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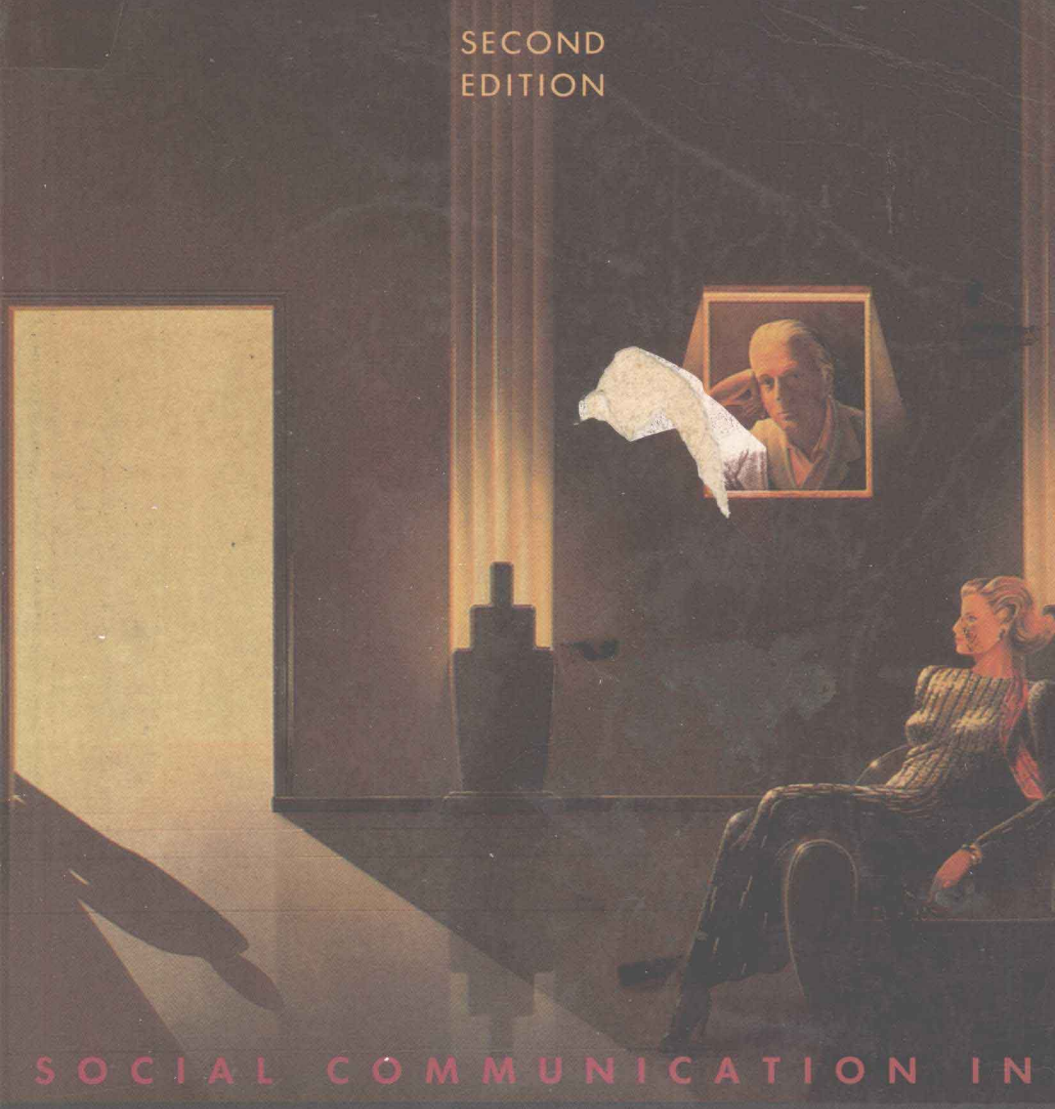

SOCIAL COMMUNICATION IN

ADVERTISING

LEISS
KLINE
JHALLY

PERSONS, PRODUCTS AND IMAGES OF WELL-BEING

Social Communication in Advertising

PERSONS, PRODUCTS & IMAGES OF WELL-BEING

Second Edition, Revised and Enlarged

• WILLIAM LEISS • STEPHEN KLINE • SUT JHALLY •

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Preface to the Second Edition

For the second edition, we have prepared three new chapters, made additions to other chapters, included some new illustrations, and updated the bibliography. Chapter 13, on political marketing, is entirely new. Both Chapter 7, on the advertising industry, and Chapter 12, on social policy issues, are substantially new, although they retain the basic thrust—and some of the content—of the first edition; in addition, Chapter 7 contains new interview materials. A new section, entitled "The Ad Industry Discovers Art," appears in Chapter 4.

We incurred many debts in the course of this project, which was begun in 1976 as a modest contract assignment with a federal government department in Ottawa (the officials were intently disinterested in our report, and injured pride spurred us to further study). Arlin Hackman and Judy Wright assisted us on that assignment, which resulted in the first version of our protocol for analyzing advertisements. When the final protocol was ready, in 1980, Edwine Hugenholtz supervised the team of coders for the ad sample at York University; we are especially grateful to her and to the other coders for their diligence and patience during this arduous task. Special thanks also is owing to Liss Jeffrey, who conducted most of the interviews with industry professionals that are quoted at many points throughout the book. Later JoAnne Stone, David McRobert and Glenn Ponthier at York University, and Leslie Wallace at Simon Fraser, helped us as research assistants. Professor Brent Rutherford of York University gave us astute guidance in configuring and interpreting our data from the ad sample.

Along the way we had the good fortune to encounter Professor Richard Pollay, Faculty of Commerce, University of British Columbia, who was engaged on a separate historical study of magazine advertising content. Those who work in this area know his extensive series of publications and research reports; he has been exceptionally generous to us with advice, encouragement, good humour, and gentle criticisms. We also happened upon Stan Shapiro, professor of marketing in the Faculty of Business Administration at Simon Fraser University. Professor Shapiro welcomed our novitiate amid the marketing literature, and pardoned our many interpretive errors; he has also championed our work among the members of his profession, cheerfully disdaining the possible adverse consequences for his own reputation, for which he has earned our admiration. Our copy editor for the first edition, Elizabeth Reid, vexed us with her line-by-line sifting of our manuscript, but finally won our admi-

ration and thanks for her insistence on clarity and precision of expression. We thank many publishers for permission to quote passages of text. Companies that allowed us to reproduce advertisements featuring their products are listed below; their cooperation in providing illustrations enhanced the effectiveness of our text. For permission to make use of earlier versions of some parts of this book, we would like to thank the following: University of Toronto Press, publisher of *The Limits to Satisfaction* (1976) by William Leiss; the editors of the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory,* publisher of three essays by us (1978, 1985); and the editors of *Theory, Culture and Society,* publisher of "The Icons of the Marketplace" (1983).

Sut Jhally extends special gratitude to Eileen McNutt; to his colleagues and graduate students in the Department of Communication at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst; and to Bill Livant.

Stephen Kline records his gratitude to Jill, Daniel, and Meghan Kline, for their support and tolerance; and thanks friends and colleagues Grahame Beakhust, Dian Marino, Peter Penz, and Neil Evernden.

William Leiss is deeply indebted to three dear friends and colleagues—Gaetan Tremblay, Liora Salter, and Arthur Kroker—for many kindnesses; to his departmental colleagues and Roman Onufrijchuk at Simon Fraser; to Folke Olander and Preben Sepstrup, Aarhus University, Denmark; to members of communications programs in Quebec: Bernard Schiele and others at Université du Québec à Montréal, Annie Méar and others at Université de Montréal, Gail Valaskakis and others at Concordia University, Gertrude Robinson and others at McGill University, and Michel de Repentigny and others at Université Laval. And, beyond measure, to Marilyn Lawrence.

During and after our book's gestation period, graduate and undergraduate students at York University, Simon Fraser University, and the University of Massachusetts nourished our project with their keen interest in the course materials through which we were developing our ideas. We are very grateful for their encouragement.

We are grateful to Mr. David Ward and his colleagues at Nelson Canada for their continued support of our book. We would also like to thank the New York ad industry executives for the interviews they granted to Sut Jhally in Summer 1989, and Mr. Jim Dosman of Vancouver, B.C., who did some valuable photography work on the illustrations for this edition.

We have made every effort to trace the ownership of all copyrighted material and to secure permission from copyright holders. In the event of any question arising as to the use of any material, we will be pleased to make the necessary corrections in future printings.

Vancouver, B.C.
Amherst, Mass.
January 1990

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Introduction

A single thread of argument is drawn through this book: in industrial societies in this century, national consumer product advertising has become one of the great vehicles of social communication. Regarded individually and superficially, advertisements promote goods and services. Looked at in depth and as a whole, the ways in which messages are presented in advertising reach deeply into our most serious concerns: interpersonal and family relations, the sense of happiness and contentment, sex roles and stereotyping, the uses of affluence, the fading away of older cultural traditions, influences on younger generations, the role of business in society, persuasion and personal autonomy, and many others.

Advertising represents a "privileged form of discourse" about such concerns in modern society—meaning simply that we accord what it says a place of special prominence in our lives. A century ago in North America and western Europe, the forms of privileged discourse that touched the lives of ordinary persons were church sermons, political oratory, and the words and precepts of family elders. Such influences remain with us, but their prominence within the affairs of everyday life and the rhetorical force and moral authority that they carry are generally sharply diminished now; among industrial societies, only in the United States does a significant part of the population retain a passion for religious rhetoric.

The space left as these influences have diminished has been filled largely by *the discourse through and about objects.* We intend this phrase to convey the idea that communications among persons, in which individuals send "signals" to others about their attitudes, expectations, and sense of identity, are strongly associated with—and expressed through—patterns of preferences for consumer goods. People in contemporary society come together in "taste cultures," "lifestyle groupings," or "market segments," which represent distinctive consumption patterns. Such subsidiary formations are quite informal in nature but can be identified quite precisely; businesses try to aim their product design and advertising messages carefully at them. We also intend this phrase to convey something more specific: a significant portion of our daily public "talk" and action is about objects (consumer goods), and about what they can do or should mean for us.

This discourse is privileged in two senses. In "market-industrial

societies" (North America, Western Europe, Japan, and a few others), economic affairs and marketplace transactions occupy a preponderant place in public life. For example, much of our political debate deals with "managing" the national and international economy. The talk about our economy's fortunes overawes everything else and indeed forces most other concerns to be expressed in its terms; the "bottom line" for all this talk is "delivering the goods" to consumers.

At the individual level, too, the discourse through and about objects sidles up to us everywhere, beckoning, teasing, haranguing, instructing, cajoling. Advertisements, the most accomplished vehicles of this discourse, are expertly and sometimes brilliantly constructed; it has been said with some justice that commercials are the best thing on television. Advertisements also make up the most consistent body of material in the mass media, something we have come to expect when we turn on the radio or television or open a magazine or newspaper. They are present in the most personal settings in our lives, at home and in leisure activities, just those times and places in which we relax and have the opportunity for self-expression.

How do we react to this omnipresent discourse? Typically, with matters that are major "fixtures" in everyday life, that are regarded as permanently troublesome but also indispensable—such as public education—we are ambivalent. So it is with advertising. Extensive public opinion surveys show that a high proportion of people enjoy ads as an art form, think that neither our economy nor the mass media could exist without advertising, and regard it as playing a generally positive role in society. In a major Canadian survey, respondents were asked whether the public school system or advertising had the greater influence on society: 54 percent identified schools, 42 percent ads. In the same study, an equally high proportion responded that good products do not have to be advertised at all; that ads cannot be believed, make products more expensive, do not influence consumer choice, and cause people to spend money on things they do not need. In another major Canadian survey, 60 percent of respondents agreed with the statement: "Most advertising is an insult to one's intelligence" (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission 1978).

Many individuals hold contradictory and sometimes diametrically opposed views on advertising, mirroring the divergence of opinion in society as a whole. Advertising has given rise to harsh criticism ever since it became prominent in the national media, on the grounds that it has a negative impact in general—for example, it encourages people to overvalue "material" things in life. Suggestions that subliminal messages hidden in ads affect us without our being aware of their influence are alarming, although this sort of claim usually turns out to be groundless. Advertising is defended with equal ardour as a valuable contributor to the

efficiency and freedom of a market economy. Recently, it has been acknowledged as a form of artistic expression; each year, prizes are awarded at an international competition held in Cannes (site of the famous film festival), and a collection of the year's best commercials makes the rounds of movie theatres.

Should we consider advertising and its effects on us (whatever they might be) as important issues? Does advertising, in fact, have a significant and measurable impact on our basic attitudes and behaviour patterns? Criticisms of advertising often are based on the presumption that it does have such an impact; rejoinders are made with equal conviction that no decent proof has been offered. The main difficulty here is to pin down what exactly it is that the two sides are arguing about. By now researchers are quite convinced that, as John Driver and Gordon Foxall (1984) conclude in a recent review of the literature, "advertising is helpless when it comes to establishing long-term purchasing patterns."

Notice that Driver and Foxall phrase the point in very specific terms. The debate about advertising is often vaguely cast, as demonstrated in the opinion surveys mentioned above. Driver and Foxall remark that many economists, advertisers, marketing managers, and policy makers still "cling to the conventional notion" that advertising exerts a strong influence on consumer behaviour. Research, they say, does not bear this out: "By and large, advertising does not act forcefully via intra-personal, mental processes to create attitudes which determine behavior." However, they are discussing a very narrowly defined issue—purchasing decisions for highly competitive consumer brands.

On the other hand, they are prepared to entertain a different perspective on the more general issue, conceding that "the aggregate effect of advertising on a materialistic society may be very great" (Driver and Foxall 1984, 98–104). Indeed, advertising's overwhelming presence today leaves little doubt that it is a factor to be reckoned with. In part, society tries to keep tabs on what the industry is doing by regulating it. Laws and industry codes of ethics are supposed to discourage unfair or misleading practices. All regulation is an attempt to work out a compromise among parties with conflicting viewpoints, but regulating advertising has not, by and large, ended the disagreements about its influence or appropriateness.

Fortunately, a welcome spate of studies has appeared in recent years, so that, even if we cannot yet decide what (if anything) we should do about advertising, we are in a much better position to understand it. Most of these studies are referred to and made use of in the following pages. Notable among the more recent of them are Daniel Pope's *The Making of Modern Advertising* (1983), the first extensive historical study to connect the industry's development with broader currents of change; Michael Schudson's *Advertising, the Uneasy Persuasion* (1984), a judicious, wide-

ranging commentary on major cultural and social issues, with a wealth of references to relevant literature; Stephen Fox's *The Mirror Makers* (1984), a sophisticated historical study of the industry, focusing on dominant firms and personalities and including materials drawn from manuscript collections; and Roland Marchand's *Advertising the American Dream* (1985), a superbly illustrated study of the period 1920–1940 and undoubtedly the finest historical account of a segment in advertising history ever written.

A series of insightful works published a few years earlier stimulated these efforts, especially Stuart Ewen's *Captains of Consciousness* (1976), Judith Williamson's *Decoding Advertisements* (1978), Erving Goffman's *Gender Advertisements* (1979), and Gillian Dyer's *Advertising as Communication* (1982). In a sense, the maturing of advertising studies as a domain for serious research was heralded by the invaluable annotated bibliography compiled by Richard Pollay, *Information Sources in Advertising History* (1979), and by the growing literature in essays and articles, especially the series of research reports issued by Pollay and his collaborators.

The recent literature seeks to set the serious study of advertising firmly on the twin pillars of history and culture—an objective we share.

The pillar of history is reflected in the consensus that we can grasp the implications of present-day practices best by seeing how they were composed and put into place step by step during this century. The works by Ewen, Pope, Pollay, Fox, Schudson, and many others reflect this conviction, as does our own book. Older advertisements are a treasure house of fascinating and often amusing illustrations of how people and products used to look; exhuming and examining them turns out to be a pleasant chore. They are also a "condensed" and graphic representation of certain aspects of life in times past. Robert Atwan and his associates put together a selection of ads spanning this century in *Edsels, Luckies and Frigidaires* (1979), remarking quite accurately in their preface that "advertisements tell us in miniature a great deal about an entire civilization, its actual material life and interlocking collective fantasies."

Even a cursory glance at the past helps to persuade us that what exists now is by no means the inevitable outcome of prior events, that things could be other than they are. For example, if some of the businesspeople who controlled media industries in the 1920s had had their way, there would be no commercials on radio and television. Had this happened, we would have grown up knowing only noncommercial broadcasting, which would appear "normal" to us, and under such circumstances most of us would be offended at the very idea of having commercial messages on the electronic media. Our present-day situation, considered all by itself, always appears at first glance to be a "whole": everything seems to be linked naturally to everything else.

Thus, to understand the present we must first, so to speak, disassemble it. In this book, we will devote a good deal of space to inquiries into the historical evolution of various institutions: consumer goods marketing, the mass media of communication, popular culture, and the advertising agencies. Then we will put the pieces together again. The advertising industry is a complex mechanism, made up of many parts, and its products reflect that complexity; by taking it apart and reassembling it we hope to show how it works.

The second pillar for the study of advertising is culture. Many controversies about the real or imagined effects of ads on specific aspects of attitudes and behaviour are bound up with our cultural traditions; see, for example, the comprehensive review of sex-role stereotyping in Courtenoy and Whipple (1983). We have in mind, however, the more general issue of the decline of older European cultures and the creation of a twentieth-century "consumer culture." Here it is not a matter of advertising "causing" this or that, but rather of it being one actor among others in a powerful social drama. Stuart Ewen's *Captains of Consciousness* (1976) pioneered in this area; the collection of essays edited by Richard W. Fox and Jackson Lears, *The Culture of Consumption* (1983), made important further contributions. Stephen Fox contends in *The Mirror Makers* (1984) that advertising was a "primary, independent force in the molding of American culture and mores" in the 1920s, but thereafter served more as a mirror for "deeper cultural tendencies."

Our main point is a simple one: **Advertising is not just a business expenditure undertaken in the hope of moving some merchandise off the store shelves, but is rather an integral part of modern culture. Its creations appropriate and transform a vast range of symbols and ideas; its unsurpassed communicative powers recycle cultural models and references back through the networks of social interactions. This venture is unified by the discourse through and about objects, which bonds together images of persons, products, and well-being.**

In seeking to analyze and understand this discourse and its historical evolution, it is necessary to weave together and synthesize elements from a number of different perspectives within the general domains of history and culture. Table 1.1, "The Development of Media, Marketing, and Advertising," summarizes our main argument and findings about the development and place of advertising as social communication in modern culture. It reflects our belief that only through an integration of insights from a number of different approaches is it possible to fully understand the role of advertising in the discourse through and about objects. Table 1.1 draws upon five main perspectives to aid us in this.

First, we focus on broad *economic* changes that characterize the transition in societies from largely agricultural and artisanal modes of production to a predominantly industrial mode of production. This tran-

TABLE 1.1
The Development of Media, Marketing, and Advertising

Media for Advertising*	Newspapers/ Magazines	Radio	Television	
Marketing Strategy	Rational	Non-Rational	Behaviourist	Segmentation
Advertising Strategy	Utility[a]	Product Symbols[b]	Personification[c]	Lifestyle[d]
Period	1890 1900 1910	1920 1930 1940	1950 1960	1970 1980
Elements in Ads	product **qualities, price, use**	product **qualities**	product	product
		symbolic attributes	**person prototype**	**activity (person-setting)**
Metaphoric-Emotive Themes In Ads	quality, useful, descriptive	status, family, health, white magic, social authority	glamour, romance, sensuality, black magic, self-trans-formation	leisure, health, groups, friendship

* Pre-1890: Posters and billboards.
[a] See Figure 1.1.
[b] See Figure 1.2.
[c] See Figure 1.3.
[d] See Figure 1.4.

sition necessitated not simply the adaptation to new ways to produce goods, but also required the development of new mechanisms for the distribution and circulation of goods.

Second, we draw upon *sociocultural* perspectives in seeking to understand how these economic changes influenced the way in which people related to goods. We pay special attention to the way in which the cultural forms that give meaning to the world of things undergo a drastic repositioning, such that in the consumer society marketplace institutions come to replace the family, community, and religious institutions that were important in agricultural societies and earlier forms of industrial society.

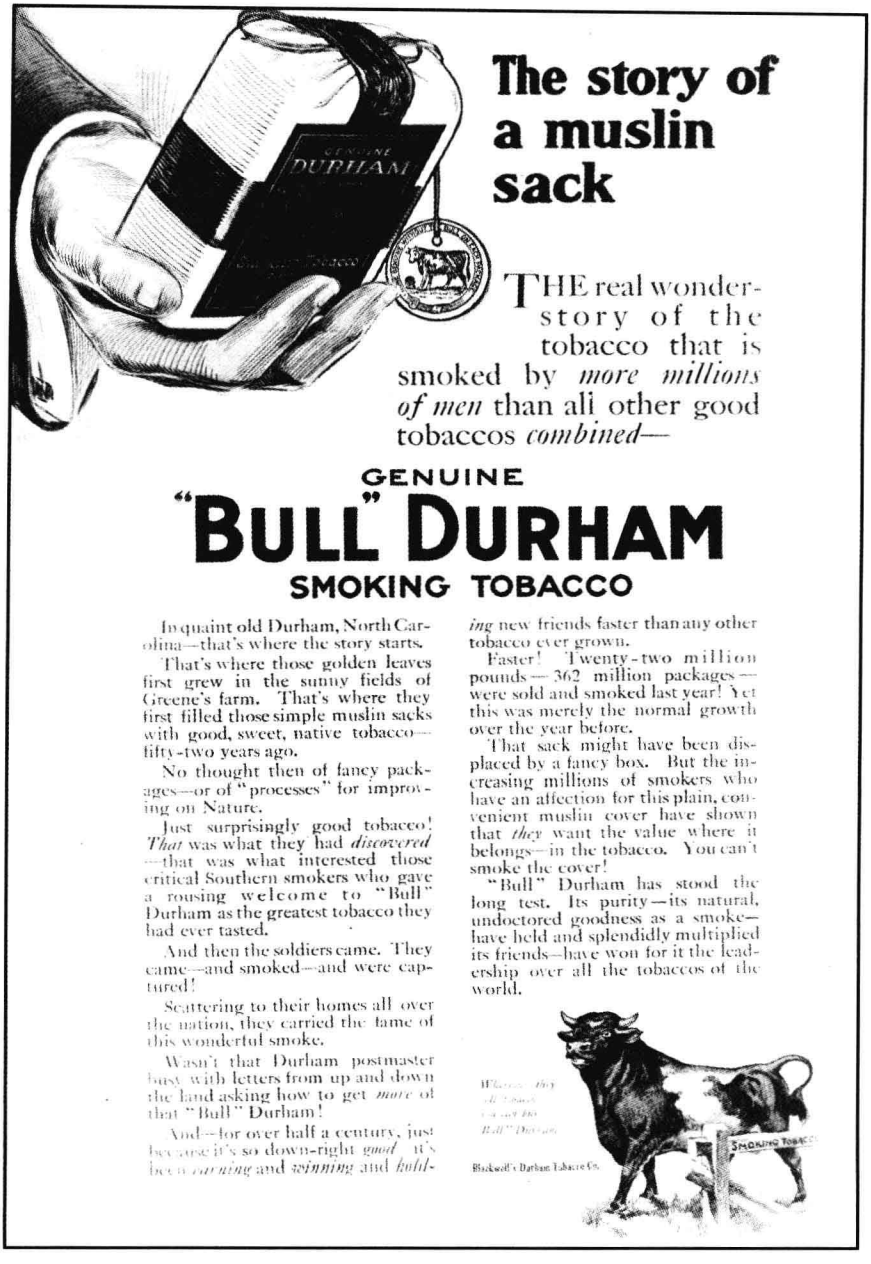
Third, we pay special attention to the specific manner in which these economic and sociocultural changes were *institutionally* mediated by the emergence and development of two key symbiotically related industries: the commercial mass media and the advertising agencies. In terms of the mass media, we focus on the way in which the successive integration of newspapers, magazines, radio, and television into the sphere of marketplace communications that deal with the discourse through and about objects profoundly influences the nature of that discourse. Different media offer different potentialities for advertising formats and strategies. This dimension is reflected in the "Media for Advertising" categories in Table 1.1. The commercial media are the delivery system for advertisements, which are actually planned and created by advertising agencies who act on behalf of their manufacturing clients. It is important to find out how the agencies and advertisers are thinking about consumers and ways to appeal to them. We identify four main phases in the development of "marketing strategy" throughout the twentieth century (see line two in Table 1.1).

Fourth, we closely *analyze advertisements* from all periods of this century to see how the economic, sociocultural, and institutional contexts influence their form and content. Specifically, we identify four main stages in the development of "advertising strategy." (See lines three to six in Table 1.1, as well as Figures 1.1–1.4).

Fifth, drawing upon our previous analysis of advertising content, we ask how this framework impacts upon our general understanding of goods and the ways in which they are integrated into the process of satisfaction and communication in the consumer society throughout the twentieth century. Particularly, we focus on the predominant set of images, values, and forms of communication in any period that provide a "*cultural frame for goods.*" We identify four major cultural frames that have historically given some definition to the relationship between people and things (see below and Chapter 11, especially Table 11.1, line 7).

We have just described our general approach to the understanding of advertising as a form of social communication. More specifically, chapter by chapter, in taking apart and reassembling the mechanism of modern

FIGURE 1.1
Utility: A Discourse about Product Quality



Source: Courtesy of The American Tobacco Company.

FIGURE 1.2
Product Symbols: A Discourse about Social Values and Tastes