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Nike, Feminism and Rhetoric

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in

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of

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Abstract

Nike, Feminism and Rhetoric

Erin Huck

This thesis examines Nike's women-directed advertising in the 1990s. The emphasis is placed on determining how Nike advertising reached such great levels of popularity, and why they resonated so deeply with female consumers. Considered in light of contemporary theories of rhetoric and feminism, it is demonstrated that the ads are invested with meaning and importance because they answer concerns about identity, representation, self-definition, agency and a sense of meaninglessness that preoccupy the modern citizen. Using magazine ads drawn almost exclusively from the periodicals *Runner's World* and *Mademoiselle*, this study demonstrates that it is through the rhetorical figures of the body and Nike's corporate image that these concerns are addressed, enacted, and articulated. In this way, Nike ads "work" to appeal to the female consumer. This reading of Nike ads merges interests in feminism, theories of rhetoric, visuality and very simply, how things become important.

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Introduction

What happened?
One day you're strolling
around in the buff and
looking the world straight
in the eye without
so much as a blush.
Then wallop!
Puberty. Boys.
Magazine images.
Suddenly the mirror is no
longer your friend.
So who defined your template of beauty?
Who said you weren't OK?
Get real.
Make your body the best
it can be for one person.
Yourself.
Just do it.

(Self, June 1992)

Setting the Pace

In the late 1980s and early '90s, the hugely popular Nike Corporation saw its lead on Reebok disappear in the sporting goods manufacturer market. Very quickly, in 1986 Nike's 1985 market share of 28% fell to 21% while Reebok's climbed from 13% to 30% over the same period (Cole, 1995). It quickly became apparent that this reversal of positions was proportionate to the amount of resources being assigned to the emerging women's market in sports wear. Worried that investing in the women's market would undercut the image of a serious sporting company, Nike had mistakenly dismissed aerobics as a fad. By the late 1980s, Nike had slipped to second place.

What resulted was the launch of what has been alternatively called the “Empathy” (Pomice, 1993) or “Dialogue” (Grimm, 1992) campaign. After a few misstarts, this campaign took off like a rocket, setting the pace for Nike’s advertising strategy in the women’s department. Under the leadership of Janet Champ and Charlotte Moore, the ads, which targeted 18-35 year-old women, assumed a familiar and understanding tone often accompanied by nostalgic images and poetic verse, pulling at the heartstrings of readers (Cole & Hribar, 1995, 359-60).¹ This campaign set the mark for women’s advertising for the decade, establishing Nike as a trendsetter for women’s advertising and a company in touch with consumers.

These ads, curiously, came to stand for something much greater than their rather prosaic function as marketing tools for a multinational sports company. These ads were seen as genuine and slightly subversive, accurately capturing women’s experiences. In the earlier years of the campaign they did three things: one, they championed feelings of a female heroism without resorting to mythic, superstar images of unrealistic proportions; two, they undercut prevailing notions of beauty and body; and three, they encouraged women look to themselves for alternative role models.

Much like hockey and baseball-bubblegum cards that boys trade and

¹As Cheryl Cole and Amy Hribar wrote in “Celebrity Feminism: *Nike Style*. Post-Fordism, Transcendence, and Consumer Power”:

The celebration of the authentic self is heightened through exercise as a strategy for locating, expressing, and caring for the self. The campaign, popular described as personal and inspirational, was effective (360).

collect, girls and women cut out these Nike ads and messages and made them into their own self-styled posters, stickers and cards. These ads were taped to the inside of lockers, attached to the fronts of binders, and pasted to fridges. In doing this, women demonstrated an allegiance to a value system that was articulated by an advertising campaign. Admittedly, many distinctions between the nature and function of hockey cards and magazine ads could be made, but this is not the focus here. Rather, what is at stake are issues that *underlie* the creation of identity, community, and social discourse, and the question as to why women, young and old, cut out these magazine ads? There was no group with which to meet and trade ads, and certainly women did not quiz each other about merchandise stats. So what was it that drew women to these ads?

Throughout my teenage years, I cut and pasted enough Nike ads to paper the walls of my room. Although an entire study could be easily devoted to the act of clipping ads, my focus here is to identify how and why Nike appealed to women of my generation. In other words, this thesis investigates how the ads worked, within a particular context, to generate, perpetuate and carry meaning. How is it that they had such an effect? What forms emerged, what ideology was propounded, and what figures were used? How and why did these ads resonate? And why is it that when I look at the ads today, I still sometimes get a shiver?

Methodology

Nike, at least until the early '90s, was definitively male: think Nike in the late '80s, and you automatically think Michael Jordan; mention Spike Lee's alter ego Mars Blackmon in conversation and the allusion to Nike is clear. As well, Nike's media presence throughout the '90s was often slightly controversial. Consider for instance, the contention surrounding Atlanta's 1996 Olympic games and Nike's inflammatory "You don't win silver. You lose gold" campaign,² the headlines about kids killed for footwear in the "sneaker wars"³, and attention to Nike's underpaid workers in Southeast Asia⁴. The various incarnations of Nike through the decade (and ensuing media perspectives on it) demonstrate an almost exclusively male focus that is juxtaposed by Nike's women-directed campaign in terms of orientation, rhetorical form(s) and media treatment.

There are ample studies that have examined, from a quantitative or content analysis approach, the differences between ads that are exclusively directed at women and those that are not.⁵ This is not my focus. Rather than

²Nike's conduct during the 1996 Games was seen as the catalyst for the establishment of new marketing guidelines at the Olympic Games. Nike's ad campaign, the brain child of Weiden & Kennedy, Portland, Ore, was criticized as being antithetical to the spirit of the Games (see "IOC, advertisers prepare new guidelines for Games" (Jensen, 1997b) .

³Children killing children for their shoes, dubbed "sneaker crimes" by the media, received international attention in 1990, although the violence hit the streets the same time the first Air Jordans did, in 1985 (See Cole's "American Jordan: P.L.A.Y., Consensus, and Punishment", *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 1996, 375-76).

⁴A spate of negative publicity of underpayment, harsh conditions, and mistreatment of plant employees in Nike's overseas factories made headlines throughout 1997 and 1998, and was the topic of a documentary in 1996, causing Nike CEO Phil Knight to announce a series of new initiatives in May, 1998. (*Advertising Age*, 1998).

⁵ See, for example, Patricia Incantalupo's "Portrayal of Women in Sport Advertising in Two Women's Sport Magazines" (M.A. Thesis, Springfield College, 1992), M.C. Duncan's "Denial of Power in Televised Women's Sports" (*Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5(1), 1988), M.J. Kane's "Media Coverage of the Female Athlete Before, During, and After Title IX: *Sports*

counting how many times the words "Just do it" appear, or whether the woman in the ad is active or passive, I identify the rhetoric of Nike through a qualitative and affective review of the style, context and intent of its women-directed advertising. Looking at a cross-section of magazine ads drawn almost exclusively from *Mademoiselle* and *Runner's World* between the period of 1990 and 1999, I decipher what strategies, forms and stylistic qualities have been evident in Nike's women-directed campaigns since the inception of the so-called "Empathy" and "Dialogue" campaign, and why they worked. In brief, this approach is interested in the vision of society being offered by a text.⁶ It examines how a text performs or "acts", and identifies what tropes and figures are used. It investigates what these ads are trying to "do" or say. In short, it tries to find out what the ads stand for.

Face Off: Rhetoric and Feminism

The question as to whether or not Nike ads "work" rhetorically by identifying with women through the use of a feminist, self-empowering message that is encouraging, validating and accepting, is investigated. It is argued that

Illustrated Revisited" (*Journal of Sport Management*, 2(2), 1988), and Suzanne Eggins & Rick Iedema, "Difference without Diversity: Semantic Orientation and Ideology in Competing Women's Magazines" (*Gender and Discourse*, Ruth Wodak, ed., London: Sage, 1997).

⁶Intrinsic to this discussion of ideals and assumptions is an emphasis on context and specificity. For instance, the precepts of rhetorical thought assume that communication is deliberative, personal, and the audience (hence context) is instrumental in shaping meaning, ultimately offering a certain understanding of communication. Some prescriptives offered by feminism, such as equal opportunity of the sexes, valuation of the private sphere, reevaluating the hierarchy of logic and emotion, and right to self-determination, similarly present a distinct vision of society.

the bringing together of these two disparate intellectual histories - that of rhetoric and feminism - effectively informs and transforms each realm of thought. Lisa Ede, Cheryl Glenn and Andrea Lunsford have argued this convincingly in their discussion of the intersections of rhetoric and feminism:

Rhetoric offers feminism a vibrant process of inquiring, organizing, and thinking, as well as a theorized space to talk about effective communication; feminism offers rhetoric a reason to bridge differences, include, and to empower, as well as a politicized space to discuss rhetorical values (401).

Throughout this opening discussion, I explore not only how the politics of feminist theory are consonant with those of rhetorical theory, but also how Nike ads enact these shared assumptions. I identify six issues common to both rhetorical and feminist theory that emerge from Nike ads throughout the 1990s. These are: one, emphasis on community; two, the revision of the subject/object dyad; three, the projection of bodily experiences into theory; four, the politicization of the private sphere; five, the replacement of a transcendent authority with an embodied positionality; and six, an orientation toward change. These issues demonstrate not only that Nike enacts a feminist rhetoric, but that this special form of appeal is unique in that it is highly political, bringing into question the traditional allocation of emotion, personal experience, and the body to the private realm.

Politics, Body and Image

If chapter one establishes a framework for the entire thesis, situating the Nike ads firmly at the theoretical intersections of the politics of rhetoric and

feminism, it remains that the shared preoccupations of feminist and rhetorical thought do not in themselves answer the driving question of this thesis. Namely, why are these ads are so powerful?

Ironically, although both contemporary feminism and rhetoric are invested in a politics of the present - as the emphasis on subjective reading, calls to action, and interest in an embodied positionality attest to - I argue that the ads are effective because they appeal to, for a lack of better words, greater things. Although articulating the situational and irreducibly contextual politics of rhetoric and feminism, it is the presentation of these politics *through* the use of grand metaphors, tropes and figures that endow the ads with meaning and power. Through central metaphors - what Michael McGee calls "ideographs" (1999b) and I call "figures" - the politics inherent to rhetorical and feminist readings find meaning, and become important. In Nike ads it is the figures of the "body" and the "image" that are invested with, and pivotal to, the creation of meaning, and are consequently key to discussions of rhetoric and feminism.

In chapters two and three, I explore the power of Nike ads in relation to the power invested in these figures, using them to organize and divide the discussion. Through studying these figures - how they are manipulated, referred to, and spoken about within the normative implications of a feminist rhetoric - the impact of the ads is evaluated. Specifically, chapter two focuses on how the female body figures, is referred to, invoked, and represented in Nike's 1990 women-directed ads. In terms of methodological models, I will look to writings by

Cheryl Cole (1996), Cole and Amy Hribar (1995), and David Laurence Andrews (1993) - all studies that examine Nike's "embodiment" of ideals, whether through specific campaigns or through the body of special athletes, like Michael Jordan. The centrality of the gendered body to both feminist and rhetorical thought is examined, particularly in light of Alan Ingham's oft-cited 1985 "From Public Issue to Personal Trouble: Well-Being and the Fiscal Crisis of the State", and the fitness-crazed idea that the "urge 'to do something about my life' is most eagerly translated into a precept 'to do something about my body'" (Zigmunt Baumann, in Ingham, 48).⁷ Finally, the role of the body in Nike ads is considered in light of issues of community, a new subject/object dyad, the projection of bodily experiences into theory, politicization of the private sphere and an orientation toward change.

Chapter three discusses issues of advertising, representations of female athletes, ways of looking, and the image in light of the style, nature and success of Nike's 1990s women-directed campaign. In this section I critique debates of representation, ways of looking, and advertising, as explored by Sut Jhally (1987), Roger Koppl (in Cross, 1996), William Leiss, Stephen Kline and Sut Jhally (1986), John Tagg (1988) and Judith Waters and George Ellis (1996). This chapter interrogates the nature of the image, the relation between a visual image and Nike's corporate image, and how Nike's corporate image is relevant

⁷ Ingham's article, which enjoyed fairly widespread acknowledgment, argued the fit, athletic-crazed body of the 1980s became charged with the burden of earthly failures and successes. Ingham also situated this body directly at the centre of the tensions and paradoxes of America in the 1980s.

to the importance that Nike's advertising is assigned in contemporary society. For this discussion, I look to the works of John Lucaites and Robert Hariman, particularly their "Remembering the way it was supposed to feel: photojournalism and emotional remembrance in American public culture" (n.d.) and their studies of how images pack affective and emotional weight. Both Lucaites and Harimans' collective and independent work (or "way to read") offer a point of access and vocabulary to contemplate the relationship between image and meaning for Nike.

A concluding chapter suggests ways the role and function of the body and the image create resonance for Nike. In offering some final remarks on the impact of figures in meaning creation, further paths of study are suggested. These include a brief discussion about the popularity, meaning and resonance of Nike ads for women in the 1990s, as well as the impact, and somewhat ambiguous legacy, of Nike.

First Last Words

In the simplest sense, the Nike ads offer a way to examine the politics of feminism and rhetoric. The ads provide a meeting ground of these intellectual interests, functioning in accordance with the politics of both contemporary rhetorical and feminist thought, and operating with the same assumptions. In short, they enact principles common to the politics of both rhetorical *and* feminist thought, enact and propound a similar politics, and even *play by the same rules*.

Language is political. Language is all about hierarchies and power. The frameworks provided by feminism and rhetoric allow a way to interrogate these issues of power and language. Nike is a social discourse that plays within these frameworks; it avails itself to our critique, allowing us to act as both participant and judge of its performance. Afforded this opportunity to contemplate how women are represented, and how the trappings of womanhood - one's sex, body, and experience - are used to express a distinctly female perspective, a question that must be asked is whether individual women like myself are fairly reflected in the words and images of Nike. In other words, to see if I find myself in these ads is to discover what parts of the ads find resonance with me.

Chapter 1

Meeting Points: Rhetoric and Feminism

The focus for this thesis is to identify how Nike ads had such an effect - in short, how the ads worked, within a particular context, to generate, perpetuate, effect and carry meaning. By their very nature, ads are persuasive. However, Nike's persuasion is stronger, more compelling, the identification of reader/consumer to the product too intense for its popularity to be explained that simply. We could write that Nike ads work by identifying with women; a facile statement, but one which begs the question - how is this identification achieved?

It is my argument that the politics of feminist theory are consonant with those of rhetorical theory, and that Nike ads enact these shared assumptions. In other words, the normative implications of rhetoric and feminism echo each other, and Nike exploited the politics common to contemporary rhetoric and feminism to appeal to their audience. This appeal is rhetorical in the stronger sense of being political; Nike ads call not only for identification, but also action and change that is politically charged. There are six issues common to both rhetorical and feminist theory which emerge from Nike ads throughout the 1990s. These are emphasis on community, revising the subject/object dyad, the projection of bodily experiences into theory, the politicization of the private sphere, the replacement of a transcendent authority with an embodied positionality and an orientation toward change. Through discussion of these six points, Nike's peculiar form of feminist rhetoric will be defined. This chapter will

situate the Nike ads firmly at the theoretical intersections of the politics of rhetoric and feminism, and investigate how these interactions are enacted within the pages of the Nike ads.

Nike, Feminism and Rhetoric

As I write, I face a wall that I have plastered with Nike ads. At one end, I realize there is a confusing variety of messages which seem to completely contradict each other. Independence (“Why do I run? To be alone.” - *Runner’s World*, May ‘98) faces off against collectivity (“Together, we can push each other to go another block” - Appendix A10); inherent self-worth (“Embrace your body” - Appendix A8) stares down necessary self-improvement:

Think of how good you can feel...after a workout...that makes you feel self-assured, proud of yourself, more beautiful,

And that can make us happy to be

EXACTLY WHO WE ARE

(Appendix A9)

At the other end, however, there are a number of ideals which underlie the ads, endowing the ads with unity and coherence; ideas of a deep/true self, pride, competitiveness, insurrection and bucking the system, whimsy, stoicism and fortitude thread through the ads, often presented in a dry, ironic tone that betrays an awareness of media’s constructed and interested nature. These recurring ideas work to create a kind of community of feeling tangible within the

pages of Nike ads.

Community is a fundamental concept in rhetorical theory. As early as Aristotle, rhetorical theorists recognized that effective political language depended upon and forged community through its three major categories of proof; *ethos* (the respect given to the speaker), *pathos* (the emotional sympathy of listeners) and *logos*, which depended upon shared knowledge, convictions and a sense of the probable. These aspects of rhetorical speech demonstrate that theories of language, appeal and persuasion are dependent upon the presence of an imagined community.

Rhetorical studies are predicated on the presence of a community; meaning rooted in the local and performative aspects of discourse offers a socially constructed understanding of communication. From a rhetorical perspective, the individual and discourse is situated, irrevocably, within the context of a social environment (Casaregola & Farrar, 732-735). Identification relies on gaining trust through appeal and being able to establish commonality within the context of one such community. Whether this "rhetorical culture", as Thomas Farrell calls it (in Charland, 256), exists on the internet, on an athletic field or within the pages of a magazine, therefore, rhetoricians investigate the prejudices, sentiments and assumptions that make up the audience/community.

This emphasis on community⁸ illustrates the first parallel that exists

⁸ Community, in this sense, does not restrict itself to traditional appreciations of community achieved through proximity, and geography. As Dorothy and Richard Counts articulate in their investigation into Recreational Vehicle communities, quoting Thomas Bender's 1978 *Community and Social Change in America*, "Community, then, can be defined better as an

between current feminist and rhetorical theory. The roots of both intellectual histories are embedded and intertwined with issues of audience, audience creation, and the manipulation of such communities. For feminist thought, the importance of group dynamics bridges centuries - the marches of the suffragettes of the Victorian period were replayed in NOW⁹ demonstrations of the 1970s movement feminism. The creation of a visible, tangible community was not only instrumental to lending greater political visibility, credence and strength to the burgeoning Second-Wave feminist movement¹⁰; a visible, politically articulate feminist community also served to confront women's isolation and create feelings of community by articulating experiences that were previously seen as private.

As Maurice Charland argues in his reading of Kenneth Burke, the implication of rhetorical analysis begins by situating discourse within social formations; rhetoric always speaks to a particular time and place (255). From this specific, contextual perspective the rhetor's "work", so to speak, is to identify

experience than a place. As simply as possible, community is where community happens" (Bender, 1978, in Counts, 65).

⁹Angered by the lack of seriousness with which women's issues were addressed by The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, following the addition of the category of sex to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act in 1964, the National Organization of Women (NOW) was formed in 1966 (Huber, 85). This group, made up largely of educated professionals, and is often identified as part of the Women's Rights movement that emerged in the 1960s which fought for legal and occupational equality through legislative reforms (Linda Nicholson, ed., p.1)

¹⁰Linda Nicholson identifies the Second Wave as a political movement that grew from "two, originally separate, political movements"; the Women's Rights movement of the 1960s, a group largely consisting of older professionals who focussed on equal employment issues, and the Women's Liberation Movement, which was a group that was ideologically aligned with broader issues of civil rights and social organization that preoccupied the New Left of the late '60s. The Second Wave questioned gender roles, often holding the national attention hostage in the media, and led to a "major restructuring" of institutions, in North America and elsewhere (1997, 1-2).

the tensions, ambiguities and contradictions experienced by individual social subjects within the discursively constituted prejudices of their communities. Rhetoricians then reshape this knowledge and publically produce new social knowledges (256). In doing so, the rhetorician is not only offering a new perspective or critique of culture; the rhetorician embarks on what Charland calls “a particular form of interpretive and political practice” which makes normative, prescriptive claims not of how things are, but how they *should* be (256). This reshaping of knowledge places the social nature of it, and communities, at the forefront.¹¹

This notion of community, or “people”, is central to many works on rhetoric. Barbara Beisecker’s rereading of Kenneth Burke (1997) concludes that rhetoric offers an ontology that is indivisibly, unredeemably, and undeniably social - rhetoric is the means through which the intrinsic division between men is bridged, and social cohesion wrought by producing identification (Beisecker, 1997, 40-1). Similarly, Michael McGee sees “the people” as a process, not a phenomenon, that is defined rhetorically through a “collectivization process” (McGee, 1999a, 345-6). This process is dependent on the commitment and faith in what McGee call “basic myths”; if we believe in these myths, there is unity and collective identity (347).

Philippa Spoel’s revisiting of rhetorical epistemology, touches on this

¹¹“The people” is used, in this sense, interchangeably with “community”; it use denotes an assumption of, or invokes, a community already formed.

issue. Spoel writes that meaning and “embodied knowledges” are created through and dependent upon a process of shared conversations (203). This notion of a collective “people” recurs in texts that identify themselves as feminist. Feminist texts, in return, demonstrate a *modus operandi* that is distinctly rhetorical in its interest and preoccupation with creating, through its appeals and assumptions, just such feelings of community.

Dorothy and David Count discount the notion that community and social organization are dependent upon shared interest and common territory:

A community involves a limited number of people in a somewhat restricted social space or network held together by shared understandings and a sense of obligation. Relationships are close, often intimate, and usually face to face. Individuals are bound together by affective or emotional ties rather than by a perception of individual self-interest. There is a “we-ness” in a community. One is a member (53-54).

If Nike ads expound a “shared understandings and a sense of obligation”, what exactly is this understanding? There is no intimate, face to face interaction in magazine reading, which would seem to negate the possibility of the growth of affective or emotional ties.

Nike works to replicate the intimacy that the Counts speak of through structure of language (rhetorical tools), affective, meaning-laden messages and design layout which all work to duplicate a face to faceness. The use of the interrogative in Nike’s women-directed ads acts to draw in, and call the audience into being. The questions posed in the ads are open-ended, soliciting discussion as opposed to short answers. This creates an atmosphere of conversation and

exchange, as some lead questions of the ads illustrate; “Does a hero know she’s a hero if no one tells her?” (Appendix A4); “When do we start so desperately wanting to be someone else?” (Appendix A9), and “Is it possible we’re more beautiful in motion than we are standing still?” (Appendix A6). The community is implied through this atmosphere of exchange.

This imaginary community includes not only those who “do it” - it extends beyond the everyday athlete to the everyday woman, and does not assume a competitive, exclusionary tone that other Nike campaigns have adopted.¹² Although there are contradictions inherent to an “everywoman” approach, Nike uses shared experience, inclusive pronouns, familiar forms of address, allusions to collectivity, references to injustices and inequality, and specifically female experiences to create a feeling of a community. It is, largely, an experiential community, elusive but given shape when a woman turns the page and is identified as having experienced similar problems or suffered the same insecurities.

It is not only Nike’s aura and influential media presence that confers upon itself a sense of community; the precepts and mantra of Nike’s corporate culture so clearly demarcate a Nike ethos that it is almost as if they were rules of membership. These are so well-defined that Nike has been alternately called a

¹²Take, for instance, Nike’s inflammatory “You don’t win silver. You lose gold” campaign of the Atlanta’s 1996 Olympic games. Nike’s ad campaign, the brain child of Weiden & Kennedy, Portland, Ore, was criticized as being antithetical to the spirit of the Games and spurred the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to establish new marketing guidelines for the Games (Jensen, 1997b).

cult (albeit “a good one”, *Nike*, a documentary by Peter Swain, 1997), and served as a subject of a case study on propaganda for a Master’s thesis (Anderson, 1998). This sense of community is fostered, paradoxically, by an emphasis that every individual can overcome personal obstacles. In Nike, this focus on process and improvement falls on the body. As the slogan “There is no finish line” has trumpeted since the late ‘80s, although self-discovery and improvement can be solitary (and often is, as the images accompanying this slogan imply: a solitary runner in a field; a man doing stairs in a mammoth stadium), the task shared by all makes the process more collective than not.

The body in Nike ads is presented as a site for ongoing improvement, a site that is both individual and shared in that *all* bodies are subject to improvement. This emphasis on *process*, discussed by both Beisecker and Spoel, is central to a feeling of collectivity that emerges from the text and images of the ads. Placing greater accent on process shifts focus away from the product, and onto meaning and knowledge creation which Spoel writes is achieved through a process of shared conversations, dependant upon the “sharing and translation of embodied knowledges across and among communities” (Spoel, 203).

Interestingly, the process of discovering one’s inner self through the realization of physical goals is often conveyed in terms which imply a kind of crusade, a journey of discovery and exploration that is a kind of personal holy grail. The Word of Nike is that within the body there is a latent “inner” body that

can be realized through single-minded determination and faith (in oneself). This basic myth of Nike has a community forming function, not unlike the myths McGee says are central to a collectivization process. McGee writes that it is within "incipient political myths" that a "people" is born. Thus in the attempt to create and motivate a people a myth contains "the people" more than "general ideological commitments, for it focuses on specific problems and specific situations" (1999a, 346). Nike offers a vision to society is a shared even as it is both personal and collective, constant and ongoing.

Occasionally, Nike self-consciously mocks this notion of community-through-Nike, as if they themselves are aware of their audacity that a sports company is in the business of community building. To challenge the validity of these associations serves only to affirm both their presence and pervasiveness, as Nike does in a number of ads:

Motherhood
Becoming a Bride
Breaking the Glass Ceiling,

What do they have to do with shoes?

(Mademoiselle, April 1998)

The irony is that Nike's linking of women's experiences with their shoes has been made so repeatedly that they now have *everything* to do with shoes. The ads imagine a community peopled by all those who have experienced one, or all, of the things enumerated in their ads, through which one can find liberation, peace of mind, and safety from insecurity through exercise. In short, salvation

through a community of sweat. Their ironic question, therefore, highlights and reinforces the power of these associations.

Revisiting Subject/Object

There are a number of parallels that may be drawn between Nike's ads for women through the 1990s and other campaigns by Nike of the same period. Like other campaigns, the "Just do it" mantra appears in women's advertising, as does the use of compelling and no-frills language. What disappears, however, are challenges issued in an imperative, scornful and appreciably masculine tone. The community of Nike's women-directed ads restructure the hierarchy of writer/reader by refusing to order and berate the female reader.

For one, the directive of "Just do it" does not dominate the text or figures on the page. No longer does the imperative voice dominate the ad. Often it is moved from its lower-right hand authoritative place, as if its importance is displaced, its meaning diminished. The "Just do it" lettering is often scribbled, like a note, or written in cursive script. One ad's slogan is even accompanied by a little smiley face. The feeling is friendly and any sense of the imperative is replaced by supportive encouragement.

Nike's refusal of faintly militaristic models of speaking illustrates a second issue common to rhetorical and feminist thought - the unsettling of the subject/object dyad. Traditionally, the subject/object dynamic involves the presence of a sovereign, all-knowing subject which positions the listener/reader

as passive as a receptive and inactive object. When speaking of women readers/listeners, this position of disenfranchised subject is exacerbated by femininity's characterization as passive, receptive and unproductive (the last being the greatest irony). Feminist theory has long reread this binary, recognizing that it bred an unjust power dynamic. Excluded from knowledge creation, dominated groups do not define themselves but are defined (Spoel, 202). Problematizing the "standard" masculine ways in which authors presume a position of enunciation is, for writers like Elizabeth Grosz, a central tenet of feminist authoring.¹³

What is at stake in feminist theory is redressing the power relations inherent to who is speaking to whom. This interest with issues of power and powerlessness has become a concern in rhetorical theory. According to Amanda Goldrick-Jones, feminist writers are revamping inherited rhetorical tradition and addressing the powerlessness incurred by an imbalanced and gendered dynamic inherent to rhetorical thought. For Goldrick-Jones, examining rhetoric from a feminist perspective demands that we call "into question how western thought and western rhetorical theory inscribes oppressive power relations" (in Sutherland, 12). She advocates an alternative logic that does not originate in an inequitable and disempowering dynamic of speaker/listener, and injects this concern with issues of power and powerlessness into current rhetorical debates.

¹³Grosz argues that a feminist text must, in one way or another, problematize the standard masculinist ways in which an author assumes and occupies the position of enunciation (23).

From Goldrick-Jones' perspective, although feminist concerns can find voice within, or be applied to, rhetorical theory, they are not automatically shared by those interested in rhetoric. For her, it is important that two unique intellectual histories be recognized. This acknowledgement that rhetoric and feminism come from different theoretical places demonstrates that some writers carefully attribute specific politics to feminism and different ones to rhetoric. Karlyn Kors-Campbell agrees; she argues that the rhetoric of a feminist text *necessarily* rejects traditional rhetorical models and the typical relationship between participants in a rhetorical situation (1999, 400). Kors-Campbell's emphasis on context¹⁴ seems to discount the possibility that rhetorical styles have ahistorical or timeless attributes, which would make inherited rhetorical tradition out of synch with the concerns and politics of 1970s feminism she discusses:

The distinctive stylistic features of women's liberation rhetoric are a result of strategic adaptation to an acute rhetorical problem. Women's liberation is characterized by rhetorical interactions that emphasize affective proof and personal testimony, participation and dialogue, self-revelation and self-criticism, the goal of autonomous decision making through self-persuasion, and the strategic use of techniques for 'violating the reality structure'. I conclude that, on stylistic grounds, women's lib is a separate genre of rhetoric (403).

Kors-Campbell and Goldrick-Jones are not discounting outright the possibility that theories of rhetoric and feminism speak to each other. Simply, they are calling to revisit old theoretical models, and create new ones by

¹⁴For Kors-Campbell, rhetoric is determined, "formulated and shaped" by context and subject matter, each style or "genre of rhetoric" is distinctive, and interdependent with the subject matter, time and place (1999, 397).

applying a different(ly politicized) model of communication. It would be a mistake, however, for Kors-Campell and Goldrick-Jones to claim that the interest in dismantling the subject/object model is the exclusive agenda of self-identified “feminist” writers. It is also a mistake to assume that a feminist approach imparts a *completely* new, alien or uniquely revolutionary perspective to rhetoric that no other philosophical or political thinkers can bring in respect of the subject/object binary.

Some contemporary rhetorical thinkers revisit early theories of speech and communication theory, and problematize the role of the speaker/writer as the sole creator of the text. Motivated by theories of social change, and championing the possibility of viable personal agency, text creation is seen by some as also the task of the listener/reader, factoring context and specificity into the equation. For example, rereading Kenneth Burke, Barbara Beisecker proposes a “‘new’ concept of the dynamic relations of structure and subject and for a ‘new’ theory of social change that takes rhetoric seriously into account” (1997, 19). She writes later that a rhetorical event “marks the articulation of *provisional identities* and the construction of contingent relations that obtain between them”, making “possible the production of identities and social relations” (1999, 243, emphasis mine). The subject and object therefore, are mutable, finding shape and identity in relation to each other and immediate context.

Phillipa Spoel’s discussion of perceived “crucial dimensions” of feminist

rhetoric travels a kind of middle road through this debate. From Spoel's perspective, there are some feminist principles that can be retrieved from, as opposed to injected into, rhetorical theory. For example, although she believes the traditional model of persuasion follows a classic "conquest" form which aims to trick and control the audience, she maintains that rhetoric, in essence, offers possibilities of exchange and dialogue; thus the "reconfiguration of the nature of both the knower and the known, or the subject and the object" produces an atmosphere and dynamic that is like a conversation (207). This dynamic of shared exchange is critical to feminist knowledge creation.

Although Spoel works to weave two distinct models of rhetoric, she recognizes each model has its own characteristics and logics. Juxtaposing a feminist rhetoric (re: reciprocal and conversational) with a classic rhetoric (re: strategic, competitive, sophistic), Spoel ultimately assumes that women do not want power and do not play power games. This model of rhetoric as conversation, the tenor of which we find in the Nike ads, does not challenge the "gendering" of communicative forms - logic is male and emotion, again, is feminized. Is, then, this rhetoric really feminist? Furthermore, how should we define a feminist rhetoric?

Nevertheless, what is different and slightly revolutionary about feminist rhetoric as conceived of by writers like Spoel is that the female logic is upheld and expounded as powerful. Positioning equality among women through conversational and intimate language, the relationships of speaker to listener

becomes central to the text and they share space on the page.

The Body and Experience

The disassembling of the subject/object in rhetoric and feminism leads us to a third issue; the projection of the body and its experiences into theory. Attributing greater agency to the subject is a direct result of rethinking the position of object to subject. This rethinking leads to a greater appreciation of the value and importance of the voice, ideas, beliefs and experiences of the newly positioned subject. Consequently, emotion and the body are no longer disregarded as inconsequential or superfluous to the creation of meaning.

There are some who would argue a concern with the body in cultural theory is neither specifically, nor exclusively, feminist. For example, Alan Ingham positions the body in the middle of 1980s American (and by extension, Canadian) social politics, effectively mirroring feminist efforts to place the body at the centre of theoretical debates. Ingham argues that the body is, and has been for decades, central to issues of social reproduction; the concept of "lifestyle" that emerged in the 1970s focused increasingly on the body as the means to solve problems, gauge success and achieve emotional, personal and economic success. In particular however, it was during the social-political culture of the 1980s - with the rise of the New Right, the decline of the welfare state and the boom of consumerism - that the body became the embodiment, locus and vehicle of achievement.

In a broader social sense, Ingham argues that mastery of the body was seen increasingly as a way to solve larger, structural problems. These were increasingly discussed in terms of self-discipline and personal difficulties. Quoting from Zigmunt Bauman, the demonization of fat, social aid and government dependency became less a personal issue and increasingly a symptom of cultural dislocations:

The body, this objective of loving care, has retained its central defining features as articulated and imputed during the dawn of disciplinary power: it has remained first and foremost the paramount source of evil and suffering, and as such it cannot be left unattended: the care of the body as the crucial time and money-consuming activity of the denizens of consumer society is an uneasy, poorly balanced mixture of love and horror (which renders the body not unlike the divine objects of religious fervor of the past). As before, the body is charged with the responsibility for success and failure in earthly endeavors, and the urge 'to do something about my life' is most eagerly translated into a precept 'to do something about my body'. (in Ingham, 48).

Although the body is central to both Ingham and Bauman's theories on society, knowledge, agency and power, it would be wrong to identify them as feminist writers on the sole basis that for them the body is a political site. In this light, it has to be acknowledged that the concern with the body is not exclusively feminist. For instance, our bodies - and the unbidden, often unintended, emotional responses that come from them - have always been an intrinsic part of the classical rhetorical tradition. A number of speeches whose power is dependent upon an almost physical, affective response have become favourites for modern rhetorical studies. Consider the visceral and emotional speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I had a dream" speech, with its rhythmic, repetitive

cadences; or JFK's inaugural address of Jan. 20th, 1961, the success of which has been attributed, in part, to the fact that even today it reaches the audience on an emotive level (Corbett & Connors, 462).

The emotive and visceral aspect of rhetoric, explored in articles by Robert Hariman and John Lucaites, for example, do not denigrate the body or "illogical" emotional responses. On the contrary, Hariman and Lucaites focus on these emotional responses, and use them as a point of departure to decipher why some texts (in this case, famous documentary photos of the mid-twentieth century) resonate in postmodern American life. In "Remembering the Way it was Supposed to Feel: Photojournalism and Emotional Remembrance in American Public Culture" Hariman and Lucaites argue that photos function rhetorically "in moments of crisis or celebration to recall past emotional experiences and manage our emotions in the present" (n.d., paragraph 1). They argue the logic of some photographs is "not programmatic, of course, but emotional; the photograph works *primarily to activate and manage feelings* of both vulnerability and obligation that are endemic to our liberal-democratic culture" (n.d., paragraph 14).

Lately, a number of writers have emerged in the field of rhetoric who have made unorthodox choices in reviewing texts for their rhetorical value and function. These choices are examined from a perspective which prioritizes emotional effect; specifically, how the reader/listener visualizes and experiences the feelings of the text's author in each "rhetorical moment". This is similar to

what Michael Osborn calls “interactive metaphors”, through which we feel and sympathize with the writer, as Vicki Collins writes:

Privileging “symbolic moorings of human consciousness over rationality, depiction seeks the rhetorical moments when listeners engage with “significant presentations of reality”. Indeed, depiction creates desire in the reader: desire to experience what has been described (Quoting Osborn, 114).

The body is key to feminist thought. Is a preoccupation with the body in rhetorical thought a revolutionary innovation? Not at all, for the body has been historically central to rhetorical tradition. However, the body in traditional rhetorical thought, though purportedly unsexed and rational, is definitively male. Perhaps what is revolutionary is the fact that the body for feminist rhetoricians is a *female* one. In contrast to inherited rhetorical canons, writers like Spoel, Nicole Brossard and others envision a feminist rhetoric where the body is gendered and decidedly “womanly”. Brossard offers a feminist vision grounded in the reality and vitality of “the living breathing body” which operates not from a position of transcendence, but grounded in particular social, political and historical contexts. Admittedly, the importance of the audience in rhetorical tradition similarly grounds the rhetor/writer of rhetorical tradition contextually. However, a feminist perspective guarantees that the rhetor speaks from a body that is gendered and sexual, and gives priority to the “particular” contexts and issues that are important to feminists. Spoel is interested to establish the body’s pathos and elements of “sensual and emotional persuasion” as a viable possibility for “bodily and embodied rhetoric”, and position the body as “integral

to rhetorical processes of knowledge generation, or of invention" (201):

One of my objectives, then, is to participate in the general disruption by feminist scholars across disciplines of this historical-cultural legacy by revalidating and reformulating the body's role in the generation - not only the communication or delivery - of rhetorical knowledge (200).

A subject's past, present and the future emerge, ultimately, from the histories and "infinite individual" memories of each woman's body (Spoel, 204). This "embodied positionality", as Spoel describes, by nature invites and allows knowledges engendered from other bodies' feelings, perceptions and memories (205).

The place(ment) of the body is an unavoidable topic when discussing women-directed Nike ads of the '90s. Not only is the body clearly integral to both rhetorical and feminist arguments in general, for Nike the body is invested with weighty aspirations; it is the locus of curing social ills, upheld as the root of becoming (becoming healthy, becoming successful, becoming beautiful, becoming independent), vaunted as a tool of liberation. It is placed at the centre of a rhetoric of agency and individual will, a response to what Ted Polhemus calls:

A communication crisis in a middle-class, educated Western peoples. This is an attempt to recoup the financial losses as Reebok surpassed Nike, on one level. On another level, this is because in every time or era, there is an embodiment of social values in corporeal form via a corporate model or icon (33).

Through the 1990s, the Nike female body is seen as both locus of insecurities *and* portal to liberation and power - remember the ad quoted at this

thesis's opening, which appeared in a Spring edition of *Self* magazine in 1992. From Nike's perspective, a woman's sex has unfairly become her defining characteristic, the definitive thing in her life which presents or withholds possibilities. This body, riddled with uncertainties and presented as the inextricable cause of our experiences, is pushed to the forefront in many of the ads' texts. It is up to the Nike woman to overcome her shame in her body, like the woman in the "*Did you ever wish you were a boy*" ad, and recover the pride and beauty that hides muffled at her very core:

*Did you ever wish you were a boy? Did you? Did you for one moment or one breath or one heartbeat over all the years of your life, wish, even a little, that you could spend it as a boy? Honest. Really. Even if you got over it. Did you ever wish that you could be a boy just so that you could do *boy things* and not hear them be called *boy things*, did you want to climb trees and skin knees and be third base and not hear the boys say, Sure, play, but that means you have to *be* third base. Oh ha ha ha....*

*...And one day when you're out in the world running, feet flying dogs barking smiles grinning, you'll hear those immortal words calling, calling inside your head *oh you run like a girl* and you will say shout scream whisper call back Yes. What exactly did you think I was?*

(Self, July 1992)

In these ads, not only is the body a central rhetorical figure, but it is provocative in the sense that it functions *to provoke response*. A woman's body - historicized, gendered, emotional - is validated and affirmed, whatever shape she may be (in).

The Personal is *still* Political

The primacy of emotion - validating the female body and the experiences

and knowledge borne of it - has always been integral to feminist thought. This leads to a fourth issue common to rhetorical and feminist thought; the politicization of personal spheres. If we define things political as issues and ideas recognized as relevant and of public importance, we are demonstrating our agreement and enacting a shared knowledge. To challenge the canon of capital "K" knowledge is to change what is considered political (of public importance and relevance), and vice versa. Both feminist and rhetorical thought are engaged in the debate of what is political, albeit in different ways: feminism by revising what is considered political, and rhetoric through its redefinition of public discourse.

For feminism, the politicization of womens' interests entails embracing and upholding womens' emotions and experiences as powerful and full of potential, as Sheila Lorde observes:

As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and nonrational knowledge. We have been warned against it all our lives by the male world, which values this depth of feeling enough to keep women around in order to exercise it in the service of men, but which fears this same depth too much to examine the possibilities of it within themselves (Ede et al, 412-13).

Lorde's attention to a specifically *feminine* body to validate knowledge born of emotions are *reactions to* the pervasive devaluation of the private sphere: she seeks to politicize the personal.

While feminist thought has struggled not so much to inject the personal into the political as recast the idea of what is political, some writers view rhetoric as always-already having a legacy of using the personal for effective, persuasive

tricks. This constitutes valuing a different kind of memory, or *way to knowledge*.

Sharon Crowley has written:

Until the modern period, memory held a central place within rhetorical theory...In ancient times even people who could write easily...relied on their memories, not merely as storage facilities for particulars, but as structured heuristic system. In other words, memory was not only a system of recollection...; it was a means of invention (Ede et. al, 410).

In recent centuries, this system of invention, which leaned on memory, has come to be seen as being without structure, fallible, and therefore without value. Today, this heritage of memory is recalled, added to by contemporary rhetoricians using more personal, private texts as the basis for rhetorical studies. The shift in rhetorical theory to unearth previously neglected bodies of text reflects a decided interest in the personal. For example, Linda Bense-Meyers examines the rhetorical dimension of private writings. She insists that the codes of imagery in English emblem books were unconsciously incorporated in our expressions, thoughts and habits of mind, concluding that this influenced rhetorical practice in imagistic reasoning (98-99). Bense-Meyers' article tells us two things; first, that the effectivity of personal reading has a political (read: public) impact; and second, that it is worthwhile to think about texts outside of accepted canons of rhetoric - thus making us rethink what we consider to be canons.

Both feminism and rhetoric share an interest in politicizing the personal; to what degree do these interests intersect - or do they at all? Some feminists argue that while there are intersections between feminist and rhetorical thought,

examining a text rhetorically doesn't automatically constitute a feminist act.

There remains a distinction between the interests and motivations of rhetoric and feminism. When Kors-Campbell argues women's lib is a separate genre of rhetoric wherein the conflicting exigencies of public and private create a dialectic, she concludes that rhetoric itself is basically non-feminist (1999, 405).

Critiques like those offered by Kors-Campbell can be answered in two ways.

First, as rhetoric and theories of it are being constantly reevaluated and rethought, to juxtapose feminist theory with rhetorical thought is to decide upon a particular brand or flavour of rhetoric. Kors-Campbell has ascribed a number of characteristics to rhetorical thought which then position feminism in opposition to it. The gap between the two is thus definitional. Second, contemporary rhetorical thought's increased interest in choosing nontraditional texts for study coincides with feminist efforts to recognize works by female authors; although the motivations for reading such texts may differ, the implications and consequences may not.

This having been said, it is important to remember that when we speak about rhetoric, we often talk of the "traditional" arts of rhetoric or "classic models" of rhetorical persuasion. This demonstrates our awareness that Aristotle's time is worlds from our own. The emphasis on the personal, in classical time, has different connotations than today; there was no personal sphere in the sense that we speak of today, nor were emotions and the private life politicized, as they currently are.

Rather, classical models of persuasion mobilized personal states for political ends. The personal, or use of emotion in public appeal in classical rhetoric, then, was not motivated by the desire to reevaluate a public/private binary that drives much feminist thought. Where key links can be made - where similarities or parallels may be drawn between rhetoric and feminism - is that classic models of rhetoric offer contemporary theorists a heritage of seeing the public and political possibilities of the personal.

A campaign that was issued in 1998-99 offers a picture-perfect illustration of the politicization of the personal, be it from a feminist or rhetorical perspective (Appendix A). A series of about 12 ads appear as pictures and clippings fixed somewhat haphazardly in a photo album. As if not intended for public eyes, the pictures are candid, casual and intimate - a young black mother in a t-shirt holding her baby, ads featuring little girls variously playing dress-up, blow-drying their hair on an unmade bed, grinning at the camera with messy hair; a snapshot of WNBA star Cynthia Cooper giving a teammate a high-five, her teammate's hands just intruding onto the frame, off-centre; typed text amended by additional scraps of paper, affixed by tape, and personalized by cursive script, pieces of ribbon or personal items; and finally, evidence of torn out pages of the photo album/scrapbook.

All these design elements contribute to a feeling that the ads were created by unprofessional (read: private) hands. The use of the personal is markedly present through the choice of images, the personalization of the ads,

the decidedly unfinished, makeshift quality, and the less than subtle subtext asking women to value aspects of ourselves that we usually overlook as small and inconsequential. Identification is achieved by placing the personal in a public space (magazine articles), implicitly asserting the private is important and nontraditional subjects deserve attention - both elements of feminist and rhetorical thought.

Fight the Power

Academia's interest in so-called private writings, feminism's attention to the power and validity of personal experience, and the preponderance of personal and domestic images in public places are powerful indications that the personal is key to knowledge creation. This inclusion and validation of the personal as important and meaningful has had no mere consequence; authority no longer travels downward, withheld from society, but is invested in images and words available to all. It is no longer a faceless "They" that monopolizes knowledge creation; now, it is the task of "I/Me/We" to decide what is important and noteworthy. This rejection of a transcendent or ultimate authority preoccupies both feminist and rhetorical thought, and presents a fifth point of intersection.

Current rhetorical thought has spent much time and intellectual energy rejecting the idea of a transcendent authority. This has been accomplished through a deliberate emphasis on context or "scenic component" of rhetorical

action.¹⁵ Emphasis on the situational or scenic component of rhetorical action does not, however, constitute a complete disregard for heritage or histories of meaning. Lloyd Bitzer's contextual vision of rhetoric, for instance, acknowledges the force of tradition in shaping and influencing any situation (Kors-Campbell & Jamieson, 14-15). Many current studies of the role and significance of public address maintain a focus on discourse which is contingent, public, persuasive and contextual - and undeniably classical (Lucaites et al, 1999, 4).

Consequently, for some writers the force of tradition has great influence upon emerging rhetorical forms. And just as tradition shapes contemporary socio-political culture, inherited rhetorical tradition is intertwined with emerging rhetorical forms. This relationship between traditional rhetoric and a feminist rhetoric, characterized as repressive by some, or beneficial to others, is nonetheless unavoidably and inarguably influential:

Rhetorical forms are born and a special vocabulary, grammar and style are established...because we experience situations and the rhetorical response to them, a form of discourse is not only established but comes to have a power of its own - *the tradition itself tends to function as a constraint upon any new response in the form* (Kors-Campbell & Jamieson, 15, emphasis mine).

Stephen Mailloux talks about rhetorical authorities in his book *Rhetorical Power*. For Mailloux, the power of discourse comes from persuasive and authoritative concepts that help us map our social experiences (60-69). Much

¹⁵For instance, Kors-Campbell and Jamieson's emphasis on context and subject matter in the shaping of a distinct feminist liberation rhetoric in *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action* (1976).

like McGee's ideographs (430, 1999b)¹⁶, Mailloux's rhetorical authorities are the means through which discourse is endowed with power; these authorities interact and coexist with the world they are creating. He is not talking so much about an omniscient authority that is invoked or referred to, to give speech power; rather, he focuses more closely on "...rhetorical power, the specific way discourse achieves its effects on audiences within and without its conventional boundaries" (60).

Spoel also discusses authority, but she stresses a rhetor's embodied positionality which ultimately serves to limit any possibility of transcendence. Spoel argues that theories of embodied positionality inherently invite and acknowledge positions born of other bodies' feelings, perceptions and memories. The result is a deafening plethora of voices, articulating personal perspectives, which effectively drown out any singular authoritative voice. For Spoel, the creation of meaning and knowledge is born of these voices, each one offering different perspectives. This rhetorical knowledge is motivated less by a desire for "power-over" and more for a desire for "power-with"; that is to say it operates from a position that is by nature interested in solidarity and commun(al)ity (205).

How do Spoel and Mailloux suggest a link between rhetoric and feminism? In a sense, both Mailloux and Spoel's emphasis on context effectively

¹⁶McGee's use of the term "ideograph" refers to how certain concepts or "myths" take on special significance in shaping and constituting public social and political consciousness (1998, 10). These ideographs illuminate the particularly social human condition, and define a particular collectivity, as well as derive their meaning from and in relation to each other (1999b, 430-433).

weakens the power of the speaking subject. Their focus on the participatory nature of argument and the wishes and desires of audiences demonstrates a commitment to group action which is part of the traditional rhetorical process (Lucaites et al, 400). Interestingly, a commitment to some form of group dynamics - and action - is also a common feminist tenet, probably because it juxtaposes and contradicts the competitive "masculine" model of sociality. As such, both rhetorical thought and feminism lay great stake in ideas of nontranscendent authority and in power invested in and emerging from groups

Notions of the "we", collectivity, audience and community important to feminist and rhetorical thought, emerge from the pages of Nike ads. Ads that question the prevailing notions of beauty encourage a sense of collectivity among the readers, creating an audience of women who have experienced the double standards Nike calls to task. For example, the ad which asks "Isn't it possible for femininity and physical power to coexist?" (Appendix A8) - the question is underlined by a picture of a stack of weights, the lighter ones lettered "toned", and the heavier plates lettered "manly". Feelings of community and collectivity also emerge from ads that undercut the imperative tone and prescriptive nature of magazine images, like the ad that declares "A magazine is not a mirror":

Most magazines are made to sell us a fantasy of what we're supposed to be.

They reflect what society deems to be a standard,

However unrealistic or unattainable that standard is.

(Appendix A7)

Reading this ad, women are encouraged to question standards not of their own creation. Asking women to question standards and assumptions, these ads purposefully undercut the authorities who have issued these “unrealistic or unattainable” dictums on beauty, femininity and worth. Issuing challenges like these, authority passes to the women addressed in the ads, recognized as having the power to create their own standards.

The questions raised in the ads are provocative, designed to inspire women to make a difference. This brings us to a final theme common to both feminism and rhetoric; an orientation towards change.

Talkin' bout a Revolution

In the epilogue to *Contemporary Rhetorical Theory: A Reader*, John Lucaites and Celeste Michelle Condit explain that rhetorical theory is uninterested in universal or permanent truths; the rhetorical community of scholars does not claim to be always right, assume permanence, or uphold unquestionable authorities. Rather, Lucaites and Condit argue that:

Rhetoric exists in a context of contingency and situatedness, and exists for audiences and publics that are often differentially empowered and who must work to create coalitions in order to negotiate for their desired ends (1999, 611).

While for some writers the classical version of rhetoric translates fairly easily to contemporary contexts, for others rhetoric has to be recast in order to have modern relevance. McGee is part of the latter group. In “Text, Context, and the

Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture”, he writes that rhetoric has to be reevaluated and rethought so that it can be used as a realistic strategy to grapple with the “so-called post-modern condition” (1990, 279).

McGee’s reappraisal of rhetoric and criticism, which sees discourse as patched together and largely unfinished, offers a model of rhetoric where the speaker/writer’s main task is *interpreting the text* and the audience/reader/critic’s role is *text construction* (1990, 274). Meaning-creation lies within the audience, which places the possibility of change and criticism fully in their hands. This notion of “critical rhetoric” that McGee defines positions rhetors as instrumentally concerned with empowerment and chiefly preoccupied with the constraints of culture (1990, 281). McGee offers a modern version of rhetoric that implicitly speaks of change and agency.

McGee’s vision of rhetoric speaks to feminism in two ways. First, it considers society to no longer be homogenous, but culturally heterogeneous (1990, 285). This shares with feminism the general belief that reality is constructed discursively, a compilation or composition fabricated of ideological systems like race, ethnicity, gender and class, as Shari Dworkin and Michael Messner argue in “Just do...What?: Sports, Bodies, Gender” (1999). Second, McGee’s rhetoric shares with feminism an interest in displacing the power invested in image and media-makers; this is undertaken by scrutinizing the formation of texts we have falsely taken to be “natural” and “disinterested”, and investigating the power structures that lie behind their fabrication.

The interventionist stance shared by feminism and rhetoric suggests that examining a text for feminist implications from a rhetorical standpoint is a politicized act. Discourse is a form of action, with intent, and exigency. As Maurice Charland argues, rhetoric *necessarily* involves a concern with action, or “*praxis*”:

Furthermore, and this is key, the artful deployment of language, through topics, arguments, tropes and figures, has real effects upon language itself, upon meaning, and finally, upon what humans do (255).

As if the goal of creating change isn't difficult enough, social movements often have to play by inherited rules of rhetoric *while* challenging the classical definitions of what is considered public discourse (Lucaites et al, 382).¹⁷ This challenge to definitions of public discourse seems to be exactly what Charland is writing about when he argues that a rhetorical study necessarily involves a study of *discourse in action* in light of theories of *social production of discourse* (Charland, 383). Attention to the production of social discourse not only invigorates rhetorical study; it is also integral to feminist thought. Despite the fact that advertising is one of the neatest and most readily drawn examples of rhetoric, Nike seems confusing and at times contradictory. On the one hand, Nike's rhetoric upholds personal and individual empowerment, and

¹⁷This is particularly the case with women's liberation movements, though is easily applied to any rhetorical study which moves its focus to untraditional texts. Often social movements are confronted with the challenge of reconciling the demands of the public with the demands of the movements' members (Lucaites et al, 382), though it is probable there exists just as much conflict within one social movement which tries to represent people on the sole criteria of sex, as does feminism, as there is reconciling the demands of society and forces which seek to change.

advocates action and change:

Fight the things you don't want to live with.
Talk about the things that bother you.
Ask why it has to be that way.
Then change it.

(Appendix A2)

At the same time, some argue that Nike situates women firmly within the very structure of corporate consumerism that oppresses them - a tactic that creates very few, if any, possibilities for productive change (Dworkin and Messner, 1999). To study Nike demands that its depoliticized and defused "empowerment" be examined critically. A critique of Nike, therefore, represents an attempt to start a dialogue that may raise questions, trigger awareness, change and ultimately initiate agency.

Subject Matters

Rhetoric approached from a feminist vantage point intrinsically calls into question the very authorities that the speaker in Nike ads challenge; Nike ads question, outright, transcendence, exclusivity, the denigration of emotion, and the rejection of the female (bodily) experience in favour of the male (logical) experience. The feminist vantage point, which values the personal and experiential and rejects the object/subject duality, is illustrated by Nike's rhetoric *and* articulated by writings about feminist rhetoric. The Nike ads considered here demonstrate the intersections as outlined above, expressing a brand of feminist rhetoric. Without initiating a chicken-and-egg debate, both bodies of thought

inform each other in the pages of these ads, and can be seen to influence the other, depending from which side of the academic, theoretical or political fence we write.

By their very nature, ads are persuasive. However, Nike's persuasion is stronger, more compelling, the identification of reader/consumer to the product too intense for its popularity to be explained that simply. It would seem that Nike's women-directed ads are distinct because they are rhetorical in the stronger sense of being *political*. For example, rather than simply engaging the audience on an emotional level, Nike politicizes emotions, calling them into the arena of public debate, questioning emotion's second-class status. Through this and other aspects of a politicized rhetoric, Nike identifies a community that is *politically-audienced*; it is called into being from an perspective that is ideologically normative. Thus Nike ads offer prescriptives about means and modes of communication, power and agency of the modern female consumer, reevaluation of canons and subversion of accepted societal norms.

However, while the shared preoccupations of feminist and rhetorical thought illustrate the theoretical intersections suggested at the beginning of the chapter, they do not in themselves answer the driving question of this thesis; why are these ads so powerful? The two following sections of this thesis explore how the Nike ads actually work to appeal through figures of the body and the image, within the theoretical parameters of a feminist rhetoric outlined above.

Chapter 2

Figuring the Body: Sugar and Spice and Just About Everything Else

This chapter endeavours to identify how the body works as a rhetorical figure of appeal within Nike ads during the 1990s. Investigating how the body is manipulated, referred to, and spoken about within the normative implications of the feminist rhetorical politics as defined in chapter one provides a way to evaluate the impact of the ads. Setting out to decipher the figure (shape, qualities, attributes) and function of the body in Nike ads demands that I first explain what exactly I mean when I talk about the body; in what theoretical framework am I operating? To establish this, I borrow from a number of writings that have dealt with theories on the body. From there I situate the body in a discussion of rhetoric and feminism, before turning to explore the *puissance* invested in the Nike body.

Exploring the power invested in the Nike body is a two step process. This begins by establishing how the Nike body functions alternately as a vehicle and embodiment of salvation. Ultimately, this notion of body as salvation draws together contemporary theories of modern malaise and writings on the body, situating the Nike body in a broader sociopolitical theoretical context that explains more fully the rationale for a body rhetoric. This rhetoric of the body will be located as a specific, historical discursive form that grew out of issues raised by postmodernity.

From there, the course of looking at power invested in the body changes

slightly; looking carefully at the mechanics of the ads, it is possible to identify different forms and faces of the female Nike body. These forms - perhaps better described as representational themes - are each invested with meaning and power. Four are identified and discussed below; the body as part of a feminist legacy, the body as sacred, the body beautiful, and the notion of the pure/deep body.

Theories on the Body

Just as there are different discourses within political, academic and popular arenas, the ways we represent the body are also spoken about as different “discourses”.¹⁸ This relates to the different ways we conceive of and give shape to our bodies, and explains what is meant when we talk about different “versions”, “shapes”, “models” or “kinds” of bodies. According to Anthony Giddens, sociocultural phenomena like discourse, practices and institutions “‘shape’ and ‘invest’ corporeality by constraining and,...enabling particular activities...”(Schatzki & Natter, 8).

Often the discourses that help to shape our bodies are in conflict with each other, as different versions of the body implicitly support or represent particular politics. Michel Foucault wrote in *Discipline and Punish* that the body becomes imbued with “material elements and technique that serve...and

¹⁸Pierre Bourdieu defines discourse as “...constellations of signification; interrelated ways of talking, thinking, and representing” (in Schatzki & Natter, 6).

support...the power and knowledge relations" (Schatzki & Natter, 2). I would agree with Foucault that the body is invested with "elements and technique" that support power and knowledge relations. A small point of difference, however; the body, constituted through discourse, not only serves or supports "power and knowledge relations", but is also a place of contest, change and identity formation. It is through the body - through the different "versions" of the body spoken about above - that ways of thinking can be challenged. Ultimately, these different versions or models of the body allow us to see how the body acts not just as mirror, but as "text or social operator" (Bertholet, 397):

Above all, a complex social reality of the body, [is] a reality which is neither reducible to the biological level nor synonymous with a two-dimensional, simplified vision of society (394).

In this discussion, the politics inherent to the feminist rhetoric expressed in the Nike ads, and the sociopolitical context of which they are born, shape a particular version of the body.¹⁹ But what exactly is this sociopolitical context?

From a Foucauldian perspective, the world is underlaid with an intricate pattern of power struggles, these negotiations taking place through the formation and representation of forms. Because it can challenge, subvert or perpetuate

¹⁹As J.M. Bertholet has pointed out, the body constantly shifts and changes, always becoming something different in the attempt to appease and represent various interests; these are models offered by mechanistic thinkers (body as organic), psychoanalysis (body as frame for inscription of discourse, expressed socially via the Id and Super Ego), psychology (introduction of holistic body images), and ethology (body as means of communication with physical, ecological and sociological environment). Bryan Turner similarly says that intellectual movements in social theory, have presented varying understandings or models of the body, such as social darwinism (man as evolving animal), Freudianism (body as embodiment of desire), and Cartesian understanding of mind and body (split body dichotomies) (Turner, 2).

meaning, a form *practices* power. The body, in whatever incarnation or understanding, is one such form that works to carry, embody or convey meaning. The next step is to incorporate this perspective on forms and the body with an interest in rhetoric. Rhetorical forms of the body are important players in the game of meaning, identity creation, and power relations.

In this field of meaning, some forms are attributed greater importance than others. The loss of these forms, or changes in how we think about them, can reflect shifts in tradition and culture. Many contemporary thinkers write of a feeling of anxiety or cultural crisis specific to the postmodern era. The loss of a central figure, described by many authors as a loss of transcendence, is blamed as the cause of countless ills of modern society. Charles Taylor, for instance, characterizes contemporary society as plagued by a general feeling of decline and malaise, lacking vision and order, and void of feelings of sacredness and value (2-8).²⁰ Like George Steiner, Taylor argues that the loss of God as our moral "authenticator" has resulted in a feeling of moral aimlessness and loss of value (26).

For some, this inability to seek union with God has contributed significantly to the loss of meaning of the modern era. This major fact of our existence, an existence marked by a lack of a "real presence" and characterized

²⁰Charles Taylor identifies three harbingers of a general feeling of decline and malaise that he feels characterizes modern society: individualism, which rejects the authority of larger orders, effectively robs humanity of a broader vision and ordering, ultimately leaving modern man without order and meaning; the primacy of instrumental reason, which rids everything of sacredness and value; and loss of freedom, as participation dissolves in the face of feelings of powerlessness (2-8)

by a "sadness and loss and sense of crisis", is seen by many as a defining feature of modern Western culture (Schleifer, 3). The presence of an ultimate referent found within a higher power is particularly present in Althusser, who wrote:

God...defines himself as the Subject *par excellence*, he who is through himself and for himself ("I am that I am"), and he who interpellates his subject, the individual subjected to him by his very interpellation, i.e. the individual named Moses. And Moses, interpellated-called by his Name, having recognized that it "really" was he who was called by God, *a subject through the Subject and subjected to the Subject*. The proof: he obeys him, and makes his people obey God's Commandments (*Lenin and Philosophy*, cited in Brantlinger, 94).

Others, like Emile Durkheim, write of an incessant need for something transcendent, without which man is left terrifyingly insignificant and alone. It seems unfair to paraphrase, when he wrote so eloquently:

It has been sometimes said that because of his psychological constitution, man cannot live without attachment to some object which transcends and survives him, and that the reason for this necessity is a need we must have not to perish entirely. Life is said to be intolerable unless some reason for existing is involved, some purpose justifying life's trials. The individual alone is not a sufficient end for his activity. He is too little. He is not only hemmed in spatially; he is also strictly limited temporally. When, therefore, we have no other object than ourselves, we cannot avoid the thought that our efforts will finally end in nothingness, since we ourselves disappear. But annihilation terrifies us. Under these conditions one would lose courage to live, that is, to act and struggle, since nothing will remain of our exertions (*Suicide*, in Burrows and Lapidés, 53).

The loss of form that Steiner refers to, the dethroning and dispersal of a central kingly body in Hariman, the demise of Althusser's ultimate referent, McGee's collapse of the roles of reader/writer, and modern man's self-referential authority which is void of any sacredness described by Taylor; these authors are all writing about shifting power relations and a loss of a central authority. But

where does this power and authority shift?

Many of the writers above are either interested in the erosion of a classical god/man binary, or borrow from this hierarchical model to understand positions of reader and writer. This model of higher/lower has imprinted itself upon our conceptual and intellectual understanding; binaries abound - man/woman, intellect/emotion, logic/intuition, mind/body. When we try to re-imagine humanity, we are faced with either revising this structure, or rejecting it. Reevaluating the positions of power, it follows that one possibility is to attribute greater agency to the body, and reconsider the body's power and importance in knowledge and meaning creation.

For Kenneth Burke, the body *underwrites* the rhetorical nature of language - rhetoric is based in the body, physical, visceral, and contextual. As such, the body becomes a *means to* achieve identification; it is not only a sign, or an image said to represent the tenor of a society or manifest a political stance. And as there are countless contexts and physical bodies, there are so easily as many authorities.

In other words, there is no longer a unified, classical body because there no longer exists an outside, transcendent authority that imposes uniformity, order and value. The proliferation of "bodies" is part and parcel of a proliferation of competing meanings and interpretations in a time when eternal signifiers have been dethroned. Traditionally, social formations like religion, centralized government, and the family have dictated what is important and meaningful.

Individuals identified themselves in relation to these social formations, defined themselves by the terms provided by these social bodies; in this way, one becomes a Baptist, a Canadian citizen, a father/provider or mother/ nurturer. However, faith in these social formations, and their ability to offer terms through which subjects can define themselves, has eroded. As a result, no longer defining itself in objective terms, or in relation (against) the church, state or family, the body has to find new ways to define itself, and create a discourse to do so. Given this loss of faith in traditional authorities like the church, the inadequacy of the state, and the splintering of the subject in critical theory, representations of the body are metonymic of a larger sign system and social coding where meaning is *self-referential*.

The self-referential quality of the body - defining oneself *through* or in reference to the individual body - is, in part, the result of a transformation of visibility and representational practices. This change has effectively blurred the boundaries between writer/reader, speaker/listener and text/context. As was seen earlier, authority of the author and primacy of the text have been challenged, and placed in the hands of the public. Ultimately, this fragmented discourse of the body has been increasingly identified as a site of liberation and agency for those who choose to articulate or represent their own bodies.

Nike has taken advantage of these developments in theory, inciting readers to define their own bodies, as well as blurring the boundaries between writer and reader by involving the reader in a practice of reading and

identification. The body, in this respect, is positioned as a rhetorical figure; constructed of fragments, constituted of parts that act to appeal to the audience, it imposes a politics and way to read that places itself at the centre, challenging classical theories of rhetoric and incorporating the interests of feminism.

The Body as a Rhetorical Figure

What exactly does it mean to speak about a "rhetorical figure"? The term "figure" has historical connotations, to be sure, and as such has undergone a change in how it functions in conversation. W.J.T. Mitchell tracks the associations between an object, idea and word, pinpointing the historical shift away from the use of ornamental rhetorical *figures* in language to the more rational, scientific and empiricist *image* born of the Enlightenment.²¹ Mitchell argues the advent of theories that interrogate supposed realist representations has undermined any simple or naive acceptance of the image as reality. Such a challenge, adopted across academic disciplines, has reintroduced the figure to conversations of representation, meaning-making and the image (1986, 24-5).

²¹For Mitchell, just as the notion of the image superseded the rhetorical figure, the abstracted and nonmaterial understanding of the image superseded a more material understanding of the image. Historically, Mitchell argues that throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the notion of the figure, viewed increasingly as part of an old-fashioned, ornamented language, was replaced by the notion of the image. In the Romantic and modern period, this notion of the image was set up in opposition to the excessive, irrational, prescientific and ornamental rhetorical figures. The notion of imagery was split in two; the pictorial or graphic form, considered the lower form (and often associated with the empiricist model of perception), and an internal, organic, "higher" image. And just as the notion of the image superseded the rhetorical figure, the abstracted and nonmaterial understanding of the image superseded a more material understanding of the image (1986, 24-5).

Contemporary images of the body rely upon our knowledges to understand figures of the body; to do this, we have to recognize, be familiar with, and understand that there was an original body, which is now being re-presented or symbolized. Essentially, any figure of the body offers us fragments of the body out of which we construct a new body. A figure of the body, what ever shape, feel or colour, works with a stock of images we draw upon - myths, ideas, memories and knowledges - so that we may be able to see the body as imag(in)ed by Nike.

Thus when we "figure" something, we are changing the order of things so that they are presented in a way that is different from what it was originally. In this respect, the figure of the body refers to an ideology constructed out of connotative signifiers, as per Roland Barthes' reading of the image.²² It is difficult to apply this to Nike, as there are many levels of figures, metaphors and images. Rather than the tangible physical body simply standing for something, the body is figured throughout Nike in the sense that Nike constantly restages and re-presents bodies through literal, figurative, aural and oral images.

Trying to decipher the impact and effect of the body in women-directed advertising in Nike invests great semantic value on a material form. In a sense, it endows the body with connotations, much like words carrying meaning (a signifier), effectively erasing the line drawn between figurative and literal

²²Barthes identifies three levels or messages that constitute an image; a linguistic message, a symbolic coded or connotative message and a literal, non-coded, or denotive message. Barthes argues there is a tautological relationship between the last two iconic messages, difficult to separate as one relies on the other (35-7).

speech. Quintilian in *Institutio Oratoria* collapses this distinction between figurative and nonfigurative usage in his theory of rhetorical figuration:

The first point for consideration is, therefore, what is meant by a *figure* [*figuram*]. For the term is used in two senses. In the first it is applied to any form in which thought is expressed, just as it is to bodies which, whatever their composition, must have some shape. In the second and special sense, in which it is called a *schema*, it means a rational change in meaning or language from the ordinary and simple form, that is to say, a change analogous to that involved by sitting, lying down on something or looking back (Kibbey, 9).

Quintilian recast the inherited hierarchy of word and form and invested figures previously dismissed as linguistic forms with power and function. This is not unlike current rhetorical methodology, such as Ann Kibbey's analysis of eighteenth century Puritan liturgy:

Puritans often sanctioned prejudicial acts obliquely through the representation of violence in figurative language, and by indirectly cultivating an attitude toward material shapes that granted considerable semantic value to material forms (4).

For Kibbey, there is a collapse between the real and the intangible, world and word; there is no hierarchy of forms. Like the redrawing of inherited subject/object positions, the distinctions between the real and the intangible are similarly recast. She argues the classical understanding of *figura* had nothing to do with language; "In its earliest usage *figura* meant a dynamic material shape, and often a living corporeal shape such as the figure of a face or a human body" (8). Thus, texts and words are placed on the same level as feelings and our bodies' intangible forces and responses. Conversely, discourse and speech is similarly figural, dynamic and has material shape (10).

This collapse between figurative and literal speech is an assumption made when we look to the 'signs' of texts, reading them as if they convey a literal meaning. Cheryl Cole demonstrates this in her reading of how Michael Jordan's body "works" (1996).²³ Arguably one of the most recognizable figures worldwide, the meaning surrounding Jordan requires an agreement about what his physical strength and corporeal form represent and what meaning his body communicates. For Cole, Michael Jordan is a figure representative of American political culture and the national symbolic. This means that the body of Jordan lives, embodies and produces the myths of American society.

Although Cole does not identify herself as working from a rhetorical perspective *per se*, she argues the body of Jordan is a fantasy figure that enacts a nation's myths, a fantastic and inhuman form that evokes a response banal only in its predictability. For Cole, the emotions that the figure of Jordan invokes are the result of intense and savvy marketing. The campaign examined here is not much different in the sense that it was an intense attempt to evoke a strong level of response. However, while Jordan's body is defined through its physicality, the female body in Nike advertising denies tangible, physical, descriptive definition.

The language surrounding the Nike body, while operating within the normative implications of a kind of feminist rhetoric, overtly *avoids* description of

²³"American Jordan: P.L.A.Y., Consensus, and Punishment" looks, among other things, at how Nike-sponsored athletes like Michael Jordan and Sheryl Swoops work as instruments of modern power, functioning as discursive elements in a nation-centric discourse which helps contemporary society decipher what is violent, criminal and dangerous in society.

the physical body; the body is spoken about, but not in physical, descriptive terms that could exclude women who do not match the ideal offered. To be sure, bodies are shown - and these are fit, active, happy and healthy bodies - but text accompanying the pictures works to open up and invite identification from all shapes and colours. There are no lists of attributes, physical standards to meet or criteria to be fulfilled. The result is a body with meaning but without definite shape.

If the body is without definite shape, how can we explain how it works as a rhetorical figure of appeal? From a rhetorical perspective, language is intrinsically about the battle for symbolic pre-eminence, the struggle to co-opt signs and transform them. This understanding is informed by the classic Aristotelian notion that the rhetor's aim is to identify and persuade the audience. Burke's notion of rhetoric carries this forward, arguing that the written or spoken text, motivated by an ever-always condition of estrangement, appeals to a collective subjectivity in the attempt to assuage the "general divisiveness which, being common to all men, is a universal fact about them" (Beisecker, 1997, 46).

Taking a page from a rhetorician's book, communication is social in that any form or symbol - be it a word chosen, a house painted a certain colour, a briefcase bought - is, in a sense, an appeal to others. This is not simply the desire to "socialize one's position, to induce agreement in others." (Burke, 1984, 81). Rather, there is competition *within* a shared social knowledge, a quest for order *and* rivalry and greed. In this respect, representations of the body can be

seen as competing discourses of self-interest. This pragmatic or realistic appraisal of humanity is more realistic given that Nike's audience is vast, undefined, and more likely than not, has competing interests.²⁴ Consequently, the faceless quality of the Nike body (the fact that it tries to remain without shape and avoids description) works to appeal to as broad a consumer group as possible, to further Nike's self-interest.

Burke offers a way to see the collective nature of language within the increasing compartmentalization and competition he writes of; rhetoric is a means to seek unity, through language. The Nike ads represent a working illustration not only of how allusions to collectivity and community figure within rhetoric, but also how ideas of unity and a kind of shared-ness are essential to identification:

Identification is affirmed with earnestness precisely because there is division. Identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from one another, there would be no need for the rhetorician to proclaim their unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very essence (in Biesecker, 1997, 49).

These ideas are interesting in view of how the Nike body pretends to be cohesive and unproblematic. If the body can be seen as central to formations of identity and, consequently, of how we organize ourselves in society, then discourses of the body function as embodiments of appeal, essentially form(s) of rhetoric.

²⁴Burke recognizes this, saying this increasing "departmentalism" of small interest groups (1984, 47), contributes to a sense of impermanence which I see as characterizing contemporary society.

Perhaps we can look again to Burke, and borrow his terminology to describe the rhetorical function the body plays in Nike's advertising; Burke names the central governing expression within an ideological argument a "god-term" (1969a, 355). Although not an expression or term in a strict sense, Nike's body is a silent yet ever-present god-term in the sense that it performs like a referent for the ideological structure being expounded by the Nike ads. In the ads the body carries with it a history and a series of associations. Though this history, intimately linked to the female body, is fictional, universal, and disregards difference, the body represents and establishes the lexicon of the Nike discourse.

Burke's understanding of a god-term is much like the idea that grand metaphors, tropes and figures endow the ads with meaning and power. It is through the central figure of the body that the politics inherent to rhetorical and feminist readings find meaning. However, it is not only meaning that is created through these central metaphors; more accurately, it should be said that meaning becomes such (becomes "meaningful") because it is imbued with importance. For the Nike ads, the politics inherent to a feminist rhetorical discourse, outlined above, are important and effective because they appeal to greater things.

For example, Cole writes that identity is formed relationally, contingent and dependent, in a Foucauldian sense, on what it excludes. The normal self is defined and stabilized "through the location, containment, and visualization of

the deviant, the criminal, and the pathological (as corporeal identities)” (1996, 373).²⁵ Applying this to the woman in Nike ads, there is a similar good/bad dichotomy that finds meaning from a dyad of the natural/unnatural woman. The woman you’ve always wanted to be is miraculously revealed through exercise; this woman, or rather the *desire* to be the perfect woman, is the greater thing that Nike appeals to. We can imagine that in a similar fashion, borrowing Cole’s framework, that the fit healthy woman of Just do it advertising is declared in the national imagination in contrast with women who *don’t* do it. Another dyad is thus constructed; the active, liberated Nike woman is juxtaposed with the submissive and disenfranchised non-Nike woman.

The stigmatization of the unhealthy, or more precisely, unmotivated body, is in some respect a way to divorce or distance the body from the “pure self” waiting to be discovered at the end of an aerobics class. Bryan Turner calls this alienation by disease and social stigmatization from our sense of embodiment the ‘anarchic environment’ of the body. Consequently, we are incited and encouraged to work on our bodies as if they are somehow separate from our very selves:

Our bodies are a natural environment, while also being socially constituted; the disappearance of this environment is also my disappearance. Furthermore, it is not simply a question of the singular body, but the multiplicity of bodies and their social regulation and reproduction (1984, 7).

²⁵For Cole, this is how modern strategies of power work - we imagine and interpret acts through frameworks of identity categories. In this way, power makes itself visible by helping us recognize what is deviant. Cole argues that just as the dyad of athlete/gang member dominates the way contemporary America positions young African-American males, and provides a frame of reference to identify them (1996).

These ideas of a good/bad body and alienation reinforce the notion that our identities and social selves are defined by looking back *onto* ourselves - we “work” on our bodies, and purportedly define ourselves through this process. This willfully ignores that the independent, self-made body is part of an entire discourse of the healthy body, a denial that challenges me to assert and describe the mechanics and meaning from which this discourse emerges. While this idea may not be radical at the conceptual level, what is challenging is the attempt to decipher the shape, language and rationale of the body at a particular place and time. In short, what exactly does it the female body mean in Nike advertisements in the 1990s?

The Nike Body

Discourses of the body can be seen variously as democratized and personalized, self-affirming and self-referential, oppressive and dogmatic. Ideas of the body, which are conveyed through style and manner of representation, are implicitly about issues of power and thus have great impact upon the identity formation and articulation of individuals and groups. Just how this impact is achieved - how the body is represented and what discourse is employed - is at the crux of deciphering how the body “works” in Nike ads.

Nike ads derive their meaning, in part, through the power and importance invested in the body. Of course, a campaign that spans a decade is sure to have more than one version of the Nike body; in the interests of financial gain, Nike

tries appeal to as broad a section of the population as possible, targeting different ethnic, racial, interest, and economic groups. To do this, the body is imagined and imaged in a number of ways, presented from a number of perspectives so that different sides of the body, so to speak, are seen. In what follows, I will examine four prominent “takes” on the Nike body will be discussed; the body as part of a feminist legacy, the body as sacred, the body beautiful, and the “pure/deep body”. In order to make sense of these bodies, I will situate them in the social, political and theoretical context from which the discourse emerged. This demands looking at how the Nike body is endowed with meaning socially (how it performs and figures in society), what connotations it carries, and what are the ramifications to social and political theory.

The Body Sacred

McGee argues that social control is fundamentally rhetorical - all judgements, decisions, actions, even common sense are a result of persuasion. For McGee, such persuasion depends upon what he terms an “ideograph”. Ideographs are value-laden terms that point to the social, as opposed to the rational or ethical, functions of language. Making “pure thought” impossible, ideographs could be described as “language with history” (1999b, 428-430). Ideographs are ideological constructs like “liberty”, “freedom” and “the people”, which work to define and negotiate the life of the community (in Corbin, 10); as a result, they demand commitment to an understanding or usage of a term,

betraying their social nature.

In a number of discourses the body is a value-laden term; the body of Our Lord in liturgy, a body of water or land, a body of work by an author. Take these terms out of context, however, and they will lose their value and become meaningless. It is for this reason that McGee suggests we look at ideographs in relation to others (thus deriving their meaning tautologically) or in ideological arguments, where they work to explain, justify or guide policy in specific situations. In more ways than one, the body of Nike advertising functions like an ideograph. In Nike ads, the body is endowed with importance; despite being materially or physically undefined - or perhaps because of it - it is bestowed with an aura of magic or specialness, as if it is the seed of identity and becoming. More than a metaphor for success or happiness, the body becomes a locus for meaning, the sure thing, the centre. For Nike, the body is sacred.

This idea of the body as sacred permeates Nike advertising. It could even be said that this idea lies at the core, or very root of the Nike identity; consider the mythology surrounding Steve Prefontaine, the fiery Olympic distance runner from Oregon State who wore the first generation of Nike shoes. Prefontaine, or "Pre", has been mythologized in two movies and idolized in bronze at the Nike headquarters "World Campus" in Beaverton, Oregon, where the Nike Museum is dedicated to him. The advertising around Pre is vaguely hagiographic; "We made our first pair of shoes for him. We'll make our last pair of shoes for him"

(*Runner's World*, Dec. 1994).²⁶ Pre, however, is not the only athlete immortalized in Beaverton, or elsewhere; life-size images, towering statues, sculptures and cut-outs of other Nike-sponsored athletes grace NikeTowns across the USA. These huge, multi-level, gymnasium-like superstores have ironically been described as churches and temples (Anderson, 43). Essentially, if these are places of reverence, shrines to a Nike religion, it is the body that is being worshipped. It is the body's actions that are praised, the feats of athletes which are celebrated. These celebrated bodies, all different, are the same in that they embody the values and ideology of Nike, and are made sacred.

Christian Anderson points out in his discussion on Nike propaganda that sport is one of the most pervasive social institutions in contemporary society, ranking as one of the most important aspects of American life (20). Nike is often said to represent the ideals held most dear to Americans - values of progress, determination, integrity, achievement through winning competition, the grittiness of the underdog, and individualism (57-9). This is a link many who write on Nike make, as John Fowles wrote:

In Nike's case, the company attempts to link its products to deeply held and widely shared beliefs and values, many of which are above reproach. It creates and disseminates themes that the target audience finds significant and that support its personal ideology (Fowles, 1996).

Placing the body at the centre of this ideology reveals it is held most

²⁶A shorter version of copy reads simply "Pre would've like them" (*Runner's World*, Nov. '94)

sacred. These ideals are embodied in the athletes Nike has selected over the years. Rogue sportsmen like English footballer Eric Cantona, whose aggressive exploits on the field cost him game ejections in the mid-'90s, helped to create an awe-inspiring persona (one ad ran "He's been punished for his mistakes. Now it's someone else's turn" - *Nike*, Swain, 1996) and emotional John McEnroe (of whom a Nike executive once said "Everytime McEnroe throws a racket we sell more shoes" - *Sports Illustrated*, 1993), who was attributed with a kind of anti-establishment/counter-authority persona that made him seem unique and rare. These athletes, positioned as special outsiders, demonstrate awesome physical feats, their bodies and skills elevating them to a level of grace. Melodramatic as it may seem, if sport is the religion of the USA, the body is the church and these athletes are their gods.

Firmly positioned in the Nike ideology, the body is irrefutably important to different kinds of campaigns, yet undeniably different in important ways. In women-directed advertising throughout the 1990s, it is hard to find awesome and fear-inspiring bodies, like Cantona, McEnroe, and McEnroe's successor, Andre Agassiz. Instead of creating distance between the reader and the athlete, emphasizing their difference, the bodies of athletes like WNBA star Cynthia Cooper, volleyball/model Gabrielle Reece, and soccer Olympian Mia Hamm are positioned closer to the audience through friendly advertising; in one ad Cooper is pictured grinning at a teammate, giving a high five, in another Reece appears smiling opposite a sheet filled out (supposedly) by her, complete with smiley

faces and motivational cliches, and Hamm appears opposite a snapshot of her and her grandmother, with text which implicitly attributes her success to heritage, enthusiasm, spirit and desire to compete (in that order); nothing is said of burning competition, gritty determination, skill or the blood, sweat, tears and pain that has surely accompanied their successes in sports. In short, even the bodies of international female athletes are presented in an accessible, friendly manner.

So what is sacred about the female body, if women are not presented like their male counterparts? For starters, the female body as a whole is presented as a means of rejoice, escape and celebration. The “We are hedonists and we want what feels good” series of ads that ran in *Mademoiselle* in 1997 are one example of this; in all ads, the body, its pleasures and senses, are placed on the forefront:

We are all basically hedonists.
That's what makes us human.
And we were made to want pretty simple things:
Food.
Water.
Shelter.
Warmth.
And pleasure.

We want what feels good.
We need the thrill that comes from being good at something.
The thrill of doing what we weren't sure
we could ever actually do.

In the Hedonist ad featuring two runners, the body is also a kind of temple where faith is exercised:

Now a runner runs because she has faith.

Faith the road will carry her.
Faith her knees will last one more mile. And one more mile.
And she knows that running isn't food. And isn't shelter.
And it isn't even, at the end of the day,
really all that warm.
But it is how she finds pleasure.

(*Mademoiselle*, March 1995)

Pleasure, debauchery, excess, gratification - these are some synonyms for hedonism. In contemporary society, it seems that it is experiences that distance the self from the body that are described as hedonistic. Most often we invite or submit ourselves to external stimuli so we can distance ourselves from our own bodies; religion, drugs, sex and music are some means that come to mind. Euphoric escape through, say, aerobics, does not. One major difference with hedonism by Nike is that pleasure is found *through*, not outside the body.

In a more general way, the focus on the female body in Nike's women-directed advertising illustrates its undeniable importance. Our insecurities and strengths, our successes and hesitations, our sources of creativity, power and inspiration all lie within our bodies, Nike seems to be saying, encouraging us to embrace, claim and explore this force. In a sense, the specialness and sanctity of the women's body is to be realized.

The Body Beautiful

As well as a source of meaning, the body in Nike ads is also featured as a source of insecurity and self-doubt. Heightened by the 1990s backlash against the reigning "heroin chic" of ultra-thin supermodels à la Kate Moss, and following

runaway feminist hits such as Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, and Susan Faludi's *Backlash*,²⁷ Nike seized on increasing awareness and public criticism of beauty norms. Clearly part and parcel of a larger feminist agenda, Nike placed body image front and centre.

Placing the body centre stage works to do two things: validate women's insecurities and also incite change. Both are part of feminist rhetoric as we saw above. This rhetoric presents women's experiences, intimately linked to their bodies, as legitimate sources of knowledge. It identifies an audience of women by simple virtue of their biology, creating a sense of community. It politicizes the personal. Finally, through motivational and inflammatory text and images, it incites women to take charge and effect change. Using the body as a central figure in terms of politics and (politics of) representation makes it virtually impossible to talk about Nike without talking about body ideals.

Do ideals of the body beautiful only affect women? In view of the examples elaborated upon below, drawn mainly from *Mademoiselle* and *Runner's World*, this would seem to be the case. Although *Mademoiselle* is clearly directed at women, ads were systematically taken from *Runner's*

²⁷ Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth: The Undeclared War Against Women* identified notions of beauty as part of an oppressive regime against women (New York: Morrow, 1991); Susan Faludi's *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*, argued norms of femininity and increasingly conservative, anti-feminist politics of the 1980s were insidious tactics within a broader sociopolitical agenda to slow, stop, or reverse the progress of the women's movement in America (New York: Crown, 1991). Both works were immensely popular, heralding the introduction of what many described as "Third Wave" feminism to the arena of sociopolitical and cultural critique. As a result of these publications, both Faludi and Wolf rocketed to literary celebrity.

World as well, a non-gender specific magazine. Of the 76 Nike ads now sitting in front of me, I cannot find a single one that speaks about the male body in the same way the female body is spoken about. In fact, there was only one which I originally took to be the exception, positioning the male body like a female body. The ad, one of a set of four with similar stylistic features that appeared in 1990, stood out because it seemed to assign the same importance to physical appearance that is taken for granted, and then problematized, in ads directed at women.²⁸ Although I was later convinced that it was feelings of mid-life crisis and lost youth that were nipping at the runner's heels, not nagging insecurity about looks, the ad would have only served as an exception to the rule. The discrepancy only serves to underline that Nike sees beauty is important to the articulation of a female identity, and manipulates this.

In ads where the ideals of beauty are either referred to or featured, Nike exploits a growing criticism of beauty norms. This is done in a number of ways. Accepted notions of femininity are questioned, ridiculed and subverted, feelings of self-doubt are held up for examination, images in popular media are cut down to size, and finally alternative ideas of beauty, in the form of both everyday and

²⁸The ad in question, which appeared in the 1990 March and September versions of *Runner's World*, seemed to me at first to locate the runner's reason for running in his fears of aging or unattractiveness, as if his worth lies in his physical appearance. My thanks to Maurice Charland (May 29, 2000) who pointed out the idea that it was feelings of mid-life crisis and lost youth that were nipping at the runner's heels. In short, he is trying to out-run time:

He's fat and he's soft,/And he's/wearing your clothes./And he's/gotten too old,/ And he was /born on your /birthday,/And you're/afraid if you stop /running he'll/catch up with you/Just do it.

famous athletes, are presented.

In order to situate themselves counter to accepted notions of femininity, Nike has to demonstrate its awareness that beauty is often defined through inherited ideals of grace, elegance, and unmuscular thinness. For example, one ad points out that ideas of beauty have been changed, hinting that further changes are on the horizon:

Beauty is now something we express
through strength, passion, and skill.
And it's time we applauded ourselves for doing it.
And recognize the power in each walk.
Because the more we keep moving,
the more we leave in our wake a lasting image
of
what's
beautiful.

(Appendix A6)

Yet another problematizes the association we make between slender femininity and womanliness, asking:

If we encourage muscles these days,
why are too many muscles manly?
We were all born with muscles.
They don't belong exclusively on men,
any more than skin belongs exclusively on women.
Isn't it possible for femininity and physical power to coexist?
Isn't it possible that the more we embrace our bodies,
the more womanly we become?
Embrace your body.
And find out.

(Appendix A8)

A number of ads use text that recognizably reflect inherited notions of femininity, and juxtaposes them with language that directly challenges these inherited codes of femininity and beauty. One reads, in cursive, gentle script, on

one page:

*You are a nurturer and a provider.
You are beautiful and exotic*

yet on the facing page, amidst scribbles in stark uppercase text, a recognition of the modern woman's rejection of these legacy's answers:

YOU ARE NOT FALLING FOR ANY OF THIS
(*Mademoiselle*, Dec. 1997)

Other accepted signs of femininity, such as those learned from fairy tales and embodied by princesses and dancers, are coopted and revamped in a new vision of what is feminine and beautiful. For instance, in the ad below, the fairy tale text is cut short, then edited in handwritten script from an entirely different - and decidedly un-fairy tale-ish - perspective:

The prince knelt down and slipped the glass slipper over Cinderella's foot. And it fit just right.

In fact, it fit almost as comfortably as the new Nike Air Huarache™ Plus. Which is built on a woman's last²⁹ and which has a foot-hugging neoprene upper. So a woman can stop waiting for her stupid prince to come and go for a nice long run instead.

(*Runner's World*, Sept. 1993)

Consider as well how the soft images of little girls in white and pink tutus, in a slight Degas style, are compared to the strength, agility and fleetness of Mia Hamm in an ad which appeared in *Mademoiselle* in August 1994. Contrasting Hamm's lifestyle with that of a dancer causes the reader to reconsider what we

²⁹ A "last" refers to the bottom of a foot, important to shoe design as it is an area where the differences between the sexes is often overlooked.

consider beautiful, essentially by illustrating alternative notions of femininity.³⁰

In the pages of Nike ads, redefining what is beautiful enjoins the reader to contemplate how visions and versions of beauty are not the sole prerogative of image and media makers. This shifts the reader from a position of passivity into one of action and activity, and allies Nike *with* its female readership and *against* those who declare norms, like an excerpt from the ad below:

Most magazines are made to sell us a fantasy of what we're supposed to be.
They reflect what society deems to be a standard,
however unrealistic or unattainable that standard is.
That doesn't mean you should cancel you subscription.
It means you need to remember
that it's just ink on paper,
And that whatever standards you set for yourself,
for how much you want to weigh,
for how hard you work out,
or how many times you make it to the gym,
should be your standards.

Not someone else's.

Just do it.

This idea of playing against the norms of beauty, creating alliance *with*

³⁰The ad ran a page's length, in courier script, broken by a graphic midway down the page, of Hamm charging mid-stride, hair flying, off the page. It concluded;
AND THEN YOUR FATHER kicked you a ball.
and the ball was the shape of the whole wide world to you.
AND NOW IF YOU SEE GREEN YOU CAN ONLY THINK OF ONE THING TO
DO.
AND THE WORLD SLIPS AWAY FROM YOUR FEET.
AND THE SKY SLIPS DOWN INTO YOUR ARMS.
And you are free you are free you are absolutely free
TO BE WHO YOU WANT. TO GO WHERE YOU CAN.
TO BE WILD TO BE LOUD TO FLY IN THE MUD AND RUN IN THE RAIN.
STRONG ENOUGH.
AND SURE ENOUGH.
LIKE A DANCER.

readers and *against* physical ideals, is emphasized through Nike's winking and ironic tone. Ultimately, the codes of representations of women and feminine imagery within Nike ads (ie; the "stupid prince" copy; or the disbelieving "You're not falling for any of this, are you?") work to ally, and identify, with the female readers, and affect a slightly counter-consumerist ironic posture. The criticism of prevailing ideals of beauty, and media's role in perpetuating them, is central to these ads.

As Linda Hutcheon writes in her study of irony, an ironic attitude is often critical or assumes an attitude of judgement (38-41). This is an invested or interested position of judgement, due to the emotions or affective nature of irony - emotion somehow always involved in the attribution or intention. Therefore, irony is "often desperately 'edged': it has its targets, its perpetrators, and its complicitous audience, though these need not be three separate and distinct entities" (40).

With Nike, this ironic stance simultaneously solidifies and depends upon a feeling of community. Essentially, Hutcheon talks about how irony depends on discursive communities of shared knowledge and understanding to "happen". Thus; "It is less that irony creates communities, then, than discursive communities make irony possible in the first place" (18). Nike's attempt to effect readers sharpens this edge, between those who understand and those who do not, and creates the 'in-groups' that Hutcheon writes about, and uses images of the body to play out the contradictions and ambiguities of female imagery. She

writes that this edge, which “would seem to ingratiate and to intimidate, to underline and to undermine;...[and] brings people together and drives them apart”, is the distinguishing feature of irony as a rhetorical and structural strategy (56).

The Feminist Body Part

In part, the Nike discourse derives its meaning and power by presenting itself as pro-woman, implicating itself into a tradition of feminist thought by borrowing recognized signs and language of women’s fight for equal rights. Consider the scribbled script which underwrites one ad for running shoes; “The Air Verona for women. The opposite of being barefoot and in the kitchen” (*Runner’s World*, Sept. 1992). This is a perfect example of Nike’s effort to involving itself in the history of women’s struggles. Recognizing and asserting a popular feminist agenda, Nike offers a narrative of what it means for young girls to grow up, and rewrites the myth of girl/womanhood. Regardless of whether this was the experience of all women, Nike proclaimed it to be. In doing so, Nike’s focus was increasingly on personal experience and the body, and less on events or issues in the world at large.

As such, the body is key to Nike’s feminist narrative. In order for the discourse circulating in Nike ads to express a “feminist” politics, experiences rooted in the body have to be recognized as key to these politics and a crucial part of a feminist history. What are the relations between the body and

feminism?

To begin, "feminist" is a complex category. A text is not feminist merely because of its author's intentions or because of a reader's disposition. Along these lines, a female could author an anti-feminist tract, and a male could see the feminist ramifications in a text previously ignored by feminists. Rather, a text's "feminist" or "feminine" identifications lie, according to Elizabeth Grosz, in the complex relations between the author's corporeal textual residues or traces, the text's materiality and effects in marking the bodies of the author and readers, and the corporeality and productivity of the readers (18)³¹.

Grosz clearly places emphasis on the contextual, embodied, and political positionings involved in text creation. Contingencies, how a text is used, when, and to what effect, are key when considering the feminist nature of a text because they consider the place of the body in relation to a particular situation, and the impact context has in shaping the body. Jennifer Wicke places this concern at the forefront of her take on 1990s North American feminism, emphasizing the intersections of social, gender and material conditions within the contemporary multimedia universe. In this respect, there are feminist implications in locating not only ideology, but the circulation of images conceived

³¹This "discursive positioning" of a feminist text that Grosz describes is temporary and contingent, yet in that moment demonstrates certain characteristics. Briefly, these characteristics are threefold. One, a feminist text renders patriarchal or phallogocentric presumptions governing the context of a text visible (22-3). Two, a feminist text must, in one way or another, problematize the standard masculinist ways in which an author assumes and occupies the position of enunciation (23). And three, a feminist text must not only be critical or challenge governing patriarchal norms, but must to facilitate the production of new, perhaps unfamiliar discursive spaces, styles, modes of analysis, argument, and genres that contest the limits and constraints currently at work in the regulation of textual production and reception (23)

of as feminist, in the public sphere. Wicke coins the term *celebrity feminism*, defining it in relation to other genres or schools of feminist thought:³²

Feminism is not exempt from celebrity material, and more and more, feminism is produced (or feminisms are produced) and received in the material zone of celebrity (754)

Looking at, and borrowing Wicke's model of celebrity feminism to interrogate Nike allows us to incorporate interests in media, feminist theory, and rhetoric. It provides a vocabulary to examine the role of images and impact of media in popular culture. However, where a feminist perspective as per Grosz may focus on the intertextuality of reader, writer and context, and assumes a set of values or politics, celebrity feminism is not defined the same way. Whereas the politics of a feminist text may declare it as feminist, this does not seem to be the case of a text that one might declare *celebrity* feminist. In short, two texts, one feminist and one celebrity feminist, are declared feminist for entirely different reasons; the former because of the politics and characteristics it expresses and the latter because of its position and circulation in society.

It is not as if celebrity feminism and other kinds of feminism have nothing in common. For example, Wicke argues the interconnections of celebrity feminism and materialist feminism are impossibly intertwined, declaring that the

³²In particular, Wicke juxtaposes celebrity feminism with materialist feminism, which she sees as impossibly intertwined, influenced by and bearing weight upon celebrity feminism. In particular, Wicke defines materialist feminism as "a feminism that insists on examining the material conditions under which social arrangements, including those of gender hierarchy, develop" (751).

nature and conditions of material feminism influence celebrity feminism (751).³³ In the same way, celebrity feminism and the feminist rhetoric expressed in the ads reflect each other. For instance, the politics in Nike ads enact many of the characteristics of feminism described by Grosz. At the same time, the arena is a public one, and the impact and influence of media is unavoidable, thus exhibiting some characteristics of Wicke's celebrity feminism.

In this way, Wicke's celebrity feminism provides a framework to think about Nike. Wicke's relevance to this discussion lies in the placement of media, celebrity images and portrayal/representation of feminists central to debates and "academic-feminist quarrels and controversies" (776). For Wicke, images of bodies - glossies and tabloids and entertainment news - operate or are at the service of a feminist politics. The bodies of the ads, independent and powerful, enact a self-proclaimed feminist lifestyle.

For Wicke's notion of celebrity feminism to be contribute to this discussion, then, it has to be thought about in terms of the values and politics discussed earlier in chapter one; in what way does celebrity feminism relate to rhetorical feminism? On a very basic level, celebrity feminism circulates images that invite identification through the bodies of Nike athletes, as Cole and Hribar argue in "Celebrity Feminism: *Nike Style* Post-Fordism, Transcendence, and Consumer Power" (1995). Cole and Hribar identify Nike's 1980s and '90s

³³In particular, Wicke defines materialist feminism as "a feminism that insists on examining the material conditions under which social arrangements, including those of gender hierarchy, develop"

women-directed advertising in the United States as part of a discursive formation that legitimized and promoted a brand of popular feminism amidst an era of neo-conservatism and feminist backlash. Cole and Hribar identify this “Nike-woman alliance” (350) as a brand of ‘celebrity feminism’, and associate Nike with high-profile, media-focused events and athletes like Michael Jordan and more recently, Mia Hamm and WNBA stars Lisa Leslie and Sheryl Swoops. In this discussion, the bodies of the mega-athletes are at the centre of a feminist media circus.

As well, by the very fact that it emerges from or is born of the contemporary media system, celebrity feminism demonstrates an interest in context and immediacy that is emphasized in Nike’s rhetorical feminism. For Wicke, the discourse of celebrity feminism is a social process occupying one of the most active and powerful ‘zones’ of contemporary society uniquely relevant to feminism in the mid ‘90s. She argues that “the logic of celebrity construction is complex, rich, and historically specific” (757).

The celebrity zone is the public sphere where feminism is negotiated, where it is now in most active cultural play. This zone lies on the border of academic feminism, adjacent to it, sometimes invading it, at other times being invaded by it. (757)

This emphasis on context is critical to a rhetorical perspective on Nike. As such, the era of the “celebrity zone” demands brief discussion. According to Alan Ingham’s analysis of the Reagan era, 1980s feminism meant having a job, a power suit, and very few traditional feminine aspirations *or* qualities (remember the unlovable female characters in *Working Girl*, *Baby Boom*, and *Mr. Mom*).

Ingham argues that the New Right saw feminism as a threat to the family and the state. The crisis of the family and the state of the 'postfeminist' imaginary, he writes, was soothed by a national preoccupation with the body.

Cole and Hribar believe that Nike positioned itself alongside, or in concert with, this postfeminist imaginary, an atmosphere greatly changed from the movement feminisms of the 1970s. In a general sense, a postfeminist imaginary denotes a less interrogative, more conciliatory, conforming and normative brand of feminism which increasingly married consumer ambitions with feminist values, reconciling these previously disparate meanings and goals (Cole & Hribar, 356-7).

Cole and Hribar argue that the "Just do it" logo was positioned in direct opposition to the "Just say no" slogans that were designed to deter the threat of the dependent, ailing, marked and sickly AIDS/HIV and drug bodies. For them, the Nike body is part of a hard/soft body dichotomy that subsequently took shape. Whether fitness, or Hollywood images of increasingly toned and fit stars, Cole and Hirbar write:

The articulation of the family with the economy and of fitness, health, and hard bodies with success, ambition, discipline, will, and effort established the body as the normalizing lens through which other bodies were judged and condemned (354).

Nike, it can be said, adopted a feminist vocabulary by exploiting a number of theoretical and sociopolitical knowledges that were part of the contemporary feminist discourse. This discourse acknowledged the pervasiveness of the entertainment/sports industry, demonstrated a suspicion or cynicism of media,

and integrated a vocabulary introduced by feminists like Susan Faludi and Naomi Wolf. Nike adapted their form of feminist rhetoric to the mass media/entertainment industry, and exploited both a contemporary obsession with the body and feminism's political and theoretical interest in the body. From Nike's perspective, placing the body central to a media system of advertising and meaning making was a winning strategy, as it relied upon and reinforced the intertextualities and interrelations of audience, consumer and producer within a situated and historical body - core principles of a feminist ethic.

The Deep/Pure Self

In light of this focus on historical, cultural, and societal contexts, Nike appears not so much to be offering a new body as patching one together from inherited discourses, representations and myths. One myth in particular, which Cole and Hribar charge Nike with borrowing, is the myth of the 'natural' self. Leaning heavily on Ingham's characterization of the Reagan era outlined above, Cole and Hribar point out how the idea of the deep self and free will are constantly invoked in Nike's '90s ads. This is a discourse that envisions the self as something natural, a true, real essence struggling to shed any obscuring and unnatural artifice. Thus:

Nike appeals to a discourse which judges as unnatural those practices that alter the natural body and apparently falsely represent the self. Nike's appeal to a more authentic, internal self that can be realized through exercise is generated over and against external practices and the inspection of the body's surface (the site of gendered pleasures). Nike (as a metonym for exercise)

situates itself as a better version of a beauty practice through its apparent recognition and affirmation of an inner and more authentic self. Nike directs our gaze away from bodily surfaces to depth, to the qualities of the eternal self. In Michel Foucault's terms, **Nike wants to display, free and celebrate the *soul* contained within the body. Why is this deep self so appealing?** And, how is the deep self implicated in America's postfeminist imaginary? How are women being repositioned in the world according to Nike? (352, bold emphasis mine).

The notion of the deep self is an idea repeated in a series of ads, spanning the decade. It underlies ads that encourage women to throw off repressive ideals of femininity, and embrace themselves. Consider, for instance, the series of ads that ran in 1999 that invited women to imagine themselves and ordinary women as heros, extraordinary in their life. Three of these ads began "Two years ago, even she didn't know she was a hero", "Does a hero know she's a hero if no one tells her" and "Who are your heros?...Did you name a woman? (Did you name any women?)" (Appendix A3-A5).

If, however, there is the *real* body of women, this deep self to be revealed through self-affirming exercise, there is a contradiction between Nike's so-called celebrity feminism, with its emphasis on figures in the media spotlight, and Nike's own emphasis on the decidedly *unglamorous* everyday inner self. Is this contradiction resolved if we consider that although the space Nike uses is public, the tone, imagery, words, selection of topics and overall style of address is intimate, personal and private? Can these ideas of the deep self coexist within a kind of celebrity structure described by Wicke? One answer may be that, as mentioned above, Nike tries hard to avoid painting a physical picture of the ideal

woman - there is no categorical list of things a woman should aspire to - and instead puts much energy into encouraging women to create their own ideals.

In Nike ads, there are few, if any, images of women who have signs of working class social status, let alone women of colour who aren't athletes. Some writers argue that because of this the Nike ideal is irrelevant to anybody but upper-middle class women, useless to ethnic, black or working class women. Sherri Dworkin and Michael Messner write that Nike offers an individualized and depoliticized feminism (350). For Dworkin and Messner, the fit Just do it body has a "heterosexy femininity" that offers no hope to women underrepresented in the media, nor does it champion changing current representational practices.

In the media, these bodies are not unambiguously resistant images of powerful women, but rather an ambivalent framing or subtle trivialization or sexualization of women's bodies that undermines their muscles and their athletic accomplishments (352-353).

In a similar vein, R.W. Connell calls this "emphasized femininity". This is where images of athletic women are muted by a persistent idea that one is rewarded if one maintains a heterosexual attractiveness (Dworkin & Messner, 352).

Others, like Karen Avenoso, poke fun at the rhetorical equation of liberation and putting in a good seven-minute mile. "I see no causal connection between sweating and social change." Avenoso wrote, "Eighteen-to-30 year-old women are being invited to bond over sneakers, as we shrug off debilitating problems that demand far more energy than exercise does" (18). Detractors, like Dworkin and Connell, assign consumerist qualities to Nike's feminist message, essentially dismissing any effective feminist value. They argue that given the

focus on ourselves, our self-esteem and our bodies, effecting greater social change seems to be placed on the back burner.

For both Connell and Dworkin, the Nike version of the female body is narrowly defined, limited by ideas about beauty and traditional ideals of femininity. Following this argument, Nike has limited appeal as well as limited effect. The limitations of Connell and Dworkin's readings of Nike is that they discard the agency of the reader, and invest meaning solely within the text and not in the play of the text in society, the interaction between text and reader, or within the reader's interpretation of the text. For instance, Dworkin's argument that the images downplay the masculine attributes of sport by making even international level athletes - and sports in general - seem unthreatening by virtue of their femininity, locates meaning in the ads and not in relationship to (the elements of) the text.

Meaning, however, does not lie within the ads themselves, but rather in the exchange of meaning between image, reader, and context. For example, the swastika adopted by the Third Reich prior to the Third World War has come to represent the terror and inhumanity of the Nazi regime, assuming anti-Semitic tones and the aspirations for Hitler's pure race. The swastika, however, meant something completely different for hundreds of years, and never had much to do with the Germanic and Nordic races save random engravings on pictorial slabs and tombstones in Nordic countries, none dating later than 1500 years ago (Liungman, 64-68).

In this light, Dworkin's basic argument is flawed; not only are Nike ads appealing to an audience broader than the narrow demographic represented on paper, the meaning of Nike ads does not lie solely within the text but rather within the reading and compilation by readers. The images of the women, though limited in range, do not limit the possibilities of how they can be read, or who will read them. A parallel example is the fact that although they themselves are rarely pictured in Nike ads, young black and hispanic males are Nike's largest consumer group for sport shoes. This market instead sees itself represented by figures like Michael Jordan and fellow Chicago Bull Scotty Pippen, effectively forfeiting any differences amongst themselves as a demographic or market group, and ignoring the discrepancy between their lives and the lives of Jordan and Pippen. The meaning of a Nike shoe came to signify things other than what they purportedly represented in the ads themselves - success, wealth, authority and power were accrued from a Nike shoe, often not even through sport, but rather through possession.

In this way, the deep/pure self that Nike offers exists for women who may not find themselves (their social, racial, ethnic) represented in the pages of Nike ads. The power of the ads lies not in the framing of the bodies, or the images themselves, but how they are read as powerful or strong or even revolutionary. Certainly the non-competitive messages that Dworkin identifies, such as goal setting, self-appreciation, self-realization and mutual support, could be seen as aligned with the politics of a feminist rhetoric discussed here at length. There is

a difference, however, which asserts the power of the Nike ads, and the possibilities that lie within them; the difference is that rather than locating meaning entirely within the text, the normative implications of a feminist rhetoric embraces a politics which inherently values the position of the individual and invests the reader with agency. As well, Nike offers models of change at all levels, through the very representations of women, envaluing of women's contributions in home and society, and giving recognition to female role models.

Significant Bodies

When considering a series of texts like Nike's women-directed campaign, the body takes on a particular significance. In these ads the figure of the body is pivotal to the creation of meaning and consequently key to discussions of rhetoric and feminism. The exploration of corporeality, as it functions within the Nike ads, invites us to consider how we imagine the body - what importance, what position, what forms, and what connotations we impress upon it. The body becomes a terrain for textual exploration, a concoction of time, experience, and adopted meaning. In short, the social existence of the body is one grounded in context, bearing the indelible markings of history as well as enacting ingrained habits of demeanor and sociality.

The presence of the body, whether it is assumed, ignored or articulated, is central to critical readings of identity politics. This discourse is often used to forge social identity and manipulated to assign value. Issues of identity, power

and agency are mapped out on the body, which becomes a site of negotiation. The body is a means through which social processes of identification are undertaken and issues of alienation are addressed.

In the pages of Nike's ads, the body is represented in a number of ways, all of which ask readers to fill in their selves - their histories, their experiences, their shapes, their likes and dislikes. Borrowing and subverting codes of femininity, insinuating themselves into a recognized history of feminism and exploiting a contemporary need to identify with a central force (the body), Nike uses many voices to appeal to readers. This takes place, to a great extent, on the terrain of the body.

Much like the body figured in Nike's ads, this understanding of how the figure of the body can function rhetorically, as well as the manner it is constituted through images, figurative and otherwise, can be applied to a different kind of body. In the next section of the thesis, Nike's corporate image is shown to function like the figure of the Nike female body: as Nike used different forms of the body (the body beautiful, the body sacred, etc.), there are different "faces" or campaigns; just as the body is invested with importance and meaning in part through its association with a social formation (the feminist movement), Nike's corporate image is invested with greater importance through its associations with sport and the nature of advertising; and finally, much as the Nike body can be positioned as part of a broader theoretical context which interprets the athletic body as a placebo for social ills, Nike's corporate image can be similarly read as

managing a need in society exacerbated by the ease and comfort of consumerism - the opportunity to define oneself either through the challenge and struggle of sport, or by the purchase of material goods.

Chapter 3

Image is Everything

In the previous chapter, the figure of the body was shown to be central to the meaning created in Nike ads, enacting a politics shared by both contemporary feminism and rhetoric. In particular, the female body and related codes of femininity, sexuality and emancipation were manipulated, subverted and invoked, essentially creating a particular image of womanhood *through* images of the female body - whether verbal, figurative, metaphoric, or photographic.

Adhering to a feminist rhetorical politics, the image of the woman's body was instrumental to Nike's distinct and recognizable style that developed throughout the 1990s. Nike advertising adopted a tone and method of rhetorical appeal that was paradigmatic, in terms of language, contemporary themes, position of reader and an ironic view of media. Nike adopted a tone, assumed a position that was, and still is, imitated; from Michelob ads that poked fun at the same norms of femininity (Appendix B1), to Reebok ads that began using women athletes in a distinctly Nike-ish fashion (Appendix B2), even current Addidas ads that are often mistaken for Nike ads,³⁴ Nike has consistently revamped and

³⁴Take, for instance, Adidas' "Runners: Yeah, we're different" campaign, which ran in Runner's World from the late 1990s onwards; this campaign seems similar in tone and style - the Adidas logo in roughly the same spot as Nike's "Just do it" logo, the images celebrating the rituals of sport which may be seen as too extreme, unusual, or uncomprehensible to non-competitors. One example is the male runner taping his nipples down before a race (a common practice to avoid chafing from shirt and race number), oblivious to an elderly woman's look of bewilderment.

remoulded its image, spending more advertising dollars than any of its competitors throughout the 1990s.³⁵

These dollars have been well-spent; the Nike logo, and the swoosh that represents it, are two of the most recognizable symbols in the world. The widespread recognition of the swoosh, and the popularity of Nike ads, are the result of a pervasive and extensive marketing strategy, to be sure. The ubiquity, alone, however, does not explain *how* the symbols, and Nike's diverse campaigns, work to represent an image Nike that is identifiable, impressive and appealing. How does the image of Nike – the corporate body, if you will – appeal to consumers?

Nike is associated with certain key American values: independence, success through perseverance, emancipation, freedom, character, determination and willpower, among others (Anderson, 1998; Dworkin & Messner, 1999; *Nike*, 1997; Cole, 1996; Cole & Hribar, 1995; *Sports Illustrated*, 1993). These values contribute to an image of Nike as a mythic and rebellious company. Much like the figure of the body in women-directed advertising, which portrays a particular feminist image by invoking a politics textually and visually, the corporate body of Nike is an image constructed of fragments. This image is comprised of aspects chosen by Nike as well as formed from our interpretations of these images. Nike's corporate image is "read" visually, and enjoys a prominent place in the

³⁵For example, in 1997 Nike spent \$163 million on media expenditures, compared to Reebok's \$56 million, Adidas' \$20 million and Coke's \$112 million. According to Nike's 1998 fiscal report, the total advertising and promotion costs of 1997 amounted to \$978 million, \$500 million devoted to sports marketing and \$400 million to advertising (Anderson, 77).

North American imagination.

Earlier chapters explored how Nike's women-directed ads are constituted, and act rhetorically. Throughout, the body has been central to this discussion, whether as a topic of theoretical concern, functioning as a rhetorical figure of appeal, or simply providing an analytical category or focus. Discussion below continues this exploration, arguing that Nike's corporate image acts, and can be read, in much the same manner as the image of the Nike female body. In short, the same rhetorical principles apply; for example, language works rhetorically by appealing to and identifying with potential audiences, authority is de-centered, ousted from traditional centres, meaning is an irrevocably contextual practice, and readers are re-positioned so that the subject/object position is problematized (the last being crucial to feminism). Finally, before embarking further upon this discussion, it is important to note that while earlier in this thesis the implicit subject is the "viewer/audience", the focus on Nike's corporate image calls us to reconsider how we imagine the subject being alluded to; rather than the viewer/audience, the subject is defined in terms that are connotative of the one's role as a consumer, and as such the "consumer/audience" moves to the forefront.

Admittedly, by virtue of their many disparate campaigns and markets, countless qualities could be associated with Nike. The corporate image examined here is the product of a deliberately articulated corporate culture, treatment by media, and Nike's subsequent response to critique. Nike's

corporate image associates itself with specific ideals and values through advertising strategies and iconic representations, using rhetorical strategies of appeal to identify with the consumer/viewer. These strategies, it is important to point out, are enacted *publically*, ensuring that the focus of this discussion is similarly committed to examining the public, social, and shared nature of language.

In the foreword to her seminal *Decoding Advertisements*, Judith Williamson wrote that “Politics is the intersection of public and private life. This book deals with a public form, but one which influences us privately: our own private relations to other people and to ourselves” (10). In the same vein, my aim here is to understand how texts perform publically and explain the mechanics behind what has an impact, and why. Because of this focus, I am bound to texts that have a public nature, aspects of Nike that would reach and affect the consumer. The public qualities of rhetoric, advertising and Nike all ensure this focus.

The Nike image appeals to consumers on three different, yet complementary, bases: one, Nike answers a basic need to define oneself in relation to, or against, something through both sport and material gain; two, Nike’s ubiquitous presence as an advertising entity, a public sphere that monopolizes the contemporary imagination, practically guarantees its persuasive character; and three, Nike takes advantage of the role and importance assigned to sports in contemporary society in general, and their consumers in particular.

How does Nike's corporate image have anything to do with the success of Nike's women-directed campaign of the 1990s? Through these three rhetorical strategies, the consumer/viewer identifies with Nike's corporate image, causing Nike ads to resonate in the hearts and minds of consumers. This, in turn, lends weight, authority and credibility to the women-directed campaign of the 1990s, ensuring their marketing strategy ample media attention and ensuring Nike a special place in the American imagination.

The rhetorical strategies described above provide useful categories to investigate how the corporate image *works* to make Nike ads more meaningful. Whether figurative, metaphoric, literal or otherwise, the corporate image assumes poetic, political or emotional weight. Here, I draw upon John Lucaites' and Robert Hariman's collective and independent work (or "way to read"), which offers a point of access and vocabulary to contemplate the relationship between image and meaning. Lucaites and Hariman provide a way to understand how the Nike image becomes meaningful through, among other things, the company's persona, corporate ethic and culture, myth, academic, professional and popular discussion, and their own responses to critique. Much like the texts Hariman and Lucaites study, Nike similarly answers a basic need in society. Here I also look to W.J.T. Mitchell's notion of "iconology", and put his inclusive understanding of the image to work, as well as Roland Barthes' idea of a rhetoric of the image.

To investigate how Nike's integral role in the culture of advertising has rhetorical functions in itself, I look to John Tagg, William Leiss, Steven Kline and

Sut Jhally, Raymond Williams and Judith Williamson. To explore the role of sport in modern society, and how Nike manipulates the ritualistic, mythic and sacred values that have been transferred onto sport, I look to Pierre Bourdieu, Grant McCracken, Daniel Boorstin and David Lawrence Andrews, all authors who investigate the centrality of sport to the modern imagination.

The Great Rebel

To investigate how Nike's corporate image works, it is necessary to first define the Nike image we are speaking of. In Nike's case, there are many campaigns that are clearly cultivated to appeal to different consumers, each campaign offering a different take on Nike. Nike is the renegade when it challenges IOC edicts, the independent woman when it glorifies active femininity, the world activist when it pledges to make working conditions more equitable at their factories in developing nations, the conscientious and caring citizen when it embarks on social campaigns for inner-city youth. These different images or faces of Nike, however, are not completely divorced from each other, nor do they draw their power and meaning independent of each other. Instead, they are informed by Nike's corporate body, their appeal and presence perpetuated by a defined, articulated and influential company image.

Images - whether figurative, metaphoric, literal or other - carry poetic, political or emotional weight. In the same way, the many faces of Nike contribute to a distinct image. Shrewdly, Nike takes full advantage of the central role and

function played by advertising in society; manipulating their own media personality, exploiting a system of language that is predicated on appeal and conscious of the important role of the image within that language system, Nike engineers a forceful, unavoidable and most importantly, appealing presence. This is done through the marketing strategies, public discourse, and the ads themselves.

From its origins, as pointed out earlier, Nike had somewhat mythic beginnings. The rags to riches story of Phil Knight driving miles to state track meets, selling shoes out of trunks of cars, is often cited as evidence of an auspicious, yet humble root of greatness. Success despite obstacles has heroic connotations, a theme that Nike often returns to in their creation of what is essentially a Nike pantheon. By creating their own gods and goddesses of Nike, these (often anti-) heros and heroines lend a sense of greatness, immortality and power to Nike, feelings which are then invested in their products.

The creation of heros, who embody or symbolize ideals held in high esteem by society, like Michael Jordan, Shaquille O'Neal, Mia Hamm, and American distance runner Suzy Hamilton, are important instruments in the Nike myth-making machine. As one employee, a former Olympic rower, Harvard graduate and founder of a grassroots organization is quoted, "Nike is in the business of active hero creation" (Feit, no date).

Christian Anderson points out that sports tend to focus on athletes who transform into heros and archetypes for successful behaviour (64). Nike's

athletes work to represent and externalize key American values (65), their human feats transformed into spectacular accomplishments and successes. Although these successes are on athletic fields, the athletes' influence extend far beyond that, ultimately positioning Nike's representatives as community leaders, social exemplars and models of American living. For instance, Cheryl Cole's look at Nike's promotional strategies and how they work to secure Nike's image as patriotic, charitable, and socially responsible, positions Michael Jordan as a safe black hero. Cole refers to Michael Jordan as a representative character of American political culture and as a figure of the national symbolic (1996, 370). What this means, for Cole, is that Jordan lives, embodies and produces the myths of American society. He is a fantasy figure who enacts their myths and then acts as proof of them.

Another recurring theme in Nike advertising is the myth of immortality, an idea perpetuated through the figure of the fiery Steve Prefontaine, who is resurrected through ads that place his image, often mid-stride, under nostalgic and inspiring text. Prefontaine neatly enacts this image of Nike, embodying Nike's mix of a rebellious attitude with overwhelming, almost heroic, successes. In conjunction with this, Pre's personal story is painted with a tragic sense of what-might-have-been that is indivisible from the imagining of many of America's celebrity pantheon; James Dean, Malcom X, JFK, Marilyn Monroe and John Lennon all come to mind. One print ad illustrates Pre's effect on the crowd, the depth of emotion a young runner from a state university could invoke, tying these

feelings closely to Nike's image:

The look in Pre's eyes. Nobody else ever had it like that. Sometimes when he ran, he was trance dancing. There were carpenters, mill workers, shopkeepers in the bleachers at Hayward Field. A competitor once said the cheering for Pre was so deafening, you almost wanted to stop running. He ran the kind of race that made spectators yearn. Pre died in a 1975 car crash and it just about broke everyone's heart. What would he have done with distance when he was 25 or 30 years old? He placed fourth in the '72 Olympic five thousand and would have been 25 at the next Olympics. How far could he have gone? He didn't get a chance, we didn't get a chance to know. What does a great runner who died almost twenty years ago have to do with Nike running shoes? Everything (Anderson, 30).

In addition to the mythic quality engendered by the status of Nike's athlete's as heroic and immortal, Nike also draws upon a David and Goliath mythology which emphasizes rebellion and insurrection, coupled with a never-say-die attitude. Regardless of whether the establishment is the International Olympic Committee, advertising standards committees, or societal norms that tell women sweat is unseemly, Nike's refusal to accept norms, unquestioned, plays a large part in its image. Phil Knight has even been quoted as saying "It's all right to be Goliath, but always act like David" (Jensen, 1995). This David and Goliath relationship has been a backbone of the Nike corporate image, and repeatedly played out.

Consider three examples. Nike's "What if we treated skateboarders like athletes" ad campaign, which was featured in the 1998 International Cannes Advertising Festival, parodied the mistreatment and misconceptions of skateboard athletes. Challenging the safe lines drawn around "respectable" sports like tennis, running and golf, the television commercials depicted police

officers confiscating golf clubs, berating thirtysomething golfers for thinking that the world is their playground, other cops breaking up a mixed doubles game of tennis, ordering more fortysomethings to "put down their rackets", and documents the derision and derogatory comments two joggers receive while running (eg; one woman calls out to the runners in a scathing tone, "I used to run too...WHEN I WAS EIGHT!").³⁶ This campaign, which ran in the summer of 1997, positions Nike alongside the public, in opposition to norms which can limit creativity, expression and ultimately, achievement.

Another example is Nike's support of Kenya's first-ever nordic ski team at the 1988 Winter Olympics. Although widely considered an overt marketing ploy, Nike's support demonstrates their belief that effort and a never-say-die attitude spells success, no matter how insurmountable the odds. This belief in oneself becomes almost a sense of stubborn and irrefutable pride, as copy for one ad reads:

All your life you are told the things you cannot do. All your life they will say you're not good enough or strong enough or talented enough. They'll say you're the wrong height or the wrong weight or the wrong type to play or be this or achieve that. THEY WILL TELL YOU NO, a thousand times no until all the nos become meaningless. All your life they will tell you no, quite firmly and very quickly. They will tell you no. And YOU WILL TELL THEM YES (Anderson, 83).

Finally, Nike's selection of volatile yet fantastic athletes like Eric Cantona and John McEnroe demonstrate that rather than just treading water, Nike prefers

³⁶This campaign ran in the summer of 1997, and first appeared on ESPN in the weeks of June 9-19th. The titles of the spoofs were "Confiscated Clubs" and "Thrown off the Tennis Court" (Personal communication with Jeff Evans, distributor of Nike advertising material, July 30, 1999).

to plunge into the consumer's imagination, sticking with athletes who make a splash. This association between the bad-boy image is perpetuated through Nike's endorsement of athletes "who are seen as rogues, rule-breakers, rebels", as Anderson has pointed out (18). At first glance, this rogue, underdog and gritty aspect of Nike's image may seem at odds with the mythic, heroic quality of Nike, not to mention that it is difficult to accept that Nike represents the counter-establishment when it is consistently the top sports company ranked annually by the leading advertising trade magazine.³⁷

Nike remains on the edge, however, by its constant challenge to norms, from its criticism of the leading networks for not devoting more time to women's soccer during the 1996 Olympic Games (Jensen, 1997a), or the creation of ads often cited as too aggressive or "violent in a gratuitous and wantonly destructive manner" (*Advertising Age*, 1997), evidence that Nike looks to current advertising models, then revamps them. The feelings of CEO Phil Knight, although as not as great a part of public discourse as the ads themselves, underline that Nike is devoted to preserving the rebel and underdog quality of their image. The quote below from Knight confirms that it is a key ingredient in the making of Nike's image:

But I do want to stop fighting so much with governing bodies and leagues,...It's easier to fight when you're the little guy. Even though we still think the old way, being Number One means that you simply can't fight all the time. We have to

³⁷ *Advertising Age* ranks the top 100 brands in terms of money spent on advertising - throughout the 1990s, Nike consistently ranked in the top 50, and is the top sports company within the mega-companies listed (available online: <http://adage.com.dataplace/archives>, June 29th, 2000).

start waiting for the really big fights (*Sports Illustrated*, 72).

Working the Image Out

Nike's image is a construction of a number of campaigns, read visually much like the figure of the body discussed in chapter two; the consumer puts the different parts of Nike's public discourse together to get a "picture" of Nike. Through various means, such as Nike's articulated corporate voice, academic and professional critique (the last includes Nike's related responses), and advertising itself, Nike's image has been steadily under construction, making the intersections of rhetoric, the image and advertising plain. Nike has a corporate image that resonates with the modern consumer for many reasons, three which are examined below. The first borrows from Robert Hariman, John Lucaites and W.J.T. Mitchell's writings on images, rhetoric and resonance.

In Mitchell's essays on iconology, he discusses what he calls a "rhetoric of images". He offers two theoretical approaches; one following a tradition of art writing, primarily interested in the description and interpretation of visual art, and another entailing a study of what images say. The latter, he writes, is concerned with the way in which images speak, persuade, tell stories and describe (1986, 2). To investigate how the corporate image of Nike impacts the way Nike ads resonate with the consumer aligns the focus of this thesis with Mitchell's second theoretical approach; essentially, what is the corporate image saying?

For many rhetoricians, there is a basic essence or defining trait of society

that is reflected, or finds resonance in, a popular image. For instance, in Mitchell's writings the tension between word and image, pictorial and linguistic signs is the "struggle that carries the fundamental contradictions of our culture into the heart of theoretical discourse itself" (1986, 44). Similarly, Robert Hariman and John Lucaites write that images can reflect and enact tensions central to American society. Hariman and Lucaites' exploration of the reception and iconic status of Dorothea Lange's *Migrant Mother* and Alfred Eisenstaedt's *Times Square Kiss* traces the use and reception of these two photos in an effort to decipher why they have an almost limitless kind of appeal. Hariman and Lucaites argue that both photos help manage the tension between the "liberty and value of the individual and the duty and power of the state" (n.d., paragraph 8) in American society. Not only do the photographs enact a "synesthesia of public and private life", Hariman and Lucaites contend that the photographs provide a vocabulary of sorts for younger generations to deal with apprehensions of poverty and war, as well as present a framework or template to represent people or things that are considered worthy of respect (paragraph 23). For Hariman and Lucaites, it is because the photos manage the tensions of American society, and so fully express representative emotional experiences that they achieve both iconic status; both photos expound and exploit an understanding of humanity that Hariman and Lucaites identify as a key method of persuasion in American society, whether to shape public response or initiate change.

How does Nike fit into these models of visibility and meaning-creation that Hariman, Lucaites and Mitchell explore? Hariman and Lucaites catalogue the photos' iconic status in terms of the "typical criteria" of social significance both photos have met; both have been viewed by all kinds of media, declared definitive examples of a historical era or *mentalité* and singled out for both critical acclaim and study. They have been the subject of imitation and parody, they express aspects of classical composition and demonstrate ideological structures of the era during which the photos were taken (paragraph 4).

In almost every aspect, Nike has met this "criteria", impressing upon us its centrality to the North American experience. Nike has been the subject of study, acclaim, and parody; academic articles have deconstructed Nike's feminism, Michael Jordan, and used Nike as a case study for propaganda; journalistic pieces have monitored Nike's ad practices, corporate image and impact; films have investigated Nike's legacy of Third World labour exploitation and anticonsumer groups have levied similar charges in the form of spoof ads.

That having been said, in what way does Nike embody or represent a basic ethos that appeals, rhetorically, to tensions "endemic" to American society? Nike, it is important to remember, has played a part in its status "as icon"; ad marketers, design teams and public relations managers have pointedly *sought out* things that are important in the North American psyche, and then tried to find a way for Nike's image to speak to these areas of sensitivity. In a way, this is a fabrication of iconic status, an attempt to manipulate points of

tension so that, put plainly, people buy shoes. Undoubtedly Nike speaks to North Americans, and has great appeal worldwide. But how does its image work?

While “Remembering the Way it was Supposed to Feel” focuses on the visual image, Hariman’s *Political Style: The Artistry of Power* places the image of a public figure centre stage, positioning the body and embodied political style as the rhetorical image under scrutiny. In *Political Style* Hariman explores how rhetorical styles enact and impose a series of social relations upon audiences, directly affecting identity formation(s). For instance, Hariman argues that the dissolution of monarchies worldwide during the nineteenth century marks a period that witnessed a revolution in visuality and representational practices. According to Hariman, discourse fragments of the courtly trope can be found among the communicative practices of the modern mass media. Modern celebrity culture (be it government or the entertainment industry), advertising and the American presidency have appropriated the courtly trope’s metonymic eliding of the body of the king with the body of the state:

The premodern practice re-emerges in modern life through propagation by the mass media, but in fragmented form that characterizes no specific social structure yet becomes a dimension of media production itself (53).

In a way, Hariman brings us full circle to the ideas that began this discussion. Not only does he provide a segue to a discussion of Nike’s corporate image; Hariman reminds us, as Barthes outlined, that the image as a concept encompasses many things. *Political Style* also places emphasis, similar to “Remembering”, on public culture, mass media and the realm of celebrity. These

are unavoidable concepts in any discussion on the appeal of Nike and the image. Using figurative, literal and even aural imagery in their advertising to appeal to the viewer, and within these aspects of imagery, Nike advertising has monopolized almost every medium imaginable.

Writers like Hariman, Lucaites and Tagg have shown that different mediums play differently in meaning-creation, each form bearing its own historical, aesthetic and contextual weight. The appeal of the ads therefore lies not in a formulaic method of identification, but that they somehow transcend their sense of *being an ad*, that there is somehow a grain of truth, a moment of clarity or flash of identification within the constructed ad that is nevertheless *not* fabricated. In short, something that makes it real to the viewer, as Tagg writes:

But what is also real is what makes the print more than paper - what makes it meaningful. For this, however, we must look not to some 'magic' of the medium, but to the conscious and unconscious processes, the practices and institutions through which the photograph can incite a phantasy, take on meaning, and exercise an effect. What is real is not just the material item but also the discursive system of which the image it bears is part. It is to the reality not of the past, but of present meanings and of changing discursive systems that we must therefore turn out attention (4).

Returning to Mitchell, what is the basic societal quality that finds resonance in Nike advertising? As seen earlier, much of Nike's energy and attention is directed towards a sense of competition and achievement. If the most basic struggle of man against nature has been defused in contemporary society, a glance at Nike offers that this struggle has been resurrected in the shape of man against himself. With the most basic threats to humanity removed, humanity seeks challenges to give life meaning, and many of these challenges

lie within personal, physical obstacles that humanity can create for itself. It is this basic quality of struggle that is central to Nike, and reflected in Nike's corporate image. Whether it is the rebel versus the establishment, women versus norms of beauty/occupation/history, men versus age, pain or death, Nike's corporate image perpetuates this quality of struggle that modern society needs in order to make life meaningful. This image therefore acts in much the same way that Mitchell proposes popular images act - it speaks, persuades and tells stories that resonate with society.

Theories of Sport and Advertising

As Mitchell asked in *Iconology*, the focus of this discussion is deciphering how "we transform images, and the imagination that produces them, into powers worthy of trust and respect?" (1986, 30). One aspect that comes to the fore is how the image enables and perpetuates social communication. Visuality, regimes of representation, and interpretative practices, never random or accidental, enact a social agreement in respect to meaning and how such meaning is communicated. Robert J. Cox calls these common conceptions (*loci communes*), constitutive principles in our discourse (1982, 228). Here, Cox's constitutive principles recalls Aristotle's, or *topoi*, common topics. *Topoi*, which Aristotle contrasted with the *idia*, are the specific or particular topics in arguments. What *topoi* offer to this discussion is the idea that there exists, socially and shared, "lines, or strategies, of argument" (Kennedy, 190).

I agree with Cox that ways of seeing are constitutive principles, but would

qualify his argument to say that how we look is varied and plentiful. By this thinking, there are innumerable “constitutive principles” and countless discourses. For example, there are several *loci communes* at work in Nike advertisements, undoubtedly as many discourses at work as there are Nike campaigns directed at nations or events (like the Olympics), or different sports (a commercial on cricket would probably not have the same rousing effect in Canada as, say, in Britain). Each one operates within some assumptions, be it about national identity or the history or importance of a sporting event or particular sport.

In Nike, sport and advertising function much like Cox’s “constitutive principles” - there is social agreement about what they mean to society, as well as how they function as discourse. In a very Burkean way, I am arguing that reading signs (connotative images) is not completely random; we depend on our practical, national, cultural, and aesthetic knowledge. Burke touches upon this, writing that seeing something in terms of something else involves what he calls a ‘carrying-over’ of a term from one realm or set of circumstances to another (1969a, 504):

Language develops by metaphorical extension, in borrowing words from the realm of the incorporeal, invisible, intangible; then in the course of time, the original corporeal reference is forgotten, and only the incorporeal, metaphorical extension survives (506).

Although the issues of Nike’s role as an advertiser are explored more fully below, at this point it is clear that we organize ourselves, via Nike, through a system of advertising that adheres to certain rules of presentation, meaning and

knowledge. Nike's subversion of, and challenge to, rules or symbolic modes of language within advertising discourse underlines the existence of a shared knowledge. In terms of sport, Nike draws upon the meaning, ritual, and power invested in it, and transfers this to its products, adopting a sports mentality to the everyday running of the company.

Nike Advertising

Tagg's idea of social agreement segues to a closer examination of how certain images not only clearly stand for something, but come to have special or significant meaning in society. An image therefore conveys importance, value, sacredness, ceremony. According to William Leiss, Steven Jhally and Sut Jhally, this is an iconic mode of communication where an image has exceptional weight (239). Thus, in secular settings, pictorial representations of secular values can have special or elevated status in a contemporary context.

The discursive system examined here is Nike advertising, the focus being how Nike's corporate image functions within a system of appeal. Largely through its marketing strategy, Nike is one of the most recognizable corporate bodies in the world, whether from its swoosh, style or manner of address, or how it figures as an important expression of identity. By nature of the fact Nike circulates in a media system where advertising plays a central role in meaning creation, social identification and representation, and that advertising is intrinsically a persuasive and appealing medium, Nike's corporate image begs examination

from a rhetorical perspective. Driven by profit, Nike's corporate image performs a role that society has dictated advertising plays. Nike's corporate image appeals to society, acting like Hariman and Lucaites' photos in that it offers a way for society to imagine and define itself, and fill a void of representation.

Thanks to what Robert Hariman calls "aestheticized knowledge" (1998), Nike successfully married ideals of independence, strength and femininity to a swoosh that was designed for 35\$. Nike ads represent a time and place, and offers a particular understanding of how things should be.³⁸ In keeping with what Leiss, Kline and Jhally call user-centered advertising, which draws "upon the shared experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of the segmented audience" as opposed to advertising which focused on the product claims to get the attention of an undifferentiated market, Nike listens closely to the pulse of the consumer. Tony Schwartz, ad creator, calls this the "resonance" of communication. This is where the very core of advertising, its main purpose, is not the message itself as a communicator of meaning, but instead the *relationship* to the audience (Leiss et al, 151).

As seen earlier, the text and visuals of Nike ads are both reminiscent and exhortative. Nike ads are imbued with connotations of the personal, and struggle

³⁸As Christian Anderson pointed out in his case study on Nike and propaganda, writings on advertising often claim that advertising serves to mirror or parrot values felt to be common among society:

In Nike's case, the company attempts to link its products to deeply held and widely shared beliefs and values, many of which are above reproach. It creates and disseminates themes that the target audience finds significant and that support its personal ideology (Fowles, 1996). Advertising experts argue that this technique of developing messages that are consistent with a group's experiences may be useful in encouraging consumers to accept a particular product (White, 1976) (Anderson, 58).

against the odds, and success. It is a personal, yet universal, success story that embraces a dichotomy of someone/everyone. Nike's corporate image functions much the same way. A rhetorical perspective looks at an advertisement's place and time, and tries to discern why a particular meaning resonates. In the second chapter, the female Nike body was positioned as a replacement and consolation to the loss of central figures of authority, a response to contemporary feelings of loss and a kind of modern malaise. In a similar way, advertising is seen as a kind of panacea for the divisions caused by a postmodernist sensibility - or more aptly, the wounds caused by the demise of a modernist sensibility. This is the idea that we can attain earthly salvation through achieving the American Dream. While some writers feel this is positive, as it distracts our attention from bad things, it also distracts our attention from fixing the things that are wrong in our society, as Roger Koppl has said:

What advertising does is diffract the rays of our longing for salvation. We have lost faith all right. God is dead. But we still long for some form of salvation. We still seek some kind of liberation of the soul. Advertising and consumerism give us outlets for this urge to salvation, outlets that point in different directions (80).

Along the same lines, Theodore Levitt believes both art and advertising are signs of humanity's effort to transcend his animality; "...Both represent a pervasive and I believe *universal* characteristic of human nature - the human audience *demand*s symbolic interpretation in everything it sees and knows. If it doesn't get it, it will return a verdict of 'no interest'" (in Jhally, 5-6). Others, like Williamson see advertising as having a social and remedial function in society,

replacing the function that has traditionally been fulfilled by art and religion, via “structures of meaning” (12).³⁹ Not simply a language, of which parts can be catalogued or are predetermined, Williamson argues that advertising is a structure within which objects are assigned values, making “connections” between consumer and products. It is within these structures of meaning, and through our consumption of goods, that we satisfy our need to distinguish and place ourselves in society. Nike helps us fulfill that goal.

Williamson examines how signs (which for purposes of this thesis we take to mean components of image) act as currency in the way that meanings are transferred. What is meaningful is transferred to and drawn from objects represented.⁴⁰ This operates, as Williamson notes, at an emotional level:

The technique of advertising is to correlate feelings, moods or attributes to tangible objects, correlate feelings, moods or attitudes to tangible objects, linking possible *unattainable* things with those that *are* attainable, and thus reassuring us that the former are within reach (31).

Similar to Tagg, who wrote that times of great change coincide with changes in modes of communication, Raymond Williams argues “new kinds of appeal” are novel strategies for a new economy. Calling advertising “the official

³⁹Williamson’s argument develops more fully, using a Lacanian vocabulary to discuss how the consumer’s identity becomes elided with the goods he/she consumes. Seeing ourselves in products, the image in advertising gives us back to ourselves (60). Therefore “Advertisements are selling us something else besides consumer goods: in providing us with a structure in which we, and those goods, are interchangeable, they are selling us ourselves” (13).

⁴⁰This transfer of meaning to object is an idea also embraced by Grant McCracken in “Culture and Consumption: A Theoretical Account of the Structure and Movement of the Cultural Meaning of Consumer Goods”. In this article, McCracken examines the mechanics of meaning, identifying four “instruments” responsible for this movement. Advertising is one of them. “Advertising is a conduit through which meaning constantly pours from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods” (McCracken, 1986, 75-76)

art of modern capitalist society", Williams also sees advertising as an educational tool of social and personal values (184-5). These values are attached to the object as if by what Williams calls "the magic of advertising". For Williams, the fantasy of consumption - the magic of advertising - works by associating consumption with things it logically has no real reference or connection, for example success and pantyhose. "The magic obscures the real sources of general satisfaction because their discovery would involve radical change in the whole common way of life" (189):

It is clear that we have a cultural pattern in which the objects are not enough but must be validated, if only in fantasy, by association with social and personal meanings which in a different cultural pattern might be more directly available. The short description of the pattern we have is *magic*: a highly organized and professional system of magical inducements and satisfactions, functionally very similar to magical systems in simpler societies, but rather strangely coexistent with a highly developed scientific technology (185).

There are many ways that Nike could be said to demonstrate the magic of advertising. In Nike ads, aerobic shoes are vessels of escape, poetry and air; athletic pursuits become emotional celebrations; a young woman's sports gear marks her as liberated and self-confident.⁴¹ These connections demonstrate the association of specific values, emotions or ideas with objects that were previously unrelated. One fine example is the group of values assigned to the figure of Michael Jordan. David Lawrence Andrews' discussion of Jordan, a

⁴¹ For example, the ad that ran in *Mademoiselle's* October 1992, which described an aerobic shoe "*poetry in motion*" and "flashing moving impetuous", followed by one that ran a month later, which declared "This shoe is full of the sky". Or a glossy, 12-page spread that in the October 1993 issue that associates feelings of lust, euphoria, fear, disgust and the truth (awakening) with the rituals of sport, appropriately titled "Falling in Love in Six Acts".

“national popular commodity-sign” (11), reveals how Jordan is both a “product and producer of Reagan’s America” (129). Enacting and perpetuating a set of social codes of the New Right - a political culture of the 1980s that blamed welfare-liberalism for problems in the spheres of economics, military, culture and policy - Andrews has argued that Jordan enacts values that articulate an ideology of the New Right:⁴²

In other words, Jordan materialized as a simulated model of the appropriate [African] American within the context of the Reagan’s neo-liberal, neo-conservative, and morally traditionalist version of America (143).

Sports Shoe Company

The dominant culture at Nike comes from the playing field. The world of sports marks the way we talk to each other and how we relate” - Phil Knight (Anderson, 30).

In 1985, Nike made a conscious shift away from being a sporting shoe manufacturer to a “sports company”. This shift in focus amounted to a change in Nike’s marketing approach, leading to the company’s emphasis on image rather than product advertising, an emphasis that led soon after to the “Just do it” campaign strategy in 1985 (Feit, n.d.). As Josh Feit summarizes in his look at the Nike mentality, this led to a change in the marketing, culture and *raison d’être* of Nike:

⁴²Andrews defines the New Right as a melange of three political ideologies, “the revisionist economics of neo-liberalism, the regressive politics of neo conservatism, and the cultural tyranny of moral traditionalism” (78). Andrews describes the Reagan era as one which sought to reassert the cultural hegemony by reasserting “a vision of an America dominated by a white, heterosexual, and patriarchal, middle-upper class” (100). Figures like Bill Cosby/Heathcliff Huxtable and Michael Jordan are notable, Andrews argues, in that despite their race, they perpetuate the ethos of the New Right.

Employees now were doing more than selling shoes. They were selling sports, an ideology based on the pursuit of excellence in which people's lives are improved through competition, fair play, fitness and self-esteem. The new Nike wasn't simply about shoes and slam dunks, but about promoting a higher way of life (Feit, n.d.).

Although the average consumer is most likely oblivious to the particulars of Nike's corporate culture, this shift contributed to Nike's success because it defined, more clearly, Nike's ethos as a sports company. This carries weight in the shaping of a distinct, and influential Nike image. As one employee has been quoted as saying, Nike's swoosh "represents a whole value system". This value system, which inspires almost fanatical loyalty among its employees, is *advertised* to consumers through the medium of sport. In short, sport gives Nike a ready-made vocabulary of competition, spirit, drama, excitement and passion, providing limitless possibilities of appeal. Therefore, it is not just from Nike's influence and prominent place in the discursive system of advertising that the corporate body draws power, and resonates with consumers. The "higher way of life" Nike employees speak of finds perfect expression in sport, and is thus available to all.

Sport is one of the most, and quite possibly the last ritual enjoyed by the modern consumer. In terms offered by Grant McCracken, ritual is the "opportunity to affirm, evoke, assign, or revise the conventional symbols and meanings of the cultural order. To this extent, ritual is a powerful and versatile tool for the manipulation of cultural meaning" (78). Nike's seriousness about sport, the passion committed to it, elevates Nike to mythic status, the rituals of

sport enacting and enabling this status, immortalizing its players.⁴³

In the same way that Nike ads operate (and “work” in the sense they “make sense”) under the assumption that there are some basic principles of reading, looking and understanding within the discourse of advertising, the fact that Nike sells shoes through the built-in drama that is sport also carries connotations and ensures that “reading” sport is a process similar to “reading” advertising. An agreement about what sport means is one constitutive principle important to the meaning-making of Nike advertising. The iconography of sport, brought to living colour by Nike in their print and television ads, perpetuates the place of privilege that sport holds in American society, a position that is secure by social agreement.

The suspension of disbelief about the unnaturalness of sports, for instance, is one example of social agreement. The “unnaturalness of sports” refers to the undeniable fact they are games that are performed and therefore, in a sense false. They function within a parameter of rules and regulations that exist only for the purpose of the game, and for many “don’t mean anything”.⁴⁴ This is perhaps why Boorstin calls sport a “pseudo-event”, a construction of

⁴³To see how seriously Nike sees sport, one has to only glance at the ritualistic and almost religious attitude Nike approaches what they do; inside Nike, words describing Nike and the Nike ethic often lean towards reverential, even religious, tones; Nike’s “World Campus” is a “shrine”, the word of Nike espoused by employees is “gospel”, and ferociously devoted workers are often described as having “drunk the kool-aid”, a reference to the cultish devotion of victims of the Jonestown massacre (Feit, n.d.).

⁴⁴Overheard in a team huddle, June 17th, 2000, at an Ultimate frisbee tournament in Rochester, N.Y. Obviously, this was meant tongue-in-cheek, to challenge athletes to think about how much sports do mean to them.

images created in the effort to satisfy unrealistic hopes.⁴⁵

Pierre Bourdieu's writings on sport offers another perspective on Nike, as well as demonstrating a further link between Nike's corporate image and the popularity and resonance of Nike's women-directed campaign. At first glance, Bourdieu seems to contradict the idea we can make certain assumptions about the meaning of sport. He emphasizes that the social definition of sport is an object of struggles, and "...this field is itself part of the larger field of struggles over the definition of the *legitimate body* and the *legitimate use of the body*, struggles which, in addition to the agents engaged in the struggle over the definition of sporting uses of the body, .." (361), from clergy, educators, doctors and fashion designers. Bourdieu's approach, however, which looks at sport from its inception as a bourgeois, elitist construct, to the popularization of sport as a spectacle produced for the people, is a much broader historical study. The shifts he writes of refer to changes and struggles over class, identity and political self-determination that occurred from roughly the early Victorian era. Undoubtedly, within a period of ten years, we have to consider the changes Bourdieu writes of would have been almost undecipherable. What *would* have been evident is the day-to-day practices of sport, each practice demonstrating an agreement about

⁴⁵ Boorstin argues that both popular and serious media have displaced the reporting of "real" events with images of what he calls "pseudo-events". The idea of the pseudo-event contends that our reality is a construction of images - news, tv, journalism - all created in the effort to satisfy what Boorstin sees as our excessive and immoderate hopes that all parts of our lives be more than they ever could be. Thus, "By harboring, nourishing, and ever enlarging our extravagant expectations we create the demand for the illusions with which we deceive ourselves" (5).

the rules, reason, and meaning of sport. It is these practices - practices of reading, practices of women playing sport, practices of advertising discourse - that demonstrate an agreement about what sport means to society, its position of importance in society, and the knowledge that it is a connotative and meaningful construct.

It is at the level of practice, then, that the challenges Bourdieu spoke of take place. These often take place on the body, which demonstrates the interconnections between the issues of feminism, rhetoric and sport, and ties Nike's corporate image to the figure of the female Nike body; sport is crucial to body forms, shape, control and definition, all issues that are key to the meaning of Nike's women-directed advertising. Thus " ...the sports practices which have the aim of shaping the body are realizations, among others, of an aesthetic and an ethic in the practical state" (367).

As a ferociously marketed *sports* company, Nike draws upon the connotations and values that are attributed to sports and uses this place of sports in contemporary society to make a connection with the consumer. As one Nike executive has said, "Sport is sexy, it *is* dramatic - it is a perfect thing to move product" (from *Nike*, 1997). Similarly, as writings on advertisement attest, the place of advertising in society is undeniably important. According to the writers above, advertising lends (or imposes) structures of meaning, provides society with a gauge of identity and markers of difference, offers salves to

feelings of emptiness and remedy for feelings of rootlessness, and expands the vocabulary of modern social communication. As remedy, salve, connector - advertising serves Nike's purpose because it already has both social purpose *and* meaning.

Brands, Power and Meaning

Nike's image "works" because it is an influential presence within a discursive system that is critical to social identity and meaning - this cannot be overemphasized. Coupled with this is Nike's ubiquitous presence on the stage of popular, professional and academic discussion, which has contributed to the feeling that Nike simply means more than other companies. Just as it was argued in chapter one that Nike is unique and powerful because of the political nature or intent of its campaigns, public discussion around Nike invests its ads with importance, and elevates it to special status among multinational companies.

As evidenced throughout this discussion, interest in Nike is multi-faceted and pervasive; the trade magazine *Advertising Age* has carefully documented and evaluated almost every new campaign Nike has introduced and *Sports Illustrated* has devoted 20-page articles to examining Nike's influence ("The Triumph of the Swoosh", 1993). There have been Master's Theses ("Corporate Propaganda Analysis: A Case Study of Nike, Inc", Anderson, 1998), Doctoral

Theses ("Deconstructing Michael Jordan: Popular Culture, Politics and Postmodern America", Andrews, 1993), Academic Articles (Cole, 1996; Cole and Hribar, 1995), books (*Just do it: The Nike spirit in the corporate world*, 1994; *Swoosh: The Unauthorized Story of Nike, and The Men Who Played There*, 1991) and documentaries (*Nike*, 1997).

Nike has also attached itself to social concerns that promise it greater visibility, ensuring that its corporate voice is easily heard, its values easily deciphered and evident. A reporter for *Advertising Age* was once quoted as saying that with the exception of an ad campaign to promote voter turnout in 1992, she couldn't think of any major company besides Nike that had tied a value system directly to its product; "You can't compare anyone to Nike," Kate Fitzgerald said. "Nike has its own way of communicating 'cause' image advertising". What media critics call "cause marketing" (Feit, 1997) is exemplified by Nike-sponsored Tiger Woods speaking out against racism, Nike's crusade against inner-city violence and creating opportunities for underprivileged youth with its Participate in the Lives of American Youth (P.L.A.Y). campaign, and the "If you let me play" campaign linking sport to the prevention of low self-esteem, drug use and teenage pregnancy among girls and young women. Whether this is crass consumerism, or blatant opportunism, Nike's corporate image as an involved, hands-on and ideologically-driven organization is vigorously enacted. This image of Nike lends greater credibility to Nike's ethic of determination and competition, making images of Nike more

meaningful and contributing to their resonance.

Articles dealing with the phenomenon that is Nike - their successes, failures, media entanglements - have provided a forum where Nike has carefully crafted an image. This image, however, has not only been the product of Nike's efforts. Just as, theoretically, the "image" is constituted of different aspects, the image of Nike is partly fragments of reactions to, ideas about and readings of what Nike means in contemporary society. Thus, the image is not only the work of Nike. Nor has it been entirely positive.

For example, it has been pointed out that almost every newspaper in America has run a story on Nike's overseas factories (Feit, n.d.). In what has been dubbed "Shwooshtika" - referring to Nike's disregard for human rights and ruthless and unethical corporate practices - Nike's politics have been under attack since it was revealed its successes are dependent upon cheap labour practices in developing nations. From American university campuses staging protests against Nike's monopoly of their sports teams (Penn State's "Nike Workers Before Nike Profits", Duke's "Students Against Sweat Shops", and the University of North Carolina's "Nike Awareness Campaign", coincidentally Michael Jordan's alma mater), Gary Trudeau's satirization of Nike in his *Doonesbury* cartoon strip in 1997, *New York Times* columnist Bob Herbert's tirades against Nike's exploitation of workers (Charlton, 2000; Feit, 1997), a Nike

spoof ad crafted by the culture-jamming group Adbusters,⁴⁶ and a documentary detailing the ideological and practical incongruity between Nike's ideals of self-improvement and opportunity, and suppression of basic human rights, Nike has been under careful and seemingly ceaseless attack.

The critical scrutiny of Nike's manufacturing practices has been, according to some trade specialists, one of historic dimensions. "Nike has been singled out in a way that others have not," says Aaron Cramer of Business for Social Responsibility, a San Francisco firm that advises companies on social issues. "I don't know that another company has been the focus of such targeted efforts. You'd have to go back 20 or 25 years to Nestle, they are the only one I can think of, and they were accused of killing babies" (Feit, 1997)⁴⁷.

Nike CEO Phil Knight has spearheaded the responses to the attacks to his company, participating in the never-ending cultivation of the Nike image. In May of 1998, Knight announced a series of initiatives to the National Press Club

⁴⁶ The ad, which pictures an Indonesian woman running shoeless, imitates the style of Nike print ads. The accompanying text indirectly accuses Nike of cut-throat managerial practices, and challenges the consumer to consider their support of a company that has been repeatedly accused of unfair and unethical working conditions:

You're running because you want that raise, to be all you can be. But it's not that easy when you work sixty hours a week making sneakers in an Indonesian factory and your friends disappear when they ask for a raise. SO THINK globally before you decide it's so cool to wear N[i]ke (<http://www.adbusters.org/spoofads/fashion/nike/>, accessed June 29, 2000).

⁴⁷ Josh Feit explains in "Shwooshtika Politics" that "a consumer boycott of Nestle in the late '70s forced that company to stop marketing baby formula in Third World nations after women became dependent on the milk substitute but couldn't afford to continue using it." (Dec.11, 1997).

that would address any mistreatment of employees at overseas Nike factories.⁴⁸ The wide coverage of Nike critique, Knight's responses to this, even commentary of the coverage *itself* emphasizes how a corporate image contributes the shaping of this image itself.

Looking at Nike, advertising is permeated with reactions and ways of reading that merge roles of reader and producer, blurring the lines of the image "as product" and image "as process". As Boortsin has written, through the creation of images, and corresponding pseudo-events, the roles of audience and actor have become mixed (29). Theories of branding, a whole area deserving of attention in itself, can similarly be interrogated by this notion of representation and image-ing as process; "brand" and "image", terms often used interchangeably (even by Nike itself) both rely heavily upon effect and depth of appeal of their advertising to create meaning. This emphasizes that the meaning assigned or invested in a brand depends heavily on this connection between a corporate image and a set of meanings. An excerpt from Nike's 1997 annual report articulates this commitment to making connections between their *brand* and their consumers, at an emotional and cultural level, through the "timeless human passion" of sport (in Anderson, 58). Thus the sense of what Nike *means*, as CEO Knight has said, is very clearly about reactions, emotions and appeal:

⁴⁸ Announced to the National Press Club, these initiatives committed Nike to more expansive independent monitoring programs; these included non-governmental organizations, foundations and educational institutions, and increase in minimum age of footwear factory workers to 18, and other light-manufacturing workers to 16 ("New Nike Initiative on Asian Plants", *Advertising Age*, May 13, 1998, available online).

A brand stands for something. It creates an emotion in a person's mind, either positive or negative, that brings out all kinds of reactions to that brand. And when we got to start our own brand, and have our own name, we were very ambitious about some of the things that we got to stand for. But I mean as you stop and think about brands around the world, ...Sony, Coca Cola and Rolls Royce, why they all stand for very different things but they all create an emotional response. And something that is really very strong and powerful (from *Nike*, 1997).

Nike's impact - the depth of its appeal - is obvious even in the simple fact that it is responsible for generating such extensive, passionate, yet careful critique. As Brian Bethune wrote in a recent *Maclean's*, this volatile relationship characterized by Naomi Klein in *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, is of the fan-celebrity variety; "emotionally intense but shallow enough to turn on a dime". This is the subtle and unpredictable outcome of branding; making strong emotional connections the consumer and the product (Bethune, 53).

Nike's image weighs heavily on the hearts and minds of consumers. Kevin Keller offers a succinct synopsis of this; "Ultimately", writes Keller, "the power of a brand lies in the minds of consumers or customers, in what they have experienced and learned about the brand over time (157)." As a result, Nike's own attention to crafting a distinct, visceral and intimate Nike personality has been self-conscious and intentional, though not entirely or exclusively of their own doing.

Image, Society and Practice

What we believe an image to be, and how we imagine it to then be constituted, tells us volumes about structures and codes of society. Essentially, images enact, reveal and perpetuate social formations. Nike's corporate image not only invites broader discussion about theories of the image itself, but also about how visuality and images tell us about what is important and meaningful. These practices reflect, implicitly, structures of power, manifest conflict and identity-creation sites, and demonstrate the nature of social relations; how we read the image, then, is a process of being and becoming.

As Tagg has pointed out, very specific social strategies with accompanying sets of connotations are perpetuated through the birth of the genre, effecting citizen/state relations, inscribing the roles to the subject and object, and ultimately reflecting a set of social relations.⁴⁹ In many ways, we have seen that the style of address, quality of images, strategies of association, and public nature of Nike's corporate image similarly have a set of social strategies.

As a major player in the modern advertising game, Nike's corporate image works so that individual campaigns appeal to the consumer/viewer. For some,

⁴⁹ Using the example of documentary photography, Tagg argues a very specific social strategy with an accompanying set of connotations was perpetuated through the birth of the genre, effecting citizen/state relations, inscribing the role of photographer and subject, and ultimately reflecting a set of social relations:

In its mode of address, documentary transformed the flat rhetoric of evidence into an emotionalised drama of experience that worked to effect an imaginary identification of viewer and image, reader and representation, which would suppress difference and seal them into the paternalistic relations of domination and subordination on which documentary's truth effects depended (12).

this image expresses what they call a Nike "ethic", a weave of "stray strands of corporate philosophy - grit, determination, passion" (Jensen, 1998). As a sports company, Nike has taken advantage of the place of sport in the hearts of Americans, taking the ideals of sport as its own personal ethos, and contributing to a near-religious appreciation of sport and its athletes. Nike's corporate image, a construction of Nike marketing and responses to this advertising strategies, also speak to consumers because of the place of advertising and their central role within this global system; Nike answers a tension that is intrinsic to both advertising and sport discourses - the continual need to position oneself in society, whether through material gain or athletic achievement.

For these reasons, Nike's corporate image "works" in contemporary society, positioning individual campaigns within the matrices of advertising and sport discourse, and bestowing them with meaning, power, and resonance. Partly due to the recognition of Nike product - whether this should be described as celebrity, infamy or popularity - the women-directed campaigns of the 1990s were vaulted into a position of great visibility. Advertising directed at women could therefore draw upon a set of values and ideals that Nike had already succeeded in associating with their products, bestowing women's advertising throughout the '90s with an even greater significance.

Conclusions

The aim of this study has been to show how Nike's women-directed advertising resonated with consumers. I have argued that Nike's ads were particularly successful because they spoke to issues that are important to the modern consumer. Reading the ads through the matrices of rhetoric and feminism, I have established that the ads "work" rhetorically because they address concerns of community, power(lessness), the body, alienation, modern malaise, ritual, representation and identity. In exploring how the rhetorical figures of the female body and Nike's corporate image act, I have demonstrated how Nike's ads become invested with meaning, power and importance.

Looking Back

We have seen that Nike ads were important and meaningful because Nike used imagery that consumers could identify with, borrowing and even subverting prevailing language codes. The figure of the Nike female body is constructed through a process of reading that repositions the reader in relation to the text, draws upon legacies of the women's movement, and calls women's experiences into the texts. In much the same way, the figure of Nike's corporate image is pieced together through practices of reading, in this case patched together and invested with meaning through its association with advertising and sport. As well, both the female body and the corporate image have special significance, whether because it offers a means of control (the Nike body) or

whether it provides an opportunity to define oneself through struggle, competition and achievement (the Nike image).

Questions Raised

It becomes increasingly clear however, that the meaning of Nike ads is not a discrete, closed area of study; it is never frozen, finished or quantifiable. Meaning, and what is important, is continually produced through the relations between text, producer, reader and context.

Symbols and images are critical to this understanding of meaning as process; as the ways we interpret and read images can be incredibly varied, meaning is an impossible topic to pin down. Therefore, although the physical images that constitute Nike ads are concrete, the meaning we assign them via the use of figurative images, inherited codes of reading and allusions to events, history and shared culture, is not. This understanding of the ambiguous nature of meaning raises some important questions of this project - questions that are key to this project. For how can we talk about the meaning of Nike ads on one hand, and then problematize the notion of meaning on the other?

Many writers – Burke, Mitchell, Tagg, Cole, McGee, Cox, Lucaites and Hariman, to name just a few - have shed light, in terms of methodological and theoretical insight, upon this study of language and meaning. What emerges is that language is inherently rhetorical in its nature of appeal and selection of words and images. As Burke has argued, our efforts to communicate constitute a

cornerstone of language and meaning:

For rhetoric as such is not rooted in any past condition of human society. It is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols (1984, 43).

Clearly, Nike ads, and the images and figures that constitute them, participate in the process that is language. As a result of this thinking, I focused on exploring the public function of the ads as opposed to the impossible task of trying to gauge and measure emotional and personal reactions of a diverse audience, which would amount to me pretending meaning could be frozen, counted and analyzed. Admittedly, I offer an explanation about Nike's resonance. However, the methodological emphasis on exploring the procedural, contextual and fragmented nature of meaning reflects the theory that meaning is always process and never a product.

So how was meaning understood in this thesis in relation to Nike?

Grosz's discussion of what constitutes a "feminist" text offers a neat model of how Nike ads, as explored in this thesis, can be seen to "work". For one, Grosz argues there are no "secret codes" that define the purpose or meaning of a text (16). As I have demonstrated, Nike's acceptance as a "feminist" text lies in the acknowledgment that *is* a feminist text. In other words, this agreement is a shared, social one. Two, Grosz argues that any inquiry into the feminist quality of a text demands that "the relations between a text and the prevailing norms and ideals which govern its milieu...must be explored" (22). In short, the impact

of context – be it the political climate, contemporary theories of the subject/object, interpretative practices, or feelings of loss in multimedia society – is immeasurable. My own reading of Nike shows how the sociopolitical context of the late 1980s and the 1990s, the relation of reader to image, and theories of feminism and visuality all influence a reading of the body in Nike, and Nike's corporate image. Finally, by placing emphasis on sociopolitical and theoretical contexts which foreground the body, the centrality of the body to theories of rhetoric and feminism is acknowledged. The body ultimately provides a model to imagine, and read, Nike's corporate image.

The centrality of the body to this thesis raises another question: how can we use the body to understand Nike, when many writers are decrying the impossibility, or absence, of the body? Briefly, using the body as a figure to understand Nike underlines three things: one, that language is historical and our memories of the body, and what it means, are long; two, that even in the age of technology - or perhaps even because of it - the body has become more precious and important; and three, in whatever shape or form, the body is something humanity has in common, and consequently is a rhetorical figure all readers can identify with.

As a result, representations of the body exist as denoted physical bodies *as well as* a body represented through allusive, referential and connotative images. The corporate image of Nike works much like a visual image, invested with meaning and importance, becoming a corporate body to parallel the female

body investigated in the second chapter. On the whole, both “bodies” reflect an entire sociopolitical atmosphere or ethos which privileges multiplicity and the shifting, collective nature of meaning. Changes in ways of looking and visibility have contributed to this fragmentation, demonstrating that representations are no longer limited to word, visibility and print.

Just Did It

Nike ads trumpet competitiveness, collectivity and aggressiveness. They celebrate individuality and pride, applaud tenacity and perseverance. That we understand Nike in these terms is largely a result of how we read and understand the images used. These images, as discussed throughout this thesis, run the gamut of figurative, literal, textual, physical, and even corporate.

Burke has argued that body expressions and acts are “but part of the *idiom of expression* involved in the act [of human relations]. They are ‘figures’. They are hardly other than ‘symbolizations’.” (1969a, 507). In much the same way, I could downplay Nike’s “symbolizations” and demonstrate how they are “but part of” how we communicate in contemporary society. To posit that a company, which had its start selling waffle shoes out of the backs of cars, performs a key function in the production of social meaning, could easily seem audacious and out of proportion.

This, however, betrays the purpose and thrust of this thesis. The figures we study, like the figure of the female body and the figure of the corporate

image, are never “hardly other than” or simply “but part of”. They are crucial to how things become meaningful within modern society, in that they manipulate, enact, address and challenge issues that are important to identity, knowledge and meaning creation. This study has interrogated the relationships between language, meaning, and the image, and expanded the understanding of the image beyond realist or photographic representations. Nike, as we have seen, draws from an entire heritage of social formations such as advertising, gender, rhetorical practices, sport, and feminist theory. These social formations have memories and are laden with concepts, vocabularies and styles that can be drawn upon to connect with consumers.

Nike provides a window to examine how things are important to us, and how they have meaning. This thesis has been motivated by an effort to determine, what exactly makes a jingle, the words of an orator, or even some advertising copy, unforgettable. In many ways, it tells us as much about ourselves as it does about Nike, and ultimately serves as both mirror and commentary of society.

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Magazines

Mademoiselle, Jan. 1990 - Dec. 1999

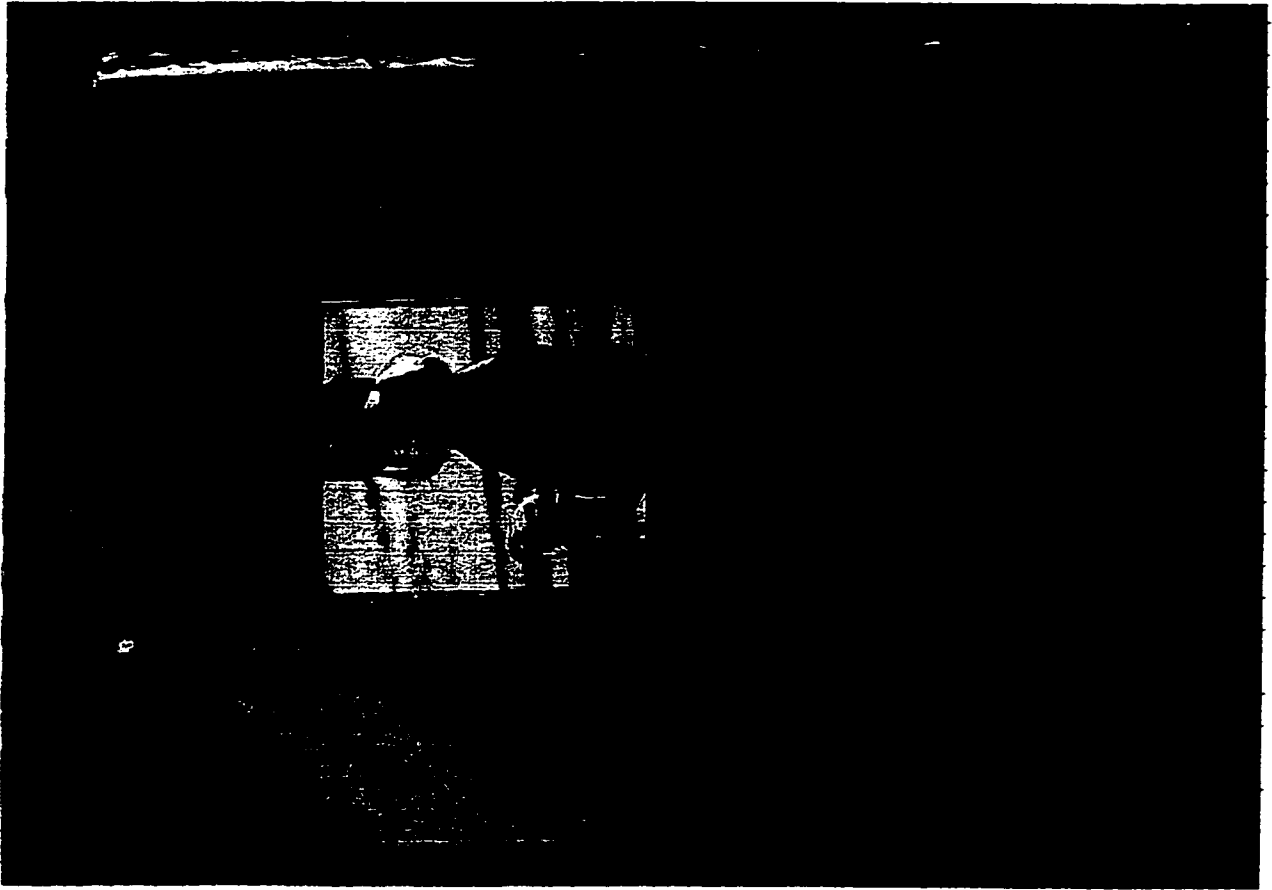
Runner's World, Jan. 1990 - Dec. 1999

Self, June 1992

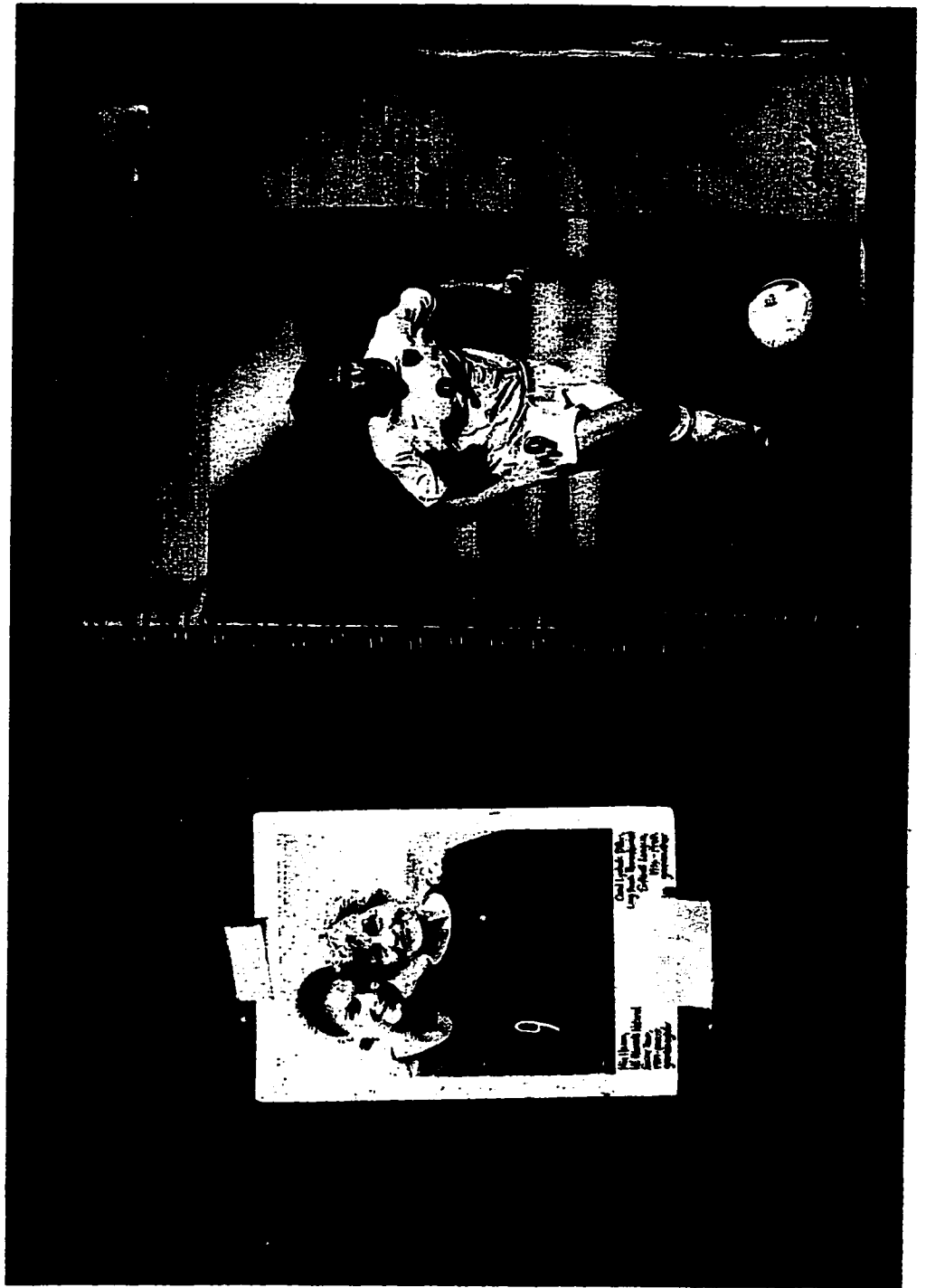
APPENDIX A

GROUP OF ADS, RECEIVED FROM NIKE TORONTO, AUGUST 1999

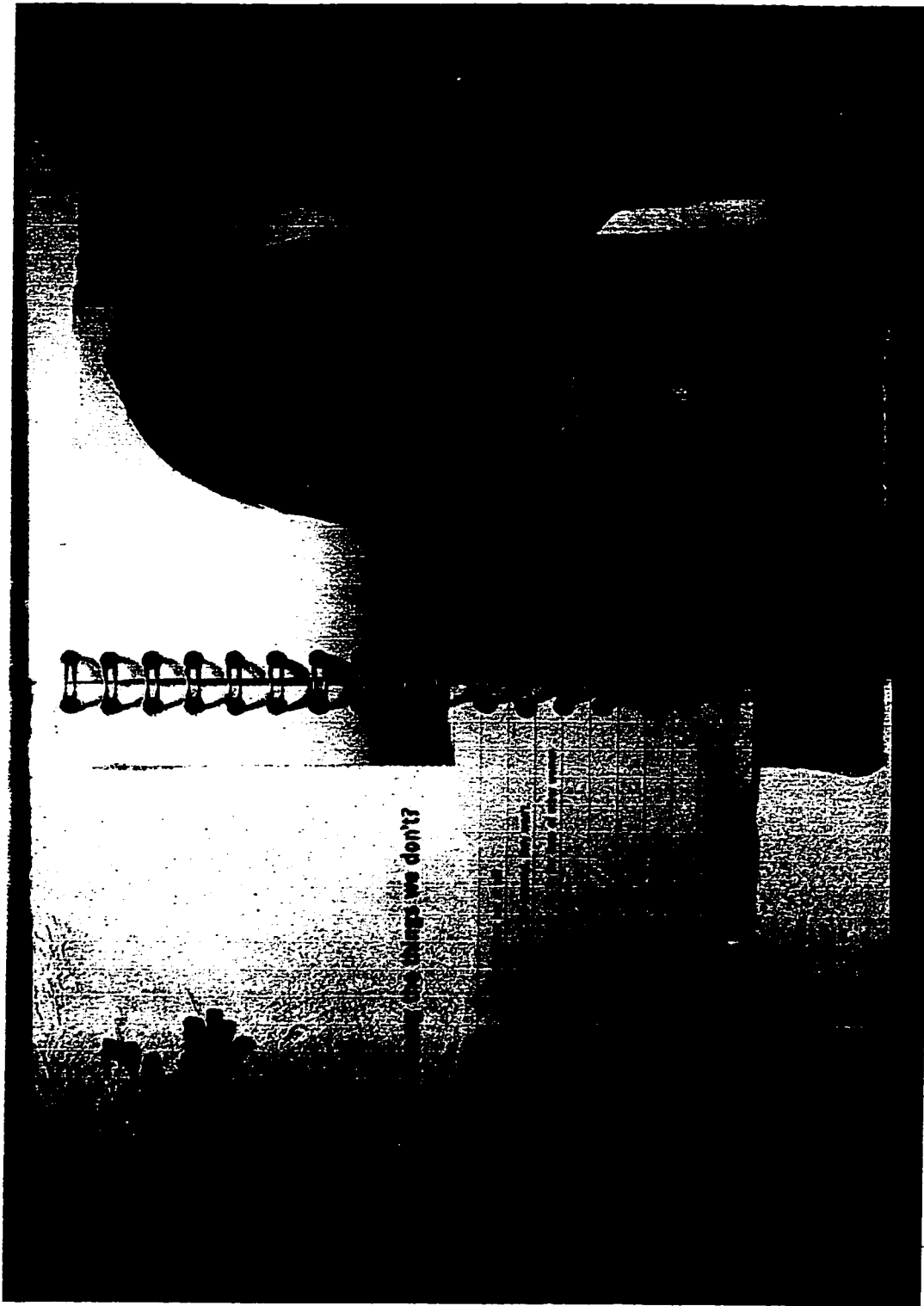
Appendix A1 a)



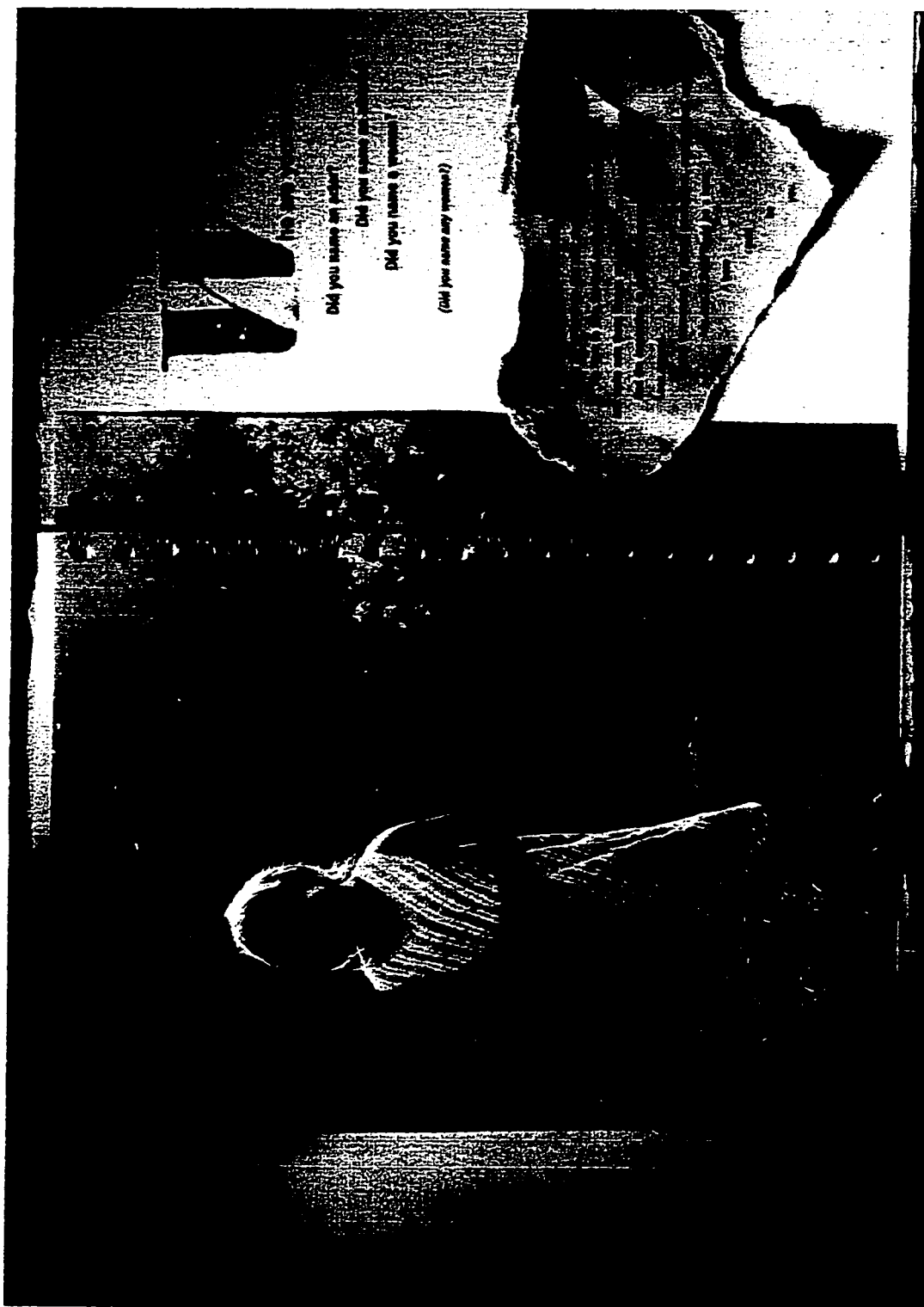
Appendix A1 b)



Appendix A2



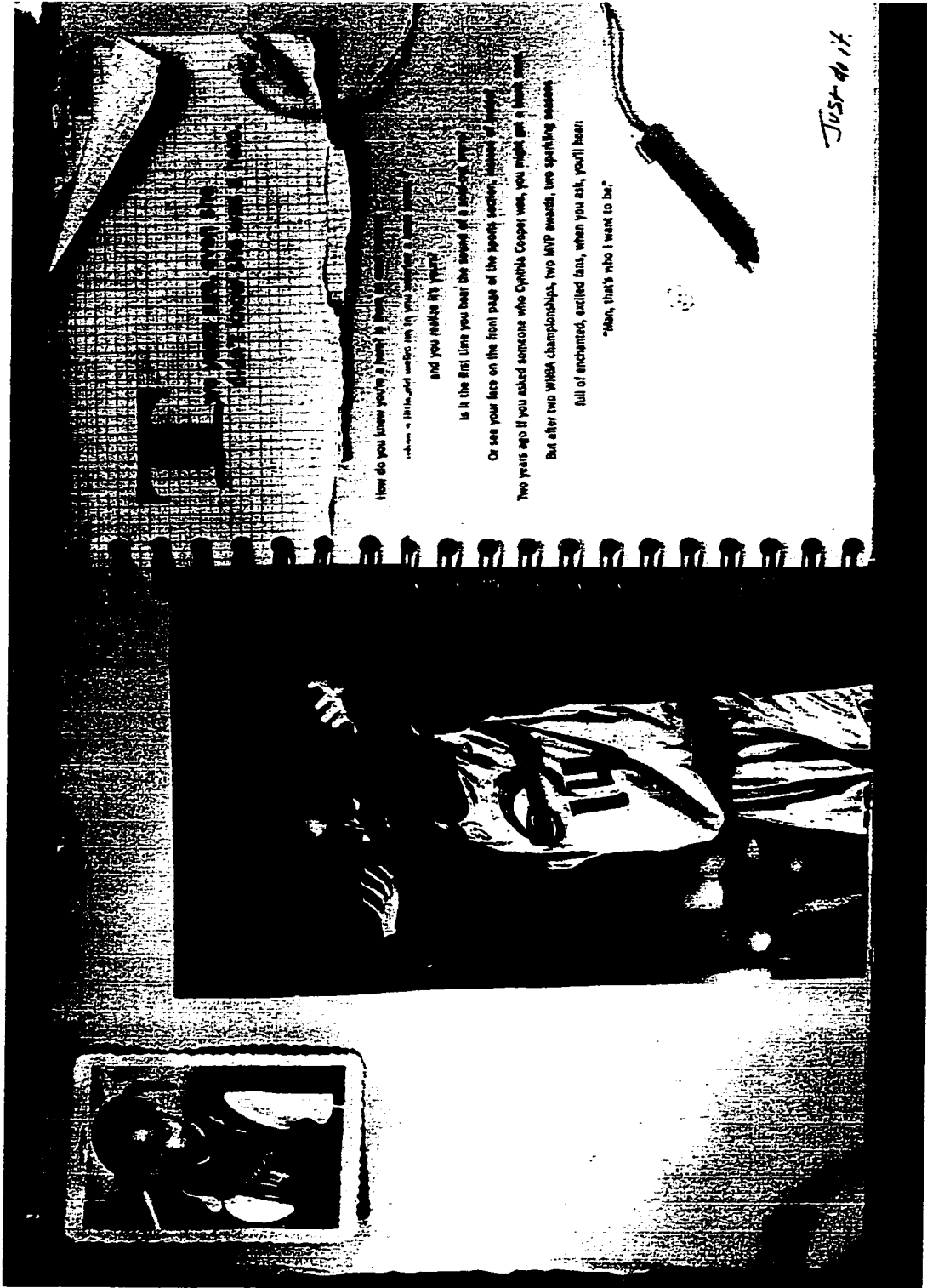
Appendix A3

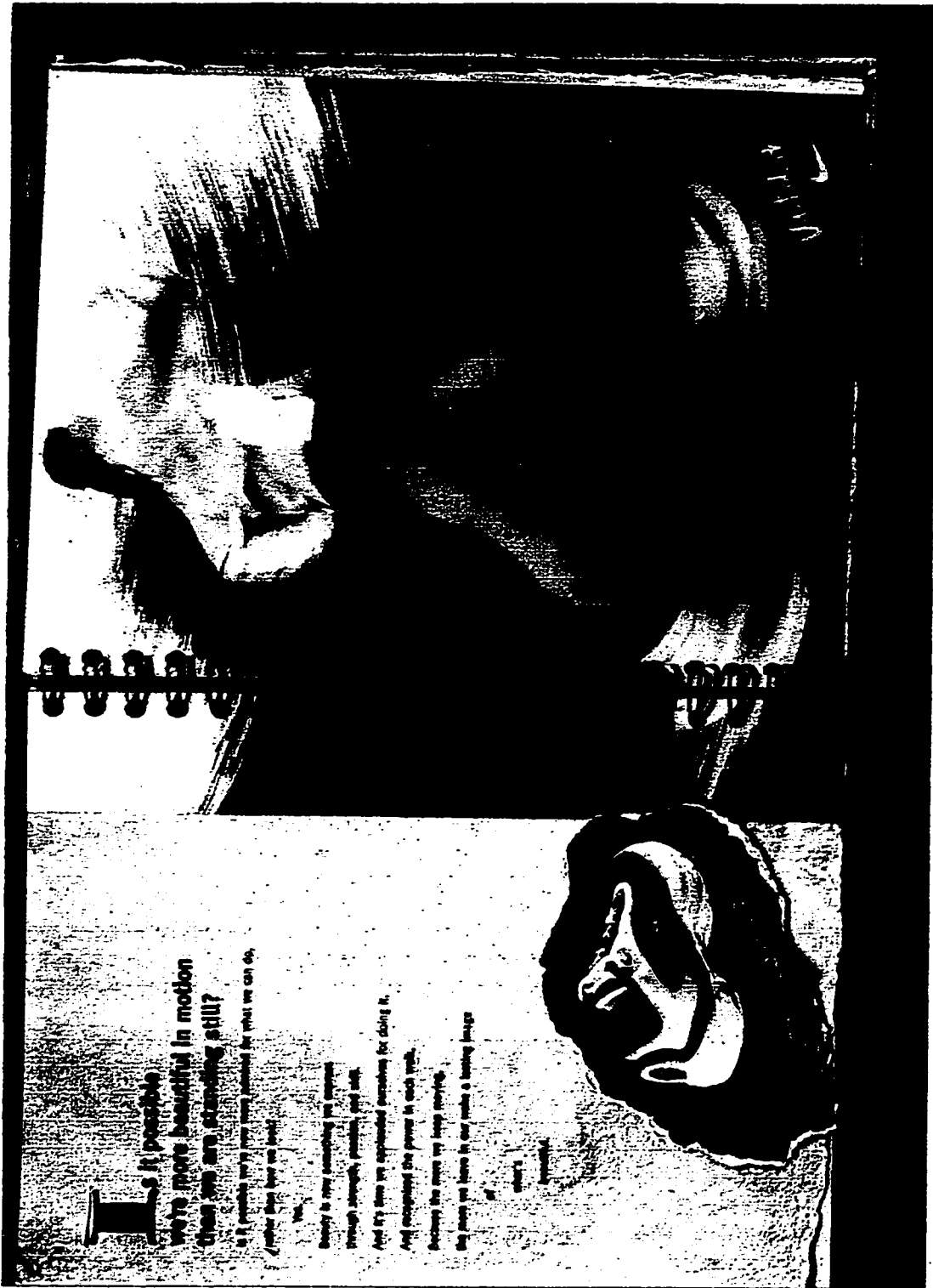


Appendix A4

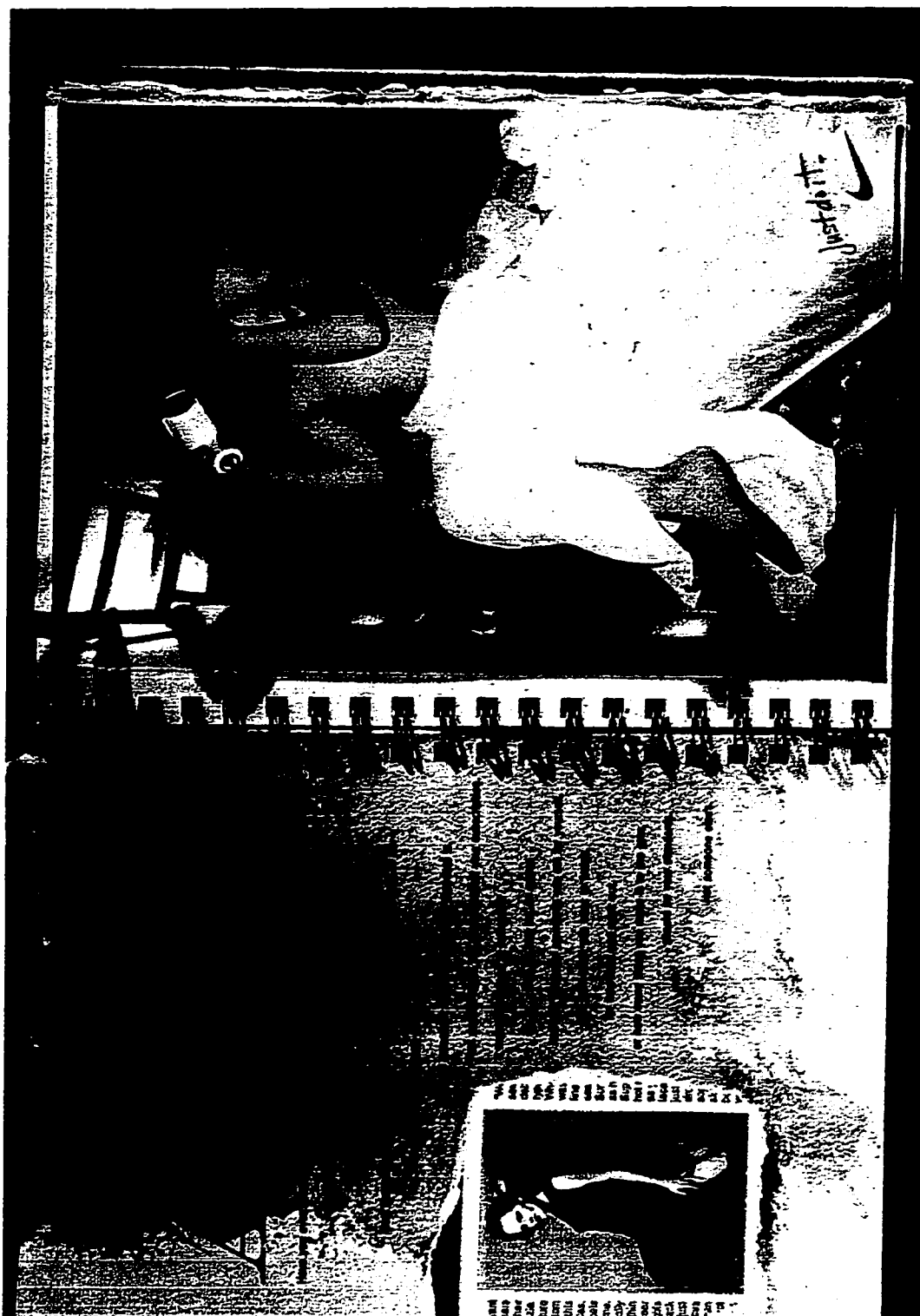


Appendix A5



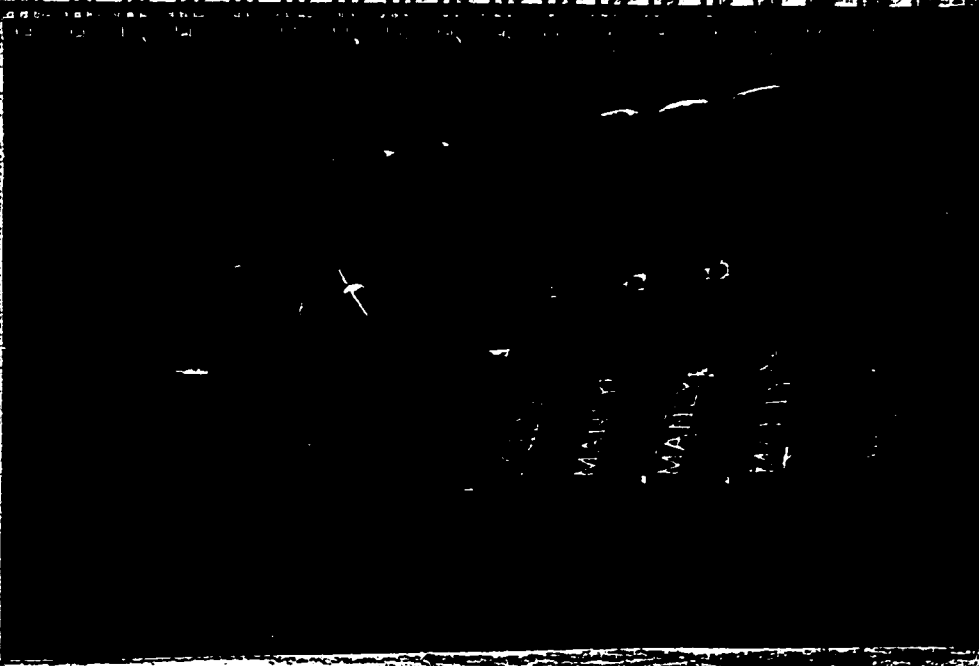


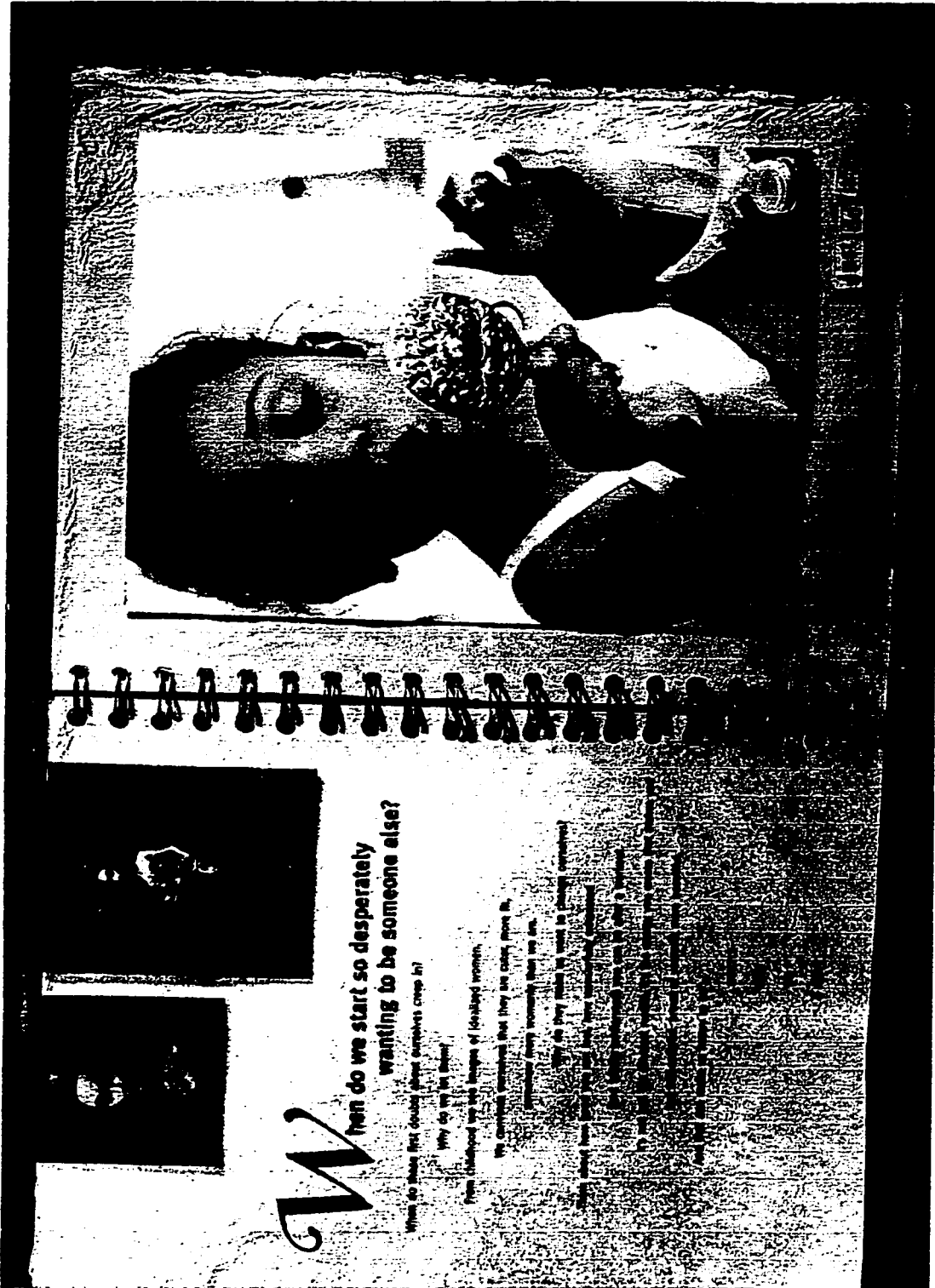
Appendix A7



What makes women think this?

If we encourage muscles these days
why are too many muscles made?
We were all born with muscles.
They don't belong exclusively on men,
any more than skin belongs exclusively on women.
Isn't it possible for femininity and physical power to coexist?
Isn't it possible that the more we embrace our bodies,
the more we'll be able to become?
Embrace your body.
And shed out.





W

hen do we start so desperately
wanting to be someone else?

When do these first doubts (were someone creep in)

Why do we let them?

From childhood to the hopes of married women.

We sometimes remember that they are coast, there is.

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Why do they think we want to

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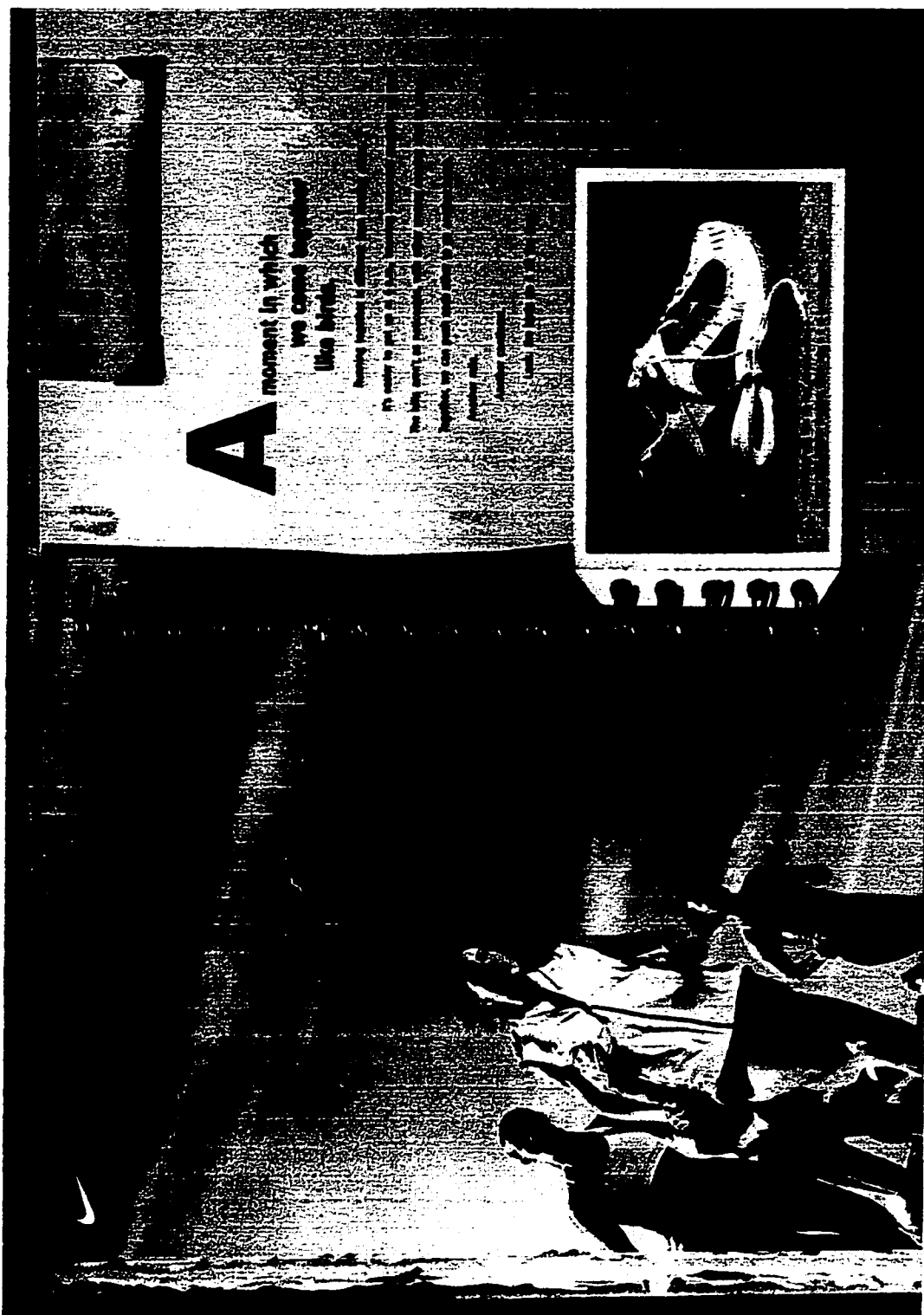
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APPENDIX B

RELATED ADS

Appendix B1 - Michelob Advertisement, *Mademoiselle*, May-Nov., 1994.



Appendix B2 - Reebok Advertisement, *Mademoiselle*, April 1994.

