

Conclusion

Advertising ‘tells’ its recipients narratives, or myths, in order to transform potential buyers into actual ones. While classical myth – metaphorically speaking – approached its recipients in the guise of a story and essentially claims to be true, the myth of advertising approaches the recipient in the guise of truth and yet essentially its statement only contains a story: The myths of fashion advertising – the fashion myths – attempt pointedly to tell the consumer: Lifestyle is the art of living. Lifestyle, in fashion terminology, does not, however, mean ‘style of *life*’ but ‘style of *consumption*’, because life is only a *good* life with these or those particular consumer goods. However, there is little reference in advertising to goods or services, but to symbols of values, needs, competences and virtues that exist beyond or, to a certain extent, *behind* the goods themselves. That is why I speak of *meta-goods*.

Three categories of meta-goods keep on recurring in advertising for fashion and fashionable consumer products that imply elements of the art of living: *staging*, *melioration* and *youthfulness*. To put it another way: Fashion myths tell three narratives: With the aid of fashion (1) the individual ensures perfect staging on the social stage of life; (2) improves himself and his life in a holistic way; and (3) renews himself. These three fashion myths imply three philosophical-anthropological assumptions:

(1) Man is a social being and seeks recognition from his fellow human beings. In order to acquire this recognition, he makes use of staging. (2) Man lives with the constant intention of improving his life in some form or other. Because of this, he considers the actual situation and his options in the *comparative*. (3) As a being that is preoccupied with metaphysics and seeks transcendence, man is also interested in the transcendence of life and

is aware of its finitude. For that reason, man appreciates those symbols that stand for the present, for freshness and youth.

Three phenomena stand out particularly among these anthropological assumptions that are important philosophical-anthropological implications of fashion(advertising) that are worth emphasising and collating once more in conclusion:

1. *imitatio prominentis* (imitation of prominent persons)
2. *holistic melioration* (improvement), that gets its bearing from the comparative nature of human life
3. *reinvestination* (pseudo-reincarnation by means of reinvestination)

1. *imitatio prominentis*

Mircea ELIADE in his comparative studies of religion elaborates on *imitatio dei* (imitation of God), which is a subcategory of *imitatio prominentis*: In the sacred ritual, the individual partakes via ritual acts – during which he imitates gods – in the transcendental, thereby experiencing a symbolical improvement of his constitution (purgation of effects, healing of illnesses, etc.). Via the imitation of what is better, more outstanding or prominent, the consumer – with the aid of consumer products that are presented in advertising as having to do with what is prominent, more beautiful, or standing out from the crowd – participates in their consumer style (i.e. in their lifestyle), and thereby apparently experiences an *ennoblement* of himself.

2. *Imperative of comparative melioration*

Advertising follows two strategies in this connection: (1) It communicates to the consumer the command to make comparative improvements: ‘Make yourself better... either better than you are at the moment... or better than the person next to you!’ (2) It holistically broadens the picture of the individual regarding clothing and consumer goods. On the one hand, fashion advertising harnesses the anthropological intention for melioration; on the other, it undertakes a ‘strategic’ broadening of the individual regarding clothing and other consumer goods. In advertising for fashion consumer goods and services the advertised products, however, are nearly always linked to *meta-goods*. The item to be acquired by the consumer has thus an additional value, a satisfying of a need, competence or virtue that improves the individual as a unity of mind-soul-body – and not only at the level of

consumer goods. The lady's tights of a particular brand are not only of an excellent quality in themselves but also supply beauty for body and mind at the same time.

3. *Reinvestination*

This phenomenon is most clearly seen in advertising for cosmetic products. The decline of outward appearance can apparently be stopped or even reversed by the ennoblement of the individual with the aid of cosmetic products. Purchasable *rejuvenating* substances are assimilated by the body, which too will become younger and more beautiful (in the event of consistent and intensive use of rejuvenating cosmetic products, the consumer would be re-incarnated at some stage as a baby or in a previous life). By seasonally renewing consumption of fashionable clothing, the individual takes part in the new at a personal level. New, fashionable items of clothing and their meta-goods are integrated into the totality and unity of 'mind-soul-body-clothing', thereby renewing this totality and unity. By the seasonal repetition of this, the individual is constantly 'reinvestinated', metaphorically speaking, as when the soul is born into a new body in the concept of reincarnation. Since, however, the holistic concept of the individual and the consumer product in advertising itself represents a simulation, because body and clothing do not form such a unity, the renewal of the whole person also represents a simulation.

