The Woman in Pieces: Advertising and the Construction of Feminine Identity

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Abstract
This article aims to analyze the representation of the feminine identity in advertising. It explores the notion of social identity as a category that is experienced in the tension between classification and value. It also discusses the logic by which ads elaborate an image and, while in this process, transform the woman into a silent and fragmented body. In this article, I follow the anthropological tradition of symbolic systems analysis, and with it contribute to the debate concerning social representations throughout mass communication in general and, particularly, in advertising.

Keywords
anthropology of consumption, advertising and culture, communication studies, media and society, images of the woman

Communication, Advertising, and Symbolic Systems
This article aims to analyze some aspects of the woman’s image in advertising. It seeks to understand the logic by which ads elaborate an image of the feminine identity and, while in this process, transform the woman into a silent and fragmented body. Certainly, the “woman,” like other representations in advertisements, has by definition the duty to make sales of products and services possible. For that reason, every ad needs to maintain a constant and intense dialogue with society, making a very particular cut of the innumerable possibilities opened by the social experiences available. Therefore, it is fundamental to thoroughly analyze this material as a way of understanding how an ideological pattern of contemporary culture classifies differences between social groups through consumption. Hence, in this article, I explore the anthropological tradition of symbolic systems analysis, and with it contribute to the debate concerning social representations in mass communication in general and, particularly, in advertising.

The themes here approached—mass communication, social identity, advertising, and culture—are complex, broad, and multifaceted. Their profound discussion surpasses the limits to this article. Thus, they neither shall be subject to an exhaustive investigation, nor is it intended to explore the many possibilities they unfold. However, it is important to refer to the issue that relates directly to this article of women’s representations in the media and their ideological consequences. Many authors have focused on discussing the feminist perspective, the politics and the power involving the idealization of the woman, the uses of the female body image for consumption purposes, cultural aspects of gender role portrayals, and the reproduction of the traditional male superiority model in mass communication (Bordo, 1993; De Grazia & Furlough, 1996; Frith, Shaw, & Cheng, 2005; Kuhn, 1985; Sneeringer, 2004; Wiles, Wiles, & Tjernlund, 1995). Kates and Shaw-Garlock (1999) examined ads in female magazines to analyze some of the ideological representations of women, whereas Lynn, Hardin, and Walsdorf (2004) investigated photographs of women in sports publications, suggesting a maintained support to sexual difference that would serve capitalist hegemony. Also, Kilbourne (2000) studied the impact of ads that target young female consumers, indicating that advertising may create a kind of addictive effect that persuades women to recurrent consumption practices as a path for fulfilling their dreams. In this respect, Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Stacer (2006) pointed to the construction of a postfeminist consumer that embarks in a project of self-actualization through cosmetic surgeries and diverse beauty treatments, emphasizing ideas of personal choice and individualization, instead of original feminist causes of social change and liberation. Goffman (1977), in his classic study, discussed the ritualization of femininity showing that the analysis of advertising may reveal representations of the woman as kind, docile, and playful, constructing her identity with numerous values and labels such as “submissive,” “hidden,” “distanced,” “toy,” “childish,” “funny,” “sweet,” and “happy.” Moreover, a fundamental
meaning of the woman is given when opposed to the world of men, classifying the feminine identity in a subordinate hierarchical place. The author explains how advertising frequently portrays the woman in a passive or assistant position, while the man often symbolizes a superior status and is pictured in a protective attitude, according to the social environment (familial, professional, or affective) where he interacts with other participants.

Bearing all of these ideas in mind, this study should be seen as part of the tradition of studies on the woman’s image in the media and an interpretation to a concrete case of advertising construction of the feminine identity in Brazil. Its goal is to indicate that anthropology has a distinctive way of analysis that is an important contribution for the dialogue that should characterize research over the immense repertoire of images, identities, representations, symbolisms, and classifying systems available throughout that what we call cultural industry. In general, we believe that everything in the world of media changes rapidly. Advertising always seems so contemporary, modern, new and bold or, at least, in line with the latest cultural trend (whatever that may be). We see it as a kind of radar that captures what is up to date, always pretending to indicate social changes. However, things are not always what they seem. Indeed, under a certain plan of observation, advertising images do identify the change. Nevertheless, when observed in another plan, we see an impressive recurrence between the meanings of such images in various moments. In other words, the representations and images—of the woman, of the man, of the child, of the family, and so forth—change without changing. Even though ads always tend to seem new in form and in style, a careful comparison unveils an amazing similarity between their structural plans. This indicates that they seem to be in what Lévi-Strauss (1970) called totemic temporality—cyclic, nonlinear, a kind of “time” that bets on permanency and is parted from the historical order. Something like the manner of myths reproduces the logic by which ads are made (Rocha, 2006, 2010, 2012). As we will see ahead, the woman’s representations in ads of the 1980’ in Brazil reveal themselves to be most near to today’s, composing a central axis of the collective imaginary concerning the feminine identity. Thus, to study advertisements is to perceive in them the recurrence. It is a way to see renewed eternal images which express a cyclic and totemic time. For example, Rocha and Pereira (2013) examined ads from 1960 through 2012, demonstrating this recurrent, cyclic, and totemic time in representations of youth in campaigns for a typical Brazilian soft drink called “Guaraná.” This temporality is an important issue to understand advertising as a speech that classifies products and people through consumption.

Actually, the questions that advertising presents to thought are an interesting challenge for their diversity and complexity. The representations and images that inhabit our imaginary form a kind of “script” which we enact in the daily experience. The anthropological perspective may serve as a privileged form of interpretation of the universe of images, ideas, and meanings that are produced by the cultural industry (Rocha, 2006, 2010, 2012). There is a great potential for intellectual work in following this path of study, especially when we think of the media as one of the most active voices occupying public spaces in contemporary culture. Its messages perform a drama where meanings are made public, where consensus is imposed and ideologies spread.

The cultural industry places society before an extensive repertoire of ideas, emotions, feelings, sensations, choices, impositions, and practices. A complex ideological universe is formed by representations of that society which are then constructed, repeated, and transformed through their everyday dissemination in texts and images of advertisements, newspapers, soap operas, magazines, news broadcast, movies, web sites, and so on. These representations are like a systematic speech and, from the social actor’s point of view, a speech as comfortable as it is inevitable. However, this ideological universe transmitted by mass communication always has consumption as purpose and as a way of self-maintenance. Without consumption, the media system is unfeasible. The commitment to consumption—of products, services, ideas, tastes, and feelings—calls for the use of a common language to the public, because the media only makes sense in the audience. To be comprehended is a matter of maintenance. Media representations are not unilateral creation, but an exercise over a concrete relationship between speech and audience through a common code. Each product of the media is a bridge that establishes and fixes itself with the thoughts and practices of the respective consumer markets.

The relationship between society and cultural industry can be seen as a mirror where the image doubles in countless rebounds. The important thing is that whatever the precise form of that relationship, the meanings produced by the media are public, shared and collective, which makes it difficult, for example, for someone not to understand an advertisement, radio news, television program, or newspaper photo. This indicates that the study of meanings propagated throughout these materials serves as clue toward the existing models, desires, and dilemmas of a culture. The cultural industry raises interest because of the keys it holds within that open passages to the imaginary of the society that produces it. In this sense, I propose to investigate the most evident traces of what ads show as the feminine identity. More specifically, I suggest observing how the woman’s image in advertising presents a fragmented body and a silent being so that products may “speak” for her.

It is important to understand that in advertisements the feelings that are expressed, the privacy that is shown and the intimacy that is exposed are no longer individual characteristics, but, as publicly exhibited, become collective representations. In Durkheim’s (1970) sense, they are social representations. A “thing” that is coercive, extensive, and external to the individual. The identities, both of the “man” and of the “woman,” once translated by the media, turn into
codes or patterns where society sees ideas, styles, and practices. In this sense, the identities are not dimensions of the individual, hovering over social, for, when transformed into media images, they no longer are a “judgment of one’s conscience,” but a collective classification constituted through likewise social values. The feminine identity drawn in ads does not care for inner selves, subjective characters or multiple faces of the psychological universe. The ad does not speak of the difference between individuals or of the singularity, because selling is betting on the far-reaching and group discourse, classifying everything that is possible as a consumer public. Advertisements speak of products and services to reach consumers. They are generic to the extent of their markets. The media communicates through what we have in common: collective representations and social classifications.

Thus, I wish to retain two basic points. The first is that this study, paraphrasing Clifford Geertz (1978), is not “about” the cultural industry, but “in” the cultural industry and, particularly, in advertisements, assuming the symbolic material they propagate necessarily has an intense relation with society. Ads must dialogue with receivers, they cannot be strangers, or detached. These materials must fit in to the lives of consumers. The second point is that the identity is inclusive. It is something that encompasses the individual, and annuls its subjective and psychological dimensions. We shall look at it as a social fact, codified in the media as a behavior model, defining “what it is,” “what it can” or “what it should be” in the feminine world, as a cultural experience and a collective identity.

Next, I approach the ideas of classification and value as a way of thinking about social identities. The study follows with a discussion on the relationship between advertising, totemism, and consumption, showing how ads trigger a classification system that is central to modern life. Afterword, there will be a brief explanation about the methodology and the Brazilian political redemocratization context that suggests some important ideas to understand the feminine identity as projected by the ads of the 1980s. Finally, I will look to capture certain meanings of the body and its fragmentation as essential axes in the construction of the woman’s image and a mechanism for promoting products and services in Brazil. As we are going to see, the fragmentation of the woman’s body is an interesting advertising strategy to create possibilities, spaces, and markets for different brands that entitle themselves as owners of each one of these pieces, settling specific territories for their various consumer goods.

Identity, Classification, and Value

Ideas like identity, person, character, mask, or role can be related to the debate over performance or enactment in everyday life. These are terms that refer to traditional sociological subjects—such as interaction, group, power, social organization, and so on—besides involving several complex theories of the Social Sciences. Nonetheless, the concept of social role is among the most ordinary ideas to speak of society. It appears in common sense through familiar expressions, such as the “role of the fool,” “fulfill your role,” or “role model,” and even in refined speeches that define proper roles, its attributes and functions. Similarly, the idea of “status,” somewhat close to the idea of role, has its popularity, and both deserve a deep study, a true archaeology of structures and contexts by which different authors considered them.

A profound study about these concepts would have certainly related to theater as a privileged metaphor. In Ralph Dahrendorf’s famous book Homo Sociologicus, a classic on the investigation of social roles, the theater theme is clearly presented:

People, person, character and mask are words that, while originated from different stages of linguistic development, share a common area of meaning: the theatre. In drama, for example, we speak of people or characters whose roles are played by the actor. And, although he no longer uses the mask, this word too has the same origin. (Dahrendorf, 1969, p. 43)

The theater metaphor is also found in Goffman’s “dramaturgical perspective.” In an interesting scheme described in The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, Goffman (1975) explained that the “self” acts projecting his characters toward characters projected by other “selves” that are as well the audience. A third word from the theater, the audience is, in everyday life, formed by those who watch the performance of the “self.” All that is said right in the preface, where the importance of the theater metaphor is emphasized, as the author assumes the theatrical representation as the main perspective used to develop his interpretation of the self in everyday life.

Back to Dahrendorf, it is clear how the idea of theater was explored in Homo Sociologicus. The text begins showing the idea of theatrum mundi as one of the first metaphors used in this sense. The human world is like an immense theatrical drama and all living individuals play a single role. Next, Dahrendorf uses the famous line of Jacques—a Shakespeare character from the comedy “As you like it”—as an example of a new vision regarding social role. Jacques explains, “All the world’s a stage and all the men and women merely players.” In this vision, there is no longer a single role for each human being, but roles that succeed each other in time. One after another—“His acts being seven ages”—in a sequence that ends only with death. The point is that each different age described in Shakespeare’s play is also related to professional roles, such as student, soldier, and judge. Each professional role, in a certain sense, defines an individual in a proper age to occupy it (Dahrendorf, 1969, p. 47).

From human life as a single role—theatrum mundi—to a sequence of roles during a lifetime—“His acts being seven ages”—until, finally, we come to the idea of multiple and non excluding roles that each of us is supposed to play. The
multiple roles that individuals may carry and how they may activate each and every one of them in different moments. It is toward this idea that converges a great deal of the social role debate. Dahrendorf (1969) created a famous example of a situation where a certain Dr. Hans Schmidt, unknown until this moment, is introduced in a meeting. Once better acquainted and after gathering information about him, we come to acknowledge that there is only one Hans Schmidt, although he is engaged in many different positions and social roles: adult, man, married, citizen, of German nationality, father, professor, and so on. This example shows how the individual’s indissolubility is a central thought concerning social identity. Dahrendorf explains the “homo sociologicus” as the tension and the intersection between the individual and the society. The individual is constituted by preestablished roles, which are, as a counterpart, the boundaries imposed by society.

It is important to understand that roles and identities must be thought of in the crossroads between individuality and society. Actually, it is difficult to place the individual under perspective, to see it as a social construction, because as something so fundamental in our culture, it is perceived as absolute truth, inalienable, independent, and beyond every concrete social or historical experience. This reification and universalization of the individual seems to be the path followed by part of the discussion on social identity. Our ethnocentrism transforms the “idea” of the individual into something absolute. The Brazilian anthropologist Roberto DaMatta (1983) observed,

One could say that the English anthropology seems to present a kind of contradiction: if, on one side, there is a search to forming a collective or holistic perspective, there is, on the other side, a need to forever recover the individual, who is, in fact, an irreducible value of his own system. (p. 44)

Roberto DaMatta criticizes a few studies of Edmund Leach about social organization that, like others in English anthropology, tend to look over society as a result of assembled trajectories, transactions, and individual strategies. Depicted like this, social life comes as reference, invention, and result of an unstoppable negotiation of private and individual interests. But, if we think that “individual” and “individualism” are concepts more related to our ideology than with the effective nature of identity, we may move forward to a less-social-centric perspective from where we can start thinking about social identities.

The individual should be seen as a social category. Furthermore, it is important to understand that is not every society that transforms the individual in a substance so relevant to its existence. For Western culture, the individual is the center of the system, a kind of measure to many attitudes and thoughts before the world, and configures an inner space, appearing as an isolated unit opposite to the social system. To us, the individual is a place of choice, owner of feelings, and author of our intimate novel, capable of establishing many of the rules of the world we inhabit. However, it is also an ideological elaboration of certain social systems. The reality of the individual as something empirical and physical does not assure that every culture transforms it into a social value. Continuing with Roberto DaMatta (1979),

On one side, we have the empirically given notion of the individual as concrete reality, natural, inevitable, independent of ideologies, and collective and individual representations. Thus, we know that there is no human social constitution without the individual. But, between recognizing the empirical existence of the individual and surprising it like a relevant and active social unit, capable of generating coexisting ideals of individualism and equalitarianism, there is a social and historical fact, a product of the development of a specific social structure: the Western civilization. (p. 171)

There is a great distance between the empirical reality of the discontinuity of bodies and individualism as an ideological elaboration of a given society. This distance is enough to avoid a general and absolute understanding of social identity based on the reification of the individual. So, once again, if we consider the individual in a relativistic perspective, from what should identities be thought of? When placing the concept of social role in the intersection between individual and society, Dahrendorf offers a direction. If his terms—individual and society—betray the social centric angle mentioned by DaMatta, the idea that identity happens in an intersection is interesting. Better explaining, the identity is located in a crossroads, but this must be free of predetermined contents. It needs a place, except this place does not need to be where the categories of individual and society intersect. It is a fact that the individual—a value socially and historically elaborated by a “specific social structure”—cannot be, at the same time, one of the axes that define identity to every culture. As something elaborated by a determined culture—the Western civilization—the individual becomes parallel to society and not paired to it, making any crossing impossible. However, to think the concept of social identity as an intersection between two axes, clear from contents specific to a single society, enables a relativistic point of view where two lines intersect, not of individual and society, but of classification and value.

This “geometric” metaphor serves as exercise, for it allows another angle to think about social identities. Like so many anthropological themes, the notion requires a fine-tuning involving ideas sufficiently abstract to resist the ethnographic diversity and precise enough to interpret the concrete social experience. The reflection concerning social identity is a paradox, because it must suppose the specific singularity of every culture and, then again, the presence of the phenomenon in multiple cultures. That is why the issue of social identity requires an open interpretation, like the ideas of classification and value, which result in particular forms of choice and accomplishment of the concrete identity when
intersected in any context. Classification and value are means of construction, operation, and distribution of social identities. Through them it is possible to walk away from the ethnocentric entrapment, avoiding the Western individual as explanation to the notion of identity in every society.

Classification is a place in the structure to be necessarily filled so the world becomes coherent and intelligible to social actors. The work of Lévi-Strauss (1970, 1975) showed that the necessary coherence to wholeness means to allow multiple translations among its parts; however, these parts may permanently serve as means to recover this wholeness. The integration establishes distinct meanings, or values, that are spaces filled with content by the position the very classification system defines. Thus, classification indicates a specific position, whereas value gives meaning to this position in the structure. This pair, classification and value, enables one to understand how, in a given social system, local conditions define a set of local identities. In this sense, classification and value are ways of dealing creatively with the particular and the universal in social identities. Next, I propose to test these ideas in advertising, making explicit its classificatory nature and looking at values the media uses to dress up the feminine identity.

**Advertisements, Totemic Systems, and Consumption**

According to the teachings of Lévi-Strauss (1970) in “*The Savage Mind*,” classifying is an exhaustive process. It is how culture inscribes its particularities in the world. Nothing would make sense if we did not obtain meaning from everything that surrounds us. This process establishes order, difference, and meaning. The existence assumes a human atmosphere; everything takes place, because, to us, it is impossible to live in inconsistency, a kind of “jelly world,” like Mary Douglas’s (1966) fortunate expression.

Lévi-Strauss indicated that what in anthropology was called “totemism” is, in fact, a homology between two separate systems. A classification of things that uses differences within the natural order converted into differences within the cultural order. The classification scheme said to be totemic is how certain societies find coherence in the world through the exchange of messages, the mutual translation or dialog between nature and culture. Matching both systems is how cultures make particular “readings” to transform “their” world in an integrated space. But, to find coherence in complementing nature with culture, the totemic logic needs to make time cyclic instead of linear, to bet on the structure and its establishment, trying to suspend the passing of historical time. Alternatively, societies like ours, with the central axis that gives meaning to the world in the linear time plan, often refuse classification systems that, like “totemism,” are machines for the suppression of time (Lévi-Strauss, 1970).

But even in our societies there are openings, ruptures, and contradictions that allow the existence of domains where categorization operates in a way similar to the “totemic” model. Here we start to think of advertising as a classification system. In ads routinely transmitted to us a drama that reminds life is enacted, although painless, free of misery, anguish, doubt, or human frailty. Something that is just perfect. Products have feelings, there is no death, and happiness is absolute. Children smile, women desire, men are fulfilled, and oldness beatifies. Ads show a world that is neither truthful nor misleading: it is magical. In advertising (like in myths), we can follow narratives where animals speak and magical events repeat themselves. In the “society of reason” reigns a tacit commitment to believing in the impossible, accepting realities elaborated in ads that, based on everyday “real” life, produce idealized narratives.

Advertising is a way to categorize, classify, hierarchize, and ordinate *The World of Goods* (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979) as well as relationships between people through consumption. We know the manifest function of ads is to sell products and services, but a simple observation is enough to notice that, in a certain way, goods are the least consumed. Every ad sells lifestyles, feelings, and worldviews, in generously larger portions than cars, clothes, or toys. Products and services are aimed to possible buyers, but advertising messages are distributed indistinctively, indicating its classificatory destiny. Advertising speaks of the eternal, suppresses time, cuts differences in the series of production, and converts them into differences in the series of consumption. Advertising, then, performs the very clear function of mediating the opposition between those two economical domains. Ads recreate products, giving them an identity, specifying, and preparing them, at last, to an existence no longer imbibed in the dynamic of production, but in the middle of human relations, symbolic and social, that characterize consumption.

Under certain aspects, production and consumption are substantially different processes. The first happens among materials and machines. Anonymity and sequencing are rules, and products are multiple and impersonal. Production is the domain where human is absent and alienated from work (Marx & Engels, 1992). However, products that are impersonal, sequenced, and anonymous must be consumed by human beings and introduced in discontinued social segments, incorporated in spheres of singularity. They must have a face, a name, and a story to occupy a place in the symbolic order.

To balance differences, advertising, and marketing need to skip the production process and the social history of products to reencounter “humanity” in the symbolic instance. In the bourgeois world, consumption is the arena of difference where products and services are one of the central elements in the construction of our identities, worldviews, and lifestyles. Nothing is consumed in a neutral fashion. Consumption translates a universe of distinctions; products and services accomplish their classificatory nature through the symbolism attached to them. The advertising system gives names,
Contents, representations, and meanings to a constant flow of goods. Many would not even make sense if a label did not offer them the proper classificatory information.

Advertising classifies products, gives meanings to services, positions goods, and elaborates hierarchies of objects. This system draws a map of needs and reasons, or it writes a script of feelings that attaches contents to types of products, making them specific brands endowed with a name, a place, and a meaning. Thus, advertising is an instrument of selection and categorization of the world, creating nuances and particularities in the domain of production and, mutually, differentiating groups, situations and states of spirit in the human domain of consumption.

The classification principle acting within advertising enables the idea of studying the issue of social identity through its vast materials and, specifically in this article, how ads choose contents that are fixed as representations of the woman. But, there is still another axis—value—to understand social identity. When classification happens, it defines a space, so, the next step is to investigate values that fill it. Let us see how these values operate, studying a group of ads that, due to product or thematic, need to classify the feminine universe, to construct an image and to elaborate an identity of the woman.

**Brazilian Society in the 1980s: Notes on Methodology**

This work examines a corpus of ads with the purpose to reveal advertising representations of women in the Brazilian society from 1980 through 1989. To investigate media discourses that refer to the female universe, standard one-page ads are used here for a textual analysis (Bauer & Gaskell, 2002; Duarte & Barros, 2009; Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, & Vetter, 2000). Both the visual and the written dimensions of advertisements were considered in this investigation, aiming to identify some of the main characteristics of women’s media images of that time. Hence, the analysis reflects on the syncretism between visual and verbal languages, which are basic aspects of every ad in print. In effect, advertising published in magazines, of weekly or monthly distribution, adequately conjugate verbal language with visual and image manifestations to express and materialize abstract contents, to fulfill its commercial purpose.

Ads were selected from five Brazilian magazines, “Nova,” “Claudia,” “Playboy,” “Isto É,” and “Veja,” which are still among the leading publications of the Brazilian editorial market today. The compiled material was separated into 21 classes, according to the type of product or service announced. This typology is a “native” process of classifying ads used in the professional world of advertising to establish categories in its innumerous contests and prizes. In a previous work (Rocha, 2010), I adopted the same criteria to analyze the “liquor” class. Now, the chosen categories are “cosmetics and toilette” and “clothing and textiles.” The first includes ads for creams, lipstick, lotions, perfumes, powder, bathing salts, dentifrices, deodorants, soaps, shampoos, depilatories, sprays, hair dye, nail polish, brush, and comb in general; tanners, feminine napkins, shaving razors, and related items. The second comprises ads for clothing in general; lingerie; textiles; wool; leather goods; shoes; bed, bath, and table linen; and sports apparels. Both categories were elected because these kinds of products advertise mainly to the feminine public.

Magazines collected totalize 1,400 editions from 1980 through 1989. Today, these publications have approximately 200 pages per edition. In the 1980s, an average issue had about 100 pages. At that time, as today, around 50% of an edition was dedicated to one-page ads. The universe is estimated in 70,000 ads, which were divided considering the 21 categories mentioned above. Evidently, some categories have more products and services advertised than others. But on average, we can estimate there is something like 3,300 ads for each category. For this analysis, two categories were chosen, “cosmetics and toilette” and “clothing and textiles.” Considering that, in these categories, about 20% of advertisements are directed to the male readership, there were 5,280 ads available for examination. Nearly 5% of them (260 ads) offer us a significant material to discuss the woman’s image, because they emphasize her body, sensuality, and beauty. Among this selection, here are presented some of the advertisements for the following brands: Max Factor, Chique, Appel, Del Rio, DeMillus, DuLoren, Lib Slip, Matitte, McChad, Sulfabril, U.S. Top, Helena Rubinstein, Hidraskin, Skin Dew, Wella, Sanny, Power Bust Flex, and Dropyn.

Another important thing that gives consistency to this textual analysis and that may offer us some clues to understand the image of women is the identification of the Brazilian historical context in the 1980s. This should help us understand the ideological patterns that appear on women representations in ads, which are directly related to cultural models, political behavior, economic reality, and social life as experienced in great Brazilian urban centers of that time. In fact, the 1980s in Brazil were characterized as a crucial moment of passage from a military dictatorship, which began in March 1964, to a desired redemocratization. This transition was gradual, slowly conquered, but still a sustained process that began in the late 1970s and was fulfilled with the presidential election in 1989, the first one to happen by popular vote in almost 30 years.

In 1960, Brazilian voters elected democratically the president Jânio Quadros for 5 years. However, within a year the president suddenly renounced his post and was replaced by vice-president João Goulart. This was a period of political turmoil with changes in the government system from presidentialism to parliamentarism and back again. In an ideologically complicated and tense setting, a military coup d’état occurred in March 31, 1964 (Dreifuss, 1980). This military regime ruled the country for the next 20 years, alternating five generals in the presidency, attested by a submissive...
national congress that was powerless to question military decisions. The dictatorship created its own laws, started to censor the media, violently pursued adversaries of the regime, and destroyed organized political groups and parties. The remaining professional politicians, by personal interest or by lack of options, accepted the military terms and were divided into the only two parties that were permitted, MDB (Movimento Democrático Brasileiro [Brazilian Democratic Movement]) and Arena (Gaspari, 2002a). A private Brazilian joke of the time said that the country possessed two parties; one that said “yes” (MDB) and the other that said “yes, sir” (Arena) to military orders.

The dictatorship reached its most radical moment between the end of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s with the publication of the “institutional acts” establishing nondemocratic changes in the Constitution. This is the moment of greatest repression in the cultural and political levels that the country has experienced in recent history. No newspaper, radio, television, or magazine could publish anything without a previous censorship. The cultural production—of books, movie pictures, theater, fine arts, dance, and even soap operas—was roughly censored (Gaspari, 2002b). Because of this terrible climate of cultural oppression, it almost became mandatory for the media, including advertising, to use patriotic elements and support the so-called “Brazilian economical miracle” in its narratives. The main local client of advertising agencies at the time was the very government that demanded self-promotion campaigns to exalt its accomplishments and ideology. However, in the second half of the 1970s, economic crisis allied to changes in the international political scenario led to an increase of popular dissatisfaction that forced the military to begin a process of opening the regime, including the amnesty of political exiled in 1979. The ads that were selected for the present analysis were published during the 1980s, a period of increasing political and cultural flexibility, with elections of state governors by popular vote and the election of a civil president by the national congress (Gaspari, 2003).

For the purpose of this study, this is a crucial period, because, besides incipient possibilities of once again establishing democratic political practices, other social forces also repressed by the regime started to find spaces for their manifestations. This is the case of the feminist movement and the growing presence of women in Brazilian social, cultural, and political life (Costa & Sardenberg, 2002). In 1980, for example, Rede Globo, the most important Brazilian network since that time and currently among the biggest of the world, launched two television shows that placed women’s everyday problems and possibilities as central issues of debate. One of them was a prime time fictional series called “Malu Mulher” (in English, Malu Woman) that approached themes such as female work, masculine oppression, sexual and affective conflicts, and so on. The other one was a variety show called “TV Mulher” (in English, TV Woman) that touched from conservative things, like culinary and decoration, to bold subjects, as freedom, oppression, work market, and the intimacy of the body. Incidentally, the aggressive sexuality of films such as “Fatal Attraction” (United States, 1987), in which a man is threatened by the obsessive desire of a woman, was subject of exciting conversations in social gatherings in Rio de Janeiro. This was also a time when many women singers, such as Rita Lee, Maria Bethânia, Simone, Joana, Fafá de Belém, among others, became big stars of the Brazilian pop music with songs that expressed the female point of view about love, relationships, desire, and so forth. (Fernandes, 1987; Mattos, 2010; Ribeiro, Sacramento, & Roxo, 2010; Xavier, 2007). In universities and Brazilian scientific associations of the Social Sciences, women’s studies, feminism, and gender-related issues began to appear as respectable objects of academic debates, supported by scholarships and research grants. In 1981, the Brazilian government sanctioned the United Nations convention of 1967 about the elimination of every form of discrimination against women. Also, during the 1980s, more governmental and private companies began to admit women in their staffs (Costa & Sardenberg, 2002; Miceli, 1995).

This complex process of political and cultural redemocratization of the 1980s in Brazil is marked by, as expected, an increase of repressed demands. The feminine universe reproduces this exact atmosphere of breaking limits and creating possibilities. For women, the beginning of public discussions concerning their insertion in society as professionals, sexual-ity, maternity dilemmas, and political participation formed a compound of multiple, diffuse, fragmented, and scattered needs and expectations. This brief review of the redemocratization period in Brazil gives us a concrete indication to understand the cultural circumstances behind the female representation in advertising. Therefore, the ads analyzed in this article express their connection with their time, constructing the woman’s image as an individual with uncertain possibilities in a body that is exposed in multiple fragments and desires of consumption.

**The Body in Pieces: The Woman's Fragmentation**

The designated place in the classifications system and the hierarchical position indicate a space to be covered up with values that build the feminine identity. The first thing to be noticed is that in advertising images women are classified in a counterpart relationship before men, and also, before several types of women. The “woman’s” identity differentiates itself as well from the notions of “girl” or “young lady.” In an advertisement for “Max Factor,” for instance, an exuberant woman’s picture and a line define the difference: “Some things are just better in a woman than in a girl.” The woman’s identity is shaped in the advertising system by its distinguished places facing the masculine universe as well as the ideas of “girl.” This place may even be the same as of a
“thing,” as a text for “Del Rio” lingerie, along with photos of women significantly without a face, suggests,

In a soft Lycra set by Del Rio many beautiful and well made things fit: the Lycra bands and more resistant seam, the bra’s shaped pad, the panty’s anti-allergic cotton interior, the charming backstitch, needle or lacework, and, it fits you, another pretty and very well made little thing.

Similar to a “thing,” different from a “girl” or subordinate to the “man,” the woman’s identity will find a space between contrasts that is covered up with values. A fundamental value that articulates all others is the attribution of the idea of individual to the feminine identity. The need to assure the woman as a “human being,” and how she as well can be considered an “individual,” appears very clearly in a text displayed to promote the “Nova” magazine to advertising agencies: “Nova is the magazine of the woman as a human being. Nova is not the family magazine, is not the household magazine, or the children magazine. It is the magazine of the woman as an individual.” The idea of individual or of individuality is a striking value in the construction of the woman’s identity. For example, an ad for “Chique” perfume states—“There are many ways you can be yourself. But none of them are quite that chic.” Also, like the ads transcribed below for “Matitte” and “DuLoren”:

Matitte is the jeans label that respects all your gestures, your expressions and your individuality. Wherever you are, it is the pair of jeans that follows your will to come and go freely. No censures, no inhibitions. Involve yourself with Matitte jeans.

This summer, be a woman even underwater. Wear a DuLoren bathing suit. And leap. Leap in the sun, into the sea or in the swimming pool. Leap in fashion. With the new DuLoren submarine collection you are much more of a woman, inside or out of the water.

The ideas of “you being yourself,” the respect to “individuality” and “be a woman even underwater” show the first sign advertisements establish in the feminine identity. It seems so necessary to claim the woman is “herself,” has a “self,” and shows “authenticity” as if an obvious collective value—the individual—needs to make explicit that the woman belongs as well to it. To build or to reinforce the individual as value is a fundamental advertising operation. Ads must emphasize buying as an act of will, dictated by rules of choice, and the individual as its decisive instance. Accordingly, terms such as want, desire, choice, will, freedom, and others alike are often used with eloquence in advertising narratives. These are generic ideas that can be used for selling dresses to women as much as for selling cars to men. So far, the analysis suggests that ads for men and women can be quite similar. Regardless of the identity at stake in representations and images, the desire to reinforce the individual as a central value is present. Advertisements define consumption as a supposed arena of individual choices, implying it as a “natural” act, something in the free will sphere, carried out in the subjective decision plan, being affirmation, choice and exercise of singularity. In this sense, an ad only synthesizes a key operation to the greater phenomenon of consumption.

However, while it does not seem necessary to reinforce the relationship between male “individuality” and consumer goods, there appears to be a recurrent emphasis in connecting female “individuality” to products and services. This difference becomes more evident when investigating values that are specifically distributed to elaborate the individuality imbued in the feminine identity. The individual as a “woman” turns into a “body,” so now its possession, use, beauty, treatment, and enhancement are at stake. The body is a property, a fundamental good, and value of this individuality, a territory of feminine action, as clearly established in many ads. For example, one for “Artemis” expresses this idea in a simple line: “Artemis, the best in your body.” Another one, for “DeMillus,” is more emphatic and, after the title “Put your body in the right places” a text compares the idea of individuality with the woman’s body:

The woman needs to position her body in relation to life: she needs to come out with presence, stirring up love fires. To do so, she must always be in the right places, letting nothing escape from all a woman has to offer. With DeMillus modelers, you put your body in the right places.

The body as main possession, the very translation, of the “woman” individual is recurrent in several ads. But, what is significant in many of them, different from others that speak of the whole body, is the focus in different and fragmented body parts. An ad for “McChad” jeans serves as an example of this approach, while focusing on “waist,” “buttock,” and “thighs,” along with the text “Brazilian anatomy. Few jeans fabricants understand the lyrics to this samba.” Another one refers only to the “buttock” and, along with a meaningful picture, gives women an order to “Enhance the filling of Lib Slip—the disposable panty.” This body in pieces may be depicted also as just the “breasts”:

How to keep your breasts firm and stiff? Forget all you have ever seen about miraculous balsams, creams and ointments to stiffen your breasts. There is only one organic and natural way to accomplish this: strengthening the major pectorals. And there is only a way to strengthen them: making specific exercise, like Power Bust Flex.

The body fragmentation continues in representations of the woman’s “face” that, in the following ads for “Helena Rubinstein” products, appears prominently in photo and text:

The power of pastels. The summer makeup. Gentle tones, but vibrant at the same time . . . created specially to enhance your face in the irresistible fashion of pastels colors.
Finally, there is a compact eye shadow that lasts longer. Have a firm and uniform coloring, in a delicate movement, with the new applier that is adjusted to your eyes' natural curves.

There are many possibilities for advertising to translate the feminine individuality as property of a body and its parts. And advertisements indefinitely fragment the body, breaking it up in as many pieces as necessary to the product—hair, foot, hand, nail, eye, eyelash, leg, breast, buttock, tooth, skin, among others. In this dismantled body, a part outstands itself for its constant need of treatment. The skin, according to ads, is always, somewhat "sick" or "damaged" and in need of "treatment." As it is perceptible in the following texts,

Hidraskin. It is the most simple and efficient way to treat your skin. Whatever your skin type, the new Hidraskin line is the complete care you need. Make your beauty treatment with Hidraskin and have a healthy, soft and very, very pretty skin.

After creating the makeup, Max Factor creates the beauty treatment within the makeup. Whipped cream makeup collection, the makeup treatment. You make yourself up. You treat your skin. Now, you have a makeup line so rich in moisturizers that act as a beauty treatment while you are with your makeup on.

The quite "indecipherable" universe of the "skin" and, by definition, its permanent "lack of treatment" is a chapter apart, deserving another complete study for itself. And, no matter the skin, because "if you have normal or dry skin, Skin Dew is the most complete and efficient treatment line you can find." In this very particular fragment of the body, notions such as health, treatment, profundity, moisturizing, humectants, dry, beauty, natural oils, and others, repeat themselves, creating a world at least unknown and dangerous if not properly protected by products. A careful study of texts from advertisements of "skin" products gives interesting clues to a reflection over the things this mysterious "dermatological" world of ads is capable of. Inevitably, this reminds the attentive comments of Barthes (1972) concerning the very peculiar appropriation of ads over the idea of profundity:

All advertising of beauty products is based, as well, in a sort of epic representation of the intimate. The little scientific introductions destined to publicize products tell us that it cleans in profundity, clears in profundity and nourishes in profundity, that is, whatever costs, it infiltrates. Paradoxically, it is because the skin, before all, is a surface, but live surface, therefore mortal, and susceptible of drying and ageing that it easily imposes itself as tributary of profound roots, of something that certain products call as the basic renovation layer. (p. 58)

However, the body's representation goes beyond the pure and simple possession of its parts, as they must be "embellished," "enhanced" and "accentuated." Once it is the main property, a kind of fundamental good of exchange, of this "woman individual," it will have to be more. Like the example that follows, it will have to be "stretchy" as well:

This fabric's elasticity is the latest thing by U.S. Top. It stretches where it needs to: in width. A fabric like this allows a perfect adjustment that values your body and your swing. As for your body's stretchiness, you just have to do a little work out.

The body has to be "elastic," "stretched," with "swing." The many possibilities translated by images of the feminine body appear as well in ads for a "DeMillus" campaign, through the women's expressions in photos and contents of the following texts:

Free the flower of your body. Your body is a flower. And flowers need freedom to blossom. In light moves, appearance fitting to moments, its lines must correspond to the situations. DeMillus gives you the liberty you need, with soft, stretchy and caress full bristles that allow your body the freedom to show itself.

Feel a touch to your body. The touches in your body should be the right caresses in the right places. DeMillus has a nice touch for you to always remember: soft, shapeable, comfortable, a dream of stretchiness. DeMillus has the prettiest touch to a woman in this bra detailed with a Richelieu cut that will never let you forget your charms.

The sweetest embrace you can be granted with. The embrace from DeMillus is full of emotion: warm, soft, stretchy, modeler, to be remembered forever. DeMillus understands a woman's needs and transmits its quality in little sets like this, in striped Lyra, that embraces a woman's body like it needs to be.

The representation of the woman's body expresses freedom, because its nature is of a "flower" that wishes to "blossom." Her body must be "caressed," "soft" the way you like it. It must always "remember" the "gentle touches," getting "the right caresses in the right places." The body, modeled and bendy, is ready to receive the "sweetest embrace" that must be "full of emotion." Therefore, products "understand a woman's needs" better than anyone else.

The body is marked as a central value of the woman's individuality. Furthermore, it is in many ways fragmented, variegated, detailed, and scrutinized. It is divided into parts, and some of them may be "enhanced" while others can be "treated." The body must be "stretchy," "embraced," "caressed," "touched," and "free." It is a flower, and also permanently in lack of something, needing to be "cared," "embellished," and "accentuated." After all, the body, while property and basic element of the individual, must be used as the main strength, power, and locus of the event of the woman's individuality.

Still, the woman's image in advertising is more complex. It must be submitted to the broader representation of the individual in our culture. And that is certainly experimented to some extent by the body, but its main emphasis is toward
something this body carries as essence, content, or substance. The “individual” would articulate and result from the compound of elements of body and spirit. But, generally, the substance—described in our culture in terms like “mind,” “soul,” “head,” “self,” “spirit,” and so on—overcomes the material dimension—the body—that sustains it. That is why, not even in the magical world of advertisements, the feminine individuality may just be framed by the body.

The woman represented in ads has to be more. It is up to advertising to balance and distinguish the dimensions of “substance” and “body” between genders. On one hand, the “substance” and its qualities usually prevail in the masculine identity, and on the other hand, the “body” and its qualities prevail in the feminine identity. Nevertheless, as seen before, it is necessary to amass other values to make compatibles of both components of “individuality” as a broad cultural representation. Thus, the woman in advertisements assumes contents apparently more “spiritual” in search to recover coherence between terms. For example, in the next ad for “Swell’s Kolestral” cream, under the title “made up mind woman,” a text speaks of other values:

In charge, up to date and ready for life. Every day she accomplishes her own space in order to fulfill her fundamental role in society. This is the woman today that always values her own charm. She never lets go of what she holds as most important: her femininity.

Following this path of feminine “spiritual” values, it is perceptible the existence of some ideas that offer “content” to this “individual.” The woman must be as well other things that are added to and dialogue with the body. She must be sometimes “in charge,” others “up to date,” almost always “ready.” Like an ad for “Sanny,” a clothing fabricant, teaches us, the product ought to propose “new intimacy concepts” and the “intimate” content, that will fill the inner space, explains itself in the image of a woman with a provocative look, half-open mouth, wearing only her underwear. Beneath the title “woman in very saucy version,” the feminine individuality acquires characteristics defined by a text that explains: “Sanny proposes new intimacy concepts. It is something that has much to do with the new, emancipated, and very sexy woman of our time.”

The content of the body, therefore, is of “a new, sexy, emancipated woman of our time.” She must affirm, emphatically, her inner self, as the following ad states, “I wear Dropynl because I am beautiful, modern, and intelligent” or “I wear Dropynl because I love compliments.” Besides affirming the self, an ad for “Sulfabril” shows other contents, because the represented woman must “dare to use a Sulfabril fabric” and “stick to a promise until the end.” The idea of individual in feminine version present in ads is slightly emphasized and refers to a plan—erotic, beautiful, sensual—that finds, again, in the body its only instance possible of translation.

Nonetheless, this “individual” needs to “speak.” And, it is from the “substance” or “spirit” that speech is made possible. As the feminine individuality that advertising projects is, mostly, sustained by the “body,” words will have to be expressed by another instance: the product. As seen in texts like “Find yourself in a DuLoren” or “Conquer your space by the cloth you wear,” the product assumes itself, decisively, as the woman’s speech: “Elegance, class and lots of charm. Appel: the perfume that speaks for you.” When reading the next ads, it is curious to notice how “she” delegates her ideas and words to products that, at last, take charge of the “inner woman” as representatives expressing desires, wants, thoughts, and emotions:

Lipmaker: a luminous idea in your lips. It is mainly with your lips that you show to have brilliant thoughts. That is why Max Factor created Lipmaker, a lipstick different from everything you have ever seen. Put this word in your mouth: Lipmaker.

Make your words last even when conversation is over. Max Factor Color Fast Lasting Lipstick. A lipstick that has a formula specifically created to stick more to your lips. With the new Color Fast Lipstick from Max Factor you put a colorful and sparkling cream in your lips, that lasts as much as the impressive things you say. With Color Fast Lipstick the conversation may still end, but never the spark.

Thus, it is possible to realize how ads elaborate a version of the feminine identity attaching certain marks and signs to it. First, there is the previously discussed idea of “individual,” as it is a fundamental operation of advertising to transform the impersonality of production into the particularity of consumption. The “individual” is emphasized as basis to the identity, because consumption must be experimented as a volunteer act, a kind of affirmation of the “self,” something in the sphere of private choices. The “woman” portrayed supposes the presence of a consumer individual whose value is reproduced in ads in general. Therefore, the starting point is to construct the woman’s representation as an “individual” that has the desire for consumption as its core value.

Second, the woman’s representation in advertisements has its individuality specifically characterized in the idea that this “woman individual” means primarily the ownership of a “body.” However, this “body” is not represented as a “natural” unit. It is divided into parts and manipulated to become matter capable of being indefinitely fragmented, like a mosaic formed by pieces that, if isolated, do not outline a picture and, therefore, do not signify. This body, dissolved into many fragments, is the main power of the “woman individual” that, through it and almost exclusively by using it, makes herself bold, modern, seductive, in charge, and so on. The feminine body, when broken into multiple pieces, makes somewhat impossible the unified construction of a fundamental dimension of individuality, that is, its “substance”—“mind,” “spirit,” and so on—so the individual can be
complete. The representation of a fragmented “body” may indicate that an equally fragmented “substance” matches it. So, individuality does not acquire consistency, and, the inner plan does not sustain itself.

In this sense, the “woman individual,” as shown in advertising, when existing mainly as a fragmented body, makes impracticable the construction of an “inner plan” and, consequently, the realization of speech. The third mark fixed to the feminine identity in ads is that of a silent woman that possesses a body, and must know how to use it, although to this body words are forbidden. As “she” does not own a “substance” or, at least, has it in precarious form, her speech is pushed to another instance. Hence, the “woman” in advertising assigns “words” to products that “speak” for her, reveal her “ideas” and express her inner self as “needs” and “desires.” Only they can understand her.

Certainly, a broader study of the woman’s image throughout advertising would include further dimensions not perceived in this exercise. The analysis of other types of products—for children, cleaning, foods, or household appliances—could tend to indicate, for example, the existence of the woman’s representation as “housewife” or “mother.” Advertising studied as a production system of the imaginary of our culture complex questions, so this article does not presume to exhaust the subject. It is but an effort to debate the problems of social identity from the thoughts of classification and value axes and through the investigation in ads.

This work showed some basic cuts of the feminine identity as elaborated in advertising. From the analysis of a “woman” created by ads emerges the image of individuality where the “body”—and not the “substance”—is what matters. Also, advertising reveals that the feminine body suffers a process through which unity is lost and parts prevail over whole. The woman represented in ads exists, above all, in pieces—breast, foot, leg, skin, face, nail, hand, buttock, eye, lip, lash, thigh, and whatever else may be detached—as an inverted puzzle with dislocated bits hiding the picture that is never formed. Of course, this image of the body, and its pieces, cannot sustain the individual as wholeness. Thus, the Western individual, while believing in materiality and substance, transforms itself in something twice as uneven. On one hand, because individuality is seen as a relationship between body and spirit, matter and substance, and not as only one of these terms and, on the other hand, because not even the body, which subsists in the feminine individuality, is integrated. So, like the individual in the woman’s image from ads was undone by the absence of substance, also the matter—the remaining term—is undone by the lack of unity between parts. And then, the “woman” represented in ads silences, as speech is an expression of the “spirit,” proper of singularity. What is left of the woman’s image is a body, or, pieces, rests, fragments of it that, without alternative, delegate words to products.

Therefore, ads analyzed in this article suggest that the female body is divided, broken, shattered into multiple fragments, to serve for consumption purposes. A “woman in pieces” appears as an ideological strategy to open new market spaces for products and services that become holders of these ever more specific territories of the body. In the 1980s, in the midst of the Brazilian redemocratization period, when new political forces—including feminism—looked to give voice to their demands and to reach for spaces, the woman’s image projected in advertising is silenced. The fights for female liberty that occur at the time are transformed into mere consumer desires. In fact, ads reveal a woman fragmented into several parts that translate the idea of a perfect female body as the support for a wide variety of consumer goods and, at the same time, this body becomes itself the very object of consumption. Finally, the “woman” constructed by ads lets products assume their place as owners of choices, desires and needs. They “speak” for her, and, certainly, in advertising representations, the woman must keep herself in silence.

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