Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for a degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter now, including display on the World Wide Web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis.

Abram Eduardo Tapia April 13, 2020

Selling Exploitation, Buying Consent: A Reading of Advertising in Ecuador

by

Abram Eduardo Tapia

Sean Meighoo
Adviser

Comparative Literature

Sean Meighoo

Adviser

María M. Carrión

Committee Member

Cynthia Willett

Committee Member

2020

Selling Exploitation, Buying Consent: A Reading of Advertising in Ecuador

By

Abram Eduardo Tapia

Sean Meighoo

Adviser

An abstract of
a thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Comparative Literature

2020

Abstract

Selling Exploitation, Buying Consent: A Reading of Advertising in Ecuador
By Abram Eduardo Tapia

In this thesis, I study the peculiarities of reading an advertising photograph through a persistent reading and re-reading of a variety of photographs and scans of pages from magazines and newspapers I collected in southern Ecuador during the summer of 2019. In the first chapter, I establish that photographs constitute a readable message in order to explore the nuances that give these photographs the power they utilize in educating their audience on their place within the conditions of their existence. In the second chapter, I explore how a politicized reading of advertising can reframe how we understand the role of advertising in the cohesion (or lack thereof) of a social formation. I explore the relationship between social policy and advertising to understand the extent of the power of advertising images. In the third chapter, I compare print advertising with the storefront photographs that were taken in Cuenca, Azuay and Chuquiribaba, Loja to understand the power of the advertising image. I include a consideration of difference and the geographical reach that the images of advertising have. In thinking through distribution, I invoke production as well. It is through the study of a wide variety of theorists that I begin to reframe advertising, to change the terms of engagement with advertising, and to re-politicize reading.

Selling Exploitation, Buying Consent: A Reading of Advertising in Ecuador

By

Abram Eduardo Tapia

Sean Meighoo

Adviser

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Emory College of Arts and Sciences
of Emory University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements of the degree of
Bachelor of Arts with Honors

Comparative Literature

2020

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my adviser and mentor Dr. Sean Meighoo for all the support and guidance throughout this project. I would like to thank Dr. María M. Carrión and Dr. Cynthia Willett for their time, support, and advice. I would also like to express my gratitude to Dr. Rocío Zambrana for the encouragement and suggesting a formative line of inquiry. This project was possible because of the backing from the Emory Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship team. I would also like to thank the department of Comparative Literature for arduously and consistently advocating on my behalf.

This project would not be what it is without the support of my brother, Paul Tapia, and my father, Eduardo Tapia, who helped with the photography and were my body when my own failed. For more of Eduardo's photography, I recommend following his social media (under the name of Giraluna). I would also like to thank my mother, Anna Gates Tapia, for being part of this journey. I would like to recognize everyone who has been part of the long process that is and will continue to be my education.

Table of Contents

Introduction: Troubled Work for Troubled Times.

The project that would eventually become this thesis had two distinct points of origin. The first was the 2017 election process for the president of Ecuador. The election was between Lenín Moreno, the first-term vice-president for the "pink tide" presidency of Rafael Correa, and Guillermo Lasso, a board member for Coca-Cola and once CEO for the *Banco de Guayaquil*.[1] At the time, I was struck by the closeness of the race that was won only by a narrow margin in the second round of votes. The choice seemed like a straightforward decision from both a political-ethical level and a material level. On one side we had Moreno, who promised to continue and expand the unprecedentedly successful policy changes of his predecessor that challenged the IMF and general U.S. hegemonic power. On the other side we had Lasso, who had very close ties to international capital and had implemented austerity policies as the Minister of Economy ("Ministro Secretario de Economía y Energía del Ecuador") for the botched presidency of Jamil Mahuad (who has been sentenced to 12 years in prison on embezzlement charges) and, for all we knew, would let the IMF organize Ecuadorian society however it pleased. Lasso proposed to continue the series of austerity policies that had preceded President Correa. I wanted to know why so many people were prepared to support a Lasso presidency when it seemed to be clearly against "their" material interests. At the end of the day, this question became somewhat obsolete from the electoral perspective. It did not matter who the people voted for; President Moreno distanced himself from any and every left politic to implement a series of austerity policies and welcomed the IMF home. The second point of origin was my 2017 visit to Ecuador. The first thing I noticed about the city of Quito, where I was staying with a cousin, was both the number of billboard advertisements and their

[1] "Bank of Guayaquil." All translations in this thesis will be mine, except where citations are provided.

questionable (and question-educing) visual representations of what I perceived to be "Americanness."

It became obvious that a study of advertising as it relates to political "consciousness" was necessary. The link between the outright exploitative ways of the companies in South America (such as Chevron and Coca-Cola) and the images of happiness they promoted in and outside the region appears as a politically important contradiction that merited study. This became the starting point: What is the link between advertising images and the ideals that the capitalist State wants us to hold dear? What are the political consequences of this link? How does this link structure society? To the end of answering these preliminary and fundamental questions, it became clear to me that a method of reading advertising was required—a method that would understand the power of the rhetoric of advertising and a method that would frame advertising in light of its power as a tool for social shaping. It was the goal of this method that guided the study; much like the Turin Communists, my goal was "to modify the political direction and the general ideology of the proletariat itself as a national element that lives within the complex of State life and is subjected, unconsciously, to the influences of the educational system, of newspapers, of bourgeois tradition" (Gramsci, *The Southern Question* 20). I will admit that it is an ambitious goal for a thesis, but it provided the direction necessary for the ambitions this method requires.

Advertising, especially in television and radio, is fleeting and hard to pin down to an analyzable text. The easiest way for me to sit with advertising texts and have the time that a serious reflection requires was to limit my study to advertising in print media. In the summer of 2019, I traveled to the southern city of Cuenca in the province of Azuay, Ecuador to collect these

texts. For a total of one week, I bought every magazine and newspaper sold at the intersection of Calle Luis Cordero and Simón Bolívar located in the historic downtown. These magazines and newspapers became the cornerstone of my research. What I noticed in my walks back and forth between my aunt's house and the corner kiosk that sold the texts was both the resemblance and difference between the storefront displays and the pictures in the magazines, they seemed to complement each other in some way. A couple of weeks after collecting the bulk of my texts, I asked my father and brother to accompany me in a photographic excursion to document the salient storefronts in a single-block radius from the kiosk. The photographs taken on this day became part of the study as well. These storefronts required a new question to be asked: What are the differences between advertising images in print media and the advertising images people encounter when walking through the city? This question encouraged me to take a one-day road trip on a rural road in the province of Loja in search for a better understanding of difference. On this road trip, I visited the towns of Cera, Chantaco, Taquil, and Chuquiribamba. The sole purpose of this journey was to compare urban and rural storefront advertising. In the end, I had three different kinds of data that might give me the ground needed to start reading.

Before diving into the content of this thesis, I want to give my readers insight into what to expect. This project contains a persistent reading and re-reading of a variety of photographs and scans of pages from magazines and newspapers combined with a grounding on a variety of theories that have addressed the surrounding conditions of the focus of this thesis. The first chapter of this thesis studies the peculiarities of reading an advertising photograph. I first establish that photographs constitute a readable message in order to explore the nuances that give these photographs the power they utilize in educating their audience on their place within their conditions of existence. To this end, I engage with a variety of theorists from Ferdinand de

Saussure to Jacques Lacan to Roland Barthes to Norah Campbell. In the second chapter, I explore how a politicized reading of advertising can reframe how we understand the role of advertising in the cohesion (or lack thereof) of a social formation. This chapter explores the relationship between social policy and advertising in order to understand the extent of the power of the advertising image. This chapter also demands a reconceptualization of the State. To engage with the demands of this chapter, I engage with another set of theorists from Luci Cavallero and Verónica Gago to Pablo Dávalos to Karl Marx to Louis Althusser and back to Roland Barthes. In the third chapter, I compare the print advertising with the storefront photographs taken in Cuenca and provincial Loja. This chapter intends to remind us of the importance of considering distribution when reading advertising. This chapter raises the question of difference and the geographical reach that the images of advertising have. In thinking through distribution, I invoke production as well. This chapter focuses on a specific set of theorists, Walter Benjamin and Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno. It is through the study of this wide variety of theorists that we will begin to reframe advertising, to change the terms of engagement with advertising, and to re-politicize reading.

Chapter I: The Meaning in Meaninglessness.

> Language then has the strange, striking characteristic of not having entities that are perceptible at the outset and yet of not permitting us to doubt that they exist and that their functioning constitutes it. (Saussure 107)

When we first approach an image, or, more appropriate to the case of advertising, when an image approaches us, the image seems to act. Not in the sense that the image moves its position to perform an action as a film would, but that every component of the image—the photograph, the special effects, the choice in lighting, the accompanying written text—puts forth and moves a narrative or a message. Sometimes this narrative is more or less obviously graspable: "Use this toothpaste and your teeth will be the whitest teeth" (see Figure 1); "Drink this memory juice and you too could become a successful executive" (see Figure 3); or "Due to the loan ('the best way to have a new car') this couple was able to purchase a car that will move their relationship towards happiness" (see Figure 5). In the image, we can see several elements simultaneously at play. The summertime green, the white car, the "white" skin, the "white" teeth, the "white" shirt, the half-embrace, the necklace. Through the "obviousness" of any photographic message, there is much more at play. The purpose of this chapter is to establish where this "much more" is grounded, how it is that an image can have a message, and ultimately to find the source where the image attains its power to reorder and reconstitute a reality that mobilizes every aspect that the image plays with.

* * *

Figure 1: "Edition Number 178." *¡Hola! Ecuador,* 12 June. 2019, pp. 3.

Mutilated by the inevitable corners of a rather large page, half a face timelessly "smiles." No need for a joke, no need for a blush. The smile intends to show-off the "beautiful" set of teeth. Why beauty? The advertisement does not allow for any philosophical inquiry, the audience receives the answer before the question is asked: "Whitening." At first, this answer is to be taken literally. Whitened teeth, the action of whitening teeth, is the answer to the unasked

question of “why beauty?”. Purchasing this toothpaste will make the teeth white; this white will create beauty. “Well, is it not the case that beauty is subjective? At least, there is no fundamental, essential, natural beauty.” Why not, but nothing changes. The abrupt angles of the toothpaste box, contrasted with the rounded angles of the face, announces the operational power of the advertisement: the glow on the mutilated face produced by the lighting, the glow on lips produced by makeup, the glow of the sparkling stars in the upper right corner produced in editing. It is not the teeth that are beautiful; the whole set of signs surrounding them point towards an association with something like “beauty.” Whitening is a verb, the moving from something that was not as white to something that is whiter. Whitening implies a difference and differentiation between white and non-white. The advertising presents the dazzling show celebrating the movement between two different states (white and non-white) that values the white over the non-white, presenting the whitening next to the smile that conjures anything remotely close to “beauty.” More still, the advertisement needs the value of the association between whitening and beauty in order for the commodified-white that the toothpaste promises to be important enough to be sold. The advertisement needs its concept of beauty to be important for “whitening” to be important. More still, the advertisement needs to be imitated. “Personality means hardly more than dazzling white teeth and freedom from body odor and emotions. That is the triumph of advertising in the culture industry: the compulsive imitation by consumers of cultural commodities which, at the same time, they recognize as false” (Horkheimer and Adorno 136). The advertisement’s concept of “beauty” does not need to be “true,” it only needs it to be acted. The toothpaste is purchasable at Supermaxi, a locale that promotes the magazine in which this advertisement was found.

Figure 2: "Edition Number 1244." *Vistazo* 20 June. 2019, pp. 79.

The unspecified magic dust descends from the polluted heavens of the unidentified city to merge with the act of consuming a specified pastry that might as well be any other pastry. The backdrop in the studio is probably a green screen, an open slate for the designers to touch up at the will of the advertisers. The human figure in the forefront is the interest of this reading.

Every possible description of this figure brings a plethora of political associations with social stratifications. As Leora Farber writes in the essay "Skin Aesthetics": "Far from being a neutral point of transition between inner and outer body, skin is inscribed with layers of politicized associations. A primary signifier of racial identity, it is also a visible marker of hybridity and crosscultural/racial mix" (Farber 247). The skin acts as a sign that signifies a set of associations, from the phenotype, signifying racial classification, to the tension of the skin, signifying youth(lessness). Why has the advertisement selected these particular signifiers present in the human figure? Farber has an answer to this: "Skin holds particular currency for westernized women, and (increasingly) men, as this signifies the nemesis of the western ideals of slimness and youth" (Farber 247). Advertising employs this currency in achieving its own goals. It is important for the logic internal to the advertisement (to sell) that the human figure be marked with "whiteness" and "youthfulness." However, the value that the currency essentially relies on is only reaffirmed with its deployment. Currency is only possible with value. Value, in turn, has to be established. The magic dust values the pastry and the white, youthful skin in a single swirl.

Figure 3: "Edition Number 178." *¡Hola! Ecuador* 12 June. 2019, pp. 83.

The articulated promise of this advertisement is a fairly straightforward one: "This elixir will better your memory and concentration. Don't believe me? Here is an example of success." As an audience, we are left to assume that the juice (or is it pills?) does indeed work. The advertisement is nudging us to believe it works. Three components nudge us towards this belief: The suit, the gesture pointing towards the "mind," and the grin. Let us focus on the first. One

would think that fabric forming the suit is completely insignificant, or at least, not a sign. One would think that the fabric is neutral in signification, that it is just material. However, "the conventional outfits worn by the average man and woman in the street are chosen within the constraints of finance, 'taste', preference, etc. and these choices are undoubtedly significant" (Hebdige 101). The clothing choice for the advertisement is working within the constraint of the message that the juice is successful. Like the clothing choices in the advertisement, people make choices of what to wear when they "go out." In his book, *The Meaning of Style,* Dick Hebdige notes that "these [clothing] choices contain a whole range of messages which are transmitted through the finely graded distinctions of a number of interlocking sets – class and status, self-image and attractiveness, etc." (Hebdige 101). In an attempt to decipher the message, we can ask: Why a suit? We could answer with "professionalism" but that itself is a code for class and status. The suit is charged with signifying a "upper" class: "gentlemen wear suits." Meanings are pliable; perhaps the suit only means, or is associated with, success. The suit is chosen in this advertisement because it implies the success that the advertisement wants to associate with the juice. At the same time, the suit means success only because of a history of class and the association that class has with success. Let us not hide the fact that the suit is "western," and that with it comes an implied system of social organization. The success implied is colored to the conditions under which that success is achievable: capitalism. The advertisement in figure 3 can also be found on page 73 of the magazine *Vistazo* ("Edition Number 1244." *Vistazo* 20 Jun. 2019, pp. 73.).

Figure 4: "Edition Number 19" *Vistazo Enfoque*, 20 June. 2019, pp. 21.

I have yet to find an advertisement that is as theoretically rigorous in exploring the concept of family as that of Figure 4. This advertisement does not have to even mention the word "family" for the concept to be invoked. We have four individuals: two adults and two children. For each pair, we have a male and a female. We cannot know if the individuals in this

advertisement are engaging in the relations that we know as family or if they are all actors performing this role. The difference is negligible; the message is graspable. While the message is "family," we could be more precise as to what kind of family: the nuclear family. All we have is the basic unit of reproduction and the smallest unit for consumption. The number of commodities that a nuclear family consumes must be much larger than those of an extended family: instead of one blender, you now need a dozen. It is perfect that the actors are holding up what appears to be a roof. These sets of individuals represent the family that represents the single-family home. The walls of this home are made out of the flesh of the individuals. This equation is of material significance; it becomes the norm of how we conceptualize and organize space. The equation prioritizes single-family suburban construction over a multi-family housing complex. The nuclear family is not a timeless form of organization; this advertisement serves the function of naturalizing the single-family home in a region where this concept and form of organization is relatively new.

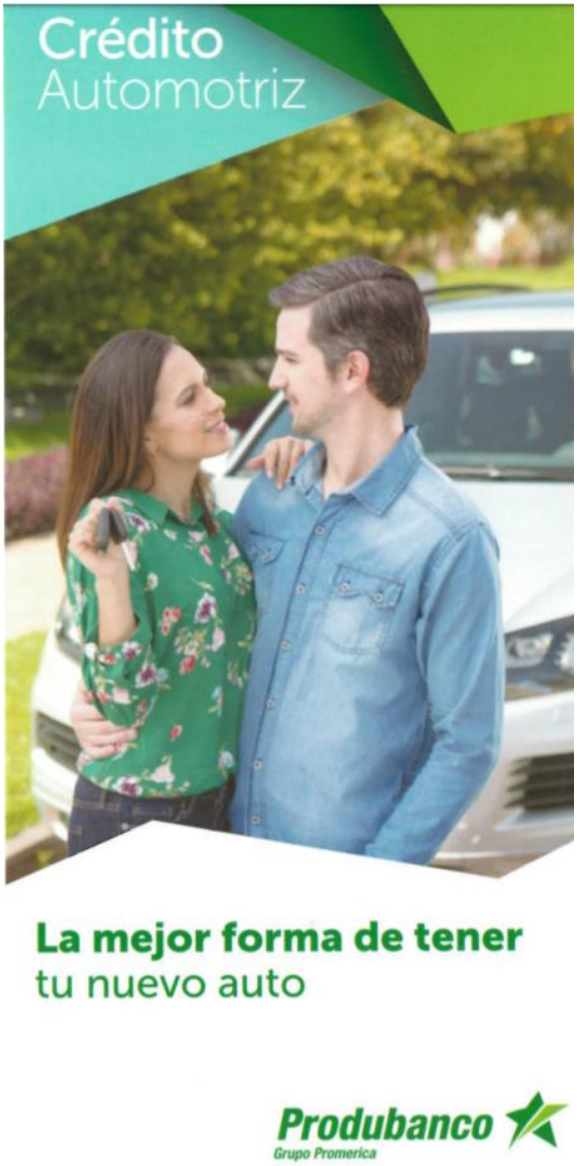

Figure 5: *Produbanco* leaflet retrieved from the Supermaxi supermarket in Loja, Ecuador, (undated).

One way or another, all advertising revolves around the concept of "happiness." The angle at which happiness is promised varies from one advertisement to another. Figure 5 has a couple of layers of messaging before arriving at happiness. If happiness is the goal, then romantic attraction (induced by the half-hug and prolonged eye contact) becomes its vehicle.

This advertisement seems to imply that romantic attraction needs its vehicle as well (quite literally); it is the car that "produced" this moment of romantic attraction (or at least that is what the image suggests). The car remains in the background; what is brought forward are the two individuals and the key in the hand of the left figure. It is the possession of the key that ignites the passion of a half-hug. What is this advertisement for? It is not for a particular brand of car or even a dealership. It is not for couple's therapy. It is for a bank. The written text lets us know that the advertisement is for car-related credit: "the best way to have a new car." This claim is highly debatable; going into debt for a car will only increase one's dependence on one's wages. "Everyone can be like the omnipotent society, everyone can be happy if only they hand themselves over to it body and soul and relinquish their claim to happiness" (Horkheimer and Adorno 124). This is the exchange that this advertisement offers: we will give you the happiness of a car if you give us a portion of your wages (past and future). This exchange will only make us more dependent on the system as a whole, the one we were unhappy in before.

* * *

Dear readers, you may disagree with my reading of the above images; some experience or interest or association might incline your reading away from mine. Let us focus on what we do agree on first: that the images can be read. When the meaning is open to "interpretation," what can be agreed upon is that there is a meaning. We agree that the pictures are meaningful. Roland Barthes states that "pictures become a kind of writing as soon as they are meaningful: like writing, they call for a lexis" (Barthes, *Mythologies* 110). Let us delve into the world of linguistics in search of a method that we can use to read pictures. The photographic elements of advertising, much like the written text surrounding them, carry a meaning that goes beyond the

"literal"-ness of them. With the meaning or value always pointing outside of the sign, the sign is susceptible to whims of a hegemonic social force. Its susceptibility allows the "message" of a particular sign to gain its power to project and shape the meanings of everyday activities by carrying the sign to every material surface that will house it. To get to this conclusion, I want to continue this chapter by exploring the concept of the sign. In the *Course in General Linguistics*, linguist and semiotician Ferdinand de Saussure began his exploration of the sign by challenging the notion that language is a simple naming process where every individual thing has a corresponding name (Saussure 65). Saussure found this naïve view of language to assume that ideas preceded words, to be unclear as to whether the name is vocal or psychological, and to overall simplify the link between the thing and the name (Saussure 65).

Saussure proposed that "the linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound-image" (Saussure 66). Instead of language being a list of names that then maps onto the reality to which the language refers, Saussure knew language to be a relationship of signs. The sign is itself constituted by the relationship between the abstract concept and the "psychological imprint of the sound" (Saussure 66), the concept and the sound-image. The sound-image is the "material" or form by which a concept is expressed or associated or pointed towards. The sound-image is the word uttered (the sounds and frequencies) or written (the shapes on the page or the shapes drawn in the air), however, it is psychological in the sense that can be latent: it can be expressed as the language in our head when we speak to ourselves, it does not need to be uttered or expressed to be present or carry a concept with it. To avoid confusing the relationship between the abstract concept and the sound-image, a relationship that in a sense defines what constitutes each component, Saussure refers to the concept as the signified (*signifié*) and the sound-image as the signifier (*signifiant*). Using signifier and signified has "the

advantage of indicating the opposition that separates them from each other and from the whole of which they are parts" (Saussure 67), exemplifying the tension and complexity of the sign as a unit. A degree of ambiguity remains as to the relationship between the concept and the sound-image; this will continue to be explored throughout the chapter.

A principle that is important to Saussure is the arbitrariness of the sign; that is to say, "the bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary" (Saussure 67). This is how Saussure explains why we can have "the same" concept across languages: sister, *hermana, sör* can all be used to signify the concept of the relationship "sister." This is a point where we can problematize or "complexitize" Saussure; despite the previous problems Saussure points out, the concept seems to precede the language insofar as there is a "universal concept," a something that is a-historical in its timelessness or embedded deep in the veins of "human nature." At the same time, Saussure writes that "there are no pre-existing ideas, and nothing is distinct before the appearance of language" (Saussure 112). Language is tied to the material ability of the language to be expressed and a body with limited options open to its experience. Instead of using examples of signifiers across languages, it is better to point out that the signifier can take the shape of the written word, the intonations of the spoken word, and the conventions of drawings that can all indicate the "same" concept "sister." The signifier is always building up the signified; the signifier captures and invades the concept. But I am getting ahead of myself; the takeaway is that every mode or form of the signifier is not inconsequential to the signified.[2] While the relationship of the signifier and the signified might be arbitrary, the sound-image used to signify a particular relationship; for example, saying beef being tied to a relationship of food

[2] This reading is not the predominant reading of Saussure; there will be more on this reading in the paragraphs that address Lacan.

("beef" and "food" being sounds or lines on a page), the meaning of the relationship between the signifier and the signified remains open.[3]

It is the materiality of the signifier that is arbitrary: the sound, the shape of the lines of letters that make up a word, whatever the symbol might be. The ability for the arbitrary materiality to convey a concept is based on convention or stereotype: "[E]very means of expression used in society is based, in principle on collective behavior or – what amounts to the same thing – on convention" (Saussure 68). In other words, the sign is not arbitrary in its use: "The choice of the signifier is [not] left entirely to the speaker …; I mean that it is unmotivated, i.e. arbitrary in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified" (Saussure 69). Much is left in the open. Where does convention come from? Probably from the history of a particular class or social formation.[4] Regardless, we are left to conclude that the meaning of the sign does not come from the connection between the signifier and the signified. To say that the signifier is arbitrary is not the same as saying that the sign has no value. What it does say is that the value of the sign is not a positive value or that it cannot be found within itself. In other words, we cannot separate the arbitrary from the value: "*arbitrary* and *differential* are two correlative qualities" (Saussure 118, emphasis in original). A sign of any kind gains value only because it is different from other signs. This also means that the only "requirement" of a particular sign to be of value is that it is not confused with other signs, regardless of the materiality or internal differences of the sign (Saussure 119, 120). A suit is a suit regardless of its color or if it is made of fabric or pixels or if it is a size M or a size XL. Like Saussure's chess knight, "its material make-up – outside its square and the other conditions of the game – … means nothing to the

[3] As someone who does not eat meat, this relationship as a "natural" relationship is challenged. This challenge demonstrates the plasticity of signification.
[4] Beef as opposed to cow. Mutton as opposed to sheep. Poultry as opposed to chicken.

player; it becomes a real, concrete element only when endowed with value and wedded to it" (Saussure 110). To a radical extent, this implies that "in language there are only differences without positive terms" (Saussure 120). The signs in themselves do not contain meaning.

Ferdinand de Saussure opened a door to our understanding of how something becomes linguistically meaningful. In Jacques Lacan's essay "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud" in *Écrits*, the sign is also addressed in a way that builds on the relationship between the signifier and the signified. Lacan analyzes "the whole structure of language that psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious" (Lacan 139) to provide a novel way of approaching the signifier/signified relationship. Opposed to Saussure, who envisioned the relationship of the signifier and the signified to be reciprocal, Lacan places "signifier over signified" (Lacan 141). While this might appear as a minor distinction, the implications are astounding. First of all, the adding of the "over" does away with "the illusion that the signifier serves the function of representing the signified, or better, that the signifier has to justify its existence in terms of any signification" (Lacan 143). Lacan elaborates this point with his famous example of a bathroom door. The materiality between a "men's room" and a "ladies' room" door is the same but signifies a split reality. In a sense, the signified between the two doors is the same but the "signifier in fact enters the signified – namely, in a form which, since it is not immaterial, raises the question of its place in reality" (Lacan 143). I do not want to speak about reality from this frame; it is a futile task. However, we have reframed the relationship of the signifier and the signified in a way that allows us to see the power that the signifier has over the signified.

Lacan extends Saussure's concept of the differentiation of signs as the location of value. As Lacan formulates it, "only signifier-to-signifier correlations provide the standard for any and every search for signification" (Lacan 145). This signifier-to-signifier correlation is called the signifying chain. Lacan sees this pertaining to sentences; a particular word means something based on the surrounding words. If you change the words around it, you change that word. This is a rudimentary example: the green tree is not the same as the dead tree. "Tree" means two different things or materials in that sentence.[5] Regardless of how crude the example is, we witness an "incessant sliding of the signified under the signifier" (Lacan 145). The associations of the signifier are constantly in flux. Lacan takes this to another level and concludes that "no signification can be sustained except by reference to another signification" (Lacan 141). This sounds much like Saussure's understanding of the sign being meaningful only in its differentiation. Lacan takes what is there: the differential value is not just between signs but signifiers. What does this have to do with advertising? In an advertisement, we have multiple elements of significance that are all creating a chain of signification that affects the signified. One cannot limit the reading of the advertisement to a singular sign (for example, the commodity being advertised). Lacan explains this concept as follows: "Whence we can say that it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning *insists*, but that none of the chain's elements *consists* in the signification it can provide at that very moment" (Lacan 145). We must always look at the moving elements, the relationship between one signifier and another, the framing of the whole. All this has been quite abstract; the question remains: how can we transfer this theoretical framing to advertisements and photography?

[5] One might say that "tree" is a single concept; however, for the "tree" concept to be the same in the "dead tree" and the "green tree" we need another concept: the cycles of life.

Figure 6: "Edition Number 17,024." *El Tiempo: Diario de Cuenca*, 28 June. 2019.

This photograph of several people crossing a rocky hillside path appeared on the cover of the Friday publication of the periodical *El Tiempo: Diario de Cuenca.* The light-brown soil, highlighted by the lack of vegetation, gives way to a play of shadows and contrasts created by the boulders and rocks; the steep incline of the rising mountain provides a dynamic background that surrounds the figures in the action of crossing a path. The people, with their cargo, cross the exposed terrain. After a pause, the header invades the image. The header above the photograph reads, "On the road Gualaceo-Limón, the closure Ingamullo II is a point of danger." From this, the photograph appears differently. Ingamullo II is a road that hides underneath the rocks and sand. Not only that, but the crossing is a precarious one. The caption underneath the image reads, "Farmers and ranchers rush to traverse the road full of soil and rocks, with the imminent danger that the petrous material may fall on top of their bodies; the road connects Azuay with

Morona Santiago." While the initial glance at the photograph did discern movement, the caption has given this movement speed. The caption engenders who the figures are and their intentions. Somehow the photograph has changed, or rather, the image of the photograph has changed. The figures and backgrounds in the image have obtained or have been charged with a different meaning. The text surrounding the image has entered the photograph and has created a new image.

It is this meaning altering "conversation" between the written text and the photographic text what Roland Barthes explores in his essay "The Photographic Message." Barthes argues that any photograph in the press is a message that is informed by a source of emission, a channel of transmission, and a point of reception (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 15). The source of emission includes the photographer as well as the intellectual work of a staff who produces, manages, and frames the picture within the periodical. This frame can refer to the caption or accompanying written text, but it can also mean the periodical itself. The periodical *El Tiempo* ("*The Time(s)*") frames itself as objective as time itself and frames its cover picture with this same objectivity. The enframing is the channel by which the image is transmitted. Whoever reads the photograph constitutes its point of reception. The process the photograph goes through is of great consequence. The message of the photograph changes and develops with each step; "the photograph is not only perceived, received, it is *read*, connected more or less consciously by the public that consumes it to a traditional stock of signs" (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 19). The framing of a photograph affects how it is read. Like Barthes, I start here with a photograph from the press because there is an association that the photograph transmits "the scene itself, the literal reality" (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 17). If this were true, then the photograph would not have the properties of a message; but it would be a replica of reality. This is for Barthes the

photographic paradox: it is a message, but it is also a perfected analog of "reality." Beyond its appearance of meaninglessness, the very existence of one photograph and not another is meaningful. The ability for the photograph to relay a message, due to its framing, leads us through another path that separates us from viewing the photograph as an analog. With Barthes, we will turn to advertising to understand the linguistic properties of the photograph.

With the press photograph we might be tempted to downplay the intentionality that propelled it into existence; we might be tempted to say that the picture and the image have an objective relationship. However, as noted in "Rhetoric of the Image," the advertising image is different; "in advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional; the signifieds of the advertising message are formed *a priori* by certain attributes of the product and these signifieds have to be transmitted as clearly as possible" (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 33). A whole series of associations are mobilized to signify whatever intention the advertising agency is attempting to signify. In advertising we see the intentionality of deploying significant elements; in this intentionality we can see that these significant elements operate as signs. Along with the press photograph, we see that the treatment that the photograph receives frames the signs that convey a message: "[the] signifier is the 'treatment' of the image (result of the action of the creator) and whose signified, whether aesthetic or ideological, refers to a certain 'culture' of the society receiving the message" (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 17). What we can gather from this is that the significant elements are the treatment or framing and the culture of the reception. By limiting our understanding of the photograph as an analog of reality, we overlook these two elements.

Figure 7: "Edition Number 179." *¡Hola! Ecuador,* 17 July 2019, pp. 99.

The very act of writing a reflection on an advertising image demonstrates how much reading goes into an interaction with an advertisement. What are the signifiers in figure 7? To begin, we have four human figures that seem to be having "a good time." I read this because I associate laughter (especially ridiculous laughs) with "a good time." I also read friendship; the half-embrace of four individuals suggests such a reading. One of the individuals is singled out

by an aura of a white credit card frame. This subject is given a name: "María Gracia García." The written text underneath it reads: "Don't discover new places without her." It is ambiguous as to whether the subject of the sentence is "*La* Tarjeta de American Express" ("the American Express Card") or "María Gracia García." They are one and the same; the advertisement makes it so that even contradictory readings are resolved in the interest of the advertiser. What is important is the sense of adventure signified by the "youthfulness" of the human figures combined with the undistinguished waterfall in the background and the laughter that is easily commodified. The reading I might have of a sign might vary: the half-embrace I read as friendship can be read differently, the four "friends" might be lovers. "The knowledge on which [the] sign depends is heavily cultural" (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 35). For example, to say that two of the figures are male and two are female, my ability to gender the group of "friends," is based on a set of cultural codes of what gender is (how gender is "expressed" or signified). Later in this thesis we will politicize cultural codes. However, for now, we can see how the objectivity of the photograph is as elastic as our ability to read an image.

What we can see with the use of photography in the advertisement is an appeal to the objectivity of the photograph. The objectivity of the photograph becomes a "sign of objectivity" (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 18). It is this sign of objectivity on which advertising relies to validate whatever meaning is being conveyed: "Coca-cola does make you happy, just look at this group of people who are happy because of it." We can develop a series of methods for reading photographs: "*the one lexia mobilizes different lexicons*" (Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* 46, emphasis in original). One text can be subject to different readings. It is not my intent to close reading but to demonstrate how prone photographs are to reading despite their sign of objectivity. With advertising we are presented with texts that pretend to be objective or mundane

and therefore not readable. But we are also dealing with a power that hides behind its mundanity and its intelligibility:

> The visual organizes the worldview of the seer. The visual is at its most powerful when it is most invisible; scientific diagrams, for example, have a rhetorical force which sell ideas and funding applications. The exemplars used here are primarily from the realm of advertising, but only because it is the most immediate form of managerial organization; uniforms, packaging, computer software packages, brand logos, buildings, web sites, management reports, staff, servicescapes all constitute instances of visual control. (Campbell 108)

Since the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, each sign reifies a particular connection between the signifier and the signified. With the photograph we see something close to visual control in the sense that the meanings of particular appearances are made to signify particular concepts that are then taken from the advertisement and transplanted into other everyday relationships. In the next chapter, I intend to explore the consequences of this power. "The working of a text hides itself; it works because it seems natural, transparent, obvious, unimportant, undeconstructible. In fact, the more something stands in full view, the more our vision is impaired" (Campbell 114). With an understanding of the power of advertising to hide itself and to manage our field of vision (and our understandings of possibility), I intend to present a different form of reading advertising that takes into account its power.

Chapter II: Selling Exploitation.

> "Popular beliefs" and similar ideas are themselves material forces. (Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader* 215)

Twenty years after the end of history, the ground began to shake. Forces that had been exterminated in stadiums and desert graves began to move again. During the month of October 2019, Ecuador became the topography where a broad coalition of people including unions (Frente Unitario de los Trabajadores), indigenous peoples (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador/CONAIE), students (Federation of University Students of Ecuador/FEUE), and the residents of the cities of Quito and Guayaquil let the world see their political role (their communal being) and demanded the end of austerity policy. The Ecuadorian political topography was connected to the general topography of neoliberal austerity that was enacting a rollback of the political state and substituting it with debt from Puerto Rico to Haiti, from Lebanon to Chicago, from Chile to France. It is too early to say where these movements will take us; however, especially in the case of Ecuador, we can see where we are now. At this time, I do not blame the careful reader who has quietly protested at the direction of this chapter. Was the subject of discussion not language and advertising images? The first chapter was the long road to arrive at this location, the establishment of the ground of how an image can be full of meaning. The Gramsci epigraph is the hint as to what direction we will take. The advertising images that we have studied (and will continue to study) do not exist apart from the state of politics, not only because they lie somewhere in the streams of capital and the circles of production but because they also play a role in the formation of ideas. Ideas, however personal we want to believe that they are, perform social work that forms and informs our relations with

each other and forms our attitudes towards the "status quo" of the world: austerity, exploitation, racism, sexism, class as a natural phenomenon, the ideal life. As such, I want to begin by explaining the context for the unrest in Ecuador as the road that will take us to an understanding of the work that advertising images do to form a hegemonic force. This force shapes (or tries to shape) the ideology of a population as a means to subjugate them into a status of dependence (both material and conceptual) where they become a means and the ground on which and by which capital and surplus-value are extracted.

The unrest in Ecuador has been largely attributed to the end of several petroleum-product subsidies by the Moreno government.[6] While this is undoubtedly true, it is only part of the story. In a letter of intention approved on March 11, 2019, titled "IMF Executive Board Concludes First Review of the Extended Arrangement Under the Extended Fund Facility for Ecuador, Approves US$251.14 Million Disbursement," a crucial context for the unrest is formed. This letter of intention brought back a lived memory of the role the International Monetary Fund (IMF) played during the return of democracy after the dictatorships of the 1970s as the economy was mobilized as a means of enacting violence (Dávalos 137). There are many points to be made about the letter of intent as well as the general role that the IMF plays in forming the policy of the State. In this letter of intent, it is stated that "the Ecuadorian government has demonstrated its resolve to restore fiscal discipline by rationalizing public spending" (*IMF Country Report No. 19/210,* 2). What is meant by "rationalizing" spending is a reformed economic policy that is geared towards putting "debt on a sustainable path and strengthening Ecuador's external competitiveness" (*IMF Country Report No. 19/210,* 2). That is, the debt that

[6] Colloquially in Ecuador, and I am unsure to what point this is generalizable, "government" (*gobierno*) is used to describe the executive branch while "the state" (*el estado*) is used to describe both the palace of Carondelet and the national assembly.

has been acquired by the political state comes with a structural change that is geared towards repaying the debt. In other words, the role of the state shifts from "irrational" public spending that is characterized by the state's ability to be involved in the economy and the life of the community to a rational state that is geared towards repaying the debt and allowing capital to replace its role in the life of the community. What for? "Strengthening the external competitiveness," all in the name of the economy.

The deal struck between the political state of Ecuador and the IMF is an exchange of the release of credit for changes in economic policy ("El acuerdo con el FMI, detonante de una protesta que pone en jaque a Ecuador"). The "exchange" is more of a polite cohesion or a subtle buying of the political state. Some of the most salient policy changes the IMF asked for includes "non-imposition and non-intensification of restrictions on payments for current international transactions" (*IMF Country Report No. 19/210,* 2) which would permit the flow of capital both in and out of the national borders without much care for regulation (the political state steps back from its communal role). This ability to easily move capital in and out of an economy could mean a lack of direction to what markets should be prioritized when capital is invested (there will be a favoring of markets with high returns as opposed to markets that are not high return but are necessary for the daily needs of people) and it would mean that in times of recession capital could flee the local economy (expediting the instability of the markets). Another policy change, although this is more of a general policy-attitude change, is "maintaining fiscal discipline" (*IMF Country Report No. 19/210,* 11) which I have referred to as austerity but implies a "laissez-faire" approach to the well-being of people by reducing the political state's involvement in public infrastructure. This last point could be expanded into a research project with its own merits. However, just to give a taste of what this point implies: in an interview, Ecuadorian economist

Pablo Dávalos stated that IMF's letter of intention suggested a drastic reduction of public spending that would impact public contracting as well as public investment; this would lead to the cutting of one hundred thousand public functionaries leading to a deinstitutionalizing of the political state and lack of public funding for any number of present and future programs (*Eco. Pablo Dávalos, Explica Su Tweet Sobre ¿Por Qué El FMI Quiere Desdolarizar al Ecuador?*). The last point I will hark on is, in passing, that the IMF notes that "the domestic debt market is underdeveloped, with limited domestic investor participation and low secondary market transaction volumes" (*IMF Country Report No. 19/210,* 13). I take this as a suggestion that the debt market should be "developed," the debt market being the buying and selling of "personal" debt by a third party to the initial loan. This point struck me as salient because not only is the IMF providing the means for the public debt of the political state, and not only is it shaping the economic policy of said political state, but it is also involving itself in developing a market of debt.

In *Una Lectura Feminista de la Deuda,* Luci Cavallero and Verónica Gago do the work of de-individualizing debt by making it "visible y ponerla como problema común" ("visible and putting it as a common/communal problem") and showing it "en su diferencia sexual y de géneros" ("in its sex and gender difference") (Cavallero and Gago 11). Cavallero and Gago identify a problem in only talking of public debt or the debt of the state; this limited form of understanding of debt leaves out the debt of everyday life and the debt from subsistence (Cavallero and Gago 14, 25). By leaving this latter kind of talk out, the problems and the impacts of debt are abstracted or put out of reach from the communities that directly experience the consequences of that institution, and the link between "la deuda y las violencias machistas" ("the debt and the sexist violence of machismo") is obscured (Cavallero and Gago 14).

Cavallero and Gago note that the strategy of actual feminist struggles involves a movement "de politización y colectivización del problema financiero" ("of politization and collectivization of the financial problem") (Cavallero and Gago 14). These financial problems are roughly encapsulated by "su papel a la hora de desmantelar el salario como un acumulado de las luchas que han constituido y la financierización de los servicios que estaban a cargo del Estado: de la salud a la educación" ("their role in dismantling wages as an accumulation of the struggles they have constituted and the financialization of the services that were in charge of the State: from health to education") (Cavallero and Gago 21).[7] The latter point rings as consistent with the above reading of the IMF's statement. The former point opens a door to a new line of analysis: debt as a new avenue of extracting surplus-value from wage laborers or any other person living in a precarious position. To this last point, we can see that "hoy el endeudamiento generalizado *amortiza* la crisis. Hace que cada quien afronte de manera individual el aumento de tarifas y deba ocupar su tiempo en trabajar cada vez más por menos dinero. Hoy el hecho mismo de vivir 'produce' deuda" ("today, generalized debt *amortizes* the crisis. It makes each person individually face the increase in rates and occupy their time working more and more for less money. Today the very fact of living 'produces' debt") (Cavallero and Gago 26). Here, the "rationalizing" of spending, the "rationalizing" of the economy is indeed the rationalizing of debt as a legitimate form of both "private" and "public" extraction of value by capitalists.

[7] In this quote, Cavallero and Gago are paraphrasing Silvia Federici's work.

Figure 8: "Edition Number 178." *¡Hola! Ecuador*, 12 June, 2019, back cover.

With this context, a whole new set of significations are made readable in the advertisements. Although the following point has already been challenged, this context induces a new reading: the signs in the photograph go beyond the "factuality" or "truth" of the meaning that is interpreted, giving us an opening to read the signs for the work that they do. The work of advertising has always seemed to be clear and straightforward, and as such also innocent: the advertising is selling a commodity and creating or positioning this commodity in the market. If

we read Figure 8, an advertisement for a bank, what is the commodity? We have an infant and an adult; the relation of their figures to each other connotes that they are father and child. The adult extends its hand towards a dark frame, presumably a computer of some sort. The relationship between the computer and the adult is ambiguous; that is where the written text comes into play: "No combines tu vida de hogar y trabajo sin ella" ("Don't combine your domestic and your work life without her"). The written text engenders the image by the parallel of the father/child relationship with domestic life, and the adult/computer relationship with work or labor. The "her" of the sentence maintains its ambiguity: is it referencing the child or is it referencing the saintly aura around the father's head and the frame marked "American Express"? This tension remains unresolved, merging into the single topic of the bank. Both American Express and Banco Guayaquil stamp their presence into this tension. Since the child has already been addressed in the duality of the written word, it is left to assume (still carrying the tension) that it is the credit card (or perhaps the creation of a bank account) that is the "her" and the commodity being sold. The hidden and paradoxical reference in this advertising is the *tu*. The "you" of the advertising is amorphous, unidentified as a concrete individual (anyone or any group could look at this advertisement and be the "you" even if they do not identify with the figure). However, we can see that the advertisement has created this identity regardless. It has individualized the financial world to a singular subject. We can see that the materiality of "personal" debt reifies the individuation of society, but we can also see the advertising reifying this individuation at the conceptual level. Is it not possible that the advertising works (at some level) to defend IMF policy by naturalizing the ideology that fuels it? To explore this further, I want to critique the divide between public and private.

There are many threads of thought that we could follow when addressing the private/public binary. We could say that the private is the individual and the public is the social. As the spheres start to form, it is worth asking about the boundaries of these spheres. As seen in Figure 8, many would say that the sphere of the individual (the adult) coalesces around the family and the social coalesces around work. However, the family is as social as work is private. Family is constituted of relationships (whether economic or "spiritual") with the community and within the "unit"; "work" has become the vehicle where the individuals debase themselves to cogs in their establishment of personal careers. Let us start again. The distinction between public and private is a legal distinction that finds its roots in the concept of private (and bourgeois) property and the enclosing of the commons. Louis Althusser notes this distinction when addressing ideological state apparatuses such as the family, the media, and religion which are relegated to the private sphere (that opposes the "public" state). When addressing the private/public binary, Althusser writes: "This distinction concerns only the status, that is, the definition, of the legal *persons* who hold formal title to this or that institution" (Althusser 79, emphasis in original). It is the Law, as an institution, that defines the personhood and the rights of that person and where we find the base for the binary of private/public. The Law is earthly and material, that is, it is formed and informed by society and the actions of people in a community. Althusser continues: "[The] law is universal and formal, we already know that it abstracts, by its nature, *from the content* of which it is the 'form'" (Althusser 80, emphasis in original). This concept becomes less abstract when we consider those who have been defined by the Law, such as those that have been defined as illegal persons (the immigrant, the queer, the inmate). The form that the Law has built for these persons affects the content (to be shot because

of one's treatment by the law will affect the "content"); however, the people who are treated as non-being still are (they exist).

In "On the Jewish Question," Karl Marx locates the distinction between private and public in the political history of the liberal State. Marx saw that there is a contradiction at the heart of this state. For Marx, a society under liberalism is composed of two elements: 1) the political community, where every human is engaged with other humans as communal beings; and 2) civil society, where people are engaged with each other as private individuals (Marx 36). This constructed duality only highlights the conflict between public or communal interests and private interests that comes to form the contradiction in this society. The source for the duality lies in the created contradiction that "the state dissolves distinctions of birth, of social rank, of education, and of occupation if it declares birth, social rank, education, and occupation to be non-political distinctions" (Marx 35). Instead of dissolving and resolving these distinctions, the liberal State "creates" a non-political category (civil society) where it offloads and pushes these distinctions. For the state, a category is "created"; however, it is more precise to say that the state presupposes the category that encompasses private property as well as birth, social rank, education, and occupation and allows them to "function and affirm their particular nature in their own way" (Marx 35) outside of and untouched by the state. The liberal state does not touch these presuppositions in order to "do away" with them. The same thing happens with religion when it is pushed out of the state only for it to remain in the non-political category allocated to the private individual. At the same time as it suspends these distinctions, the liberal state "calls on every member of the nation to be an equal participant in the national sovereignty" (Marx 35). Marx argues that this universality is abstract and ephemeral because, in the state's eyes, it has suspended the differences that prevent universality. This leads people ("man") to live " a double

life, a heavenly one and an earthly one" (Marx 36). Birth, social rank, education, and occupation are not only economic aspects that are valued in such a way that impacts how people live with one another, but they also define and contain the individual in their alienated individuality. The actuality of civil society is one in which the private individual views "other people as means, debases himself to a status of means, and becomes a plaything of alien forces" (Marx 36). The realm of civil society is where emancipation is deferred. Here advertising takes note and promises this emancipation through the consumption of some commodity or another. We can still go further.

Then what is the role of the state according to Marx? The state as it stands in liberal society is not the realm where the human finds their species-being (their communal existence), but an apparatus that preserves the laws (the rights) that in turn preserve civil society and create an antagonistic communal stasis. Marx observes that the posited human rights are but the right to preserve civil society as it is, unchanged (Marx 44). The freedom of liberalism is the "freedom of man as a monad isolated and withdrawn into himself" (Marx 45), the freedom to enclose onto oneself and one's (private) property. Equality is the right for every human to be "equally considered to be a self-based monad" (Marx 45). As such, this equality does not play an emancipatory role but an alienating role. This means that "the practical application of the human right of freedom is the right of private property" (Marx 45), the human right of freedom being the abstraction and the right of private property being its earthly form. The political community or state is then used as the means for the preservation of the right of private property (the "human right") in civil society. This implies that instead of a universal and equal participant in "national sovereignty", the "bourgeois is taken to be the real and true human being" (Marx 46), the one and legal subject. Behind the flowery masks of political emancipation of all people

and the suspension of private property in the political realm lies the emancipation of the bourgeoisie and the freedom to private property. To be clear, Marx is not opposed to political emancipation; however, in reading Marx we find a larger implication to the meaning of emancipation. Political emancipation "is the final form of human emancipation within the previous order of things" (Marx 37). The aim then becomes emancipation that goes beyond the framing constraints of the existing order. Emancipation within the existing society amounts to people being constrained in their freedom. Within this order, "['man'] was not freed from property. He received the freedom of property. He was not freed from the egoism of trade, he received the freedom of trade" (Marx 49). Every component is freed but left to itself and the whims of civil society. General emancipation is confined to the relationship that the liberal state has established between civil society and the political community not only because the relationship of the state functions to preserve civil society, but also because the political community has deferred the realm where general emancipation is possible to civil society.

We can see the IMF's moves in Ecuador as contrary to Marx's aim. The IMF's interest in the expansion of free trade intersects perfectly with its loaded suggestions to cut the government's spending (infrastructure). Antonio Gramsci, picking up what Marx laid down, saw free trade as based on the distinction between political society and civil society. However, Gramsci also realized the role of the political state in the development of civil society; this implies that the relationship between the political state and civil society is reciprocal as much as they are in opposition: "It is asserted that economic activity belongs to civil society, and that the state must not intervene to regulate it. But since in actual reality civil society and state are one and the same, it must be made clear that laissez-faire too is a form of state 'regulation', introduced and maintained by legislative and coercive means" (Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader*

210). This reconceptualizes the relation of the state to the economic sphere. The state is used to secure the private interests that are for free trade. Dávalos reiterates this point:

> El estado era el soporte que legitimaba esta violencia [(el despojo territorial, el control social, la criminalización a la resistencia política, la conversión de la política en espectáculo y la concesión de la soberanía política tanto a los inversionistas como al crimen organizado, en un contexto de globalización financiera y especulativa)], pero las políticas de ajuste del FMI y las políticas de privatización del estado, eran en sí mismas violencia que desgarraba al tejido social a nombre de la economía y sus prioridades. (Dávalos 136)

> The state was the support that legitimized this violence [(territorial dispossession, social control, criminalization of political resistance, the conversion of politics into spectacle and the granting of political sovereignty to both investors and organized crime, in a context of financial and speculative globalization)], but the IMF's adjustment policies and the state's privatization policies were themselves violence that tore the social fabric in the name of the economy and its priorities. (Dávalos 136)

We have a historical precedent to the IMF's use of the state to implement policy on how people should relate to each other. The IMF's and the Ecuadorian state's actions are not accidental. Gramsci notes that laissez-faire as a form of state regulation "is a deliberate policy, conscious of its own ends, and not the spontaneous, automatic expression of economic facts. Consequentially, laissez-faire liberalism is a political programme, designed to change – in so far as it is victorious – a state's ruling personnel, and to change the economic programme of the state itself – in other words the distribution of the national income" (Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader* 210). The state,

then, as Gramsci reconceptualized it, encompasses both civil society and the political state insofar as they are both locations of power that shape the formation of society. This state becomes the theater of the struggle for the power to change the formation of society towards the conditions that are more favorable for everyone. With this new lens, we can see advertising as another actor on this stage.

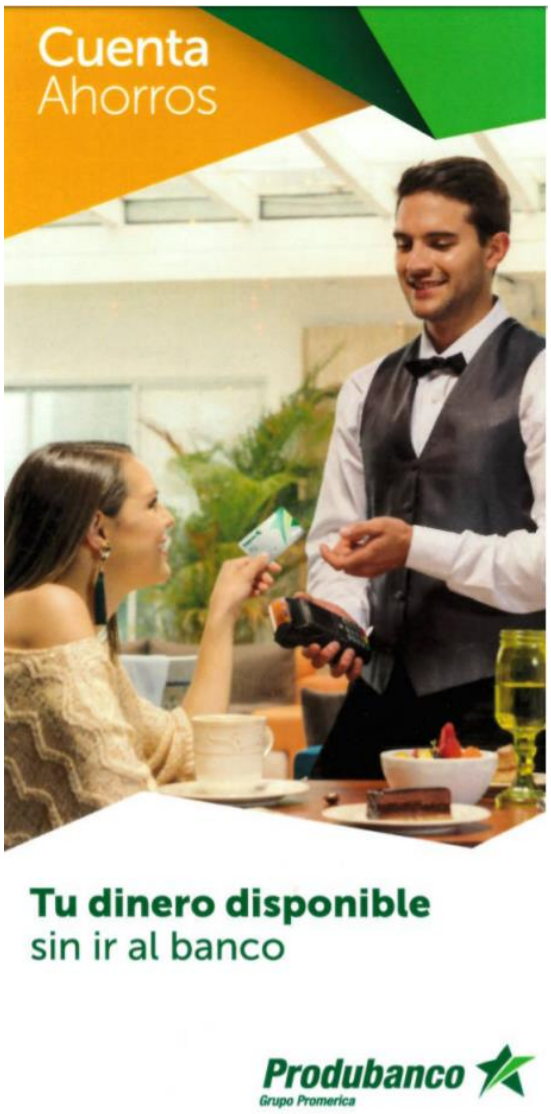

Figure 9: *Produbanco* leaflet retrieved from the Supermaxi supermarket in Loja, Ecuador, (undated).

The question then becomes how advertising plays its part on this stage. We see in Figure 9 the hints that might help us answer this question. In Figure 9, an advertising leaflet for the *Produbanco* bank, we have two people relating to each other. The setting seems to be a restaurant or a café: one figure is sitting down at a table with a mug and what looks like a piece of chocolate cake; the other figure is dressed in a white dress shirt, a vest, and a bowtie. The figure that is sitting down is handing the standing figure a card. We can deduce that the figure standing is the waiter that is taking the payment in the form of a card (the card being part of that which is vaguely advertised). We have established that the image depicted in the photograph is a waiter/consumer relationship. The text underneath the photograph lets us know who the audience of this leaflet is supposed to identify with: "Tu dinero disponible sin ir al banco" ("your money available without going to the bank"). The subject of the sentence is the person with the card, with the purchasing power. The waiter is part of the world and the audience is not asked to identify with them. Following Marx's theory that emancipation is pushed onto civil society, the back of the pamphlet reads: "Un paso importante hacia tu independencia" ("an important step towards your independence"). We know that purchasing power is necessary for living in this contemporary society. However, as Cavallero and Gago have noted, the relationship between bank and patron is an abusive one. In the advertisement, both parties are happy (at least the smile they give each other might make us think so), giving the impression that the interaction is a positive one. Their interaction is not a natural one, both in the sense that it is produced in a studio and in the sense that it represents an interaction that is possible in a very specific state that is constrained in time and political prioritization (civil society dictates communal direction). As such, we conclude that the interaction represented is an ideological one (or inspired by ideology).

Ideology forms our relations to the world by making us subjects, by naturalizing myth, and by hegemonically organizing the range of our possibilities. Let's take this trio one by one.

Ideology is an operation that occurs at a very localized level: at the level of "you" and "I." Ideology functions at "the level of individual 'subjects': that is, people as they exist in their concrete individuality, in their work, daily lives, acts, commitments, hesitations, doubts, and sense of what is most immediately self-evident" (Althusser 176). In every small interaction, ideology is present and at work. We can think of these interactions as a reflection of the state of things, that is, a consequence of how society is structured. In these interactions, we see that the bourgeois ideal of living takes a concrete form: people's ambitions, their worries, their sense of value. As Gramsci puts it, people become "conscious of their social position, and therefore of their tasks, on the terrain of ideologies, which is no small affirmation of reality" (Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader* 196). However, we can go beyond an understanding that ideology is a mere reflection of the structures of our society: ideology is an affirmation (that is, an action with the material consequences of action). Ideology is the "mechanism [that] makes individuals 'act all by themselves', without there being any need to post a policeman behind each and every one of them" (Althusser 177). To understand this mechanism, it is important to locate the process of ideology as much as we can. We have ideology working at the level of the individual, but it is important to distinguish that ideology works at representing a relationship to reality and not representing the "reality" itself. Louis Althusser makes the argument that "'people' do not 'represent' their real conditions of existence in ideology (religious ideology or some other kind), but, above all, their *relation* to those real conditions of existence" (Althusser 183, emphasis in the original). Ideology does not work at representing the conditions of existence, so the conditions of existence can be represented as "false" (two actors pretend they are happy about

their new and dismal credit score); ideology does not "care" whether the conditions are true or false. Ideology might use the representations of the conditions of existence, but it ultimately represents the relationship we have with the actual conditions of existence. This distinction might seem like a minor one; however, it is a crucial one. This distinction helps us focus from a broad stroke of ideological representation to an individualized understanding of the mechanism and the consequences of ideological representation.

The distinction between the real conditions of existence and the *relation* to those real conditions of existence can be complicated. As this chapter's epigraph reads: "'Popular beliefs' and similar ideas are themselves material forces" (Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader* 215); the relations to real conditions of existence are in themselves a material force that acts on and shapes the conditions of existence. However, ideology operates at an individual level. As such, we must focus on how ideology structures the individual. Althusser suggests: "*All ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*, through the functioning of the category of the subject" (Althusser 190, emphasis in original). That is, ideology takes individuals and, by the category of subject, represents their place in the world. It is the constant act of hailing that reminds the individual of their subjectivity and the sets of relationships into which they are placed. We can understand advertising as a form of hailing: the "you" in figure 9 reminds the individual encountering the advertisement that they are a subject; the represented relationship to the waiter/patron reminds the subject that they are consumers. Althusser argues that we are always subjects in the sense that we become what we already "were" just as the child is "always-already a subject" (Althusser 192); the subject-to-be "has to 'find' 'its' place, that is, 'become' the sexual subject (boy or girl) it already is in advance" (Althusser 193). In a way similar to Althusser's child, the advertising viewer is also a subject-to-be. Their constant interaction with

advertising is the hailing that continuously makes them what they already where: subjects in capitalism. Here we glimpse the possibilities for difference.

Figure 10: "Edition Number 179." *¡Hola! Ecuador*, 17 July 2019, front cover.

The becoming of the subject that the individual "always was" is a process that is in itself worth studying. To achieve the status of "always already being," the individual has to be convinced (or hailed properly as such) that the framework of any given subjectivity is the only

(and eternal) one. In figure 9, we can see how an individual is hailed in advertising. The advertisement directly references the audience as a "you"; we can see how the advertisement endows this "you" with a particular consumer relationship. In figure 9, the hailing is addressed directly to the individual. This is not always the case. The cover page in Figure 10 hails differently; we can see that there is another process taking place in the realm of ideology: naturalization. Naturalization is the process by which the conditions of existence are involved in hailing the individual. That is, the relationship to the modes of existence is presented as the only one (or the only one within a single framework of relations) that exists, can exist, and has always existed. On the cover page, we see a set of wedding photos that by themselves pass as innocent but lend themselves for the naturalization of an expensive ritual and a social structure. Roland Barthes theorized this active naturalization as a mythology of everyday life in his book, *Mythologies*. Myth is the form by which any material (however we want to think of material) is socially used (Barthes, *Mythologies* 109). Myth, often present in advertising, is not about truth; myth is aimed at causing an impression (Barthes, *Mythologies* 130). To create an impression, myth is a message and not "an object, a concept, or an idea; it is a mode of signification, a form" (Barthes, *Mythologies* 109). Myth is a form of representation. Mythology "transforms history into nature" (Barthes, *Mythologies* 129) by giving "an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal" (Barthes, *Mythologies* 142). This is achieved because ideology is not identified: representations do not appear as grounded in a relation to the modes of existence but as representations of the modes of existence themselves. That is, all representations of historical relations are given a natural character.

Let us look closely at figure 10. What is the big deal with these photographed pictures of a wedding? Myth pretends that it has no interest in the concept: "[W]hat causes mythical speech

to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason" (Barthes, *Mythologies* 129). An exorbitant wedding is the perfectly ideal wedding, an exorbitant wedding is a happy wedding; family, marriage, weddings are (the most) natural and fundamental social structures. Myth naturalizes the concept of any given representation; these representations appear innocent not because their intentions are hidden but because they are naturalized (Barthes, *Mythologies* 131): "[J]ust as bourgeois ideology is defined by the abandonment of the name 'bourgeois', myth is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things: in it, things lose the memory that they once were made" (Barthes, *Mythologies* 142). Weddings go from being an active social practice to appearing as a passive social fact. The reason why the photographed pictures on the magazine cover appear as a non-issue is because the images appear as reason itself. Instead of seeing the complexity of human relations that lead to weddings, we are left with an empty reality:

> In passing from history to nature, myth acts economically: it abolishes the complexity of human acts, it gives them the simplicity of essences, it does away with all dialectics, with any going back beyond what is immediately visible, it organizes a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident, it establishes a blissful clarity: things appear to mean something by themselves. (Barthes, *Mythologies* 143)

By doing so, myth is able to present any particular relationship as something that just is—no questions necessary. The more mundane the text, the richer this power of naturalization becomes. It is this process that makes reading and repositioning of advertising politically significant.

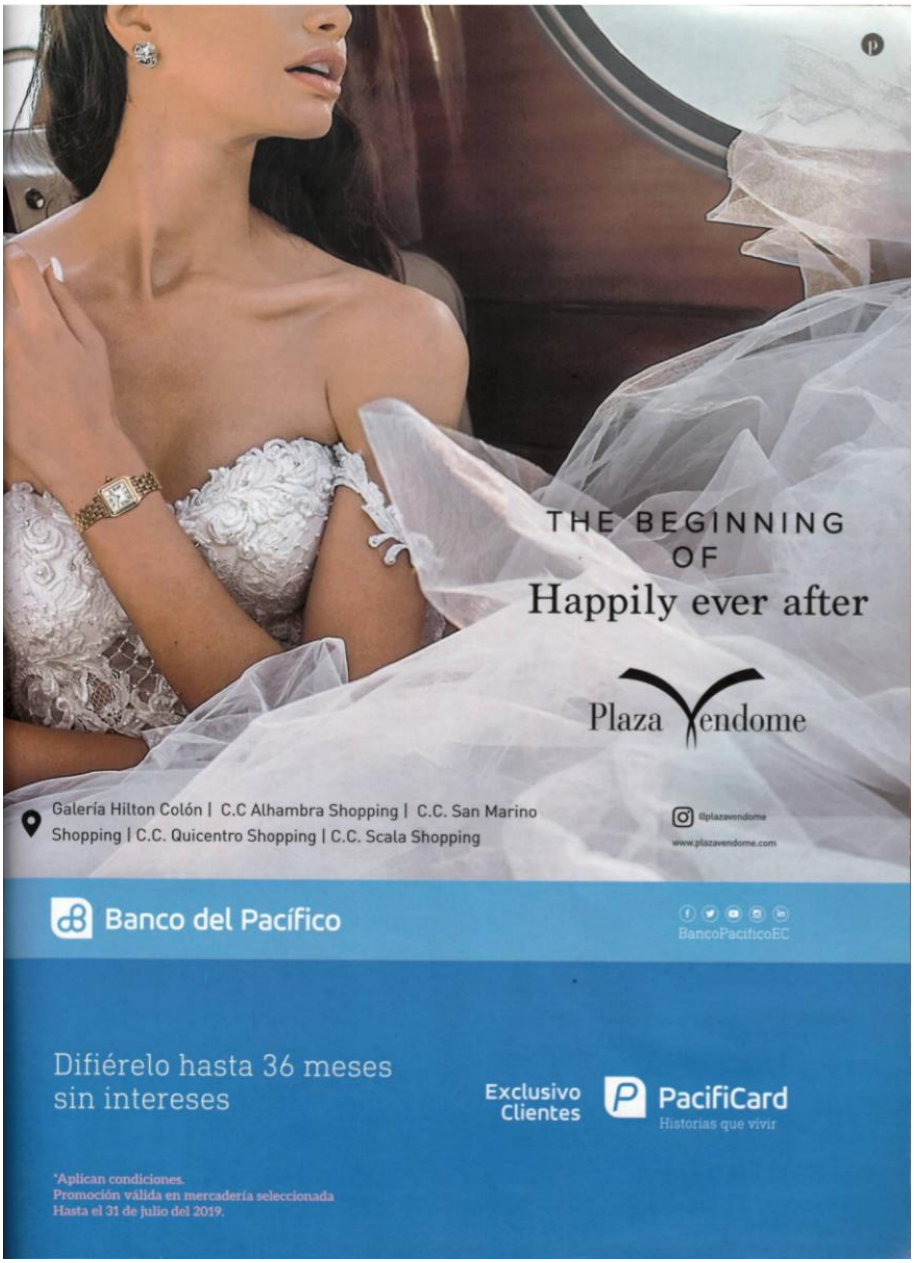

Figure 11: "Edition Number 179." *¡Hola! Ecuador*, 17 July, 2019, pp. 9.

Although I have not stated it (or quoted it) directly, myth is depoliticized speech. Myth takes intentionality and action out of an interaction. This is central to Barthes' conceptualization, that a unique understanding of politics is necessary. Barthes states: "One must naturally understand *political* in its deeper meaning, as describing the whole of human relations in their

real, social structure, in their power of making the world" (Barthes, *Mythologies* 143). By presenting the world as factual and not something that is made, myth depoliticizes. Barthes notes the importance of understanding de-politicization: "one must above all give an active value to the prefix *de-*: here it represents an operational movement, it permanently embodies a defaulting" (Barthes, *Mythologies* 143). We can see that the idea of a wedding is still mobilized for a certain end even when it pretends to be natural. In figure 11, we see that the wedding is another "reason" for a loan. In the same magazine that parades the weddings of the wealthy, a promise is made: "You too can have a wedding like this if you become dependent on the bank." What is delivered in this promise is exploitation via means of extraction of labor without the already inadequate protections of the employer/employee relationship. This false promise is intentional: "The culture industry endlessly cheats its consumers out of what it endlessly promises" (Horkheimer and Adorno 111), leaving them worse off than when they started.

Noting that myth is an operational movement brings me to my next point: representing the relations to the conditions of existence is powerful in shaping the whole of human relations; as such, it takes power to represent those relations. The conditions of existence can be shaped through a variety of policies. One of these policies is military intervention. The United States militarily intervened in Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Cuba, Haiti, Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Panama, Granada (Galarza Zavala 37). In the case of Ecuador, the United States established four military bases: one on the Galapagos islands, one in Salinas, another in Manta, and another in Archidona (Galarza Zavala 8). We can describe the United States as a hegemonic power; this power is realized by both military and economic flexing. The United States does not need to exercise its arsenals in order to accomplish its goals. However, by staying here, we lose track of the big picture. It is important to affirm the base of the State

before we proceed with the hegemonic forms that maintain power. Althusser reminds us that "the base or infrastructure of the class state is thus well and truly, as Lenin said, *exploitation*" (Althusser 93, emphasis in original). The strategic uses of power all revolve around this point: "The effect produced by the superstructure is simultaneously to ensure the conditions under which this exploitation is carried out (Repressive State Apparatus) and the reproduction of the relations of production, that is, of exploitation (Ideological State Apparatuses)" (Althusser 93). As such, the United States as an institution is just one branch of the class state. This State has many branches that operate to maintain the power of one class over the rest.

As Antonio Gramsci mentions in his study of the operations of the State and the possibilities of fighting class warfare in creative ways: "[I]deologies are anything but arbitrary; they are real historical facts which must be combatted and their nature as instruments of domination revealed … in order to make the governed intellectually independent of the governing" (Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader* 196). We can see how ideology is used to affirm the powers that be: "[T]hey 'organize' human masses, they form the terrain on which men move, acquire consciousness of their position, struggle, etc." (Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader* 199). We can understand ideology for its operation, but we can also study ideology for its consequences. In the creation of subjects, or the identification of individuals with subjects (hailing), the individual's relationships are identified with the subject and, as a consequence of this, we have "the withering of imagination and spontaneity in the consumer of culture today" (Horkheimer and Adorno 100); "the power of industrial society is imprinted on the people once and for all" (Horkheimer and Adorno 100). A study of the piercing reach of ideology is necessary to truly understand the consequences of ideology at work.

Chapter III: Buying Consent.

> The whole world is passed through the filter of the culture industry. (Horkheimer and Adorno 99)

While advertising is the centerpoint around which this study has revolved, I have yet to consider advertising in itself. In a general engagement with advertising and a particular engagement with "green" advertising, Sabine H. Hoffmann notes that "advertising is not a modern phenomenon" (Hoffmann). Tracing this history of advertisement leads Hoffmann to recount how "ancient history reveals that in early times, people employed advertising to announce and promote their products and services. For example, the Romans promoted upcoming gladiator fights on city walls; in Greece, town criers advertised available goods" (Hoffmann). What is brought into figure is the use of advertising: announcing and promoting products and services. This—in many eyes—becomes the base of what advertising is and the work that it does. As I have argued before, there is more going on that cannot be reduced to this use-value; however, let us continue with the train of thought that Hoffmann conducts: "From the 17th century onward, with the emergence of newspapers, advertising began to emerge as an independent field. The first newspaper advertisement was published in 1704" (Hoffmann). The rise of advertising as an independent field coincides with the rise in the technological reproducibility and distribution of texts, such as the newspaper. What is also worth noting is that the rise of advertising as a field and as an industry lines up around the same time as capitalism begins to colonize the world and distributive capabilities open the possibility of reaching a mass audience that is forming itself into a consumer mass. "By the end of the 19th century, having passed through the Industrial Revolution, businesses became increasingly interested in

advertising their mass products (e.g., soap, canned food)," writes Hoffmann, also adding that, "with competition now growing, the need to 'shout louder' gained importance. This resulted in the expansion of products and shopping venues advertising (e.g., the newly emerging department stores)" (Hoffmann). When advertising is tied to industrial capabilities, the economic system of production, and the technologies of distribution, the question remains as to how the changes in these bases have changed the consequences of advertising work. To believe that there is a constant in advertising that seeps through its history mythologizes advertising by presenting it as eternal and natural. To avoid this, this chapter will study the impact that the technological reproduction of images has on the distribution of images and the possible differences in how spectators relate to the images they are receiving. This chapter will also study how this change in the distribution has led to a seeping of images from an industrialized system of advertising to a reproduced residue in order to understand the differences of large capital advertising from localized advertising.

With only a few exceptions, contemporary print advertising relies heavily on photography. This is an important component that differentiates the advertising studied in this thesis and the early examples of advertising that Hofmann mentions. Photography, alongside other means of technologically reproducible art, allows for a "here and how" to be displaced, transplaced, and replaced for an element that can travel and have simultaneous viewings regardless of divides in space and time; this allows for any element to be viewed by a mass. Walter Benjamin makes this point in his essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," which brings to the front how the technological reproduction of art has drastically changed what art is. In its technological reproduction, art loses something but gains something else: "[The] technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the

sphere of tradition. By replicating the work many times over, it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence. And in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is reproduced" (Benjamin 22). As Benjamin alludes to it, the ability to reproduce a work in mass form does not just increase the quantity of that work, but it also changes what that work is as the very concept of authenticity is challenged and ripped apart. What is lost is the art's dependence on tradition and its aura; what is gained is the ability for art to conduct itself across situations to meet its audience wherever they may be (regardless of space, time, or state of mind). This development in the distribution of phenomena presents a break between advertising that predates the use of photography and advertising that takes full advantage of the properties of photography. The consequence of incorporating photography into advertising goes beyond the technological capabilities that are now open for it. The development in advertising opened the new social roles that I have discussed in the previous chapters of this thesis.

Benjamin finds the development of the mechanical reproduction of art politically important; instead of allowing for the naturalization of "a number of traditional concepts – such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery—which, used in a controlled way … allow factual material to be manipulated in the interests of fascism" (Benjamin 20), the primary text is able to reach people in a way that allows them to interpret the text without fascist distortion. However, what does the technological reproducibility of art have to do with advertising? Advertising as an art form never laid claim to any aura. The only uniqueness that advertising claimed was deferred to the commodity advertised. The individual author lays no claim on the advertisement; advertisement relies on its reproducibility and its lack of singularity. Can we even call advertising art? I am sure that there are plenty of arguments that say that it indeed is,

arguments that rely on form or design. However, the argument that advertising is not art probably goes like this: "Advertising is not art because it is practical, it has a pragmatic role." I do not want to linger on this question; we can see that the ability for art to be reproduced and distributed in mass form is accompanied by a similar capability for the distribution of advertising. At the same time, we see art assuming a pragmatic role. If not the same thing, they share the same structure and have followed a similar trajectory: "By the 1920s, not only had advertising grown in volume but it was now spreading from print to radio and later to television" (Hoffmann). Next to every great piece of art sits an advertisement; sometimes it is hard to tell which is which. In their famous essay, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno note that "film and radio no longer need to present themselves as art" and become closer to advertising than anything else when they shamelessly admit their truth (Horkheimer and Adorno 95). Horkheimer and Adorno continue: "The truth that [film and radio] are nothing but business is used as an ideology to legitimize the trash they intentionally produce. They call themselves industries, and the published figures for their directors' incomes quell any doubts about the social necessity of their finished products" (Horkheimer and Adorno 95). This is one way that culture, in general, begins to become an industry, distribution being its cornerstone.

I mentioned in passing that art has subsumed a pragmatic position. Horkheimer and Adorno argue for this point: "Art now dutifully admits to being a commodity, abjures its autonomy and proudly takes its place among consumer goods, that has the charm of novelty" (Horkheimer and Adorno 127). That is, art is produced as a commodity and it is distributed as a commodity. This is different from "actual" or "pure works of art" in that the latter maintain an ambivalent position by negating "the commodity character of society by simply following their

own inherent laws" and simultaneously being a commodity (Horkheimer and Adorno 127). The consequence of art being solely a commodity is that "what might be called use-value in the reception of cultural assets is being replaced by exchange value; enjoyment is giving way to being there and being in the know, connoisseurship by enhanced prestige" (Horkheimer and Adorno 128). Art, like advertising, becomes a means to something else and "everything has value only in so far as it can be exchanged, not in so far as it is something in itself" (Horkheimer and Adorno 128). What can be assessed by reading both Benjamin on the one hand and Horkheimer and Adorno on the other is that the change in the distributive capabilities of both art and cultural works has changed our relationships to these works and the social impact of these works.

Figure 12: "Edition Number 539." *Qué!*, 27 June, 2019, pp 5. On the left. "Edition Number 178." ¡Hola! Ecuador 12 June, 2019, pp 17. On the right.

If we continue with the framework of use-value and exchange-value, we can see that the advertisement on the left frames the commodity in terms of its use-value. The crab pot is exalted for its characteristics: thick aluminum, shiny interior and exterior finish, professional lining. We can still see that the pot is a means: the bowl of crab limbs reminds us of this. However, there is still an appeal to exchange value in the advertisement. The flagged text reads: "It is time to bring everyone together around the table to enjoy a moment between family and friends." In this quote, we have a brief appeal to the exchange value that the pot promises: bringing people

together to be in a community. This is a promise that the pot itself cannot uphold. However, contrasting the advertisement on the right, its false promise is to end alienation. The advertisement on the right promises something altogether different: happiness through entrenching ourselves into our alienated selves. A few pages after an article praising the riches of Hubert Baudoin's (a CEO or someone of that type) "exclusive private paradise in Florida" (*¡Hola! Ecuador* 8), we have a photograph of a group of young people dancing around to music we will never hear but we have all heard a hundred times before. Their backdrop is a pink single-family suburban home. By the palm trees surrounding this house, I assume it is in some corner of Miami or LA. Whether it is in Miami or LA, the difference is negligible; both cities represent the same lifestyle. The watch that pretends to be the center of the advertisement presents itself as a step in that direction. We do not have a description of the materials of the watch or mention of its craftsmanship as we do with the advertisement on the left. The person who opens the magazine would find themselves placed in the point of view of the camera; everyone in the frame is facing that person. The advertisement then whispers, "by purchasing the watch you will become part of this group of cool, always in the know, friends." The page of the magazine is made out of paper which instantly denies the fantastic promises of the advertisement's whispers. The person encountering this page is denied the materiality of being a part of that group, of basking in the "riches" of the lifestyle. We can see that it does not really matter if the particular watch is purchased; "even where the entertainment does not directly serve the publicity needs of the manufacturer concerned [it] advertises the system as a whole" (Horkheimer and Adorno 115). This system is implied by the backdrop, having the subaltern classes (located in Ecuador) aspire to the bourgeois ideal of individuation/subjectification of the consumerist suburban life currently (and perpetually) out of their grasp.

Most of the advertising studied so far resembles the advertisement on the right. UMCO, the company responsible for the crab pot, is an "Ecuadorian" company. That is to say that the production and distribution are relatively localized to a geographic and legally defined region. This is contrasted to the advertisement on the right which is funded by entities with large amounts of capital. By the logo on the bottom right, I assume that the advertisement of the watch probably comes from Swiss Gear, a company owned by Wenger which is owned by Victorinox. The stylistic differences between the advertisements on the right and the left could probably be linked with a difference in capital. Regardless, we see a trend that leans towards using the rhetorical devices present in the right advertisement even in (seemingly) more localized capital such as the *Produbanco* leaflets analyzed in the first chapter (see Figure 5). We could understand this move of resemblance by reading Horkheimer and Adorno, who argue that "culture today is infecting everything with sameness" (Horkheimer and Adorno 94). This sameness is observable at the level that all advertisements are relying on matching signs and uniform aesthetics. It is this sameness that attracted my attention to advertising in the first place. However, we can understand this sameness at another level than an aesthetic sameness. Horkheimer and Adorno understand sameness as a consequence of the cultural system that is formed as an industry: "Film, radio, and magazines form a system. Each branch of culture is unanimous within itself and all are unanimous together" (Horkheimer and Adorno 94). Aesthetically, we see this move to sameness as the movie starts and the advertisement models begin to resemble each other. It is often observed that movies and products will be advertised on the same napkin or advertising surface.[8] Materially, we can understand this system as a consolidation of capital. As in the case with Swiss Gear, there is a higher level of capital that

[8] On a recent flight, the napkin that accompanied the coffee I was given advertised the airline and the newest *Star Wars* movie.

organizes commodities and pushes for advertising in a systematic way that does not adhere itself to the differences between industries or nations. As with the Crab Pot, we can see that there is an "outside" the system. This outside, while perhaps based on the same capitalist logic, mobilizes a different set of signs. To what extent can we consider difference in advertising?

Figure 13: "Edition 51." *Revista Cuenca Ilustre*, April 2019, pp. 68.

There are counterexamples to the hegemonic forms of advertising that I have studied so far. In *Revista Cuenca Ilustre,* a long list of counterexamples presents themselves—from advertising that does not include photography to advertising that presents the staff of whatever industry the advertising promotes. Figure 13 presents a stark contrast to the advertising pages of *¡Hola! Ecuador* or *Vistazo* or the other publications I have studied so far. First and foremost, the page is very busy, including seven advertisements by different companies. The page in Figure 13 is the first of four pages in succession that all follow the same structure and advertise the same products. This brings us directly to the second point, which is that all these advertisements surround and address the car. In a single page, there are three car electricians advertised side by side. While Horkheimer and Adorno state that "in the competitive society advertising performed a social service in orienting the buyer in the market, facilitating choice and helping the more efficient but unknown supplier to find customers" (Horkheimer and Adorno 131), it is hard to distinguish between the three. Between "Electro Automotriz Mic" and "Auto Electrico Ivan," who advertise their staff in a similar gray uniform, the only serious difference is the street address. This difference might be a helpful orientation for someone who is in need for electrical work done on their car. We see these advertisements as swaying with the market; they are at the dependence of the car industry and their business relies on cars being our mode of transportation. They do not seek to create or orient a market despite their display of fancy cars like that convertible BMW. Then why is it that we do not see a similar style of busy advertising for Swiss Gear watches? Horkheimer and Adorno respond: "Today, when the free market is coming to an end, those in control of the system are entrenching themselves in advertising. It strengthens the bond which shackles consumers to the big combines. Only those who can keep paying the exorbitant fees charged by the advertising agencies … can enter the pseudomarket as sellers"

(Horkheimer and Adorno 131). The trend away from multi-company advertisements to single-page single-company/product advertisements, as Horkheimer and Adorno point out, is due to the ability for "big combines" or large capital to flex itself by buying out a whole page. It is more expensive to publicize on a national or international distribution magazine than in local and city-oriented distribution. This means that large advertisers have the ability to control the market by silencing competitors with smaller amounts of capital. This silence means that the "freedom" of choice that a capitalist market offers all comes from a singular source. This takes an even more socially controlling level when "the cost[s] of advertising, which finally flow back into the pockets of the combines, spare them the troublesome task of subduing unwanted outsiders; they guarantee that the wielders of influence remain among their peers, not unlike the resolutions of economic councils which control the establishment and continuation of business in the totalitarian state" (Horkheimer and Adorno 131). By peers we can understand the amount of self-dealing that occurs by those who have established power; we can also begin to understand the hegemonic qualities that come out of the "self"-empowerment of the bourgeoisie. At the end of the day "advertising today is a negative principle, a blocking device: anything which does not bear the seal of approval is economically suspect" (Horkheimer and Adorno 131). We can expect to never see a page like Figure 13 in *¡Hola! Ecuador*.

Figure 14: Tapia, Eduardo. From *Untitled.* 2019.

While advertising can be a blocking device in publications, radio, and television (places that we are likely to see a hegemonic advertising language), there are spaces that are "outside" the capital influence of the large combines. Storefronts are a landscape that still has a level of

relative autonomy from the entities that produce the commodities inside.[9] In a way, we can read these storefronts in a similar way that Benjamin reads the film actor who is transported to the masses: "While he stands before the apparatus, he knows that in the end he is confronting the masses. It is they who will control him. Those who are not visible, not present while he executes his performance, are precisely the ones who will control it" (Benjamin 33). The storefronts of Cuenca are a prime example of this. We have the taking of models and actors out of their contexts, controlled by the vendors of these stores, to promote commerce. In a sense, the streets of Cuenca present the control of the "masses." However, as we see in figure 14, it is not the actors themselves who are controlled, but it is they who are now free to be taken to any context in time or space. The two actors can now walk on their timeless catwalk as the man walks on the street portraying the beauty folded and sown into their suits. The one who walks by the storefront does not exactly control the performance of the models as much as he "controls" the meaning of the performance, but more is to be gained if we linger on this meaning. Why were the actors in figure 14 chosen to be the ones to occupy this particular storefront? We see in their representation a residue that has been seen in some of the advertisements studied so far. To explain what I have called "residue," Horkheimer and Adorno write: "The dominant taste derives its ideal from the advertisement, from commodified beauty. Socrates' dictum that beauty is the useful has at last been ironically fulfilled" (Horkheimer and Adorno 126). All that is beautiful takes its form in that storefront. The very concept of beauty is always "compromised" and loaded with ideological implications to the point that the actor's interpretation is reduced in its variables. We should be skeptical of the control the passerby has on the meaning of the storefronts.

[9] This relative autonomy is perhaps to be short-lived as large chains are threatening to monopolize these expressive surfaces.

Figure 15: Tapia, Eduardo. From *Untitled.* 2019.

There is a material difference between large-corporation media and localized distribution networks that lie outside or in the periphery of the industrialized media. The people making the decisions of what is featured on the storefront advertisements are different people in different contexts. The interests of a storeowner in Cuenca and a board of executives of a large corporation are at times, in principle, the same: to maximize profits. However, we can see that

this goal might clash with itself; the profits of an executive might come at the cost of the profits of the store owner.[10] To this end, we can see that the development of technology, in general, is not used for the benefit of the people everywhere, but "the basis on which technology is gaining power over society is the power of those whose economic position in society is strongest" (Horkheimer and Adorno 95). The reliance on the human body (and abstract concepts such as Beauty, Happiness, and Success that such a body can carry) in the storefronts might in part be explained by the diffusion of the ideology that hegemonic advertising has advanced. In a way, storefronts might be too close to the feet of power to present a serious alternative. As Horkheimer and Adorno crassly put it: "Just as the ruled have always taken the morality dispensed to them by the rulers more seriously than the rulers themselves, the defrauded masses today cling to the myth of success still more ardently than the successful" (Horkheimer and Adorno 106).[11] Success is one of the many things that the defrauded hold on to, it is the ruled that begin to dispense the morality of the rulers – the distinction between "ruler" and "ruled" not always being an incredibly clear one. Is the ruler the capitalist or the biggest capitalist? Regardless, I move further from the areas affected by *¡Hola! Ecuador* in search of the meaning of difference.

[10] Look at how Walmart affected local store owners in the United States.
[11] This is an argument that is also made in Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Prince.*

Figure 16: Tapia, Eduardo. From *Untitled.* 2019.

On the dirt road from the city of Loja to the provincial town of Chuquiribamba sits a cement outpost (see Figure 16), a *tienda* that is not out of form with the *tiendas* I grew up around in the city of Loja. Usually run by a family, a *tienda* is the form by which products are distributed besides street vending, the municipal marketplaces, and the newer supermarkets. The *tienda* in Figure 16 doesn't find the need to advertise itself; the products in it and their representations surrounding it are enough to mark what to expect happening indoors. For the most part, aside from a mascot and a logo, it is the products that are advertised: sodas and ice-cream. The representation of the products, seemingly provided by the producers of said products, does the advertising for the store. This is not always the case, as seen in Figure 17.

Figure 17, a *tienda* from Chuquiribaba, shares the properties of distribution of the *tienda* in Figure 16. In Figure 17 we see the traces of where an advertising poster was once plastered. However, even when the store is advertised, it is unmarked products that are advertised on the storefront. These stores are not independent from the relations of production that lead to the products that lay inside them, yet they are independent in the form of distribution. The lack of hegemonic advertising makes this point clear.

Figure 17: Tapia, Eduardo. From *Untitled.* 2019.

These rural towns are not outside the productive web that links the city and the large companies that move capital around. They are connected by a flow of produce and trucks; many vegetables grown in the areas surrounding these towns are trucked into the city or other points of

distribution. Perhaps it is because of this connection that we can still see the residue of hegemonic advertising— also visible in the city storefronts—repeated (in its own way) on the storefronts of a rural town (see Figure 18 and 19). In Figure 18 we have a photograph of a supermarket aisle. The representation of the supermarket aisle, like a modern cornucopia, is probably used to signify plenty. In this signification, we can see a romanticizing and a mythologizing of the supermarket as a mode of distribution. We also see the mobilization of the empty supermarket aisles as a form of criticism of "socialist" states. With this sign in mind, we see an interesting dynamic at play in Figure 18. In part, the storefront takes the sign of the supermarket and makes it its "own" by deploying the meaning of the sign for its own purposes of advertising the *tienda*. The irony of this reframing is that the *tienda* is advertising another form of distribution. The use of another form of distribution is not a mistake. The fact that the supermarket aisles are used as a sign gives us insight into the permeating power that hegemonic residue has. The romanticizing of the supermarket, a product of advertising and films, is associated with a form of success. The *tienda* storefront takes this sign to associate itself with this success, but at the same time, the storefront advertises the system that produces the supermarket.

Figure 18: Tapia, Eduardo. From *Untitled.* 2019.

In a similar light we encounter the representations of models in the beauty salon (see Figure 19). The attraction of such a storefront is to provide the customers with a moment of inspiration as they walk by: "I could look like that if I get my haircut here." While this reaction can be understood for its use-value, we can see how it takes up elements of other advertisements studied in this thesis. Although the photographs are probably taken from a magazine or a stock photo bank, we still see the same dynamic as we do with any advertisement that incorporates a human body. It is true that the photographs used are mostly busts, limiting the number of signs present, yet the photographs are charged with meaning. From the beards to the limited differences in phenotype, we can see that a particular "look" is prioritized: short hair and a beard for men, blond hair for women (a few exceptions aside). This contrasts with the "look" of the

people walking the streets (see Figure 20)[12]: no beard, long to short hair for men, dark hair for women, and "brown" phenotype for both (again, a few exceptions aside). Even though this store operates "outside" the grasp of large companies, we see it reproducing the rhetorical patterns that perpetuate the ideology also seen in the advertising of larger capitalist endeavors. Perhaps I am reading the storefront with an uncalled-for seriousness; it is possible that the operations of this store challenge capitalist notions of what a business is. However, despite the operations of the store, we see the weight that advertising has in reproducing a specific set of relations within society.

Figure 19: Tapia, Eduardo. From *Untitled.* 2019.

[12] The streets of Chuqiribamba were not busy at the time of my visit; no one was walking in front of the beauty salon. I include a photograph of a neighboring house with people waiting for a bus (see Figure 20).

Even when we distance ourselves from the advertising products images by large capital, we see doubles of these products roaming the streets. The reach of the ideological framing seen in the rhetoric of advertising attests to the power of the distribution and general spread of advertising images. When we study the "residue" of the ideology present in texts where we would not expect to find it, we can see how influential the mythologies produced by texts where we do expect to find a strong ideological direction are. We do encounter difference, and this point should not be ignored. The difference we encounter should help us remember how the hegemonic forms of advertising are not natural but products of a history and a social relation to modes of production. However, from city-distributed magazines to storefronts to *tiendas*, we have evidence that the encounters with hegemonic representations (whatever the means) are reproduced. This reproduction is embodied in the storefronts and the activity of those who walk by them.

Figure 20: Tapia, Eduardo. From *Untitled.* 2019.

Conclusion: Trapped in Advertising Looks.

> Existence in late capitalism is a permanent rite of initiation. Everyone must show that they identify wholeheartedly with the power which beats them. (Horkheimer and Adorno 124)

It is through works of fiction that we are often able to see ourselves for what we are. Perhaps it is the exaggerations that allow us to see what through modesty we hide. Maybe it is the reduction of complexity into characters that lets us focus on specific phenomena. There is an episode of the television series *Black Mirror*, "Fifteen Million Merits," that takes inspiration (either ironically or sardonically, it is unclear who the joke is on) from a combination between Horkheimer and Adorno's essay, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," and Guy Debord's book *The Society of the Spectacle.* In this episode, we encounter a society (or a class) surrounded by screens and coerced into cycling as a means of maintaining their livelihood (Lyn). It is unclear how the characters relate to their circumstances or how they arrived at those circumstances in the first place. What is clear is that every person, dressed in gray clothing and whose bodies are stuck in the rotations of the machines they power, has a virtual double that lives the imaginary life the screens provide. They can spend the merits (credit, money) they earn by working on their respective cycling machines to lavish up their virtual selves or transcend space and time by watching some television show. However, there is a catch: every subject in this world is forced to watch the advertisements for the limited selection of shows that they can also purchase to watch no matter where they are—on the cycling machine, in their room, or washing their hands. There is a scene where the protagonist is lying in his bed and playing a videogame (which doubles the gray world that he lives in but spices it

up with a shotgun the protagonist can use to shoot at the even-lower class), when the game is interrupted to show an advertisement for the "amateur talent" show titled "Hot Shot," promising the possibility of the chance for one of the cyclists to become famous and leave their uneventful labor. The protagonist uses his merits to skip the advertisement when a second advertisement begins (which is something I can relate to); this time, it is a pornographic advertisement. This advertisement begins to torment the protagonist to the point that he closes his eyes; almost immediately the screen goes red and an alarmed voice repeats "resume viewing" multiple times until the protagonist reluctantly decides to consume the pornographic product.

The climax of the episode occurs when the protagonist is so frustrated with the outcomes the social system is producing that he threatens to slit his throat in front of the rolling cameras. This moment presents itself as a genuinely authentic moment of human expression that was not previously calculated into the list of expressive outlets the system had provided. This moment lasts only a few minutes before the audience starts clapping and cheering the protagonist's actions. The source of the protagonist's frustration is ignored and replaced by a recognition that his expression can be commodified as well. The protagonist ends up having his own show, and the knife he was going to use is sold as a virtual item for everyone's virtual double. "Even on those occasions when the public rebels against the pleasure industry it displays the feebleness systematically instilled in it by that industry" (Horkheimer and Adorno 116). In light of the protagonist's inability to organize change, he reaffirms the very institution he rebelled against. The tragedy of the theater we are in is made apparent. The irony of the moment is that it takes a sudden knock on my door to be reminded that the moment of genuine expression witnessed inside the four walls of my apartment was part of a show (and already commodified before I even pressed play).

Several elements of the episode create a relatively familiar world: from the drudgery to the limited forms of expression available, every movement and activity is commodified. This episode reveals to us an exaggerated double of the late-capitalist society we live in. It is true that we are not at the point when a voice screams at us every time we close our eyes at an advertisement and skipping an advertisement does not cost us money—but we are on our way there. Every corner of the city is plastered with a message of false promises that might just become true. Every stranger's car is half-full of music and half-full of "commercial breaks." Every video the professor tries to play for their class is anticipated by an advertisement. It is hard to exaggerate the pervasiveness of advertising. Even a passing glance up at the sky will meet you with a flying billboard. Before we can believe that this is the worst it gets, the episode of *Black Mirror* suggests that there is no meaningful resistance. As soon as resistance is demonstrated, another opportunity to identify with the powers is presented.

Before an advertising agency hires me, I would like to conclude with a few notes on resistance. What became clear from this project early on is that there is no "good" advertising. There is advertising that does not employ the hegemonic signs; however, this advertising does not do much to challenge or strategically oppose the advertising that does employ those signs. While difference does fuel opposition, difference by itself does not constitute a resistance. An understanding of difference might provide insight into a path of resistance. In a way, the very existence of this thesis has been to provide a hermeneutics of resistance. The goal of this thesis has always been to provide a method of reading that would allow us to see how we are always within ideology. And in ideology, we are "subjected, unconsciously, to the influences of the educational system, of newspapers, of bourgeois tradition" (Gramsci, *The Southern Question* 20). What I have aimed to demonstrate in this thesis is that all is not well and, before resistance

begins, we are already inside the system that we aim to resist. As such, we need to reconceptualize resistance in order to develop a strategy that will be effective at achieving the goals that call for resistance in the first place.

What a study of advertising presents is that there is indeed no outside of ideology. The further and further we move from the center of hegemonic advertising, we still see residues of the ideology presented by the hegemonic force. The consequences of this are visible from political rallies to everyday interactions: "What is decisive today is … the necessity, inherent in the system, of never releasing its grip on the consumer, of not for a moment allowing him or her to suspect that resistance is possible" (Horkheimer and Adorno 113). Resistance is already framed from the beginning; difference is less and less attainable. This is not to say that all is lost and we should bow in allegiance to the class state. The reason why I paint such a bleak picture is to achieve the exact opposite. Just as photography becomes a subject of mythology where history is made nature, the class state transforms resistance into a meaningless movement as a strategy of neutralizing it (by and through rationalizing it to its own logic). The class state profits and detests all that is outside of it: "This principle requires that while all needs should be presented to individuals as capable of fulfillment by the culture industry, they should be so set up in advance that individuals experience themselves through their needs only as eternal consumers, as the culture industry's object" (Horkheimer and Adorno 113). The way we relate to the world is political: it is active, it is part of the social structure, it is part of the process of making the world. Reading becomes a tool in the arsenal of disempowering the class state, a tool for exposing its operations, a tool for realizing the power we have to re-structure the state (no matter where we are positioned in this state). Skepticism of the mundane is a step in this re-political direction.

Works Cited

Althusser, Louis. *On the Reproduction of Capitalism: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*. Trans. G. M. Goshgarian, Verso, 2014.

Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath, Hill and Wang, 1977.

---. *Mythologies*. Ed. Annette Lavers, trans. Annette Lavers, Hill and Wang, 1972.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility, and Other Writings on Media*. Ed. Michael William Jennings et al., Trans. E. F. N. Jephcott et al., Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008.

Campbell, Norah. "Regarding Derrida: The Tasks of Visual Deconstruction." *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal*, ed. Jane Davison et al., vol. 7, no. 1, Jan. 2012, pp. 105–24. *Emerald Insight*, doi:10.1108/17465641211223492.

Cavallero, Luci, and Verónica Gago. *Una lectura feminista de la deuda: "vivas, libres y desendeudadas nos queremos."* Fundación Rosa Luxemburgo, 2019.

Dávalos, Pablo. *Hacia Un Nuevo Modelo de Dominación Política*. *www.academia.edu*, https://www.academia.edu/18550810/Pablo_D%C3%A1valos_Hacia_un_nuevo_modelo_de_dominaci%C3%B3n_pol%C3%ADtica. Accessed 12 Feb. 2020.

Eco. Pablo Dávalos, Explica Su Tweet Sobre ¿Por Qué El FMI Quiere Desdolarizar al Ecuador?". *YouTube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2xLeBVtR8yc&feature=youtu.be. Accessed 17 Feb. 2020.

"Edition Number 19" *Vistazo Enfoque*, 20 June. 2019, pp. 21.

"Edition Number 51." *Revista Cuenca Ilustre*, April 2019, pp. 68.

"Edition Number 178." ¡Hola! Ecuador 12 June, 2019, back cover, pp. 3, 17, 83.

"Edition Number 179." *¡Hola! Ecuador*, 17 July, 2019, front cover, pp. 9, 99.

"Edition Number 539." *Qué!*, 27 June, 2019, pp 5.

"Edition Number 1244." *Vistazo* 20 June. 2019, pp. 73, 79.

"Edition Number 17,024." *El Tiempo: Diario de Cuenca*, 28 June. 2019.

"El acuerdo con el FMI, detonante de una protesta que pone en jaque a Ecuador." *La Vanguardia*, 10 Oct. 2019, https://www.lavanguardia.com/vida/20191010/47890513971/el-acuerdo-con-el-fmi-detonante-de-una-protesta-que-pone-en-jaque-a-ecuador.html.

Farber, Leora. "Skin Aesthetics." *Theory, Culture & Society*, vol. 23, no. 2–3, May 2006, pp. 247–50. *SAGE Journals*, doi:10.1177/026327640602300252.

Galarza Zavala, Jaime. *Bases militares norteamericanas en el mundo: capítulo especial Ecuador*. Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores Y Movilidad Humana, 2016.

Gramsci, Antonio. *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings, 1916-1935*. Ed. David Forgacs, Aakar Books for South Asia, 2014.

---. *The Southern Question*. Trans. Pasquale Verdicchio, Bordighera Press, 1995.

Hebdige, Dick. *Subculture the Meaning of Style*. Routledge, 1979.

Hoffmann, Sabine H. “Advertising.” *Green Consumerism: An A-to-Z Guide*, SAGE Publications, Inc., 2011, pp. 4–6. *SAGE Knowledge*, doi:10.4135/9781412973809.

Horkheimer, Max, and Theodor W. Adorno. *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*. Ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott, Stanford University Press, 2002.

IMF Country Report No. 19/210. https://www.finanzas.gob.ec/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2019/07/1ECUEA2019004.pdf. Accessed 16 Feb. 2020.

Lacan, Jacques. *Ecrits: A Selection*. Trans. Bruce Fink, W.W. Norton, 2002.

Lyn, Euros. *Fifteen Million Merits*. 2, Zeppotron, Channel 4 Television Corporation, 11 Dec. 2011.

Marx, Karl. “Marx: Early Political Writings.” *Cambridge Core*, trans. Joseph O’Malley, June 1994, doi:10.1017/CBO9781139168007.

Produbanco, "leaflet," undated. Loja, Ecuador.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Ed. Charles Bally et al., trans. Wade Baskin, 1st McGraw-Hill paperback edition. McGraw-Hill Book Co, 1966.

Tapia, Eduardo. *Untitled.* 2019.