



A Spoonful of Sugar

The cozy melody rises to greet you like a familiar friend, and its lazy, carefree meandering takes you away to a quiet place, reminding you of the warmth of a peaceful afternoon in the Tom Sawyer summer of your childhood.

You are listening to the theme song from *M.A.S.H.*

Were you aware that the melody has lyrics? I discovered this bit of trivia as a result of wandering through a video rental store without a specific title in mind. Scanning the shelves for movies I had not yet seen, I suddenly realized that everyone in America saw *M.A.S.H.* in 1970 except me. I rented the movie.

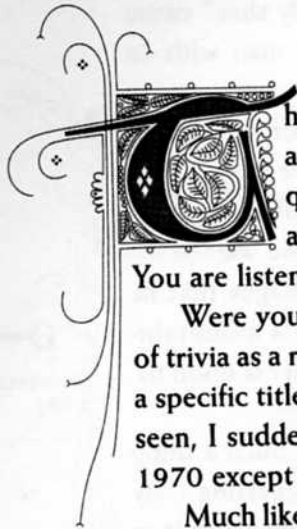
Much like the TV series that followed, Robert Altman's film opens with a helicopter scene and that amazingly innocuous Johnny Mandel theme song. The subtle difference is that in the movie, a vocalist croons a message of suicide with the bright-eyed innocence of a child.

The movie is forgettable, but the melody of that theme song is so utterly seductive ("Through early morning fog I see . . .") that I have breezily sung of suicide ("visions of the things to be . . .") for the past three weeks ("the pains that are withheld for me . . ."), never once realizing ("I realize and I can see . . .") that I was sipping psychological hemlock ("that suicide is painless . . ."). Such is the power of music .

"So I guess you're saying that it's good to use jingles in our broadcast ads?" Let me answer plainly: there is nothing better than a good musical jingle, and nothing worse than one that is average.

Unfortunately, most jingles are average.


But if music has the power of echoic intrusiveness to enter an unwilling mind and the tenacity of echoic retention to remain, then shouldn't we use it in all the ads we create? In theory, the answer is



Forgettable? →
Though a
perceptive
critic, perhaps
ye Wizard doth
sometimes err.
- Anonymous
Student
JM



yes, but to say that all music is memorable is as silly as saying that all speeches are memorable. Just as it takes an unusual combination of words to engage the listener's imagination, it requires an unusual combination of notes and rhythm to surprise and enchant the mind. A powerful tool, music is the language of the soul in the hands of a master, but counterproductive in the hands of anyone else.

You know at least a dozen writers of dazzling words, but do you know many masters of melody? It is far easier to master the language of men than to sing in the language of angels. 



See ch. 21, "Wernicke and Broca."



Echoic intrusiveness: The tendency of unusual combinations of spoken* words, notes, or rhythms to lodge themselves in the listener's memory and play over and over in the mind.

*"Spoken" can mean "heard in the mind" (see "echoic memory," p. 55).



Way Too Stupid

A Frenchman lies on his back in a field and chews on a straw while staring at the clouds overhead and says, "Anything that is too stupid to be spoken is sung."

"Someone left the cake out in the rain. I don't think that I can take it, 'cause it took so long to bake it, and I'll never have that recipe again. Oh, nooooo!" "You're so vain I'll bet you think this song is about you. Don't you? Don't you? Don't you?" "Ventura Highway in the sunshine, where the days are longer, the nights are stronger than moonshine."***

Would it surprise you to learn that our Frenchman made his observation just a few years after the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock? Radio would not be invented for another two centuries. Was Voltaire having a vision of the future, or was he merely commenting on the phenomenon we have come to know as echoic retention?

"TwoAllBeefPattiesSpecialSauceLettuceCheesePicklesOnions OnaSesameSeedBun"?

Echoic retention causes people to remember things they never committed to memory, and a working knowledge of it gives one the ability to work miracles through the power of words. Echoic retention and the power of words are the heart and soul of advertising, though very few ad professionals understand it.

To infuse an ad with the power to persuade your customers, you must do one or more of the following:

1. Remind customers of what they already believe to be true, then associate your message to this "known" truth, thereby causing them to feel differently toward your product. (This is the definition of an emotional ad. This process is currently being labeled "branding" by people who are only now discovering its power.)

"Ventura Highway"
Dewey Bunnell,
1972

*"MacArthur Park," Jimmy Webb, 1968

**"You're So Vain," Carly Simon, 1972



See ch. 36, "Intellect vs. Emotion."



2. Ask customers to make a new decision based on new information that you have presented and substantiated in your ad. (This is an intellectual ad, the most common type in America, though few companies ever bother to substantiate their claims.)

3. Use unusual word combinations, rhythms, and melodies to sneak past the intellectual guard at the gate of the customer's mind. (This is an echoic ad. It can be intellectual, but more often it's emotional.)

No, I'm not talking about musical jingles. I'm talking about using unusual words in unpredictable combinations. I'm talking about the use of modified timing, inflection, pace, and tone in the ads you record for broadcast. The human voice is irresistible to the mind when used in a manner unexpected. This is true whether a reader is hearing his own voice in the quiet of his mind or whether he's hearing your voice through television or radio. It is predictability that turns the raging bull of language into the docile steer of dull advertising.

Are you emasculating your ads by using predictable phrases, styles, pace, or tone? Or are you using unexpected words as music to the mind? 