just won an advertising award you and your partner right now, at 20 years old need to really go for it and I took his advice. Really, really hard slog middle of the recession in 1992, but we eventually got it and we made our first job before we were 21 [09.30] so it was great.

**What was the course you mentioned?**

**Subject D:** The course was HND in advertising and graphics at Stockport college.

**Right ok that is interesting. Do you recall any particular texts that relate to advertising that you used in your studies?**

**Subject D:** Erm... not text I think we were very much encouraged to do, we did a lot of art history erm... very much I loved all the surrealists erm... movement I think that was quite inspiring thing for me, seeing Dali and all those guys very much a lot of the art movements are quite inspiring. Erm... creative review campaign the modern artist I guess as they probably were deemed to be, erm... inspired me more I think because we were immersed in a world of advertising at the time it was Haagen Daz it was, Boddington's it was these were the artists of today and I think they were my major inspiration. I want to emulate those guys they were my Messis of the advertising world (10.00) if you like and I want to be like them.

**Right ok. So in terms of the actual art of copywriting of writing up ads is there any particular books that you recall being used?**

**Subject D:** I think Ogilvy and Advertising was a great one, erm... all the anything with Bernback, they were fantastic to read as well, erm... those sort of literature side of

things we were encouraged to not necessarily sit down and read lots and lots of things like this but just immerse ourselves in the world of what we enjoyed and that world erm... was could be anything from lyrics from the Happy Mondays to where your inspiration can come you know. I think music was a big form of inspiration for me, erm... the pop culture itself, the sporting culture because it was my, my background is sport. My inspiration was not like a traditional literature journey it was more a case of a cultural journey if that makes sense.

**It does, yes, yes. That is great. Do you recall you learnt about semiotics?**

**Subject D:** Yes we were learnt a small amount about semiotics but I think my career as it has progressed I guess I have learnt more and more about semiotics and the importance of how they are and what they do and like you need to be mindful of what happens with those and erm... and be tailoring things into, to suit that in the way that we are.

**What kind of semiotics did you learn about then or do you think about today?**

**Subject D:** Good question. ((laughs)) Deep question. Erm... I think the individual cultural ones, the way people are, the way they react, erm... you know how cultural inferences can sort of like erm... impact on those. Erm... the different trends which are coming through all those need to inform how you actually go about talking to people, erm... in a certain way from when I advertise Xbox you need to understand all the Emos all the different sort of like people you are talking to, it is not just one audience it is like all different waves of people coming through and sometimes no one message strikes everybody does it let's face it.

**Indeed not and that is something we are going to talk about in a little while that aspect, try to develop that a bit more with you. So you are seemingly familiar with cultural semiotics and this kind of thing did you learn about Barthes and this kind of thing Roland Barthes?**

**Subject D:** No, no.

**Ok do you use any text now if you are [12. 41] ads do you ever refer to text or is it just your experience?**

**Subject D:** I think, unfortunately with over 20 years I guess of doing I think I just tap into my experience more than anything. I, I am very mindful I am very, I have read you know like the D&AD of this world have been my bibles the like I say the Craig(?) Reviews understanding all the awards, immersing myself in that world of what is great, the Economist advertising, great words from that point of view, that they are the words that influence me. Reading books erm... like the Ogilvy erm... I mean they are the influence as well. John Heggarty I read his great, you know they are great books as well his language he uses again he is a massive hero of me erm... he was like the ultimate sort of guy when I was growing up he was like the God of advertising, erm... and I wanted to be, I would loved to have worked for someone like that because he struck me as a completely inspiring erm... very really well mannered, very gifted, very bright, very calming sort of chap who just produced genius and they were, they were the biggest influences for me and my generation.

**Thank you. Ok you have, the next part of this is about forming ideas and I think you have already sort of explained that very thoroughly for me erm... because the question would have been explain the process of forming ideas for new ads which I think you have just done that anyway.**

**Subject D:** Yes

**There was the brainstorming process, the way that you work with other people, throwing ideas around,**

Subject D: Yes

**So I think we have pretty much covered that, erm... is there anything you want to add about your philosophy of your daily work?**

**Subject D:** Erm... my philosophy I think erm... constantly look to strive and be better erm... don't believe you know all the answers because no one does. Look at what is happening in the world, lift your head up away from your laptop, away from your computer. Erm... I have three young children who are 11, 13 and 9 seeing their world unravel and the way they are, the way they interact with their friends, how their life is changing how they are looking at their world, opens my world in a different way. So being a parent influences my world and my thoughts. I still have a love and a passion to do great thinking. As long as that remains I think I will strive, want to be the best but I still think there is better to come and maybe hopefully 10, 15, 20 years (15.00) down the line I might still think that, but that, my philosophy is definitely try and look to be

better. Look to improve, look at new things, never stop learning. I never stop learning I have learnt something new every day and like you know but it is being mindful enough and open minded, that you can learn even from a young person who can join the team you can learn, they can teach me things I would never even dream of. Like I, vice versa I can teach them different things. It is that mix of different skill sets and different mind-sets, coming in that creates great greatness.

**Right great. When you are devising an ad, you get a brief, you have got an ad is it something that you come up with fairly quickly or is it a gradual process a building process?**

**Subject D:** Erm... that is a very good question. I think there is not one answer. I think sometimes you get there very, very quickly, someone once told me this is a very true saying the difference between someone off the street and someone professional in the business we are in is that someone off the street can come with something genius, or nothing someone professional can come with something genius or something. You like to think you are always going to come with genius every single time. Certain briefs, certain restraints, budgets, timings, the brief being over complicated, having several propositions, not just one, trying to sort of leverage every single point, touch point instead of having a primary sort of like thing. The simpler the brief, you will always get there quicker and you will always do far greater creative work. Modern briefs now, clients tend to over think them, erm... my experience [16.40] the better clients understand what we need to do, the brief is a springboard, a catalyst for the creative imagination if you over complicate a brief, you actually over complicate the end product so erm... for want of a better phrase, if the brief is rubbish to start with chances are you are probably going to get something quite rubbish at the other end, or something professional. If you want brilliance you need to do a lot of work with strategy, insight, distilling all the client information, looking at the... looking at all the things out there, being culturally aware, being aware of the landscape of the competitors who are out there, so all those things need to be mashed together to create a great brief. Once that brief is started the great brief will always, you can always tell a great brief when it is briefed in because people can't wait for the people to leave the room because they are ready to go. That is the secret. If you get that sort of brief you will get to, you will get to great solutions quickly. Even while someone is talking, and briefing you I am already thinking about what that can be, so that is a great brief. If you get a brief that is really convoluted, erm... that is when your problem kicks in and that's when it becomes harder and harder, it becomes like more of a convoluted end product which can take far longer. Brilliance actually my understanding of brilliance and my experience of it, can strike you very, very quickly if you have got really, really clever people briefing you who have distilled it down, who are clever planners, who are clever individuals who know what they need to feed and seed into creative to get the magic at the other end. That is hard, that is the hard bit, to write a fantastic inspiring brief is the secret to great creativity.

**So basically it is distilling it down, to the actual core of it, get rid of all the extraneous stuff and developing that.**

**Subject D:** Yes and that is the hard bit, is that people don't like letting go of things it is like you know sometimes you can write, you see propositions and they are two sentences long you need to write me a proposition that is a few words long to inspire me that I can then immediately I know my, my end product then is much more clear and simpler for me and you will get a much more amazing sort of ad campaign whatever there will be at the end of that. But the magic only takes place when the two are really, really married together.

**That makes sense thank you. This one, this doesn't apply to all advertising people but I think it will be applicable to your thing because you are quite a big firm aren't you?**

**Subject D:** Yes we are pretty big yes.

**The question is to what extent do you approach, is your approach different according to whether you are, your main focus is enhancing a brand or a brand image or whether you are trying to flog a particular specific product.**

**Subject D:** I think it can vary. I mean we, in one day I can actually just be focussed on one particular product and a big of brands. That could be, a particular food item when there is a big fleet of different foods that might be, so I can be as focussed and tailored as that, but other times you are actually doing a brand idea that will be much more extensive, bigger, more time consuming and we will probably dial into different people with different skillsets. So I think again you tailor your solution to whatever is required at that moment in time and that, and that is the secret in a big agency that you have a number of different skilled people, who you can then build the dream team to (20.00) answer that particular problem.

**I am thinking, I mean I am different altogether to this so you will have to forgive me if I am being I am thinking in terms of I was in advertising I would assume that if I am trying to flog Versace as a brand, on the one hand or on the other hand I am Cadburys and I have come up with a whole new chocolate biscuit that is all new flavoured that has got chilli flavour in it or something like that. I would have**

**thought that the actual approach to the two would be quite different. There is no point in telling people that Versace smells nice, or..**

**Subject D:** No, no, no sure. I think that the point you are making is a massively valid one. You need to understand the two brands you have described there are quite polarising so, a lot of the parallels however in what you are saying is absolutely right but is also at the same time there is the thought process and approach to both would be very similar in many ways. What you basically would have is you still need people to immerse themselves and get under the skin of the client brief, understand the brand, understand the competitor landscape, if it is a new product launch like a Cadbury, Cadbury will have a way of doing it, and designed to reach [21.14] and their world. In Versace we need to be more fashion orientated and less more classic advertising line. You need to immediately recognise what you are trying to do there and the audiences you are talking to and how you actually need to engage with them. So yes there are, lots of differences but there is lots of similarities because each will have its own unique audience, its own market place, share, voice, brand, reasoning erm... it will like a Cadbury will have different issues compared to a Versace. So you need to dissect that particular issue and then again tailor it but there will be a lot of the thought processes that goes into both of those that will be very applicable to both. You just come up with a completely different solution in the end. But by coming to this magic, creative funnel and ask a lot of very similar questions but then tailor it as it goes through and then you come up with two completely different but appropriate answers.

**Yes, does brand always play a role, I mean if I invented something new and my name was unknown and I was wanting to flog this particular item my invention, would I have no brand to offer, I have no brand to highlight.**

**Subject D:** Yes but, I think, my answer to that would be brand probably does play a role realistically because people buy brands, we buy into something don't we I mean you know we need to, whether that brand is established like a Cadbury or even the start-up that needs to have a voice. You need to stand for something so the brand has to stand for something that could be value, that could complete premium nature, that could be economical, that could be for every like a Dove, like suddenly Dove reinvented the way beauty came about and Dove was like a campaign for real beauty that itself defined it's market place, share, amongst all the other brands doesn't it. So what it does, it actually defines, who you are, where you are, what you stand for.

**How you differ from the other ones.**

**Subject D:** How you differ from the other ones because that is sort of what marketing is doing, is it is giving you a unique place within that particular sector of market whether you are a car, you have to be a type of car for me to buy into you. So you are a brand whether you like it or not I guess you have to understand that...

**You can't separate it off.**

**Subject D:** Not really no. I mean you might be a small brand, within a giant market share so suddenly you are not against a Ford but your niche within the market. We have to cleverly work out where you sit, what market place you are at, who you are talking to, what demographic, what is the strategy, what is the unique thing we can actually try and unravel for you. When Skoda you know when they actually came with a great line of like there is a waiting list for a Skoda that was unheard of. But because that was just such a great statement that they [24.12] of like spun Skoda as a brand on its head and made it something as if it was a badge that you wanted to have now instead of something you didn't. But that was reinvention of a brand. So there can be so many different ways that ultimately whenever you get anyone coming through, thinking about it now because you are really making me think about it, I don't think there is anything in my head where, there is not one client that comes through the door that isn't a brand in some way shape or form. They might not believe they are but they are a brand because that is what we do, I mean like you know you might be a service, you might, but ultimately a service is another name of a brand isn't it. If you are a bus service, your first bus [24.55] you know you are still a brand so you have to be treated in the right way. So, how are you as a brand are you cost effective, (25.00) are you efficient, are you, you know are you super tasty, are you really cheeky and lovable you know, all those things that unravel a brand you peel away the brand onion or like you pinpoint to the brand eye, all these different terminologies that people will have the clever bit where people pay a lot of money for is actually to give them a really strong stance in a market place to define what the brand is. Once you define what the brand is, what it stands for. PlayStation stands for something completely different to Ford. Ford stands for something completely to... to like a Ferrari. You buy into these brands don't you. I am that type of person whether we like it or not consciously, subconsciously you buy into it.

**I live in Sweden and of course the big brand of car is Volvo**

**Subject D:** Absolutely

**And they certainly are well aware of how their brand is perceived and that is what their, basically the only brand less advertising probably is classified ads.**

**Subject D:** Yes

**Everything else has got brand on.**

**Subject D:** I generally wouldn't go anywhere near classified ads because, I am a big brand thinker so I mean I guess that's what I have made my career doing is re-inventing brands, giving them a point of difference in the market place from I have been lucky enough to work for brands from launching Lynx Apollo Leave a man come back a hero, to Cadburys to coca cola global I have been fortunate enough to work on some of the big world's biggest brands you know you define coca cola different to Dulux paints to, the way I have defined Cadbury biscuits to you know all those brands, they all I mean the beauty of what we do, is what I do and what I love is I love the way to be challenged I love the fact that I am looking at a blank piece of paper, and you look at it and the magic has to unravel so I have got to unravel that somehow by immersing myself in the internet some past work, some great brief, just letting my mind loose into that world, and solving that problem. And I love that challenge the fact that you just, you don't know what the answer is until it just suddenly materialises and then you push it, and then you push it again and then you squeeze it then you stop that is it, that is an.

It is recognising that point and there is so many people who do what we do, it is like anything you have got the Messis of this world and you have got like the Vauxhall [27.26] and you are all people they all would like to think they are Messi, but they are not it is understanding what you are about and how you do it and what you do and as long as I have got that buzz and energy to crack things and solve things. I am a problem solver at the end of the day I am just a sophisticated problem solver who has got lots of amazing people around me and amazing things at my disposal to solve that and engage and make someone's brand stand out above someone else.

**The next question really relates to semiotics. I have asked you if you can explain I think you have covered that in your first answer so I will move on from there. Erm... very, very briefly indeed, I don't want to stop very long on this one, if you just describe for me your routine if you, [28.14] you have got a brief, it is, you have got it, you have agreed it, you are going to do it, what is the first physical thing you are going to do.**

**Subject D:** The first physical thing I am going to do, is I try to clear my head of anything that happens in your life at that moment in time. So you have got to, I have got young children I could have walked out of the house and my daughter is doing sats this week,

my son is over here, my other daughter is doing this over here so it is a busy world we are in, that is my world. My world is like a dad, a husband, coming to work, I have then got the problem somehow my brain is trained and programmed or whatever it will be to somehow just departmentalise that part of my world, at that moment in time. Once I actually read the brief and immerse myself in the brief, I am there I am like in a different zone it is like, it is the way my brain is sort of trained to work. Erm... I have to cut out the daily grind, that we all have let's face it sometimes it is more difficult than others, but I will look at the brief interrogate the brief, to a point that I will ask the questions of the account guys if I am not clear on something, I will immerse myself in the world of the brand. I will do some it could be on-line sort of research, it could be looking at the website, looking how the competitor is doing stuff, look at other sectors who are maybe doing something similar to sort of get my mind in that, into that sort of like state where it is starting to flow with some creative thinking. Maybe not just form the ideas just yet but I am starting to get myself the creative juices in your mind you can feel them flowing. Then you start unwinding your, literally scribbling down some thoughts it could be you find an image on-line it could be a word, a phrase something like that you are just bouncing ideas around. I think it is that, thought process of bouncing (30.00) some ideas around. Everyone has got a different way of working. Some people are quiet, they just get their head down they do it, they like working straight onto a laptop, some people are quite free and they like working straight into a pad, other people they are very much they talk and talk and talk. I mean me personally I need a bit of free headspace I need a bit of time to consider, think and reflect. Once I have done that I can then start talking. If I go straight into it I don't feel like I have had the reflective time. You need a bit of time to really absorb and immerse yourself in what it is you are trying to do, so you get your head in a really good strong thought process, and then I am in that world, then once I am in that world, the magic unravels pretty quickly. And like my mind thinks very, very erm... very, very fast in that environment there, and I can drill a number of different ideas and bounce them around and recognise things in other people very quickly. So even in a matter of hours you can crack something quite amazing, but then there is a thing which is always a very, very good technique is always do an overnight test on an idea because what you might think is a great idea at the end of play when you are tired, and your brain has probably had a bit of a, high lows, peaks of the day my best thinking is always done mid-morning, between 9.30/10 o'clock and 12 o'clock then I will have a dip the I will come back in mid to late afternoon so within that I programme my day to give myself little peaks because you can't think solidly at a level your brain doesn't work like that, you get tired, you get jaded you need a break away go and get a coffee, go and chat with someone, go into another meeting, then go back in again so it's having those peaks and recognising when you think at your best. My best thinking time is the 2 or 3 hours in a morning, always my best time. Everyone's is different. Some people might think better later. Recognise when your strong points of the day are. Within that I then go back in and do an overnighter so if I look at it first thing in the morning again, in the cold light of day, and it still works that is the proof of a great idea and that is always the proof for me I have always done.

**That is the same advice actually I give to my essay students because they have the same kind of ups and down with their thinking processes.**

**Subject D:** You can't, we are not programmed, we are not like machines we can't just think of the same from, I would love to think that between 9 and 5.30 I could just think at the same rate all day but your mind, I have got to get interested you know that is just the way our mind works isn't it.

**It is yes, yes, that's like take the dog for a walk, if you get stale.**

**Subject D:** You need to recognise go and get a drink, let's get some fresh air, have a break, reconvene in 15 minutes, just doing that that is why brainstorming should really never be longer than 45 minutes because people's, you have lost them you can see them the attention span in the room has gone. It is short sharp out. Japanese great meeting ethics they come in and there is no chairs, you stand, you meet you focus, you don't have these in the meeting room, you are in the meeting, you are in the meeting. What is it, what is the problem, 10 minutes alright ok brill I am gone. Much more decisive that way and that is the way I like to be. I like to be decisive about things.

**Could you just tell me something about what you are doing at the moment, what adverts you are working on at the moment.**

**Subject D:** What I am doing at the moment, we are just erm... we are doing a big campaign for Soreen Minions so the Minions movie coming out, it is a new on pack promotion win a big star prize to go to Universal Studios to meet the Minions. So that is really exciting. Erm... I am doing a super rate TV commercial and so reconvene of the commercial we did 6 months ago, some more 10 second commercials added to it and some slight new twists on the 30, erm... I am doing a fantastic project for Leeds Rhino's Foundation which is Leeds Rhino's the big super league charity. So I am an honorary member of their Trustee.

**Is that the rugby club?**

**Subject D:** That's the rugby club so they are the challenge cup champions they are one of the biggest clubs in the country really so, they are just on our doorstep. I got asked by the Chairman of the committee to get involved with the committee and erm... you know on the back of that we are doing a film for them erm... and various collateral for free, so

we are doing a charity piece for these guys so they do amazing things for the community and as an agency we are backing that and doing some great stuff for them. So that is a few of the things I am doing right now.

**Good thank you. When you are, just talk me through the process then of how you direct your advertising to particular groups, particular segments within the community, what is the process of working that out.**

**Subject D:** Yes I think the, unfortunately erm... we are all bracketed into different categories so whether we like it or not we are A1, As, B1, C1s, Ds yes, within that I know I have to talk to people in a certain way in a certain time. You know Leeds Beckett University is one of our big sort of clients (35.00) and erm... they have to position themselves in the right way, they are not Oxford, they are not Cambridge, they have to sort of sell to their strengths and play to their strengths in that area. They still get very bright people, but just wanting more of a vocational approach. Like a Superbreak which is one of our clients they are slightly more grey market 55, bit more money in the bank, maybe the kids have fled the home, there will be more disposable income, so you know you talk to those in the right way. You then not only talk to them in the right way you reach them in the right way you have got to book slots that reach them, you know to understand what they watch, when they watch, how they talk, how they interact what they read, all those things, make up how you communicate with people. You know to talk to a Sun reader who is a brickie who is 23 years old is different to talking to a guy who is consulting sort of neurosurgeon, you have got to recognise how people react. That people are visual you know, 75% of people are visual anyway and but the words you use have to be considered and representative of the people you are talking to, so you know that plays a massive part in how you attack anything.

**Do you check up at all that you have got through to them in the right way do you run focus groups or...**

**Subject D:** Yes we erm... up until recently we erm... had probably one of the biggest research agencies in England who were just here, so they were about 40 strong. They are Asda's research agency so we use qualitative and quantitative research quite frequently, you need to analyse what you are doing you know you need to be mindful of that, you need to be informed and when you do things again you are then informed as to what works and what didn't work what you know, and go from there.

**Ok thank you. We have talked a bit about symbolism in advertising and icons, I have a question here but I will just tell you [37.08] some of the adverts, some of the more sophisticated adverts in magazines often allude to things such as even**

**Greek mythology and this kind of thing you know or historical events, or art, that I do wonder whether people are actually getting it or not. Erm...**

**Subject D:** Yes,

**I was looking at one advert for a perfume and the analysis in the textbook of this particular ad was to the effect that it was a comparison between the modern woman and the Dionysian legends of Ancient Greece and I was wondering if people really do get the connection.**

**Subject D:** I think it is a very good question. I personally don't get that deep into mythology and symbolism and things like that. Erm... I think there are certain people who believe that it works, erm... I personally don't use it very much as a technique. It is a technique that people unravel erm... I think what you find in advertising that erm... photography styles, typefaces, colours, techniques, animation, illustration, icons, they all go in cycles. So at the moment you might have a cycle where this is currently on trend and it is all trends, and so you will notice this as you go and you look in 3, 4, 5 years' time, erm... I can have an up-to-date current book, this is where you need to constantly keep on top of your portfolio because, if I don't do that in 4 or 5 years' time for arguments sake, it can look very dated. And I think this is the thing. Right now, it is current, it is brilliant but then if you look back you think whoa, you look at it now we are moving from Sky will only accept now HD films so your commercial now has to be HD ready to be sent to Sky. Erm... that is, the quality of everything the way imagery is done, the way photography is captured the way typefaces, what looked amazing 5, 10, 15 years ago you look at it now it looks really dated and out of trend, because it is like fashion it is like everything. Advertising is a fashion erm... you need to try and keep on the fashion trend, right you need to have your own personality but you need to be very mindful of what is going on out there and I think that's the trend, that might work for some people doesn't really work for me. You know but I mean, it is a personal choice.

**I remember the Flora ad is your man a Flora man and the housewife buying the Flora for him to protect his heart.**

**Subject D:** Yes, yes

**You couldn't show that nowadays it would be found just hilarious.**

**Subject D:** Yes, what can be done then is not right now is it. And it is just being mindful of it. I mean if you look how cars have changed, look how technology has changed, look to a film like and it is done in the 1980s look at the computers they have on the desk. (40.00) At that time it might have been a state of the art computer, now you notice it in films as well. I was watching Friends the other day and they were capturing something camera, people don't, they capture the camera is on them all the time now they pick it up and answer a phone, it is a different world isn't it. It is being mindful of all those things as they change consistently and advertising is a fashion and you need to keep on it.

**Yes. Do you think sometimes they are a bit too sophisticated for people, sometimes they miss the target because they are a little bit too obscure.**

**Subject D:** Potentially. There is a lot of clever people, a lot of clever thinkers who try and get things right but that doesn't mean to say it is always right. I think you are only too right there.

**Do you think that, I suspect that you are going to tell me that you do erm... but it is a question I have to ask you, do you think you still use things like stereotyping, in your advertising or?**

**Subject D:** I think there are definitely stereotypes yes. I mean erm... you try where possible to avoid them but, there are natural stereotypes. I mean you watch Carlsberg, Carlsberg is a classic if Carlsberg made supermarkets you know there is a guy walking out with a beer and it is always beer and some eggs or something on a blokes shopping list for Carlsberg that is a stereotype. It is quite funny. Stereotypes are inherent and they always will be, erm... I think it is just using and deploying them in the right way.

**They are semiotic in one respect aren't they because they are a cultural myth but you know the two housewives talking over the garden fence, is a cultural myth really I am not saying it never happens but erm... it is something that we can see immediately and know what is going on. And know what they are talking about.**

**Subject D:** But I think the point you are making there is a valid one that sometimes it helps you connect A to B quicker and that is ultimately what advertising is about, it is communicating this brand is cheaper, better value than that brand or, you know this one is a premium brand compared to that not so premium. That is sometimes you need the most stereotypical way, to erm... to bring that to life really.

**Yes can you just allow me quickly, this is going [42.25] something we haven't covered that often crops up here, your word choices, you obviously you are often putting words with images, this kind of thing. Do you have any general thoughts about how you choose your words or do you go for puns or?**

**Subject D:** Personally I really don't like puns.

**You don't?**

**Subject D:** Puns have a, a place and they are a certain charm to certain puns erm... you know that generally I would say my approach and I again this is a subjective thing because what we do is subjective, there is no right or wrong in theory, erm... I try to apply a cleverness that I think actually erm... the words and the crafting in the words are really important to me. That actually make someone stand up and take notice and think. Erm... like for example I won a copywriting award a while ago, for a restaurant that was actually housed in an old police station. And erm... the line was rhubarb and custody slight pun but again just had a cleverness to it, so that is as far as I would like to go. Erm... within that, I generally think the best words out there, the clever words, I like the Economist posters, that really make you think nature versus you know, nature versus nurture [43.45] that is the cleverness of words for me. I think they're, that is where I want to be. That is what I try and get out of the team, my department. There is times when you potentially could be a bit punny and there is a fine line, but if it is pun, pun, pun I think that is wrong.

**Ok, my last question really, erm... the reason I am asking for this, this is basically a linguistics question if you are advertising a specific product, if that is what your main aim is, rather than focussing on some brand promotion, how do you try to appeal to your audiences pre-existing knowledge how do you sort of work with that? Do you have any thoughts on that one?**

**Subject D:** Well, I mean say Volkswagen, Volkswagen has got a history of erm... being reliable, always starting, always being things like that where you have got a pre-existing template if you like.

**Yes, research basically.**

**Subject D:** Yes you need to understand the brand, understand the history of the brand, what has worked, what hasn't worked, if there is a plethora of things that are there, you will be rather foolish to ignore. So I think you need to understand the start point, before you go off and ignore it completely. (45.00) That would be foolish thing to do. So I think if you understand the history of a brand, how it is worked, how it has manipulated itself into the mind of the person, erm... then you inform, make an informed decision from there.

**Yes. Right so that begs the question, the second part of that question is how do you make sure that it is immediately relevant to your target audience but I think you have pretty much answered that. The relevance part.**

**Subject D:** Yes,

**How is it relevant to you.**

**Subject D:** Well I think the key is you are doing advertising for someone else not you. So when I get a 55 – 60 year old client telling me that wouldn't appeal to them going to university, I have got [45.44] question well you are not going to university, you have got someone 40 years younger than you going to university, so you have got to put your mind in their shoes not your shoes.

**Yes, yes**

**Subject D:** So in a polite way it is like saying it is not meant to appeal to you it is meant to appeal to someone far younger, likewise if I did an ad appealing to you, it probably wouldn't appeal to the 20 year old. So you have got to recognise...

**The client has to trust your trust your judgement and experience in that then as well.**

**Subject D:** Absolutely yes. Yes.

**Well thanks very much for that you have answered all my questions, very thoroughly and I don't really have any more for you. Thank you.**

## **SUBJECT E**

**Right sorry carry on.**

**Subject E:** I was a copywriter for a long time, but now I don't write, though I do a little bit, erm... but I see a lot of advertising and critique it and brief it and that sort of stuff so hopefully I will be able to answer your questions. But I am just, so you know so I didn't spend yesterday writing ads, though I spent many years writing ads so you will get a slightly different perspective from me.

**But you have the experience.**

**Subject E:** Oh absolutely.

**And you work in the industry so that is absolutely fine. Erm... I have got a set of questions here, what I am doing the first part is about you personally, and then the other parts are about how you form ideas and your strategies and so on. Erm... some of the questions are by nature repetitive so if I do find us going over stuff you have already told me then I will sort of move on to the next one and so on. Erm... so I will try not to make it too repetitive for you. My first question is by what route did you enter the advertising industry what is your background prior to that?**

**Subject E:** Erm... I did a PhD in Ancient Greek.

**Oh right**

**Subject E:** So and so, there weren't as many obvious openings plus I love words so getting into advertising gave me a chance to work with words and concepts and that is how I got in really.

**Right have you had any formal, I mean in terms of university education in advertising or marketing?**

**Subject E:** No

**Ok,**

**Subject E:** To be honest, I... we often don't employ people who have though in the creative department we do, but people who have studied marketing degrees not that interested in them to be honest. Though if they are a great personality and very bright then yes but I prefer someone who had studied history or geography or something like that because sometimes the marketing degrees erm... the calibre isn't as high as it might be with...

**Right. Journalism, I found the same with some journalists they prefer someone with a good English degree rather than one in journalism.**

**Subject E:** Yes absolutely that is identical for us. Except when it comes to the creative department, because the creative department you have to have gone through some sort of study of how to come up with ideas, which an English graduate really hasn't had. That's just to clarify that for you.

**Yes, yes indeed that makes sense yes. Erm... so the next question will not apply to you because it is what text do you recall studying but of course you have not studied anything to do with this in terms of university education. So I can move onto the next bit then. I mentioned semiotics to you, you obviously know what they are.**

**Subject E:** Yes

**Where has that come from how did you come to...**

**Subject E:** Semiotics. Oh I mean I did a bit of linguistics at uni but it was only a year, and that is a long, long time ago erm... and I just, I may get this completely wrong, but to me semiotics is the linguistics of images and pictures and signs and... but I might be wrong there.

**No you are on the right lines yes.**

**Subject E:** And like for example, erm... that is, I remember, oh why has his name gone out of my head, you will say it instantly erm... the Name of the Rose author.

**The which author?**

**Subject E:** The author the Italian who wrote the Name of the Rose. The book.

**The Rose.**

**Subject E:** The Name of the Rose.

**I don't know. Sorry.**

**Subject E:** Ok he is a professor of semiotics at Bologna or something, and I thought that was a wonderful book, and erm... his name will come back to me very shortly, erm... Umberto Eco.

**Oh yes.**

**Subject E:** And it's full of imagery and visual so, so I never studied semiotics but I am sort of aware of it.

**Yes, my area of course being a linguist, Eco's area is more the visual things so that's probably why it didn't immediately ring a bell, now I know who you are**

**talking about. Erm... so I was thinking more about people like Saussure, Peirce, Barthes possibly not familiar with?**

**Subject E:** Erm... Barthes probably is he, is it,

**Mythologies guy**

**Subject E:** Yes, what is his first name?

**Roland.**

**Subject E:** I was going to say was it Roland Barthes, I think I have read some of his stuff, years ago erm... but just only because when I was doing my PhD I took the time to read widely, (05.00) and then since then I have read widely but then of course you retain certain things and you forget other things and whatever.

**Yes**

**Subject E:** So I just know bits and not a lot.

**Ok that is cool. So in that case then would you be familiar of the concept of a myth in terms of semiotics?**

**Subject E:** You will have to tell me what it is there.

**Ok, erm... the classic example from Roland Barthes is erm... the broken bag of shopping on the Italian Pasta company and he came up with the notion of Italianicity, so you see the broken bag, you see the erm... pasta ingredients in there and the fresh vegetables and the tomatoes and so, the same colours exist in the same with the Italian flag, and the notion, you see the Italianness of it and the Italian name Panzani immediately you have a concept of the Italian family life, the sunshine, the olives, the tomato growing and so on, yes the Mamma cooking the pasta for the family and so on, you get the whole Italian myth surrounding that**

**even though it is probably not how most Italian people live today and that was his, one of his ideas. And he was suggesting that we look at something very quickly. Whereas a stop sign we just know that means stop, whereas if you see someone wearing a cowboy hat and wearing a waistcoat, a black waistcoat and with a gun belt and so on we get the whole cowboy myth surrounding that, that was his idea. Erm... and a lot of advertising education erm... when we talk about semiotics is based on the sudden image or a few words and you get a whole picture that we know about already.**

**Subject E:** Yes that makes sense. So what is the question or is there a question?

**No obviously my question was were you familiar with that concept of myths I think you are but not by that name.**

**Subject E:** Not by that name.

**No that makes sense ok that's great. Do you use any actual texts that you regard as seminal texts when you are devising adverts today? Will you refer to another writer Ogilvy or Saatchi or anybody else?**

**Subject E:** Well you know I have read some of the books, I have read Ogilvy on advertising I have read some of certain books on advertising by a copywriter or some excellent essays by copywriters, often it would be more to read what they had actually written as an ad, as opposed to what they write about advertising. Erm... but generally there is a feeling that you should try and create your own style and erm... so and there is a bit about breaking rules there is certain rules that you shouldn't break, and then other rules that you should break. You know there are certain rules that are there that if you break them you just look silly done something stupid. Erm... but other times you want to give yourself as much creative freedom as possible, so that so, so I wouldn't have said, I wouldn't encourage a copywriter in here erm... I wouldn't say here, read all that stuff and do it that way.

**No but there is nothing that you would think to yourself I will go to Ogilvy and see what he has got to say about this, you wouldn't or..**

**Subject E:** No

**Are you now so experienced that you think no I will go my own way now I have got all that, that is in the past?**

**Subject E:** Yes I would try and go my own way.

**Ok. Could you just explain to me briefly the mental processes the forming ideas for adverts what goes through your mind, when you get a brief?**

**Subject E:** Wow right, well erm... I would probably think what does the guy, you know or female out in the street think of this particular product or service. What is going on in their life erm... and then I would try and come up with some sort of truth that would they would identify with and think oh that's me. Erm... so that often then would mean I wouldn't, as a writer sometimes you end up with a little word plays but I would tend not to do that. Sometimes the little word play erm... you have come upon it, that seems to fit with the product but it doesn't necessarily fit with what the people that you are trying to persuade erm... so it is a technique (10.00) over the actual understanding. So I often think that the best, here is a simple one right. I have just remembered, way, way back we had the Sky Sports Council asked us to promote one of their golf training courses. So erm... you go along they will teach you how to play golf. And, one of the headlines I remember writing it just, and we put this in golf magazine so it just said big bold, Play Less Golf. Now most people reading that would think oh I am golfer why would I want to play less golf. But of course you do actually want to play less golf you want to go round in 72 shots rather than 82 shots [10.51] so that was, that was designed so you ask any golfer would you prefer to go round in fewer shots, they will say yes. Then the skill of the copywriter is to then communicate that, communicate in a way that makes the golfer lead on and that, that was very successful advert because golfers when you read play less golf think no I want to play more golf, but fundamentally they actually want to play less. And that is how the advert, that advert, that particular advert worked and what it was doing was trying to [11.36], it is very, very simple, every golfer wants to go round in fewer strokes. So there was, so that was just, that is how that came about.

**Yes, if you recall I mentioned to you about one of my interests was in [11.51] pragmatics as opposed to semiotics and that is a classic example because pragmatics looks at context, and the context basically most of the modern theories on that would say that it is something in order to attract attention it has to be relevant to the person seeing it. And play less golf then of course you see the word golf, then that is relevant to me, and I look at the sentence play less golf, that is presenting me with a conundrum, a quiz why is then which rewards me does it not by deciphering what it means and now I understand it.**

**Subject E:** Yes because underneath it, it explains it. Because we wouldn't leave you with just play less golf and then the logo because you mightn't get it.

**How long ago was this?**

**Subject E:** Oh that is probably 20 years ago.

**Right ok.**

**Subject E:** But that thought is an enduring thought I mean that could be, if you read that now it would still...

**Absolutely yes, it would still be right yes. When you are actually devising an ad then like that, do you sort of, do you have a complete mental picture of where you are going with it fairly early and then that is, and you develop that or is it a sort of building process?**

**Subject E:** Erm... I suppose it depends sometimes if it is part of a campaign so, where you have got a product that has got probably a key message but different, you can approach the same message in different ways and you want to show that the, person that you are talking to that this product is multifaceted and there is more [13.30] to be had from the product. This product maybe versus another and you are getting your money's worth. So therefore, erm... that, if it were for a campaign then I would try and work out what the key messages are, and the overall feel, you know what is the tone of, general tone of voice, am I being serious or, am I being you know is the tone of voice like very optimistic, full of beans, erm... or you know what... so it is hard to answer that, until you have actually got the blank sheet of paper and the brief. Sometimes things just come very quickly, because you, you think about the person you are trying to persuade, you put yourself in their shoes if you can and an interesting way of looking at it comes quickly. It often happens that you are, you are writing and then you get up, walk to the loo and by the time you have come back you have solved it because you have moved away from your seat. I found that happens a lot, or used to happen a lot. Sometimes other things I used to do erm... is if I would sometimes listen to music (15.00) that I thought had the same sort of tone as I wanted to get across. So if I was being quite aggressive, I would listen to quite erm... well say Holst Planets Mars, bringer of war something like that, you know I would think yes that's the way I should and you know and perhaps my head would then fill with those types of thoughts. That kind of attitude. If I wanted to write something quite erm... sweet and you know I might put the Pastoral Symphony on or something like that there, whatever that sometimes worked.

**That sets your mood ready, but again someone else I was talking to about this said that he will write down ideas and then go, in an afternoon and then put it away, and not look at it again until the next morning because he said on the next morning I would see it differently.**

**Subject E:** Yes, yes. Sometimes I used to write on yellow paper just, it doesn't have to be yellow but as long as it wasn't white, so that it made me feel differently. Your paper is white there and most stuff you see is on white paper and after a while I just thought it's a bit, the same whereas if you have got a bit of yellow paper and a bit of Beethoven going on in the background it might just make you, take you out of the humdrum take you out of the what you are used to and that is of course what I am always trying to do is get out of where I usually am and put myself somewhere else.

**Yes, that is something else I am looking at as well which is, yes formalism. Erm... yes something that is interesting about this particularly is imagine you have, let's compare two different briefs. One is brand promotion that is your main aim, we want to get our brand better known. The other one is I want to advertise a very specific product, something new I want to give people the information so that they are going to make a choice to buy that one, and not my competitors.**

**Subject E:** Yes

**Is there a different approach that you use between the two kind of briefs?**

**Subject E:** Yes probably I mean without knowing what those two things specifically were, it splits, the normal answer to that would be, the first one the brand one would be more emotionally biased and the product one would be more rationally biased. So here I am trying to get an emotional attachment between you and the brand and make that brand feel as if it is part, that that brand gets to occupy a privileged position in your panoply of brands. Those ones that depending on the consumer but often some consumers, me included, are very particular about what brands I buy, and to get, and they and I will be very, very loyal to them if they continue to deliver. And that is quite emotional, ok there is a, rational element to it, but erm... because they perform, but I just like the association and I like the emotional association of a brand, that where there is an expertise involved oh they do it beautifully and erm... so, so that is what I would try and do with the brand one I would say, try to say to them that is a brand for you. And here is the reasons why. And it would tend to be quite emotionally based. If it is a product that does the job, erm... then I would go into the detail of it because I would see

that the person I am trying to sell it to is in a different mode, where they have got a problem that needs solving and this solves it in that it delivers. I bought a rucksack not that long ago and not particularly erm... as a result of an advertisement but if I were to advertise that rucksack one of the things I would do would, I cycle a lot, and cycling to work so it is a commuting rucksack. And, its product benefits, features are excellent so I would be listing them and saying why they were so good and to try and attract the person who is finding that their current one isn't working as well. So there would be two different ways of doing that Is that the sort of thing you are wanting?

**It is exactly what I am looking for because I mean I am thinking back to Bernstein's notion of Reason and Tickle?**

**Subject E:** Say again.

**Bernstein is one of the writers in advertising he wrote about something called Reason and Tickle.**

**Subject E:** Reason and tickle?

**Yes. The reason being what you have just said, what you have just given me. The reasons I am going to buy something are here are the reasons for it, I am going to list them down for you, (20.00) these are the, and on the other hand you have got tickle which is as you said emotionally based, it is stimulating your interest and identifying you with the product and giving it an aura. An example of that, I sometimes talk to my students about is erm... if I was to advertise Versace just a brand named Versace, erm... or Channel perfume even, I am not saying to people how it smells. I have never seen an advert yet for a Channel perfume that gives me any information at all it is just all, it is all just image and making the most of a particular model Claudia Schiffer or whoever happens to be there, is associated with it but beyond that I am getting no information. But if you want to sell me components for a erm... forklift truck in a trade magazine, then you are not going to use Claudia Schiffer and that kind of thing, and a brand it is information. So you have got information and you have got reason and tickle that was the idea and he suggested that both, most adverts are a mixture of the two to some degree.**

**Subject E:** Yes I would never have used the expression tickle but that is up to him if he wants to use it, erm... but yes. Well I think there is, there is a... it is, it is there will be some ads I suppose, that are pretty devoid of emotion, and some that are pretty devoid of any rational reason. Erm... but most ads have a mixture.

**Yes which is what Bernstein was saying basically.**

**Subject E:** Yes and to be honest that is pretty obvious which is fine ((laughs)).

**No it is yes, yes. And it is interesting to me as well because I would argue that if we are branding, we are using semiotics, more. If we are using the reason rather than the tickle then we need to be using pragmatics we need to set context. And, advertisers maybe, future advertisers might be a little bit better off if they were aware of that the techniques for attracting attention by way of relevance. So that is...**

**Subject E:** Yes that makes sense to me.

**That is my hypothesis anyway. Erm... you have explained to me how you sort of you [22.22] process of forming ideas erm.. can you sort of relate to me a recent advertisement that you were involved in its promotion and how it panned out?**

**Subject E:** A recent advertisement? Well, erm... one that I was involved in recently it is happening at the moment, and it is, it depends what you mean by advertisement.

**Yes broadest possible sense.**

**Subject E:** Yes this is quite, it is broadish, but it does sort of, it is going to play out more in on-line content, but that in itself is erm... video content. Still is sort of an ad. One of our clients produces erm... microwavable noodles, erm... Bangkok Street Noodles, and they are excellent, so it is as far from pot noodle as you can get really. They have got a new technique for doing it, and erm... if I served you them up now even though it takes 90 seconds in the microwave, you would think wow, how can microwavable noodles be as good as that. So that is a great, that is a bit of a first. So, the thought process here is how do we, how do we get over the stigma that microwavable food is a bit more like pot noodle erm... so we invented the very simple phrase Wok Quality Noodles. Which is a little bit like Laboratoires Garnier erm... Salon Beautiful Hair. So and we started with Wok Quality Noodles, so we said oh right microwave but they are Wok Quality. Then to so that to be honest that is a little bit of the rational and possibly a bit of the pragmatic, that they are going to taste erm... really good. So because they are aimed at a bit of a snacking market you don't want to be eating something that doesn't taste good. So they

are wok quality, I am getting a tick there, I will give them a try the calories are good, as for the actual engagement of the people to make them sit up and take that in and enjoy the brand and do the sort of thing that perhaps that Peperami did in that it had an attitude about it so you buy into the attitude as well as if you like the, the sort of whatever it was, salami whatever they called. Whatever it is some sort of wurst or other going on.(25.00) We, erm... we then came up with the idea of you don't need your Wok anymore. Ok. So you don't need a wok anymore, because wok quality noodles are available from the microwave so my idea was this thing of wok cycling. What are you going to do with your wok how are you going to recycle your wok now that you don't need it anymore. So we are shooting some little videos of a wok with wheels on being used to pull a little dog, a little dog along, erm... it can be used erm... to play tennis with you can play tennis with woks and it's all the campaign of now that we have got wok quality noodles, from the microwave, how are you going to wok cycle. And, so that's, that is the sort of the thought process there, there is a bit of pragmatic but actually quite interesting fun stuff, erm... going on and of course people can then add their own versions of that. Erm... I can't remember the different ones we are doing now to be honest but there is lots of them. You can wear the wok as a hat, just anything silly and that is how that works.

**So again as with the one you give me with the golf, people are having to look at it and then they are having to look at trying to work out the context from it.**

**Subject E:** Correct

**As part of a little mental puzzle. And then they reward themselves obviously... oh yes I understand that.**

**Subject E:** Yes that is the technique being used there.

**Yes. Erm... you do TV adverts obviously do you do, what other kind of advertising do you do here?**

**Subject E:** All sorts, anything really.

**Magazines or?**

**Subject E:** Absolutely anything we have done and still do.

**And you do nationwide?**

**Subject E:** Oh yes, and European and all sorts. To be honest I spend a lot of time in Sweden erm... they are one of the biggest kitchen holding companies in Europe is called Nobia it is head quartered in Stockholm and they own Magnet kitchens here which is Doncaster, and Leeds, and Hygena which it's just sold and various other ones and there is a brand in Denmark called HTH so we run that advertising out of this office well most of it.

**Right. So you are familiar with Stockholm.**

**Subject E:** Yes I have been on the Arlanda express many, many times. I love Stockholm.

**I do it is one of my favourite cities. I like Copenhagen as well.**

**Subject E:** Yes I have been there just the other day I was there,

**I am there tomorrow.**

**Subject E:** Very good.

**Erm... right so I think we have answered the next couple there. Just a general question you may have covered this already I think you have but if you want to add anything to it I would be interested erm... it is about how you actually identify to whom the advertising is directed. Does any sort of approaches going on there, as to who those people are?**

**Subject E:** Well erm... that is usually worked out less by the copywriter and more by the client and the account manager in the agency that is, and the media people. Because you can get quite sophisticated ways of working out erm... who we are trying to target and particularly now in this very digital age, it is easier to work out who is consuming what

type of ad or product. There is a whole thing happening at the moment called programmatic media buying and advertising which is a computerised highly sophisticated very targeted answer to that question. So if I were you if you haven't seen this, it is a big buzz word at the moment.

### **What is it called again?**

**Subject E:** Programmatic, so as in programme

### **Programmatic.**

**Subject E:** Programmatic, have a look at that, that answers that is a way of doing that but it is only just here. Erm... only in the last 6 months, really on people's just because erm... with all the data that you can have, and the computing power and the erm... sophistication of brands, targeting people on the internet and following you round. You will have seen yourself being followed once you click on a product, and then you think oh I don't want to buy that, and then you are on a news site, suddenly there is an ad for it next to it, that is them following you because they have dropped a cookie on you and so, anyway there is that whole computerised bit of it. The people that you are trying to target I, (30.00) once I, one of the reasons a good creative person in an agency tends to because they have to work out what am I selling here, and what is the best way of selling it, they often end up with the simplest and probably most accurate way of seeing it, even though the client and the media company and the account handler spent months trying to work out who the audience is, what they should say and whatever, it is when the person tries, who is responsible for how do we say it, it is they have to have it so simple. A good writer will want it so simple erm... so they pare everything back and they think right what is my key message and who am I saying that to. Do I understand those two things. Erm... so although you will have been pointed in the right direction, you have to get that person in your head, erm... and yes so I will have that person in my head, because that's how I started this whole conversation. You asked me how I think up an ad, I think of the person I am writing it for.

**So if you have a 4 or 5 page brief you have to distil that down to the actual core little miniscule part.**

**Subject E:** Yes that's it yes. So we used to have a thing on our brief it was divided into various sections and there was one part on our brief point 4, and it was what is the key thing we want to say. And I would read that first. Erm... and because like for example I remember getting a brief from a guy we used to do a lot of advertising for Umbro and

erm... it was the time whenever Michael Owen was, had burst on the scene so France 98, round about that time he wore their boots. And, a young lad and I remember seeing point 4 in the brief written by an account handler and it was probably about 3 sentences long, and I looked down and looked at him and sort of joked with the guy and I just sort of scribbled it out in a jokey way but still making the point, all he needed to write was and these boots were called let's say they were called Velocity, the point on the brief he could have replaced his 3 sentences with these words Michael Owen is lightning fast because he was very fast, and we wanted to say these are the boots that you make for Michael Owen he is lightning fast, and let's say they are really light and things like that so if you are a good footballer and you would like to be as fast as Michael Owen at least you can wear the same boots as him, if speed is in your game these are the boots for you. So instead of these three sentences about or maybe one long sentence of over 3 lines the copywriter really just needs to see even just 2 words, lightning fast. And then all you think then is right speed. Or just one word speed. You know.

**Yes**

**Subject E:** You try and pare it down, ok.

**That's great, thank you. Yes. The next question is how do you ensure the reader of your [33.27] will understand do you have any sort of check-ups to make sure that people are likely understand. One of the issues I have when looking at some ads is I can see the artistry in designing the ad, but I am not always entirely sure that they are going to, every reader is going to [33.44] magazine [33.44] on TV is going to get everything.**

**Subject E:** Yes ok. Well this is a bit of a, erm.. there is a couple of answers to this. We have got something in here, and erm... called the Rachel test. Now erm... we used to have a receptionist called Rachel. Rachel is a lovely girl and she, she wasn't the brightest tool in the box, and she made light of that, she... often people have got the jobs that suit them and the receptionist job was right for Rachel. Erm... it wasn't a female thing it was nothing like that but that was the right job for her. She had always a great smile on her face, and she used to, she used to make jokes about the fact that I don't know what she would say but whatever. Erm... but and she was fully behind this and loved it because I would sometimes bring her in an ad and say Rachel what does that mean and she would look at it (35.00) and she would tell me and she was, she loved us doing me or whoever it was doing the Rachel test because if Rachel got it we were fine, if Rachel didn't get it, we needed to know why. And we needed to look at the ad again as it was too clever for its own good. So, I don't, we weren't being sexist or anything, because she really enjoyed it and actually that for me was a good way of doing it. Sometimes you can just be too advertising for your own good. The issue I often say and when we are critiquing work

in the agency is all of you people who like this particular ad know what the brief is, and have had someone sell it to you. You know so we would get the creative people in, and say right show me what your ideas are and they would say well we have done this because we think it is really good blah, blah, blah so, by the time you are there to make your judgement on it, you already know a whole stack if you have got the back story. Which is pretty obvious. So, we erm... we have to try and imagine that someone doesn't know any of that. That's why I don't know if you noticed what the big sign on our reception said, you mightn't have even seen it.

**Didn't see it.**

**Subject E:** Well on your way out you will see it says the power of simple. So that is why we tell people to keep it simple. So whenever they are, as you said, consumers flicking through a magazine for example, they see one of our ads, they get it, erm.... or they are sufficiently intrigued to read on a bit like play less golf like what you know, or it is really clear exactly what it means and why it is right for them. So we do a self-filtering thing, is it simple enough. We give it a Rachel test. Rachel isn't here anymore, but erm... we would do a Meena test or we would do some, we would take it round and show it to people, take it home and show it to our families, and then of course there is research you can do.

**Focus groups and this kind of thing?**

**Subject E:** All of those things. We prefer not to do those but sometimes you have to.

**One I was thinking of particularly it was one that erm... from one of the textbooks on advertising showing Claudia Schiffer advertising Bulgari is it?**

**Subject E:** Bulgari is an Italian fashion brand, that does jewellery it does [37.38] it does jewellery it does perfume, yes.

**This was for actually a perfume and it was a pink perfume with a gold top on it, and the she was sort of positioning, you couldn't see what she was wearing but it was suggesting she was naked, but you could only see her from... obviously and the suggestion of the text was that people were readily recognised the Dionysus connection of ancient Rome with the Roman lettering of Bulgari and I am thinking**

**to myself, will they. Will they really recognise that myth from that. Are they familiar with it? I am not sure I am not convinced.**

**Subject E:** No erm... so somebody analysed it that way,

**Yes that is what they are telling the people and the people are going to understand that.**

**Subject E:** Well they aren't going to understand that I don't think.

**No I wouldn't have thought so.**

**Subject E:** Erm... and I can see the Bulgari Bv but a specific myth with which particular...

**Dionysus**

**Subject E:** Well Dionysus is Greek, no he is not he is Bacchus is Greek, but Dionysus is a bloke and she is not.

**Yes but it was the idea of with Bacchus the idea of...**

**Subject E:** Bacchanalia and that sort of stuff?

**Yes all that kind of stuff, that was kind of...**

**Subject E:** Hedonism and...

**Exactly yes, that was the suggestion and as I say I wasn't entirely convinced that the public would see that. I am not even convinced that the advertisers necessarily had that in mind at the time but...**

**Subject E:** No they won't. But it depends what all the rest of the ad is, if you can see but again erm... I suppose that's, erm... without getting it is just the feeling you get when you see it.

**Yes I mean I could see the link there was a lot of pink in the advert and the perfume was pink so the femininity with Claudia Schiffer and then you got the gold which I understand again I get the gold bit, the luxury of a well-known star I get the connections there, I get the signifiers but I am just saying I think [39.49] it has been over analysed when they are saying we are talking about yes Dionysus. That is my suspicion.**

**Subject E:** Yes, and yes I would guess that there will be a very small proportion of the women that that is aimed at that will look at that and think, yes they just won't. But that is a layer to be discovered by a [40.18] but then of course you often would think that the person who knows that, you wouldn't naturally associate the person who would know that with perhaps splashing money on, on a premium perfume because their head tends to be, I would say the person who understands that, head is more grounded in academia than it is... (40.00)

**In**

**Subject E:** Yes and luxury and frivolity and superficiality.

**Erm... can you just give me a few words on how you try to use symbolism and icons for things in your advertising.**

**Subject E:** Yes, well erm... icons you know are often a short cut to what you want to say, so there is a well-known technique in advertising, or a well-used technique in advertising where you combine two symbols to help you get across what it is you want to communicate. And this has been going on for a long as I have been in advertising, and it is one that I think works well because you do get erm... quite a lot of erm... enjoyment out of seeing it. So a campaign that I saw the other day that we were doing in here, I have nothing to do with it but it follows this, is Dreams the bed retailer, and mattress

manufacturer. Erm... one of our biggest clients and we are advertising their latest memory foam latex mattress which in the summer is quite a cool mattress so one of the messages is cool. Ok a bit like Michael Owen speed, and what I have seen is a picture of a mattress on a lollipop stick, so taking the two things mattress and lollipop to give you cool mattress. And, when you see it and probably with the headline let's call it Britain's coolest mattress, that won't be what the headline was but that is the sort of thing and you see the lollipop you think wow yes I get that. I get that and it is definitely a mattress because it has got all the little, little things on it, that is light mattress but it is on a lollipop stick, so that is where you take the two images. I mean you will be aware of that there is a lot of that happens.

**Yes it does**

**Subject E:** Over, there is many wonderful, wonderful ones done in this agency but done brilliantly in all of the big agencies, any agency there is lots of that goes on. And then yes, there is lots of other imagery we use like from you know, icons, but that's what they you know, that is a universal sort of language iconography and pictograms and any other types of imagery you have in mind or...

**No I was just curious. Because we are talking semiotics I can't discuss semiotics without inviting you to talk a little bit about icons and symbols and so on. Erm... icons and symbols in semiotics are different things technically but as you probably know. Erm...**

**Subject E:** I don't, because I just don't ((laughs)).

**Yes well for example an icon looks like what it represents to some degree. So but if you see like a sign for a, if you see a knife and fork sign on the road, it doesn't mean there is a cutlery sale down the road, we know what it means.**

**Subject E:** A restaurant or something.

**Yes it is still arbitrary, someone has decided that that is a sign for a restaurant but because it looks like what it represents. Symbols don't they are 100% arbitrary. There is nothing in them that represents, so that there will be a symbol because there is nothing in there that suggests why is that good, and not that, or that or**

**something or that whatever it is arbitrary so there is the difference there, that's is the point.**

**Subject E:** Ok didn't know that interesting. I should read a book on semiotics.

**You might not need to erm... one last question then really just, is there anything that you do specifically in mind when you want to draw upon or get your viewers or readers or listeners to activate their pre-existing knowledge to trigger them so that they make sense of things. Because obviously you must rely upon that to some degree they know stuff already. And I am going to tap into what they know to make sense of the ad. (45.00)**

**Subject E:** God.

**That is a tough one isn't it.**

**Subject E:** Yes, so, well I mean this probably isn't the answer or erm... this might be answering an entirely different question but sometimes we will erm... refer in an ad or prop an ad with things that we would want the product to be associated with. So, kindred brands and erm... so, it is a bit like saying you will like this because it is set in a context that you are familiar with. Or you would like to be with. Familiar or associated with. So, that is, playing on that bit. Erm... we probably, if you are talking to one of these specialist audience, or as they sometimes call them vertical audiences, [46.19] but that's what they do, erm... then you can assume a lot of erm... prior knowledge. That person, the people you are talking to know. We did a lot of our early advertising was for Berghaus the mountaineering people so we would be talking to sometime the last thing you would do is give them Janet and John advertising. Our specific Janet and John advertising, these people know more about the outdoors than we will ever know, erm... so you, I often whenever we were writing erm... Berghaus ads I always showed them to my friends in the British Mountaineering Council, just to check I wasn't patronising or erm... just you know just to save us looking like someone who didn't know. I thoroughly enjoyed writing about mountaineering although I don't have a head for heights and stuff like that and I would have a bash at it, I like the outdoors but I knew that the people I met in the mountaineering council were just an entirely different breed to me, I loved them in all their grubbiness and you always felt [47.39] snowball and there was just lovely things about them but they weren't me, but because they weren't me, I had to make sure that when I am writing ads for them I didn't erm... look, that they had the look as if they were written for mountaineers by mountaineers.

**Yes that makes sense. That fits in well. I am thinking particularly of one of the adverts in Sweden for Volvos they are predicated on an assumption that you know that Volvo has a reputation for safety. Erm... and so if you didn't know that, then the advert wouldn't make any sense to you whatsoever. You would think what are they talking about there. So that is why I was [48.23] that one a little bit, erm... if that is ever built into it, in the design.**

**Subject E:** Well yes but often, yes but that is because you think that the brand has had a long heritage of advertising to do with safety or with Volkswagen did for a long time was reliability, and BMW is great engineering, and then of course these things move on a bit. So when you approach the brief you approach it with thinking that all of those years erm... of indoctrination, have planted something in the brain, so I yes I am sort of surprised to say that but then I haven't, I mean I saw the Jean Claude Van Damme Volvo truck advert where it splits and there is a bit of safety, well there is safety involved in that but erm... I would have thought the Swedes would all know.

**They do yes, the adverts are predicated on that so for example they might show two children and they might say don't forget your valuables. Ok we all pick up the [4941] from that oh yes it is for safety.**

**Subject E:** Yes I can see that.

**Whereas if you didn't know about Volvo's reputation for safety actually...**

**Subject E:** That wouldn't make a lot of sense.

**No it wouldn't no, no.**

**Subject E:** But that is quite a nice little ad that, it sounds like a nice ad.

**Yes.**

**Subject E:** Parent to make sure you buy a boring safe Volvo if you have got kids.

**That's right. Thank you very much that has been extremely enlightening.**

## **SUBJECT F**

**Subject F:** Marketing and branding are very different things where marketing has become more like branding over the years in and of itself, but branding both commercially and the guys in brand consultancy and the visual identity company who take a massive share from advertising agencies, but also in terms of the academia. The shift from transactional to relational erm... paradigms it doesn't... how we understanding marketing, so it is not just about the transaction it is about building relationships and that is what, you know social media is obviously in and of itself contributed a massive part to the debate as has the whole notion of you know consumer generating content, prosumers all these kind of buzz words that I guess they kind of, they disrupt the old value equation of companies use agencies to create communication, to bombard consumers and then things have become a lot more complex obviously as we know over the last few years. But erm... first of all I would, I would, if I was to describe semiotics I wouldn't go through the linguistics arm, although I mean I never studied linguistics so my understanding of this is very much informed by my reading around it, although I obviously understand the founder of, one of the founders of semiotics was also the founder of structuralism and structural linguistics, Frederick de Saussure and his insights erm... both spawns the whole idea of scientific study of languages as a kind of comparative study of languages and also as a footnote just like Richard Dawkins spawning the whole field of mimetics not really intending to in a kind of epilogue in the Selfish Gene, Saussure has this phrase in his Course de Linguistique where he says you know there is this potential for the science of semiotics, semiology, which would, of which linguistics is one subset, and semiology would, would study, its domain would be vast, it would study every signifying entity and its place is staked out in advance, and it would study the life of science and society, which is everything from flags to semaphore to you know, erm... you know advertising and art and all sorts of things. But I guess, sorry this is a long way of saying though, that erm... I very much think of semiotics as more, think of it in terms of the branch of philosophy, to do with representation, I think of it... because I think for me that widens it, its application but also I think that it is easier to see, I think you know the notion of thinking of advertising as a sort of language or a language of commodities is a very sort of nicely 70s, 80s paradigm. Not to say it doesn't have a lot of truth, but I think that, because the whole [02.40] communications area is so visual now, and we are moving beyond the visual into the haptic and the sensorial I think that is so far divorced from where linguistics is in terms of people think of glyphs and writing, I think we live in such a visual culture now that I think, thinking of semiotics as a branch of representation, a branch of philosophy to do with representation with the rigour of erm... social, you know social sciences and various you know, social sciences, substrates like grounded theory like adduction and other kind of things that give it its rigour and its erm... its sense of

systematisation it can look at things systematically. I think that for me is, is a more... it makes what I do more explicable. Because I think also because you know I work, I work within this tradition I think of cultural studies and I am quite ecumenical in terms of the theories I pick. Whereas I think if you look at a French semiotician, they are working with the Greimasian framework that uses the semiotic square, that is a development of structuralism in terms of binary oppositions and looking at contradictions and contraries and implications. And it is much easier to see what they do from as a direct result of the linguistic kind of heritage. Whereas what I do comes as much from philosophy and from visual culture and cultural studies as it does that, probably more so in some respects. Does that make any sense?

**Yes it does, yes, yes, yes. You mentioned things like Saussure and the structuralist..**

**Subject F:** Yes

**I am wondering, see some universities when they are teaching this topic that is as far as they go, they look at Saussure, look at Peirce and so on, one or two will go onto Barthes and his notions of mythologies and so on. Some go to erm... Levi-Strauss but I've got a bit of a suspicion that most of them don't go that deep when they actually start in the field of work in advertising. I suspect that they, that is stuff at university. Am I wrong?**

**Subject F:** Erm... I'm not sure if I am going to answer your question but I am going to try and answer your question. Erm... I think, there probably are people out there that study this stuff at university, they get... they have a smattering of what they think they need to do to do semiotics and then when they get into the field (05.00) they probably forget all of that, and then just sort of freestyle [05.06] digging out meanings that they come to intuitively and sometimes they may retro-actively justify those using theory sometimes they don't, sometimes they just leave it and think of academia as kind of something they had to go through to get the qualifications and now they are, now they are in the field they just practice it. Erm... I am not someone that, that you know, that's not what I personally, personally do erm... I am also not that aware of there being that many courses, well there are not that many qualifications in semiotics in fact there may be only 1, that I am aware of. There may be more than 1. Well no that's not true, there are probably a few but a handful and the ones I know of are in Tartu where there is a whole department in Estonia dedicated to semiotics. Then you have got places like Aarhus in Denmark where you can study cognitive semiotics and places like the Copenhagen Business School where there is someone who is very established in semiotics who will teach, I think teaches courses where there is a number of professors teaching courses in semiotics. But each of those places they would teach erm... a

number of different theories, but they would have their kind of home theory or their kind of core theory, and in Tartu it is kind of Yuri Lotman and the kind of Soviet School of Semiotics. In Aarhus it's Peirce and his erm... those who have tried to kind of clear up some of the quandaries and uncertainties in his voluminous work, ((laughs)) of which there are many, many you know he is obviously an amazing thinker but you know the Scandinavians tend to be really into the Peirce. Partly because I think the geekiness kind of ties in with that very, very kind of in depth, very, very erm... that kind of continental philosophical tradition I think it really Peirce really plays into that but also because of their interest in design and design thinking. That Peirce is a really helpful way of thinking your way around design objects using things like iconic [07.03] indexicality and you know how, how the perception of an object relates to meaning in different ways. So, erm... I mean, like I am not really sure what your question was but I guess my answer is, so the question I think you are asking is sort of saying it feels like, I was [07.21], it feels like, you were saying that there could be quite a superficial engagement with some of these thinkers, without really tying it together is that?

**That's my suspicion yes.**

**Subject F:** Yes, yes you are probably right yes.

**Yes once they start in the field they just basically bin most of the stuff, that is university stuff, this is the real world.**

**Subject F:** Absolutely well there is, there is that I mean, and for good reason because I mean you know I have had, I was recently working, I am now doing some work well I am on the BBC roster which is great, so I can pitch for work. And I sent them a brief, I sent a proposal for a brief recently where the response of the fairly junior research person was oh you know, why are you mentioning Roland Barthes in your proposal that scares people that you are going to come up with all this academic verbiage we can't understand. And I was like well, yes I mean I am putting this in there because my you know, you have got an overall understanding [08.16] I think for me it's an advantage to show that there is a theoretical rigour in what I do, but you know I am never, I am less and less surprised with the sort of anti-intellectualism almost the kind of, the vicious anti-academic, anti-intellectualism I find in business where even if, an academic reference should help the understanding or give you credibility point, people just react as if there... they are allergic to it. And so I can understand why there is some people that therefore eschew the use of theorists and names like that in any document that goes to a client, because they have been burnt too many times. Having said that, I think that is probably a minority, accounts for the minority of people that don't do it in the field. I think often more likely to do with a combination of laziness, lack of rigour, lack of knowledge do you see what I mean?

**Hmm**

**Subject F:** But I think it can be because people have tried that, and they have been burnt, because people don't want that, some people don't want that. Or, you know, because for me the way I see it, you know I try and, I will convey, I will tell you what my methodology is based on because ultimately otherwise it is just based on my interpretation you know which is, I think is very sound ((laughs)) because I think people don't give enough weight to what someone's personal interpretation is if they have a massive, massive erm... grounding in a field. It is like what Malcolm Gladwell said you know, instincts are real things they happen you know and they can be trusted so someone's opinion is worth more than another, it is just the way it is. I mean this whole egalitarian thing on the internet has gone too far, you know elitism you know is important. I mean you wouldn't, you know if someone is having a stroke you would rather have a brain surgeon trained in facial coding recognition looking (10.00) at them, than some random who goes, oh yes I have seen a couple of ads on TV they are probably having this kind of an aneurism or whatever. Anyway I am just making argy but erm... yes but as I say there are people that have been burnt and they have decided to neglect it, but I think it is more because there is, it is difficult to unify these worlds and I think you know, the other thing that is probably true is although there are some very smart people in marketing there are probably a lot of none... a lot of people that aren't that smart and those people they you know, they went through university not you know maybe engaging with certain things and so now they are in the world of work and earning money it is their opportunity to not you know to not engage with it. I mean that is more of a kind of a, a paranoiac, perhaps slightly paranoiac view but I mean I think all those things come into play.

**Yes**

**Subject F:** But there are a couple of papers I can send you that can, there is one by David Glen Mick which is all about how people don't use theory rigorously enough in the commercial world. There is also a thesis I can send you on the ways different traditions of semiotics have been used in the commercial semiotics in the UK which should be quite useful as well.

**That would be brilliant yes. Yes.**

**Subject F:** There is probably another actually, there is probably 3 things, I don't know if the last one, I am not sure I can dig it out, I think I have got it somewhere, it is about

basically, it is a real, it's a massive long, it is a semiotica paper it's about 100 pages long, and when it was written in 2004 it was like a survey of all the commercial semiotics erm... projects that have been published in academia, and looking at how rigorously they used the theory, with quite a critical perspective.

**Yes**

**Subject F:** So I think if you are looking for that sort of erm... to develop in your perspective those could be quite useful.

**That would be great. I mean one of the problems I have is that my background well, since coming to Sweden has been academic and that aspect of it, I am from a different discipline altogether originally, but I am a linguist now and I am trying to reconcile different approaches to it. One of which is there has been some recent work done by a Japanese erm... linguist called Kay Ko Tanaka, erm... and she is suggesting that we should be considering using a different branch of linguistics called Pragmatics, which is really more my area. That is looking at language in context. It's how we actually use it to erm... to generate meaning without using the actual words. So for example if I said to you is there a window open. I could be effectively asking you to close the window because I am cold, open the window because I need fresh air, or lock the window because we are going to go out and a burglar might break in. So it is the meaning underlying it. When you look at classified ads, they are pure information, which brings us onto another set of theories as well that we are talking about the, the reason and tickle notion. This guy erm... I don't know if you have heard of him David Burstein came up with this book in the 1970s.**

**Subject F:** Yes

**[13.00] advertising and part of that he talks about reason and tickle. And he was saying, [13.05] he sticks to the same view well adverts are usually a combination of reason of logic and of tickle which is to inspire interest to amuse, to so on erm... again I am trying to reconcile that with a notion of difference between branding something, and creating customer loyalty and so on, brand recognition on the one hand and on the other hand a hardnosed element of flogging something to people. And an example that I sometimes give with my own students is I say to them, well you know you are all Swedish students, you are all familiar with Volvo cars and you are also familiar with Volkswagen cars. So what is the criteria, what is the selling point. What is it you are going to be making, what is going to make your mind up to buy a Volvo or a Volkswagen. And if it not loyalty to the fact that Volvo**

**is a Swedish firm then it is going to have to be something about the product that sells it. So it is these kind of areas I am working in, in my paper.**

**Subject F:** Yes, I would say reliability and safety respectively for VW and Volvo. I mean historically, not maybe on a model to model basis but I think as a marque, as a car marque that is what they are kind of known for. But I think it is interesting what you are doing, I mean, I would say that, you know there is, there are various semiotic kind of techniques or ideas, one is this notion of connotative index so, for example you take the Obama logo from 2008 whenever it was, erm... that has got very high connotative index. Connotative index is the extent to which there are different propositions and different associations packed into a very small area. So this idea of hope, the idea of agriculture and fecundity and fertility, so this idea of the sun coming over the kind of prairie with in the American colours with the sun kind of rising erm... and erm... that ties into all sorts of things you know it's kind of the resonance of the 1940s, 30s and 40s the New Deal (15.00) which obviously for right wing Americans is not that cool, [15.02] but for a lot of Americans is very cool but even those that don't associate the politics with it, it is a time of hope, a time of prosperity, affluence, the baby boomers, a time when America was suffering, so there is all sorts of things packed into that.

**Sounds like Barthes doesn't it?**

**Subject F:** I believe that is branding. I mean obviously it works to market Obama, but I would argue the branding is often more subtle and more emotional, usually I mean again I don't think you can create clear, a cut and dried binary oppositions between marketing. I think one is more transactional and one is more relational, branding being more relational. But I think, you know, there is a combination there, but I think the idea of connotative index for example, perfume, spirits, luxury products they have higher degrees of connotations they tend to be marketing to you less explicitly but much stronger on branding. Whereas what you talked about insurance, banking, classified advertising because they have a lower level of connotations their branding is less, there is less density of meaning in there, they are appealing to you more on a rational, rhetorical level but you know on a more explicitly rhetorical level. So I mean there are those that would disagree with me but I think in general my experience is such. So I think you could look at it in terms of connotations, that would be a way of semiotically being, that would be one indicator of marketing versus branding in terms of looking at advertising, or any symbolic, any symbolic communication. Just as an example.

**Yes, oh that would good yes, interesting. You have pretty much answered my question, what exactly does your firm do then do you actually you take the brief...**

**Subject F:** I do, I mean what we have discussed the kind of nitty gritty of analysing erm... advertising and other brand communication that is why, that's the kind of, that's the sort of bread and butter of what I do but in terms of how I make my money is I write reports and I present erm... visuals, some inspiration documents that help give companies ideas of how they can move forward. Usually because they, they want to do, they want to commission an independent view on their market place and their brand, that they can then give to their agencies to make their agencies more effective in communicating. So, so I could be delivering work to a design agency, to an advertising agency, to a brand consultancy. Brand consultancies there is this kind of very, you know, there is no surprise that they came into currency along with spin doctors in the late 90s they are kind of, the Peter Mandelson's of the commercial world ie no one really know what they do, but they make shitloads of money ((laughs)). You know like, I am thinking about Wolff Olins for example, who created the Olympic logo or they would rebrand Dubai for example, or Singapore so they are charging like 5 million or 10 million whatever dollars or pounds to do it. Having said that, although people go oh they just produced that logo, the amount of checking and rationale that goes into creating something that is going to be reproduced millions and millions of times, could last years and years, it has to appeal to a massive range of stakeholders from employees, to shareholders, to the press, to you know you name it, a lot goes into that, so you know I am at pains to say yes they do, they still profiteer over the top but probably not as much as you suspect because there is a hell of a lot that needs to go on underneath the hood in order to be sure, get to the inside it's all very well you have maybe 5 different options but then to work out which of them does the best job, and guarantee that they minimise risk, that is a whole other story. So anyway erm... but yes so brand consultancies I work with design agencies, and advertising agencies, and essentially I help inspire them to think in different ways and then to yes give them visual evidence for why I am saying what I am saying. If you go onto my website there are a few examples on there. So, but let me send you these documents.

**If you would that would be great.**

**Subject F:** They will help you, they will definitely I mean if your question is you know, this discrepancy or you know how does an academic erm... training translate into commercial semiotics, then I think these are the best things I have read and I do continually look for things and try and keep up to date so there is not that much, probably that I haven't read. I mean I say that, it sounds quite arrogant but in English there is I have read a lot, let's put it this way I have read a lot of what has been written on this topic, because this is kind of what I do and I need to but erm... and I have also written a paper on how to become a commercial semiotician which is a sort of you know erm... a paper that I wrote from my own personal experience but you know I use semiotic frameworks to explain what it is I do, to people that are curious erm... about how and I guess one of the things (20.00) I am saying is actually although it is important to not to be, not to sort of discard the theory and if you can to bring it in, because I think it gives more credibility and validity to what you are doing, personally but I also think

you know, this is only... theory is only part of why I am able to do what I do, there is a lot of lateral thinking and aptitude that you need to cultivate like a martial art. And that is not lodged in books and that is not about erm... the fact that, that is more [20.32] that is more how to do something rather than accessing factoids and grids in your head of the way other people do it. It is much more freewheeling and it is much more craft skills and I think that is something people often don't realise. I mean it is not that I am that different from a forensic scientist or I don't know anthropologist or who else could be maybe even a pollster like everyone has got craft skills they use, but it is not as if I will read Barthes and then apply this, roll out the same theories. No. You know semiotic is object based analysis you know, applied semiotics so we are not metaphysicians you know we, we work with packaging or we work with industrial objects, we work with advertising and everything we work with is different and therefore our tools will need to be different. So, you know that's, that is, one of the things that is, has an area of complexity and means that, erm... you can never just take a theory and go right that theory is, if I just apply that theory systematically it will do the work, that is not the way it works.

**No, no.**

## APPENDIX 4



IMAGE 1



IMAGE 2



IMAGE 3



IMAGE 4



IMAGE 5



IMAGE 6

Appendix 4 contd.



IMAGE 7



LOW TAR As defined by the Government  
DANGER: Government Health WARNING:  
CIGARETTES CAN SERIOUSLY DAMAGE YOUR HEALTH

IMAGE 8



IMAGE 9



IMAGE 10



IMAGE 11



IMAGE 12

Appendix 4 contd.



IMAGE 15



IMAGE 16

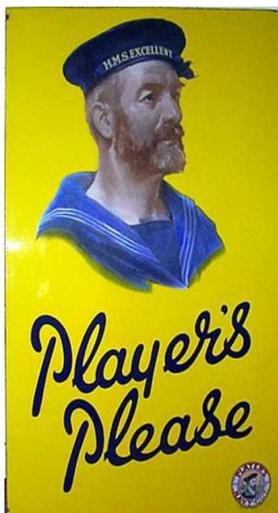


IMAGE 15



IMAGE 18



IMAGE 17



IMAGE 18