

Matey Capitalism and the Appliance of Science

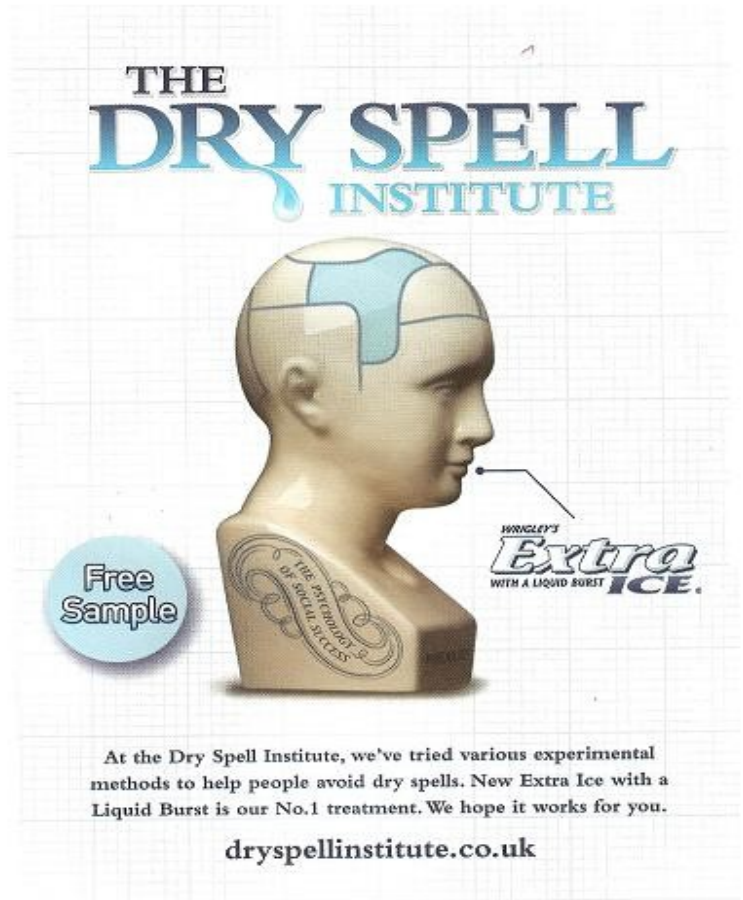
It's the job of advertisers to make us need stuff. That's what they get paid to do.

There are only so many ways to do this:

- One is to imply (subtly) that “YOU ARE SHIT. BUY THIS AND YOU WON'T BE.”
- Another is to proclaim that “this product is NEW and IMPROVED and SCIENTIFICALLY BASED” (cue idiot actor with clipboard and white coat).
- Yet a third is to use humour and self-mockery. “Look, I know you don't believe me. We both know about this advertising thing- it's a bit of a joke. But I have to get paid, see, so just go along with it there's a good chap(ette) . Anyway, you are awfully clever to get the irony; so many people don't, you know.”

There's other tactics, but that's a different rant and one image can only take so much explanatory weight...

Finally, this is an example of 'matey capitalism', where products are there to help you through the tough times (in this case to get you laid after a dry spell). By appropriating everyday phrases (“dry spell”, “hole in the wall” for ATM etc) advertisers make capitalist production and consumption seem natural, and imply that they're on your side. It isn't and they aren't...



Visual Element	Surface meaning	Underlying message/comments
Graph paper	Ooh, it's scientific!	
Phrenology head	Ooh, bits of the brain (parietal lobe, sort of)	Ironic for anyone who knows about phrenology
Swirly “psychology of social success”	Gosh, it's psychology!	Irony alert!
'Antique' swirl and old-fashioned head	Tradition!	Irony alert!
“Dry Spell Institute”	It's an institute! It must be really reliable	Presumably they couldn't get an ac.uk domain (I doubt the registry hands them out willy-nilly)
“Experimental Methods” to make it a “Treatment”. The flip side of the card says “Specially Formulated”	Gosh, more science words!	Yes, up there with the 'scientifically proven' anti-ageing treatments. Harmful anti-oxidants, visibly improved etc etc.

Plausible Deniability

We're all able to 'read' irony, aren't we? Erm, not all of us. The advertisers know they are getting a double whammy here; some people (I couldn't say what percentage) *will* 'read' this advert as scientific. Others will be 'in' on the joke and feel flattered that they spotted the irony. In either case, the advertisers win. If anyone attacks them for their devious ways, they can retreat into saying “either you don't get irony or you have no sense of humour.” It's very very clever stuff, and virtually hermetically sealed from counter-attack.