



Advertising

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1. INVENTING FOOD

Advertising has been part of our lives for many years now. We are all used to the fact our cities play host to thousands of enormous billboards, that newspapers and magazines habitually carve out spaces in which to discuss various kinds of products, and that television programmes are continually interrupted so that we can be advised on the purchase of something or other. And this is only the traditional media, because today advertising is increasingly digital, making ample use of the opportunities offered by the internet and the ubiquity of interactive devices such as smartphones and computers, thus expanding enormously not only the ways in which messages can reach us, but also the way in which they are presented. Not only do we have websites, those virtual shop windows that no company can do without, but also social networks such as Facebook and Instagram, video content sites such as YouTube and myriad online news outlets employing varyingly innovative strategies to also entice us to buy. There is an enormous amount of information that we often insist we pay no attention to, but that actually play an enormous role in how we get to know the world around us and structure our tastes and desires.

It is precisely this aspect that interests us most in this chapter. We can clearly see how advertising is particularly concerned with food products. Something we tend to notice less is how this form of communication has historically conditioned our food consumption and the extent to which it continues to do so today, impacting (albeit indirectly) our very tastes. If we think about it, we can see very quickly how what we know (or think we know) about water, beer, frozen foods, snacks and a great many other products has come from the way advertising has spoken to us about them. In order to get an idea of how important this kind of communication is, we have to think about what happens those rare times in which certain brands^x are not available, as happens in discount supermarkets that offer unbranded products or those made by **brands** that do not advertise. The sensation we get when we first visit these stores is one of bafflement, followed by suspicion: what will those biscuits whose **brand** we don't know actually taste like? Will that milk we have never heard of actually be safe? These doubts are often enough to stop us from buying, if not stop us from visiting such places altogether.

It is no coincidence that vast multinationals like Coca-Cola or McDonalds, which have built their own fame by investing in expensive advertising campaigns, have never stopped producing them, even when they apparently have no need. This is not simply because on some level advertising works and leads to greater sales, but that our very tastes are influenced by these campaigns and communication in general. Contrary to what we might think, the choices we make, our ways of consuming food and even the times at which we do it, are not bound only to individual sensibilities and habits, the result of a supposed biological 'nature' that is the defining factor in establishing our preferences, but an intersubjective and social dimension that can modify over time. It is on this that advertising intervenes, and it is because of this that it is so effective. Of course, one advert cannot make us like a food that our body refuses, but it can undoubtedly contribute to making us prefer one food over another, to leading us to introduce a new one into our diets, modifying the quantities of it that we consume and to thinking of new occasions on which we would be ready to eat it. In short, advertising is responsible for inventing our current way of eating, and history is there to prove it.

2. COCA-COLA: FROM MEDICINE TO A PART OF DAILY LIFE

One of Coca-Cola's first adverts (and actually one of the very first for a food product) is that dating back to 1886, shown in Fig. 1. At that time, the famous **logo** with its characteristic curved lines did not exist, as we can see from the uniform font used for both the title and the body text. Coca-Cola was just a name, and not even a particularly imaginative one seeing as the drink was derived from leaves of the Coca plant (the same plant from which cocaine is extracted, though obviously here

the psychotropic substances were removed) and the Cola nut. The real **brand** was not the famous Coke, but (as demonstrated by the signature in the bottom right corner) John Stith Pemberton, the Atlanta pharmacist who invented the recipe for what would become one of the most successful industrial products of all time. What is surprising about this advert, besides the total absence of images, is how it describes a drink that we think we know very well. It is described first and foremost as an 'intellectual beverage', as well as a tonic and a stimulant for the nerves. The advert references its taste ('delicious'), but is most meticulous about listing the ailments it can alleviate: 'sick head-ache, neuralgia, hysteria, melancholy, etc.'. The same drink that is, today, the indispensable accompaniment to pizza and hamburgers. After all, it had been invented by a pharmacist whose first thought had inevitably been the effects that mixture might have on the body, with taste a mere afterthought. The 'peculiar taste' was essentially a kind of collateral effect, a happy accident that would allow, many years later, for that drink to be sold not in pharmacies but in every supermarket and restaurant in the world.



Fig. 1. Coca-Cola advert from 1886. At that time the product was described as a medicine, albeit one that tasted good.



Fig. 2. Coca-Cola advert from 1905. The product was associated with sport for the first time.

But how did it go from being a medicine to the drink we know today? As we know, the chemical modifications were minimal and always committed to respecting its characteristic aroma, meaning that its taste has barely altered over a century and a half. What has changed drastically is the product's image. This transformation is in large part due to advertising, or more generally, communication, with this term understood as a broader collection of actions that are not limited simply to adver-

tising spots and billboards, but involving events, packaging, sponsorships and much more. It would be impossible to take even a cursory glance at the many advertising campaigns created by Coca-Cola from 1886 to date as there are simply far too many. Thousands of adverts and spots have been churned out one after the other without there being even a moment's silence from the **brand**. The only thing we can do therefore is give examples of the way in which they introduced the specifics of that which we have referred to as the product's relative image.

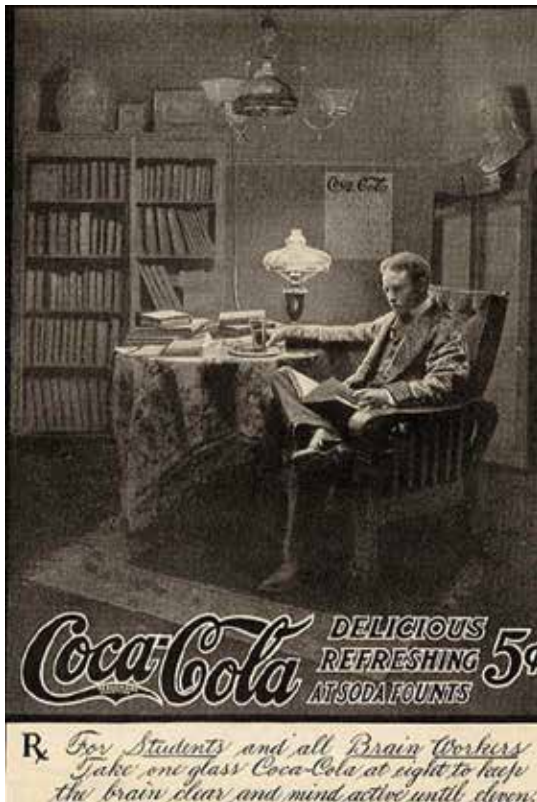


Fig. 3. Coca-Cola advert from 1905. The product not only refreshes but also improves brain function.



Fig. 4. Coca-Cola advert from 1974. Coke becomes a part of everyday life for all sections of society.

For example, the relationship between Coca-Cola and sport began very early on. Already in 1905 we have a print advert telling us how refreshing it is to drink a Coke after physical activity (Fig. 2). Careful though: it does not refer to baseball, football or other popular sports, but to golf and tennis, sports that were the prerogative of the more well-to-do classes, a sign that the drink at that time was a delicacy to be enjoyed by only a few. As we are well aware, the **brand** has never stopped highlighting the drink's relationship with physical activity, doing everything it can to associate consumption with times of physical exertion. It is interesting to note how important it was even back in 1905 to establish a link with activities of an entirely different nature: those involving not the body but the mind. In another advert (fig. 3) it is clearly stated that a glass of Coke taken at 8pm would ensure a clear

and active mind until 11pm, an obvious reference to the pharmaceutical dosage which gave rise to it all. For decades, body and mind, sport and study were keystones in the promotion of Coke consumption. And yet, up until 1905 and also long after, this drink was thought of as a 'break', and not as an accompaniment to something else, something to sit alongside the consumption of food, nor, deep down, was it considered a product to be consumed regularly or in large amounts. It is no coincidence that the bottles at that time were no bigger than 25 cl., equal to a glass, and that bottles holding 1.5 or 2 litres, which today are entirely normal (ideal for bringing to the table in order to accompany a meal), did not even exist. A campaign breaking with this idea was used in 1974 (fig. 4), and in it the product was placed in a scene from daily life in which a mother and her son are cleaning vegetables, each with a 1 litre bottle of Coke next to them. Coke became the companion for daily tasks, for real life – 'For the real times' went the slogan. Furthermore, the family drinking it here are African-Americans who, given by what we can judge from their activity and what we can see of the house they are in, belong to the working class. Not only was Coca-Cola now for everyone, but it could be consumed in any occasion and in much larger quantities. So, it was no longer a break but the indispensable compliment to daily life, irrespective of the consumer's social status.

3. ADVERTS AS TESTIMONIALS



Fig. 5. A poster from the 1930s produced by the Italian National Rice Institute (Ente nazionale risi), a governmental institution that aimed to promote the consumption of rice in a country that traditionally ate pasta. The text laconically reads: "Rice gives you strength and health. Eat rice".



Fig. 6. An Italian poster promoting the consumption of beer in general, rather than that of a specific brand. The slogan reads: "...And to drink? More Beer!".

Working hard?

Refresh with Milk—

Milk makes Energy!

Get a glass of milk when you need a lift that lasts.
Milk is high in protein.
It's a powerhouse of energy.
Recharge—and carry on refreshed,
really refreshed, lastingly refreshed.

Milk, the High-Protein Refresher.
Proteins help build strong bodies in youth, re-build sound bodies in adults. We need proteins every day. Milk is your handy, your economical source of complete proteins. Milk is a miracle food, a marvelous drink! Enjoy it!

You never outgrow your need for

Milk

Drink 3 glasses every day

AMERICAN DAIRY ASSOCIATION • CHICAGO
Representing the dairy farmers in your area
See "The Perry Como Show" on NBC-TV
© 1950, AMERICAN DAIRY ASSOCIATION

ALBERT DORNE

Fig. 7. An announcement by a consortium of American milk producers from 1950 contributes to the creation of the idea that this drink is an irreplaceable source of energy, even for adults.

We could have gone on much longer discussing Coca-Cola's advertising campaigns, highlighting the changes that each one might bring about in the public's impression of the product at any given moment, while perhaps also considering how this translated into a rise in sales and a greater number of consumers. However, our aim is not to carry out an exhaustive analy-

sis of the communication employed by a particular company, but to demonstrate how it is possible to take on different perspectives when it comes to advertising. One in which we view it as a **testimonial** that speaks to us not only of the product being promoted, but of a way of conceiving an entire food universe. A universe that is obviously bound to both global dynamics, such as those that led to the widespread consumption of a product such as Coca-Cola, and to the sensibilities and processes that take place at a local level, such as those of a specific country. It is surprising how accurately a particular culture's sensibility for food can be described through advertising, but most of all, how it helps us grasping the dynamics that bring about changes in food culture.

Take Italy, a country that has one of the oldest and most articulated food traditions in the world, which is, as a result, clearly identifiable from the outside. Everyone, including Italians, are led to think that everything involved with the food choices in this country has its roots in a very distance past, itself a guarantee of inherent goodness and the right nutritional value. In 1910, for example, the advert for a famous meat extract produced by the company Arrigoni boasted of the fact it was made from Australian meat, as if good meat had to come from far away, from an exotic, uncontaminated land. Needless to say, today any such advert would be inconceivable, not to mention counter-productive. Over the years, the gastronomic image has entirely changed direction, and for today's average Italian quality food is food produced close by, that does not have to travel, but that is also the result of a tradition of production that they know and that they can check. Good food is, therefore, food produced locally, as if that had always been the case. Few people reflect on the fact that those who have inherited this tradition, parents and grandparents, were probably born at a time when good meat was meat from abroad.

Of particular interest here are those adverts that were not those created by a specific company to promote a specific product, but by institutes, consortia and even the State in order to promote food lifestyle changes. Continuing with Italy, we have two campaigns that promoted the consumption of rice and beer respectively. With regards to the first of these cases, we have a poster from 1951 in which an attractive woman throws rice into a saucepan (Fig. 5). The slogan says: "Rice gives you strength and health. Eat rice". There is no branding other than that of the *Ente nazionale risi*, the Italian rice institute created in 1931 at the height of the Fascist era to organise the production of this cereal and promote its consumption. The reason for this communicative push is very simple: Italy was a country that predominantly ate pasta, a sensibility that forced rice producers to export their produce, placing them in competition with other much larger producers like China, who forced them to lower their prices. This is why a fistful of rice is being thrown into that typical high-walled Italian saucepan, perfect for cooking spaghetti, that we find in the image.

Something similar happens with beer. This time the advert, from 1964, shows us a family that is about to sit down to a classic Sunday lunch (Fig. 6). Everything follows tradition: the home furnishings of a middle-class family, the boastful elegance of the diners and, naturally, the menu, which centres around the legendary *polpettone*. Even the family is straight out of a manual: father, mother and two children, one male and one female. 'And to drink?' goes the slogan, 'more beer!', whilst further down we can read 'with all food and in all seasons'. What we immediately notice today is that every person sitting at the table is holding an identical large glass of beer. It is clearly encouraging child alcohol consumption, but at that time the effect would have been very different. Not only was beer viewed much more as a soft drink than as an alcoholic beverage, but it was a given that wine would be the drink of choice at the table. Once again, an advert attempts to modify tradition and, therefore, sensibilities by introducing a different drink to a country that is traditionally both a producer and consumer of wine, with the advantage, evidently, that it could be shared with even the youngest members of the family.

Obviously, Italy is just one of many possible examples. It would not be difficult to find old adverts from other countries that promote ways of consuming food that have since disappeared or that, conversely, have become entirely normal. In the United States, for example, a print advert from 1950 promotes milk consumption (Fig. 7), not that of a particular **brand** (the campaign belongs to the Dairy Producers' Association) but of generic milk, extolling its nutritional values and its capacity for refreshment that are associated with 'hard work'. It is no coincidence that that country went on to develop a particular taste for this food, to such an extent that it became an accompaniment to meals, a habit that in Italy seems entirely inconceivable from the moment in which milk consumption is relegated almost exclusively to breakfast time, and in some cases, as a snack. The fact that many years later nutritionists have considered the effects of excessive milk consumption and the health problems this can cause, is an incidental fact that is not necessarily a testament to Italians' inherent greater wisdom, but to a different way of viewing food. As such, in a wider sense, if it can be true that the Mediterranean diet is one of the most balanced and correct from a biochemical perspective, we must ask ourselves which chance phenomena – be it of a communicative or a productive nature – are responsible for it taking root.

4. THE **VALORISATION** OF FOOD

Up until now we have looked at how advertising interprets the tastes and trends that exist outside of food, and also how it contributes to the modification of a nation's tastes, continually altering those very traditions that we believe to be the unchangeable bequest from a past that was always happy and more correct than the present. We are now clear on the role played by advertising: that of attributing value to products made for

consumption. Take the milk we discussed earlier. It is obvious that this is a very particular substance with fixed properties, nutrients, characteristics and possible uses, and yet what interests us from a cultural perspective is how all this is *perceived* by consumers. Advertising does not sell milk, it sells a particular idea of milk, the same one that the final user is looking for when they go shopping. Over time, milk understood as a material remains the same (except for chemical and physical alterations caused, for example, by the technology used to aid production), but the idea we have of it can alter beyond recognition. This is what **brands** count on: though they know full well they are selling a product that, in the majority of cases, has very few differences to its competitors, they can and must make their product unique.

The question we ask ourselves is, therefore, how can such a change be brought about. What are the strategies that advertising can use to inscribe particular values into their products? When Coca-Cola goes from being a medicine to a tonic (for the body and the mind), then becomes an enjoyable break, and then changes again to replace water as a companion for daily life, it is not the drink that changes but the way in which it is understood and, therefore, how value is attributed to it. In other words, what advertising does is give meaning to products, ensuring they become a part of a given culture. What is interesting is that these strategies are not infinite. Despite the differences between advertising campaigns, with their slogans, characters, images, music and so on making each one recognisable and interesting, it is always possible to pinpoint certain courses of action that we could describe as being standard. We could describe it as an issue of perspective, as it is necessary to focus each time on the way in which the product is featured, the role it takes on within the story the advert constructs around the product in order to render it not only easily identifiable for the consumer, but also interesting in terms of their lives. Some brief analysis will allow us to better understand what these strategies of advertising **valorisation** are and how they function.

5.1. **PRACTICAL VALORISATION**

The poster from one of Evian mineral water's most successful campaigns is very simple (fig. 8). There are no complicated slogans, just the **brand's logo** and, beneath it, two simple words: 'Live young'. Further down is the image of an older woman holding a bottle of Evian water and wearing an odd t-shirt. On it is the image of a toddler's body whose neck coincides perfectly with hers. The message is clear: Evian water keeps us young. There is no reference to the fact water quenches thirst, that our body needs it or that it is entirely natural. Instead, Evian chooses to feature its water as a kind of elixir, a magic potion that stops us from aging (on the inside at least). This is essentially what advertising does: it adds something special to different products, presenting them as magical objects

as if from fairy tales without which we would never be able to achieve our goals, be they staying young or, in the case of a car, getting around with speed and safety.



Fig. 8. An Evian campaign that stands out for its simple message: that this product will help keep you young.



Fig. 9. The spot for Evian's 'Live young' campaign highlights the youth-giving properties of this mineral water.

This is the defining characteristic of **practical** advertising, which presents a product as a *means* to a particular end. It is not about what the product is, but what it can do for us, for the way in which (magically or otherwise) it can help us achieve goals that are not directly linked to the product itself. The woman is not drinking the water because she thinks it tastes good or because it is a natural product, she drinks it to keep herself young. This is an effect that a multi award-winning spot from the same campaign highlights perfectly, articulating how this can be done in the space of a short film (fig. 9). During those canonical 30 seconds, set in the streets of a city that could be any, we initially see a man who discovers that his reflection, caught in a number of reflective surfaces (the glass door of a bus, a car's rear view mirror, and finally a shop window), does not show his face but that of a small child who looks just like him. It is in front of a large window created entirely by a mirror that, incredulous, he attempts to test his reflection with a few dance steps. In that moment, the background music swells and in just a few moments he is joined by other people, all with their own tender double imitating their increasingly wild movements. It is as if the mirror were showing their true nature and that (it goes without saying) they are young inside thanks to the water they drink – Evian – as we only discover at the end with the writing that appears on screen: 'Drink pure and natural', before leading to the inevitable payoff – 'Live young'.



Fig. 10. The spot for Santa Lucia Croccarelle (produced by Galbani in Italy) in which mozzarella croquettes resolve a family problem, rather than a nutritional one.

However, **practical** advertising does not necessarily have to refer to the product's nutritional characteristics. For example, the spot for Santa Lucia *Croccarelle* (Fig. 10) (fried mozzarella sticks) shows us something entirely different. It tells a very articulate story, that of a woman who has to organise the meal at which she will meet her son and the woman he has asked to marry him. The situation is obviously a complicated one to manage, as is made patently clear by the shots that capture the looks exchanged by the two young people as they meet at the woman's front door for the first time. It is the product that

then resolves everything: thanks to the croquettes' 'warm mozzarella centre' and the string that ensues when they are broken in half, those sitting at the dining table are 'bound by affection'. There is no talk here of energy, lightness or health, the bond that is referred to is immaterial and demonstrated solely by those white strings. Nevertheless, despite the obvious metaphor, the role played by the product remains one of a means to an end that is not necessarily the purchase of the product. There is no suggestion that the product has its own inherent value, that it would be opportune to possess this very product, only that it can be useful for other reasons, even if the 'other' reason in this case has more to do with emotional rather than physical wellbeing.

5.2 UTOPIAN VALORISATION

It should be clear at this point that a **strategy** opposite to those described up until this point can also be employed, in which the product is not presented as something required in order to do something else, a *means*, but as a value in itself, an *end*, one with which the subject reaches self-realisation simply by possessing it. In these cases we refer to *basic values* rather than *use values*, alluding to the fact that what the advert attempts to show (and demonstrate) is that the value we attribute to a food product can affect one specific individual, even if it is clearly expected that a far greater number of potential consumers are able to identify with that person.



Fig. 11. An advert for Cadbury's Dairy Milk presents a bar of chocolate as an object of final value by adopting a **strategy** of **utopian valorisation**.

The example with which we would like to begin is another spot that received numerous accolades in 2018 (fig. 11). The product is a chocolate bar with a particularly high milk content: a full one and a half glasses in each bar, as we are told at the end of the spot. The way in which the film begins in its 60 second version couldn't be further from what we are used to seeing for a luxury product. The first scene takes place in a noisy, crowded fast-food kitchen where we see a weary young woman coming to the end of her shift. Over the course of the next few seconds we see her on the bus, tired, waiting for her arrival at a destination we only discover in the next frame: her daughter's school, where her child is the last one waiting to be picked up. Normal daily life shrouded in the sadness of inner-city life and an unhappiness that is tangible. In the next scene the mother's phone rings. Her face immediately shows worry: it is clear she faces many difficulties and that in this moment another is about to be added to the list. It is at this point that the daughter decides to go alone into the corner

shop next to which they have stopped. She immediately goes to the till and politely asks for a bar of chocolate. "It's for my mum" says the little girl to the bearded shopkeeper who lifts his gaze to see the woman standing outside the shop speaking on the phone. A moment later, when the man places the bar of Cadbury's *Dairy Milk* on the counter, the girls begins to do the same with the things that she holds valuable enough to pay for it: a plastic coin, two buttons and – after a glance from the man – a plastic ring and a little blue unicorn. It is all a play on exchanged looks, on things left unsaid that lead the shopkeeper to understand the symbolic value of those objects as fair payment for the product he then hands over to the little girl. She is somewhat sad as she has had to give up her most prized possessions, but at this point something unexpected happens: the shopkeeper says to her: "your change" and places back on the counter the unicorn the little girl showed most sadness in having to part with. A moment later, the child, now happy, leaves the shop and says to her mother, "Happy birthday Mum!". Taken aback, she thanks her daughter and holds her in a warm hug under the satisfied gaze of the generous shopkeeper.

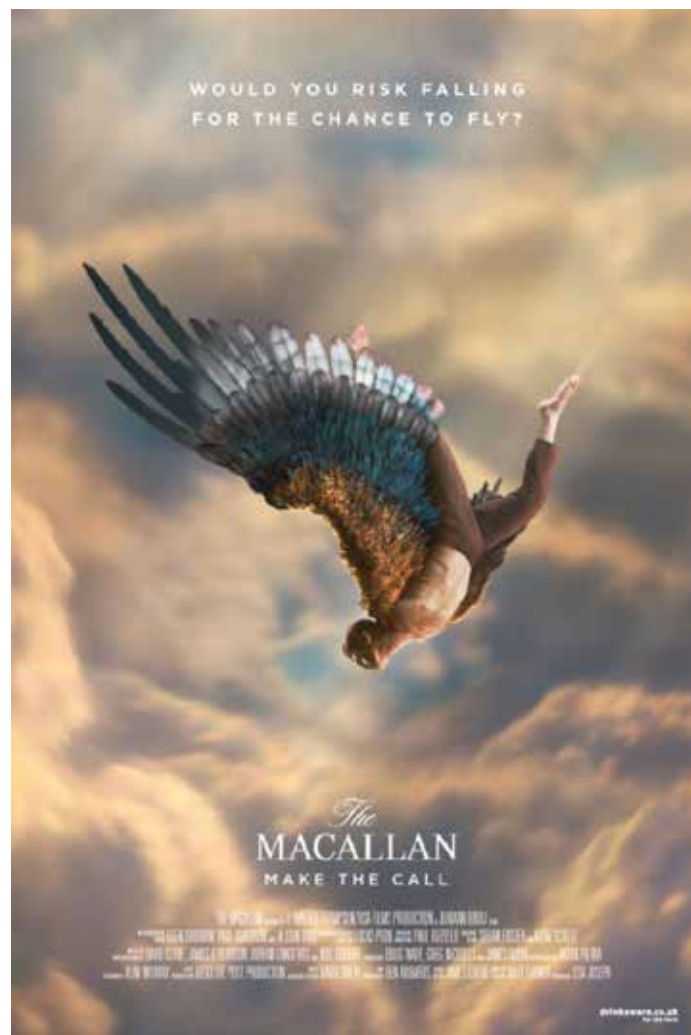


Fig. 12. The poster for a campaign by Macallan whose slogan reads: "Would you risk falling for the chance to fly?"

We cannot help but ask ourselves here what this Cadbury's advert is trying to sell us, because to think it is simply chocolate would be reductive. What counts here is not the product but its value for those involved. For that mother, who in a difficult situation finds her daughter's love in that gift; for the child, who gives up her treasures in order to "buy" something for a birthday that is both so special and so ordinary; and finally the shopkeeper who quickly understands the situation and not only decides to give the woman and the child something himself, but also teaches the latter an important lesson. He does not simply give the bar of chocolate away, refusing the useless payment, but instead he accepts it, thus clarifying that there is always a cost when buying something, but without depriving the little girl of her most precious possession. At the end of the story, we do not see the food but something very different indeed: a symbol of the love that can exist not only between mother and child, but also between people who do not know one another. When at the end we read, 'There's a glass & a half in everyone', it is undecidable whether this refers to milk or, actually, love. What matters is not eating the chocolate, but giving and receiving it.

Another good example of **utopian** advertising is that found in a campaign by Macallan whisky from 2018, which comprises not only of the poster seen in figure 12 but also a spot that is very visually refined. It is no coincidence that the poster looks like one for a film, as anyone could see from a cursory look on YouTube. Alcohol is a product that often adopts this **strategy** (if for no other reason than that it is difficult to focus on its nutritional values), or one that is generally presented as a means to obtaining some kind of shared objective. The poster simply reads: 'Would you risk falling for the chance to fly?'. Beneath the writing is a strange creature, half man and half bird, that seems to be spinning in mid-air, and further down we see the **brand logo** and the payoff characterising the whole campaign: 'Make the call'. What has all this got to do with whisky? Very little. If it weren't for the amber tones in the sky and the creature's wings, which seemingly recall the drink's colour, we could say with no uncertainty, absolutely nothing. What it refers to is, perhaps, the drinker, the person at whom that whisky is ideally aimed, someone who, by the mere fact of having chosen that **brand** and not another, qualifies as a kind of Icarus, the protagonist of the Greek myth who, having received a pair of wings from his famous father Dedalus, got too close to the sun and woefully plummeted after the wax that was holding the wings together melted. No reference is made to the whisky's taste, to its characteristics, its aromatic notes, only to how courageous and desiring of an extreme, unique experience the person for whom it was made must be. Once more the product is a value in itself, or rather, it has value because it defines a certain kind of person.

5.3 LUDIC-AESTHETIC VALORISATION



Fig. 13. The advert for *Le Coq* in Aarhus, Denmark, finds a very amusing way to communicate that one eats well there.



Fig. 14. Sometimes a dog is used as a testimonial for mayonnaise: "No leftovers. Sorry Spike" reads the slogan.



Fig. 15. The advert for *Mon Cheri* Ferrero chocolates is a journey through the taste sensations experienced when you bite into one.

Imagining food as a tool or an end in itself clearly does not exhaust the possibilities. Indeed, each of these two positions are often denied by the advert. Let's look at the entire universe of pleasure, of which food is obviously an essential part. From a strictly logical perspective, valorising food as pleasure means placing its utility to one side, forgetting its nutritional value without, however, being explicit about it, as is the case with **utopian valorisation** in which a symbolic value sets the taste characteristics to one side. Once again, I will give a number of examples that will help illustrate this point more clearly.

The advert we find in figure 13 does not promote a product but a bar-restaurant called *Le Coq*, in Aarhus, Denmark. The idea is a simple one, all that needs to be said is that the food there is good. To do so explicitly would, however, be counterproductive, not only because overly obvious advertising is often banal and ends up being ignored, but because it would be too obvious the discourse was biased and therefore, even if not false, undoubtedly excessively flattering. The solution to

this problem is simple and effective: no slogan, just an image that shows a group of the bar's customers dressed as chefs. The underlying message is effective in its simplicity: if the bar's customers are chefs, what is served there must be delicious.

The example we have just seen shows us how it is not necessary for **testimonials** to be famous, whether sports stars, singers or actors. It is enough for the person to be easily recognisable as an authority or expert, someone who knows how to evaluate and choose, and who therefore, if they prefer a particular product, does so for good reason. This is essentially what happens in a Christmas advert for Hellmann's mayonnaise whose protagonist is a dog named Spike (fig. 14). Spike is actually a rather sad little dog and this is because of the product, as we clearly understand from the slogan: 'No leftovers. Sorry Spike.' Like any good dog, Spike is an expert in leftovers, and as it is Christmas, he was obviously expecting to fill his belly. However, unluckily for him, the mayonnaise made all the meals so delicious that nothing was left. Once more it is not simply stated that that product tastes good, this deliciousness is *signified* by enacting a story that alludes to this quality in a way that is not overly explicit.

There are also adverts that deal with the food's flavour in depth, even attempting to describe it with technical and linguistic solutions very close to those used by poetry to suggest feelings or sensations. More often than not, this is done with television spots, because in order to do so it is necessary to produce somewhat articulated discourses. One good example is the advert for *Mon Cheri Ferrero*, a chocolate filled with rum and a whole cherry (fig. 15). The spot opens with a young woman biting into the product at a party. As soon as we hear the sound of the chocolate cracking between her teeth, however, the shot immediately changes and we are projected into an unreal dimension. We now see the woman walking in a kind of forest filled with strange trees that are entirely brown, and even her dress is different, now also made from brown flakes. It takes a few seconds and the help of the offscreen voice saying "the snap of dark chocolate..." for us to understand that what we are watching are the sensations caused by the chocolate. Each detail of this setting is used to signify this. For example, at one point we see leaves blowing up behind the woman as if they had just exploded. They are also brown and we cannot help but associate them with the crunching noise made by dry leaves when walked over in the street, a crunch that makes us think of the dry sound chocolate makes when it breaks. But there is no time to concentrate on how rich this setting is in suggestion before the scene changes and we see the same woman in a different dress, this time amber coloured, descending a staircase. The voice tells us this refers to the warmth of the liqueur, and her descent seems to represent the sensation alcohol produces as it runs down the oesophagus, leaving a trail that is referenced by a long veil. Finally, we have the third scene change and the inevitable reference to the cherry. The woman is now

dressed in a red dress with a large tulle skirt and falls, slow motion, into a pool full of cherries from which she emerges with one of the fruits in her mouth, as the voiceover says: “*Mon Cherì* is one emotion after another. To understand it, you have to try it”. Proof, in a certain sense, the spot itself has provided us with, translating the sensory stimuli provoked on the palate by eating *Mon Cherì* into high impact images that manage to evoke precisely what happens in the mouth. Despite the complex staging, everything that takes place is an affirmation of the pleasure provoked by the product, as is the case with **ludic-aesthetic** advertising.

5.4 CRITICAL VALORISATION



Fig. 16. Rather than articulating a discourse on taste, the advert for Tabasco concentrates solely on heat, which is easier to express.



Fig. 17. The symbol for radioactivity perfectly expresses the potency of Tabasco whilst associating this sauce with the consumption of pizza.



Fig. 18. Starbucks Coffee becomes a need worthy of a drip.



Fig. 19. A brilliant spot by McDonald's that culminates in the slogan: "We couldn't make it tastier. So we made it bigger".

With the last of the four advertising strategies being discussed here, we are brought into contact with what is perhaps the greatest problem when advertising food: objectivity. We all know that taste is purely subjective. It is so individual that it cannot be brought into discussion, because one person's likes might be disliked by another, so no one is permitted to pass such judgement. *De gustibus non est disputandum* said the Ancient Romans. Even simply saying that a certain food is tasty can give rise to objections: it may be tasty for some, but not necessarily for all. This is the reason use of such adjectives is treated with great caution in advertising. For example, there are enormous differences with the automobile market, in which there are parameters that are, if not objective, objectifiable. A car's performance, for example, can be measured and expressed numerically, and although in certain cases such numbers are not particularly relevant, the very possibility of presenting them produces certain communicative effects. However, while a car **brand** can say that its product has the best acceleration in its category or a larger boot space than a competitor's model, when we talk about frozen minestrone, stating that the taste of one may be better than another is not only difficult to believe but also may give rise to criticism. It is no coincidence that very often in food advertising reference is made to the food's nutritional qualities, diverting attention away from things that are non-quantifiable, such as taste, to something that is, such as fat content, vitamins, carbohydrates and so on.

This is why finding an objective variable in food often ends up going beyond the product, leaning on the ultimate parameter: price. There are many adverts that refer to this, even when (when this happens) it is to state that it is low and, therefore, the extent to which a certain **brand** manages to offer good quality *despite* a cost that they want to be deemed derisory. At the beginning of McDonald's long success story, for example, the 15¢ price of a hamburger was displayed on enormous signs inside restaurants and, of course, in advertising. 'Real good...and still only 15¢' read a poster from the 1960s. Like the hamburger chain, many other **brands** have used price in communication. In fact, we could say that all products for mass consumption do so periodically, launching campaigns that rely alternately on a reduction of cost and an increase in quality in the product that can be bought for that price. On closer inspection, even the Coca-Cola adverts we see in figures 2 and 3 make clear the price of 5¢ a bottle.

Different again is the case of food products that are not sold on taste, but on a characteristic that is not strictly flavour related, and that unlike taste can be objectified. One such example are the many spicy sauces on the market, which often focus their communication on the sensation of heat they are able to produce, and which becomes central to the message. The most prolific **brand** from this point of view is undoubtedly *Tabasco*, which has, over the years, brought to life a vast number of captivating solutions with which to affirm their 'strength', sparring with their competitors. Their creative output often references objects and images that are generally associated with heat, like the fire extinguisher seen in figure 16 or a thermometer, but also the symbols of danger and power, as with figure 17 where the pizza slices left in the box depict the symbol for radioactivity, as if thanks to *Tabasco*, an innocuous pizza might transform itself into a mighty bomb. Furthermore, by doing this the sauce is associated with a specific food, making a suggestion to the consumer who, paradoxically, may not be able to come up with a correct pairing for the sauce on their own. In these cases, the effect of objectivity is obtained through the use of **figures**, objects from the world that can be referred to visually or verbally, and that are usually associated with things other than food so that it is possible to imagine various ways of objectivization. Another example is that given in figure 18 in which the image of a drip immediately tells us just how necessary and effective a coffee from Starbucks is.

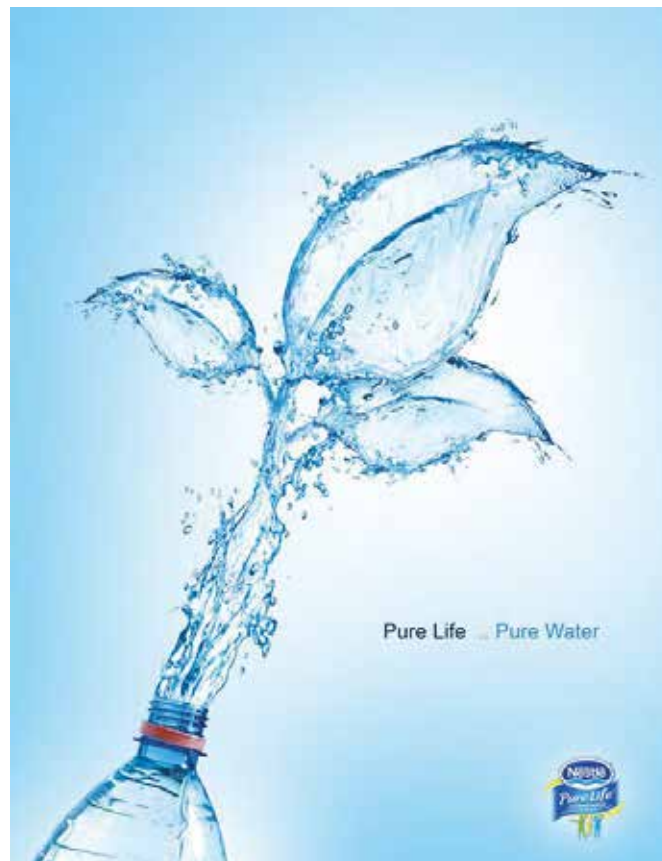


Fig. 20. 'Pure life...pure water' reads the advert for *Pure Life*, focus on how natural the product is.

One of the very few cases in which there is a successful operation of objectivization of taste in itself and not through a specific sensation, can be seen in a McDonald's spot (figure 19). The film begins with a series of shots that show two young customers talking about the Crispy McBacon, a limited edition sandwich sold at that time. The appearance is one of spontaneous interviews despite the fact that when each of the interviewee's faces appear on screen it is accompanied by a kind of superimposed Facebook post where we can read what that person has just said. Hence the slogan: 'We couldn't make it tastier. So we made it bigger.'. From a communication point of view, the idea is as simple as it is brilliant: unable to talk explicitly about how tasty the product is, it is referred to in the negative. But most importantly, a parameter is introduced, the size of the sandwich, which is undeniably objective. In this way, a measurable quantity ends up being related to one that is not, with the result that the latter somehow ends up finding its own measure. According to the customers, the taste cannot be improved, the only way of going further is to make the product bigger.

6. CONCLUSIONS

It goes without saying that a discourse on advertising, even if limited to the food sector, could go on forever, as the few examples we have made are nothing more than a tiny fraction of those that have been created. However, our intention was not to write an exhaustive dissertation of what advertising says about food, but to show the main ways in which to ensure a specific product is perceived as a desirable object when compared to others. Advertising valorises products as we have seen, but these products are almost never alone on the market, hence why companies support the economic investment involved in financing advertising campaigns in order to prevail over competitors. The problem shifts: it is no longer a case of stating a product's value, but of making it clear how one product distinguishes itself from others that are often very similar. There is no doubt that the more similar products are (and/or less likely it is consumers are able to distinguish between them), the more necessary it is to have an effective communication **strategy** in order for a product to be easily identifiable. This is why we have chosen to think in terms of advertising strategies. If a mineral water such as Evian decides to publicise its product with a **practical strategy**, it would be rather ineffectual for another mineral water **brand** to do the same thing. The outcome would be that one keeps you young and the other, let's say, purifies the body, or worse, that one keeps you younger than the other, creating nothing but confusion for consumers. 'Which was the one that kept me youngest?!' one may ask. It is fundamental in advertising to *differentiate* products. This is what the strategies that we have looked at aim to do by visualising the various ways of constructing an identity for any given product so that the creative work carried out is focused entirely upon

affirming what counts most: the product's personality. This is how a water **brand** like *Pure Life*, produced by Nestlé, uses its advert to position itself at the opposite end of the scale to Evian (figure 20). What the water does, what it is for and what its benefits may be are not discussed by the poster. Nor does it discuss taste or convenience. Instead it evokes nature. 'Pure Life...Pure Water' reads the slogan. The key concept is the purity that is declined by a superior value such as that of nature. Signifying this is the shape taken by the water as it leaves the bottle: that of a plant that has little to do with water (there are no waterfalls, fish, rivers or any such thing), but that speaks volumes about the environment, which is understood as an absolute value. Life is not understood here as a physical state, but as a supreme good from which the value of water hails, water that (at this point) is not a means but an end, as we see with **utopian valorisation**. The idea is that if the consumer shares these values, if this is their identity, then this is their water. After all, water is the product that perhaps requires most communication. Colourless, odourless and tasteless by definition, it is a substance that is difficult to unequivocally identify. Furthermore, its effects on the body do not differentiate much from one **brand** to another, unlike the fat content in biscuits for example. Preference is something that must be constructed by evoking images that are different each time, images that make differences that are very often only minimal, but that are both perceptible and concrete. As we have said, what is being sold is not actually a thing, a product with particular characteristics, but the idea that we form of that product from the systems of signs that signify it.

At this point we could consider advertising to be a kind of dark force that conditions consumers, forcing them to make senseless choices. It must not be forgotten however that, if it is true this is a one-sided discourse that often brushes with untruths in order to capture the public's attention and convince them of the desirability of what is being sold, consumers are never passive, defenceless subjects. As 'native advertisers', we have not only learned how to understand spots and slogans, but also how to defend ourselves from them, not to take them too seriously, and in some cases, criticise them mercilessly. This is another reason why what we have said thus far is important: to better understand how our tastes are formed and change in a world that, like it or not, talks to us using multiple languages.