



Ethical issues of global marketing: avoiding bad faith in visual representation

Janet L. Borgerson
Stockholm University, Sweden, and
Jonathan E. Schroeder
Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm, Sweden

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Abstract *This paper examines visual representation in marketing communication from a distinctive, interdisciplinary perspective that draws on ethics, visual studies and critical race theory. An ontological approach is offered as an alternative to phenomenologically based approaches in marketing scholarship that use consumer responses to generate data. Suggests ways to clarify complex issues of representational ethics in marketing by applying a semiotically-based analysis that places ontological identity at the center of societal marketing concerns. Analyzes representations of the exotic Other in disparate marketing campaigns, including advertising, tourist promotions and music, as examples of bad faith marketing strategy. Music is an important force in marketing communication, yet marketing studies have rarely considered music and its visual representations as data for inquiry. Feels that considering visual representation within marketing from an ontological standpoint contributes additional insight into societal marketing and places global marketing processes within the intersection of ethics, aesthetics and representation.*

Introduction

Marketing communication depends largely on visual representation to produce meaning, brand images and spectacular simulations that create associations in consumers' minds. Despite their importance in creating meaning, a theoretical consideration of visual issues is fairly rare in marketing scholarship. Most marketing communication research focuses on persuasive effects of communication from a consumption orientation. Visual representations in marketing communication can also be considered socio-political artefacts; they create meaning within the circuit of culture that often extends beyond what may be intended by photographers, art directors, advertising agencies, and firms whose products are advertised.

A key strategy of contemporary marketing representation is to create a compelling, unique image for a product or service by linking brand names to an identity of their own. Pictures of people – models, spokespersons, average

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consumers, employees – make up a large part of advertising imagery. At times this image creation draws upon and reinforces simplified, even subordinating, representations of cultural difference, group identity and geographic specificity. That such representations, harnessed in the attempt to create a product image, potentially undermine the full human status of represented groups and individuals is of great concern (Cortese, 1999; Davila, 1997; Goffman, 1979; O'Barr, 1994; Schroeder and Borgerson, 1998; Stern, 1993; Williamson 1978). Representations that are exoticized, sexist, or racist damage the reputation of the represented group, and associated group members, and manipulate their being for consumption by others (see Hughes, 2000). The claim is not that some advertising, as well as other forms of marketing communications, might offend the damaged group or its members, but that semiotically and ontologically associated groups and individuals, and their opportunities for the future, may be damaged by certain forms of representation.

Representations often “stand in” for experience as sources of information and serve as a foundation for future knowledge. Information, sensibility and attitudes gleaned from representations may influence thinking and understanding about people and cultures. Moreover, such influence may affect the way new experiences and information are interpreted. One feels that one has learned something in observing or examining a photographic image of a person or a geographic location. Yet the way that representations stand in when experience is lacking, or function in conjunction with experience, is of particular concern in media and marketing. Marketing representations have the power to make us believe that we know something of which we have no experience and to influence the experiences we have in the future. These reflections upon a frequently unreflective occurrence mark this article’s basic concern.

Ontology, perception and marketing communication

This paper examines visual representation in marketing communication from a distinctive, interdisciplinary perspective: it uses an ontologically-based philosophical theory to explore ethical issues in marketing representations of identity. Ontology is the study of being and essences, often focusing on the relationship between forms of being. Work in ontology can include consideration of how meaning and being are created, interrelated and represented. The argument locates marketing communication within a complex visual signifying system that includes the interrelated domains of the aesthetic and the political. We suggest ways to clarify complex issues of representational ethics in marketing by applying contemporary work in visual studies, marketing and critical race theory. Considering visual representation within marketing from an ethical and theoretical standpoint contributes additional insight into societal marketing and broadens the scope of understanding of its processes.

One of the most serious outcomes of representational practices is that people’s perceptions, even “misinformed perceptions”, often have “the weight of

established facts" (Gordon, 1995, p. 203). The ontological categories presented by these images are not defined in the context of being a particular case in a given society at a particular historical moment. Rather, they are presented as what is the case about particular individuals or groups. This concretizing of contingent ontological categories serves as an instance of "bad faith."

Recent modes of semio-ontological interpretation have emerged in philosopher Lewis Gordon's work on anti-black racism. Gordon mobilizes Jean-Paul Sartre's mechanism of bad faith. Bad faith describes the attempt to avoid responsibility for the open nature of human being and human projects, resulting in the diminution of human being. In bad faith, the inability to face the openness of human existence fosters a lie of predetermined being and limited possibility (Sartre, 1956; Gordon, 1995). That this diminution marks a closing-down upon the fullness, uniqueness and potential of human being, argues Gordon, helps to articulate anti-black racism and other forms Manichaeian essentializing.

The use of demeaning or stereotypical images is especially misleading in the global marketplace, where kaleidoscopic cultural contexts already complicate communication. Marketing and advertising are discourses that both reflect and shape cultural values, stereotypes and norms. One of the dominant forces shaping the world today, global marketing communication has the power to persuade and plays a pervasive role in mass media. As wielder of this authority and influence, marketing communication bears responsibility for ensuring "good faith" in its policy and practice.

Following on Merleau-Ponty's observation that "perception represents sedimented contextual knowledges", philosopher Linda Alcoff argues in her article on racial embodiment that "there is no perception of the visible that is not already imbued with value" (Alcoff, 1999, p. 15). A kind of "common sense", formed by "past historical beliefs and practices of a given society or culture", influences and informs racial knowledge. Yet, unlike explicit manifestations of racist, or sexist, ideologies, this "common sense" as part of everyday consciousness feels "natural" rather than as a site of reflective or contestable knowledge. "The process by which human bodies are differentiated and categorized by type", writes Alcoff, "is a process preceded by racism" (Alcoff, 1999, p. 16). Perceptions, preceded by generally circulating "common sense", reflect and enact racist knowing. While appreciating the varieties of racial common sense, Alcoff writes that "there is a visual registry operating in social relations which is socially constructed, historically evolving, and culturally variegated but nonetheless powerfully determinant over individual experiences" (Alcoff, 1999, p. 23). Working to avoid bad faith in marketing representations carries forward Alcoff's project of "reactivating racist perception and experience toward a process of reorienting, reconfiguring and disrupting 'habitual perception'" (Alcoff, 1999, p. 23).

Marketing research, interpretation and an ethics of representation

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A philosophically informed ontological approach, as introduced in this paper, affords complementary yet distinct insights into meaning in marketing communication compared with more established phenomenological methods (e.g. Thompson, 1997). Whereas a phenomenologically-based hermeneutical approach provides a description of the interpretive process, the concern of this semio-ontological work is to ground an understanding of how representations go wrong. Phenomenology used in consumer research depends on the sense data and reported experience of individual agents. That is, phenomenology is concerned with a description of what “appears”, often failing to pursue critical questioning and investigation of what “appears” and why. Phenomenological methods often attenuate the level of reflective or critical contextual understanding on the part of individual agents. Further, phenomenological data often underestimate contextual factors and overestimate individual agency or interpersonal skill, when making attributions about causal implications of behavior (Ross and Nisbett, 1991). Individuals living in a context of oppression, for example, may be unable to reliably articulate their own position in relation to a broader cultural matrix, and what results is individual interpretation of decontextualized experiences (Bartky, 1990; Borgerson, 2001).

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Hermeneutical frameworks that attend to consumers’ personal perceptions provide useful information to those interested in psychological insights for target-marketing purposes, but such data do not facilitate an understanding of broader undesirable trends that can anchor much-needed ethical analysis. Phenomenological methodology, particularly within managerially-based market research, often fails to capture ethical concerns within image discourse. Working from an ontological tradition, on the other hand, enables recognition of problematic representational sites and maintains an openness to what Houston Wood in his analysis of “the rhetorical production” of negative cultural identities calls “poly-rhetoric.” Poly-rhetoric is defined as the attempt to conceptualize how communication might function, if marginalized groups had greater access to mass media’s representational power (Wood, 1999). Ontological analysis of images draws upon a theoretical apparatus that takes representational histories and hegemonic semiotic coding into account and focuses on the capacity to de-ontologize images (see, for example, Gordon, 1999; Mirzoeff, 1999; Wells, 1997).

This study joins a growing body of work on ethical concerns in marketing’s visual representation that shares a broad historical framework and a complex array of analytical tools (e.g. Bordo, 1997; Desmond, 1999; Goldman and Papson, 1996; O’Barr, 1994). Further, it contributes insights to the critical issues of race, class and gender within the marketing-research pantheon (e.g. Bristor *et al.*, 1995; Desmond, 1997; McDonagh and Prothero, 1997). A case study of Hawaii’s market transformation into a consumer paradise illustrates the enormous societal force of marketing-constructed representation. A discussion of a recent Benetton ad campaign investigates the problem of negative

stereotypes in contexts with few competing representations. We argue that marketing, with its increasing presence and influence in the global marketplace, needs what we call an ethics of representation (Borgerson and Schroeder, 1997). We conclude with a discussion of the complex intersection of marketing, visual representation and ethics as vital issues for societal marketing.

Visual representation and the making of meaning

Marketing research often treats visual issues solely as an information-processing variable, even though, as one consumer theorist points out, “[I]t is chiefly the visual aspect of the advertisement that conjoins the world and object between which a transfer of meaning is sought” (McCracken, 1988, p. 79). Furthermore, advertising research generally focuses on the internal content of advertisement, looking at the design of the ad, what it claims, and how it links the product to consumer benefits. These are important issues, to be sure, but advertising also acts as a representational system that produces meaning outside the realm of the advertised product (e.g. Ritson and Elliot, 1999; Stern and Schroeder, 1994; Yahklef, 1999).

Marketing scholarship has turned to the concept of representation for insight into diverse market-related phenomena, including advertising imagery (Pearce, 1999), war propaganda posters (Hupfer, 1997), research methods (Stern, 1998), information technology (Schroeder and Borgerson, 2002a), and photography (Schroeder, 1998). As representation refers to meaning production through language systems (cf. Stern, 1998), how that language is used is central to creating that meaning. Using representation as an analytic tool, recent studies have emphasized how cultural practice, such as laws, rituals, norms, art and advertising, all contribute to meaning production within marketing (e.g. Firat and Shultz, 1997; Hirschman, 1986; Messaris, 1997; Schroeder, 2002; Scott, 1994). Conventional views of representation hold that things, such as objects, persons or consumers, exist in the material and natural world, and that their material characteristics define them in perfectly clear terms; representation, according to this view, is of secondary importance in meaning making.

Meaning is produced or constructed by social and cultural forces; thus, representation is of primary importance. The very process of representing objects or ideas shapes meaning. In this way, representation enters into the very constitution of things. Research using this approach has been characterized as falling into two categories, semiotic and discursive (Hall, 1997). Semiotic research, or the poetics of representation, is concerned with how representation produces meaning. Discursive research, or the politics of representation, stresses effects or consequences and connects representation to power and culture (Hall, 1997). Both types of research – at times overlapping, at times discrete – are necessary for a full examination of representation as meaning producer.

Advertising, a pervasive representational form, both reflects and creates social values. As philosopher Richard Lippke writes, “The ways in which

individuals habitually perceive and conceive their lives and the social world, the alternatives they see as open to them, and the standards they use to judge themselves and others are shaped by advertising, perhaps without their ever being consciously aware of it” (Lippke, 1995, p. 108). Visual perception of “lives and the social world” is intensified and magnified by information technologies of photography – which includes still photography, video, film and digital imaging, and representation today depends on photographic imagery to accomplish its many tasks (e.g. Solomon-Godeau, 1991). Sociologists Goldman and Papson point out the close interconnected relationship between advertising and photography:

... [t]he power of advertising lies in its ability to photographically frame and redefine our meaning and our experiences and then turn them into meanings that are consonant with corporate interests. This power to recontextualize and reframe photographic images has put advertising at the center of contemporary redefinitions of individuality, freedom, and democracy in relation to corporate symbols (Goldman and Papson, 1996, p. 216).

Advertising employs photography – as information technology – to produce meaning within a circuit of production and consumption (Schroeder, 2002). The photographic representations, harnessed by advertising, ripple through the culture, circulating information about the social world. As Cadava (1999) expresses it, even the world itself has taken on a “photographic face”. The ethical, aesthetic and political interconnections of photographic representations constitute an important realm for societal marketing.

Aesthetics, images and ethical theory

In the history of Western philosophy, sensible, material things (*aisqhta*) have often been opposed to immaterial, non-sensible, or “thinkable” things (*nohta*). In their attempts to discover and understand the relationship between these apparently discrete domains, philosophers have explored the distinctions between image and reality, the beautiful and the sublime, and the human and the divine. Expanding the spectrum of philosophical aesthetics, Immanuel Kant (1965) sought to articulate the a priori principles of knowledge gained by way of the senses (Deleuze, 1984), and Schopenhauer (1970) held that one could experience the absolute (Truth) through art. These, and other fundamental philosophical questions, emerge within the field of aesthetics. An astonishing number of advertising scenarios reflect philosophical concerns, as marketing instructs the customer in the philosophical quest for a good life (e.g. Crocker and Linden, 1998).

Visual representations are central to aesthetic processes as well as ethical inquiry (Borgerson, 1999). Represented identities profess to express something true or essential about those represented and certain ontological assumptions emerge, functioning in relation to culturally defined hierarchies and dominant semiotics used in marketing communications. Theorists and scholars interested in ethical and aesthetic dimensions of cultural production attempt to determine what aesthetic (and political) choices are made, when a less powerful, subordinate or colonized group is represented by a dominant group within the

cultural realm of visual representation, including marketing communications on the World Wide Web, television, billboards, and in magazines, travel guides, and tourist brochures (Desmond, 1999; Gross, 1988). Our approach to visual representation research attempts to understand the ethical, aesthetic and cultural implications of representing geographical locations, individuals, or cultural identities, particularly the identities of marginalized or oppressed groups of people. Researchers are faced with having to discern the process by which external things are made objects of desire and how dominating agents are allowed to claim all that they see as their own (Hegel, 1993).

Ontological othering, typicality, and epistemic closure

Ontology is the study of being. Being is active, verbal, not simply in the sense of being a speaking out, or voicing of a subjectivity, but related to activity in general. To be is to be as an activity, human, for example. Some philosophers have attempted to define the essential features of being, but such essentialism denies the contingent social and historical context and construction of being. Gordon, in rejecting essentialist ontology, writes:

... eventually, blackness and whiteness take on certain meanings that apply to certain groups of people in such a way that makes it difficult not to think of those people without certain effectively charged associations. Their blackness and their whiteness become regarded, by people who take their associations too seriously, as their essential features – as, in fact, material features of their being (Gordon, 1995, p. 95).

Further, he continues, ontology should be the study of “what is treated as being the case and what is realized as the contradiction of being the case” (Gordon, 1995, p. 133). This attitude avoids what Gordon calls “taking our associations too seriously” and promotes interrogation of naturalized normative hierarchies – sedimented knowledge about stratified categories of being. Moreover, this semio-ontological perspective comprehends the role of interpretation and makes a semiotic link between being and culture (e.g. Moxey, 1994).

Contemporary philosophical theorists have written extensively on the relation between representation and ontological status (see, for example, Bartky, 1990; Borgerson, 2001; Butler, 1987/1999; Gordon, 1995; Walker, 1998; Young, 1990). These studies theorize the sort of beings that are capable of ethical action and responsibility. They are linked by a concern with how visual markers such as skin color and gendered gestures – which are mapped in and on to the body – represent or determine the status of beings, particularly in the context of racism and sexism.

As a result of dichotomous thinking in patriarchal cultures, being has traditionally been divided into two parts. This binary or dialectic mode has given rise to well recognized, hierarchically ordered dualisms: self/other, white/black, heaven/earth, civilized/primitive, rational/irrational, finite/infinite in a “logic of colonialism” (Hawkins, 1998; Plumwood, 1993). Ontologically dualistic hierarchies carry semiotic relevance and express the interrelations of subordinated elements. For example, Gordon’s semiotic reading locates blackness at the subordinated pole in the hierarchical black/white dualism that

operates as a sign of value within what he calls an anti-black world (Gordon, 1995).

These poles of the one and the other existed before Plato marked the distinction between material and immaterial, and Kant described the superior mode of the “sublime” in contrast with the “beautiful” (Kant, 1960). The most basic dualism, self/not-self, paves the way for an understanding of the self that is set against the not-self (Kant, 1973/1790). The self, as subject, defines the not-self as other. Knowledge of the self develops through a self-versus-other epistemology of difference (e.g. Coviello and Borgerson, 1999).

This ontological othering has perpetuated and reinforced the dualistic hierarchical orderings that historically have favored the male, the white and the rational (cf. Goldberg, 1993). In such a context, those associated with the privileged elements stand in the position to claim knowledge of all that is important to know about those associated with the subordinated elements. That is, the dualistic relation engages with the potential for epistemic closure. A worldview informed by epistemic closure essentializes being and tends toward creation of a recognizable “authentic” identity, while knowing next to nothing “about the typical Other beyond her or his typicality” (Gordon, 1997, p. 81). Knowing the other as “typical” refers to an abstracting and condensing of characteristics that create a familiar identity or pattern for beings and occurrences of a kind. Such interactions with the world increase the probability of human subjects interpreting what they experience or have represented to them as typical, as well as interpreting these experiences and representations through versions of familiar typicality (Natanson, 1986). Epistemic closure leads an individual to believe that he or she knows the other’s being completely, and this assumption of knowledge denies the other status as human being and erases any possibility for human relationships.

Ethics and representational practice

Margaret Urban Walker contends that the assumption that people are a kind or type is propagated and created by representational practices, which “are among those that construct socially salient identities for people” (Walker, 1998, p. 178). She argues that, if practices of representation “affect some people’s morally significant perceptions of and interactions with other people, and if they can contribute to those perceptions or interactions going seriously wrong, these activities have bearing on fundamental ethical questions” (Walker, 1998, p. 179). By the statement “interactions going seriously wrong”, Walker implies that a person influenced by such images may treat members of the represented group as less than human and undeserving of moral recognition.

Philosophers concerned with ethical norms and behavior have traditionally proceeded as though all problematic situations of moral recognition could be countered in the following three ways: through constructive definitions of personhood, through formal requirements of universality or universalizability, and through substantive demands for impartial or equal consideration (Walker, 1998). These three prescriptions, from Walker’s point of view, lack sufficient

conceptual strength to handle representations that characteristically manipulate and damage the identity of subordinate groups. Moreover, these prescriptions fail to provide sufficiently complex considerations to deal with problems of representation and, worse, damaging representations often fail to even qualify as ethical or moral problems.

Reliance on preconceived or stereotypical characteristics and images to create a successful marketing communication reveals an area of ethical concern. Representations of racial, gender, and ethnic identities are often most easily recognized and comprehended when they correspond to a preconceived typification of a particular racial, gender, or ethnic identity. In cases like these, an intended or unintended audience reads or interprets the representation within a field broadly determined by cultural meanings and categories – what Alcott (1999) refers to as common sense. Furthermore,

... [a]dvertising is a particularly salient instance of a system of representation that draws on a stock of stereotypes and visual conventions. Advertisers construct “consumer-goods ads to maximize the likelihood of preferred interpretations. This requires them to over-determine (to make redundant) the encoding process as a means of steering viewers in preferred directions ...” (Goldman, 1992, p. 124).

Ads are certainly read in different ways by different people, but creating a successful marketing communication of identity often relies on typified representations. Typified representations, especially those that are racist or sexist, for example, undermine a group’s dignity and historical integrity and cast a demeaning light upon their physical and intellectual habits and ontological status as human beings (cf. Miller, 1994). Further, viewers may have an “investment” in responding in certain predictable ways: “What makes one take up a position in a certain discourse rather than another is an ‘investment’, something between an emotional commitment and a vested interest in the relative power (satisfaction, reward, pay-off) which that position promises (but does not necessarily fulfill)” (De Lauretis, 1987, p. 16).

Advertising images and ontological identity

Advertising that promotes typification of identity and ontology also instructs and informs (Bristol *et al.*, 1995). Reflecting broader cultural stereotypes, many advertisements represent women as inferior to men and build on notions of women as product, woman as sexual object, and woman as threat (see, for example, Cortese, 1999; Goldman, 1992; Goffman, 1979; Schroeder, 2000; Stern, 1993). Further, marketing serves to renew and perpetuate these images to each generation. As a result, advertising influences the ontology of women in several ways. First, it links women with fashion and style, ephemeral concerns of the moment. Second, advertisers portray women in ways that underscore the body as the site of female identity. Third, advertising rhetoric reinforces the ontological status of women as subordinate, non-intellectual, child-like, and other (Schroeder and Borgerson, 1998). In general, and particularly in comparison with female bodies, the male body in advertising remains ontologically related to forms of masculinity represented through material

success, professional skill and economic power (e.g. Collier, 1992; Cortese, 1999; Schroeder, 2002; Schroeder and Borgerson, 1998; Stern, 1993). The meaning produced around male bodies in ads tends to recuperate “patriarchal ideology by making it more adaptable to contemporary social conditions and more able to accommodate counter-hegemonic forces” (Hanke, 1992, p. 197).

Dominant semiotics – what categories, characteristics, or individual signs represent within the dominant culture – prescribe and structure the elements of identity, representation and performance that will be rendered quickly culturally intelligible. Moreover, particular dominant groups often hold decision-making power about what and who will be represented and, perhaps more significantly, how subordinate groups will be represented (see Davila, 1997; Rabinowitz, 1994). People that have a stake in representing and reinforcing certain stereotypical gestures, characteristics, or styles do not necessarily operate in the best interests of those represented. Moral recognition or standing is often denied to those whose human status is contested, particularly in racist and sexist settings. The lure of familiarity, typification and clichés points out the necessity for moral theory to confront instances of damaging representation.

Marketing Hawaii: colonialism, representation and ontology

Representations of subordinate groups, particularly marketing representations circulating within the dominant semiotics of media culture, rarely contradict and typically reproduce versions of subordination. The necessity for an ethics of representation grows out of the ethical significance of ontological divisions and hierarchies and the reality of epistemic closure. Representations of the cultural identity category Hawaiian can be analyzed to illustrate the efficient power of this type of meaning production. This section focuses on marketing representations of Hawaii that have produced a discourse of typicality. The analysis calls on conventions from art history and advertising design as well as the semio-ontological value categories implied in hierarchical dualisms. In the representations discussed – which include images from what is marketed as Hawaiian music – perceptual signs indicating subordinate elements have been codified by photography, “a key tool in visualizing colonial possessions and demonstrating Western superiority over the colonized” (Mizroeff, 1999, p. 139).

In many minds, Hawaii is synonymous with marketing representations of the 50th United State, particularly as a popular and exotic tourist destination. The Hawaii represented is the Hawaii that exists for most people, and therefore seemingly innocuous and “fun” representations create and maintain a discourse that reveals effects and precursors of colonialism. Marketing representations of Hawaii and Hawaiians reflect a dominant cultural view of the exotic other (Tatar, 1987). Whether these interpretations are found in marketing promotions, tourist brochures, record albums, Hollywood films, or advertising, “Hawaiians are repeatedly presented as people whose lives are less complex and less valuable than the lives of Euro-Americans” (Wood, 1999, p. 113).

Hawaii's assimilation into the USA is a classic case of imperialism, which Laurie Whitt (1995) defines as "one of a number of oppressive relations that may hold between dominant and subordinated cultures. Whether or not conscious and intentional, it serves to extend the political power, secure the social control, and further the economic profit of the dominant culture". For example, Whitt claims that commodification of native spirituality through trade marks and copyrights serves to colonize native belief systems thus:

EuroAmerican culture seeks to establish itself in indigenous cultures by appropriating, mining and re-defining what is distinctive, constitutive, of them. The mechanism for this is an oft-repeated pattern of cultural subordination that turns vitally on legal and popular views of ownership and property, as formulated within the dominant culture (Whitt, 1995).

It is important to remember that marketing does not merely use a pre-existing discourse but works to create, and then sell, its own visual rhetoric through the use of carefully designed marketing communication and promotions (Schroeder and Borgerson, 2002b).

Marketing representations work in a broad context to influence the construction of the world through marketing images (Firat and Venkatesh, 1993) and, as cultural theorist Richard Leppert points out:

Images show us a world but not *the* world . . . When we look at images, whether photographs, films, videos, or paintings, what we see is the product of human consciousness, itself part and parcel of culture and history. That is, images are not mined like ore; they are constructed for the purpose of performing some function within a given sociocultural matrix (Leppert, 1997, p. 3).

Through information, images and a barrage of appeals brought to the consumer by way of marketing, Hawaii was developed into what has been described as a conceptual resource: "an ambient resource, that special combination of elements such as warm, sensuous and non-debilitating climate; exciting coastal and mountain scenery; warm, clear ocean water; and one of the most interesting cosmopolitan populations in the world" (Farrell, 1982, p. 28). The power of this type of creative conceptual representation insures that many people continue to experience and think about Hawaii in the way that marketing images have intended; representation has helped create Hawaii as an exotic, primitive, tourist paradise for many people.

Marketing, the mastermind of representational images designed to sell elaborately positioned products, including geographical locations and cultures, created in the past, actively creates in the present, and will have to continue to create in the future images and identities designed to maintain the desired impact. Even a conceptual resource must be continuously renewed. Hawaii discourse and representations do not just exist "out there" but must be created and recreated (cf. Costa, 1998; Buck, 1993). Much of the ideological power of the representations discussed here lies in their almost infinite repetition – similar images are presented over and over again in a wide variety of marketing contexts and epochs.

Hawaiian music: marketing the exotic other

Music is often used in marketing communication, yet marketing studies have rarely considered music and the visual representations found on record albums, CDs, and cassettes, as data for inquiry into marketing images (Holbrook, 1982; Schroeder and Borgerson, 1999). An extremely popular genre from the 1910s through the 1970s, what came to be known as Hawaiian music on the US mainland functioned as a prominent representational site of Hawaii and Hawaiians (Kanahele, 1979; Taylor, 1997). Hawaii record albums were a huge market: hundreds of records were released each year at its peak with the tiki trend in the early 1960s (e.g. Kirsten, 2000). Many Hawaiian record albums were given away by airlines, travel agents, and tour companies as part of broader efforts to attract visitors to Hawaii, yet few studies reflect music's important promotional roles (cf. Desmond, 1999). Moreover, sheet music, radio and television shows, packaged musical tours, and movies were instrumental in marketing the image of Hawaii world-wide (Schroeder and Borgerson, 1999). Interestingly, the typical themes displayed in Hawaiian record albums – paradise, escape, sexuality, tropicality, going native – are present in many marketing campaigns for products ranging from sun-tan oil to corporate relocation (cf. Manderson and Jolly, 1997; O'Barr, 1994; Williamson, 1986). These types of images are invoked to promote tropical island regions generally: “much of what constitutes the desirability of the South Pacific is in fact its place in popular fiction, travelogues and films” (Sturma, 1999, p. 714).

Record albums are useful sights for marketing scholarship for several reasons. First, they are durable. Unlike most print and television advertisements, records were – and are still – collected and coveted by consumers, and displayed in stores and homes. Records from the 1950s are widely available today. Vinyl has rebounded as a viable niche within the music industry. Used records are sold by the thousands in vinyl stores, record fairs, and on the Internet. As consumer artefacts, records and CDs exemplify crucial identity-forming practices, such as leisure, the building and sharing of expertise, and the invoking of nostalgic reverie. Second, old records are often re-released on compact disc, thus enjoying a new product life. Many records from the past sell briskly in contemporary music stores. Furthermore, although images from 1950s and 1960s advertisements usually appear hopelessly dated, record cover designs enjoy new life on compact discs that cash in on ironic trends or retro fashions (see Brown, 2001). Third, record cover design was a leading purveyor of graphic images during the decades after the Second World War (see Holbrook and Stern, 2000; McKnight-Trontz and Steinweiss, 2000). Many leading artists and graphic designers produced record designs; some of which are considered collectable classics (e.g. Beddard, 1997).

The album: records of representation

The word album is derived from the Latin *albus*, white, and also *albho*, white ghostly apparitions. By definition, an album is a book with blank pages for the insertion and preservation of collections, such as photographs or other

keepsakes. Alternatively, an album has been defined as a blank tablet on which records or notices were inscribed, registered, or listed. In the case of ethnographic collections or “ethnic” music, “album” evokes the white colonialist potential of a medium that begins as a blank slate and treats the observed exotic native, often dark-skinned, as an object to be reported on and recorded by the outside observer.

Recorded music albums are albums within albums. The black vinyl disks are inscribed with a collection of musical pieces held within another album form: two covers containing “liner” notes, photographic images and the index of songs. Record album images are visual and aural: the photographs or designs on the covers collaborate with the music and lyrics inside. Record jackets, liner notes, and the actual lyrics instruct and inform through their representations of place, history and culture.

Marketed versions of Hawaii show up in the *Kodak Hula Show* and the *Webley Edwards’ Hawaii Calls Show*. Both of these popular tourist attractions released multiple tie-in record albums. The *Kodak Hula Show* was designed to provide “authentic” Hawaiian scenes every day for tourist photographs and promote the sale of Kodak film. Such a well-established attraction provides a comfortable familiarity for anxious visitors, who, having purchased the album, have essentially already seen the experiences they themselves will have and the pictures they will take (Buck, 1993; Costa, 1998; Schroeder, 1998; Wood, 1999). *Hawaii Calls* live show, radio show and record albums attracted avid fans, and claimed Hawaiian authenticity for their tin pan alley-originated music. Most songs were “adapted”, written, and recorded by white men, who claimed authorship, copyright and, hence, royalties for this so-called “authentic” Hawaiian music.

The genre of Hawaiian record albums provides a spectacular site for analysis of the way aesthetics, identity and representation cooperate in cultural production. Marketers use the album cover as a conveyor of visual representation to sell products, but it is more than just attractive packaging. The packaging – in this case the album cover or record sleeve – has played a significant part in constructing the visual meaning of Hawaii seen by consumers (Costa, 1998; Borgerson and Schroeder, 1997; Williamson, 1986). Certain knowledge gains domination over other knowledge through the power of representation, and the relationship between knowledge and representation is not one-way. Representation not only reflects knowledge; representation creates knowledge.

Packaging paradise

Western Judaeo-Christian culture gives paradise two central meanings: the Garden of Eden and Heaven. Record album-based marketing representations of Hawaii emphasize the former, featuring the dark-skinned women of paradise clad in “native cloth,” peering out from palm fronds, frolicking in the ocean tide. Represented as paradise on earth and marketed as a tourist paradise, Hawaii is only one example of how the concept of paradise pulses through many

marketing campaigns. In each case, this idea of paradise underscores the connection between consumption and the good life (cf. Brown and Patterson, 2000).

Costa argues that the history and function of paradise in the West has exerted profound influences on the way Hawaii has been marketed as a tourist “paradise”. Exposure to paradisaical discourse comes about through marketed representations of gender (male/female), race (black/white/somewhere in-between), the histories of religion (saved/damned) and other cultural institutions that make use of hierarchically-ordered dichotomies, including us/them (Costa, 1998). Gleaned from hundreds of record albums and their covers, the packaged version of Hawaii reveals typical colonial representations of Hawaii’s people as natural, primitive, sexually sensual and accessible, and presents Hawaii’s culture as ignorant and exotic, without literature, melody, or development (see Costa, 1998; O’Barr, 1994). Sexist representations compare women with nature, such as woman as island, as the lure of the islands posed on waterfalls, always decorated with flowers, sexually available and unburdened by Western guilt. Hawaii itself is feminized (Schroeder and Borgerson, 1998). Racist representations call up the exotic Other, even while marketing communications urge tourists to go native and somehow assume the Hawaiian identity that has been diminished to an exotic typicality. Through consumption, the Anglo becomes the exotic, even if it only lasts for a week of vacation (cf. Lencek and Bosker, 1998).

The hula dancer became a stock image and common trope of Hawaiian sensuality via repeated representations in sheet music graphics, Hollywood movies, television, and record albums. “Hula girls” appear in hundreds of images; and most Hawaiian records feature at least one song about a caricatured, commodified and sexualized hula dance. Although the hula was an integrated religious system of poetry, movement and rhythm, Western images of the hula dancer refer to “a youthful beauty with a dreamy smile undulating to the rhythmic strums of a ukulele” (Griffin, 1996). In one frequently recorded song, listeners are teasingly instructed to keep their eyes on the dancers’ hands during a hula performance, and not be distracted by “the lovely hula hips”. What was once a spiritual practice was transformed into a scintillating spectacle for the gaze (cf. Desmond, 1999). This hackneyed hula is alive and well in contemporary marketing imagery – recruited to sell many things from computer RAM chips to generic vacations.

Hawaii, Nearer than You Think, Lovelier than You Dreamed is an early version of a promotional tie-in strategy. This album simultaneously served as an advertisement for Hawaiian Airlines, Hawaii as a tourist destination, the musical group the Hi-Lo Hawaiians, and the local tour companies that distributed the album to tourists. The cover of *Hawaii, Nearer than You Think, Lovelier than You Dreamed* features a “Hawaiian woman,” who is identified with Hawaii itself as “nearer and lovelier than you dreamed.” She is feminine, barely dressed, and serves to represent Hawaii’s qualities as a sensual resort paradise as well as to portray a dark-skinned, Polynesian woman with a “come-

hither” look. Her identity as a person is obscured through the use of stock conventions: pose, framing and props promote interpretations of “island woman” typicality.

The packaging for *Hawaii, Nearer than You Think, Lovelier than You Dreamed* includes five or six blank white pages, supplied for the album owner’s own inscription. These pages could be filled with personal reminiscences of the laughing Hula girls, the white sand, and the lush island paradise. The album also included color photos of key visitor sights and a vinyl recording of songs and sounds, including waves on the beach at Waikiki and exotic birdcalls. These inspirational visual and aural images presented the Hawaiian experience, whether one eventually traveled to Hawaii or found satisfaction simply sitting in the living-room with the album and a record player. Ironically, tourists traveling to Hawaii often do little more than play out the scripted journey that matches the photos seen on Hawaiian albums.

Discussion: representation and domination

Ethical issues arise when representations of subordinate groups facilitate the erasure of identity and domination of that group (cf. Kaplan and Pease, 1993). Hawaiian marketing discourse often reflects the dominant cultural view and provides a compelling example of how representation by dominant groups enables a colonialist process of objectification and imperialism (e.g. Clifford, 1988; Drinnon, 1997; Eisenman, 1997; Said, 1993). The ideology of the colonizer can be heard through the representation of the colonized. Much that is recognized as Hawaii – a state, an ethnic identity, a race and a cultural form – has been constructed through misapprehension, appropriation and representation of indigenous culture by dominant culture.

Music serves as an aural image of Hawaii, and album cover graphic design reinscribes Hawaii’s visual image. Through the technological assistance of radio and stereophonic hi-fi recordings, the uninitiated mainlander was invited to share the spirit of aloha. Hawaiian music has gone through several life cycles – from exotic, primitive music early in the twentieth century to schmaltzy tourist trap sound-tracks in the 1950s and 1960s – only to be smartly repackaged as “exotica” and “lounge music” on compact discs in the 1990s. Thousands of Hawaiian record albums formed an important stage in the construction of Hawaii as a conceptual resource, just as pineapple, sugar and battleships played important roles at earlier stages (Borgerson and Schroeder, 1997). Even the titles of record albums and films invite consumption of packaged Hawaii as product; records like *Island Paradise*, *The Lure of Paradise* and *Hawaiian Paradise* and films like *Blue Hawaii*, *Elvis in Paradise*, and *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* serve as examples. This type of marketing influences the way consumers see Hawaii as island paradise, tourist destination and honeymoon resort (cf. Diller and Scofidio, 1994). Hawaii, island paradise, simultaneously exotic and familiar, becomes more real than the actual group of islands in the South Pacific (cf. Sahlins, 1981).

Marketing discourse implies that it took Western ingenuity to make Hawaiian music a force in the market in much the same way as it required Western cook-book authors to transform native food into a palatable commodity. History gleaned from record jackets and liner notes is laced with propaganda to support statehood and capitalist economic and colonizing cultural expansion. Hawaii is there for the West to discover (Cook, 1996). Hundreds of record album liner notes openly acknowledge Hawaii as a resource and point out the colonialist relationship between Hawaii and the USA. "Hawaii," one reads, "is not only a popular vacation land but also an important commercial possession of the United States" (*Hawaiian Rhythm*, Spinorama Records). Hawaii is a cultural resource for the USA to develop.

Unfortunately absent from the descriptions is the reminder that imperialism always functions within a context of unequal power. The indigenous peoples of Hawaii have a rich, largely unrepresented culture, yet the image of Hawaii that dominates many people's imagination comes from travel brochures, cook-books, record albums, musicals and films. It is a Hawaii constructed through strategic marketing campaigns to resonate with vacationers, business interests and honeymooners. Furthermore, the power of these representations is such that people "displaced from their communities in a book and film culture become in large measure dependent on information about themselves that is shaped by the colonizers' representations" (Wood, 1999, p. 155). The suggestion here is that even native Hawaiians turn to popular representations to express their identity (cf. Tomaselli, 2001).

The celebratory "mini-melting pot" narrative so often found in tourist discourse hides stories of Chinese and Japanese nationals imported as laborers. In addition, these blurbs offer to generations of white US tourists an easy explanation of why their 50th state is populated by few people who look like them. These marketed and represented identities do in fact explain, in semiotized ontological form, the racial state of Hawaii. The island state is a Polynesian paradise, filled with exotic natives who are also US citizens. This produces an interesting paradox; Hawaiians at once are not like us and, at the same time, they are us. These representations are instrumental in constructing the image of Hawaii as an exotic, primitive paradise within colonial, patriarchal and racist discourses that ultimately lead to bad faith marketing.

The face of white desire to become the Other, to gain in a safe, controlled way the desirable traits of the "aloha spirit" is represented on one album cover after another through the theme of the white woman, often clearly a new bride on honeymoon, taking on the "native" look (Schroeder and Borgerson, 1999). Dressed in a crisp floral halter-top and short skirt with a flower behind her ear, her left hand prominently displaying her wedding band, she poses in the palms. She becomes "Hawaiian" easily, for this transformation translates into exotic native guilt-free sexuality and a sensual playfulness for her and her new husband. Let's take off our clothes! Let's frolic in the waterfall! What a great place for a honeymoon!

Representations of the exotic other such as those discussed here have erased the legitimacy and identity of native people, as composers or musicians, for example, and erasure through representation is a destructive paradox. This vision of an exotic vacation paradise has been used in many tourism campaigns for the Virgin Islands, Ibiza and Bali, to name a few examples (cf. Allason, 2001). Some scholars have argued that representation in marketing images is an improvement over racist and sexist days gone-by, when most marginalized groups were not represented at all. However, there exists a strange phenomenon of absence through presence that is manifested in an anonymity through which anyone might stand in for anyone else of a certain kind or an invisibility through typicality that will never be undone by bad faith marketing representations (Gordon, 1997, p. 80; Natanson, 1986). Clearly, the human other exceeds this typicality. Yet, through the ease of epistemic closure and the lie that allows the typical to stand in for the human, bad faith emerges within representational practices.

Benetton and bad faith

Bad faith visual representation is not limited to specific geographical or cultural areas. The Italian clothing company Benetton and its creative director Oliviero Toscani provide a current example of marketing communications interaction with ethical concerns. Benetton has received much critical attention for the marketing campaign it refers to as “the United Colors of Benetton.” A crucial criticism of Benetton’s advertising strategy has been that the images that the company chooses de-historicize and de-contextualize the people and situations represented. For example, a recent campaign used photographs of death row inmates in the USA, who have been sentenced to die in seven states that allow the death penalty (Berger, 2001, p. 249; *International Herald Tribune*, 1999). In trade-mark fidelity, Benetton has consistently used socially provocative photographs, violent images and racial representation in its marketing communications, and the “Sentenced to death” campaign fit its pattern well. Of the many ways that Benetton might have selected to deliver the message, it chose to present close-up photographs of death row inmates, the majority of which are black men.

Among the sites chosen for the Benetton campaign were several prominent billboards in downtown Stockholm, Sweden. Although recent immigration is changing the demographics, particularly in larger cities, relatively few faces of color are seen in Stockholm. Further, few images of black men appear in Swedish media. When they do, most of them are represented as entertainers; black musical forms of jazz, soul and funk are conspicuous throughout Stockholm. Rap is particularly popular and ubiquitous on European MTV, providing its own controversial stereotypes (Goldman and Papson, 1996, p. 165). In the context of a homogeneous country, such as Sweden, the Benetton ads may do little more than reinforce negative versions of black male typicality, here associated with extreme criminal activity and guilt.

Benetton claims that their images protest against the death penalty and focus attention on the plight of death row inmates and the use of the death penalty in the USA. It may be that in Sweden, in particular, Benetton's use of black men in the death penalty ads does indeed focus attention on racism and injustice in the USA – responsible for placing black men in this position of oppression. Moreover, if a black man is more likely to be sentenced to death than a white counterpart, and he also happens to be innocent, this effect of US racism further bolsters concerns about the death penalty. Blackness here may function as much as a sign of victim status as of criminality. Be that as it may, the presence of these images serves to perpetuate the visual representation of blacks as the other (see Williams, 1987). Moreover, given cultural stereotypes about blackness, especially within the Euro-American context, the representations in Benetton's advertising semiotically link black identity with murder and death.

Whereas Benetton may not be intentionally racist, a justifiable concern is raised over how this company – and marketing communication in general – represent identity in campaigns (e.g. Giroux, 1994). It is crucial to understand here how blackness functions semiotically as an ontological and representational category, and how representations of blackness, mired in typicality and anonymity, may associate negative and damaging cultural images with those identities that are represented by concretizing contingent categories of being (Gordon, 1995).

The ontological perspective presented here underscores the process by which representations link people to identities. Despite Benetton's success in generating publicity and market share for its brand, marketing's use of social and cultural controversy becomes controversial itself. The situations of the men in the Benetton ads are clearly negative and seem destined to reinforce racist stereotypes about blacks (cf. Collins, 1990; Cortese, 1999; Fanon, 1967; Goldberg, 1993; James, 1997). Many have criticized this campaign as celebrating murderers by representing them as human, yet we point to other potential problems of Benetton's dally with death. Justifying the ads on the basis of the shaky possibility that they promote pity in the viewer could be met with the observation that pity itself signals an ontological status differential.

Benetton might claim that the ads motivate viewers to the action of protesting against the death penalty or somehow becoming involved in the social and political controversy of race, crime and corrections. However, many commentators raise concerns about the use of controversy to promote clothing (Giroux, 1994; Goldman and Papson, 1996; Ramamurthy, 1997). Perhaps a more significant ethical consideration is how these advertising representations do little more than foster a negative typicality of black men in contexts where few other competing representations circulate in the visual culture.

Further, Ramamurthy (1997, p. 192) points out that history reinforces and thus insures the effectiveness of advertising's created images: "Images do change meaning according to their context; yet images, like everything else, are historically-based and cannot avoid the meanings and symbolisms which the

past puts upon them". This is why marketers are mistaken when they claim that representations that are de-historicized and de-contextualized are completely open to interpretation. The death row campaign may perpetuate long-standing racist assumptions about who black people are, who they can be, and provides yet another example of how marketing communications holds blackness and other subordinated identities in a representational prison. We believe that Benetton is acting in bad faith.

Conclusion

Bad faith in marketing, especially in global marketing, must be avoided, if business sincerely wants to create "a genuine . . . enterprise, a mode of activity that resolves society's crises, not causes them" (Guillet de Monthoux, 1993). If marketing is to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem, it must not contribute to typified images and representational bad faith. "Bad faith" marketing creates a paradox, for, even as more diverse human subjects are being represented in marketing and advertising images, their human identity suffers from racist, sexist and colonialist erasure. Representations of the exotic other continue to evoke a historical matrix of subordination. Moreover, as long as men remain the dominant sex, pictures of women in subordinated roles have marked implications as well.

How can marketing avoid bad faith in visual representation? One might think that simply including images of under-represented or marginalized cultural groups in marketing communications would help, but this strategy often leads to exoticized images, images informed by typicality, and "token" images. Benetton's approach to cultural "inclusion" has been widely criticized as perpetuating stereotypes of difference – an ironic result that illustrates the complex intertwining of identity, representation and marketing within the global economy. Moreover, representation can also lead to an invisibility, a strangely equivocal effect that reflects the difficult dialectic between identity and representation in a context of oppression.

We believe that organizations need to pay attention to this issue, particularly as they expand globally. Awareness is one step. Avoiding bad faith depends on an awareness of potential negative communication; we suggest that increased visual and semiotic literacy is an important component of societal marketing. We also point to a stakeholder approach to management, one that acknowledges multiple constituents for corporate activities, including marketing communication (e.g. Sirgy and Su, 2000). Most firms have been reluctant to offend targeted consumers, but recent trends in advertising show that shocking images gain attention. Sometimes these attention-grabbing images are shocking, because they draw on sexist and racist typicalities. We believe that brilliant marketing campaigns need not rely on damaging representation, and we call on the industry to pay more attention to their messages' complex and far-reaching meanings.

When marketing campaigns represent identities of groups or individuals, so that the representations themselves purport to express something true or

essential about those represented, aesthetic intersect with ethical questions and allow certain ontological assumptions to emerge. Identities are “performed” through images, especially images that enter the cultural landscape through popular mass media (Goffman, 1979). In addition to damaging the reputation of members of represented groups, some forms of representation that are exoticized, stereotypical, sexist or racist actually manipulate these groups for consumption by others. Given power inequalities and lack of access to mass media forms of representation, subordinated or oppressed individuals or groups often do not have control over how they are represented, particularly within the discourse of advertising.

An ontological focus underscores the political and ethical implications of marketing images in bad faith. Every representation has the potential to construct the way societies see other cultures and genders. Visual connotations of interpersonal relations are so familiar that an entire range of race relations and political power can be summoned with a single image of, for example, a hula dancer (cf. Leiss *et al.*, 1990). Those who create marketing communications must be encouraged to think critically about their responsibilities in this act of creation.

Representations construct reality and are part of the lived experience. As such, these images are crucial to global race relations, ontology and marketing. Viewers do create meaning, and interpretation of ads is subjective. Understanding these outcomes, advertisers in good faith must accept responsibility for the reverberations of their representations at home and abroad; they must reject their dubious tradition of drawing on typicalities of ethnicity, race and gender, especially those versions of typicality constructed from colonialist, racist, and sexist positions. Another means of developing insight into the ethics of visual representation is to promote visual literacy through training and education in visual communication. Although photography is the most pervasive form of communication in the world, most people have had little formal training in the historical background of photography, the processes of photographic production, or the function of pictorial conventions. Advertising, like photography, seems to present a world that just is, even though photographic images are cropped, selected and edited for consumption. Linking advertising to representation enables researchers to recognize advertising as a global communication system based on visual images. Further research to locate and identify specific ontological themes in advertising will add to the gathering literature in this field. Understanding the concepts of representation, typicality, gaze, objectification, and bad faith will contribute to understanding the global implications of marketing communication.

Although interdisciplinary theory and readings are critical for explicating how visual representations work within marketing communications, these studies alone are not enough. Two other analytic strategies are necessary for the study of marketing in 2002 and beyond. First, the power of visual representation within the cultural flow of marketing images needs to be better understood and, second, the role of advertising both in the socio-political

economy and in the constitution of consuming subjects needs to be more fully defined. Ethical issues of marketing representations are central to global marketing efforts, and the interdisciplinary approach for apprehending a pervasive representational system brings with it the hope that societal marketing, confronting bad faith, may lead to a more just millennium.

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