

**SUBVERTISING VERSUS ADVERTISING: A SEMIOTICAL ANALYSIS OF  
THE CULTURE JAMMING ACT**

A THESIS  
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MASTER OF FINE ARTS

By

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December, 2005

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## ABSTRACT

# SUBVERTISING VERSUS ADVERTISING: A SEMIOTICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURE JAMMING ACT

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This study examines the act of Culture Jamming on the basis of semiotic theory mainly by Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes. Accordingly, the analysis based on the examination of existing Culture Jamming examples. Depending on the related issues of Culture Jamming as a social phenomenon, history of advertising, ideology and propaganda are explored. This study also includes practical side that is conducted to a better understanding the act of Culture Jamming.

**Keywords:** Culture Jamming, subvertising, advertising, activism, semiotic analysis of Culture Jamming

## ÖZET

### REKLAMA KARŞI REKLAM YIKMA: KÜLTÜR KARIŞTIRMASI'NIN EDİMİNİN SEMİYOTİK ANALİZİ

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Bu çalışma Kültür Karıştirması'nın edimini semiyotik açıdan özellikle Ferdinand de Saussure ve Roland Barthes'ı temel alarak incelemektedir. Bu doğrultuda, inceleme varolan Kültür Karıştirması örnekleri üzerine temellendirilmiştir. Bu çalışmada sosyal bir fenomen olan Kültür Karıştirması ile ilişkili konular; reklamın tarihi, ideoloji ve propaganda ele alınmıştır. Bu çalışma ayrıca Kültür Karıştirması'nın ediminin daha iyi anlaşılmasını sağlamak amacıyla uygulamalı bir proje içermektedir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Kültür Karıştirması, reklam yıkma, reklam, aktivizm, kültür karıştirmasının semiyotik analizi

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT .....	III
ÖZET .....	IV
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	V
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	VI
LIST OF FIGURES .....	VIII
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Thesis Organization .....	3
1.2 Scope .....	6
CHAPTER 2. SUBVERTISING VERSUS ADVERTISING .....	7
2.1 The Adventure of Advertising .....	7
2.2 Culture Jamming .....	12
2.3 Ideology and Propaganda .....	23
CHAPTER 3. SEMIOTICAL FRAMEWORK OF ACT OF CULTURE JAMMING .....	25
3.1 Ferdinand de Saussure .....	26
3.2 Roland Barthes .....	30

CHAPTER 4. SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF CULTURE JAMMING WORKS..	39
4.1 Cola & Capitalism .....	41
4.2 Nike: Jumpman .....	47
CHAPTER 5. JAMMING BONUS CARD .....	52
5.1 Bonus Card .....	52
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION .....	61
6.1 Recommendation for Future Researches .....	64
REFERENCES .....	65
APPENDICES .....	69

## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure 1:</b> Bill Gates with the pie into his face .....	15
<b>Figure 2:</b> Camel Lights Advertisement .....	18
<b>Figure 3:</b> Culture Jamming work of Camel.....	18
<b>Figure 4:</b> Culture Jamming work of Absolut .....	20
<b>Figure 5:</b> Saussure's diagram .....	27
<b>Figure 6:</b> Logotype of Coca Cola .....	41
<b>Figure 7:</b> Culture Jamming work of Coca Cola .....	41
<b>Figure 8:</b> Web site of Coca Cola .....	43
<b>Figure 9:</b> Barthes' Two Order Signification System .....	44
<b>Figure 10:</b> Diagram of Culture Jamming Act .....	46
<b>Figure 11:</b> Nike: Jumpman Wallpaper .....	47
<b>Figure 12:</b> Culture Jamming work of Nike: Jumpman .....	47
<b>Figure 13:</b> Nike 1993 Calendar: Jumpman .....	48
<b>Figure 14:</b> Nike Web site .....	49
<b>Figure 15:</b> Nike TV Commercial .....	50
<b>Figure 16:</b> Bonus Card Billboard .....	54
<b>Figure 17:</b> A piece of Bonus Card's Presentation .....	55
<b>Figure 18:</b> Bonus Card's Logotype .....	56
<b>Figure 19:</b> Culture Jamming work of Bonus Card .....	56
<b>Figure 20:</b> Culture Jamming work of Bonus Card / Animation.....	59



## 1. INTRODUCTION

The 20<sup>th</sup> century will look back on its place in history as a time of political, cultural, economic and technological changes. Although Europe was at one time the center of western civilization, as a result of both WWI and WWII it lost its both political and economic strength. Consequently, United States of America became the new center of western civilization. United States of America pioneered the industrialized economy, mass production and mass culture. Furthermore, technology improved enormously during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Human beings went to the moon, created TV, the computer, internet and so on. The world was forced to face globalization and its outputs which include cultural imperialism. Globalization renewed the style of colonialism to legalize it. The whole world became a marketplace of corporations. Communication became the motto of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which is an illusion of globalization. The concept of globalization offered a global communication network which makes world smaller. Communication technologies improved enormously but in fact these technologies decreased personal relations. Communication back out of its meaning and became a commodity. Ideological wars were replaced with economic wars; capitalism lived its “golden age” in this century. Consequently corporations became a new dominant power in the world and advertising became the propaganda tool of corporations. Advertisements started to sell identities instead of products; they told people who they were.

In each era, there are activists who are against the dominant power. In the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, Culture Jamming appeared as a social movement that fights against dominant power. Culture Jamming's significant feature is that it utilizes from its enemies acceleration to subvert them. This act refers to jujitsu which is a martial art, using same strategy. It was influenced by its predecessors but has created its own style according to the current era's context.

In this study my aim is to investigate the concept of Culture Jamming as a social phenomenon. Culture Jamming is examined from diverse perspectives including; advertising, semiotics, ideology and the analysis of jamming examples. Advertising is one of the most important targets of Culture Jamming. To understand why Culture Jamming is targeting advertising, a closer look to the history of advertising is inevitable. The most important point for advertising in that look is its appearance as a communication and propaganda tool for dominant power holders; corporations. From this point of view I have examined the concept of ideology and propaganda and their changing meanings through time. These complicated relations are analyzed from the semiotic perspective which is an appropriate and valid method. Moreover semiotic is also preferred to analyze the act of Culture Jamming.

Mark Dery mentions the relation between Culture Jammers and semioticians at his article "*Culture Jamming: Hacking, Slashing and Sniping in the Empire of Signs*" that Culture Jammer's ad hoc approach to cultural analysis and

semiotician's attempt to read between the lines of culture considered as a text, has much in common (2004). The focus point of this project is a comparative semiotic analysis of advertising and the methods of Culture Jamming. Culture Jamming is analyzed as a social movement and its act is undertaken as practical side of this movement which is a significant feature of Culture Jamming. Although advertisements are analyzed from the semiotic perspective, Culture Jamming methods are not analyzed. Moreover Culture Jamming and its acts are analyzed but none of them from the semiotic perspective. Despite the fact it is known that Culture Jamming uses its targets to subvert them, the effects of this state on the plane are not known. The aim of this study is to figure out the act of Culture Jamming in the semiotic plane. Furthermore this study also includes a practical side that is conducted to better understand the acts of Culture Jamming and its working strategy.

## **1.1 THESIS ORGANIZATION**

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter one introduces the purpose, limits and the focus of the current study.

The second chapter offers an examination of the progress of advertising in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the concept of culture jamming. It mentions advertising history to figure out why advertisements are the main target of culture jamming. In this context, the relation of advertising with capitalism and the

role of advertising to change the power center are undertaken. In the second part of this chapter, the concept of culture jamming is examined, including origins of culture jamming, the aim of culture jammers and their working strategy. Also included in this chapter, is the examination of the concepts of ideology and propaganda. The content of today's ideology and its propaganda dominate everyday life. Both are examined to clarify the targets of culture jamming.

Chapter three focuses on semiotic as a theoretical framework for analysis of Culture Jamming. It is necessary to understand both the structure of advertisements and the act of Culture Jamming. Semiotics is undertaken from the perspectives of Saussure and Barthes. As a pioneer of the theory Saussure's approach is important for a better understanding of the structure of semiotics. His syntagm and paradigm concepts are helpful to understand the results of changes which Culture Jamming makes on its target. In addition, Barthes' point of view is needed for analyzing both advertisements and Culture Jamming methods. His concept of myth is especially necessary to understand the artificial constructions of advertisements. Barthes's approach of identifying those artificial constructions is also helpful in understanding the act of Culture Jamming.

Chapter four concentrates on the semiotic analysis of two culture jamming works. The examples of Coca-Cola and Nike are chosen for analysis; first, both brands are critiqued a lot about their working conditions and second, their examples are sufficient for explanation of Culture Jamming in the

semiotic plane. These examples are significant in defining the procedures of Culture Jamming; from the selection of target to the placement of messages. The aim of culture jamming, its working process and verbal and visual language are clearly defined through these examples.

Chapter five introduces and discusses the project part of this study. The project includes a Culture Jamming work for the Turkish brand Bonus Card. The reason why this brand was chosen for the project is explained in this chapter. For the practical side of this study, the advertisements of Bonus Card are used to design Culture Jamming works. Designs are in accordance with the known procedures of culture jamming. This is the point at which semiotic became the main focus of the project. The results of the semiotic analysis of Culture Jamming examined in the previous chapter create the path for this project.

Finally, chapter six provides a discussion of the analysis. An overall summary of the current study is also presented in this chapter as well as recommendations for future research.

## **1.2 SCOPE**

Culture Jamming has diverse types and mediums for its act. Although it seems like corporate oriented, all political and social issues can be a subject for Culture Jamming. Although the procedures of all Culture Jamming works are similar, the advertisement oriented ones are most suitable for semiotic analysis. Consequently this study is conducted on advertisement oriented Culture Jamming.

Culture Jamming can be examined from diverse planes such as cultural differences, rhetoric, interaction with popular culture, design principles and so on. Although the concept of Culture Jamming has various dimensions, this study examines its acting procedures from the semiotic dimension.

## **2. SUBVERTISING VERSUS ADVERTISING**

### **2.1 THE ADVENTURE OF ADVERTISING**

The meaning of advertising and its possibilities have changed enormously during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The purpose of advertising in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was primarily to introduce a product and inform consumers about it (Leiss, 1997: 153). As a result of the Industrial Revolution in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, an increase in production and competition forced advertising to enter a period of change. With the increasing technological revolutions and innovations, companies needed to reinvent the concept of consumer relations, because new inventions could create greater impact if the consumer learned of their benefits. (Marchand, 1986: 1) Roland Marchand states that, the relation between advertising agencies and corporations strengthened due to business leaders' fears concerning over-production (1986, 2). In the 1920's, with the effects of the post World War I and the existence of over production, advertising agencies solidified their role both in the market place and in the social structure.

As Marchand states; mass production requires mass demand. Advertisers played a pivotal role as communicator between producers and consumers and helped to create inflated mass demand (1986: 29). Advertisers created non-existent needs in order to cover both over-production and the demand

for new products. One of the most important factors in the development of consumer culture was the interdependent growth of capitalism and advertising. Capitalism, while providing endless products, triggered the building process of the consumer culture.

After the changing of economic, technological and thus cultural conditions the life style of consumer was elevated in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. These developments and the winds of change were simultaneous and evolved into enormous industrial growth and urban development. With the help of new machines, rapid production in every field created branded products with an overwhelming power and manufacturers learned that they could create cultural identities and demonstrate it in the advertisements instead of representing the usage and the information about the product. “Furthermore, the manufacturer of a branded product had to attract customers not only to a new type of product but also to the firm’s label, differentiating the special qualities of the brand from its competitors. (Leiss, 1997: 138) ”. As a result of the enormously wide reaching capacity of advertising a language for communication and dissemination of new cultural values was established.

Advertisers were shaping the economy not only by demonstrating the use value of the products but also with the effect of presentation and its effect on people. Psychological research and studies were opening new platforms and channels for advertising agencies to reach, touch and shape the consumers’ minds. Judith Williamson mentioned the practice of use



value that; “Ultimately advertising works in a circular movement which once set in motion is self perpetuating. It ‘works’ because it feeds off a genuine ‘use-value’ besides needing social meaning we obviously do need material goods. Advertising gives those goods a social meaning so that two needs are crossed and neither is adequately fulfilled” (1978: 14)

Leiss, Klein and Jhally examine the process of advertising in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in their book *Social Communication in Advertising*. They explain the process of modern advertising in periods. As they mentioned, the period between 1890 and 1925 was a product-oriented era. But later, the period between 1925 and 1945, including e World War II, was a time of symbolism in advertising. (1997: 153) During the late 1920s and early 1930s, photographs took the place of illustrations. The significant cause of this change was the impact of photographs on consumers. Photographs were powerful tools to give the sense of truth in that they gave the direct message about the product while informing the consumer about the use value. Leiss, Klein and Jhally state about the symbolism period that: “The experience with media changes the practice of advertising. In magazines, photography and art allow for innovations in the associational dimension of argumentation. Products are presented less and less on the basis of a performance promise, and more on making them ‘resonate’ with qualities desired by consumers – status, glamour, reduction of anxiety, happy families- as the social motivations for consumption.” (1997: 155).

During the third period of modern advertising, 1945–1965, the concept of advertising shifted to personalization. Television became a major medium for advertising. This new medium offered a path for creating the prototypical mass consumer that both brands and advertisers needed (Leiss, 1997: 155-157). The purpose of advertising became more about selling an identity and a lifestyle. Advertisements created product meaning to make consumers a certain kind of. Advertisements transformed the meaning of objects to create symbolism. Production mounted and thus the consumption was growing incredibly behind the technological developments. Meanwhile printing technologies were also climbing up to an advance stage and creating mass visions and ads. Advertising actively participated with psychology and other social disciplines.

Between 1965 and 1985, advertising entered into the market segmentation period. The medium of advertising was increased and improved enormously. Advertising entered into a period of change in order to adapt to the multi-media conditions (Leiss, 1997: 158). During the 1970s and 1980s, with the decline of communism, capitalism became more significant.

At the end of the 1980s, advertising expanded rapidly to the global market. “Eventually, American agencies came to dominate the advertising industry in countries all over the world- both developed and developing (Leiss, 1997: 170).” American business and culture with their new respectful roles, were playing a critical role in connecting the producers and the consumers

in the market from all over the world. Thus, the difficulties entering the global market, in terms of traditional differences of consumers, were handled by advertisers. The ways of homogenizing the global consumer attitudes were almost the same with the American market. "The worldwide success of McDonald's, Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola, rock music, Hollywood movies, Revlon cosmetics, Sony televisions, and Levi jeans all seem to testify to the increasing homogenization of needs in the contemporary period" (Leiss, 1997: 171)

With the unavoidable dissemination of consumer culture, advertising has become an undeniable part of our lives. While all of our news and information channels are dependent on advertisements, we are getting the information about the rest of the world through these channels.

Corporations continue to gain power at the global market level and have become economically more powerful than many countries. Corporations possess enough power and ability to control both political and social conditions. "In the post WW II era, corporations continued to gain power. They emerged, consolidated, restructured and metamorphosed into ever larger and more complex units of resource extraction, production, distribution and marketing, to the point where many of them became economically more powerful than many countries. In 1997, fifty-one of the world's hundred largest economies were corporations, not countries. The top five hundred corporations controlled 42 percent of the world's wealth"

(Lasn, 2000: 69). While the power centers of the world changed from governments to corporations, the target of the anti-capitalists was renewed.

## **2.2 CULTURE JAMMING**

In the 1960's French avant-garde artists and intellectuals created a movement, called Situationism, which critiqued all aspects of capitalism. Situationists became known as the first postmodern culture revolutionaries. Situationists believed that each person holds responsibility for creating any given situation, but that their actions generally fall into two categories of behavior; normal or risky. They believed in vandalism and saw sabotage as a way of destroying capitalism and its outputs (Lasn, 2000: 100).

The most significant figure; Guy Debord explained Situationism in his article *The Situationists and the New Forms of Action in Art and Politics*; "The Situationist Movement can be seen as an artistic avant-garde, as an experimental investigation of possible ways for freely constructing everyday life, and as a contribution to the theoretical and practical development of a new revolutionary contestation. From now on, any fundamental cultural creation, as well as any qualitative transformation of society, is contingent on the continued development of this sort of interrelated approach (1963)." He explained the state of the consumer society in his book *Society of the Spectacle* by stating that everything has been commodified in the world, that

there is an illusion about freedom of choice because the system has produced homogenized consumers and thus demands.

Subsequent anarchist movements were inspired by the Situationists and their creative, modern, cultural critiques. Today's anarchist movements against media and consumer culture have the heritage of Situationism. Culture Jamming is one of the new forms of consumer society critique.. Although Culture Jamming has the traces of Situationism, both economic and political exchange affects the target of activist movements. Naomi Klein explains the move from Situationism to Culture Jamming as;

“It was Guy Debord and the Situationists, the muses and theorists of the theatrical student uprising of Paris, May 1968, who first articulated the power of a simple *detournement*, defined as an image, message or artifact lifted out of its context to create a new meaning. But though culture jammers borrow liberally from the avant-garde art movements of the past –from Dada and Surrealism to Conceptualism and Situationism- the canvas these art revolutionaries were attacking tended to be the art world and its passive culture of spectatorship, as well as the anti-pleasure ethos of mainstream capitalist society. For many French students in the late sixties, the enemy was the rigidity and conformity of the Company Man; the company itself proved markedly less engaging. So where Situationist Asger Jorn hurled paint at pastoral paintings bought at flea markets, today's culture jammers prefer to hack into corporate advertising and other avenues of corporate speech. And if the culture jammers' messages are more

pointedly political than their predecessors', that may be because what were indeed subversive messages in the sixties –“Never Work,” “It is Forbidden to Forbid,” “Take Your Desires for Reality”- now sound more like Sprite or Nike slogans: Just Feel It.” (2000: 283)

Tim Jordan mentions that, cultural codes are created and spread through advertisements to create demand for products. Corporations and states control these cultural codes to create an identity, lifestyle and human needs that serve them. Culture Jamming attempts to collapse the meaning of these cultural codes (2002, 102).

Culture Jamming includes many organizations and individuals. Both organizations and individuals have different ways of criticism. Christine Harold mentions different Culture Jamming organizations that have different ways to act in her article and include Barbie Liberation Organization (BLO), Artmark, Biotic Baking Brigade (BBB) etc.

BLO is a group of Culture jammers who fight against gender stereotypes. In 1989 BLO organized a jamming attempt addressing gender stereotypes through Barbie and military action figure G. I. Joe. Both Barbie and G. I. Joe have voice boxes that are programmed to say random phrases when a button on their back is pressed. Barbie's phrases are “Math class is though”, “I love shopping” and “Will we ever have enough clothes” which serve to creating a female stereotype. On the other hand G. I. Joe's phrases represent the male stereotype and are “Eat lead, Cobra”, “Dead men tell no

lies” and “Vengeance is mine”. BLO bought hundreds of each doll and switched their voices to identify the gender stereotyping in children’s toys (Harold; 2004, 198).



**Figure 1:** Bill Gates with the pie into the face.  
Source: <http://www.bitstorm.org/gates>

BBB heaves pie into the faces of their target; Microsoft founder Bill Gates (Figure 1), CEO of Chevron Kenneth Derr, World Trade Organization Chief, Renato Ruggiero and etc. The aim BBB is to also fight against the dominant power and its outputs. They use a pie to show that they are not agreeing with what their targets are doing. Rahula Janowski from BBB explains their choice of weapon as a pie that “Pie is an example that you don’t have to revere someone just because they’re more powerful than you...Pie is a great equalizer. How wealthy and powerful are you with pie dripping off your face?” (Harold; 2004, 201). As shown, Culture Jamming has diverse ways to subvert

the corporations, but the focus point of this thesis is advertisement oriented culture jamming.

AdBusters is the activist magazine which is known by its subvertisements has been publishing since 1989. The editor and the founder of AdBusters magazine Kalle Lasn explains the magazines aim and vision in his book *Culture Jam*; “We call ourselves culture jammers. We’re a loose global network of media activists who see ourselves as the advance shock troops of the most significant social movement of the next twenty years. Our aim is to topple existing power structures and forge major adjustments to the way we live in the twenty-first century.” (2000: xi)

AdBusters is the activist magazine which known by its subvertisements has been published since 1989 by Adbusters Media Foundation. Klein explains Adbusters according to their self-describers “house organ” of Culture Jamming. Adbusters is the most well-known Culture Jamming organization and has subscribers from 60 different countries. Adbusters produces social marketing campaigns annually that include; Buy Nothing Day and TV Turnoff Week and reach supporters from all over the world. Adbusters also uses its website to reach people for inspiring them to be a participant instead of a spectator (Adbusters; 2005). Adbusters Media Foundation mentions that “We are a global network of artists, activists, writers, pranksters, students, educators and entrepreneurs who want to advance the new social activist movement of the information age. Our aim is to topple existing power



structures and forge a major shift in the way we will live in the 21st century (Adbusters; 2005).”

Advertising mediums rapidly increase and change. Advertisers will take advantage of any free space for their messages. Culture Jammers emphasize that streets are public spaces but they are full of messages of corporations that people never asked to see. So those people should have the right to attach their own messages to the corporate ones. “It’s time to take public spaces back from corporations” (Klein, 2000: 280). The Billboard Liberation Front is an organization that deconstructs the billboards. They explain their reason for choosing billboards as targets in their manifesto on their official web site. Billboard Liberation Front states that, all types of media are escapable except Billboards. People can maintain their every day life without using TV, radio, newspaper etc. However billboards are inescapable to anyone who walks on the streets. The actual definition of communication would include dialogue but now people are exposed to the one-sided messages of corporations and advertisers in the name of communication. For this reason, the BLF aims to obtain personal billboards for every citizen. They believe that everyone has the right to declare his/her own messages just as advertisers do.

Subvertisers, who makes ad deconstructions, apply the same methods of advertisers; creativity, rhetoric, design and technology. They explain this similarity using a ‘jujitsu’ metaphor. Jujitsu is a martial art that uses the

enemy's acceleration to subvert it like as subverters do. One of the good examples of this metaphor is the exchange of Joe Camel to Joe Chemo (Klein, 2000: 282).



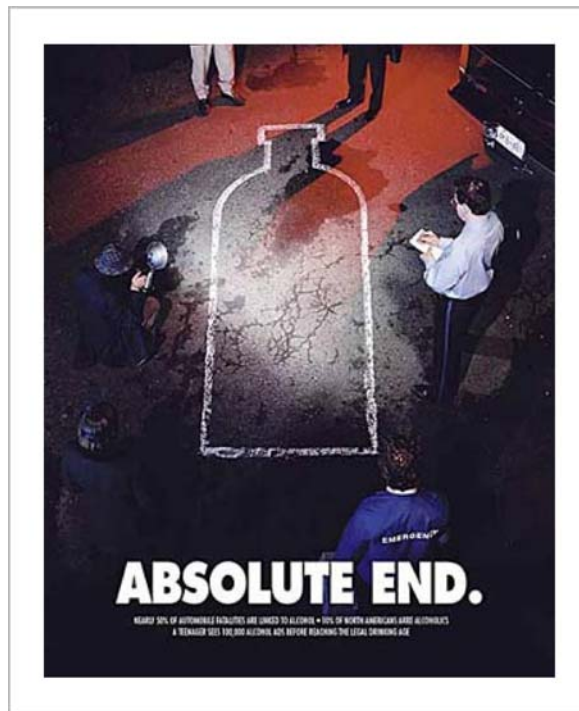
**Figure 2:** Joe Camel - Camel Lights Advertisement.  
Source: <http://www.bambootrading.com/1300/1385.jpg>

**Figure 3:** Joe Chemo – Culture Jamming work of Camel  
Source: <http://adbusters.org/spoofads/tobacco/jc1/>

Joe Camel is used to create an identity for Camel smokers. He is a cool and athletic guy. Jammers exchange cool Joe Camel with sick Joe Chemo to show that smoking is not a cool thing. Joe Camel is subverted by Joe Chemo. Furthermore, changing the word Camel to Chemo overlapped both words. It is the rhetoric exchange which is one of the significant dimensions of Culture Jamming. Thus Joe Camel started to refer to Joe Chemo proving

a strong success for jammers and consequently an example of how jammers utilize their enemy's act to subvert it just as jujitsu does.

Advertising oriented Culture Jamming has two significant tools; visual and verbal. Turning “Joe Camel” to “Joe Chemo” or changing the slogan of Absolut to “Absolute End” represents the rhetoric plane of Culture Jamming. Christine Harold, discusses culture jamming from the rhetoric point of view in her article *Pranking Rhetoric: ‘Culture Jamming’ as Media Activism*. She summarizes the aim of the essay; “I explore the rhetorical strategies of an alternative sort of culture jammer—the prankster—who resists less through negating and opposing dominant rhetorics than by playfully and provocatively folding existing cultural forms in on themselves. The prankster performs an art of rhetorical jujitsu, in an effort to redirect the resources of commercial media toward new ends” (2004: 191). Advertisements became a tool of social control by telling us what makes our life better. While creating stereotypes, icons and products by utilizing social sciences possibilities, they also create their own language. Jammers deconstruct the text of the advertisements to figure out the fact about the product.



**Figure 4:** Absolute End – Culture Jamming work of Absolut  
Source: <http://adbusters.org/spoofads/alcohol/absolutend/>

Matthew Soar examines the intersection between graphic design and culture jamming at his article: *The First Things First Manifesto and the Politics of Culture Jamming*. The *First Things First Manifesto* was declared in 1964 as a response to increasing consumer culture. Then in 1999, it was renewed and signed by 33 people who are today's American and European designers, art directors and writers. The manifesto mentions the discomfort of graphic designers, art directors and writers in regards to their professional conditions and stresses their social responsibilities.

Graphic designers create the visual component of advertisements, a vital side of ads, and thus act as the foot soldiers of capitalism. The designers are

not the decision makers in the process. Although graphic design is a tool of advertising, its aim is not to sell but to communicate. The context of work designates the situation of graphic design; it can either serve for capitalism or not. The struggle against capitalism and its social reflection – (consumer culture is visual image oriented - puts designers in a significant position. They can work for capitalism or to change the world (Soar, 2002: 583).

Culture jamming targets the capitalist system, a system which deceives the world with nonexistent needs, truths, threats, produced identities, values, and feelings through the tools of communication. Although communication seems to be gaining importance in society, this is really just an illusion because the reality is that it is a one sided monolog. The capitalist system has infiltrated all the spaces around us; the streets, TVs, radios, newspapers, magazines, internet, schools, governments, houses and our minds.

“The critical issues of our time are neither Left nor Right, neither male nor female, neither black nor white. The challenge for new millennium activists is to find the courage to let go of all their orthodoxies, ‘isms’ and sacred cows, and to commit to ‘ruthless criticism of all that exists’ And after that, the big challenge is to bring revolutionary consciousness and contestation back into the modern world by standing up and boldly announcing to the world what Parisian rebels declared some thirty years ago ‘We will wreck this world’ (Lasn, 2000: 121).”

Jordan defines culture jamming as semiotic terrorism. According to him, the act of culture jamming occurs in the sign system. The power of semiotic terrorism depends on using same language with its enemy (2002: 102).

As mentioned above, the act of Culture Jamming is based on utilizing the momentum already built up by the target. Culture Jammers' targets are primarily politically incorrect corporations and their mediums of communication. In this context, advertising oriented Culture Jamming's target can be defined as corporations and their communication medium; advertising. Advertising creates signs, symbols and stereotypes to manipulate consumers. So, Culture Jammers use the same tools as advertisers to subvert the advertisements.

Semiotic theory is an efficient plane to understand the methods of both advertising and Culture Jamming. Semiotic theory is a philosophical theory of signs and symbols that both sides manipulate, utilizing the same means for achieving different ends.

## **2.3 IDEOLOGY and PROPOGANDA**

Even if today's ideology is simply regarded as a person or a group's beliefs or ideas, the term ideology was developed in the Marxist tradition. The term ideology was primarily used to highlight how cultures are structured in ways that enable the group holding power to have the maximum control with the minimum conflict. The nature of ideology holds that the dominant institutions in society work through the values and conceptions of the world. In order to keep consistency in the whole system, the system itself defines and implements the social adaptation procedure and simply states the ideas and styles and how the world works or should work. The vision donated by ideology to the individual and the world is not the only way of looking at things but becomes a systematic and natural selection system in which the power is distributed socially (Branston, 1996: 117).

The spreading of information and ideas in a manner to make others accept them is referred to as propoganda. Propaganda can be defined as a style or a particular, planned kind of discourse to make its audience believe in something. It is generally used by politicians in a systematic and organized manner to make their voters believe what they say. Propaganda generally urges political positions such as, voting for a particular party (Branston, 1996: 117). Branston also mentions that the methods of propoganda are quite similar to advertising.

Although both ideology and propaganda terms often refer to politics, the exchange of power centre also affects these terms' contents. While at the time of WWII, ideology represented political formations such as; fascism or communism and both sides used propaganda as a tool for affecting their nations. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is only one side that is generally concerned about the white western men. Now, ideology refers to economic politics which serve global brands. Propaganda is defined as the advertisements that spread out the ideology of dominant power.

Although Culture Jammers act against the ideology of dominant power throughout their propaganda, they do not define themselves with any -isms. Kalle Lasn defines Culture Jammers as media activists whose aim is to destroy existing power structures. He also declares that this is "the most significant social movement of next twenty years" (2000: xi). Culture Jammers do not offer a new ideology instead of an existing one, they just struggle to identify the facts behind the granted.



### **3. SEMIOTICAL FRAMEWORK OF ACT OF CULTURE JAMMING**

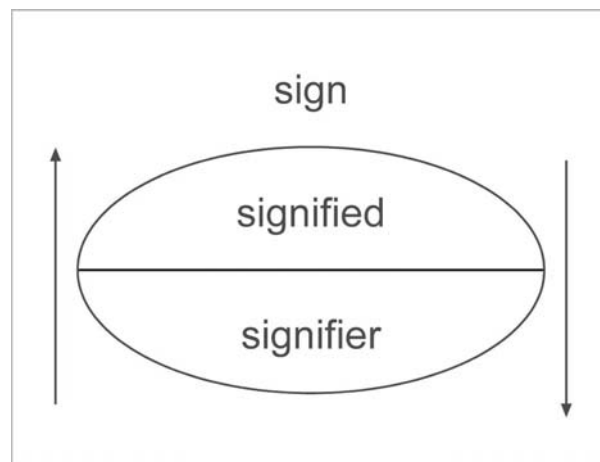
Semiotic studies analyze the role of signs as part of social life. It defines the nature of signs and their working process to produce meanings (Chandler, 1994). Semiotics undertakes the world as a system of relations. It analyzes these relations to figure out what lies beyond what is taken for granted.

There are two major figures in the early development of Semiotics; Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and American philosopher C. S. Peirce. Saussure's main concern was language and he based his approach on the foundations of linguistics. Saussure emphasized the relationship between the units of sign system. Peirce's approach is based on logic and reasoning (Chandler, 1994). Peirce is often quoted for his distinctions between different kinds of signs. He invented the terms icon, index and symbol to identify various kinds of signs. Apart from Saussure and Peirce, Roland Barthes is also a significant figure of Semiotics. His works have influenced the spread of semiotics as a major approach to cultural studies. His concept of myth brought an especially new dimension to semiotics. Dery states that Culture jammers often utilize "guerilla" semiotics as; "analytical techniques not unlike those employed by scholars to decipher the signs and symbols that constitute a culture's secret language, what literary theorist Roland Barthes called 'systems of signification' (2004)."

In order to understand the act of both advertising and Culture Jamming, Saussure's relational approach and Barthes' myth concept are appropriate.

### **3.1 FERDINAND de SAUSSURE**

For Saussure, language is the most important sign system and plays a key role in constructing reality (Chandler, 1994). Saussure defined the basic unit of semiotic 'sign' as being composed of signifier and signified. He declares that the sign is arbitrary and does not mean anything by itself. The meaning of sign appears through its relation with other signs, hence the meaning of sign is designated by social conventions (Chandler, 1994). Moreover, Saussure defines 'Signifier' as the form/ image that the sign takes and 'signified' as the concept that it refers to (Fiske, 1990: 44). He also emphasizes that the relation between signifier and signified is also arbitrary, there is no natural link between them. The relation between signifier and signified is referred to as signification. This is a conventional relationship (Chandler, 1994).



**Figure 4:** Ferdinand de Saussure's diagram

Source: <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/S4B/sem02.html>

Saussure also mentioned that; “the sign consists of physical form plus an associated mental concept, and that this concept is in turn an apprehension of external reality. The sign relates to reality only through the concepts of the people who use it (Fiske, 1990: 41). According to Saussure, signs only made sense as part of a formal, generalized and abstract system. The meaning concept was purely structural and relational for him rather than referential: Primacy is given to relationships rather than to things. For Saussure, signs were referring primarily to each other (Chandler, 1994). He focused on the relation of signs with the other signs. “Within the language system ‘everything depends on relations’. No sign makes sense on its own but only in relation to other signs. Both signifier and signified are purely relational entities” (Saussure qtd. in Chandler).

Saussure focuses on linguistic signs composed of sound patterns and concepts. The relation between sound patterns and concepts are entirely arbitrary and conventional. This relation can be examined with Saussure's tree example. The concept and the sound of tree do not have a natural link. The link between them is just cultural; the sound of tree differs in other languages. In the system of written signs, words signify a sound rather than a concept. For instance the 't' letter of tree signifies the sound not the concept. Each language uses different words for the same things. In this context, he describes the structure of language and how it produces meaning by two distinguished terms; 'La Langue' and 'Parole'. 'La Langue' is the language system that includes the structure and grammar. It is the social dimension of the language. On the other hand, 'Parole' is an individual act of speech (Branston: 1999: 7).

Saussure uses the term 'value' for which the 'sign' is designated by its relation with other signs within the system. Consequently he equates value and meaning (Chandler, 1994). Saussure makes a distinction between signification and value. He declares that; "Whilst *signification* - what is signified - clearly depends on the relationship between the two parts of the sign, the *value* of a sign is determined by the relationships between the sign and other signs within the system as a whole"(Saussure qtd. in Chandler). Thus, signification happens at the level of language, however value is produced at the level of parole. Saussure also gives an example to clarify the difference between signification and value;

“The French word *mouton* may have the same meaning as the English word *sheep*; but it does not have the same value. There are various reasons for this, but in particular the fact that the English word for the meat of this animal, as prepared and served for a meal, is not *sheep* but *mutton*” (Saussure qtd. in Chandler).

This example is also explanatory for the terms ‘La Langue’ and ‘Parole’.

Saussure identifies two directions of differential relations between signs; ‘Paradigm’ and ‘Syntagm’. Fiske explains these two terms as follows; “... a paradigm is a set of signs from which the one to be used is chosen” and “A syntagm is the message into which the chosen signs are combined” (1990: 56). In language, the vocabulary can be stated as the paradigm. Also, the sentences can be indicated as a syntagm. As a result, the entire messages involve the selection (from a paradigm) and the combination (into syntagm) (Fiske, 1990: 56).

Paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations between signs are important to understand the act of Culture Jamming. Advertising uses both visual and verbal paradigms. These paradigms include desirable concepts such as; intelligence, beauty, freedom, power, fun and etc. Each advertisement is a syntagm of visual or verbal signifiers. Culture Jamming undertakes an advertisement and makes a syntagmatic exchange on it. This syntagmatic

exchange causes a paradigmatic shift. Consequently, Culture Jamming subverts the original advertisement by using its own notions.

Saussure's theories about the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations just clarify sign's working process. "He did not really envisage meaning as being a process of negotiation between writer/ reader and text. He emphasized the text, not the way in which the signs in the text interact with the cultural and personal experience of the user (and it is not important here to distinguish between writer and reader), more the way that the conventions in the text interact with the conventions experienced and expected by the user. It was Saussure's follower Roland Barthes who first set up a systematic model by which this negotiating, interacting idea of meaning could be analysed." (Fiske, 1990: 85).

### **3.2 ROLAND BARTHES**

Barthes had worked on the theory of semiotic, following Saussure and Peirce. *Mythologies* and Barthes's other works is partially responsible for spreading semiotic as a major approach to the cultural studies at late 1960s (Chandler, 1994). His significant feature as a semiologist is making every aspect of life a subject of semiology. According to him, fashion, history, gastronomy etc. are also communication tools that have signifiers and signifieds (Culler, 1990: 75). Although Barthes' concepts and approaches are

related to their own times, many of them are still effective in analyzing cultural texts and reading practices (McNeil, 1996).

Fiske mentioned that; Barthes dealt with the capitalist society of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (1990). Barthes focused on the meanings of the things which surround us in our everyday lives. Ideology, sign and reading practices are the main concepts of Barthes's works. These three concepts have always interacted with each other (Chandler, 1994). He challenged the granted things and usual practices of everyday life and cultural texts to figure out the secondary meanings. Barthes' guiding idea about the theory of semiotic is the distinction between denotation and connotation (McNeil, 1996).

Barthes defined two signification systems; denotation is the first one. It refers to first order signifying system as literal and obvious meaning. Denotation dispatches the common sense; the natural meaning of the sign. Connotation which is a guiding concept of Barthes's semiotic theory refers to second order signifying system. It depicts the interaction between sign and cultural values to the audience (Fiske, 1990: 90).

According to Barthes, the most significant point about connotation is the signifier of the first order. The signifier of the first order becomes a sign of the connotation. In short, the signifier of the denotation becomes a sign of connotation. He stated that the distinction between denotation and connotation is clear with photography. Denotation is the reproduction of the object that is photographed; on the other hand connotation is the decision

process when the photograph is taken. It means; what is photographed is denotation and how it is photographed is connotation. He defines connotation with the operation of ideology that he also called “myth”. The operation of signs at the second order has three ways, connotation is one of them and “myth” is the second one, Barthes declares. He also mentioned that mythology is a special system which is established throughout its former sign chain (Fiske, 1990:91).

In *Mythologies*, Barthes investigated the ideology of bourgeoisie and displayed a concept of “myth” after he had taken a closer look at the implicit supplementary meanings and connotations. Myth generally refers to stories about superhuman beings of ancient Greece, but it also refers to fictitious things. Barthes used the term myth as constructed representations, meanings of manipulation that are taken for granted as natural and real. Fiske mentions that according to Barthes, myth is a cultural way of thinking, conceptualization and understanding (Fiske, 1990: 92).

Jonathan Culler states that Barthes has always been interested in history. His interest grew out of the desire to understand the present condition. He believed that history exposes the ideology of culture which can help to understand present circumstances. Barthes mentioned that History and Nature have opposite roles, one exposes and the other purifies. (Culler, 1990: 33) Barthes suggested that the function of myth is transforming history into nature. Myths hide their own roots and consequently their political and social dimensions. Barthes believed that myths established by the dominant



ideology are based on class. He suggested that language is class dominated and under the protection of the dominant ideology. Barthes illustrates that literal sources are not distributed more equally than economic sources and in fact, there is a power of manipulation through the reproduction and spread of dominant ideology. Advertising, schools, popular music, news, sports and etc are the mediums of diffusion and naturalization for dominant ideology (Fiske, 1990: 93). Myths reproduce the same meanings again and again thus, they all become a usual part of everyday life. Although myths are seen as a part of everyday life, politically they can be used to spread dominant ideology (McNeil, 1996). Image and text are generally used together in news and advertisings. Barthes used the term anchorage to define texts that are used under the photographs for explanation. He defined the function of anchorage as ideological denomination (Fiske, 1990: 120). It manipulates the reader with the implied significance of the photographs, consequently strengthening ideology through double emphasis.

Myth's function is not hiding the realities but transforming them into the path of dominant ideology and making them natural and common sense. Daniel Chandler explains the nature of myth in this way, "In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions... Things appear to mean something by themselves" (1994). Fiske states that; myths are dynamic, they are not stable but they indicate evolutionary changes instead of revolutionary (1990: 95).

Myths reflect the changes of society and culture. They mirror process and often they start the first movements of change. Consequently, the changing process can be controlled. This is also a naturalization process.

Tony McNeil mentioned that the concept of ideology of Terry Eagleton is quite similar to the Barthes's concept of 'myth'. Eagleton defines ideology in this way;

“A dominant power may legitimate itself by *promoting* beliefs and values congenial to it; *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable; *denigrating* ideas which might challenge it; *excluding* rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and *obscuring* social reality in ways convenient to itself. Such 'mystification', as it is commonly known, frequently takes the form of masking or suppressing social conflicts, from which arises the conception of ideology as an imaginary resolution of real contradictions. “(1996)

Barthes mentions “what is ideology” at his book, *The Pleasure of Text*. He illustrates ideology in this way; “It is precisely the idea *insofar as it dominates*: ideology can only be dominant. Correct as it is to speak of an 'ideology of the dominant class,' because there is certainly a dominated class, it is quite inconsistent to speak of a 'dominant ideology,' because there is no dominated ideology: where the 'dominated are concerned, there is nothing, no ideology, unless it is precisely-and this is the last degree of alienation- the

ideology they are forced to borrow from class that dominates them (Barthes, 1975: 32).” Both Eagleton’s and Barthes’ explanations show that the line between myth and ideology is blurred in many cases. Myth is the instrument of the ideology that also feeds its roots.

Barthes also mentioned that there is no escape from either the myth or the ideology of everyday life. Although ideology dominates everyday life by producing myths, the mythologist can figure out the artificial constructions by analyzing the signs and its chain. According to Barthes, the role of the mythologist is to expose the hidden history and socio-political process of myth (Fiske, 1990: 93). Barthes stated that analyzing everyday life and figuring out the myths is not enough, signs must be destroyed. In fact, Culler mentioned that after the publication of *Mythologies*, myths gained more freedom. The demystification makes myths more desirable. Culler notes Barthes’ explanation of how cultural mechanism functions in literature; “...the most resolutely anti-literary movement does not destroy literature but becomes in turn a new school of literature“(1990: 39). As it is seen, system naturalizes the critiques also. Ideology allows contrary attitudes to exist by encompassing them in its plane. Consequently, they lose their power. At this point, Barthes’ photography concepts become helpful in understanding the way of the mythologist.

The approach of Barthes to photographs at *Camera Lucida* is different than the *Mythologies*. Although Barthes has undertaken the analysis of photographs in different ways throughout his working process, his works

have consistency and continuity. He states that what we see is not a photograph, but what it represents, as it simply shows the things it cannot be the signifier (Inal, 2003: 23). Barthes put forth two terms; Studium and Punctum. Studium is coded and granted, practices of myths, but punctum is subjective experience and this hits the audience. Barthes states that Studium represents the myths of the photographer and the function of those myths is reconciling the photograph with the audience (2000: 43). Punctum is not related to the myths and ideology behind it. Although punctum is most likely outside of the photographers' intention, it can give an influence to the mythologist about how s/he creates a plane far from the dominance of ideology.

In 1973, Barthes' approach to denotation and connotation shifted. Barthes came to understand that "denotation is not the first meaning, but pretends to be so; under this illusion, it is ultimately no more than the last of the connotations (Chandler, 1994)." Daniel Chandler gives place to Kaja Silverman's thoughts about denotation which are parallel with Barthes'. Silverman states that denotation is another connotation. Thus, denotation can not be evaluated as a common sense, natural meaning because it is just an illusion of connotation. And Silverman noted; "According to an Althusserian reading, when we first learn denotations, we are also being positioned within ideology by learning dominant connotations at the same time (Chandler, 1994)."

Barthes declared in his book, *The Semiotic Challenge* that advertising is a message. Like every other messages, it has a signifier and a signified.

Barthes also emphasized the role of advertising. He believed that advertising promotes myths by creating symbols, stereotypes to alienate the images of the bourgeoisie. He gave an example to explain the structure of advertising in his book. One of his examples is the advertising of Astra Oils. Its slogan is "Cook Gold with Astra". Barthes explained the semiotic plane of this advertising as;

"The first message (the order is arbitrary) is constituted by the sentence taken (if it were possible) in its literalness, setting aside, precisely, its advertising intention; in order to isolate this first message, we need merely imagine... someone from another world...he will take it as a literal command to prepare food, and as an indisputable assurance that the food thus prepared will have as its result substance related to the metal known as gold" (Barthes, 1994: 174).

The second message is the uniqueness of signified which is always the same in all advertising messages; the perfection of the product. When the second message is perceived, the aim of the advertising is achieved. The signifier of the second message is the sign of the first message. Thus, the second message becomes a connotation of the first one. It seems like the second message is hidden beneath the first one but the fact is just the contrary. Barthes explained the reason that; "In advertising, what must be explained,

on the contrary, is the role of the message: buy Astra? We might no doubt reply (and this is perhaps the viewpoint of the ad writers) that denotation helps to develop certain arguments, in short to persuade; but it is more likely that the first message serves more subtly to naturalize the second” (1994: 176).

Barthes has worked on diverse concepts that intersect each other in many cases. If everyday life is analyzed deeply, it is easy to see how dominant ideology establishes its structure. Barthes’ approach to reading practices can be an efficient guide while analyzing the cultural forms. His diverse concepts and point of view offer a window to multidimensional analysis. Although today’s mechanism of cultural form, politics, technology and everyday life are different from his days, Barthes’ concepts are still effective.

Barthes’ myth concept unveils the act of advertising and its signification planes. Moreover, his relational approaches to dominant power and myths create a path to understand the act of Culture Jamming. Culture Jamming also struggles against the dominant power and its outputs throughout advertising. Barthes’ two planes of signification become a base of Culture Jamming for subverting myths. When the jujitsu metaphor is considered, these planes refer to the act of enemy. In other words, myths are used to harness the acceleration of the enemy, which Culture Jamming then utilizes for its acts subvertising. Furthermore, Culture Jamming creates a third plane during its act. The detailed analysis of the act of Culture Jamming is undertaken in the next chapter.

#### **4. SEMIOTIC ANALYSIS OF CULTURE JAMMING WORKS**

Culture jamming has diverse ways for subversion. In this study, advertising oriented Culture Jamming works are undertaken for analysis. Global brands such as Coca Cola and Nike spread their messages through their corporate identities and advertisements. They produce an artificial reality by creating and spreading language specific to their product. While advertisers produce codes to manipulate the consumers, Culture Jammers decode their products to figure out the “real” behind that which is taken for granted.

The Culture jamming works against Coca Cola and Nike were chosen for semiotic analysis in this study. Coca Cola and Nike are two of the best-known brands worldwide. These brands are also known to have politically incorrect attitudes which make them the target of Culture Jammers. Nike is known for the negative conditions at its factories (often referred to as sweatshops). Nike’s suppliers are generally located at foreign countries where the labour force is cheap, such as Vietnam, Taiwan, Mexico, China, South Korea and Indonesia etc. The company often moves factories to different locations when employees in current locations get organized and demand better conditions. Moreover Nike also employs children which is illegal in western culture (Micheletti, 2004: 9). Coca Cola is another company which has received unfavorable fame for the poor working conditions of its employees. The company’s Colombia factory faces extreme issues as workers complain about kidnapping, torture and murder. There are

campaigns against these circumstances in Colombia which are also continued through web sites such as; [cokewatch.org](http://cokewatch.org) and [killercoke.org](http://killercoke.org). Naomi Klein states in her book "*No Logo*" that there have been assertions made about a relationship between the Coca Cola Company and the Nigerian illegitimate military regime (2000: 404). In these cases the Corporations have strayed too far from the images created through advertisements.

Culture Jamming works firstly to erode the chosen target and its language by digressing it from its usual and secure plane. While the contradiction between message and the medium is shown, the mediator becomes a focus point of the discussion (Jordan, 2002: 104).



## 4.1 COCA COLA & CAPITALISM



**Figure 6:** Logotype of Coca Cola

Source: [http://thematking.com/business\\_industry/industrial/enterprise/righttip.jpg](http://thematking.com/business_industry/industrial/enterprise/righttip.jpg)

**Figure 7:** Culture Jamming work of Coca Cola

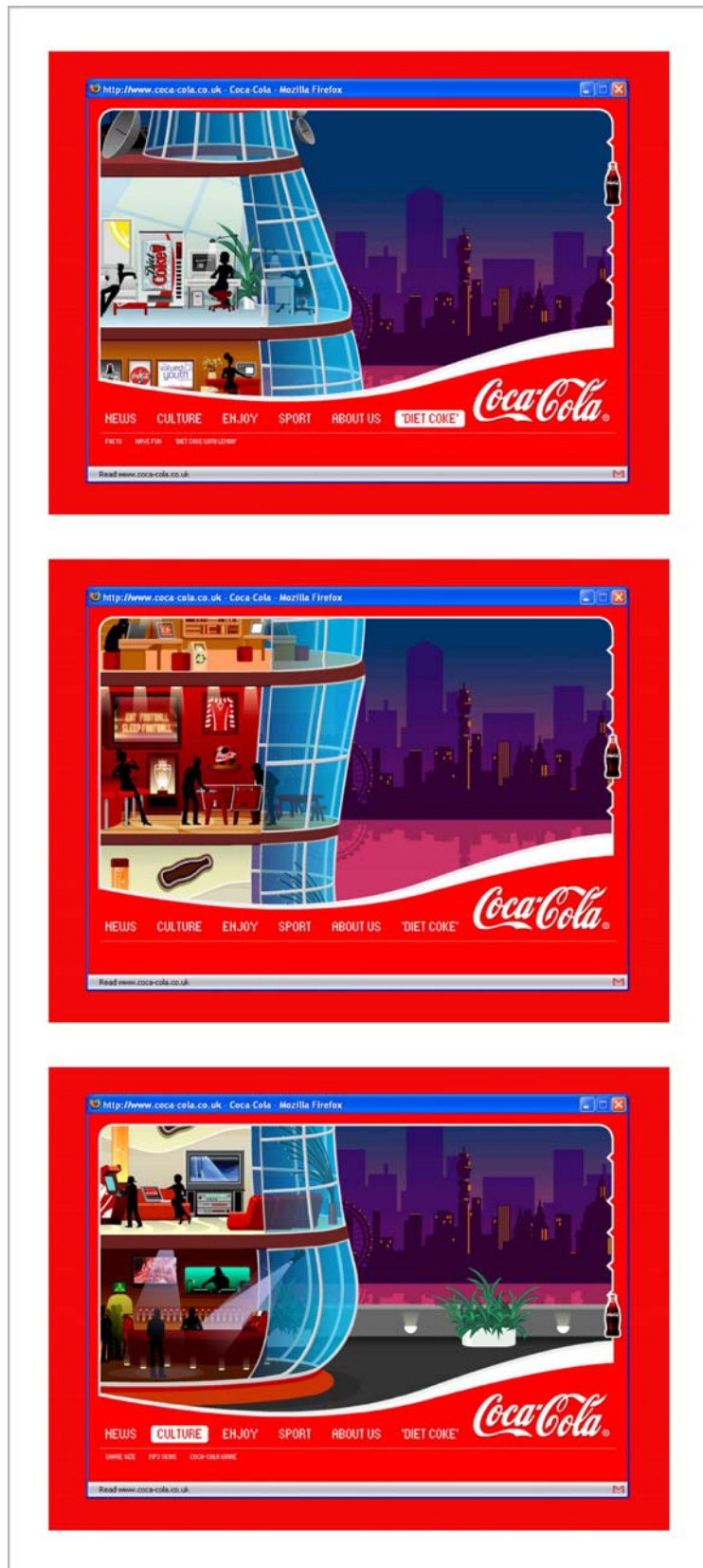
Source: <http://www.answers.com/topic/subvertise-png>

The Coca-Cola Company has used the same logotype since 1886; in fact it was only retouched during these years. The foreground and background colors were shifted; the logotype became italic and was made smoother. It has been used for more than a hundred years and thus is one of the most well known logos in the world (Blue, 2003). The usage of the color red is quite common in the food sector. Red is firstly the most recognizable color. Apart from this feature, it is also a dominant color. In this context, Coca Cola's second color choice, white, is understandable. While the red background attracts the attention, white logotype is more perceptible. This color combination is very suitable for a product sold on the shelves. In the

Coca-Cola jamming example; Capitalism becomes the new subvertisements and, the same color scheme is utilized.

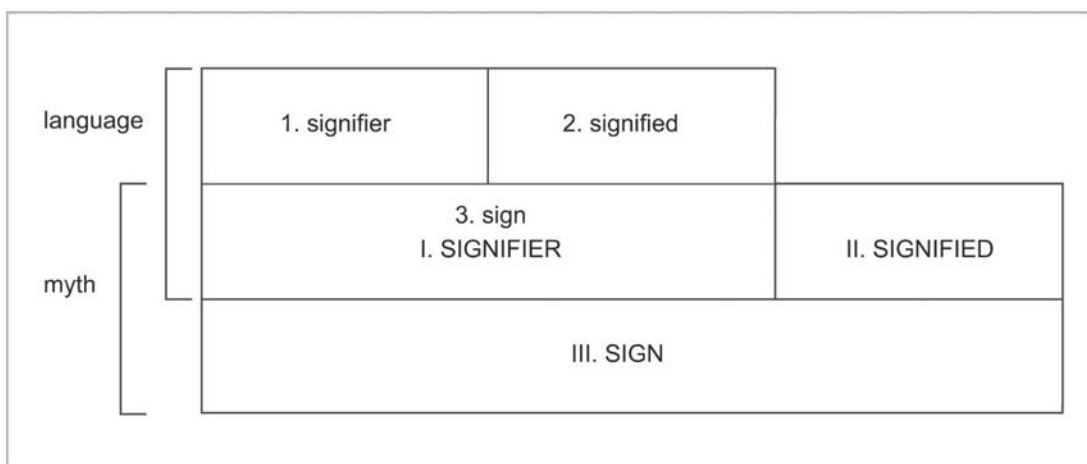
Another important feature is that the typeface of Coca-Cola is also quite recognizable. It is unique and was designed just for this brand. It carries the effect of Victorian style, the common style of the 19th century. Victorian style has organic and curvilinear forms that the typeface of Coca-Cola carries. The historical heritage of the Coca-Cola logotype also strengthens the brand's effect. Both a hundred years repetition and the old style structure make the logo distinguishable. At the jamming example, like color usage, typography is the same with the original one. As it is mentioned before, each jamming example, jammers pay attention to make the advert as close as possible to the original. This approach is the most significant feature of Culture Jamming.

Apart from the design perspective, Coca-Cola has produced meaning through advertisements and slogans; "Delicious and Refreshing", "It's the Real Thing", "Coke Adds Life", "Have a Coke and Smile", "Always Coca-Cola", "Enjoy Coca-Cola", "Life Tastes Good". These slogans represent that Coca-Cola makes life easier, happy, fun and a life without Coca-Cola is meaningless. Figure 8 includes the screen shots of Coca-Cola's web site that they present a life style instead of a product. In this Coca-Cola jam, the message of the jammers is given through rhetoric. Exchanging "Enjoy Coca-Cola" with "Enjoy Capitalism" by using the same visual language shifted the meaning plane.



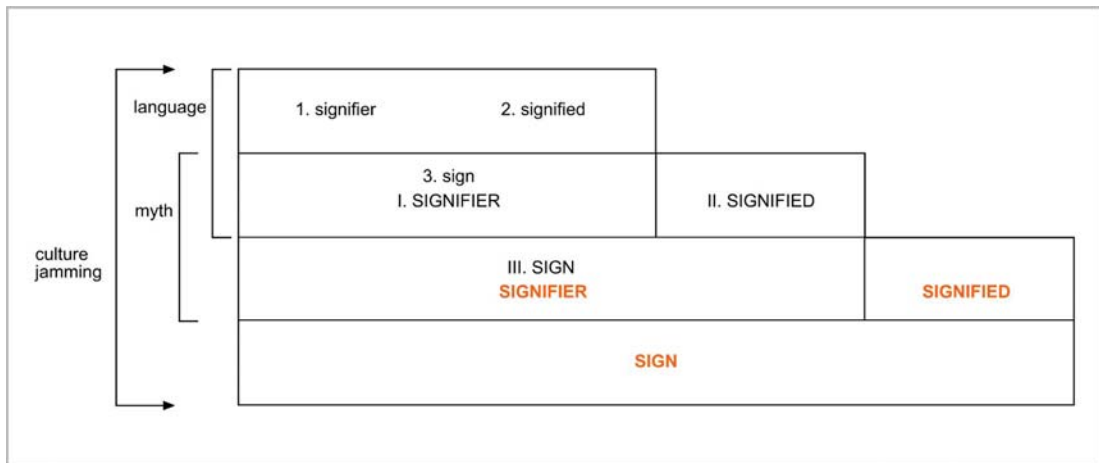
**Figure 8:** Web Site of Coca Cola  
Source: <http://www.coca-cola.co.uk>

From the perspective of semiotic theory, the Coca-Cola logotype can be examined within the Barthes approach. The schema explaining the Barthes myth concept is also suitable for explaining the Coca Cola example. In the first plane, the formal structure which includes typography, color and the motto; “Enjoy Coca Cola” signifies the fun of life with Cola. First plane also refers to denotation. In the second plane, the sign of first plane becomes a signifier of the myth system. In this context, first plane signifies that if you drink Cola, you can enter this fine life, you can be a part of it. Cola creates an identity throughout advertisements so the logotype signifies this way of living. According to Barthes, the denotation is not a first meaning, it is just the last of the connotations which pretends to be a natural meaning (Chandler, 1994). In this Cola case, the fun of life with Cola is the last of connotations.



**Figure 9:** Roland Barthes' two order signification system  
Source: Barthes 2003, 184

The Culture Jamming example; “Enjoy Capitalism” uses the mythical sign system of Coca Cola. It sticks to the formal structure of Coca Cola example the usage of color and typography are the same as the original one. In fact, writing Capitalism instead of Coca Cola with the same style creates a syntagmatic change. Moreover, this syntagmatic exchange causes a paradigmatic exchange in meaning. This example transcribes the idea behind the myth of Coca-Cola. While jamming example collapses the myth of Coca-Cola, it also uses the components that create the myth. Culture Jamming examples use two planes of Coca Cola examples as signifier. The fun of life with Cola and being a part of this life become a signifier of the jamming example. However, this signifier signifies another concept; Capitalism. In this case, a paradigmatic change occurs. Culture Jamming acts like the mythical plane to subvert myth. This duplication of mythical act creates a third plane in which myth is collapsed by additional signified. The signified of third plane; Capitalism shows the economic policy and exploitation which are the main attitude of the corporation. This attitude is contrary with the myth’s signified; fun of life.



**Figure 10:** Diagram of Culture Jamming's act

The first two plane of the diagram (Figure 10) shows Barthes' two order signification system which myth is created. Second plane (myth) uses the sign of first plane which is a combination of signifier and signified as its signifier and create an additional signified. The whole elements of language's plane which creates myth's signifier with its signified constitute a sign of myth. Culture Jamming imitates this act and uses the whole elements of first two planes as its signifier and creates additional signified and this constitutes the sign of Culture Jamming. Consequently the third plane is occurred.

## 4.2 NIKE: JUMPMAN



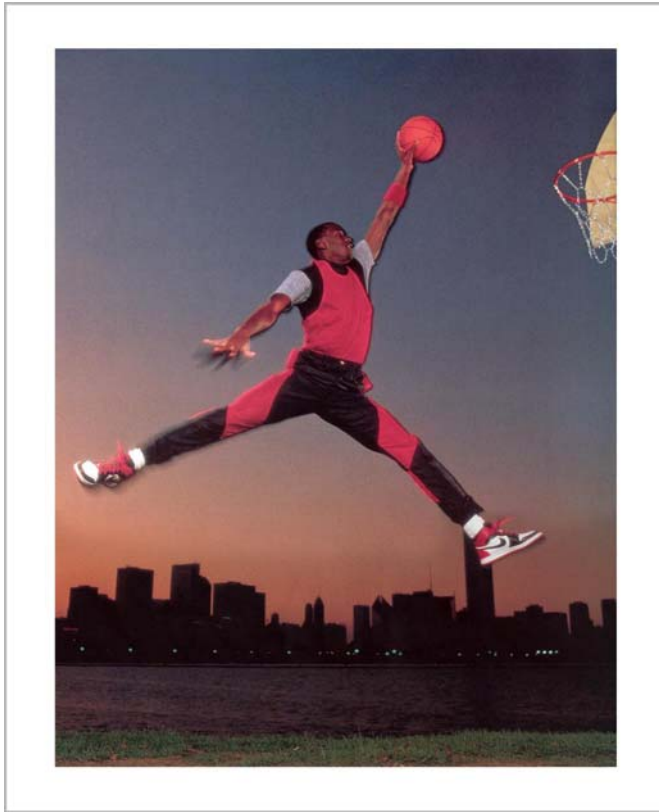
**Figure 11:** Nike: Jumpman wallpaper

Source: <http://www.jumpman23.com>

**Figure 12:** Culture Jamming work of Nike; Jumpman

Source: <http://ilef.ankara.edu.tr/reklam/yazi.php?yad=3144>

Nike has worked with Michael Jordan for a long time as a spokesperson to present its products. Nike also has products named after Jordan. Jumpman is one of these products but this time Jordan is symbolized as Jumpman. As it is known, Jordan is the legend of basketball. He is cool, dynamic, successful, famous and rich. The emblem of Jumpman is the silhouette of Jordan jumping for a basket.



**Figure 13:** Nike: 1993 Calendar - Jumpman

Source:

<http://www.geocities.com/michaeljordangallery25/photo25/1993NikeCalenderJumpman.jpg>

Black on white is a usual color combination of Nike. The jamming example sticks to the original “Jumpman’s” visual language but with little changes.

This time, Jumpman jumps for taking one dollar. The explanation of this situation is given in the text under the Jumpman; “Air Jordan Factory Workers in Indonesia earn Less Than Two Dollars a Day”.





**Figure 14:** Nike: Basketball Web Site

Source: [http://www.nike.com/emeabasketball/index.html?l=en\\_gb&ref=global\\_home](http://www.nike.com/emeabasketball/index.html?l=en_gb&ref=global_home)

Nike advertisements, slogans and other mediums such as web site (Figure 14) represent an identity. Concepts, such as; success, aggressiveness, self esteem, power etc, are exaggerated as it is seen at the screen shot of Nike's web site. The body language of these famous basketball players represent the identity which Nike sells. Nike uses successful sportsmen to utilize for both their success and fame. These sportsmen are ideal for sport audiences' because Nike creates the illusionary opportunity to be like them. The famous slogan of Nike "Just Do It" is also emphasized this illusionary opportunity. At 1998 Nike presented new advertising campaign; "I can". One piece of this campaign figures out Nike's illusionary opportunity clearly that, the slogan is "I can be the next Jordan"



**Figure 15:** Nike: I Can TV Commercial  
Source: <http://www.smug.com/15/target.html>

Semiotic analysis of the Nike example offers the same results with Cola and Capitalism works. Jumpman signifies that these shoes make you jump like Jordan; this is denotation. According to Barthes' two planes of signification system, the sign of the first plane becomes a signifier of the second one. Consequently, the first plane signifies that if you jump like Jordan, you can be like Jordan. Michael Jordan belongs to another sign chain; he represents fame, success and richness. Jumpman actually signifies this living style.

The jamming example uses the same visual language as the original one. On the other hand, it shifts the plane by exchanging the ball with a dollar and an explanation. The jamming example compares Indonesian workers with Jordan in this shifted plane. This comparison shows Nike's indifferent attitudes in different contexts. The exchange of the ball with money is syntagmatic and causes a paradigmatic exchange. The basketball legend's life becomes a signifier in the Jamming example. The signifier also shows the Indonesian workers' way of living. Consequently, paradigmatic exchange

occurs at the third plane. The act of mythical plane is duplicated to subvert the myth. The act of Culture Jamming is clearly seen to subvert its target by using its language and working strategy. Myth is collapsed by the additional signified of third plane. This signified figures out the contrariety of Nike's offerings and things that it does.

## **5. JAMMING BONUS CARD**

The aim of this project is to put in practice the procedures of Culture Jamming to better understand its acts. The brands which are used for this project are chosen among major brands of Turkey; Bonus Card.

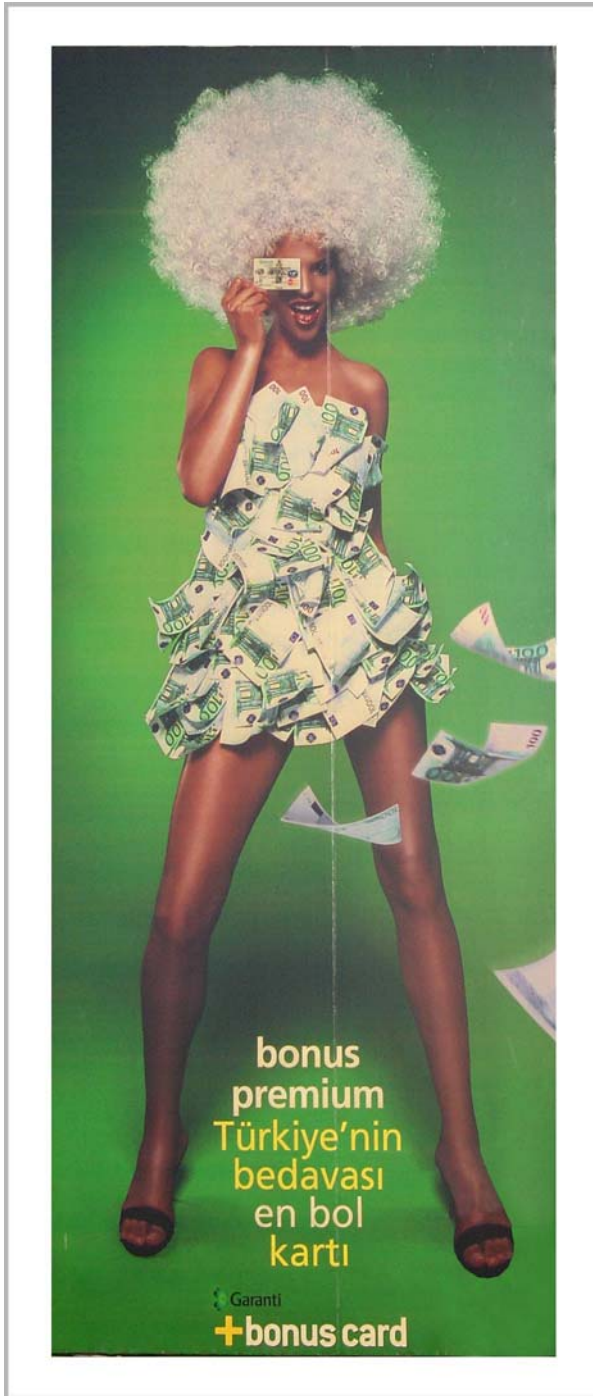
### **5.1 BONUS CARD**

Bonus Card Credit Card is chosen for this project because of the increasing credit card debts problem in Turkey. Banks offer special credit cards like Bonus allow users to pay through installments and provide unrequited products or service for consumers' expenses. As a result of competition between Banks, credit cards became easily attainable regardless of consumers' economic conditions. Banks distribute their cards on streets like street venders. Credit cards become a hope for middle and lower middle class because cards create an artificial condition that they can buy whatever they need. Banks support their marketing strategy with advertisements. Advertisements of cards create an illusion about "free of charge" shopping and this increases consumption. Furthermore, offering an opportunity for long-term installments supports the illusion of free shopping. In fact, credit cards' annual compound interests reach up to more than %100 (BDDK, 2005). Although monthly interest rates of housing credits are %1,20, credit

cards rates are % 5,5 (Garanti, 2005). As a result of high interest rates and misleading advertisements, Turkey is facing a crisis. Today, the government declares that there are 570.000 problematic cards. The ratios of suicide and killing of family members have increased in Turkey as a result of credit card debt.

Bonus Card was s chosen among various installment cards because of its volume in the sector, high interest rates and its visual presentations. Bonus Card was firstly presented with an image showing a family which is very happy for consuming via this card. The Bonus family is quite happy because the card offers a bonus limit which increases with their “needs”. In fact, what actually increases is the debt because Bonus Card has a very high interest rate.

Moreover, Bonus Card utilizes popular people or events in its advertisements. It creates an artificial world where consuming is fun and everybody can do it if they use Bonus Card. Advertisements are shiny, colorful and full of fun. This attracts people but is an illusory reality. Although there are different cards apart from Bonus, none of them creates such a strong image as Bonus does. The happy family image becomes a broken family image; while the increasing debts make people desperate. As it is mentioned, the ratios of suicide and killing of family members have increased because of credit card debts.



**Figure 15:** Bonus Card Billboard  
Source: Ankara Atakule

The Culture Jamming examples of Bonus Card are designed to identify the problem. Moreover, the designs stick to the visual and verbal languages of

the original advertisements. Bonus Card's features are explained in its presentation file. It is mentioned that Bonus is managed as a consumer brand that has green as its distinct color its distinct jingle; "alsak alsak bedavaya ne alsak"<sup>1</sup> and unique reminder object; big black wig.

**Bonus is a Consumer brand**

**We manage bonus as a consumer brand,**

- ➔ It has distinct color → bright green
- ➔ It has a distinct jingle
- ➔ It has a unique reminder object a big black wig.

**Some examples of TV commercials:**

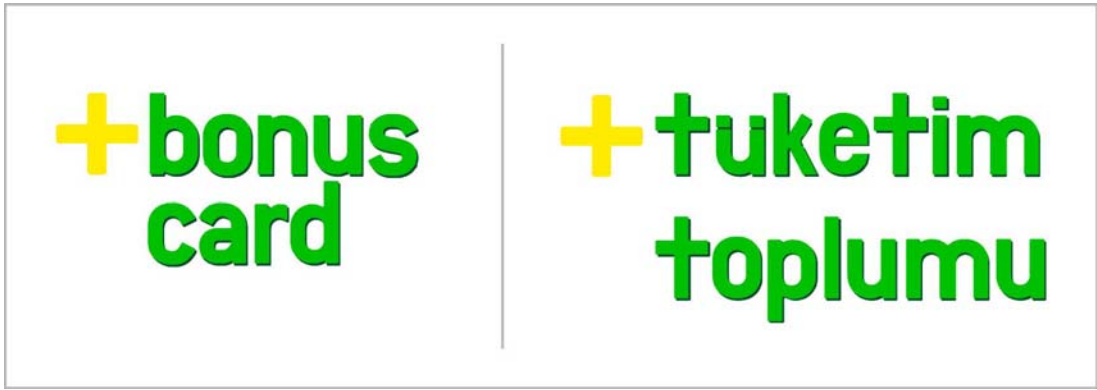
1  
2

Garanti Payment Systems

**Figure 17:** A piece of Bonus Card's presentation  
Source: <http://www.bonus.com.tr/?kurumsal/basinodasi/diger>

<sup>1</sup> English translation: what what what can we buy for free

The Culture Jamming examples of Bonus Card are designed in parallel to the procedures of the Culture Jamming act that was analyzed in the previous chapter. The logotype of Bonus Card is chosen for first jamming example. The yellow plus; the emblem symbolizes the extra earnings of the card like the name of the card; Bonus.



**Figure 18:** Logotype of Bonus Card

Source: <http://www.bonus.com.tr/?kurumsal/basinodasi/fotograflarvegorseller>

**Figure 19:** Culture Jamming work of Bonus Card

The logotype of Bonus Card signifies a credit card offering extra earnings. It is the first one of the two planes of signification. Bonus Card creates an identity via its advertisements; Bonus people can shop free of charge with this card make consuming fun. In the second plane, the first plane becomes a signifier and it signifies that if you use this card you can have fun shopping for free. People can enter a fun world of consumption via this card. Thus the myth is created.



The Jamming example sticks to the visual features of the original work. It has a yellow plus as the emblem and the same green font, but the verbal language is changed. Writing “tüketim toplumu”<sup>2</sup> instead of Bonus Card is a syntagmatic change that shifts the meaning and causes a paradigmatic change. Consequently, jamming uses the base of the original work and its artificial meanings to reveal that they are artificial. This work shows that Bonus Card and its offerings just support the development of consumer culture. This act of Culture Jamming collapses the myth with utilizing its own components. In the third plane the whole two planes of signification become a signifier. This signifier signifies an additional signified which is tüketim toplumu.

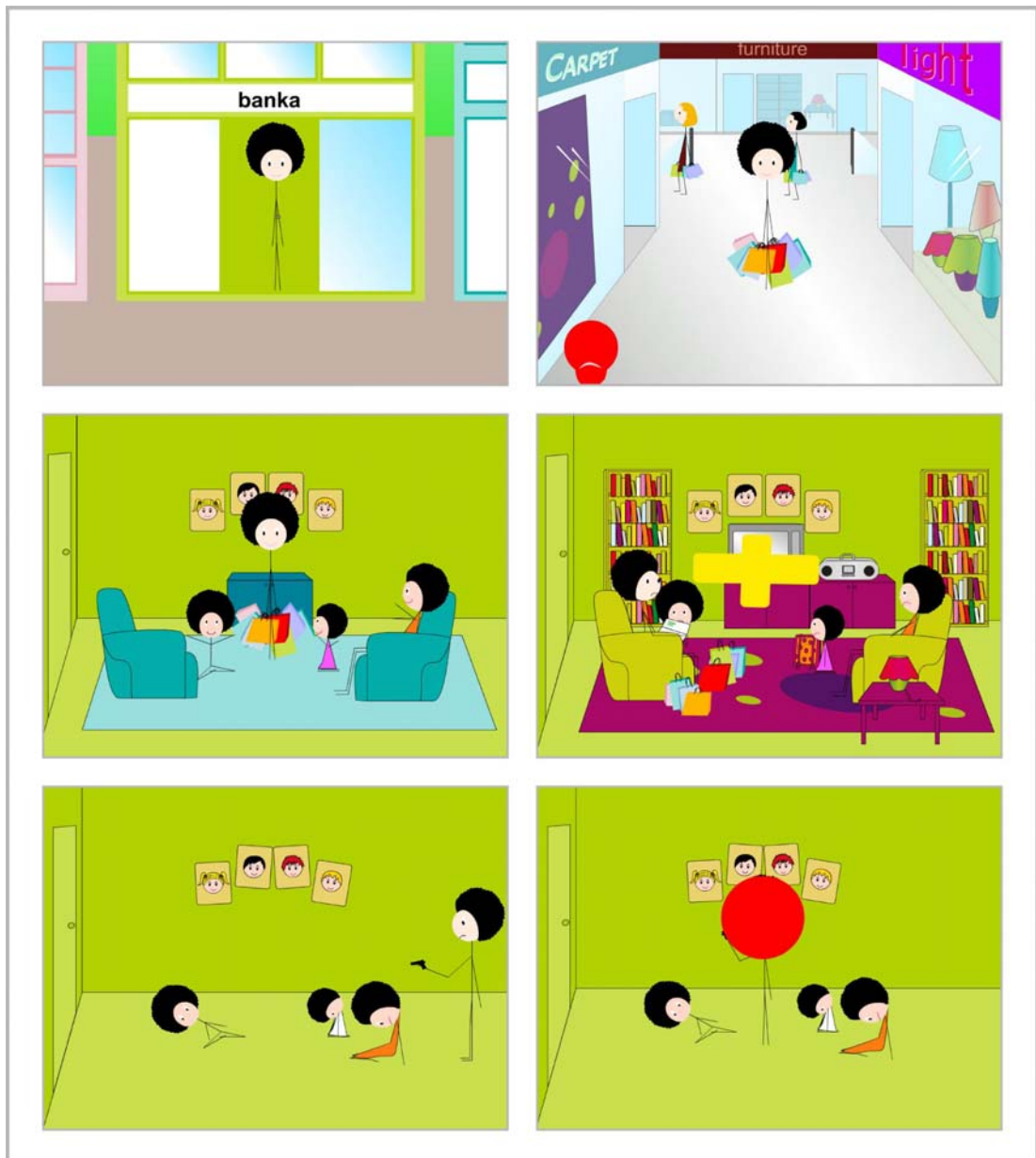
The second Jamming example of Bonus Card is an animation that serves to jam the Bonus Card’s TV commercials. Although Bonus Card’s commercials are not an animation, their visual language is close to animation. As mentioned above Bonus Card has a unique reminder object; the black curly wig. It also plays a role in creating the artificial world that reveres consumption. Bonus Card’s commercials present people who were happy for having consumed via Bonus because it offered extra installments and earnings. The black wig represents entering the Bonus world in the commercials. The animation is done without reference to a specific commercial of Bonus but instead through the identity it creates. In that context, from the semiotic perspective the first plane of this identity is consumption, represented as fun. In the second plane, where myth occurs,

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<sup>2</sup> English translation: Consumer culture

emphasis is on the fact that entrance to this amusing consumption world is offered by Bonus Card. The jamming example is constructed in these two planes. The fun of consumption and the happy family image are used as a base of jamming work to figure out the real situation. The illusion of “free of charge shopping” and the fun of consumption is identified through the real events increasingly occurring in Turkey. People, who get desperate because of credit card debts are committing suicide and/or killing family members. The happy family image becomes a broken image. The jamming example identifies this reality by using the same visual and verbal language as the original ads.

At the animation the father of the family go to the bank of Bonus and enter the Bonus world. His curly black wig represents this entrance. He starts to shop because it is easy by Bonus Card. After he finishes the shopping he turns back to home and his family is waiting for him with their curly black wigs. Whole family is so happy because they can buy whatever they want with installments which Bonus Card offers. Father keeps shopping and family gets happier till they face to their debts and interest. The emblem of Bonus Card; yellow plus become a minus which takes away the goods from the home to cover the debts; it is an execution. Home becomes empty, they lost their goods but especially they lost their happiness. Father of the family could not handle it and kills his children and wife and commits suicide like in the real world.



**Figure 18:** Culture Jamming work of Bonus Card / Animation

The additional signified which belongs to the third plane is at the end of the story; suicide and killing. Consequently the end of the Bonus story has changed in the jamming example and is a syntagmatic change. Like it has been in the other Jamming examples, this syntagmatic change causes a paradigmatic change as well.

Both Jamming works are designed according to the procedures of Culture Jamming. The original works create a base for the Jamming example. Original works have two planes of signification that Barthes refers to as myth. Jamming duplicates the act of myth plane to subvert the myth. The myth is collapsed at the third plane which syntagmatic change takes place and paradigmatic change occurs. Syntagmatic change creates an additional signified that causes a paradigmatic change.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The results of the analysis which is done in the previous chapters the portrayed significant aspects of Culture Jamming act in the semiotic plane.

First of all, Culture Jamming acts against dominant power by using their propaganda tools. Global brands and corporations became a power center during the 20<sup>th</sup> century are now the locomotives of the capitalist system. The decision of production and consumption is independent from each other in the capitalist system. Thus, corporations need constant consumption in order to compensate for their over production. In this context, the ideology of the dominant power is naturalized by its propaganda tool; advertising.

Advertisements sell an identity rather than a product and this manipulates consumption decisions. Advertisements play a trick on consumers by creating artificial realities.

The trick of advertisements becomes clear at the semiotic plane in which Culture Jamming acts. Semiotic is the link between advertisements and advertising oriented Jamming works which explains the act of both sides. Culture Jamming uses its targets' tool to subvert them. If advertisements produce artificial realities through encoding, they can be collapsed by decoding as Culture Jamming does. Using targets' domain is the most significant act of Culture Jamming. This act creates a different perspective for semiotic plane. In the light of both Saussure and Barthes, the semiotic relation between advertisements and subvertisements is analysed.

The result of the semiotic analysis suggests that, Jamming works through use the advertisements as a base of its act. These advertisements which already have connotation become a signifier of Culture Jamming works. Changing the visual or verbal language of the advertisements creates an additional signified which is contrary to or against the original advertisements' messages. This act is similar to Barthes' second order signifying system; myth. In fact, changing the visual or verbal language of the advertisement is a syntagmatic change. While Culture Jamming works do not touch the formal structure of the advertisements, they change the concept. The new concept also includes the original message of the advertisement. This change causes a paradigmatic shift in terms of meaning. The myth naturalizing the artificial construction of advertisements is collapsed.

The jujitsu metaphor is used to explain the act of Culture Jamming. This metaphor mentions that Culture Jamming uses the acceleration of its target to subvert it. This situation is also same at the semiotic plane. Culture Jamming uses the components of its target for subversion. It duplicates the act of myth which is created by its target. Myth's two planes which include sign, signifier and signified become an element of Jamming work. In this context it is obvious that Culture Jamming follows its target like shadow. Like as at the real world shadow becomes another form which includes the original form but represents something else.

While the social reflection of Culture Jamming is considered its hard to say that using targets' domain is an effective way of fighting against dominant power. Equalizing Coca Cola with Capitalism can be a way of figuring out or highlighting some relations but it does not collapse the myth in everyday life. In fact one of the main reasons of this ineffective act is that this jamming works become being a part of popular culture. These works consumed as products rather than thoughts which causes a loss of strength in terms of meaning. Although Culture Jamming influenced from movements which were against dominant ideology such as Dada, Fluxus and Situationism, it can not create an effect like as them. These movements' act was so radical and provocative according to their era. On the other hand Culture Jamming makes substitutions which can be done by anyone to against anything. The intention of Culture Jamming strong and important for the conditions of today's world but the way of displaying this intention appears to be not appropriate. Using targets' domain is not enough to subvert it even target can be utilize this act in many cases. Moreover, advertisers use provocative slogans with provocative images like as Jamming does and this situation reduces the effect of Culture Jamming works.

The current study revealed the act of Culture Jamming beginning from the choice of target to the replacement of the contrary message. The most important level of this process is the message-shifting component which is explained throughout the semiotic perspective. The jujitsu metaphor is clicked into place at the semiotic plane. Jamming works follow the same strategy of advertisers; they act like their target to subvert it. The context of

additional signified creates a paradigmatic change and this is the point which the strategy of ads is destroyed.

## **RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Based on the analysis and experiences derived from the current study, the following methods are suggested for future researchers.

Future researchers may consider conducting a similar study about the cultural differences or similarities of Culture Jamming works. The style of 20<sup>th</sup> century's activism is western oriented. In that case eastern activism can be examined.

Although advertising oriented Culture Jamming works are more common, Jammers use different mediums to subvert their target. They use dolls' voice boxes, pies, hacking and graffiti etc. These kinds of Culture Jamming works can be analyzed to figure out their semiotic act.

Finally, the act of Culture Jamming is parallel to its target so if the target changes its strategy Culture Jamming should also do so. Although it is rare for now, it can create a new path for Jamming that advertisers imitate the act of Jamming. Advertisers use the images of activists who are against the dominant power such as Zapatistas to attract the attention of wider range of consumers. In this context, the effectiveness of Culture Jamming and its relation with popular culture can be examined.



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<<http://www.bonus.com.tr/?kurumsal/basinodasi/fotograflarvegorseller>>

## **APPENDIX A: DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**Activism:** It is an action to bring out changes into social or political planes.

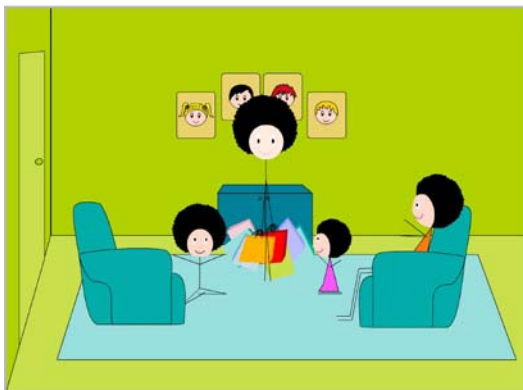
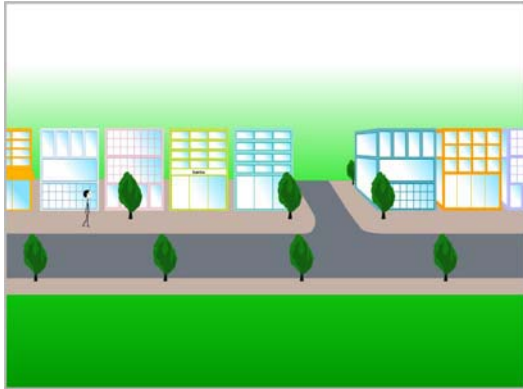
**Culture Jamming:** It is a form of activism against dominant power which is based on using existing media medium to subvert targets. Subvertising, graffiti and hacktivism are also form of Culture Jamming.

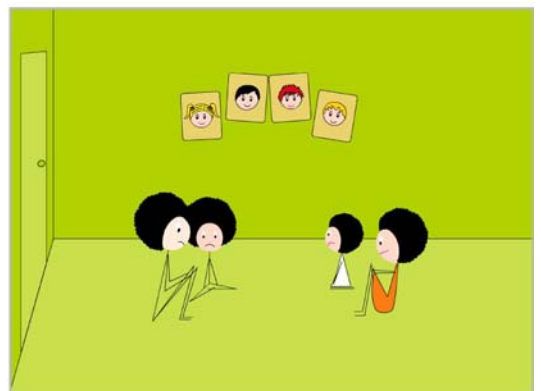
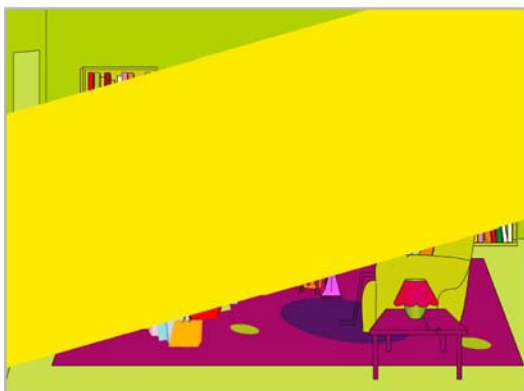
**Culture Jammer:** An individual who makes Culture jamming works.

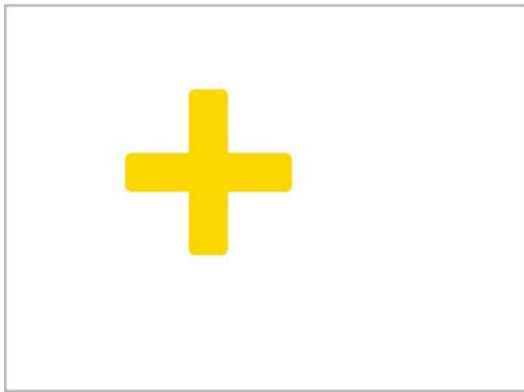
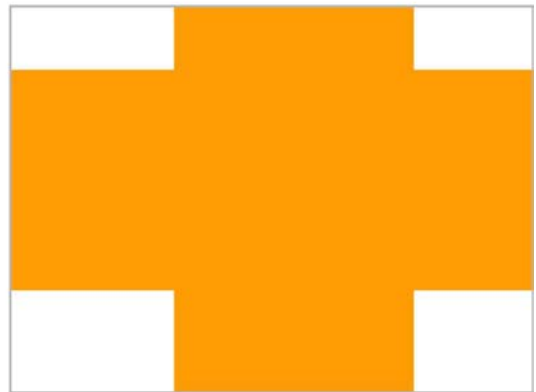
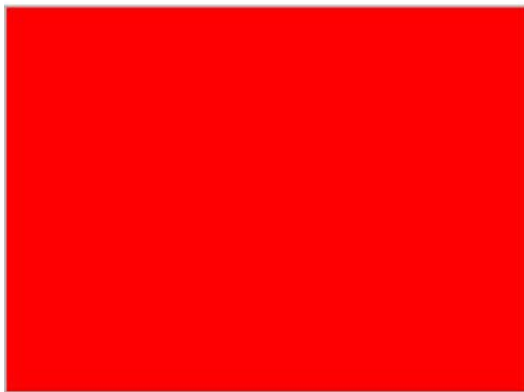
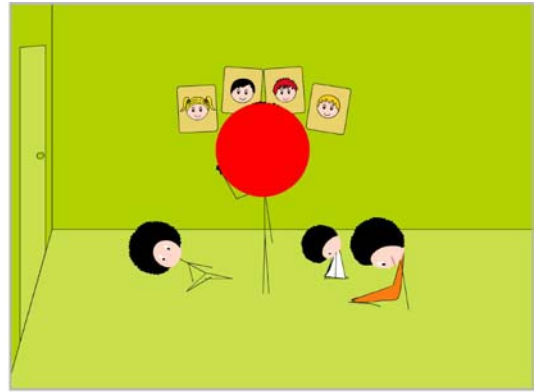
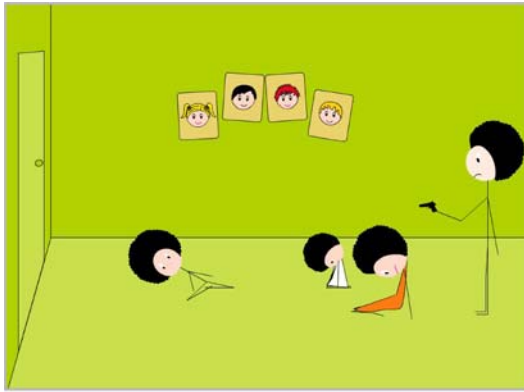
**Subvertising:** Advertising oriented Culture Jamming is called Subvertising. It is the combination of “subversion” and “advertising”.

**Subvertiser:** An individual who makes subvertisements

**APPENDIX B: Storyboard of Bonus Card's Culture Jamming Animation**









## APPENDIX C: First Things First 2000 Manifesto

We, the undersigned, are graphic designers, art directors and visual communicators who have been raised in a world in which the techniques and apparatus of advertising have persistently been presented to us as the most lucrative, effective and desirable use of our talents. Many design teachers and mentors promote this belief; the market rewards it; a tide of books and publications reinforces it.

Encouraged in this direction, designers then apply their skill and imagination to sell dog biscuits, designer coffee, diamonds, detergents, hair gel, cigarettes, credit cards, sneakers, butt toners, light beer and heavy-duty recreational vehicles. Commercial work has always paid the bills, but many graphic designers have now let it become, in large measure, *what graphic designers do*. This, in turn, is how the world perceives design. The profession's time and energy is used up manufacturing demand for things that are inessential at best.

Many of us have grown increasingly uncomfortable with this view of design. Designers who devote their efforts primarily to advertising, marketing and brand development are supporting, and implicitly endorsing, a mental environment so saturated with commercial messages that it is changing the very way citizen-consumers speak, think, feel, respond and interact. To some extent we are all helping draft a reductive and immeasurably harmful code of public discourse.

There are pursuits more worthy of our problem-solving skills. Unprecedented environmental, social and cultural crises demand our attention. Many cultural interventions, social marketing campaigns, books, magazines, exhibitions, educational tools, television programs, films, charitable causes and other information design projects urgently require our expertise and help.

We propose a reversal of priorities in favor of more useful, lasting and democratic forms of communication - a mindshift away from product marketing and toward the exploration and production of a new kind of meaning. The scope of debate is shrinking; it must expand. Consumerism is running uncontested; it must be challenged by other perspectives expressed, in part, through the visual languages and resources of design.

In 1964, 22 visual communicators signed the original call for our skills to be put to worthwhile use. With the explosive growth of global commercial culture, their message has only grown more urgent. Today, we renew their manifesto in expectation that no more decades will pass before it is taken to heart.

Jonathan Barnbrook, Nick Bell, Andrew Blauvelt, Hans Bockting, Irma Boom, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville, Max Bruinsma, Siân Cook, Linda van Deursen, Chris Dixon, William Drenttel, Gert Dumbar, Simon Esterson, Vince Frost, Ken Garland, Milton Glaser, Jessica Helfand, Steven Heller, Andrew Howard, Tibor Kalman, Jeffery Keedy, Zuzana Licko

## **APPENDIX D: Billboard Liberation Front Manifesto**

In the beginning was the Ad. The Ad was brought to the consumer by the Advertiser. Desire, self worth, self image, ambition, hope; all find their genesis in the Ad. Through the Ad and the intent of the Advertiser we form our ideas and learn the myths that make us into what we are as a people. That this method of self definition displaced the earlier methods is beyond debate. It is now clear that the Ad holds the most esteemed position in our cosmology.

- Advertising suffuses all corners of our waking lives; it so permeates our consciousness that even our dreams are often indistinguishable from a rapid succession of TV commercials.
- Different forms of media serve the Ad as primary conduits to the people. Entirely new media have been invented solely to streamline the process of bringing the Ad to the people.
- Old fashioned notions about art, science and spirituality being the peak achievements and the noblest goals of the spirit of man have been dashed on the crystalline shores of Acquisition; the holy pursuit of consumer goods. All old forms and philosophies have been cleverly co-opted and re"spun" as marketing strategies and consumer campaigns by the new shamans, the Ad men.
- Spiritualism, literature and the physical arts: painting, sculpture, music and dance are by and large produced, packaged and consumed in the same

fashion as a new car. Product contents, dictated by trends in hipness, contain a half-life matching the producers calendar for being supplanted by newer models.

- Product placement in television and film have overtaken story line, character development and other dated strategies in importance in the agendas of the filmmakers. The directors commanding the biggest budgets have more often than not cut their teeth on TV Ads & music videos.
- Artists are judged and rewarded on the basis of their relative standing in the ongoing commodification of art objects. Bowing to fashion and the vagaries of gallery culture, these creators attempt to manufacture collectible baubles and contemporary or "period" objects that will successfully penetrate the collectors market. The most successful artists are those who can most successfully sell their art. With increasing frequency they apprentice to the Advertisers; no longer needing to falsely maintain the distinction between "Fine" & "Commercial" art.
- And so we see, the Ad defines our world, creating both the focus on "image" and the culture of consumption that ultimately attract and inspire all individuals desirous of communicating to their fellow man in a profound fashion. It is clear that He who controls the Ad speaks with the voice of our Age.
- You can switch off/smash/shoot/hack or in other ways avoid Television, Computers and Radio. You are not compelled to buy magazines or subscribe to newspapers. You can sic your rotweiler on door to door salesman. Of all

the types of media used to disseminate the Ad there is only one which is entirely inescapable to all but the bedridden shut-in or the Thoreauian misanthrope. We speak, of course of the Billboard. Along with its lesser cousins, advertising posters and "bullet" outdoor graphics, the Billboard is ubiquitous and inescapable to anyone who moves through our world. Everyone knows the Billboard; the Billboard is in everyones mind.

- For these reasons the Billboard Liberation Front states emphatically and for all time herein that to Advertise is to Exist. To Exist is to Advertise. Our ultimate goal is nothing short of a personal and singular Billboard for each citizen. Until that glorious day for global communications when every man, woman and child can scream at or sing to the world in 100Pt. type from their very own rooftop; until that day we will continue to do all in our power to encourage the masses to use any means possible to commandeer the existing media and to alter it to their own design.

- Each time you change the Advertising message in your own mind, whether you climb up onto the board and physically change the original copy and graphics or not, each time you improve the message, you enter in to the High Priesthood of Advertisers.

Jack Napier

John Thomas

## APPENDIX E: Culture Jamming Examples



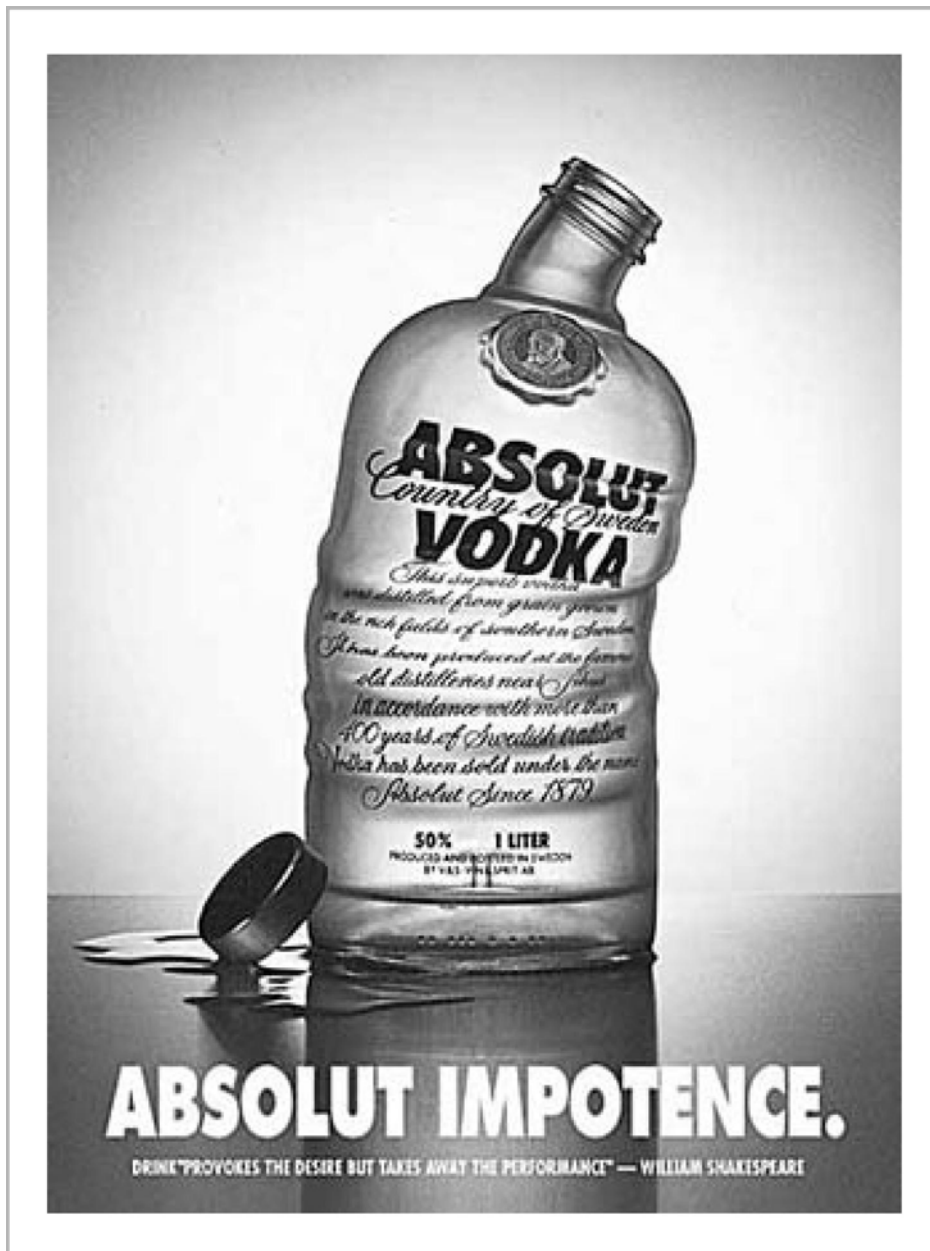
### Billboard Jamming - Apple

Source : [http://www.billboardliberation.com/images/lama/lama\\_lrg.jpg](http://www.billboardliberation.com/images/lama/lama_lrg.jpg)



**Prozac Jamming Example**

Source: <http://adbusters.org/spoofads/misc/prozac/>



### Absolut Jamming Example

Source: <http://adbusters.org/spoofads/alcohol/absolutimpotence/>





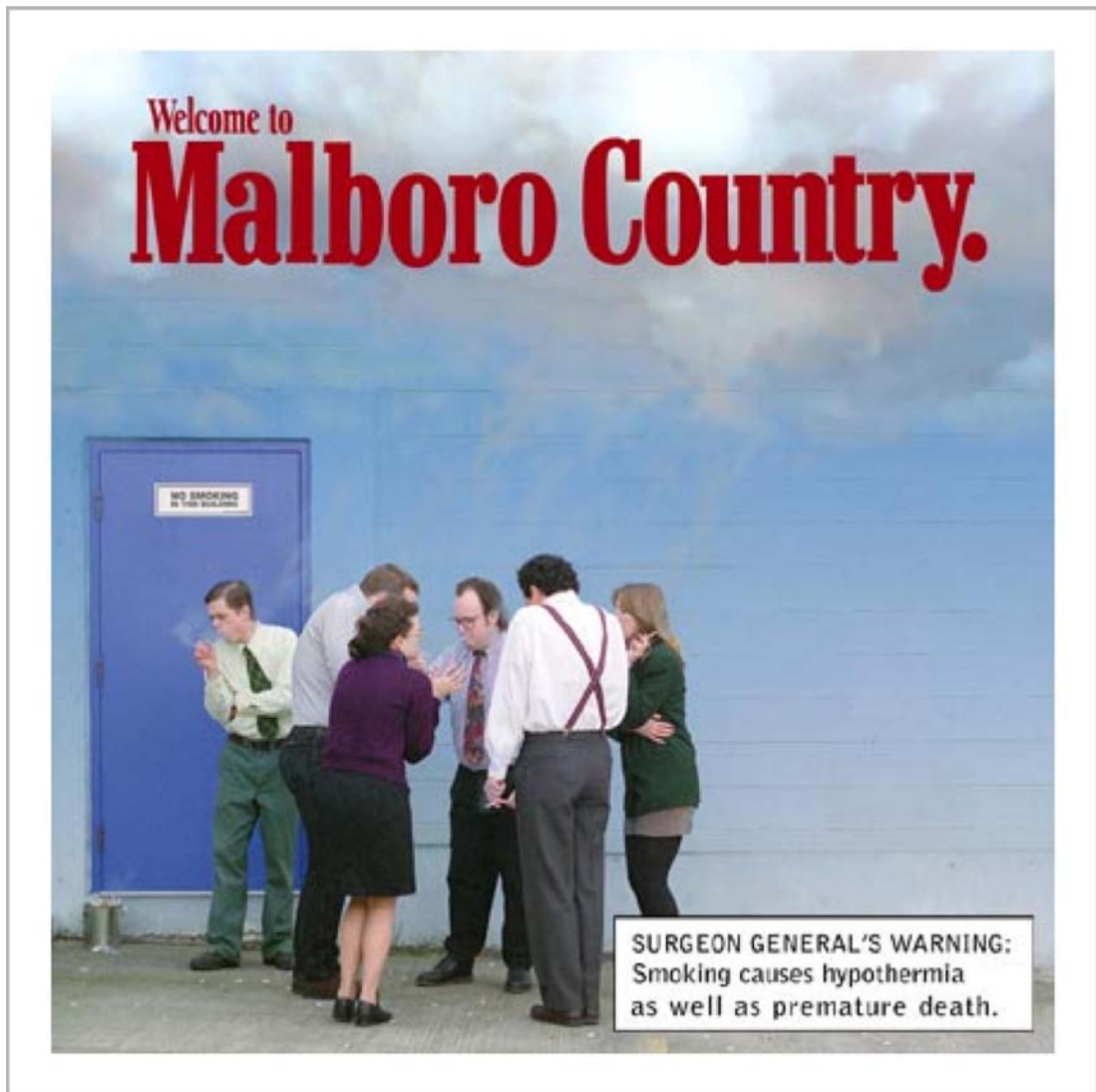
**McDonalds Jamming Example**

Source: <http://adbusters.org/spoofads/food/bigmac/>



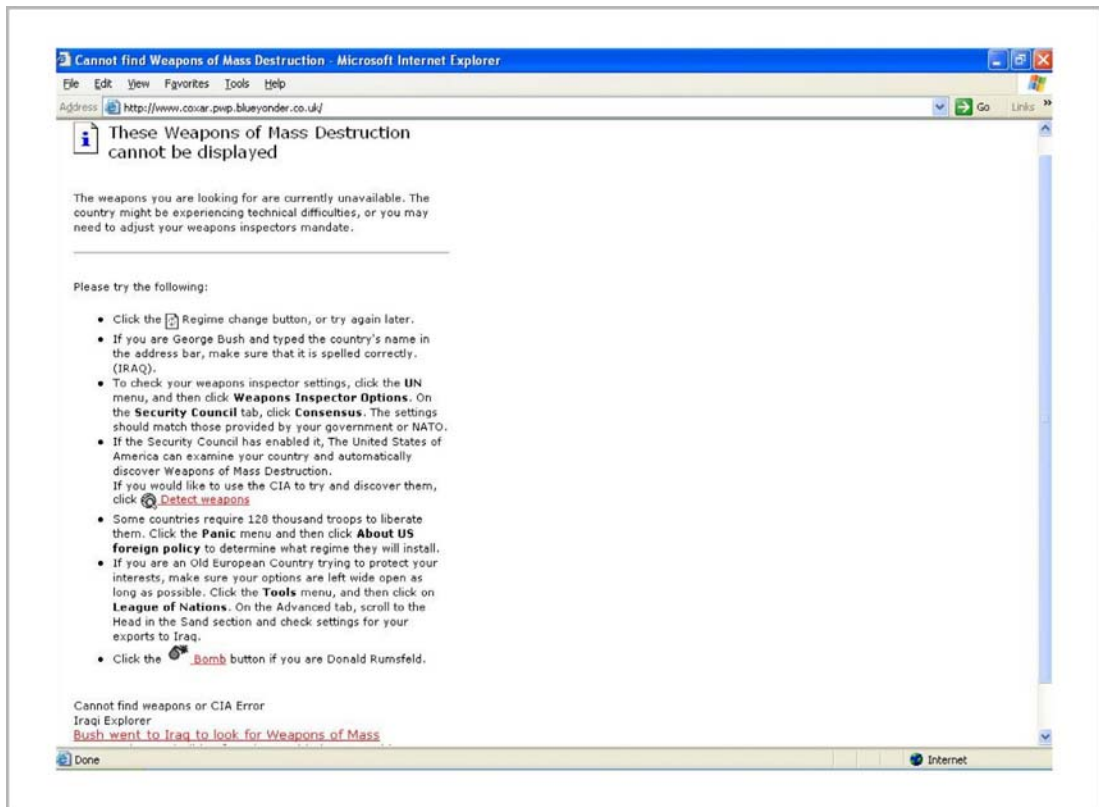
**Shell Jamming Example**

Source:<http://osx.drastiq.com/nitewalkz/interview11.htm>



**Marlboro Jamming Example**

Source:<http://adbusters.org/spoofads/tobacco/mb1/>



## Jamming Example against war

Source: [http://wiki.media-culture.org.au/index.php/Internet\\_activism\\_-\\_culture\\_jamming#Examples](http://wiki.media-culture.org.au/index.php/Internet_activism_-_culture_jamming#Examples)



Jamming Example against War

Source: <http://www.whitehouse.org/index.asp>



**Jamming Example against Bush**

Source: <http://xm.gnostika.org/art/latuff/Ronald.jpg>



**Jamming Example against War / Billboard**

Source: <http://xm.gnostika.org/art/photosandimagespart2/>