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The Authentic Self and Advertising : The Effects Advertising has on the Formation of the Authentic Self

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THE AUTHENTIC SELF AND ADVERTISING: THE EFFECTS ADVERTISING HAS ON THE
FORMATION OF THE AUTHENTIC SELF

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	IV
INTRODUCTION.....	1
WHAT IS AUTHENTICITY?	2
THE “I” AND THE “ME”	7
HOW WE UNDERSTAND THE WORLD	10
Consciousness.....	10
Awareness of the Self and Awareness of the Other	14
The “They”	19
To Authenticity and Freedom	21
THE WORLD OF ADVERTISING	30
OBJECTS ARE THE “THINGS” OF OUR LIVES	33
Understanding Advertisements	33
Approaching Objects, the Desire for “Things”	34
Transforming the Self	37
The Need for Recognition	38
An Inquiry Into the Lives of Others	42
An Unguided Guide to Authenticity	44
CONCLUSION.....	47
GILLETTE ADVERTISEMENT	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY	51
VITA	54

ABSTRACT

In a world bombarded with advertisements, it may be difficult for the development of an authentic self. Authenticity is a mode of existence in which there is ownership in the sense of self, while at the same time being able to present this sense of self to others. To be authentic is to act and live in a way that expresses a genuine concern for the self in which projects and goals pursued. The sense of self is the feeling of genuineness of the self and representing this self requires actions that correlate to these feelings. Advertisements act as communication to the public in an attempt to persuade people to purchase products. The tactics that advertising agencies use cause people and society to internalize these messages, in effect, influencing the way people experience the world. Thus, advertising can have a harmful effect on an individual by hindering the development of an authentic self.

I will first explain the concept of authenticity, following a discussion of how people organize experience by means of George Mead's concept of the 'I' and the 'me.' I will then provide a description of Martin Heidegger's account on authenticity in juxtaposition with Sartre's contrasting forms of inauthenticity by means of bad faith. Finally, I will discuss the damaging effects that advertising has to authenticity, and suggest ways to successfully exist in a world full of these advertisements.

The average American is exposed to at least three thousand ads every day and will spend three years of his or her life watching television commercials. Advertising makes up about 70 percent of our newspapers and 40 percent of our mail. ¹

-Jean Kilborne

Introduction

In the modern day we live in, we are bombarded with sensory information. Information flies at astonishing rates, and spreads to every outlet possible. Knowledge is not limited by direct experience because with technology, everything is accessible. You no longer have to fly to Egypt to know what the pyramids look like; you can search for it on the Internet or watch a video. This is the age of information exchange. News and daily events are right at your fingertips. The exchange of information is instant and information has a span farther than it ever has before.

We can find advertising everywhere; from a pop up here, to a product placement there, advertisements invade personal life. In a country that is run by consumerism, there is a need for companies to advertise in order to outsell their competitors. As explained by Jean Kilborne in the quote above, we spend a tremendous amount of time exposed to advertising. The persistency of advertising infiltrates our everyday lives, and while we are exposed to 3,000 ads everyday, the influences of advertisements go unnoticed. Advertisements have been so ingrained in our culture that we feel like it does not affect us, but it does so in the most subtle ways. These ads act as communication from companies to their potential customers, enticing customers to not just buy their products, but buy into their products.

Advertisement acts as communication to the public, by conveying messages about different aspects of life. These messages have an agenda that is projected to the viewer,

¹ Jean Kilborne, *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel* (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 58.

such as displaying societal norms, evoking emotions, motivating action, etc. Exposure to advertisements and its messages cause people and society to internalize these messages, in effect, influencing the way people experience the world. Thus, advertising can have a harmful effect on an individual by hindering the development of an authentic self.

Advertisements are harmful to the development of authenticity because they alter the knowledge that people can obtain through their relationships with objects, themselves and others. The knowledge from these relationships affects how an individual acts and experiences the world. It is essential to begin by introducing the concept of authenticity in order to better understand what it is and how it is formed. Then, I will discuss how people organize their experiences through George Mead's concept of the 'I' and the 'me,' and how these experiences are dictated by how people understand and manipulate the objects around them. I will then provide a description of Martin Heidegger's account on authenticity in juxtaposition with Sartre's contrasting forms of inauthenticity by means of bad faith. Finally, I will discuss the damaging effects that advertising has to authenticity, and suggest ways to successfully exist in a world full of these advertisements.

What is Authenticity?

Authenticity is a mode of existence in which there is ownership in the sense of self, while at the same time being able to present this sense of self to others. To be authentic is to act and live in a way that expresses a genuine concern for the self in which significant projects and goals are being pursued. The sense of self is the feeling of genuineness of the self and representing this self requires actions that correlate to these feelings. This sense of self can be gained when one can genuinely support, endorse, and embrace their life, as it effectively coincides with the general projection of one's

motivations and desires. As people attempt to construct themselves, they must feel that the person they are presenting is the best representation of their constructed self. Representing the self, to oneself and to others, requires reflecting upon the self and understanding its surroundings, as well as knowledge of personal desires, preferences, and goals. With reflexivity and personal knowledge, a person can conclude if their actions match their sense of self, determining if they are in a mode of authenticity. Since humans live in social communities, interaction with others has an effect on the creation of the self that an individual develops in relation to others and society. Others and society play as much an active role in the development of the mode of authenticity as much as individual themselves.

There are three important relationships that are necessary to the development of authenticity: the relationship to objects in the world, the relationship to the self, and the relationship to others. These relationships contribute to the greater understanding of the self, and the self in the world. A relationship with objects allows an individual to learn how to manipulate these objects to gain knowledge of how the world works. The relationship to the self allows an individual to be reflexive so they can grasp the understanding of certain facets of who they are. Relationships with others provide wisdom on how to act and live in a community dominated by social interaction. Each relationship provides knowledge that an individual can apply to their life in order to reach authenticity.

When thinking of authenticity, the notion of an independent, original and unique individual comes to mind. This is because authenticity is a reference to a particular person, in their particular life, with their particular experiences. In art, when referring to

an authentic painting, it is either one of a kind or the original. Walter Benjamin, who comments on the aesthetics of art in the age of mechanical reproduction, states, “The presence of the original is the prerequisite of the concept of authenticity.”² The original painting is set apart from others in “its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be,”³ and replication of the painting will reduce its authenticity because reproduction lacks this history. The painting is special and unique, just like people. Each individual is one of a kind and is composed of different experiences and influences that contribute to authenticity. However, being authentic is not just about being unique. It is more about ownership in life and the realization that it is each individual’s life to live. It is claiming life has his or her own. Each individual has different characteristics and experiences distinct from others, and ownership over life is being able to acknowledge the difference and accepting the life that one has made for him or herself. Much like the fingerprints of two people are different, the experiences and actions that would make someone authentic differ from person to person.

It is important to distinguish between authenticity and identity. It is a mistake to assume that an identity is authentic because people may have identities that are not authentic. Identity is a collection of characteristics that describes a person; personality traits, upbringing, hobbies, or any other description that indicates who the person is. In addition to being descriptive, an identity can also be formed through experiences.

Authenticity is a description of a way of living. Authenticity is achieved through

² Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” in *Media Culture Studies: Keywords*. ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas M. Kellner, (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 120.

³ Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, 120.

exploring certain experiences and choosing certain actions. Experiences of identity can directly affect the authenticity of a person.

There is a correlation between identity and authenticity. It is through the identity that authenticity can be expressed or explored. Identities contextually vary and can be authentic or inauthentic, but authenticity is based upon actively living and choosing a meaningful life. Throughout daily life identity plays different roles in interacting with others. The actions of a certain identity role may not be authentic all of the time. In some cases, actions are done out of duty or obligation. Authenticity takes into account all of the identity roles, evaluates them in respect to a person's manner of living, and distinguishes between identity roles and what is integral to one's being. While identity can be the outward expression of the self, authenticity goes to the core of who a person is and becomes, which is often dictated by personal goals and motivations. What would make an identity inauthentic is mindlessly "going through the motions", and living life devoid of meaning. Inauthentic choices can be made, but these choices contrast with the idea a person may have of the direction of their life, and are not meaningful because the choices do not contribute to the overall sense of self. Even though a choice is inauthentic, the results and consequences can still be considered part of a person's identity.

To say that James is an accountant is part of his identity. To say that James is an accountant and that is what makes him authentic would be mistaken. An accountant is an occupation that describes James. It describes what skills he may be good at such as crunching numbers and analyzing data, and what activities he may conduct such as meeting with clients and consulting others. To say that James is an accountant and authentic, is stating two different things. James may be authentic in stating that he chose

to be an accountant and that being an accountant is integral to his being. He would be inauthentic if he did not choose to be an accountant and had other reasons that were not based upon himself. Perhaps he became an accountant to carry on the family business, or was motivated by the financial security being an accountant provided. His occupation lacks personal meaning and he would feel no different if he were something else, like a doctor or lawyer. Because his goals and desires are directed elsewhere, his choice to be an accountant is inauthentic. In both cases, James can retain this aspect of his identity, being an accountant, however being authentic is determined by how meaningful being an accountant is to his identity, and whether his choice is motivated by this.

Authenticity is determined over the span of a lifetime. It is a continual process that requires an individual to act and make decisions that will contribute to his or her authenticity. The relationships that people experience add to the knowledge of themselves and the world, and allow achievement of an authentic existence. The continual interaction of the self and the world situates the individual, at the same time allowing for personal growth.

The 'I' and the 'Me'

George Herbert Mead gives an account of the formation of the self, described by means of the 'I' and the 'me'. The 'I' and the 'me' is Mead's way of describing two different aspects of selves. The 'I' is the immediate experiencing self, and the 'me', the social self. These two aspects carry out different functions, yet are integral to the self as a whole. Think of the 'I' and the 'Me' as two aspects of an identity. There is an identity that has its own agenda and needs, and the identity that acts with others. The identity can play different roles with different people according to the situations at hand. By looking

at the 'I' and the 'me', I will demonstrate the importance society and the contact with others have in the development of the self. The self encounters different objects and people and must have a way to make sense of it all. The 'I' and the 'me' organize experience and allow for an individual to participate in a social world.

When thinking of the self as a whole, the 'I' can be considered the internal, action component and the 'me,' the observable, social component. The 'I' is immediate experience. Once the experience has taken its course, the 'I' becomes the 'me' through memory, or as Mead would describe it, "The 'I' of the moment, is the 'me' of the next moment."⁴ The 'I' is consistently in the now and the 'me' is the reflection of the 'I' in hindsight. The 'I' can never be fully captured or described, because once it is, it has then moved to the past and becomes the 'me'. This 'I' is spontaneous and emergent, while the 'me' is the result of the acting 'I'. What is left after the acting of the 'I' is the 'me,' so the me is always the aspect of the self that is seen. The importance of the 'I' and 'me' is to show how the unstructured 'I' gains structure through the 'me', which is achieved by an interaction with the self and others. The 'I' and 'me' are components of an individual self that become part of the whole social process.

Identity has the 'I' and 'me' components. The 'I' of an identity is action oriented, while the 'me' is the identity that people see and interact with. As an individual, the person must have an identity that interacts with others, expresses him or herself to others, and learns to live in a community with others. This social self (the me), while still considering its own desires and wants (the I), must learn to restrain the complete expression of these desires and wants, in order to be in good standing with social

⁴ George H. Mead, *Mind, Self & Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*, trans. Charles W. Morris (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 174.

situations. The expression of the social identity may differ from individual identity, but these two identities are part of the whole composition of that person. People can have different identity roles in social situations, but still have their individual identity intact. While it is important to maintain a social identity, it is just as important to retain an individual identity.

The 'I' and the 'me' can be compared to the state of nature and social contract theories. In social contract theories, the state of human nature is chaos. To establish order, people would abide by the social contract to provide structure to the human state of nature. The social contract is made to civilize people and allow interaction between others, without infringing on others' freedom. To receive certain benefits, the population must consent to follow certain laws, giving up a certain amount of freedom for protection aided by the government. The 'I' is like the unruly state of nature that is animal-like and primal. The 'me', much like the social contract, holds back some of the actions of the 'I' that will not benefit social relations. The 'me' acts like a filter for the 'I', and is the aspect of the self that is presented to others and mediates between others. The 'I' must hold back some of its actions so the 'me' can properly interact with others and develop a working social and cultural relationship.

Social organization contributes to the flourishing of societies. The 'me' is the self that allows for socialization. The spontaneous, free 'I' always affects the social 'me'. In Mead's lecture *The Social Self*, he exclaims, "If the 'I' speaks, the 'me' hears. If the 'I' strikes, the 'me' feels the blow."⁵ The consequences from the action of 'I' are felt by the 'me'. The 'me' is observable and becomes the presentation of the 'I'. It is important for

⁵ George H Mead, "The Social Self," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology, and Scientific Methods*, 10, no. 14 (1913): 375.

the 'me' to socialize with others, so the 'I' needs to be restrained for the 'me' to function properly with society. The 'me' becomes an evaluative tool, a reflexive look at the developing self. Conception of the 'me' stems from both the individual's reflexivity of itself, and the other's conception of the self. Development of social control by the 'me' can suppress the actions of the 'I'. The two selves are continually working together to develop its complete self – the self that is in the world with others.

Mead provides an explanation of how an individual bridges between the self and its external environment. The 'I' and the 'me' mediate between the self and the external environment. Expression of the self must be controlled somewhat to allow smooth interaction between others, and the external environment provides the relevant data to internalize and structure the individual. The manner in which an individual acts cannot be solely based upon personal preferences, but must consider societal rules and conduct. The external environment plays a role in the development of the self, so when thinking about authenticity, one must keep in mind that authenticity also takes into account external measures.

Since being authentic takes into consideration influences from the external environment, individuals must be able to make sense of the world around them. There are endless amounts of stimuli in the environment that individuals must understand and decode. Consciousness allows an individual to process stimuli from the external environment, to arrive at an understanding of that environment. Explanation of how consciousness works will elucidate precisely how information is synthesized. Our experiences of stimuli can change the knowledge of the environment, as well as incorporating this knowledge into personal worldviews. By looking at Georg Wilhelm

Friedrich Hegel's work on phenomenology, we can see how consciousness helps individuals understand the world through experience and the capacity for reason.

How We Understand the World

Consciousness

Consciousness is a process to get closer to the absolute knowledge. The process, which is also referred to as the dialectical movement, consists of three stages or shapes of consciousness, from sense-certainty, to perception, resulting in understanding. Each shape of consciousness is built upon the last, and is essential to the overall project of understanding. When encountering the entities of the world, there is a rudimentary sense of understanding that upon reflection will get closer to absolute knowledge. Absolute knowledge to Hegel is similar to an ultimate truth. It is the final totality of the shapes of consciousness synthesized through reason.

The concept (or what Hegel would characterize as notion) of an object is independent from the actual object. How an object is understood may be different from the reality of the object. The shapes of consciousness are the movements of reason. Sense-certainty is the first shape of consciousness, and is found to be the least reliable. Sense-certainty takes the object perceived as truth, without regards to a process of mediation and reflection. It is the easiest and most accessible way of obtaining knowledge, but because of its simplicity can often be wrong. The object is seen in its entirety, but the knowledge of the object is limited to appearances. Sense-certainty is actually the least reliable source of knowledge because it does not get closer to the reality of the object. Hegel describes sense certainty to be "the most abstract and the poorest truth. All that it says about what it knows is just that it is, and its truth contains nothing

but the sheer being of the thing.”⁶ Knowledge during this stage is subjective and distinct from the reality of the object. The basis of certainty is through the senses, and may not be the most accurate depiction of the object. The concept of the object is independent from the perceiver, so it is common for sense-certainty to be mistaken because of the subjectivity that individuals present to consciousness.

The next shape of consciousness is perception. Once sense-certainty is questioned, and the knowledge gained through the senses is no longer reliable; perception finds truth in the universal. Beyond the personal experience of sense-certainty, the object must have a universal quality in order to be understood by others. All the particulars that were observed through sense-certainty are now unified into one concept. Unlike sense-certainty that is immediate, perception is mediated. The object, which exists in its truth and essence, must match up to the apprehension of the object. If the apprehension does not match with the universal concept of the object, then consciousness must reevaluate its perception of the object. However, perception too, is faulty. Hegel describes how perception works and can lead to untruth:

Consciousness is determined as percipient insofar as this Thing⁷ of its object. It has only to *take* it, to confine itself to a pure apprehension of it, and what is thus yielded is the True. If consciousness itself did anything in taking what is given, it would by such adding or subtraction alter the truth. Since the object is the True and universal, the self-identical, while consciousness is alterable and unessential, it can happen that consciousness apprehends the object incorrectly and deceives itself.⁸

Consciousness has the capability to perceive the object incorrectly. The object already exists in truth, but consciousness has the ability to change. If consciousness does not

⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 58.

⁷ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 80. When Hegel refers to Thing, he means thinghood or the universal sense of the object.

⁸ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 70.

detect the untruth, the result will be deceit. Deception will not further advance consciousness to understanding because understanding requires grasping the universal. To get out of deception, consciousness must be aware of its own mistake. It must reflect on the apprehension of the untruth, realize the untruth, and correct consciousness to the truth.

Perception is the move away from the senses, and closer to conceptual knowledge as Hegel explains the beginning of the movement, “the behavior of consciousness which we have now to consider is thus so constituted that consciousness no longer merely perceives, but is also conscious of its reflection into itself, and separates this from simple apprehension proper.”⁹ Consciousness is emerging, collapsing into itself, coming out to itself, and reflecting back into itself. This continuous cycle is the movement of a developing and evolving form of knowledge. The subjectivity that sense-certainty brought to perception is slowly dissolved by reliance of the universal. The universal does not change and contains truth that can be graspable by all.

Understanding is the final shape in consciousness. It is the final move from the material to the ideal. “In the dialectic of sense-certainty, Seeing and Hearing have been lost to consciousness; and, as perception, consciousness has arrived at thoughts, which it brings together for the first time in the unconditioned universal.”¹⁰ No longer does consciousness have to sense an object to know it exists, it comprehends the concept of the object. Understanding goes beyond the immediacy of appearances, to the eternal truth.

The significance Hegel presents with consciousness is how the external world is processed and internalized. It points out how fallible humans can be in processing this

⁹ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 72.

¹⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 79.

information as well. While there is a system of checking and reevaluating, errors can be made, and others can contribute to these errors. Consciousness is what changes the notion of the object, and it has also shown that the notions can be fallible. The understanding of the world effects how individuals experience objects and others. These experiences provide the base of information to relate to the world.

The relation to objects is important in shaping the self. In the search for the meaning of being, Martin Heidegger describes how we encounter ordinary objects. Objects are experienced ready-to-hand and present-at-hand. The discussion of ready-to-hand and present-at-hand is important in revealing how we approach the objects around us. The wrong approach, can lead to the inappropriate use of an object or a mistake regarding the relation between objects.

To experience objects ready-to-hand is to experience them in its ordinary, everyday way. Ready-to-hand is how we make use of objects and their intended purpose. We use objects in order to accomplish specific tasks. The objects become equipment and have a function that is immediately relevant. Knowledge of the object is gained simply by using it, and essence of the object is defined by its function. Present-at-hand comes after an object has been experienced ready-to-hand. Present-at-hand is the theory behind ready-to-hand, and can provide the explanation to why the object fulfills its function. Present-at-hand is known abstractly by means of concepts, ideas, and facts. To look at objects present-at-hand is to look at the objects from a theoretical viewpoint, much like the way scientists observe objects. There is a distance between the subject and the object in a way that the subject can objectively state facts about the object. Ready-to-hand is

known by use and through involvement; while present-at-hand is known by theory and through reflection.

Some objects are known as equipment and some objects are known conceptually. Ready-to-hand and present-at-hand are different approaches that an individual can take in regards to the objects of the world. The way people manipulate and understand objects become part of how they interact with the world. Using a hammer as a tool to secure nails into the wall is using the hammer ready-to-hand as equipment. The hammer is used intuitively and is revealed present-at-hand when the hammer no longer works properly. The usability of the hammer is absent, and is no longer used in its ordinary, everyday way. The hammer is known as a brute object with various properties and is theorized from a standpoint that a scientist would in an attempt to gain conceptual knowledge of the object. Since ready-to-hand is experienced before present-at-hand, Heidegger wants to demonstrate that our experiences come prior to meaning. While experience is important, meaning is revealed after reflecting upon the experience. How we manipulate and understand objects become part of our Being. Objects can be the extension of our selves, and objects can be the conceptual origin of scientific inquiry. Either way, it is how we relate and understand the world.

Awareness of the Self and Awareness of the Other

To be aware of the self is to be aware of the other as well. Authenticity is not achieved by being isolated from the world, because that is not a realistic way of living. People live in families and communities, and require interaction and collaboration. To understand and know the self is also to be aware that others have an effect on the self.

People are born into a world where they require nurture to survive. A mother must take care of her child and protect and care for it until they are old enough to do so for themselves. Mead best explains the relationship of the beginning of socialization. At infancy, a human baby acknowledges others before it gains acknowledgement of itself. Primarily the self recognizes the other not yet grasping the concept of the self. To the developing baby, the other is seen as an object. The other's actions are perceived and observed. The relationship between the two beings begins by seeing each other as objects. The two are acting and reacting to each other, developing roles and a base for interaction. An infant cries, the mother reacts and feeds the baby, or changes its diaper, etc... The child learns that crying will lead to the mother's care and the causal chain is ingrained in the child. The care shown to the child also effects the conception of how others are to be treated. The relation and connections an individual may experience orient the individual to other social interactions.

To understand the self, there is a shift from how one sees the other as an object to how one see itself as an object. Mead elaborates in *Mind, Self, and Society*,

...he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself just as other individuals are objects to him or in his experience; and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which both he and they are involved... The importance of what we term 'communication' lies in the fact that it provides a form of behavior in which the organism or the individual may become an object to himself.¹¹

The self sees the other as an object and develops their own attitudes and beliefs towards the other. The other is undergoing the same process of objectification. The attitudes and

¹¹ Mead. *Mind, Self, & Society*, 138.

beliefs the other formed are projected back to the self. The attitudes and beliefs from the other are thus internalized and become part of how an individual understands the self and vice versa. Here the individual incorporates or acknowledges viewpoints of society into his or her personal schema.

Hegel describes the same process, but he calls this process self-consciousness. Just as consciousness is awareness of objects, self-consciousness is being aware of the self. Instead of understanding the absolute truth that consciousness tries to get closer to, self-consciousness attempts to reconcile the consciousness of the other, toward the consciousness of the self. Individuals with their own consciousness cannot be regarded as a simple object because they are more complex than simple objects. The discussion of consciousness reveals the ability of the shapes of consciousness to result in error. People have desires and wants that can alter consciousness, and unlike objects that cannot change, people have the capability to transform and change themselves.

Self-consciousness is an awareness of the self that is realized when facing another's self-consciousness. Being aware of another implies that (1) 'I' am aware, and that (2) 'I' am aware of the other being aware of me. The other is an object for me, just as I am an object for the other. When conscious of an object, the relation is between the individual and the object, but with self-consciousness there is a double relation or movement between the two self-consciousness "Each sees the other do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same."¹² Each individual acts out the expectations of the other but does this in so far as the other does the same, too. Both selves want to be

¹² Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 112.

recognized, but not recognized as an object, so the struggle of recognition begins. It is also the point where self-consciousness realizes it is the other for another. *The other* has self-consciousness as well, and looks at the other self-consciousness as an object outside the self. *The other* is viewing self-consciousness as an other in the same manner. The self-consciousness of both individuals sees each other as an object, but these individuals are not mere objects.

Meanwhile, *the other* self refuses to be seen as an object for another and vice versa. Both individuals are trying to assert their dominance and project their essence, so the action is one and the same. This is seen when self-consciousness returns to itself, “through the supersession, it receives back its own self, because, by superseding its otherness, it again becomes equal to itself; but... the other self-consciousness equally gives back again to itself, for it saw itself in the other, but supersedes this being of itself in the other and thus lets the other again go free.”¹³ Self-consciousness receives the feedback from *the other*, a notion of its essence from *the other's* point of view. The other's point of view is internalized, and self-consciousness determines if the two notions match. By evaluating both notions, self-consciousness also realizes that *the other* has independence and freedom from the self; much like the independence and freedom that the self has from *the other*.

The struggle of self-consciousness is the tension between the self in the presence of another. What self-consciousness is presenting is the closest to the absolute truth of the self. Within self-consciousness, consciousness split up into two extremes; “one is the independent consciousness, whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the

¹³ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 112.

dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another.”¹⁴

Hegel is trying to point out two aspects of self-consciousness. Consciousness wants to assert itself as its own, in its truth, but at the same time consciousness is validated upon the recognition from *the other*. The struggle for recognition occurs because the other is not an object. If the other were an object, then there would be no struggle. At the same time, self-consciousness wants to assert the certainty that an object presents, while attempting to not be reduced to a mere object by another.

There is a struggle of recognition on both fronts. Both are trying to gain recognition and as Hegel explains, death of the other. Not death in the corporeal way, but in an idealistic way. Each is trying to confirm its essence, or demonstrate its essential nature, with an attempt to eradicate or replace *the other's* with its own. Self-consciousness is the essence of one's life, and to seek one's life, is to cause the death of the other's. In the struggle of recognition, self-consciousness risks its life because it believes its essence to be of value over the other.

The role of others has a significant impact on the self. It provides feedback for the self to reflect upon, as well as serve as a model for social interactions. Learning about the self begins with understanding the other. When analyzing the self, it is difficult to be objective. Individuals have the tendency to be biased. Encountering another is a way to get over this bias. At the end of the struggle of recognition, the self learns about itself through its otherness. This otherness would not have ever been known if it was not for encountering another conscious being. It is important to understand the significance of others, in reference to authenticity, because social relations become part of what an individual finds meaningful and structures the way they live in the world.

¹⁴ Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 115.

The “They”

While interaction with others is important, being absorbed with others can have a damaging effect on authenticity. Heidegger describes this absorption through an explanation of the relationship between Dasein and the “they”. Dasein is the term that Heidegger uses to describe an entity that has the capacity to inquire about its being. Being is used in two different ways in Heidegger’s writings. Being (with a capital B) as a way of existing, and being as a noun describing a living entity. Instead of using the term human or individual, he uses Dasein to strip associations that may have been attached to those terms, so he can have a clean slate in investigating the Being of Dasein. Dasein is an interpreting, investigating, and understanding entity. It is an entity that is concerned with its world and existence. The “they”, also known as the “One,” is collective others acting as one. It is also important to distinguish between the “they” and others. The “they” is the populace, as others can be single entities distinct from the self. Dasein in encountering its world will confront the “they”, others, and other entities within the world.

Dasein exists in its everydayness. All the day-to-day activities and the routine that Dasein partakes in, is part of Dasein’s everydayness. As Dasein exists in the world, it may get lost in this everydayness of routine. With all the occurrences of daily life, Dasein can get comfortable with the security everydayness provides. The “they” exists in this mode of average everydayness. Heidegger describes the uniformity of the “they”:

We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* [man] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we can shrink back from the ‘great mass’ as *they* shrink back; we find ‘shocking’ what *they* find

shocking. The “they”, which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness.¹⁵

The “they” requires acts of conformity. When Dasein is with the “they,” the acts of the “they” are the acts of Dasein. These acts cause Dasein to be mindlessly swept along with the thoughts and actions of others. When Dasein conforms to the “they”, Dasein is in the mode as “they-self”. The “they” is similar to popular culture. The “they” dictates the standards and decisions, as popular culture define trends and set the norms.

While there is comfort within the “they”, the cost is Dasein’s authenticity. It does not allow Dasein to explore the possibilities that would make Dasein authentic. There is an array of possibilities or options that Dasein can explore, such as, the different directions and ways of being that Dasein can take. While Dasein is within the “they” its possibilities are hidden. The “they” does what Heidegger calls “the leveling out of possibilities.” Leveling out the possibilities is covering up these possibilities by providing comfort in conforming to the “they”. The comfort does not allow Dasein to acknowledge these possibilities as viable options. In its complacency, Dasein forgets the range of possibilities that are available and is in the mode of what Heidegger identifies as falling.

Heidegger explains what happens when Dasein is falling.

To Dasein’s state of Being belongs *falling*. Proximally and for the most part Dasein is lost in its ‘world’. Its understanding, as a projection upon the possibilities of Being, has diverted itself thither. Its absorption in the “they” signifies that it is dominated by the way things are publicly interpreted.¹⁶

Falling is a natural state for Dasein. It is not difficult for Dasein to be engrossed with its world and in the world of others because Dasein has the characteristic of being concerned with its surroundings. Dasein has the ability to get wrapped up with the “they” and forget

¹⁵ Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, (New York: Harper and Row, 2008), 164.

¹⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 264.

that it is an individual. While Dasein is in the state of falling, Dasein is not distinguished from the “they”. This absorption in the “they” keeps Dasein from seeking its possibilities and making Dasein fall prey to inauthenticity.

To Authenticity and Freedom

Among the range of possibilities, the “they” provides are possibilities that are not Dasein’s own. In order to be authentic, Dasein must have ownership of its own possibilities. By breaking away from the “they,” Dasein can now become aware of its possibilities and have the ability to project these possibilities. This process, which Heidegger characterizes as resoluteness, “signifies letting oneself be summoned out of one’s lostness in the “they”.”¹⁷ To be resolute does not mean that Dasein is isolated from the “they,” it simply means that Dasein can differentiate its own possibilities from the possibilities that were given by the “they”.

In resoluteness the issue for Dasein is its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, which, as something thrown, can project itself only upon definite factual possibilities. Resolution does not withdraw itself from “actuality,” but discovers first what is factually possible; and it does so by seizing upon it in whatever way is possible for it as its ownmost potentiality-for-Being in the “they”.¹⁸

Dasein is “thrown” into the world, alongside others and entities that existed prior to its thrownness. Dasein is situated in an environment that it did not choose, nor create. To be resolute is to be conscious of the environment and have an understanding of what factors can, and cannot be controlled. Within a situated environment, Dasein can project its possibilities in cases where it sees fit. While still in the “they,” Dasein can differentiate the possibilities the “they” created, and assess the possibilities that Dasein can create for itself. In resoluteness, Dasein realizes its place within the world, and the possibility of an

¹⁷ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 345.

¹⁸ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 346.

authentic existence. Situations that were created by the “they” may contribute to Dasein’s inauthenticity as Dasein has the ability to exist and comport its own possibilities.

Dasein’s thrownness can be within the “they” and if Dasein doesn’t wrench itself out of the “they,” Dasein might not be aware of the possibilities that it can explore. There are aspects of one’s being that are in control, and realizing what is in control and what is not allows for control and ownership over one’s life. Authenticity is when Dasein realizes its possibilities as its own, and is capable of projecting its possibilities to build a life that is its own. Acknowledging these possibilities open up Being for Dasein to pursue and to explore a life that the “they” would not have been able to provide. Among the range of possibilities Dasein can choose, and in this choice, Dasein’s life is its own.

Along with choice, comes great responsibility. Dasein as a “they-self” was fleeing the responsibilities of making choices. Making choices causes anxiety, a divergence from the comfort of the “they.” Heidegger believes anxiety carries an important function in individualizing Dasein. Anxiety is a state-of-mind that is connected with fear. The “they” brings “tranquilized assurance,”¹⁹ while anxiety “brings it [Dasein] back from its absorption in the ‘world.’ Everyday familiarity collapses.”²⁰ Dasein is faced with an unfamiliar world that it must interpret on its own. The interpretations of the “they” were public interpretations and do not provide truth to Dasein’s own existence. Anxiety causes Dasein to interpret the world for itself:

Anxiety makes manifest in Dasein its Being *towards* its ownmost potentiality-for-Being – that is, its *Being-free* for the freedom of choosing itself and taking hold of itself. Anxiety brings Dasein face to face with its *Being-free* for the authenticity of its Being, and for this authenticity as a possibility which it always is.²¹

¹⁹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 233.

²⁰ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 233.

²¹ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 232.

Dasein always has the ability to be authentic, but the “they” provides psychological contentment. It is easy to stay in complacency and to follow the path set by the “they”, than to face the infinite amount of possibilities. Anxiety jolts Dasein out of this complacency and into reflexivity. To be authentic is to realize the angst of being free. The freedom to make choices is making and building a life that Dasein can call its own. The responsibility of making decisions, whether good or bad, is contingent upon Dasein itself. Only Dasein can be blameworthy or praiseworthy for its decisions. Anxiety also stems from not knowing the outcomes of these decisions. In choosing, Dasein is taking a risk, but at least the risk is for the self and not for the others.

Jean-Paul Sartre was also aware of this ever-present freedom. Sartre expresses in *The Humanism of Existentialism* that “man is condemned to be free. Condemned because he did not create himself, yet in other respects is free; because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does.”²² Similar to Heidegger, Sartre believes that man is thrown into the world. The difference between Heidegger and Sartre is that Sartre believes that individuals are always choosing; even when they decide not to choose, it is still a choice. The only choice that individuals do not make is existence. Man is condemned because the initial fate of existence was not of his choosing, yet he is born free and condemned to constantly make choices from that point on.

Fleeing freedom by finding comfort in the “they” is a form of inauthenticity according to Heidegger. With Sartre, fleeing from freedom is in the form of bad faith, which is being inauthentic. To commit bad faith is to deny the freedom and responsibility that humans have. The mode of inauthenticity for Heidegger, occurs by being lost in the

²² Jean-Paul Sartre, “The Humanism of Existentialism,” in *Existentialism: Basic Writings*, Charles Guignon and Pereboom (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001), 296.

world of others, while inauthenticity for Sartre, is a lie to the self. Both present types of inauthenticity, one by means of conformity, and the other is through self-deception.

Either way, inauthenticity is possible because humans are free.

The individual committing bad faith has the dual role of acting as the deceiver and the deceived. The individual is conscious of the deceit on the self, at the same time conceals this deceit from the self. Bad faith is intentional because it involves the conscious effort to put oneself in bad faith. In order to get a full account of bad faith, facticity and transcendence must be explained. Humans consist of both facticity and transcendence. Facticity is the concrete details or brute facts, such as birth dates, origin of birth, height, and past history; the facts about a person that is not in their range of control. Transcendence is the going beyond facticity. Because humans have consciousness, transcendence allows them to be other than their facticity. When a person is in bad faith, they believe contradictory terms of their being. They “affirm facticity as *being* transcendence and transcendence as *being* facticity, in such a way that at the instant when a person apprehends the one, he can find himself abruptly faced with the other.”²³ In an attempt to transcend, we are always faced with our facticity. Because we are both facticity and transcendence, we must understand our facticity and our given situation in order to transcend and to be more than this given situation. This is what Sartre calls the “double property of human being,”²⁴ because in this single unity, the individual acts out dual roles of their existence. Facticity and transcendence are misapprehended; one thinks certain aspects of their being are facticity when they are transcendence, and transcendence when they are facticity.

²³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Gramercy, 1956), 56.

²⁴ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 56.

Facticity and transcendence are inseparable parts of human existence. Humans cannot exist in pure facticity, because humans contain consciousness that allow them to become more than they already are. Humans cannot be pure transcendence either, because they have history and facts that cannot be changed about their existence. "I am not what I am... but thanks to transcendence, I am not subject to all that I am."²⁵ This statement from *Being and Nothingness*, displays how facticity and transcendence function together as a whole. The first part, "*I am not what I am*," implies there is an idea of a fixed essence of a person. A person exists in its complete entirety. There is an assumption that people have a certain nature. However, there is no human nature or essence. "*Thanks to transcendence, I am not subject to all that I am*," allows the person to go beyond the static features that have been attributed to the self. One can be more than a collection of facts; one has the opportunity and freedom to create and play an active role in one's existence. With this freedom, is the responsibility of taking control of one's life which is a gift and a curse at the same time.

Bad faith is the running away from the responsibility that comes with being free. It is easier to deny that one is free, rather than to face the anguish of being free, such as Sartre's example of the woman on a date:

She knows very well the intentions which the man who is speaking to her cherishes regarding her. She knows also that it will be necessary sooner or later for her to make a decision... In order to satisfy her, there must be a feeling which is addressed wholly to her personality – i.e., to her full freedom – and which would be a recognition of her freedom. But at the same time this feeling must be wholly desire; that is, it must address itself to her body as an object. But then suppose he takes her hand. This act of her companion risks changing the situation by calling for an immediate reaction. To leave the hand there is to consent in herself to flirt... The young woman leaves her hand there, but she does not notice that she is leaving it.²⁶

²⁵ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 57.

²⁶ Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 56.

The situation calls for the woman to make a choice, to be considered a sexual object or to be treated as a peer. She is conscious of her date's possible intentions, yet denies these intentions to herself as the night progresses. She takes his actions as facticity, when his movements are towards transcendence. He is trying to be more than the situation requires at that moment. He has desire to be more intimate than to be mere acquaintances. By not moving her hand she believes she is in transcendence, that she is a woman and not an object, yet she is in facticity because she is enjoying the desire that comes from being an object. She appears to be all intellect, but she is allowing herself to be an object. In choosing not to move her hand, she is making a choice, but her choice is in bad faith.

An individual can make choices from infinite possibilities. "Bad faith occurs when a conscious being denies her freedom to choose from among the range of possibilities, or when she denies an aspect of her facticity, for instance, that there are certain choices that she has made in the past or that these choices make up certain patterns."²⁷ The woman was in bad faith because she believed that she was not being treated as a sexual object, yet allowed herself to be treated as a sexual object. She wanted to transcend her facticity, to be seen as more than just a woman, but when presented with the opportunity to make a decision, her actions contradicted her beliefs. She also acted as if she had no choice but to leave her hand with his. It was easier to ignore the gesture, than to confront the truth of being reduced to a sexual object.

People choose bad faith to avoid anguish. Anguish stems from the given freedom humans have. People have an array of possibilities they can explore. The anguish comes from having all these possibilities, but not knowing which one is the best one for them.

²⁷ Guignon and Pereboom, *Existentialism: Basic Writings*, 269.

People have control over their future. They can pick and choose what ways their life can go, but when they do, they become responsible for those life choices. There is also uneasiness in not knowing which is the best possibility or opportunity to take. So in committing bad faith, the anguish from freedom may be relived, but the person is avoiding the responsibilities that come from leading a free life.

Sartre stresses the importance of freedom. Freedom is the root of all values, as well as the most important value to uphold. Since the denial of freedom is bad faith, Sartre wants freedom for the self and freedom for all. Intuitively, no one prefers to have his or her freedom oppressed. So to assert one's freedom to the point where it infringes on another's, is not upholding the value of freedom. Humans live in a world with other humans, and the action of one can directly affect the lives of others. As stated by Sartre, "my actions involve all of humanity".²⁸ We should want freedom because of the direct implications it has on creating our own lives and the lives of others.

To recapitulate, authenticity is a mode of existence in which there is ownership in the sense of self. To be authentic is to act in a way that expresses a genuine concern for self-promotion, in which significant projects and goals are pursued. Authenticity is a process that requires the self to reflect upon itself and the external environment of things and others. Humans are not isolated creatures; their self-development is influenced by the external environment and affects the person they are and become.

Mead explained how the self organizes its experiences to bridge the gap between the self and others. The 'I' and the 'me' are two aspects of the self; the internal acting component, and external social component, that allows for socialization. Part of

²⁸ Sartre, "The Humanism of Existentialism," ed. Charles Guignon and Pereboom, 293.

authenticity is to understand the self as well as understand others; the 'I' and the 'me' organizes and acts like a filter for socialization, while still retaining a sense of self.

Consciousness is the process of understanding. To be conscious is to have attention directed toward something, whether it is an object or person. The shapes of consciousness, from sense-certainty, to perception, resulting with understanding, are mediated between an individual's initial knowledge of an object, and the universal concept of the object. The initial understanding of the object may not be the correct apprehension of the object, so consciousness reevaluates the object to arrive at a more stable form of knowledge. Consciousness is important to authenticity because it is key to how individuals come to an understanding of their world.

The objects of everyday life are encountered ready-to-hand and present-at-hand. The explanation of ready-to-hand and present-at-hand is important in understanding the approach individuals have towards the objects they encounter. An object ready-to-hand is used as equipment and known directly, by means of manipulation. An object present-at-hand is known theoretically; when the object ready-to-hand is isolated from its everyday use, it is observed from a neutral scientific standpoint. The importance of ready-to-hand and present-at-hand is to understand the approach individuals have towards objects, because the application of the approach applies to other facets of life and how individuals understand the self.

Self-consciousness is consciousness directed inwards towards the self. Self-consciousness requires acknowledgment of others, acknowledging the self. Attitudes and beliefs from the other are revealed to the self and becomes part of the process of self-understanding. Within self-consciousness is the struggle for recognition. The other wants

to be recognized just as much as the self wants to be known. The struggle for recognition results in knowledge of the self and its otherness. Some of the attitudes and beliefs from the other are internalized and has an effect on the authenticity of a person.

Inauthenticity occurs when an individual is too concerned with others that it loses its sense of self, or when individuals fool themselves to be other than what they are. Lostness in the “they,” and bad faith are two forms of inauthenticity. In order to be authentic, there must be a change in behavior or way of living. The individual must break from the “they,” or admit they are in bad faith and attempt to get out of it.

Authenticity is possible because individuals are free. People have the ability to be authentic or inauthentic and to make choices that have an effect on their lives. Along with the ability to make choices is responsibility. Having freedom entails having control over one’s life by making choices. One becomes responsible over their life through the choices they make. Authenticity is ultimately up to the individual; it is a way of living and an attitude towards life.

Advertising is problematic to the process of authenticity. Since advertising is a form of communication from companies to the people, the messages of advertising affect the relationships between people and objects, others, and themselves. Advertisements contain messages that pertain to the self and the world, so when people receive these messages, they internalize and interpret the ideals to their life. The messages may not accurately portray reality, but people understand advertisements to model real life. In the following section, I will look into different tactics advertising agencies use to appeal to viewers. These tactics have an effect on the self in ways that can lead an individual to

inauthenticity. Because authenticity is developed in relation to the external world and others, advertising has a far reach and can affect millions of people.

The World of Advertising

Advertising agencies have been very successful in enticing consumers into buying their products. The strategies agencies use are intentional and psychological.

There is no escape from advertising, it is found everywhere; on television segments, radio, magazines, and on the side of busses to name just a few. The pervasiveness of advertising also makes it difficult for consumers to determine where their motivation to buy products stemmed from. Some people do not know the reason behind their buying, but what they do know is that they should buy. Could the motivation be based upon personal preference or grounded on societal pressures to conform? Is the individual simply exercising their right to make choices or are the choices influenced by societal norms? In this section I will look at how advertising works and how it affects the self in damaging its formation and distorting the perception of the self, the relation to others, and reality.

Advertisement has a long history and although this paper's focus will be contemporary advertising, present in America, a brief description of that history is important to understand the growth of advertising as well as to see the need for it. In the colonial time advertisements in newspapers were the most exciting sections to read. Products that were in advertisements were found locally and were more relevant, compared to the news stories coming from England. By the times stories were printed, the news from England would be outdated; information from advertisements, such as the movement of goods, the sale of properties and other items, lost or stolen goods were

more relevant than the news stories from England. During the Revolutionary War, propaganda was used on both fronts, American and British, to support their cause. The task of propaganda was to change people's thoughts and opinions, provoke emotion or action, for the greater cause. Propaganda was advertisement for an ideology, and was made to affect a vast amount of people.

Advertisement's scope grew, and dispersed throughout great distances. More people were entering America and moving westward. Placement of railroads allowed for transportation of goods and mass distribution. With the rise of industrialization, products were being mass-produced at rates where the products were not consumed fast enough. Companies needed more consumers and a way to get their product out, so they revised advertising to account for this need.

Advertising became a business and a product itself. The main purpose is to get the consumer to buy, and not just buy, but buy *their* product. People are employed to advertise products and advertise them well. Jobs depend on the success of a product, and long lengths of time are spent on research to understand the human psyche. Advertising companies look for factors that would motivate people to buy their product, as well as look at trends of the current market to meet people's demands.

Edward Bernays is known as the father of public relations. Beginning his career with political campaigns, his expertise in propaganda was well suited for the world of advertising. Employed by big corporations, his job was to manipulate and change public opinion. Since advertising is about convincing the masses, Bernays used psychological methods to manipulate the public, revealing how easily the public can be swayed. Propaganda convinced groups of people of a certain ideology, and the strategies of

advertisement were not much different. Advertisements use manipulation tactics and psychological ploys to motivate people to buy. The tactics have ways of undermining the sense of self, and affects how people act and conduct their daily lives.

Bernays used several techniques to manipulate the public, employing ideas from psychology, crowd psychology and psychoanalysis. Influenced by the psychologist Sigmund Freud, his uncle, Bernays studied the human psyche of emotions, and desire, as well as, sociology. Bernays was able to change the public opinion about smoking, revealing how an image communicates different ideals such as freedom, women's rights, and a conception of beauty. Changing mass opinion requires appealing to people's psyches, desires, and relationships, which is exactly what Bernays's advertising does. Bernays learned how to manipulate the masses in such a way that some of his stunts still resonate today.

For example, his torches of freedom campaign broke down the taboo against women smoking. Smoking was left to men, and the American Tobacco Company wanted to widen their market. During the New York City Parade, he hired attractive, upper-class women to march in the parade. At his signal they were to all light up their cigarettes as "torches of freedom." Playing on the suppression of women and in the name of freedom, women began smoking. The torches of freedom lifted the taboo about women smoking, and instead of feeling disgraced for smoking, women felt empowered. Not long after, women began smoking in movies; lighting a cigarette became more acceptable and a symbol for the strong, independent woman.²⁹ The torches of freedom stunt gave tobacco companies a new demographic to target. As tobacco companies were missing out on a lot

²⁹ Top Documentary Films, "The Century of the Self", <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/the-century-of-the-self/> (accessed December 2011).

of money by seeming exclusive to men, gaining support from women would open up the market, creating a more profitable campaign.

The torches of freedom campaign displays the elements that make advertisements successful: a message that can be easily conveyed and relatable to others, the association of an object to an ideal, providing a form of recognition, encouraging conformity, appearing as the solution to a problem, and providing temporary relief from anxiety. While these aspects benefit advertising, it has a damaging effect on authenticity by changing the way people feel and think about themselves. People begin to make associations with products to their sense of self and the messages of the advertisements promise instant fulfillment by means of purchasing a product. Bernays made the message loud and clear; cigarettes were a symbol of freedom. Lighting the cigarettes was an exercise of freedom and liberation; if men had the freedom to smoke cigarettes, women should be allowed the same courtesy. By connecting cigarettes to freedom and independence, he made smoking socially acceptable which became a habit that women participated in. It relieved their anxieties of being socially ostracized, and while they felt free, they were really shackled to the addictive qualities of nicotine... a big win for the tobacco company.

Objects are the “Things” of Our Lives

Understanding Advertisements

Consciousness is the process of understanding and making sense of the world. The different shapes of consciousness, sense-certainty, perception, and understanding, are movements from material knowledge to conceptual knowledge and from least certain to most certain. However, as shown in the section on consciousness, people have the

capability to understand objects incorrectly, and have the wrong notion and interpretation of an object. Ads on the other hand, present a false reality to consciousness which when received as true, gives the viewer a false notion of reality. So when people understand the images of advertisements to be real, they compare themselves to cultural images that do not represent the truth of object. They see the models and celebrities having a good hair day everyday, and the flawless faces and age defying skin. What they don't see is the technology that erases the blemishes and smoothes out the skin, or the thousands of dollars spent on digital enhancement. While consciousness works to obtain true knowledge, advertisement companies work to mislead this consciousness to deceive viewers in order to make profit.

Approaching Objects, the Desire for “Things”

The discussion of ready-to-hand and present-at-hand explained the different approaches people take towards objects; objects can be seen as equipment or instruments, or seen as theories and concepts of practical use. Approaching an object ready-to-hand as equipment is how an individual manipulates the world, completes tasks, and creates possibilities for itself. Once a person has an experience of an object, its practicality is revealed, which provides a meaning for its use.

Everyday objects, ready-to-hand, have meaning in people's lives, but not to the extent that advertisements portray. Advertisements want individuals to consider objects as something more than ready-to-hand, they want people to believe that objects are extensions of themselves. What was once used as equipment and a means to an end become the criteria for self worth and identity. The person that advertisements target, buys products that will fit in with their identity and has relationships with products as

they would with people. They want people to develop brand loyalty and to continue to use their product for years to come.

Advertising understands that people like to surround themselves with objects they recognize and identify with. Ads target their consumers in various ways: by age, sex, race, occupation, and region or what Juliet Schor describes as a cluster. Clusters are “groups of people who share values, orientations, and most important, lifestyles,”³⁰ that typically live in the same region, and have similar preferences. Examples of clusters are preppy, urban and rural residents, hipsters, and punks to just name a few. The buying habits of clusters have been described as conformed individuality, where they want to distance themselves from others and express themselves as individuals, while still conforming to the cluster’s standards. Schor explains the role of symbolism in determining products bought:

Yuppie consumer was more likely than the average person to consume a symbolic constellation of products (Haagen-Dazs ice cream, imported wine, and porcelain cookware), to an American Express card, to read certain magazines (Esquire and Gourmet), and to watch certain TV shows.³¹

The products acquired reflect the distinct taste of the cluster and identify the uniqueness of that group. Objects become symbolic of the cluster so obtaining the object will lead to greater acceptance. You see it in groups like the punk rockers with their spikes, combat boots, and leather jackets. The hipsters have their thick frame black glasses, mixed print clothing, and organic eating habits. While they believe they are being unique, they are participating in conformity dictated by the cluster. Advertising instills more meaning behind products than necessary. An inflated meaning towards objects, where people feel

³⁰ Juliet Schor, *The Overspent American*, (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 10-11.

³¹ Schor, *The Overspent American*, 34.

that material goods will complete their identity, leads to a materialistic mindset, a mindset that advertisers want people to have.

People have relationships with products like they have relationships with people. Some individuals provide such care for objects like they would another human being. Objects have names and are personified. Individuals treat their cars like it is another member in their household, and people find it hard to let go of the cherished baseball card collection. Objects become valuable and individuals grow attached. Jean Kilborne explains how advertisements utilize the attachment that people have to their objects,

Ads have long promised us a better relationship via a product: buy this and you will be loved. But more recently they have gone beyond that proposition to promise us a relationship with the product itself: Buy this and it will love you. The product is not so much the means to an end as the end itself.³²

Ads make the product and consumer relationship appear mutual. The reality is that an object cannot maintain a relationship in the way that humans can. The mentality, “If I take care of my car, my car will take care of me”, and “My iPhone will never let me down”, become common staples in society so that people will take care of their cars, add more additions and improvements, and continue to buy. Kilborne continues to explain further:

We encounter them like old friends in the shopping aisles. Look, there’s Mr. Clean and Budweiser and Crest! We are proud to be associated with them. We are encouraged to identify with Coke rather than Pepsi, with Burger King rather than McDonald’s, as if they were feuding families and we had to take sides.³³

Products take on a personality of their own and people treat them like they would treat

³² Jean Kilborne, *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel* (New York: Touchstone, 1999), 81.

³³ Kilborne, *Can't Buy My Love*, 82.

other people. Individuals begin to identify themselves with the objects, building a relationship with the brand as well as brand loyalty.

Transforming the Self

As previously explained, objects can become an extension of individuals, part of their identity and become who they are. Fulfillment and satisfaction can be achieved through buying objects, and the use of products can contribute to how an individual feels and views themselves. Ads convey this message that “things” will make you happy and that the collection of material objects will somehow create identity.

Advertisements make changing yourself look simple. Want a new identity? Buy Abercrombie and Fitch and be as beautiful as these models. Want to be a skater? Make sure you have a skateboard and the right skate shoes. Had a bad day? How about shopping as your therapy?

Advertising constantly promotes the core belief of American culture: that we can re-create ourselves, transform ourselves, transcend our circumstances-but with a twist... Today the promise is that we can change our lives instantly, effortlessly-by winning the lottery, selecting the right mutual fund, having a fashion makeover, losing weight, having tighter abs, buying the right car or soft drink. It is this belief that such transformation is possible that drives us to keep dieting, to buy more stuff, to read fashion magazines that give us the same information over and over again.³⁴

The promises that make people believe buying the newest Air Jordans will make them jump as high as Mike, and that Proactive Solutions will instantly clear the face or your money back, are false promises to promote this core belief of American culture.

However, these objects will not instantly change lives, despite this constant portrayal in these ads.

³⁴ Kilborne, Can't Buy My Love, 68.

By acquiring objects, people believe that they are transcending their situation, when in fact what is really happening is that they are in bad faith. Transcendence takes more work than an object can provide, and while they believe they are transcending their facticity by attainment of a materialistic item, nothing has changed. People are what they are not, and not what they are. Putting on a suit and tie will not instantly change you into a businessman; it is the education and the experience that will. The concrete facts of one's existence cannot be changed because it is in the past and already part of a person's history. The belief that an object can instantly transcend facticity is false; while it appears to be the easy way of changing the self, it will lead to a false sense of self and a materialistic understanding of self worth.

The message that advertisers send is that we can alter our lives without difficulty and become whoever we want to be. We can resemble our favorite celebrities and have what they have. The use of celebrities is a common practice in the advertising world because people have a "tendency to subconsciously transplant feelings about some person or thing onto another,"³⁵ which is a description of a term psychologists would call transference. A product that is endorsed by our favorite celebrity, when used, gives us the impression of taking on the celebrity's attributes onto ourselves, like we are transforming into the celebrity. While people acknowledge that they cannot *actually* become the celebrity, psychologically it brings them closer to their star's ideals.

The Need for Recognition

Looking back to clusters, the reason marketers like identifying clusters is to establish a form of recognition to motivate a group of people to buy. Since clusters

³⁵ Martin Lindstrom, *Brandwashed: Tricks Companies Use to Manipulate Our Minds and Persuade Us to Buy*, (New York: Crown Business, 2011), 163.

attempt to set themselves apart from others, certain products become symbolic and a marker for recognition. As seen in self-consciousness, the self relies on the acknowledgement of others to affirm the self. What advertisements do is assure people that their products will provide recognition and that other people will recognize them as well. So when people are recognized by their outward appearance and the things they own, the idea that things and products provide a means of identification is reinforced.

Advertisements make recognition look easy. The struggle for recognition, as understood with self-consciousness, is the fight to assert the self to the other, and the other to grant acknowledgment. Ads make viewers feel like they belong; that their product will comfort them just like their mother did as a child and accept them no matter what. The viewer is portrayed as the star, and the product plays supporting role. A Publix Valentine's Day commercial³⁶ uses this tactic of warmth and recognition. A son asks his mother to help bake a Valentine's Day cake for someone. The scene shows the activity of baking and putting together the cake, and enjoying themselves in the process. While the mother thinks that the cake is for a classmate her son admires, the cake was really meant for her. The message Publix wants to send is that good moms shop at Publix, which will help you become a better mom, and your family will take notice, too; recognition made simple.

On the other hand, advertisements sometimes take a different direction towards recognition, by warning viewers about being recognized as the wrong ideal. You want to drink Miller Light because if you don't, you are a girl. A recent commercial shows a man walking up to a bar and asking the bartender for a beer. She asks if he cares what it tastes

³⁶ Publix. "Publix Valentine's Day Commercial," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jHkqGgPpQOE> (accessed December 1, 2011).

like and his response is indifferent. She responds by saying “When you start caring, take off your skirt and I’ll give you a Miller Light.”³⁷ As he walks away he is wearing a bright woman’s skirt and the advertisement ends with the motto to “Man up.”³⁸ This advertisement acknowledges the stereotypes of men and women and plays into them. Men should drink manly beer, and anything less than that is considered weak and feminine. Both the Miller Light and Publix commercials demonstrate how an object raises the awareness of recognition, at the same time stating some type of preferred ideology.

The ideology in the Miller Light commercial emphasized the strength in men; in contrast to the weakness in women, and the Publix commercial displayed the ideal family unit. The images have the capability of reinforcing stereotypes, as well as creating anxiety when not being able to reach certain ideals, resulting in a feeling of inadequacy. Ads make men and women feel inadequate and put pressure on them to fit in an ideology. Women have to be beautiful and men have to be strong and mighty. If they do not fit in certain ideologies, ads make them feel like there is some defect and that it is not normal. In a Gillette body wash and deodorant advertisement (see advertisement on page 51)³⁹, the background is a young man getting out of the shower with a towel over his waist and there is a screen layered on top of the man to show him dressed in business attire on the telephone. The man’s body is chiseled, and on top he is in a suit with a tie, clean-shaven and groomed. The man is an example of a successful businessman, and he uses Gillette to keep him fresh throughout the day. He is an example of the type of man that every man

³⁷ Miller Light, “Miller Light “Skirt” Commercial.” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02p-9SsmRME&feature=related> (accessed December, 2011).

³⁸ Miller Light, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=02p-9SsmRME&feature=related>.

³⁹ “Gillette.” *Maxim*, 06 2011, 19.

should be, successful, athletic, and clean. When men compare themselves to this advertisement they see that they are not this man; they are not thin, they do not have a six-pack, or even have a full head of hair, and feel that they do not measure up. So the men viewing this ad will do what they can (starting with the Gillette of course) to become closer to this man. They will spend thousands on a hair transplant, spend \$60 on a gym membership each month, and hundreds on suits to fill this inadequacy.

While advertisements make some personality and bodily traits appear to be inadequacies, the traits are merely normal, and it is the advertisement that is abnormal. Ads display the ideal, clean, edited, version of reality, but all individuals see is what they lack in comparison to the ad. Fixation on flaws can prevent an individual from exploring possibilities, even closing off certain possibilities that could lead to authenticity. Susan Bordo explains the complexity of the relationship between the cultural images of advertising and the messages it sends to viewers:

On the one hand, the idealization of certain kinds of bodies foments and perpetuates our anxieties and insecurities, that's clear. Glamorous images and hyperthin models certainly don't encourage a more relaxed or accepting attitude towards the body, particularly among those whose own bodies are far from ideal. But, on the other hand, such images carry fantasized solutions to our anxieties and insecurities, and that's part of the reason why they are powerful. They speak to us not just about how to be beautiful or desirable but how to get control of our lives, get safe, be cool, and avoid hurt.⁴⁰

By constantly comparing themselves to the ideals of ads, the acceptance of the self that is important in resoluteness is not present. Individuals cannot stake claim on their life nor accept themselves for who they are because they are more concerned with fitting into an ideal, and believing that emulating this ideal will fix all their problems.

⁴⁰ Susan Bordo, *Twilight Zones, The Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.*, (Los Angeles, University of California Press: 1997)

An Inquiry into the Lives of Others

People will always be fascinated with others and curious about the occurrences in other's lives. "We as human beings never assess ourselves, our behaviors, or our decisions in a vacuum; we assess them in relation to everyone else."⁴¹ Humans are relational creatures that network and thrive in social communities and have the tendency to compare and gauge their lives to others. People's lives differ regionally; for some the only examples of how others live are through advertisements and other forms of media. Upscaling,⁴² a term used by Juliet Schor, describes the consumer behavior of trying to keep up with what they see in advertisements. Instead of buying only what is necessary, and using products to their maximum potential, people buy to achieve advertisement's portrayed standards of living, replacing the old with the brand new. Reference groups⁴³ are people we compare our materialistic items with, in attempt to keep up with their buying habits. These reference groups that were previously neighbors and friends are now the people we see in advertisements, television shows, and movies. Using these people as reference groups is unrealistic and causes people to exhibit excess spending habits in attempt to keep up. Budgets for advertisements and television shows are much higher than the income of the middle class, so comparing buying habits with these mediums costs much more money than people can afford.

The use of upscaling and reference groups as advertising techniques facilitates the conformity of consumers to ideals. Much like the conformity of the "they," others become the exemplar to how one's life should be lived. Because of the wide reach of technology, comparison is no longer drawn from your neighbor that has an income level

⁴¹ Lindstrom, *Brandwashed*, 108.

⁴² Schor, *The Overspent American*, 14.

⁴³ Schor, *The Overspent American*, 74-75.

similar to yours, but is drawn from the Russian man on the DirectTV commercial, in his palace of gold. Maybe even you can get your own mini giraffe too!⁴⁴ Saving for a big purchase is not a common practice, but charging items that people cannot afford to a credit card is. In the same way that Dasein is absorbed in the world and the “they,” people are concerned with the material nature of the subjects in advertisements, and are persuaded to buy these products to achieve this reference group standard.

Two particular commercials shown on Superbowl Sunday, 2011, typically portray this idea; The Audi: Release the Hounds⁴⁵ and Chrysler: Eminem⁴⁶ commercials. In the Audi commercial, the motto is “Escape the Confines of Old Luxury,” showing prison cells with rich older people inhabiting those cells. These people are dressed elegantly; the cells, filled with furniture, decor, and glassware. Two men are attempting to escape; one in a Mercury, the other in an Audi. The Mercury is driven back to the castle and the Audi escapes to define the new term of luxury.

Audi is attempting to modernize the concept of luxury. Old luxury is not luxurious anymore, it is outdated and gaudy; the new luxury is sleeker, a quality which Audi provides. The ad elicits a feeling of inadequacy in the viewer by making them feel as if they are behind the trend and urges them to continue to buy into newer and newer forms of luxury. Even those who cannot afford this lifestyle see the ad and think that they should have this “new luxury,” too.

⁴⁴ DirectTV "DirecTV Russian Guy Funny Commercial ("Opulence, I Has It")."
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkB9OT2XVvA> (Accessed December 1, 2011).

⁴⁵ Audi, “Audi Big Game Commercial 2011 - Release the Hounds.”
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3snyXTNmFm8> (accessed March 4, 2012)

⁴⁶ Chrysler. “Chrysler Eminem Super Bowl Commercial - Imported From Detroit.”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKL254Y_jtc (accessed March 4, 2012).

The Chrysler: Eminem commercial works from a different angle than the Audi commercial, targeting the average everyday hard worker. The ad even uses a celebrity spokesperson for audiences to identify with. Rapper/actor Eminem was raised in a low-income household in Detroit, portraying an average workingman that used hard work and perseverance to become rich and famous. The backdrop, Detroit city, is dirty and grungy, unlike the Audi ad, but still sells the same ideal, luxury. The message is that if you work hard enough, you deserve the luxury. Hard working, real men deserve the best as well. The advertisement is made to relate to the average middle class American, inspiring the average Joes, and relaying the message that they deserve luxury too, even if they cannot afford it. The Audi commercial was an example of upscaling, while the Chrysler commercial provided a reference group for viewers. Upscaling and keeping up with reference groups are actions of the “they.” Advertising companies realize the tendency for people to conform, so they create unrealistic standards that cause people to consistently buy. Because people get so wrapped in the ideals and appearances of advertisements, they do not realize they are falling, and remain in the lostness of the “they.”

An Unguided Guide to Authenticity

Authenticity is a process, and must be continually worked at. Unlike the surface appearances of advertising, authenticity requires a deeper understanding of who the self is, an examination inside out. The process is different for each person, and is composed of the different experiences and choices that one makes. None of the philosophers discussed provided a manual for authentic living, because doing so, takes away from the potentiality of creating an authentic existence. Heidegger described authenticity as the

openness to possibility and ownership over one's life, while accepting the "situatedness" of existence. Sartre described inauthenticity as a lie to the self or to commit bad faith, which is to deny aspects of one's being. Because people have the ability to change aspects of themselves and alter their lives, achieving authenticity can be difficult and take time.

The ability to reflect is important in the process of authenticity. Reflection allows an individual to evaluate and determine if the manner of living is one in which the individual can claim as his or her own. Among all the choices and possibilities, not every action will contribute to an individual's authenticity, so reflexivity becomes an important evaluative tool to determine if he or she is living an authentic life. Reflection takes into account the present action and ideals, while still considering future endeavors and possibilities. The present action and ideals are what the individual is currently engaging and participating in, and the future endeavors and possibilities are projections and aims that an individual can work towards. Reflection takes these aspects into consideration and there should be some type of coordination between the two, in which the present actions and ideals lead to the future possibilities. The individual should inquire if the two line up, and determine whether his or her actions and thoughts best represent the self, and if the direction that the individual is pursuing is the suitable path to incorporate into one's life.

Not only does the individual reflect upon personal preferences, but also they must reflect upon the historical context. The situation people are found in and including the past and one's history, have an effect on future decisions. Reflection allows an individual to better grasp one's being and being as part of the world. People are so embedded in the culture and environment that it can be difficult to distinguish what motivations arose

from personal preferences or from the culture and environment. Reflection however, allows an individual to think about him or herself in the context of culture and environment to determine which options are viable, and deciding if the pursuit is a genuine possibility.

Advertising sends out messages to a mass group of people. Information, with the mix of sensationalism, is sent to the public and left up to the people to decipher. The interpretation of advertisements may differ between people, so the messages extracted vary and the seriousness of the messages are applied at different levels. The messages of advertising might not affect some people as much as others; as we know that children are more malleable than adults, and susceptible to the tactics of advertising, but the key is being able to distinguish what messages are meant to entertain and what messages are meant to persuade. Just because advertisements show certain relationships between people in a certain manner or showcase a specific ideal, does not mean that is the only way to have relationships, and that this ideal must be emulated. People should learn to accept themselves and who they are, and that being different from the advertisements should not be considered a negative trait. It is difficult to completely drown out the messages of advertising because it is part of our everyday world, and can affect our sense of selves and actions without notice, but it is important to reflect upon the self and live a life worth choosing and with personal meaning and no advertisement, book, magazine, or guide can show you how to do that.

Authenticity is possible because humans are free. They can choose to be authentic or inauthentic, and make choices and develop beliefs. Freedom is why there are different variations of people, personalities, and preferences. The source to meanings and values

are rooted in freedom because among all the possibilities, the choices that are made reflect the desires and preferences of the person acting. While taking control over one's life can be scary, even if mistakes are made, at least the individual is staking claim on their own life.

Conclusion

Even in a world saturated with advertisements, there is still possibility for authenticity. Advertising is not going anywhere and it is a force that we must encounter everyday. The reality depicted in advertisements is not always the reality that we live. Real life is messy, it takes work and commitment and no product will ever provide an easy life. Advertisements are concoctions of an ideal and much like Plato's forms and can never be reached. The ideals of advertisement can be mere fantasy and while Plato's forms want you to reach a higher form of knowledge, ads want you to reach farther into your pockets.

Two ways people can live with advertisements without affecting authenticity is through conscious consumption and having the understanding of how advertising works. Conscious consumption is having awareness of objects and being able to provide justification for the products bought. Consuming is not bad, its part of how we live in and understand the world. Attempting to find justification to purchases make the individual think about the relationship to the object. Is the object a tool? What purposes does it fulfill? How does the object affect me as a person? Is this brand necessary? What is the meaning of this object? Being conscious of how one buys and the reason for buying lets the individual be honest about the motivation of the purchase, and to think about what purchases are necessary, and what purpose it

provides. Awareness of the object and what the object represents, allows the individual to be smarter consumer and less susceptible to the messages of advertising.

Advertising has been quite successful in getting people to open their wallets. However understanding the methods of advertising will provide insight on how it affects culture and the self. Formal education is one route. College campuses provide different marketing and advertising courses. If formal education is not possible, there are numerous books that can spill the secrets of advertising. Overall, the assessment of the role of advertising to culture, society, and the self provides valuable knowledge that an individual needs in order to critique daily encounters with advertising. This also means being able to understand the language of advertising, and being able to decode the messages and ideals they present. Ads do speak to the desires, wants, and needs of people, but satisfying every desire, want, or need does not necessarily lead to authenticity. Some of the messages portrayed present some type of truth, but advertisements also present a persuasive component that affect some more than others. To understand advertising is to understand that yes, it is meant to persuade, but it also portrays a certain amount of truth about society and the world. The tactics can be appealing to the self, but not everyone has to be effected.

Although influence from advertisement can be strong, people are not naïve as they have the capacity to distinguish between reality and fantasy. Both Heidegger and Sartre believe that people can be authentic and while it cannot happen overnight, it is a process that requires reflexivity and making choices, and not just any choices, but choices

that are meaningful to the individual life. Advertising is a directing force, but people still have agency and the ability to explore and create opportunities for themselves. Everyone falls pray to advertising somehow, but just be cognizant of when companies are advertising inauthenticity.

Graphic redacted, paper copy available upon request to home institution.

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