

# Essays

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## VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE ROMANIAN PRINTED ADVERTISING BETWEEN 1965-1989. A SOCIAL SEMIOTICS OF MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

**Abstract** The following article aims at discussing the relationship between gender role portrayals in the Romanian printed advertising industry belonging to the communist period (1965-1989). By closely analysing the visual images of male and female representations depicted in the chosen advertisements, the focus was placed on determining whether or not communist advertising promoted a so-called pattern of symbolic and institutionalised stereotypes based on a discursive social semiotic approach, which has currently become a widely spread marketing strategy in almost every part of the civilised world.

**Key words:** male, female, advertising industry, visual images, communist, Romanian, social semiotic approach.

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### Introduction

Within the field of visual culture – which Mitchell defines not only as the “visual construction of the social”, but also as “the social construction of vision” (170) – previous studies regarding male and female portrayals have shown that, throughout the history of advertising, gender representation was, many times, considered to be both sexually bias, as well as highly stereotyping. In this sense, we might argue that the social construct defining the advertising industry is governed by almost innate patterns of gender identity, which develop their imagery primarily from the stereotyped representations of masculinity and femininity.

Furthermore, through the constant use of *visual signs* and *symbols*, printed advertisements reproduce, according to Goffman, “gender displays” (17) or ways in which men and women are thought to behave, as opposed to the ways they

actually do behave in real life (Cortese 57). However, despite this artificiality attributed to gender images in advertisements, which allows “masculinity and femininity to interact smoothly with the logic of the market-advertising representations” (Schroeder and Zwick 22), they often provide powerful models of behaviour that can be either emulated or rejected. As one critic pointed out, “the ways in which individuals habitually perceive and conceive their lives and the social world, the alternatives they see as open to them, and the standards they use to judge themselves and others are shaped by advertising, perhaps without their ever being consciously aware of it” (Lippke 108).

Consequently, we might argue that advertisements do not sell only a product or a service, they also sell a discourse, an imagery, that is, many times, centred upon a meaningful system of difference provided by the masculine/feminine dichotomy.

Starting from the above-mentioned premises, the following paper will be oriented towards discussing the way in which gender roles, portrayed in the Romanian communist advertisements, are, from a semiotic point of view, in the same time interconnected, opposed and in relation to one another. Following this line of thought, we shall try to prove whether or not the Romanian advertising industry was aligned, within the equalitarian social framework defining Ceaușescu’s communist regime, to the international marketing strategies of the time. Consequently, the focus will be placed both on the way in which

identity construction interacts with consumption, as well as on how gender displays, belonging to the advertising and consumer culture, are mostly built upon the discourse generated by the masculine/feminine dichotomy.

### Literary Review

In the development of our study we focused on a relatively complex source of bibliographical references which encompass both general theoretical frameworks regarding the interpretation of images, as well as more practical and particular approaches of analysing gender representations within the advertising industry.

Firstly, we should refer to the works of Gillian Rose – *Visual Methodologies*, and *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* belonging to Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, which centre upon discussing possible methodologies, methods and operational strategies regarding visual images. By making use of these materials we were able to delineate a theoretical background which proved to be very useful in later interpretations and analysis.

The same pattern of theoretical works also includes W.J.T. Mitchell’s *Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture*, as well as Richard Lippke’s *Radical Business Ethics*. While the first one focuses on offering not only a general overview regarding the problem of visual culture, but also valuable insights, just as the author himself argues, into the questions “surrounding visual studies as an emergent academic formation” (165), Lippke’s work provides

a comprehensive perspective of how business issues, such as advertising, are articulated within the vastness of the social system.

Further on, considering the fact that our study was constructed upon the idea of social semiotics beautifully depicted by Kress and van Leeuwen, we directed our attention on the semiotics of Saussure and Barthes. However, we mostly focused on Barthes' line of thought developed around theories such as those found in his article entitled *The Photographic Message*. Here, he discusses the bi-dimensionality of meaning which encompasses both a denotative, as well as a connotative level of understanding.

As we advanced into the problem of gender representation, we made use of works belonging to Erving Goffman – *Gender Advertisements*, Anne Cornin – *Advertising and Consumerist Citizenship: Gender, Images and Rights*, Anja Hirdman – *Male Norms Female Forms*, or Dean McCannell – *'Sex Sells': Comment on Gender Images and Myth in Advertising*. To a greater or lesser degree, all these studies are aimed at emphasising and exploring both the organising function of gender roles, as well as the ways in which the relation between sex, class and race are exploited by the advertising industry.

These somewhat general depictions of “gender displays”, as Goffman defines them, were, in one way or another, particularised, on the one hand, in Jonathan Schroeder and Detlev Zwick's article *Mirrors of Masculinity: Representations and Identity in Advertising Images*, while,

on the other, in Anthony Cortese's book *Provocateur: Images of Women and Minorities in Advertising*. While the first study theorises upon how the male gender and identity become, at the interaction of consumption and certain marketing discourses, free appropriations of meaning by the market, the second one offers an in-depth critical analysis of how the visual representations of women and minorities trace back to a fundamental ideology of domination and control in the contemporary advertising industry.

By focusing on certain specific data selected from these given bibliographical references, as well as on a clearly defined set of advertisement samples, we were able to develop a coherent and comprehensive study regarding how the visual representation of men and women were depicted in the Romanian printed advertising industry between 1965-1989.

### Methods and Methodologies

On the basis of the theoretical and empirical framework within which the following study is included, the structure of our paper will be centred upon the triangulation of both quantitative and qualitative methodologies and methods of investigation.

Consequently, the methodological framework will include *formalism* and *positivism*, based exclusively on elements that can be quantified and factually measured, as well as a critical theory, placed in the area of qualitative studies, namely *semiotics*. The triangulation technique will be then applied in combining some of the most representative methods

belonging to each of the above-mentioned methodologies.

The first part of the study will encompass quantitative methods of investigation such as *compositional analysis*, *content analysis* and a brief *questionnaire*, while the second part will be dedicated to the *semiotic analysis*, which, according to Gillian Rose, “offers a very full box of analytical tools for taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning.” (69) Thus, after tracing the framework of a quantitative investigation meant to bring about measurable data and facts, the focus will be placed on analysing the chosen advertisements by following a semiotic grid of interpretation based mostly on the theories of Saussure and Barthes (Rose 74, 79-82).

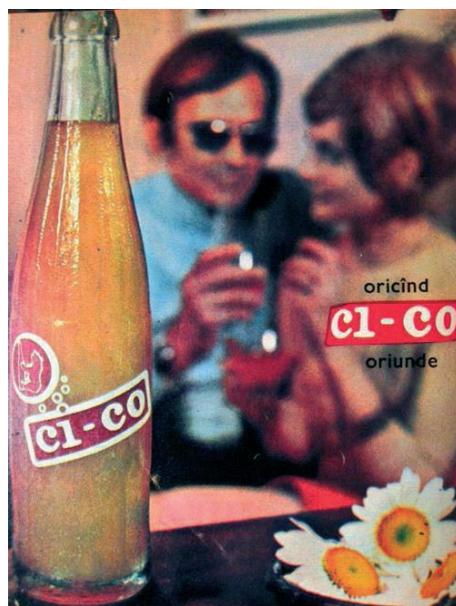
In order to make things clearer, we might argue that the triangulation of methodologies and methods belonging to both the quantitative and qualitative areas of investigation is aimed at decoding the underlying meanings and messages within the visual texts of the advertisements chosen for analysis.

### Interpretation

#### 1. The Quantitative Approach: Measuring, Counting and Asking Others

Within the qualitative field of study we shall firstly render, as we mentioned earlier when describing the methods of investigation, a *compositional analysis* of the image below, which we consider to be very representative to the total corpus of advertisements – on the one

hand, it depicts both male and female representatives, while on the other, it offers a good insight into the Romanian advertising industry of the time.



However, in order to do so, we will first need to identify the visual variables which provide, according to Gillian Rose, the “visual scrutiny” and “the compositional modality” (37) of the image itself. When talking about visual variables, we actually refer to the key elements used in describing the compositionality of visual representations such as: *content* (what is depicted in the image), *spatial organisation* (layers of depth, position, direction, angles), *colour* (hue, saturation, value), and the use of *light*.

By looking at the present advertisement, we are able to distinguish very easily its *content* or, to put it differently, what the image actually shows (Rose 38). Broadly, the viewer, who can be also associated

with a potential buyer, is being introduced to the product, a bottle of Ci-Co, by witnessing a remote but familiar scene, where a happy couple is enjoying a glass of their favourite orange soda.

Nevertheless, in order to better understand the complexity which lies behind the content of this image, we have to closely examine the *spatial organisation* within the visual representation. By analysing the given image we are able to distinguish two layers of depth, which address the viewers in different ways. The foreground is dominated by the bottle of Ci-Co carefully placed on the edge of a dark-coloured table alongside a saucer full of white daisies. The slogan accompanying the product (*Ci-Co: anytime, anywhere*) is also placed in this first layer, just above the three flowers. Another worth-mentioning aspect is the distribution of the actual objects dominating the foreground. Thus, while the bottle is placed in the right-lower corner of the table, governing the verticality of the picture, the daisies are placed in the opposite left corner, at a lower, almost horizontal level. Despite the obvious height difference, the two objects are offered a balanced distribution when it comes to the space they occupy on the table – in this sense both the bottle and the saucer are equally visible due to the oblique angle of the object they are placed on.

In contrast to the first layer of depth which addressed the viewers clearly and frontally, the perspective associated to the second one changes, being attributed a more isolated status, not only through its background position, but also through the

blurry, unclear imagery associated with it. From this point of view, it becomes obvious that the interest and focus of the implicit viewer was intentionally directed towards the first layer and no so much towards the couple placed in the background.

However, despite this apparent distinction separating the two spaces, there is a possible implicit connection between them. In opposition to the vertical axis represented by the left margin of the bottle which obviously delineates the foreground from the background, the horizontal line might be seen as a continuation of the table's felt corner (disguised by the three flowers) and the woman's almost naked leg. As a consequence, we might argue that the onlooker is invited into their intimate, almost isolated universe, which is enhanced by the presence of the closed door placed right behind the couple. This element, which might also be interpreted as a spatial, symmetrical counterpart of the table – the upper white frame of the door is parallel to the oblique dark-brown margin of the table –, functions as a barrier separating the exterior reality from the room, perceived as a self-sufficient, familiar space.

From this perspective, both the male and female presences become static instances, unaware that they might be watched. Nevertheless they are protected, in one way or another, by the visual barrier imposed by the first layer of depth upon the viewer. The position of their bodies may also indicate a sense of detachment, a deliberate distance, which denies any real contact between the two characters

and the exterior space – “What you see here is not part of our world; it is their world, something we are not involved with” (Kress and van Leeuwen 136). While the woman is seen entirely from a profile angle, the man, despite his frontal body position, is directing his look towards her. In addition, he is wearing black sunglasses which unquestionably interrupt any possible eye-contact between him and the outside viewer.

Another element which might help us determine the image’s compositionality is the *use of colour*. According to Taylor, there are three possible ways of referring to the colours of a visual representation, namely hue, saturation and value (qtd. in Rose 39). In the given image, it becomes obvious that warm colours such as orange, yellow, red or brown, outnumber the cold ones like blue or green which are used only in isolated areas of the picture. However, their saturation and value levels differ as we move from the first to the second layer of depth. Thus, while the colours of the objects belonging to the foreground (the bottle of soda, the flowers and the table) are characterised by a high level of purity and luminosity, in the background we can no longer delineate a clear-cut between the pure colours and the darkened areas which become predominant.

At this point, we cannot overlook the importance of *light and shade patterns* in the overall compositionality of the image. Despite the fact that the source of illumination is an implicit one, not accessible to the outside viewer, the use of light differs, just like the distribution of colours, from the first to the second

layer of depth. While the foreground is dominated by intense luminosity and brightness, the characters placed in the background are visibly marked by shadier or darker areas around the hair, eye, neck or shoulder regions. From this point of view, we might argue that the relation light/darkness is a device used in manipulating not only the saturation and value levels of the colours, but also the way in which the viewers perceive the spatial organisation of the image.

After analysing all the elements mentioned above – content, spatial organisation, colour and light – we might argue that they are closely interconnected in the overall structure of the image. Furthermore, they offer not only a detailed vocabulary for expressing the appearance of the advertisement chosen for interpretation, but also a starting point for a much wider and general field of investigation which we will further develop by using another formalist approach, namely the *content analysis*.

In examining the relationship between male and female representations depicted in the communist printed advertisements, we have chosen a corpus of 34 printed commercials that was analysed according to a number of coding categories, many of which were inspired from those developed by Lutz and Collins in their study of National Geographic (Rose 60-1):

1. Female representation
2. Male representation
3. Both male and female representations
4. Female dress style (casual / stylish / formal)

5. Male dress style (casual / stylish / formal)
6. Female nudity (partial / total)
7. Male nudity (partial)
8. Female Vantage (frontal / profile / semi-profile)
9. Male Vantage (frontal / profile / semi-profile)

10. Female sexualisation
11. Male sexualisation
12. Female body representation (entire body / waist up / just face)
13. Male body representation (entire body / waist up / just face)
14. The relationship between gender and merchandise

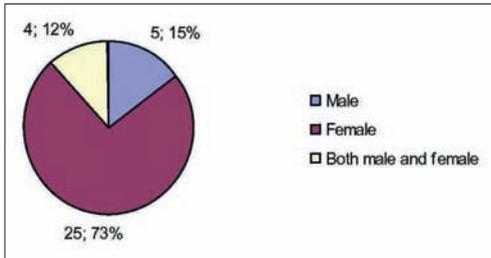


Fig. 1. Male and female representatives from a total of 34 advertisements

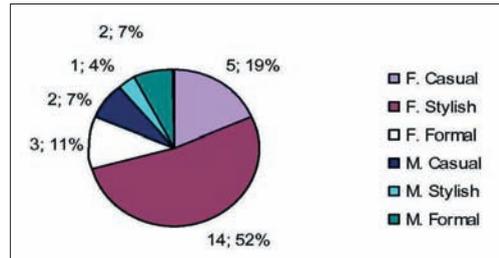


Fig. 2. Male and female dress style from a total of 38 ads (the 4 images depicting couples were used twice, both for the male and female categories)

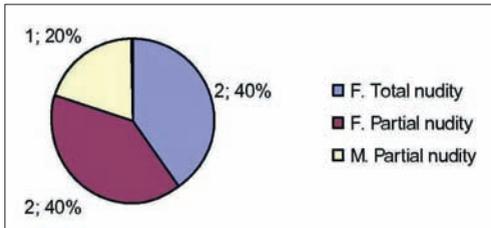


Fig. 3. Male and female nudity from a total of 38 ads (the 4 images depicting couples were used twice, both for the male and female categories)

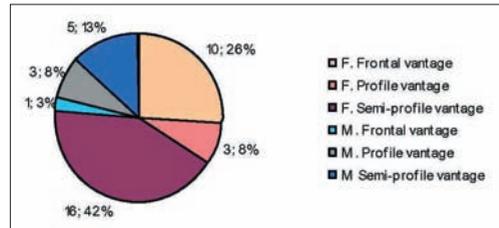


Fig. 4. Male and female vantage from a total of 38 ads (the 4 images depicting couples were used twice, both for the male and female categories)

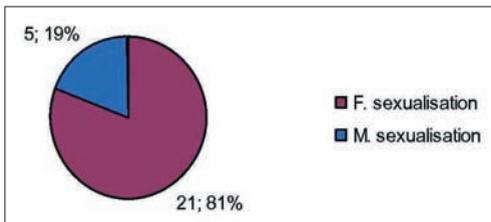


Fig. 5. Male and female sexualisation from a total of 38 ads (the 4 images depicting couples were used twice, both for the male and female categories)

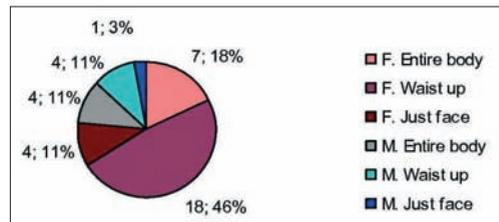


Fig. 6. Male and female body representation from a total of 38 ads (the 4 images depicting couples were used twice, both for the male and female categories)

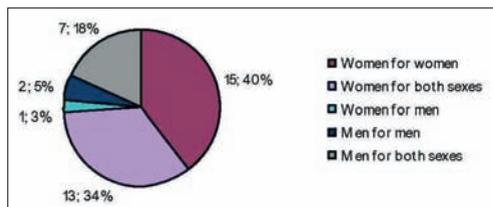


Fig. 7. The relationship between gender and merchandise from a total of 38 ads (the 4 images depicting couples were used twice, both for the male and female categories)

It should be mentioned the fact that the following advertisements were excluded from the corpus due to lack of relevance for the topic chosen: repeats, cartoons/sketches and, last but not least, the ones which lacked the presence of male and female representatives.

After coding the images, we achieved the following results:

The above graphics conclude that from the total number of advertisements due for analysis: a) females are represented in a greater degree than men, b) the female dress style is predominantly stylish, while that of men is equally casual and formal, c) female nudity is represented both partially and totally, while male nudity is just partial and in a lesser degree, d) both in the case of men and women the semi-profile vantage is predominant, followed by the frontal vantage for female representatives and profile vantage for male representatives, e) female sexualisation is depicted in a greater degree than male sexualisation, f) the female body is mostly depicted from the waist up, while in the case of men the emphasis is placed on the entire body as well as on the bodily representation from the waist up, g) male as well as female images are used in advertising

products for both sexes – however one should notice that men are not depicted in advertisements dedicated only to the female public.

The results, drawn from the content analysis rendered above, were also reflected in the outcomes of a brief *questionnaire* conducted to a well defined target group consisting of ten members out of which five were male and five were female representatives, between the age of 24 and 55. The respondents were chosen not only on the basis of their age, but also on the basis of their educational background. The diversity of the target group, provided by the difference in age and academic training, was meant to offer a rich understanding of the given advertisements that would assure multiple meanings and possible interpretations. In this sense, figure 8 will provide a comprehensive analysis of all the nine questions included in the survey.

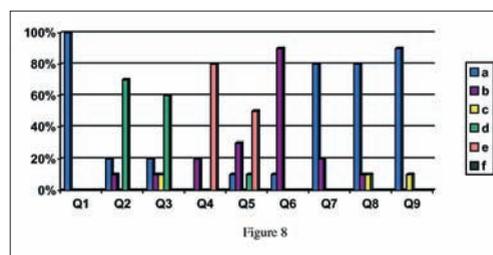


Fig. 8

The results show that, in the case of:

*Question 1:* the entire group of respondents considered that, from the total number of advertisements, the majority were constructed upon a female imagery, regardless of the advertised product or target audience.

*Question 2:* when asked what attribute(s) best characterise(s) the male characters depicted in the corpus of advertisements, 70% of the respondents concluded that the best answer would be “self-confidence, independence and self-control” (d), 20% chose “self-confidence” (a) alone, while the rest of 10% opted for “independence” (b).

*Question 3:* when asked what attribute(s) best characterise(s) the female characters depicted in the corpus of advertisements, 60% of the respondents considered that the most appropriate answer would be “sensuality, beauty and the power of seduction” (d), 20% chose “sensuality” (a), 10% opted for “beauty” (b), while the other 10% for “power of seduction” (c).

*Question 4:* when asked what are the elements which best define the male characters’ masculinity, 80% of the respondents considered that “the advertised product/service, dress code, position and attitude” (e) are all responsible for the general image of masculinity, while the rest of 20% believed that their “dress code” (b) alone is the most relevant.

*Question 5:* when asked what are the elements which best define the female characters’ femininity, 50% of the respondents considered that “the advertised product/service, dress code, position and attitude” (e) contribute to the general image of femininity, 30% chose their “dress code” alone (b), 10% opted for “the advertised product/service” (a), while the rest of 10% believed that “the attitude” (d) is the most important.

*Question 6:* 90% of the respondents argued that, according to the position they are depicted in, “female characters are the ones to be predominantly sexualised” (a), while the rest of 10% chose the opposing answer, namely that “male representatives are sexualised in a greater degree” (b).

*Question 7:* when asked to consider whether or not the characters’ body position might reproduce stereotypes based on the dichotomy masculine/feminine, the entire target group offered an affirmative response. However 80% used an absolute affirmative – “yes definitely” (a), while the rest of 20% opted for answer b – “to some extent”.

*Question 8:* when asked whether or not the different dress codes employed by the male and female characters might suggest a difference in status or power, 90% of the target group offered an affirmative response (80%: a – absolute affirmative; 10%: b – relative affirmative), while the other 10% opted for answer c – “not necessarily”.

*Question 9:* 90% of the respondents considered that the use of the female image in a greater degree than that of men, is definitely a marketing strategy (a), while the rest of 10% disagreed with this hypothesis (d).

All these measurable data and results provided by the three above-used methods, which form the quantitative framework of investigation, can be seen as an extremely appealing material for a wider qualitative approach, mostly centred upon a semiotic grid of interpretation.

## 2. The Qualitative Approach: Searching for Meanings underneath the Surface of Visual Imagery

The following section of the article will be orientated towards conducting a thorough semiotic interpretation aimed at offering not only “an elaborate analytical vocabulary for describing how signs make sense”, but also a coherent understanding “of the exact ways in which the meanings of an image are produced through that image” (Rose 69-70). We should also make clear the fact that our work will be set within the theoretical framework of what Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen have defined as *social semiotics* (6).

Starting from the Saussurean distinction between signifier and signified (Rose 74), we shall focus our discussion on the problem of forms (colour, perspective, line), identified as *signifiers*, as well as on the way in which these forms are used in the construction of meanings or *signifieds* within the overall process of sign-making and representation. According to the two above-mentioned authors sign-representation is seen “as a process in which the makers of signs, whether child or adult, seek to make a representation of some object or entity, whether physical or semiotic, and in which their interest in the object, at the point of making the representation, is a complex one, arising out of the cultural, social and psychological history of the sign-maker, and focused by the specific context in which the sign-maker produces the sign” (Kress and van Leeuwen 7).

However, these particular histories associated with the individual sign-makers

are, in one way or another, embedded in larger patterns of *social representations*, *cultural myths* and *contrasting contexts*, which according to Barthes, offer two distinct levels of reading the messages of visual images. In this sense he distinguishes between a *denotative* and a *connotative* dimension (17), which, from an analytical point of view, can be clearly set apart. By opposition, while denotation refers to the “perfection and plenitude” of an image’s analogy or its objectivity, “connotation is not immediately graspable at the level of the message itself, it is, one could say, at once invisible and active, clear and implicit” (19).

However, what these two layers of meaning attributed to visual images have in common is the fact that they are dependent on culturally and socially defined sets of codes. Thus, in a general sense, both the denotational and connotational meanings of a sign are included within frameworks of codes “organised around key oppositions and equations [...] aligned with a cluster of symbolic attributes” (Silverman 36).

For the purpose of our article, we have decided to follow Barthes’ line of thought and concentrate on eight communist printed advertisements, selected from the website *eTimpu.com*, which we consider to be the most representative for our total corpus of samples due for analysis.

The first two images we are going to look at are perfect examples of how male and female identities are represented within the popular visual culture.

While figure 9 advertises a product dedicated exclusively to women, thus

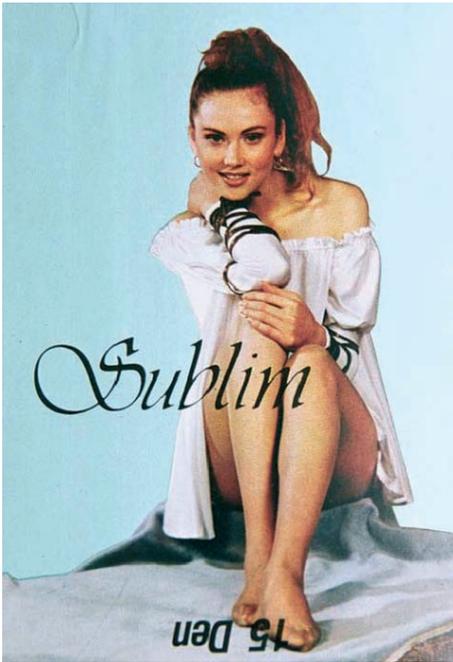


Fig. 9

being centred around a female presence, figure 10 promotes a diabetic dairy product represented by the image of a man, which addresses however both sexes. Following the Saussurean line of thought we should first focus on the formal aspects which also make up the denotative dimension of meaning. It becomes obvious that what these two images have in common is the marketing strategy according to which "sex sells". However, we should make no mistake and bear in mind MacCannell's observations, who points out that the advertising industry "suggests a counter formula: 'reproductive sex does not sell'. Biological reproduction is the model for, and therefore the primary competition of cultural reproduction. As such, it must be excluded from uncritical cultural imagery, that is, from images which intend merely



Fig. 10

to perpetuate the cultural status quo, which is a secondary function for most advertising" (527).

For this very reason, when referring to sex we are actually addressing the degree of sexualisation or eroticism attributed to gender representations. By analysing the positions of the two characters we will notice that while the woman's body is captured whole, the focus being placed on her naked shoulders and legs, the male figure is represented from the waist up, with emphasis on his arms and chest. These areas of interest do not only suggest an eroticised reading of the given images but also offer a possible framework within which gender identities are constructed and reproduced.

Furthermore, the colour codes of the two advertisements might also connote

male and female stereotypes. While the first image makes use of colours characterised by a high level of purity and luminosity such as white and bleu, in the second one we can no longer delineate a clear-cut between the pure colours and the darkened areas which become predominant. By contrast, we might argue that, while the female image is aimed at suggesting purity, sensuality and fragility, the male representative conveys an innate sense of masculinity, associated here with the idea of health, power and virility. These attributes become strongly connected with the active role of the male instance who, while making direct eye-contact with the implicit viewer, is also getting ready to drink from the bottle of milk, the elixir which assures his physical strength. Constructed in opposition, the woman is depicted in a state of expectancy, as playing the passive role while waiting for the viewer's approval.

The same line of thought can also be applied to the next two advertisements which are nevertheless aimed at promoting cosmetic products dedicated exclusively to women.

However, in these images the sexual dimension is mainly emphasised by the implied total nudity of the female characters, which is concealed, in one way or another, either by the body position (image 11), or by the distance imposed between them and the onlookers (image 12). Furthermore, the female stereotype depicted here is highly connected with what Anja Hirdman defined as the "visual image of the New woman – a woman who is depicted as coquettish and narcissistically



Fig. 11



Fig. 12

self-absorbed. [...] Such images establish the myth of the narcissistic, self-involved woman, whose only interest is inward – this in contrast to the outward looking and socially active man" (5).

From this point of view, we might argue that the erotic aspect is, somehow, internalised or directed towards a higher instance as suggested by the imagery depicted in picture number 12. Thus, while the first woman refuses any direct contact with the implicit viewer, being presented as self-sufficient and self-absorbed, the other two female instances seem to be mesmerised by the phallogentric, God-like presence of the perfume bottle, lacking any acknowledgement of even being watched. The methods employed when describing the discourse generated by the metaphorical dimension of these two advertisements suggest that the images themselves became “the definition of femininity – women-as-image” (Hirdman 5).

Moving on to the following advertisements, the line of approach changes when considering the relationship established between the characters and the implicit onlookers.

In this sense, it becomes obvious that the erotic dimension of the male and female representatives is highly diminished in comparison to those illustrated in figures 9, 10, 11 and 12. Here, the emphasis is placed on delineating more traditional stereotypes based on gender roles displays, which are meant to suggest the overall visual message encompassed by these images. While the male representatives connote the idea of competition and athletic performance closely linked to the popular ideals of masculinity, the two women portrayed in the first image are associated with the idea



Fig. 13

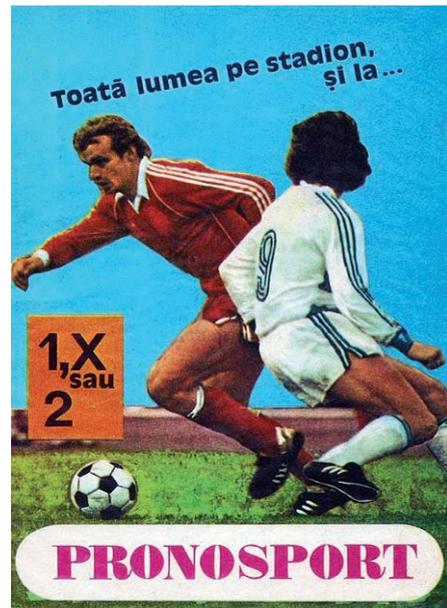


Fig. 14

of tranquillity, serenity and “naturalness” (Cornin 118) induced by the metaphorical connection between the advertised

product (a fan) and the attributes of the natural landscape (mountains and sea).

Despite the fact that the advertisements promote products and services dedicated to both sexes, the ways in which these elements are represented become part of a larger framework for identifying the discourse generated by the masculine/feminine dichotomy. In this sense, it becomes obvious that while the two women are depicted within the boundaries of an enclosed space as static instances, the men are portrayed outdoors, assuming an active, even dominating role. All these differences, further enhanced by the use of specific colour and dress codes, become defining elements in the social construction of male and female patterns of identity.

In order to better understand the mechanisms behind the ways in which these stereotyping categories are generated and reproduced within the advertising and consumer culture, we have chosen to focus our attention on two last advertisements depicting couples, and thus, direct interaction between male and female representatives.

By analysing figure 15, it becomes obvious that the advertised product is dedicated mostly, if not entirely, to a male audience. In this sense, the emphasis is placed on the image of the man who is portrayed not only as the dominant and active instance, but also as an embodiment of masculinity itself. His posture, sober dress style and dark colour codes as well the motorcycle and the feminine presence become defining elements in the process of his identity-making which is, as a result,



Fig. 15

“kept in line with the dominant ideas of masculinity-as-activity” (Dyer qtd. in Schroeder and Zwick 34).

In opposition, the female character, whose femininity becomes a secondary concern, is depicted as wearing bright coloured clothes, and standing behind the motorcycle, the symbol of masculinity, with her left hand on the man’s shoulder and the right one on the saddle. Thus, her body posture as well as the direction of her eyes suggest that her energy and attention are entirely directed towards her partner, whose only interest in her is limited to a visual dimension. Except his head which is turned facing the woman, the position of his body connotes a distant attitude, entirely engaged in the act of riding his motorcycle and symbolically of (re)defining his masculinity.

When looking at the next and last picture, we might notice that the gendered power relations, which in figure 15 portrayed the male character as the dominant and more influential instance, are slightly altered. Thus, going beyond the



Fig. 16

etiquette of colour and dress codes, the positions in which the two characters are depicted underline, just as Schroeder and Zwick point out in their study, a disruption of “the dominant gaze suggesting shifting limits of the advertising discourse” (35). The woman who is portrayed standing in front of her partner as a self-assured, active decision-maker dominates, in one way or another, the passive and inactive role attributed here to the male representative. Another interpretation however, which some might consider valid, is that the balance of power stands equally between the male and female instances. The two characters might be seen as a couple who share not only common goals and interests, but also common responsibilities.

Either way, it becomes obvious that the means according to which gender

roles were depicted in figure 16 suggest a clear shift from the so-called conventional advertising representations where “the male embodies the active subject [...], while the female occupies the passive object, the observed sexual/sensual body, eroticised and inactive” (Schroeder and Zwick 34).

### Conclusions

As argued in the introductory part of our article, previous studies have shown that gender role portrayals in advertising were many times considered to indicate both sexually bias positions as well as stereotyping attitudes, constantly perpetuated within the framework of marketing and consumerist culture.

Initially starting our investigation from this premise, we were able to prove that during Ceaușescu’s communist regime (1965-1989), the Romanian advertising industry was indeed promoting patterns of gendered identity, mostly centred upon stereotyped representations of masculinity and femininity. By conducting a series of studies based on quantitative methods and methodologies (compositional analysis, content analysis and a questionnaire) we have shown that the marketing strategy according to which female representatives were depicted in a greater degree than men, in advertisements dedicated to both sexes, was indeed quite popular.

However, the semiotic analysis developed in the second part of our article offered a more comprehensive insight into the problem of gender representations. By focusing on a certain number of adver-

tisements which we considered to be the most representative for the total corpus of samples, we succeeded in highlighting the dynamic dimension of gender illustrations which, according to Hirdman, "can be seen as an indicator of a mental and political state and as a part of the process of historical change" (236). Despite this specificity attributed to the communist advertisements, "there are certain basic features which seem to be recurrent. These features are based on the dichotomically built-up meanings of gender [...] and they confer on the sexes their respective positions" (Hirdman 236).

Furthermore, regardless of the representations of gendered power relations

which were of course encompassed within the ideological communist framework, certain scenes and characters were so stereotypically connected to a specific product, activity, or service, that they became quickly recognisable to the large public as useful symbols (Hirdman 235) across time.

All this having been said, we conclude that even during its incipient stages of development, the Romanian advertising industry was, in many ways, especially when considering the discourse generated by the male/female dichotomic representations, aligned to the international marketing strategies of the time.

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