The art of producing consumers: A critical textual analysis of post-communist Polish advertising

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Abstract

This article offers a critical textual analysis of hundreds of advertisements that appeared in Polish magazines at a pivotal historical juncture: following the collapse of communism and at the rise of a capitalist market economy in the early 1990s. We draw out from the visual and rhetorical data emblematic themes and sociocultural undercurrents concerning entrepreneurial opportunism and financial reassurance, status envy and post-rationing excess, and interconnected solidarity with the west through brands and the English language itself. By studying the anxieties and aspirations represented in this symbolic material, we might better understand how new consumers were ideologically shepherded through a moment of profound political transition. The study represents a starting point for future investigations into how advertising produces its subjects in the aftermath of communism(s).

Keywords

Poland, advertising, consumer society, post-communism, textual analysis

"The best way of arousing a child's interest in anything is to tell him that it is forbidden, and that has been the position of western advertising in Poland for the past 40 years." – Marketing trade magazine (Lind, 1991)

"Everyone suddenly seems to be in a hurry to serve with a smile, to sell something, to make money." – Poland correspondent, The New York Times (Darnton, 1993)

In producing rhetoric and imagery about goods and services, advertising, in turn, seeks to produce a consumer subject of its own. It summons into being, through competing parables of social ideology, assumptions and expectations about the audiences it seeks to cultivate. By investigating the 'secondary discourse' or 'meta-narratives' that course throughout such textual material, we might better understand larger cultural, political, and economic undercurrents of a given time and place. This research takes up that challenge at a pivotal moment of transition: the collapse of communism and the birth of capitalisms in Eastern Europe – specifically, Poland.

By analysing hundreds of advertisements that appeared in Polish magazines in the late 1980s and early 1990s – an era of radical change – we argue that such commercial messages attempted to conjure a new sense of self for individuals living within an embryonic consumer society. They thrust new demands upon the Polish psyche – seeking to engineer self-consciousness, to cast judgments about social differentiation, and to nurture elitist exclusivity in contrast to the classlessness and collective solidarity that marked communist propaganda. In a commercial act of strategic amnesia, that heritage of Soviet influence was elided behind a resolutely forward – and westward – looking entrepreneurial ethos, in which English words tantalized with the cachet of triumph, power, and wealth. At a historical juncture in Poland in which widespread advertising was effectively being invented from scratch, these daydreams invoked – of techno-capitalist opportunity exploited, luxurious material excess indulged, and

borderless horizons with Europe and the West now interconnected – sought to interpellate the prospective consumer in a useful position. In this paper, we decode those ideological premises by looking at the 'common sense' advertisers attempted to instill through their words and visuals – excavating the subject advertising minted.

Polish history, politics, and culture: A brief sketch

Poland's history, culture, and language have importantly defined how a post-communist country responded as a new capitalist market. Since the country's establishment in 922 by King Mieszko I, Poland has been one of the most conquered and divided nations in Europe (Schaufele, 1981) – a phenomenon that has, in a sense, continued metaphorically, post-1989, with the invasion of corporations and advertisers eager to carve out commercial opportunity. The most decisive occupation occurred after World War 2 when Poland became a satellite state for the Soviet Union: 'All the key levers of power within the country rested in communist hands, while a Ministry of Public Security… tightened its grip over the country' (Lukowski & Zawadzki, 2006: 281-2). For almost half a century thereon, Poland implemented a socialist system in which commodities were strictly rationed and limited. Such a socialism, based upon an undiscriminating Fordist model of mass production and mass consumption, operated under the assumption that, absent any niche market fragmentation, 'everyone wanted everything' offered (Dunn, 2004: 62). This, in turn, negated any sort of (officially sanctioned) market-based differentiation among citizens, as all were theoretically restricted to the same kind and amount of rationally functionalist consumer goods. As the Financial Times remarked in an article on the absence of Polish global brands, 'after 50 years of communism… what counted was volume and not quality or image' (Cienski, 2004: 11). Elizabeth Dunn (2004) further notes, 'The [socialist citizenship] regimes determined not only what goods one could get, but… they also determined

what kind of citizen one was' (62, italics original). Communism thus sought to imprint a profound effect on the identity of Polish people as well as collectively orienting the culture; advertising, we shall suggest, aims to interpellate its subjects, vis-à-vis goods, in much the same way though engaging self-evidently opposite ideological aims.

After forty years of rule, the communist government of Poland fell in 1989 in large part due to the Solidarnosc, or Solidarity Movement, a unity coalition of Polish laborers that flourished under the leadership of Lech Walesa, and Poland fashioned a new political system of democratic reforms. As Dunn's (2004) study of baby food production and advertising in the early 1990s demonstrates, the architects of those post-socialist economic institutions believed that Polish people were no different from Western counterparts and that consumers would respond the same to a market economy and transition 'spontaneously' to the 'natural tendencies' of capitalist rationality 'if all constraints of communism were removed' (3).

In that new economic and political environment, Poles began to question both their identities within and relations to the outside world – redefining their sense of self, as Jacek Kurczewski (1994) suggests in an article on the emerging middle class strata in post-communist Poland. He writes, 'A transformation of the criteria of self-judgment and judgment of others is taking place… Wealth and income are becoming the dominant criterion. Differences in consumption are increasingly more pronounced in view of the constantly increasing possibilities of choice' (404-5). As a result of that influx of goods, social differentiation was also thrust upon the Polish psyche – a project of cultural engineering that resonates in the advertising texts we compile and analyse here. As new ways of thinking were being grafted onto Polish society and the nation was being rendered unrecognizable, one can read the anxieties and aspirations of the moment off the symbolic materials that assisted this headlong rush into consumerism.

Yet with the emergence of a market economy, companies had to learn how to effectively sell to these otherwise 'inexperienced' consumers. Leon Zurawicki and Kip Becker (1994), in a review of the dynamics of that business environment and the marketing strategies in those newly liberated countries, argue that Eastern European nations lacked the institutions, skills, and expertise required for a market economy to 'function effectively' (64). Under communist rule, Polish citizens had been accustomed to lottery distribution of goods as well as high prices for 'black market' goods. Boreslaw Domanski (2005) further analyses the extent of these relationships that transnational corporations needed to develop after the fall of communism and maintains that Poland is a pivotal case study because it represents the second-largest post-Soviet economy after Russia and witnessed rapid industrial growth in that period (86% in the 1990s) (148). Yet leaving behind, much less forgetting, that communist legacy was not an easy task. Irena Grudzinska Gross (1992) notes how Poles took on an attitude of disgust toward anything associated with their recent past – mounting acts of resentment and abolishing monuments while yearning for a sense of normalcy and a national self to replace the former communist character of their nation:

> People are worried about their past, worried about their future, told every day that they have to learn from the West, they – who do not know how to work, how to buy, how to sell. The retreat into nationalism, or into enhanced national identity, is a way of holding on to something unique yet valuable. (148)

Iwona Irwin-Zarecka (1993) similarly assesses Polish national values after the fall of communism, chronicling Poland's attempts to eradicate any and all public memory of the Second Republic era. These efforts included the censorship of communist authors, the renaming of streets dedicated to communist leaders, and christening Poland the 'Third Republic' so as to erase from history a half-century of communist rule. Yet, as Irwin-Zarecka identifies, this staged amnesia had a fundamental flaw: 'If rummaging through the often distant history in search of

symbols of national and political identity proves problematic, it also allows avoidance of direct confrontation with the communist past – a confrontation which in the end cannot be avoided.' This study fills a gap in evaluating how that memory work – both in selectively looking back upon yesteryear and in ideologically projecting forward onto tomorrow (Zelizer, 1995) – emerged in an unexamined yet pivotally relevant context: the advertising of that era.

Given the discursive focus of this project, it is important to note that Russian and English influences – like 'adapter,' 'trend,' 'dzinsy,' and 'relaks,' among other words – have filtered into the Polish language and, as we shall see, become strategically employed in advertising communications as well (An outline history of Polish culture, 1997). Jeff Griffin (1997), for example, explores how, post-1989, the explosion of English in popular culture and, more specifically, advertising – as well as the rejection of Russian – was a method employed to erase the memory of the communist past:

> For many Eastern Europeans, eager to shed the Communist legacy and embrace the West, English has a strong cachet, either consciously or subconsciously, because it symbolises the wealth and power of the United States, the Cold War victor, and more broadly the West. (34)

Conducting a content analysis of more than 300 advertisements in 12 Polish magazines from November 1994, Griffin found that 88 percent of the sample contained at least one English word (36). Moreover, Griffin concludes, English, as a sign of prestige and a 'badge of merit,' was used toward generating the perception of higher quality products by foreign advertisers; as a direct linkage to the West; particularly prevalent in high-tech advertisements; and represented a 'passport to the future' and a shedding of the past (38, 39).

More recent research on Polish consumers – tabbed as 'difficult ad viewers,' weaned on decades of suspicion of socialist propaganda (Teresinski, 1997) – has suggested that some marketing models employed would not be transferable to post-communist Eastern European

nations (Lepkowska-White et al. 2003). As Elzbieta Lepkowska-White (2004) summarised in her content analysis of American and Polish advertising, Poland, as the 'most attractive country' in the Soviet bloc for foreign investment, went from a command economy where advertising was 'essentially pointless' to rapid development and quick evolution post-1989, reflecting an increasing sophistication among demanding consumers. During a period after the fall of the communist regime, both businesses and consumers waded into a market economy lacking the experience that Western populations had accumulated over nearly a century of advertising encounters. The history of conquest and oppression – both distant and recent – seems inextricable from this newfound consumer experience and it is therefore important to approach the study of Polish popular print media with these relevant cultural frames in mind.

Capitalism(s) in an era of neoliberalism

Poland's profound transition took shape in a broader historical era perhaps best characterised by the notion of neoliberalism. David Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as

> a theory of political economic practices that proposes human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. (2)

This trend toward deregulation, privatisation, and a general withdrawal of the state from any market intervention has been widespread globally since the 1970s – from Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher in the West to Deng Xiaoping and the U.S.S.R.'s disintegration further east, from Augusto Pinochet's Chile to post-apartheid South Africa. Although these different versions of capitalism have proceeded apace in this context, similarly broad ideals have informed the unique policy applications. Neoliberalism, Harvey argues, has 'become hegemonic as a mode of

discourse,' woven into 'the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world,' and advertising (especially in the infancy of a neoliberalised Poland) is thus a good place to locate some of the nuances of that discourse, given that the mass media offers one of the primary 'channels' to 'legitimize' those neoliberal reforms (3, 40). More specifically, this ideologically 'utopian' task included 'the construction of a neoliberal market-based populist culture of differentiated consumerism and individual libertarianism' – one that emphasized 'the liberty of consumer choice, not only with respect to particular products but also with respect to lifestyles, modes of expression, and a wide range of cultural practices' (19, 42, italics original). We trace the outlines of that differentiation and libertarianism here.

Also valuable, Naomi Klein (2007) charts the neoclassical scholarly roots for these many modes of global capitalism that trace their lineage back to Austrian economics, Milton Friedman, and the University of Chicago orthodoxy – including post-communist Poland where, former finance minister Leszek Balcerowicz has acknowledged, Friedman served as 'one of the main intellectual architects of my country's liberty' (171). Facing a crisis of skyrocketing debt, inflation, and shortages, the Solidarity Party swallowed a bitter neoliberal medicine (what Klein terms 'textbook' 'shock therapy') in exchange for loans and aid relief: This included slashed subsidies, eliminated price controls, state assets sold off, the creation of stock markets, budget austerity, and, especially relevant to this project, 'a shift from heavy industry to consumer goods production' – in what was effectively a 'comprehensive plan for the transformation of a socialist economy to a market economy' that appealed to Poles on the premise of becoming 'a normal European country' following the harsh measures (177, 179, 180). Klein quotes one human rights activist describing 'the velocity of change' in this period as

> the difference between dog years and human years, the way we're living these days…

> you start witnessing these semi-psychotic reactions. You can no longer expect people to act in their own best interests when they're so disoriented they don't know – or no longer care – what those interests are. (181)

Amidst that tumultuous disorientation to this particular brand of capitalism – and with production output and living standards declining in the early 1990s while unemployment, prices, and protests against the neoliberal reforms rose (192, 193) – the ideological task faced by advertising was at once urgent and latent.

The echoes of early consumer societies

To appreciate the emergence of that post-communist Polish consumer society as rendered in advertising work of the early 1990s, it helps to look back at the first decades of the 20th century in more Western, free-market economies. Sifting through this otherwise distant context – both historically and geographically – can assist in drawing out some key themes and chords of social ideology that reverberated in Poland's own consumer culture transformation.

To that end, in his chronicle of the roots of modern American advertising, Stuart Ewen (2001) contends that, for business and political leaders, the prospect of a consumer society represented a 'salve' that might 'tranquilize,' 'absorb, neutralize, and contain' the working-class unrest and socialist specter roiling industrial society (7, 52). Marketing further tantalised powerful interests as 'the abandonment of all class thinking' and an 'answer to Bolshevism' (88). Our study shows how that same consumption model was sold to a population surfacing from several decades of communist rule. In other words, if U.S. advertising in the early decades of the 20th century was ideologically administered to defer unhappiness with capital-labor relations into the individual accumulation of products rather than the solidarity that accompanies collective consciousness, Polish advertising in the final decade affected the 'psychic economy' in much the

same fashion (despite starting from the backdrop of socialism rather having socialism as a looming dystopia, as it did to pre-war American capitalists) (35).

One of the primary ways that advertising set out to 'manufacture consumers as well as products,' Ewen notes, was in creating desires and habits 'endow[ed]… with a critical self-consciousness in tune with the 'solutions' of the marketplace' (39). Similarly, we ask how Polish advertising of the post-communist era might have found that 'fear appeal' productive – 'presenting a world in which the individual was constantly judged by others, a world in which there was the total absence of positive bonds between people' (98) (a prospect echoed by Kurczewski (1994) above). Moreover, just as early American advertising had to engineer the displacement of 'thrift' with 'excessiveness' as a 'social value' so as to tame otherwise Puritanical instincts (25), we examine how Polish advertising moved subjects from the moral imperative of socialism to a consumption-oriented ethos of a market economy. Jackson Lears (2000) likewise charts a turn-of-the-century shift in 'moral climate' from favoring Victorian moderation and Protestant asceticism to indulgent fulfillment as advertising staked out its 'therapeutic ethos': that leisure ethic 'injunction' to attend to one's own psychic security through the abundance of consumer goods in an age of anxiety and ambiguity – a world, not unlike the sociopolitical trauma of post-communist Poland, 'in which all overarching structures of meaning had collapsed, and there was 'nothing at stake beyond a manipulative sense of wellbeing.''

In his own important survey of early American advertising and the social tableaus, consumer parables, and visual clichés that emerged from it, Roland Marchand (1985) discerns an effort toward portraying 'public aspirations' and 'popular fantasies rather than social realities' – including meta-messages about the march toward modernity, 'scare copy' dramatising 'social failures and accusing judgments,' and the democratic distribution of goods (xvii, 14, 218).

Building on Michael Schudson's (1986) notion of American advertising art as 'capitalist realism' (215) – that is, advertising as a discriminating 'fun-house mirror' illustrating ideals rather than reality – we follow Marchand's lead here by excavating from the 'detailed vignettes of social life' in post-communist advertising, the 'broader assumptions about social values' embedded in the process of selling products that can give us a glimpse of that capitalist realism suddenly thrust upon Polish society (xviii, xxi, 208).

Yet 'early' consumer society need not be confined to initial decades of 20th century nor Western capitalist markets alone; indeed, other nations emerging from communist rule have been studied (in a limited capacity) for their own transformations vis-à-vis marketing. For instance, Terri Rantanen (2002), in a study of the Russian population's sudden exposure to Western advertising, contextualises Russian capitalist advertising's emergence against communism's 'one for all' 'dictatorship of needs' whose 'collective nature of the society became totalitarian in its emphasis on rationality and common goals, leaving very little space for individualism' and whose 'uniformity made people look for difference' (110, 111). Even under communism, that space had been filled, to a lesser degree, by smuggled Western products as a 'sign of cachet' (and a symbol of 'the promised world that was denied') and, following the dissolution of the Soviet regime, a 'secondary discourse' in advertising opened up, stressing 'a global consumer identity [that] replaced a former international communist identity' and a meta-message announcing not merely available goods but also that 'the closed society was opening up' (109, 112, 114). Similarly, in a chapter devoted to the 'deep legitimacy crisis' that besieged Eastern European nations in the wake of communism's collapse, Carl Rohde and Carsten Pellicaan (1995) detail how those new meta-narratives needed to be constructed to help rebuild society and that consumer goods could 'function as a fertile ground for a new type of charismatic

legitimacy,' 'one that longs for that Western [newness] of which the ads speak' (134, 135). As befitting that capitalist realism, '[Advertising] not only become a possible way to 're-enchant' the world… but it can even function… as a main provider of legitimacy narratives' (142). In closing this literature review, we concur with Jacqui True (1999), that,

> Eastern Europe provides a laboratory for studying the expansion of global market forces and the transformations in social structure that they provoke. The accelerated transitions in this region provide a telescoped view of the market process, in stark contrast with the West, where capitalist economics is part of the common sense of everyday life. (361)

It is to that 'telescoped view' of Poland, advertising, and the emergence of capitalist economics as 'the common sense of everyday life', which we now turn.

This textual analysis examined magazine advertising appearing in Polish periodicals at the crossroads of political history: as communism collapsed, domestically, and free market capitalism took its place. We looked to the seminal work of Judith Williamson (1978) and Robert Goldman (1992) so as to sensitise us to the process of reading and decoding advertisements as ideological documents and to provide us with both a framework and tools for conducting such an analysis. We concur with Roland Marchand's (1985) rationale for eschewing a narrower (if more a priori systematic) coding schema and content analysis, for 'almost by definition, nuances [such as we sought] defy quantification and categorization,' in favor of 'total immersion… to recognize and analyze certain persistent patterns of verbal and visual expression' (xx, xvi). Moreover, we believe, like Marchand, that 'advertisements provide glimpses of past social realities' (for our purposes, post-communist Poland) and we seek to identify and explore the 'themes and motifs' that emerge consistently from that period which 'infused their images and slogans into [Poland's] common discourse' (xvi, xix, xx). Similarly pursuing advertising as 'a window onto history,' William O'Barr's (1994) work lends itself as a productive template and precedence – proposing a set of questions, like ours, that 'illuminate and

make plain ideological premises about society and culture that are embedded throughout the discourse of advertising' (1-2). In particular, his parsing of advertising as both primary discourse ('ideas in advertising about goods and services') as well as secondary discourse ('ideas about society and culture contained in advertisements') speaks to the emphasis that we wish to locate in our inquiry (3).

We sampled from three periods and publications: 533 advertisements in Politkya, a weekly newsmagazine, as drawn from the January, April, July, and October issues (so as to give us a year-around orientation) between 1988 and 1991; 608 advertisements in Gazeta Wyborcza, a daily newspaper, as drawn from January 1990; and, most fruitfully, 204 full-page advertisements in Wprost, a weekly newsmagazine, from July 1992, October 1992, January 1993, April 1993, July 1993, and October 1993. The Politkya corpus – from what is Poland's largest weekly newsmagazine – sampled the two years before and after democratic changeover, thereby allowing us to investigate any gradual changes in the advertising discourse (both visual and rhetorical) at a critical sociopolitical moment. Gazeta Wyborcza, an influential, widely circulated newspaper founded in 1989, provided an advertising-based snapshot of commercial discourse from the very month in which communist rule ended. And Wprost, with its full-page, occasionally glossy advertisements, offered a glimpse into social and cultural ideology when the consumer market was still nascent in Poland. (Unless otherwise noted, the specific advertisements referenced in the textual analysis below come from the Wprost sample, which we quickly discovered yielded the richest set of material for analysis, particularly visually, and the highest-profile – and therefore, most expensive and deliberately constructed – messages.)

From this corpus, we sought to understand, broadly speaking, how the post-communist Polish consumer was being "interpellated" by advertising – that is, addressed in a particular

ideological fashion through the communication of aspirations and anxieties. More specifically, our study sought to answer several concrete research questions: How does this advertising reflect an effort to engineer social differentiation, status, and envy (in contrast to the equality, classlessness, and collective solidarity that marked communist propaganda)? How do these ads conjure a world of abundance and excess (rather than a communist reality of scarcity and rationing) and privilege leisure and indulgence? How do these ads refer to the memory (or lack thereof) of decades of communist rule and the capitalist, free market, or democratic future? And how is Polish national identity as well as the West (and English, specifically) used and referenced in these ads?

The entrepreneurial subject

The first theme that emerged from our analysis of the visual and rhetorical data featured in post-communist Polish magazine advertising was that audiences now seemed to be hailed, perhaps foremost, as opportunistic, neoliberal subjects. This was apparent on two levels. First, and somewhat literally, a great majority of advertisements sought to entice new business owners and free market laborers through the goods and services depicted. These included, especially for the white-collar information industry, numerous ads promoting laser printers, computers, and technological products as well as commercial refrigerators and bakery inventories for small businesses. (This makes sense, given that David Harvey (2005) has, for example, noted 'neoliberalism's intense interest and pursuit of information technologies' so as to 'accumulate, store, transfer, analyse, and use massive databases to guide decisions in the global marketplace' (3).) Yet equally in that 'secondary discourse,' meta-messages about the new capitalist era proliferated; we highlight here some of the most obtrusive ideological elucidations.

One distance learning program advertisement features a set of elated characters cheering on the tagline, 'Now your success depends upon you!' As an epigram for neoliberalisation, the message is perhaps fitting, given that broader transformation to a social and economic system that stresses the privatised exploitation of opportunities and – in dismantling collectivist, welfare state-oriented ideologies – frames accountability squarely on the individual subject's shoulders. The ad further conjures a message to (and, hence, about) the enterprising go-getter living through unstable times: 'Don't hesitate. Time flies.' A telecom advertisement from the same issue shows a businessman, bulky mobile phone pressed to his ear, stepping away from a pack of competitors, beneath a slogan, 'You're always ahead' – purveying, further, the commercial parable: 'Talent, diligence, and entrepreneurship feels best in the company of common sense.' And a computer advertisement features a businessman rather cartoonishly leaping in his office – a look of wonderment splashed across his face, as he marvels at his new desktop under the tagline: 'To work. Ready. Go!'

Such an ebullient 'common sense' of techno-capitalist opportunism also showed up in an advertisement for computer distributors: 'Brilliant ideas need a brilliant machine,' it announces, juxtaposing timeless Leonardo da Vinci sketches with the contemporary PC being sold. Again consumers are inculcated in the urgency of the era lest 'their time will be wasted or time will run out.' A frantic, impatient social context is summoned through these advertisements – a world which, after decades of communist stagnation, is bursting forth with new avenues for success of which, audiences are told, they must take advantage and thereby echoing that sense of 'disorientation' amidst an overwhelming 'velocity of change' earlier cited.

Interestingly, we noted in our sample from Politkya that, in 1987 and 1988, advertisements mostly pitched these computer goods, services, and trade shows to an audience

already familiar with the technical jargon (i.e., the ads came replete with otherwise product arcane details). Yet as time wore on, such ads became simplified and brand names began to standout more boldly – evidence that a wider market was being cultivated. (Take, for example, a 1989 slogan: 'Technology for everybody.') Moreover, what had been rational, explicit explanations to that narrower audience began evolving toward a more visual, evocative approach to a broader set of potential buyers; in other words, branded image, as a functional secondhand, was entering the vocabulary of commerce.

Probably not surprisingly for a newly minted free market economy, banks, credit cards, moneylenders, and other financial services also played a prominent role in both underwriting the advertising and addressing that ideal entrepreneurial subject of the era. Such a consumer had to be simultaneously educated, reassured, and motivated about the conditions and opportunities available at the dawn of Polish capitalism. In some cases, this education was quite straightforward, even bordering on the literal: a bank advertisement, for example, that depicts a stack of checks with the message, 'A check is money in our bank.' Other ads sought to ease the anxieties and confusion that accompanied the tumultuous period. For example, another advertisement from the same bank shows clerks resolutely inspecting a stack of documents with a customer whose face is obscured: 'We deal with the important money in the world – your money,' the ad succors. Or consider a competitor's ad that shows a child's hand being covered by a (bank-branded) bandage – a metaphor, reflected in the text, for loans that can provide an effective solution in an emergency situation. And an insurance company promotion from the same month shows an egg perched precariously at the precipice of a ledge: 'With Warta [the company's name],' the text consoles, 'you are fearless.'

These ads bespeak the attempted engagement of a participant not without apprehensions in transitioning to a neoliberal regime, yet other advertisements marketed to a more ambitious, entrepreneurial impulse that no doubt characterised the period as well. For example, a bank advertisement features two businessmen in suits glancing at their watches and the viewer above the tagline, 'Today time flows faster because money flows faster' (perhaps a wryly-unknowing echo of Marx's famous dictum, 'All that is solid melts into the air'). The fast-paced fury of modern life unleashed by this emanation of capitalism demanded a subject capable of and willing to keeping up – and advertising during this period worked to conjure and train that subject into existence.

The anxious and indulgent subject

Equally abundant, we discovered, were advertisements that focused on personal and home improvements – part of an interpellative effort to coax out differentiation and envy and to arouse the indulging of excess and leisure. One might term this 'the excitation of affect' – this façade of 'keeping up with the Jones' generated through that visual and rhetorical discourse – that, once 'basic needs' have been met (however disagreeably those might come to be defined), fuels much advanced capitalism(s). Here beauty and health products addressed a readership that was egged on to fret over both outward appearance and inner wellbeing (making the self, itself, into a project for improvement), while furniture, roofing materials, flooring options, skylights, and ready-made homes were also foist upon consumers in intentionally unnerving, aspirational ways. Niche differentiation showed up emblematically in a roofing advertisement that featured several houses outfitted with different options and qualities; another carpet advertisement implicated the company's ability (and hence the reader-consumer's imperative) to stay on top of the latest fashionable trends. That aestheticisation of everyday life – a long way from

communism's rational functionalism – emerges in a vacuum advertisement, showing a woman drinking tea in a posh living room under the caption, 'Clean beauty in an elegant world.'

Such messages about the refinement necessitated by contemporary times appeared elsewhere through new invocations to exclusivity across a wide range of products – opportunities to flaunt newfound wealth and machinations to engineer ostentation. A stovetop oven is christened the 'Mercedes' of one's home; fancy watches are sold through a spare design featuring an hourglass and the heading, 'the luxury of time;' cigarettes, posed near a chessboard, seduce and flatter with the tagline, 'pleasure for the connoisseur;' and a coffee brand – with the English word, 'Exclusive,' designating the product line – tantalises with the possibility that 'you will be placed at our table' (that is, of course, a table of status, we are meant to infer). Two credit card advertisements in particular stand out to this elitist effect: one that features the card sitting next to an expensive watch, a Mercedes Benz keychain, and text that reads, 'the discreet charm of businessmen' (status thus framed as conspicuously inconspicuous); and a second ad for the 'Club' card (using the English word), shown emerging from a gift box next to a rose.

If, as Pierre Bourdieu (1984) has famously (and compactly) theorised, taste classifies and it classifies the classifier, these ads seem to be a gambit for cultivating exclusivity in a society emerging from equality, classlessness, and collective solidarity as its sociopolitical ideal. 'Club' – with its accompanying 'for you' tagline – may be extending an invitation to the reader, but 'club,' by definition, suggests exclusion for those who are not 'placed at our table.' The consumer is being taught to seek out, as that 'Exclusive' coffee advertisement advocates, 'time for the best in life.' A world of abundance and excess is summoned in contrast to Soviet-era scarcity; for example, an ad for the Swedish furniture giant, Ikea, in Gazeta Wyborcza the month in which communism fully collapsed, features a stick-figure character announcing there isn't

enough room in the whole newspaper to advertise all the variety of merchandise at the store. The tag reads, 'Ikea is an idea to buy,' which is also fitting given, as we argue here, the secondary discourse embedded in such advertising about products is meant to spread a larger message about the social, political, and cultural conditions in play. The real 'idea to buy,' in this case, then, is a dreamland of surplus consumption; a dreamland, the advertising suggests without stating it, available to consumers heretofore accustomed to shortages.

Self-improvement as a recurring motif – and a bodily metaphor for the neoliberal paradigm – also appeared throughout these pages. A make-up cream sits amongst a bed of blooming roses with only the English word 'image' affixed as copy. A shampoo features a young woman with long hair, nude from the shoulders up, no product even in sight, and a tagline that simply cautions, 'For the sake of your hair.' The transformational potential that accompanies self-improvement is shown in an advertisement for a weight loss supplement, pressuring the Polish consumer to make over their own bodies – replete with the, by now, visually clichéd before-and-after endorsement photos. And that consumer was also told to steel herself, health-wise, given a busy lifestyle and changing times, as seen in an advertisement for a natural vitamin to fight stress: 'Take on this adversity,' the copy counsels, next to a man in a tie who leans confidently into bright light and a stiff wind.

Thus, the new Polish shopper was interpellated as simultaneously anxious and indulgent – confronted with new consumptions expectations and social uncertainty, yet tantalised with the pleasures of excess that the free market affords those who succeed within it. And, of course, that gratification – at times, on an almost existential level – can be found in making the right purchases. A furnace company advertisement, for example, features this exchange: 'My deepest dreams have come true,' says one character. 'I finally have peace,' replies the other. The copy

of the advertisement highlights the machine's (apparently life-affirming) qualities, which complement 'a happy wife, healthy kids, and peace of mind.' Another advertisement shows a confident young man sitting at a bar, the subject of a host of admiring gazes from those around him and text that explains, 'CEAC helped me find my place in life.' The copy of the ad delineates instructions and guidelines to achieving success. More broadly, in a sense, the advertising of the era was helping all Polish consumers find their places in life – and within the new sociopolitical regime that furnished it.

The globalised subject

Some consideration must be given to the commercial articulation of Poland, Europe, Russia, English, and the broader international landscape as represented in the advertising of the post-communist era, particularly given the political and cultural transition from a closed society to free markets. To begin, take, for example, an advertisement for a car posed on a horizonless, computer-generated grid along with only one line of text: 'This is your world.' A Lufthansa piece in Gazeta Wyborcza – one of the rare advertisements that occupied a full-page in the daily newspaper – displaying two chipper passengers getting ready to board similarly exudes a hopeful meta-message about a new world opening up beyond domestic borders (not surprising, of course, given that the company is an airline): 'My Lufthansa ticket is my passport to the whole world before me,' reads the tagline. Another full-page advertisement for the carrier touts the fact that, while two decades earlier, their Warsaw route only took off twice a week, it now has 30 flights weekly, underscoring Poland's newfound connectedness with other nations. A Honeywell advertisement also reads, fittingly, in geopolitically triumphant English words, 'Helping you control your world.'

To that end, intriguingly, globes and maps were not uncommon visual motifs in our sample of advertisements analysed. A furniture maker advertisement features nothing more than a globe perched in a chair and the text, 'The whole world is sitting in Radom chairs! Now you should sit!' Such an advertisement seems to suggest that readers are joining a global community of consumers united around the brand – an international camaraderie by way of shopping that resonates in stark contrast to 'workers of the world unite' propaganda of old. Elsewhere, an advertisement for measuring device depicts a globe levitating above the product and an ad for Xelon packaging shows a global map being folded into a (Xelon-branded) cubic box.

The momentum of reintegrating with the West – and, in an unstated turn, away from a Soviet sphere of influence was also rendered both rhetorically and visually. One home electronics ad portrays a state-of-the-art television set with a tagline that boasts, 'European in every centimeter.' Similarly, a car ad features the following text: 'What makes it confident? A solid body. European technology and security.' Such ads seem to be communicating to consumers that, by purchasing televisions and automobiles stamped with the product quality long associated the West, they might be capable of 'buying' into that new European identity as well – one that had been, for decades, suppressed in favor of a communist solidarity eastward.

And what of the legacy of Poland's Soviet linkages as illustrated in the commercial content of the era? A marked amnesia seems to persist, though one advertisement, in particular, does stands out. It is especially noteworthy in that it borrows the familiar figure from Dmitry Moor's 'Have you enlisted in the army?' poster – a Red Army soldier shot from a low-angle with factory smokestacks in the background and whose aggressive pointing gesture and steely gaze are trained on the reader – only instead of recruiting for the proletarian revolution, it asks, 'Did you already buy it?' about a branded product (specifically candy). Here, then, is an almost

perfect metaphor for the transition from communist idealism and collectivist sacrifice to the expectation (and, indeed, necessity) of free-market consumerism.

Finally, the English language itself was peppered not infrequently throughout the advertisements we analysed. In Wprost, we saw, among others, the English word for 'leader' used in an ad for bakery equipment; 'image' (the only ad text used in the aforementioned make-up cream ad); 'club' (the aforementioned credit card); 'exclusive' (the aforementioned coffee); 'helping you control your world' (the aforementioned Honeywell); 'Big Star jeans of America' (men's clothing); and 'businessmen' (a magazine title). It is also interesting to note that nearly all of the advertisements for cigarettes used English as some, if not all, of their textual message. These include, for example, advertisements for Marlboro drawing upon its typical brand imagery of southwestern U.S. landscapes and rugged cowboys (accompanied by familiar English taglines like, 'Come to Marlboro country'). Another cigarette advertisement, cribbing the Marlboro visual motif, depicts a lone van driving across a desert valley near a billboard for 'Golden American' cigarettes. Others included a Prince brand of cigarettes with the English message, 'I go for PRINCE – with the full, rich tobacco taste!' with a Polish addendum: 'Satisfaction for the chosen.'

Many of the smaller ads featured in Gazeta Wyborcza seemed to use the English language to either advertise their products and services or to add an air of affectation to those offerings. A flea market advertisement, for example, tosses in the words, 'new style,' sprayed in graffiti and a Kawli beverage company deploys 'fun' to describe their products. Although most of the ads in the newspapers centered around local advertising and classifieds, others sought to introduce – or borrow the cachet and reputability of – more typically Western or American brands. A warehouse ad thus hypes their inventory of Camel, Gold Coast, and Marlboro

cigarettes; a beverage distributor proudly announces the importation of Coke and Pepsi; and a Price Waterhouse ad recruits potential accountants with the lure of one day landing at franchises like McDonalds, Taco Bell, and Pizza Hut. On the precipice of a capitalist era in Poland, Western brands were announcing their arrival and cultivating a new consumer society in a context, English, that long represented the lingua franca of communism's nemesis.

A consumer produced?

An advertisement for a new casino chain that ran in October 1992 – barely a few years into Poland's dramatic transformation from communism to free markets – unknowingly betrays a deeply ideological meta-message about the new capitalist era: 'Casino – the art of life,' the headline reads, above a woman clutching two chips and wearing an exuberant smile, with a man's face nuzzled against her cheek. The caption further explains: 'A casino game is not for everyone – you need to know how the casino is fun. We urge you – please check whether or not you can laugh and if you can prevail over your emotions. It could turn out you have the luck. If you have never been in a casino and you feel unsure, take a group of friends and come together – 'newbies' to provide special protection.'

Similarly, if to a less explicit degree, all of the advertisements analysed in the issues of Gazeta Wyborcza, Politkya, and Wprost presented consumers with guidelines as to how to approach the new market economy – at a juncture in which Polish capitalism was widening the gap between rich and poor after decades of egalitarian meta-narratives and collectivist exhortations (and, admittedly, more widespread deprivation). Far from those limited choices of a communist regime, Polish consumers suddenly had new goods thrust upon them and, in turn, the opportunity to differentiate themselves from each other vis-à-vis commercial augmentation. We have detailed in this paper the ways in which those goods and choices were inflected with

various 'secondary discourses' – those almost impalpable undercurrents that disclose social parables about entrepreneurial opportunism, the indulgences now afforded in response to status anxieties, and international orientations in the aftermath of open borders and markets. In sum, these magazine advertisements helped serve to educate and cultivate the new Polish consumer into being. Moreover, by analyzing advertising across time and through this profound political and economic transition in Politkya, we discover a nation under communist rule that emerges into a young capitalist marketplace; simultaneously, advertising that initially contained large amounts of copy and more informational, 'rational' appeals begins to give way to more artistic, entertaining, and abstract content.

Yet in reading an implication of 'affect' within these advertisements, we must be careful not to infer a confirmation of 'effect.' That is, as abundant cultural studies scholarship has demonstrated – not least Stuart Hall's (1980) canonic model and subsequent empirical research by David Morley (1980), Janice Radway (1984), and Ien Ang (1985) – the meanings of media texts are decoded by active audiences in ways often antithetical to their inscribed constructions (Alasuutari, 1999). To be certain, as Hall himself cautioned, readings may be intended in a particular way – and we have sought to excavate how those dominant meanings may have been intended in light of social, political, and economic context here – but negotiated and even oppositional meanings can very much be gleaned by a readership that is far from passive automatons for a coded message. In the absence of easily reachable 'encoders' (the creators of these advertisements) or 'decoders' (the audiences who were exposed to them), we hope this archival work of the texts themselves offers a stepping-stone.

More broadly, as an initial step in excavating how post-communist advertising interpellated its consumer subject – the first study, we believe, of its kind – this project has made

a valuable contribution in seeking to open a new line of inquiry into a critical sociopolitical moment in recent history. Future research would be well-served to not only take a more quantitative, content analytic approach to the themes qualitatively and inductively interpreted here, but also to expand the geographic scope of investigation to other nations making a similar transition to those various modes of neoliberal capitalism (perhaps employing a cross-cultural comparative method). We believe that texts such as those analysed here can tell us much about the aspirations and apprehensions anticipated by those tasked with training populations in the ways of a new consumer society. At the 'end of history,' new ambitions, envies, and orientations were being inscribed upon commercial subjects; by looking at that beginning and the symbolic material that accompanied it, we can read into the 'common sense' that consumers were meant to develop.

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